

# The Delray Democrat

## John Lewis – A Man for All Seasons<sup>1</sup>

*June Sandra Neal*



John Robert Lewis didn't have "the look." At 5' 6", he wasn't physically imposing and, most of the time, he moderated his voice. He lacked the charisma of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or Julian Bond or John Kennedy. Yet, when the moment called, he could rock the room with the soaring lyricism of a Baptist minister. Those who knew him said he emanated courage and righteousness as palpable as heat from a radiator.

Great people like John Lewis have a common denominator; they are all impelled by something larger than the circumference of their daily lives. This poor child of a sharecropper grew to be one of the mightiest voices for justice in America.

It was a jagged journey, as it is for all tectonic social change. He was honored as a keynote speaker at the historic 1963 March on Washington. He was spit upon during the 1965 "Bloody Sunday"

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march for voting rights, when, in a paroxysm of venality, state troopers, with gas bombs and billy clubs, charged at the crowd. Lewis stood still. The troopers cracked open his skull.

He helped shepherd the Voting Rights Acts into law and was attacked by the Ku Klux Klan. The first black president of the United States placed the Medal of Freedom around Lewis' neck. Then, the antithesis of the justice Lewis struggled for all his life assumed the American presidency. He wept seeing the televised murder of George Floyd but drew sustenance from the rivers of people of all races who took to the streets, and, like Lewis, put themselves on the line.

Through it all, he was steadfast, a man for all seasons. Somewhere among those street protestors, there is another John Lewis, or two, or more who will pick up the torch. Honor his legacy and join the fight. Help Returning Citizens register to vote. Drive a neighbor to the polls. Treat the Republicans' attempts to impede voting rights as the crimes they are.

Lewis told us the battle is not yet won. "Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime."