

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Selma to Montgomery, 1965 Speakers: John Lewis, Mary Stanton

I am Douglas Turner, a professor of Political Science here at Alabama A&M University. I'd like to welcome you to what has been a unique, informative, and often moving series of lectures and panel discussions. This series, the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama 1954 through 1965 is a joint endeavor between Alabama A&M University and the University of Alabama in Huntsville. In my opinion, this series has been highly successful and is a testament to what can be accomplished when people of good will come together and earnestly attempt to build bridges that bring together communities that often view each other with ambivalence, to say the least.

Of course tonight's program, Selma to Montgomery 1965, looks at the events surrounding the confrontation that has come to be known as "Bloody Sunday," in which hundreds of non-violent protesters led by of course John Lewis among others and Jose Williams, who attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama and were met by Alabama state troopers who kicked and clubbed marchers, severely injuring many. Congressman Lewis, himself, was struck in the head and knocked unconscious in that particular incident. The event was captured on film and of course garnered a great deal of publicity for the movement. This publicity as a subsequent march between Selma and Montgomery would prompt President Lyndon Johnson to push for the Voting Rights Act which congress passed on August 6, 1965. Also, let me mention that next week's program, "Turmoil in Tuskegee" will take place at Roberts Recital Hall on the campus of

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

UAH at 7 pm. The featured lecturer will be Frank Toland of the Department of History of Tuskegee University. Let me also mention tonight, that the last two lectures November 29 and December 4th will both be held here on the campus of Alabama A&M University. We will be moving back to the multi-purpose room in the new School of Business for those last two lectures; of course, they do began at 7 pm.

Now, of course the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama lecture series has been a success in part due to the efforts of those committee members who initiated and formulated the series and the many sponsors who have contributed financially to make this ground breaking series a reality. Members of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama planning committee include members both from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and Alabama A&M University which include Dr. Mitch Berbrier of UAH, Dr. John Dimmock of UAH, Dr. Jack Ellis of UAH, Dr. James Johnson of AAMU, Professor Carolyn Parker of AAMU and Dr. Lee Williams of UAH. Funding for the series has been provided by the Alabama Humanities Foundation, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities; Also, Senator Hank Sanders, the Huntsville Times, DESE Research, Incorporated, Alabama Representative Laura Hall. Also, the Alabama A&M University sponsorship has come from the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum, Title III Telecommunications and Distance Learning Center, the Office of Student Development, the Honor Center of Sociology and Social Work, History and Political Science.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

From the University of Alabama in Huntsville, support has been forthcoming from the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, the History Forum, the Bankhead Foundation, Sociology and Social Issues Symposium, the Humanities Center, the Division of Continuing Education, the Honors Program, the Office of Multi-cultural Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs, and also the UAH Copy Center. We also, would like to recognize other distinguished guests and visitors in the audience tonight, we acknowledge you.

The introduction of tonight's speaker, Mrs. Mary Stanton, who is a free lance writer and director of Human Resources for Riverside Church in New York City and U.S. Congressman John Lewis, Representative from the 5th district in Georgia. The introduction of tonight's speaker will be provided by Alabama State representative Laura Hall of Huntsville, Alabama. Do your Honors.

Introduction: Thank you, good evening. I want to say a special thank you to the members of the committee for Alabama A&M and the University of Alabama in Huntsville for providing this opportunity for us to reflect and for giving those of us who did not have an opportunity to live during this time an opportunity to hear about the experiences of the Civil Rights Movement. I will provide for you the introduction for Mrs. Mary Stanton. I don't believe we give enough credit to writers. We take it for granted that the printed word appears on pages for our consumption and hardly appreciate the hours of research and talent involved in writing. Mrs. Mary Stanton our speaker, is a writer to whom we owe special honor. She practiced her profession from a foundation of education. Holding a MA degree in English literature qualifies here to teach English at

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

the University of Idaho at Moscow, the College of St. Elizabeth in Morristown, New Jersey, and the writing program at Rutgers University, and this is only her secondary career. She has the most productive career in human resources. Her experiences in human resources surely give her the special insight into her writing career. I want you to know that Ms. Mary Stanton is the author of, *From Selma to Sorrow: the Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo*. Published in 1998, her depiction of how this Detroit housewife came to be murdered during the 1965 Voting Rights March is essential to our understanding of the sacrifices made by people who care. This book was nominated for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. It has been _____ optioned by the Columbia Tri-Star pictures, and we should see this new movie soon. A documentary film about the Life of Viola Liuzzo is about to be completed. We will watch also for Mrs. Stanton's new book, "Mississippi or Bus," the 1963 freedom walk that tells the story of five interracial attempts to deliver a message of tolerance to Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. One man was murdered on this march. More than one hundred were jailed and ten spent a month on death row at Kilby State Prison. Ms. Mary Stanton, thank you for your dedication to writing. We are truly honored and we benefit from the toils and your talents that you will share also with us today. Ladies and Gentleman, let us welcome Ms. Mary Stanton with a warm round of applause.

Mary Stanton: Thank you very much. Good evening everybody. I want to thank you. I want to especially thank Dr. Williams and Dr. Dimmock for your kind invitation to Huntsville, my first trip down to Alabama. I feel very privileged to be apart of this forum tonight to share some insight about the Alabama of some forty years ago. When I asked

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Dr. Williams what he'd like me to talk about, he suggested that I tackle, and I'm gonna quote right now, "the interconnections of law enforcement officials with the intra and interstate police officers, the Klan and the FBI to subvert the movement in Alabama.

That's a mouth full isn't it? At first, I looked at that and I said, "well that's a pretty thankless task", but it really is a very important part of what happened here forty years ago, and it certainly is a important part of Viola Liuzzo's story. What we know is that the Alabama Civil Right's Movement was all about power. Power. Who had it? Who intended to keep it? Who wasn't going to get any? Yes, it was also about injustice and segregation and economics, but day to day it was really about maintaining the status quo, and that depended on maintaining segregation through intimidation, because there were many more powerless black people than more powerful white ones. Now, two very effective ways of sustaining segregation were number one, to keep the electives white, so that the segregationists couldn't get voted out of office. And number two, to keep the juries white, so those violent racists wouldn't get convicted of their crimes against blacks and against race mixture. Now, in order to maintain this southern way of life, people were forced to operate outside the law. Remember, there were less than two thousand Klansmen in the whole state, which is less than one percent of the whole population. Now, the Klan was successful because they were federal, state and local law enforcement officers who were members and supporters. The very people responsible for enforcing the law were undermining it, and permitting the Klan to operate really like a terrorist shadow government. Case and point Governor George Wallace refused to intervene. Ace Carter, who was his special assistant, was an outspoken white supremacist. He

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

headed an organization called the Official Klu Klux Klan of the Confederacy. And then there were the sheriffs O'Connor and Jim Clark who all actually encouraged to defy the law.

