



**Congressman John Lewis**

**Lectured at Siena on January 19, 2006**

**“Civil Rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**

**“If we fail to act as a nation, I don’t think history will be kind to us.”**

**-John Lewis**

Often called “one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced,” John Lewis has dedicated his life to protecting human rights, securing civil liberties, and building what he calls “The Beloved Community” in America. His dedication to the highest ethical standards and moral principles has won him the admiration of many of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the United States Congress where he has represented the 5th Congressional district of Georgia since 1986.

While still a young man, John Lewis became a nationally recognized leader. By 1963, he was dubbed as one of the Big Six leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Despite more than 40 arrests, physical attacks and serious injuries, Lewis remained a devoted advocate of the philosophy of nonviolence. Today, New Orleans draws Lewis’ attention. Lewis was one of first national figures to point out the social justice issues involved in the tragedy stating “It’s so glaring that the great majority of people crying out for help are poor, they’re black. There’s a whole segment of society that’s being left behind. When you tell people to evacuate, these people didn’t have any way to leave.” Like others, Lewis was appalled by the delay in action to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Consolingly he said, “I’ve cried a lot of tears the past few days as I watched television-to see somebody lying dead outside the convention center. I went to Somalia in 1992 and I saw little babies dying before my eyes. This reminded me of Somalia. But this is America. We’re not a Third World country. This is an embarrassment. It’s a shame. It’s a national disgrace.”

Aside from numerous honors from prestigious colleges and universities, he has received the Golden Plate Award, the Preservation Hero Award, the Capital Award of the National Council of La Raza, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Non-Violent Peace Prize, the NAACP Spingarn Medal, the John F. Kennedy “Profile in Courage Award” for lifetime achievement, and the National Education Association Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Award. The Timberland Company has developed the John Lewis Award, which honors humanitarian service and has established a John Lewis Scholarship Award.