

NADOHE Mourns the Loss of Two Civil Rights Icons, the Reverend C.T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 20, 2020 - Fort Lauderdale, FL. - NADOHE mourns the loss of two Civil Rights icons, the Reverend C.T. Vivian and Representative John Lewis. The United States has lost two towering leaders of the civil rights movement, who devoted their lives to securing equality for African Americans and all Americans.

The Reverend C.T. Vivian, in 1947, at the age of 23, participated in his "first nonviolent action" to desegregate at lunch counters in Peoria, Illinois. Joining the ministry because of his strong religious beliefs, he took the position that fighting racism and segregation was a moral issue, and in 1955 he and other ministers founded the Nashville affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Together they organized and trained students to participate in the movement to end segregation in Nashville with the first sit-in in 1960, and they led the first march of the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1961, he joined Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members and other ministers to continue the Freedom Rides in Jackson, Mississippi, where members were arrested and Reverend Vivian was severely beaten. In 1963, he was asked by Dr. King to assume leadership of the SCLC, and as its strategist, he, along with others, including John Lewis, worked to get the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts passed.

None of us can forget, his famous confrontation with Sheriff Jim Clark on the steps of Selma's courthouse while leading Blacks to register and vote. The sheriff punched Reverend Vivian to the ground-and he stood back up to continue his argument-"You can turn your back on me, but you can't turn your back on the ideals of justice...you cannot beat down justice." President Barack Obama honored Reverend Vivian with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013 for his tireless efforts, placing his own life in jeopardy, to insist that this country live up to its ideals of justice.

The Honorable John Lewis lived his life in service, fighting for the rights of others, securing voting rights for the disenfranchised, and serving as a powerful voice for equity and social justice. While presenting him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011, President Obama described Representative. Lewis as the "conscience of the United States Congress."

As a college student, John Lewis was a founder of SNCC and its first president as well as one of the original Freedom Riders. He helped organize the March on Washington, where he spoke from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. In 1965, he led the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on what came to be known as Bloody Sunday. The severe beating he received that day was one of dozens that he received as a civil rights activist; he was also jailed over 40 times. His activism galvanized support for the Voting Rights Act, passed that year.

As a congressman representing Atlanta, John Lewis worked tirelessly to pass legislation that represented the people, fighting for social programs that supported the poor, created jobs, called for gun control and providing universal health care.

Representative Lewis was also the architect of the bill to create a national African American museum in Washington. The bill, first introduced in 1988, failed numerous times. Still, Representative Lewis persevered, and in 2003 President George W. Bush signed the bill to build the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The museum held its opening ceremony on September 25, 2016, and is a testament to Rep. Lewis's advocacy for detailing the African American experience and legacy in the U.S.

In his struggles for justice and the rights of others, he remained ever optimistic that change would come. As Representative Lewis stated, "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Do not become bitter or hostile. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. We will find a way to make a way out of no way."

We, as diversity champions, must never lose sight of the difference one individual can make to achieving equity. We remember and honor Reverend C.T. Vivian and Representative John Lewis.

As a nation, we mourn. As a profession, we have lost two champions, but we will not despair. We will celebrate their lives, their work, and carry on their legacy for racial justice and equity for all.

As the pre-eminent voice for chief diversity officers in higher education and with more than 1,100 members representing 750 colleges and universities, NADOHE's mission is to lead higher education towards inclusive excellence through institutional transformation. For more information about NADOHE, visit www.nadohe.org.

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