So, what does all of this have to do with Viola Liuzzo? I'd like to tell you about that. In the time that we have together tonight I'd like to talk about three things. Number one, who Viola Liuzzo was. Number two, why she was murdered, and finally, what does her experience tell us about the breakdown of the rule of law, not only in Alabama but through a network of defiance that stretched from Selma, up to Detroit and across to Washington, D.C. back in 1965. Now, if Viola Liuzzo was here tonight among us, and we were to ask, "Who are you?" She might say, "I'm Penny, Tony, Tommy and Sally's mother." Or, she might say, "I'm Jim Liuzzo's wife." After she took a breath she might add, "I'm also a medical technologist, I'm a part-time college student, I belong to the PTA, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish and I volunteer for the March of Dimes." Listening to Viola describe her life, you'd be hard pressed to figure how she ever became the most controversial of the American civil rights martyrs, and the only white woman who is honored at the National Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery.

So, how did it happen? The story very briefly is this. On March 25, 1965, Viola and a young black man, whose name was Leroy Moton, drove from Selma to Montgomery that night the voting march ended. They were picking up some marchers who needed a ride. The march had drawn twenty five thousand people to Alabama's capital city. Four Klansmen followed Viola and Moton on Highway 80 for twenty miles, and then they pulled up along side her car and fired out the side window. Viola was

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

killed instantly, and Moton who was covered with her blood escaped by pretending to be dead when the Klansmen came back to check their work. The thirty-nine-year-old Detroit housewife and nineteen-year-old Selma short order cook had been deliberately chosen by the Klansmen because they represented every thing that the segregationists most hated and feared, a white female, outside agitator driving after dark with a local black activist sitting in the front seat of her car. Because one of the Klansmen was a paid FBI informant, Viola lost her life in more ways than one. In order to deflect attention from the FBI's carelessness in permitting a violent racist to work undercover the night of that march, J. Edgar Hoover personally crafted a malicious public campaign portraying Viola as an unstable woman who had abandoned her family to stir up trouble in the south. The implication was that she got exactly what she deserved. Years of unrelenting accusations and outright lies nearly destroyed her husband and her five children. Until the family got her files through the Freedom of Information Act, nearly fifteen years after their mother's murder, they didn't know that the ugly slander about her had originated in the offices of our own justice department.

Well, this is a very sad story you might say, and yes it's tragic, and yes J. Edgar Hoover was a monster, but if this was a random slaying or even if it was a symbolic killing, what is it that we can learn from it? Well, it's this. J. Edgar Hoover may have molded a very sinister image of Viola Liuzzo, but in 1965 a majority of white Americans believed it. Why? Well, nice middle aged, working class white American women didn't go to college. They didn't champion civil rights or travel by themselves. Those things wouldn't enhance a white woman's reputation on a good day, but even a reputation

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

tongued by the FBI couldn't alter the fact that Viola was useless as a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement. Her age, her gender, her background, her class, her education, they were all wrong. Yet, ironically the Klansmen chose her as a target precisely because her death would send a message, send a very clear message that northern whites and southern blacks could understand. Come south and get involved with the Freedom Movement at your own risk.

Like the international terrorists that we face today, the Klansmen knew how to manipulate symbolism. Bin Laden chose the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, not because they are the tallest or the most beautiful buildings in America, but because they represent something very fundamental about our society. Symbolism stirs our deepest consciousness, and it has the power to terrify as well as to inspire. Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, the three young men murdered during the Freedom Summer of 1964, also became symbols. To white liberals, they were appropriate civil rights leaders. They were young. One was a white activist, college student and another one was a selfless, white social worker. The other was a black community worker fighting for the freedom of his people. These were very positive symbols. Viola was too old, too pushy, too independent, and she trampled on too many social norms. In 1965, Viola had volunteered to advance the social movement that the majority of white Americans felt was already moving too fast. Her activism couldn't be ascribed to youthful idealism. It threatened the family and most importantly, the protective status of women. White American women couldn't afford to make Viola a hero. To do that would be to invite disturbing questions about their own lives. The Goodman, Schwerner

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

and Chaney families worked hard to insure that their sons would be remembered. All these families had supported their civil rights activism, while violist husband Jim, had been very ambivalent about his wife's participation. After Viola's murder, Jim found himself continually defending her reputation, refuting these vicious rumors that were swirling around her, and trying to protect their children. Two days after her funeral, a cross was burned on his lawn in Detroit. Jim had little time or energy or even opportunity to worry about his wife's immortality. Viola's children were taunted by their classmates, shunned by their neighbors and shamed by the cloud of suspicion that hung over their mother's activism. America fussed about her and budged about her for a few days and then promptly forgot all about her. The consensus was there was something just not right about this woman.

