

John Lewis and the Civil Rights Movement
Prof. David Greenberg
01-090-292-H4

Class Time: Mon. 2:00-4:00

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Syllabus

Description. This class uses the life of John Lewis to study the Civil Rights Movement. Lewis, who died in 2020, was a 19-year-old seminary student when he became involved in the 1960 sit-ins in Nashville, which kicked off a decade of activism toward racial equality. Lewis was a key participant in other central episodes of the movement including the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the Mississippi Freedom Summer, and the Selma campaign for voting rights. When the movement fractured in the late 1960s, Lewis turned to politics, first at the local level in Atlanta and then, starting in 1987, as a U.S. Congressman. The course looks at the events of John Lewis's life and those of the movement, and the fate of his beliefs in freedom, equality, integration, nonviolence, and what he called "the Beloved Community."

Course Requirements.

Regular attendance. This course meets only once a week. Arriving on time and staying for the duration is essential. Students who miss more than one class—or substantial parts of more than one class—will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each class missed, even if they notify me. That means that if you're on pace to earn an A and have one unexcused absence, you will earn an A-; with two unexcused absences, you'll earn a B+. In case of severe illness or extraordinary events, documentation should be provided. "Severe illness" does not refer to a bad cold. It refers to something like meningitis or a car accident.

Students must show up on time and stay for the duration of the class. Regular attendance means being on time and being present the whole time. Please also do not get up and walk out in the middle of class.

Active participation. One purpose of a seminar like this is to teach students to form their own ideas and share them with their peers. The very work of the course consists of engaging in a discussion of ideas. Students who abstain from discussion are missing the course's purpose. You must speak at least once every class session. A class in which you don't contribute to discussion is equivalent to a missed class. If you miss one class because of illness and are silent through a second class, you will be penalized. I am sympathetic to students who are soft-spoken or shy and will work with those who seek help in becoming more confident. But if you are truly averse to talking in class, you should probably not take this class.

Weekly readings. Each week there will be a mix of readings totaling roughly 100 pages.

Oral Presentation. Each week one or two students will lead the discussion by making an oral presentation of no more than ten minutes. The presentation should not summarize the reading, which everyone should already have read. Rather, it should take up some large theoretical or analytic issues posed by the reading and present them in a way that will promote class discussion.

Exams. There will be two at-home exams, due on the weeks specified below. They will consist of short essays. Each student must complete these entirely alone.

Grading. There is no formula. Grades will be based on the two exams, the oral presentation, and class participation.

We will be using Canvas. Log in with your Rutgers ID and password. On the site I will post announcements, assignments, and readings.

Phones, tablets, and laptops are not permitted during in-person class sessions. It's human nature to be distracted by these devices and to use them for pursuits others than classwork. When all students put away their devices, the conversation and level of engagement is much higher.

I will return all emails. Please email me via regular Rutgers email. Do NOT use the email mechanism built into Canvas. Remember, too, that messages can get stuck in a spam folder or lost in cyberspace. If I don't reply within 48 hours, please follow up with a phone call.

Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and cheating are, of course, forbidden, according to Rutgers University policy. You are responsible for reviewing and obeying these policies. A lengthy statement of the policy is at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers>.

Reading List.

The main books for the course will be:

1. **David Greenberg, *John Lewis: A Life*.** New York: Simon & Schuster, 2024. ISBN-13: 978-1476797717.
2. **Henry Hampton, et al. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement*.** New York: Bantam Books, 1991. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0553352320. List price: \$26.00.

The books are available at the campus Barnes & Noble. They can also be bought online from various outlets for less than the list price. If you're buying online, please do so immediately, as delivery takes time. Stand-alone articles will be on Canvas.

Weekly Assignments.

- Sep. 9 **Introduction.**
 Beardslee, "The Way Out Must Lead In."
John Lewis: A Life, ch. 1
Voices, chs. 1-3.
- Sep. 16 **Nashville.**
John Lewis: A Life, chs. 2-3.
Voices, chs. 4.
 James Lawson, "We Are Trying to Raise the Moral Issue."
WATCH: *Nashville: The Sit-In Story*
- Sep. 23 **SNCC.**
John Lewis: A Life, ch. 4
 Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*, Ch. 2.
 Julian Bond, "SNCC: What We Did."
- Sep. 30 **Freedom Rides.**
John Lewis: A Life, ch. 5.
Voices, chs. 5.
 Charlotte Devree, "The Young Negro Rebels."
- Oct. 7 **March on Washington**
John Lewis: A Life, chs. 6-8.
Voices, ch. 10.
 Bayard Rustin, "The Negro Needs White Allies."
 Jeff Nussbaum, *Undelivered*, ch. 1
WATCH: YouTube video of Lewis's March on Washington speech.
- Oct. 14 **Columbus Day**
- Oct. 21 **Freedom Summer**
John Lewis: A Life, ch. 9.
Voices, ch. 12.
 Geoff and Paul Cowan, "Three Letters Home from Mississippi."
- Oct. 28 **Selma**
John Lewis: A Life, chs. 10-11.
Voices, ch. 13.
- Nov. 4 **Coming Apart**
John Lewis: A Life, chs. 12-23.
Voices, chs. 15-16.

Allen Matusow, "From Civil Rights to Black Power."

Take-Home Exam – to be completed between Nov. 4 and Nov. 14

Nov. 11 **Turning to Politics**

John Lewis: A Life, chs. 13 & 14.

Voices, chs. 22 & 29.

Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics."

Nov. 18 **African-Americans and Politics.**

John Lewis: A Life, chs. 15-18.

Voices, chs. 30 & 31.

Nov. 25 **The Clinton Presidency**

John Lewis: A Life, chs. 19-21.

Sean Wilentz, "The Last Integrationist."

Ron Brownstein, "Sweeping Promise and Missed Opportunities."

Dec. 2 **Bush and Obama.**

John Lewis: A Life, chs. 22-24.

Gerstle, "Minorities, Multiculturalism, and the Presidency of George W. Bush."

Dyson, "Whose President Was He?"

Eskew, "Barack Obama, John Lewis, & the Legacy of the Civil Rights Struggle."

John Lewis, testimony vs. John Roberts confirmation, 2005.

Dec. 9 **Protest in Politics**

John Lewis: A Life, chs. 25-28.

Gillespie, "John Lewis and the Durability of Transcendent Race Politics"

Take-Home Exam – to be completed between Dec. 9 and Dec. 18.