



A MESSAGE FROM INTERIM PRESIDENT

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.

Dear Colleagues and Students,

On Friday, July 17, we lost Civil Rights icon and United States Congressman John Lewis. As one of the original and last remaining Civil Rights movement leaders his loss is felt across this nation.

Born to sharecroppers in Alabama in 1940, Congressman Lewis grew up on a farm and attended segregated public schools. While a student at Fisk University in Nashville, TN he was named Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which he helped form. SNCC was largely responsible for organizing student activism in the Civil Rights Movement, including sit-ins and other activities. At the age of 23, he was an architect of and a keynote speaker at the historic March on Washington in August 1963.

On March 7, 1965- a day now known as “Bloody Sunday”- Lewis and fellow activist Hosea Williams let over 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama to protest ongoing injustices and issues with Black voter registration in the South. The marchers were met by Alabama state troopers who ordered them to disperse. The marchers instead began to pray and were violently beaten and subjected to tear gas attacks. Lewis’ skull was fractured but before going to the hospital he appeared on television to ask President Johnson to take action in Alabama. Lewis’ injuries shocked the nation and led to the swift passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

He began his career as an elected official in 1981 when he was elected to the Atlanta City Council. In 1986 he was elected to represent Georgia’s Fifth Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives, an office he held until his passing. He led numerous leadership positions throughout his career as a congressman and his colleagues called him “the conscience of the Congress” for his relentless pursuit of justice. In 2011, Congressman Lewis was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in recognition of his courage and lifelong commitment to social justice, and in 2016 he received the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature for the third volume of his graphic memoir *March*.

In recent years, Congressman Lewis remained outspoken and passionate about justice. Following the 2016 massacre at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, he led a sit-in on the House floor to protest inaction on gun control. He was the author and co-sponsor of legislation to prohibit institutions that receive federal funds from refusing to admit, enroll, or grant in-state tuition benefits to qualified students based on their immigration status and also to expand federal financial aid opportunities to DREAMers. Congressman Lewis was heartened by the wave of activism among young people as part of the Black Lives Matter movement and viewed their efforts as the next chapter in the fight for civil rights.

As we well know, the work of the Civil Rights Movement is not done, it is a constant work in progress as the struggle for equality continues and expands to include more disenfranchised individuals and groups. Congressman Lewis himself once stated, "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble." Let us honor his legacy and continue to work together to create a more equal and just society in which our individual differences are celebrated and respected.

Mil gracias y bendiciones,

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.
Interim President Designee

A POEM IN HONOR OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Let America Be America Again

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
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