Okay, so now that we know who she was, and why she was murdered, let's look to that last question. What does her experience tell us about the break down of the rule of law, not only in Alabama, but also through a network of defiance that stretched from Selma, to Detroit, to Washington? The answers are contained in something called the Lane report. When I discovered this report in the course of my research, the nicest thing I can say about it is that it absolutely chilled me to the bone. I want to share some of that with you. On May 11, 1965, Walter Rugaber, a Detroit free-press reporter, called Jim Liuzzo to alert him that a confidential report about his wife written by Marvin G. Lane, police commissioner of Warren, Michigan and former chief of detectives of the Detroit Police Department had been sent to Selma Sheriff Jim Clark, in April. Early in May, Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton was seen passing copies of this report to newsmen

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

covering the Wilkins trial. Wilkins was one of the murderers of Liuzzo. Rugaber told Jim Liuzzo that the free press would be breaking the story on May 12. Jim was livid. He wanted to know why Commissioner Lane was investigating his murdered wife. Jim was so upset that he called the Detroit FBI office. Lane's jurisdiction was listed in suburban Warren, Jim told the agent. Liuzzo's never lived in Warren. They had never received so much as a parking ticket in Warren. And no one from the Warren Police Department had ever questioned Jim about his personal affairs. Who authorized the Lane report? Police commissioner Ray Girardin vehemently denied that his department's criminal intelligence bureau had any part in compiling it. Commissioner Lane refused to name the sources, insisting that confidential reports were routine. Lane said he often supplied other police departments' confidential reports and he received them in return. This was, despite the fact that it was highly irregular to prepare a detailed personal history on a murder victim, after the suspects have been apprehended. Commissioner Lane's note to Sheriff Clark was written on City of Warren Police stationery. He clearly stated that on March 26, one day after the murder, the criminal intelligence bureau began an investigation on the background of Viola Liuzzo. Lane went on to request Sheriff Clark's assistance. We would like Wayne Rhode, if it is at all possible to determine the method of transportation of Selma by Mrs. Liuzzo, and who may have accompanied her. The Detroit Free Press posts three critical questions; What business of Lane's was it to compile a report from Mrs. Liuzzo since she was not a Warren resident? By what distorted judgment did Lane decide such a report was any business of Sheriff Clark's

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

since the murder did not take place in Dallas County but in Lowden. What authority did Lane ask Sheriff Clark to determine the method of transportation she took, and who went with her? On May 14, Walter Rugaber reported that virtually every detail of Lane's confidential report was smuggled out of the file of the Detroit Police Department. Rugaber even identified the file as number 1782, which contained material gathered both by the Detroit police and by the FBI. Chief of Detectives, Vincent Persanti admitted it was an obvious conclusion that Lane's information had come from the Detroit Criminal Intelligence Bureau. On May 17, inspector Earl Miller, Director of the Criminal Intelligence Bureau admitted to finding his ex-boss Marvin Lane with the file. Former Sinclair county Sheriff Ferris Lucas, who was serving as Executive Director of the National Sheriffs Association in Washington, admitted that he had encouraged Sheriff Jim Clark to ask Lane for the information. Commissioner Girardin relieved the inspector of his duties saying, "his motives were right, his judgment perhaps wasn't." Chief Persanti explained the Liuzzo funeral was going to be here in Detroit, and we wanted to know what sorts of security arrangements were anticipated? Demonstrations and counter demonstrations were anticipated and we were just trying to prepare ourselves. Commissioner Girardin was then called before the City Council to explain why inspector Miller would assume that Lane, who no longer worked for the police had a right to look at confidential information. You must remember, that Lane is a retired chief of detectives, he says, "If he asks to check a record, he would get cooperation." Girardin assured that council that he would meet personally with Jim Liuzzo. He said, "He wanted to spare the Liuzzo children from embarrassment." That quotation was picked up

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

by the Detroit Free Press and subsequently hit the wire services. Jim went wild. When he couldn't reach Girardin by phone, he dashed off a telegram demanding to know what the commissioner meant by such a statement. Distortions, half-truths, and outright lies were being circulated about his wife. Aspirations were being cast on her sanity, her morality, and her sense of responsibility in going to Selma. Girardin's statements said that aura of mystery surrounding the Lane report, his posture with the council only encouraged further conjecture. Bits and pieces of Viola Liuzzo's history were being taken out of context, and distorted beyond recognition. The Jackson Mississippi daily news was reporting that Mrs. Liuzzo had a police file four pages long. Now, I think we've come to the crux of what Dr. Williams was talking about and what was really going on here. The FBI's need to defame Viola in order to cover its own tracks is understandable, if not a forgivable motive, as is the precious desire for a good story. The connection between the Selma police, the Detroit police and the Klan is however, much more ominous. Detroit was one of America's most racially troubled cities in 1965. Relations between the white police department and the black community were as angry and violent as any in Blackbelt, Alabama. In 1925, the Detroit police department had recruited officers from the Deep South and many of them, their sons, their nephews, their brothers and their cousins remained on the force forty years later. Members of the Detroit and Selma police forces reach down empathically to one another. Many on both sides believed that a white woman who would leave her family to go off on a freedom march, live with blacks, ride in cars with black men, and advocate for their rights was, if not crazy, at least a traitor to her race and therefore very likely immoral. Now, the Lane

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

report ultimately achieved its purpose, public sympathy was withdrawn from the Liuzzo family almost immediately, her murderers were set free, and her image as a spoiled neurotic housewife abandoning her family to run off on a freedom march began to stick. I could tell you that it made other northern white middle age white women think about taking a stand on civil rights. It frightened them off, just as Viola's murderers had intended to frighten off activists who were considering coming south to work for the movement. An editorial in the Detroit Free Press on May 13th tried to set the record straight. The Lane report is inaccurate, the editor wrote, "It is derogatory, and totally uncalled for." It makes insinuations, which are not supported by the facts, and dwells on irrelevant and unfavorable minutia, not only about Liuzzo but also about her whole family. What Lane ignored was that Mrs. Liuzzo was not accused of any crime. Her murder was not the result of any provocation on her part. She was involved in no ballroom brawl, and she had broken no law. Viola Liuzzo's story, like so many other stories of the 1960's, causes us and cautions us to be careful and to stay alert. The American electorates are no longer all white. Juries are no longer all white, but intimidation and manipulation continue. Spend and character assassination continues. The power of symbolism to help and to hurt is as strong today as it ever was. Viola Liuzzo's reminds us that the fight for justice is everybody's business, and no one, no private citizen, no law enforcement official ought to be permitted to shame or to terrify anyone into backing away from a lawful position of conscience. I remember when I was a little girl growing up in Queens, New York and I got into squabbles with some of the neighborhood kids, and the kids would often say to each other, "Don't you tell me to shut

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

up, this is a free country!” That’s the message. The philosopher Plato probably said it best when he observed at 400 B.C. that, “The punishment which the wise suffer will refuse to take part in government, is to live under the government of worse men.” Let us remember that. It was something the Alabama Civil Rights activists believed was important enough to risk their lives for. Thank You.

