

# The march continues

Not unlike college students today, a young John Robert Lewis woke early and packed his backpack for the day. The books, apple and toothbrush he stuffed inside were not preparations for class. **They were preparations for going to jail.**



The 1963 March on Washington was one of this nation's largest protests. Right: A page from the Lewis graphic novel, co-authored with Andrew Aydin and illustrated by Nate Powell.



**T**hat day Lewis and other peaceful protestors marched for civil equality across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. They were attacked by state troopers. In the

haze of tear gas, Lewis' skull was fractured when he was hit with a nightstick. He was beaten within inches of losing his life.

"I thought I saw death," says now U.S. Congressman Lewis, (GA-5).

The events of March 7, 1965, later known as "Bloody Sunday," were integral in the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

That historic day was one step in the congressman's lifelong pursuit of social

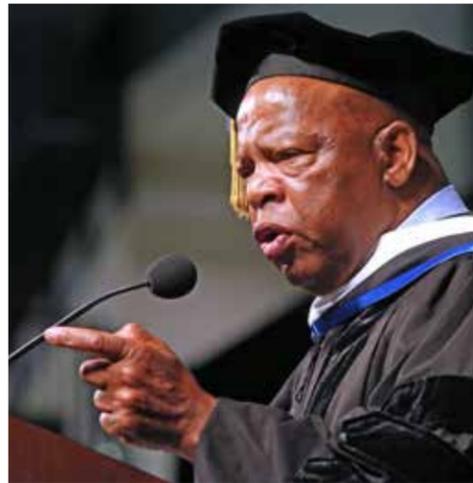
justice. His message of nonviolent protest has spanned decades and mediums. The most recent form is delivered in the graphic novel *March: Book One*, which was this year's selection for the First-year Reading Program.

The First-year Reading Program provides a shared experience for new students and faculty. Lewis added to the impact with a visit on campus to discuss his journey and the book with faculty, staff and students. "I want young students to believe that they, too, can play a major role in bringing about change," he told the reading discussion leaders.

Lewis began his involvement in the civil rights movement while a seminary student in Nashville, Tenn., leading the Nashville Student Movement. By age 23, he was a key organizer and keynote speaker at the 1963 March on Washington.

He faced opposition from every angle. In 1961, when he joined the Freedom Rides driving from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, he was attacked. During restaurant sit-ins in Nashville, patrons yelled, kicked and extinguished cigarettes on him.

His parents advised caution: "Don't get



U.S. Congressman John Lewis visited campus to help students understand the struggles recorded in his graphic novel *March: Book One*, pictured at right and above right. His remarks at Convocation received a standing ovation.



## CONGRESSMAN LEWIS' ADVICE TO STUDENTS:

"Go out and do good. Do what you can to make our country and our world a better place."

in the way," and "Don't get in trouble." But Lewis refused to back down.

He had a vision, he says, of a "beloved community," a community "at peace with itself." To achieve it, Lewis says, he "had to find a way to get in the way."

In his darkest moments, his favorite Bible passage, Psalm 27:1, brought hope: "The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?"

Lewis' courage made him a leader at an early age. "You cannot lead people to a point that you're not willing to go yourself," he explains.

Lewis was arrested more than 40 times. One arrest remains special; it happened on Feb. 27, 1960. It was his first arrest and the moment he chose to put his life on the line for what he believed. Lewis describes feeling as though he had "crossed over."

"I felt so liberated," he says. "I have not looked back since."

That night Lewis shared his liberation with 89 other people who also "found a way

to get in the way." Lewis calls it getting in "good trouble" — the kind that changes the course of history.

Dr. Stephanie Quade, dean of students and member of the committee that selected *March: Book One* as this year's First-year Reading Program book, calls Lewis' story a powerful reminder of an individual and collective call to action. "His personal journey, his accomplishments and his missteps are important reminders and challenges as students begin their lives at Marquette," Quade says.

*March: Book One* was co-authored with Andrew Aydin and illustrated by Nate Powell. The story shows the ways the young people of the movement organized and created change. Aydin worked for Lewis for several years before discussing his idea to illustrate the story. "You see and hear the optimism that exists in his voice," Aydin says. "It became a matter of taking what he had to say and putting it down on paper."

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## Honors + inspirations

• **At Convocation**, the ceremony welcoming freshmen into the university community, Marquette awarded U.S. Congressman John Lewis an honorary degree. The citation read in part: "Because of his courageous leadership for civil rights and years of public service, which exemplify Marquette's mission of leadership and service to others, Congressman John Lewis is recommended for the Marquette University degree doctor of letters, *honoris causa*."

• **Before Lewis spoke**, Dr. Stephanie Russell, vice president for mission and ministry, prayed: "May these students learn to value questions of social justice."

• **Lewis' remarks** to students embodied that sentiment and drew from the struggles he survived and his hopes. "Go out and do good," he urged students. "Do what you can to make our country and our world a better place."

**"I want young students to believe** that they, too, can play a major role in bringing about change."