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July 18, 2020

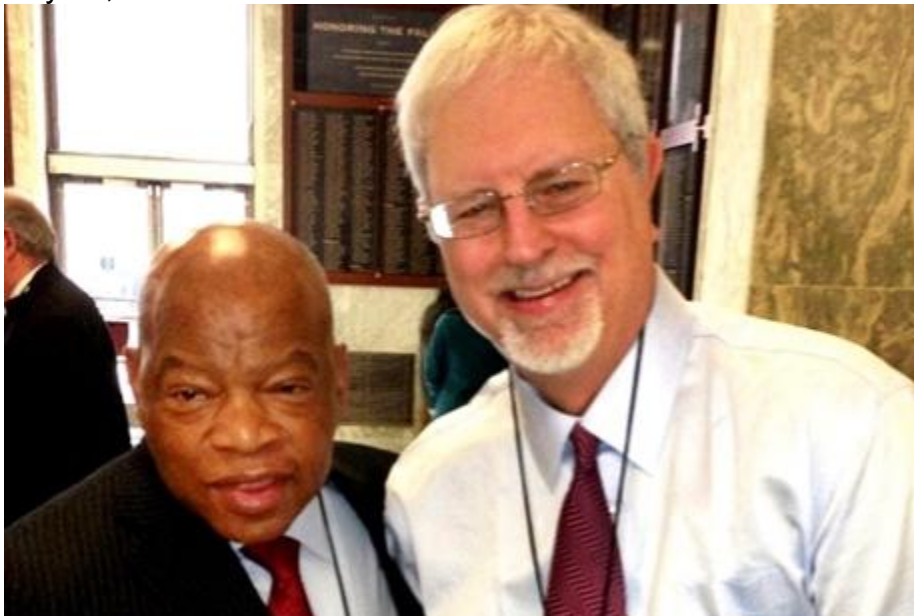
Law School News

Remembering John Lewis

RWU Law honors the towering legacy of the longtime Congressman and civil rights icon through the memories of a former dean, Professor David Logan.

July 18, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



Rep. John Lewis and Dean David Logan in 2013.

Roger Williams University School of Law mourns the passing of longtime Congressman John Robert Lewis (D-Ga.), a towering figure of the civil rights movement, who died Friday after a six-month battle with cancer. He was 80.

“He was honored and respected as the conscience of the U.S. Congress and an icon of American history,” Lewis' family said in a statement. “He was a stalwart champion in the on-going struggle to demand respect for the dignity and worth of every human being. He dedicated his entire life to non-violent activism and was an outspoken advocate in the struggle for equal justice in America. He will be deeply missed.”

CNN noted: “Lewis died on the same day as civil rights leader the Rev. Cordy Tindell ‘C.T.’ Vivian, who was 95. The dual deaths of the civil rights icons come as the nation is still grappling with racial upheaval in the wake of the death of George Floyd and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests that have swept the nation.”

RWU Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman commented, “The RWU Law community joins millions in honoring the life and legacy of Rep. John Lewis. Lewis fought for civil rights and justice, and he made it a point to tell and retell stories of the movement, even though the retelling was often hard for him. Let’s continue his legacy at RWU Law through both our deeds and our words.”

Professor David A. Logan, who had a chance to meet Lewis when they marched together on the 48th anniversary of the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., blogged about the experience in 2013. Some excerpts are offered below:

July 18, 2020

The Passing of a Champion: A Reflection by Professor David Logan

Like many in my generation, I considered John Lewis a hero. In 2013, I was lucky to be able to join Rep. Lewis in his annual pilgrimage to Selma, Alabama, when he led a reenactment of the 1965 “Bloody Sunday March” that cemented in American minds the reign of terror facing Blacks who had the temerity to insist on the right to vote. The trip was without a doubt a highlight of my life, and [pictures from that time](#) are precious to me.

I will leave it to others to eulogize the last surviving speaker from the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Rather, I would like to briefly situate John Lewis’ life’s work in the context of the civil disobedience that has swept our country since the murder of George Floyd.

Rep. Lewis always advised “get in good trouble, necessary trouble,” and he lived that creed, having been arrested more than 40 times. While he was too sick to participate in the recent protests, I am sure that he was proud of the millions of Americans who took to the streets to insist that America live up to the promises in the Declaration of Independence, seeing a younger generation pick up the torch of nonviolent civil disobedience from his generation of Civil Rights heroes. I hope and pray that this filled his last weeks with both satisfaction and hope. He sure earned it.

D.A.L.

March 4, 2013

Logan Marches at Selma Anniversary

[Dean David A. Logan, as a guest of Congressman David Cicilline, joined Vice President Joe Biden, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and 30 other members of Congress in commemorating a famous civil rights march on Sunday. Following are excerpts from Dean Logan's blogs about the experience.]

This year's Civil Rights Pilgrimage marks the 50th Anniversary of the Movement. More than 250 people, including 30 members of Congress, joined the delegation for the three-day tour of civil rights landmarks as we learned, grew, and continued the conversation together — white and black, Republican and Democrat, man and woman, senior and child. We all returned to Washington, D.C., and to our homes across the country, with a renewed sense of responsibility for the common good.

The weekend kicked off at the University of Alabama — the same place where 50 years ago James Hood and Vivian Malone enrolled as the first African-American students, facing uncertainty and death threats. Months before, then Gov. George Wallace made his famous speech, "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." But now the site — which displays its famous schoolhouse door in the entryway of the Foster Auditorium — stands as a place of reconciliation.

"For the first time since 1963, we have a member of the Wallace family, the Malone family, the Kennedy family, the Johnson family here, and we're sharing a stage," said Dr. Sharon Malone, sister of Vivian Malone Jones and wife of U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

Peggy Wallace Kennedy — daughter of Gov. Wallace — was 13 years old during the confrontation on June 11, 1963. Sharing a stage with Dr. Malone on March 1, Wallace Kennedy said while her father went on a long journey and is now beloved by many, she never received an explanation for that day.

"Today I have made my own journey to Tuscaloosa to stand in the place where my father once stood," she said. "... I stand in the schoolhouse door as a testament to change. I can now give to my sons what my father never gave to me: a conversation."

Dr. Malone summed up the historical implications of those gathered at the University of Alabama, 50 years after the Stand in the Schoolhouse Door.

"It's 2013, 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and 50 years after that historic confrontation at the University of Alabama. And although there are still issues of race and inequality that plague us still, I am encouraged," Malone said. "I'm encouraged by the bipartisan group that is assembled here today. Out of understanding comes tolerance and change."

Perhaps the most moving moment of the trip happened in Montgomery, Ala., at First Baptist Church. Police Chief Kevin Murphy, as an act of ultimate respect and reconciliation, apologized to Congressman John Lewis on behalf of the Montgomery police force — the same police force that failed to respond as participants in the Freedom Rides were beat by a mob in 1961.

After a short speech, Murphy removed the badge from his uniform and offered it to Lewis.

“You changed this city, you changed this state, you changed this country, ... you changed the world,” Murphy said. “For that we are truly grateful to you.”

Lewis embraced Murphy and accepted his apology. The act was an external representation of the reason The Faith and Politics Institute invests in the pilgrimage each year — reconciliation.

Focus on working together

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R – Va.) spoke on Saturday night from the old chambers of the Alabama State Capitol. Cantor, who brought along his high-school-aged son Mikey, said meeting Ruby Bridges on the trip was a particularly special moment for both of them. Cantor said his son has been moved by Bridges’ story — as one of the first African-American students to attend the newly desegregated schools in New Orleans — since learning about her in school.

It was a sentiment shared by many. Hearing the stories, meeting those lives most intimately touched by the violence, hatred, and lasting effects of discrimination changes perspective. Cantor closed his talk by emphasizing the important of collaboration on both sides of the aisle.

“We’ll return to Washington with a focus on what — together — we can do,” Cantor said.

‘One more time’

From Selma, they began the march toward Montgomery. On the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965, John Lewis, Hosea Williams, and many others, were confronted by mounted troops. When the marchers refused to stop, the troopers beat them, whipped them, and fired tear gas. Many of them — including Lewis and Williams — were severely injured, and the day became known as Bloody Sunday.

And in Selma, on March 3, 2013, our delegation gathered, joined by Vice President Joe Biden, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev. Al Sharpton, and Martin Luther King III.

“I regret — and though it’s not part of what I’m supposed to say — apologize it took me 48 years to get here. I should have been here,” Biden said. “It’s one of the regrets that I have and that many in my generation have.”

The almost 300-member group, followed by hundreds of other local marchers, lined up arm-in-arm to cross the bridge, as Lewis puts it: “one more time.” As the marchers chanted the words of Freedom Singers, ‘We Shall Overcome’ echoed throughout Selma.

We’ll walk hand in hand ...

Black and white together ...

Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe

We shall overcome

Someday.

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See Professor Logan's [original blogs and photos](#), digitally archived by the RWU Law Library.