Introduction: On February 21, 1940 in Troy, Alabama a little baby boy was born. With nine siblings, he worked on his family’s farm picking cotton, gathering peanuts and pulling corn. Many times they had to work on the farms rather than attend their local segregated schools in Pike County, Alabama. Who would have seen an U.S. Congressman in that little boy by the name of John Lewis? Who would have guessed that this little boy would devote his life to the beloved community? Who would have known this little boy would play his role in history? Who would have guessed this little boy who devoted his life to the beloved community where all people of all races, religion and ethnicity, would share basic human rights? Who could have foreseen his fellow congressman asking him to tell them what it was like to have been in the action of the Civil Rights Movement?

As a young student at Fisk University, John Lewis organized sit in’s and non-violent process. In 1961, he was one of the first freedom riders on the Greyhound buses in Washington D.C., then down through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana and his native, Alabama. It was 1963; John Lewis was only twenty-three-years-old and a chairman of the student non-violent coordinating

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

committee, which placed him in the national spotlight with the “Big Six”: Martin Luther King Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, Whitney Young, James Farmer, and Roy Wilkins. They met with John F. Kennedy to plan the upcoming march on Washington. John’s controversial speech at the National Mall placed him into the forefront and into the national spotlight. Gaining national attention by showing political power in numbers was a successful goal that summer in 1964. John Lewis was there to help organize voters registration drives and community action programs for the Mississippi freedom summer. Challenging Mississippi’s long standing Democratic Party of segregationists while democrats fought for seats at the upcoming national convention was a radical step. John Lewis was there. It was back home in Alabama for John Lewis on March 7, 1965. Arm and arm with the non-violence intended, they marched six hundred strong across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Suddenly, the clubs and the kicks of Alabama State Troopers turned their peaceful march into “Bloody Sunday.” A violent blow struck John on the head, knocking him unconscious. This incident propelled President Lyndon Johnson to work harder for the Voting Rights Act which congress passed on August 6, 1965. Well, a knock on the head didn’t stop John Lewis. He became Director of the Voter Education Project, which would add four million minorities to the voter role. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter named him the Directorship of Action with more than two hundred fifty thousand volunteers. In 1980, he became Community Affairs Director of the National Consumer Co-op Bank in Atlanta. After serving on the City Council John Lewis was elected to represent Georgia’s 5th Congressional District in November of

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

1986. He is currently serving his 8th congressional term, and guess what ladies and gentleman; he runs unopposed. In the 107th Congress, John is a committee member of the Ways and Means where he serves on the sub-committee on health and oversight. He is a Chief Deputy Democratic Whip since 1991. He served on the Democratic Steering Committee as a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, and a congressional committee to support writers and journalists. He is also the Co-chair of the Faith and Politics Institute.

Now I ask you, what crystal ball could have forecast that we here today would be eagerly waiting to hear this hard working, farmer's son, this courageous student, this national leader, this trench worker for voter registration, this Edmund Pettus Bridge peaceful warrior, and this distinguished Congressman John Lewis? Congressman Lewis.

John Lewis: Thank you very much, Representative, for those kind words of introduction. Let me just say to members of the planning committee, to each and every one of you participating in this event, for inviting me to be here, the representatives of University of Alabama in Huntsville, and Alabama A&M University, I'm delighted and very pleased to be here. It is good to be here with Mary Stanton telling the history of Viola Liuzzo. Thank you, Mary. Thank You. You heard in the introduction, and I want to be brief. I didn't grow up in a big city like Decatur. I didn't grow up in a big city like Troy, Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham, Bradford, Atmore, or Florence. I grew up fifty miles from Montgomery, in this little town called Troy. My father, as Representative Hall told you was a sharecropper, a tenant farmer. Back in 1944, when I was four years old, and I do remember when I was four, My father had saved three hundred dollars and with the three

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

hundred dollars he bought one hundred ten acres of land. That's a lot of land for three hundred dollars. As a matter of fact, my eighty-seven- year old mother is still living on this farm that my father bought in 1944 for three hundred dollars. On this farm, there was a lot of cotton, corn, peanuts, hogs, cows, and chickens. Now, Mary has heard me tell this story and Don Calloway, who is the Executive President of the student body here at A&M with a intern in my office this pass summer, he heard it probably more than you care to hear. Right Don? But, I tell this story just to put it into the proper perspective about the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama and our journey from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. Assuming you come to Washington and visit my office, the first thing the staff will offer you will be a Coca-Cola, because Atlanta happens to be the home of the Coca-Cola bottling company. And Coca-Cola provides all members of the Georgia Congressional Delegation with an adequate supply of Coca-Cola products to be made available to our visitors. The next thing the staff will offer you, will be some peanuts. I ate so many peanuts when I was growing up outside of Troy, that I don't want to see anymore peanuts. Sometimes when I would get on the flight to fly from Atlanta to Washington or from Washington back to Atlanta, the flight attendant would try to push some peanuts on me and I would just say, "No, no peanuts!" The Georgia peanut people provide us with peanuts and I don't want any of you to come to Georgia and say that John Lewis was talking about the peanuts okay? Don't say anything, but if you are from there we will offer you some peanuts. Also, on this farm, we raised a lot of chickens and as young black boy growing up on this farm it was my responsibility to care for the chickens. I fell in love with raising chickens like no one else could raise chickens. It was

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

my calling; it was my mission; it was my sense of obligation and responsibility to care for those chickens. Now, I know that at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and Alabama A&M, you are very smart. They have wonderful professors, wonderful administrators and smart students, but you don't know anything about raising chickens. I know you don't. Let me tell you what I had to do as a young black boy growing up in rural Pike County, Alabama in the 1940's and 1950's. You take a fresh egg, mark them with a pencil, place them under the sitting hen and wait for three long weeks for the little chicks to hatch. Now, some of you are smart in computer science and math, history and literature, but you don't know anything about raising chickens. I know you are very smart being here in this community with tons of technologies, but you don't know anything about raising chickens, but you're saying why do you mark those fresh eggs with a pencil before you place them under the sitting hen? Well, from time to time another hen will get on the same nest, and there would be some more eggs. You have to be able to tell the first eggs from the eggs that we already have under the sitting hen. Do you follow me? You don't follow me. When these little chicks would hatch, I would fool these sitting hens; I would cheat on these sitting hens. I would take these little chicks and give them to another hen. I'd put them in a box with a lantern, and raise them on their own. I'd get some more fresh eggs and mark them with a pencil, place them under the sitting hen, encourage the sitting hen to sit in the nest for another three weeks. I kept on cheating on these sitting hens in order to get some more little chicks. When I looked back on it was not the right thing to do. It was not the moral thing to do. It was not the most loving thing to do. It was not the most non-violent thing to do, but I kept on

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

cheating on these sitting hens and fooling these sitting hens. I was never quite able to save \$18.98 to order the most inexpensive hatcher incubator from the Sears & Roebuck store in Atlanta. We use to get the Sears & Roebuck catalog. Some of you may be old enough to remember that big book, thick catalog, we called it the wish book. I wish I had this, I wish I had that. So, I just kept on cheating on the sitting hens. As a young boy, I wanted to be a minister. So, when I was about 7-½ or 8 years old, one of my uncles had Santa Clause bring me a Bible. I learned to read the bible, then I started preaching and teaching; from time to time, we would church. With the help of my sisters, brothers and first cousins, we would gather all of our chickens together, like you are gathered here in this hall tonight. The chickens along with my sisters, brothers and my first cousins would make up the congregation. I would start speaking, a preacher, and as I started the chickens would become very quiet. As a matter of fact some of these chickens would bow their head. Some of them would shake their head. But when I look back on it, they never quite said Amen. I am convinced that the regular majority of these chickens that I preached to in the 1940's and in the 1950's tended to listen to me better than some of my colleagues listen to me today in the Congress and some of these chickens were a little more productive. At least, they produced eggs. But growing up there in rural Pike County, outside of Troy... When we would visit the little town of Troy, or visit Montgomery, or visit Tuskegee, or visit Union Springs, I saw those signs that said, "White men, colored men, white women, colored waiting." I saw signs that said white waiting, colored waiting. As a young child, I tasted the bitter fruits of racism and segregation and racial discrimination.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

In 1955, at the age of fifteen in the tenth grade, I heard of Rosa Parks; I heard of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1956, at the age of sixteen, a group of us went down to the Pike County Public Library in downtown Troy, trying to check some books out, trying to get a library card. We were told by the librarian that the library was for white only, and not for colored. I went back to the Pike County Public Library on July 5, 1958 for a book signing and hundreds of white and black citizens came out. As a matter of fact they gave me a library card, so it says something about the distance that we've come and the progress that was made in laying down the burden of race. I don't want to digress too much, but I was telling Jim and his wife that when we were driving in from the airport that when I finished high school in May of 1957, I wanted to study at Troy State College. I sent my High school transcript, filed my application, and I never heard a word from the college, only ten miles from my home. I wrote a letter to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I didn't tell my mother, didn't tell my father or any of my sisters and brothers that I had sent a letter to Dr. King telling him about my desire to attend Troy State College, better known now as Troy State University. In the meantime, my mother was working at a baptist orphan home, white, Alabama southern baptist orphan home, in addition to her work on the farm. She came across a little paper about a black school, supported by the southern baptist white and nation baptist black in Nashville for black students, students who studied and worked their way through school. I applied to go there. I was accepted. An uncle of mine gave me a hundred-dollar bill, more money than I had ever had. He gave me a footlocker, one of these upright trunks, footlockers with the drawers, the curtains, drapers you call it I guess. I put everything that I owned in that footlocker, my

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

books, clothing, everything except those chickens and I went off to school in Nashville. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. heard that I was in Nashville and got back in touch with me. He sent me a round trip Greyhound bus ticket and told me the next time I was in Troy for spring break to come to see him. It was in March of 1958, by this time I was eighteen years old, on a Saturday morning, my father drove me to the Greyhound bus station. I boarded the bus, and traveled the fifty miles to Montgomery. A young lawyer, I'd never seen a lawyer before, black or white by the name of Fred Grey met me at the Greyhound bus station. Fred Grey for many years was a lawyer for the Montgomery Improvement Association for Dr. King and Rosa Parks, for those of us on the Selma March and the Freedom Ride. He met me and drove me to First Baptist Church in downtown Montgomery on Ripley Street passerby Reverend Abernathy. Arriving at the steps of the church, I was so scared and so nervous. I didn't know what I was going to say to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He ushered me into the pastor's study and I saw Reverend Abernathy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. standing behind a desk. Dr. King said, "Are you John Lewis? Are you the boy from Troy?" and I spoke up and said, "Dr. King, I am John Robert Lewis." I gave my whole name. I didn't want there to be any mistake that I was the right person. That was the beginning of my relationship with Martin Luther King Jr. I continued to study in Nashville. While studying there I met individuals like Jim Lawson, one of the leading thinkers and philosopher on the philosophy and the discipline of non-violence, students like Diane Nash, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette and many other young people. We start studying the philosophy and the discipline for non-violence, every Tuesday night at 6:30 p.m. at a Methodist church near Fisk University

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

campus. In then we got involved in the sit-ins and the freedom ride. Two years later, I became the head of the student non-violent coordinating committee in June 1963 as Representative Hall said at the age of twenty-three. On the freedom ride through Alabama, we were arrested and jailed in Birmingham. Later, Bull Conner picked us up, took us out of jail and dropped us off at the Alabama/Tennessee state line, and left us. A car from Nashville came back in May of 1961, picked us up and took us back to Birmingham where we were met by the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and other students. We continued from Birmingham to Montgomery, where we were beaten at the Greyhound bus station in Montgomery by an angry mob. We continued to Mississippi, but we were arrested and jailed, a few of us was in the city jail in Jackson, the county jail in Jackson and many of us went to the state penitentiary in Parchment during the summer of 1961. All across the south, not just in Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina or South Carolina, but in the eleven states of the whole confederacy, from Virginia to Texas, it was almost impossible for people of color to become participants in the democratic process to register to vote. When I was working on my March on Washington speech for August 28, 1963, I was reading a copy of the New York Times and I saw a group of women in Africa, black women, carrying signs saying, "One man, one vote." So in my March on Washington speech I said something like, "One man, one vote is the African pride. It is ours too, it must be ours," and that became the rallying cry. That became the slogan for the student non-violent coordinating committee.

A young man by the name of Bernard Lafayette who was a student in Nashville, had gone into Selma, Alabama in the fall of 1962. He was working with Mrs. Boynton

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

of the immediate Boynton in the Dallas County Voters League, working with several ministers and others, trying to create a movement in Selma, around the right to vote. In Selma in 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1965 only 2.4 percent of blacks of voting age were registered to vote. At the same time, we were organizing an effort in Mississippi. There had been sit-ins in Selma. People had gone to jail, got arrested at lunch counters and drugstores. There had been a movement there, and we went there to help. A great deal of our time was left in a place in Mississippi. Before we could launch the campaign in Selma or in Mississippi, there was a terrible bombing at the sixteenth street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, where four little girls were killed. We intensified our effort in Selma, but also in Mississippi. We recruited more than a thousand students. Lawyers, doctors, teachers, priests, ministers, rabbis, nuns and others to come to Mississippi and work in the Freedom School. As Mary Stanton told you, the summer night of June 21, 1964 three young men that I knew: Andy Goodman, Michael Schwerner, white from New York and James Chaney, black from Mississippi, went out to investigate the burning of black church that stopped by the sheriff. They were arrested and taken to jail. Later that same Sunday night of June 21, 1964 the sheriff and his deputies took these three young men from their jail cell and turned them over to the Klan, where they were beaten, shot and killed. These three young men didn't die in Vietnam. They didn't die in the Middle East. They didn't die in Africa or in Eastern Europe. They didn't die in Central South America. They died right here in our own country, for the right of all of our citizens to become participants in the democratic process. So, when people said what they said about the election last year, and

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

what happened in Florida and other places, and they tell us to get over it, we say, "We cannot get over it." It's very hard to get over it. It's difficult for me to know that some of our friends, some of our colleagues died for the precious rights for all of our citizens to participate in the democratic process.

That was a serious blow to the movement, but we didn't give up. President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964. He won a landslide election in November of 1964. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. received a Nobel Peace Prize in December 1964. He came back to America, met by a group of us in New York, and later went down to Washington to the White House to have a meeting with President Johnson and he said, "Mr. President, we need a strong voting rights act." And President Johnson told Dr. King in so many words, "We don't have the votes in the congress to get a voting rights act passed." A judge signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Martin Luther King Jr. had come back to Atlanta to meet with people in FDLC, his own organization. We were those involved in the student non-violent coordinating committee. Then, he got an invitation from the Dallas County Voters League in Selma, Alabama from Mrs. Boynton and the good people in Selma, to come there and be the Emancipation Proclamation speaker in January of 1965. Dr. King said, "We will write that act, we will write it some place." In Selma, Alabama we had a Sheriff, as the Mayor mentioned earlier by the name of Jim Clark. Sheriff Clark was a very big man, who wore a gun on one side and a nightstick on the other side. He carried an electric cow prodder in his hand, and he didn't use it on cows. He wore a button on his left lapel, and that button said, "Never, never to voter registration." Now all of you here must keep in mind that in Selma, if you go there

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

now, the courthouse looks the same way it did thirty six years ago. The steps and the rails are the same. You could only attempt to register to vote on the first and third Monday of each month. The courthouse was the only place. And sometimes when they knew that we were organizing the voter's registration campaign they would just close the doors, just lock it up for the day or for the week. I will never forget when it was my day, January 18, 1965, to lead a group of elderly black men and women to the courthouse just to get inside the door, up the steps, get an application form and try to pass the test. You must keep in mind, and I know that there are some historians here and professors of political science, but it was very difficult, almost impossible for people to pass the poll-literacy test. They were asked things like; How many bubbles are in bar of soap? That was not on the test. There were black teachers, black lawyers and black doctors told that they could not read or write well enough, and they fought the so-called literacy test. On January 18th, when it was my day to lead a group of people up the steps, Sheriff Clark met me at the top of the steps and he said, "John Lewis, you're an outside agitator. You are the lowest form of humanity." At that time, I had all of my hair and I was a few pounds lighter. I looked Sheriff Clark straight in the eye and I said, "Sheriff, I may be a agitator, but I'm not an outsider. I grew up only about ninety miles from here and we're going to stay here until these people are allowed to register to vote," and he said, "You're under arrest." He arrested me along with a few other people. We went to jail. A few days later Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Reverend Abernathy and others came to Selma. In less than one week, we filled the jails of Selma, every jail, the city jail and the county jail. They took us out on some penal farm where it looked like a place where they kept

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

chickens. They put us all in there and we slept on wooden floors. Then, about three weeks later, I believe it was the night of February 17 or the 19th in Marion, Alabama, in Perry County, in the heart of the Blackbelt. Perry County is the home county of Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, the home county of Mrs. Ralph Abernathy, Juanita Abernathy, and the late Mrs. Andrew Young, Jane Young; all from this county in Alabama. There was a demonstration, a protest, for the right to vote. That night a confrontation occurred. A young man by the name of Jimmy Lee Jackson tried to protect his elderly grandparents and was shot in the stomach by a state trooper and a few days later, he died at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma. Because of what happened to him, we made a decision (the movement did) that we would march from Selma to Montgomery. It was the idea of James Bevel that had been involved in the Nashville incident and the Freedom Ride. A whole new staff of Dr. King suggested at one point that maybe we should take the body of Jimmy Lee Jackson to the state capital in Alabama and present the body to Governor Wallace. We decided that we would have an orderly peaceful nonviolent war from Selma to Montgomery to help educate and synthesize all of the citizens of Alabama but as a nation around the right to vote. We announced that the march would occur on Sunday, March 7th. On Saturday, March 6th, Governor Wallace made a statement that the march would not be allowed. On Saturday, the Governor, rather than the sheriff from Dallas County, Sheriff Clark, requested that all white men over the age of 21 come down to the Dallas County Court House to be deputized to become part of the part to stop the march. There was a real debate within my organization, the student non-violent coordinating committee. There were people saying that we should not march;

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

it is too dangerous; people would get hurt. So, we went back to Atlanta, had a meeting there in the basement of a little restaurant. We met almost all night debating whether we should march or not. I took the position as the chair of the student non-violent coordinating committee and said that we should march and the local people wanted to march. The FDLC people wanted to march. I felt that I had an obligation to walk with the people from Selma. I have been there; I got arrested with them. I felt that I should be there. So, the SNCC executive committee voted that early that Sunday morning, about three or four o' clock in the morning, that if I wanted to march I would march as an individual but not as chair of the student nonviolent coordinating committee. Three of us jumped in an old car and drove from Atlanta to Selma. We got our sleeping bags and slept in the SNCC Freedom House on the floor until later that morning. We got up and got dressed. We went to the Brown Chapel AME Church for the morning services. After the services, more than six hundred of us, mostly elderly black men and women and a few young people came out of the church near a housing project (playground area) where we conducted a non-violent workshop, telling people to be orderly, to be quiet and to walk in twos. We had a prayer. We lined up in twos. I was walking beside Jose Williams from Dr. King's organization. At that time, I was wearing a backpack. I had a light trench coat on and I was wearing a backpack before they became fashionable to wear backpacks. In this backpack, I had two books, an apple, an orange, toothbrush and toothpaste. I thought that we were going to be arrested and that we were going to jail. So, I wanted to have something to read, something to eat and since I was going to be in close quarters with my friends, colleagues and neighbors, I wanted to be able to brush my teeth.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

We started walking through the streets of Selma. No one was saying a word, so orderly, so peaceful and so quiet on a Sunday afternoon. We got to the edge of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, crossing the Alabama River, and Jose Williams looked down below and he saw this water. He said, "John, can you swim." I said, "No, Jose. Can you swim?" He said, "No. Well, there is too much water down there." I said, "We are not going to jump. We are not going back. We are going forward." We continued to walk. We came to the apex of the Edmund Pettus Bridge and down below we saw a sea of blue, Alabama state troopers, and behind the state troopers, you saw Sheriff Clark's deputies; you saw men on horseback and we walked. We came within hearing distance of the state troopers and a man identified himself and said, "I am Major John Cloud of the Alabama State troopers. This is an unlawful march. You will not be allowed to continue. I will give you three minutes to disperse and return to your church." Less than a minute-and-a-half, Major Cloud said, "Move up that van," and Jose said to me, "John, they are going to gas us." We saw these men putting on their gas masks and they came towards us beating us with nightsticks, tramping us with horses and releasing the tear gas. I was hit in the head by a state trooper with a nightstick. I thought that I was going to die. I thought I saw death. Until this day, I do not know how I made it back across that bridge, through the streets of Selma and back to the Brown Chapel AME Church, but I do recall being back at the church that Sunday afternoon. By this time, the church was full to capacity. More than two thousand citizens of Selma and surrounding communities from outside were trying to get in to protest what had happened. Someone in the median said, "John, you should say something to the audience." I stood up and said, "I do not understand it, how President

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Johnson can send troops to Vietnam but cannot send troops to Selma to protect people who only desire is to register to vote.” The next thing I know is that I had been admitted to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma with a fractured skull. The next morning, early that Monday (it would be March 8th) Martin Luther King, Jr., and Reverend Abernathy came in from Atlanta. They came by to see me. Dr. King said, “Do not worry. We will make it from Selma to Montgomery. The Voting Rights Act will be passed.” He was right. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., issued an appeal for religious leaders to come to Selma that following Tuesday, March 9th. More than a thousand white and black religious leaders, ministers, priests, rabbis, nuns and others came to Selma and marched to the same spot where we had been beaten two days earlier, prayed and turned back. Some of the people in SNCC that had a poster march came and they did not like the idea that Dr. King turned back. They went to Montgomery and started another effort organizing the students at Alabama State and Tuskegee; a confrontation occurred there. We went into federal court and got an injunction against Governor Wallace, Sheriff Clark and others for interfering with the march. President Lyndon Johnson called Governor Wallace to Washington and tried to get an assurance from him that he could protect us, as we got a court ruling from federal district judge Frank Johnson. I do not know what the state of Alabama would be like. I do not know what it would be like if it was not for a man like Frank M. Johnson. I remember us going into court. The Department of Justice subpoenaed the CBS film from that day of “Bloody Sunday.” Judge Johnson viewed it. He stood up, shook his robe, recessed the court, came back and granted us everything that we wanted and allowed us to march in an orderly fashion all the way from Selma to

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Montgomery. Three hundred of us walked all the way. On the night of March 15, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson spoke to a joint session of the congress and made one of the most meaningful speeches any American president had made in modern time and the whole question of voting rights/civil rights. He condemned the violence in Selma. He started that speech off that night by saying, "I speak tonight for the dignity of man and for the destiny of democracy." President Johnson went on to say, "At times, history and fate meet in a single place in man's on end in search for freedom." It was more than a century ago at Lexington and at Concorde. So, it was at _____. So, it was last week in Selma, Alabama. In his speech he said, "And we shall overcome," over and over again. He said it with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the home of a local dentist. As we watched and listened to Lyndon Johnson, tears came down Dr. King's face; he cried. We all cried. He said again, "We'll make it from Selma to Montgomery," and the Voting Rights Act was passed. We walked all the way, five days. More then twenty-five thousand people gathered there on that day. As Mary said again, Ms. Viola Liuzzo was killed on that that night traveling between Selma and Montgomery, and Reverend James Reed was beaten almost to death on the night of March 9th, after _____ crossed that bridge and later died at the local hospital in Birmingham. The congress passed the Voting Rights Act, finally to law, and I said it might be because of what happened in Selma. Because of what happened on the bridge, we had witnessed what I like to call a nonviolent revolution in this region. We live in a different country. We lived in a better country and we are a better people. Sometimes, I hear young people saying nothing has changed and I feel like saying, "Come and walk in my shoes. Come and walk across that bridge. Come and sit-in

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

in Nashville. Come and go on the Freedom Ride Bus. Come and be dropped off on the Tennessee/Alabama state line by Bull Conner at four o'clock in the morning leaving you to be ambushed." Things have changed. Today, there are hundreds and thousands of black-elected officials like Representative Hall and others because of what happened in Selma. So, tonight as we think and ponder Selma to Montgomery in 1965, we must not give up. We must not give in. We must not give out. We must not get lost in a sea of despair. We must keep the faith and keep our eyes on the prize. I was just thinking a few days ago, since September 11th, and I said it a few days after September 11th, that people may bomb our buildings, kill some of our fellow citizens, but they will never ever kill our love for freedom, our love for democratic ideas, our love for the good society and to the open society. Many of us in the 1960's would be walking across that bridge, through the sit-ins and when we went on the Freedom Ride, accepting nonviolence not as a simple average technique or as a tactic but as a way of life and as a way of living. Selma was not a struggle against a people; it was against custom and tradition, a system we wanted to build and not tear down. We wanted to reconcile and not separate. We wanted to create the beloved community, the good society. I will tell this story and I will be finished. I tell this story in my book, *Walking with the Wind*. It's a true story. When I was growing up outside of Troy, Alabama, I had an aunt by the name of Seneva and my aunt Seneva lived in what we called a shotgun house. She didn't have a green, manicured lawn. She had a simple, plain dirt yard and sometime at night, you could look up through the ceiling, through the wholes in the tin roof and count the stars. When it would rain, she would get a pail of what we called a bucket and catch the rainwater. She lived in a shotgun house.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

From time to time, she would go out into the woods and get branches from a dogwood tree and she would make a broom. She called that broom the branch broom and she would sweep the dirt yard clean, sometimes two and three times a week. For those who are so young, who might not know what a shotgun house is and never seen one, was not born in one and never lived in one, (in a nonviolent sense) a shotgun house is a old house with a tin roof where you can bounce a ball through the front door and the ball would go straight out the back door. In the military sense, a shotgun house would be an old house with a tin roof where you can fire a gun through the front door and the bullet would go straight out the back door. My aunt Seneva lived in a shotgun house. One Sunday afternoon, a group of my sisters, brothers and a few if my first cousins, about twelve of us young children while playing my aunt Seneva's dirt yard, an unbelievable storm came up. The wind started blowing. The thunder started rolling. The lightning started flashing and the rain started beating on the tin roof of this old shotgun house. My aunt became terrified. She thought this old house was going to blow away. She started crying. She got us all in the inside and told us to hold hands. As little children, we did as we were told, but we all started crying. The wind continued to blow. The thunder continued to roll. The lightning continued to blast. In one corner of the house, it appeared to be lifting from its foundation and my aunt had us walk to that side to try and hold the house down with our little bodies. When the other corner appeared to be lifting, she had us walk to that corner to try and hold down this house with our little bodies. We were little children walking with the wind, but we never left the house. As citizens of Alabama, as citizens of the world, as students and young people and as faculty members, the wind may blow; the

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

thunder may roll; the lightning may flash and the rain might beat on our old house. Call it the house of Huntsville. Call it the house of Alabama. Call it the house of America. Call it the world house. We must never ever leave the house. We must become one house, one family and one people. Just maybe, our foremothers and our forefathers all came to this great land in different ships. We're all in the same boat now. It doesn't matter whether we are black or white, Asian, American, Hispanic or Native American; we are one people. As we think about Selma to Montgomery, let us continue to walk with the wind and let the spirit of the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965 be our guide. Thank you very much.

Douglas Turner: Alright, one again, how about another round of applause for Ms. Mary Stanton as well. We want to take a short period here for answer and questions. I want to mention that any of you who might have any commendations or other certificates of recognition that you would like to present to the congressman that you can do that after the symposium is over. We do want to open the program now for questions for either Ms. Stanton or Congressman Lewis.

Q: The question and comment for both Congressman Lewis and Ms. Stanton...Congressman Lewis, you've spoke about the struggles that you had in the march from Selma to Montgomery, the pain that you and others suffered. Ms. Stanton you talked about Plato's reflection on government and participation. The suffering that has occurred so that people, all people, have the right to participate in this democracy, yet today eighty percent of young people and more than fifty percent of all adults, do not bother to vote. We have moved a great deal forward, but if we do not exercise, all of us,

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

the right to vote and if we do not take part in our responsibilities to participate in this democracy, we are going to move backward. How do we get pass this? How do we reverse this at present? How do we tell people, you have to participate if you want to keep moving forward? I sincerely believe that. I guess the question is two parts. Do you agree with that and if so, how do we win that battle?

A: That's a good response. Mary, would you like?

A: I would prefer you.

A: I agree with you, sir. I think the greatest threat to our democratic way of life and the greatest threat to our democracy and to whatever you want to call it is the lack of participation and the lack of involvement. I think the day will soon come in America, if we are not mindful, that we will no longer count the people that are voting, we will count those who did not vote. I think it is a very dangerous trend. First of all, I think we have to do something called campaign finance reform. We have to get...In the congress, there is a group of us on both sides, both Democrats and Republicans, and the Independents that we have among us in the house, trying to get campaign finance reform. There is too much money. I have been in congress for my fifteenth year, serving my eighth tenth, but I have young colleagues that come and they spend all of their time dialing for dollars. That's not the way. When you have some one in New York spending fifty or sixty million (I don't know how much money was spent all together)...but to get elected. We have people running for congress and we have someone running for mayor for Atlanta. We have to make the airways free. It cost too much to be on television. The people have the right to know. We have to take money out of it. It is too much money in American politics.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Whether someone is a millionaire or whether someone is a dogcatcher, they have only one vote. We have to change it. It is not the way to go. We have to say to our young people and those of us not so young, if you do not vote, you really do not count. You have to participate. We have to encourage more people to run, more women, more young people, more minorities. Get out there and run. Don't leave it up to people. Everybody has something to offer. Run for school board. Run for city council. Run for mayor. Run for congress. Get out there. The more people we have participating, the better our democracy is. It helps strengthen our democracy. We have a young lady who was just elected mayor of the city of Atlanta. She came out of nowhere almost. She raised a lot of money also, but she came out of nowhere.

Douglas Turner: Let me also mention that both Ms. Stanton and Congressman Lewis have books for sale back here in the back. They will be available to sign if you have already purchased one and you want them to sign it or if you will be purchasing one. Next question, I saw your hand back there.

Q: Congressman Lewis and Ms. Stanton, I am trying to find the difference really between the nonviolent revolution that you were talking about because I have looked at most of the countries who practice nonviolent revolution and they do not seem to be making any progress. They are stagnated like we are, but Americans came with a more traditional type of revolution and now we are the number one power in the world. It seems we all will be ambulating to number one or something in that area.

Douglas Turner: So, is your question or statement is that there is a need for violence or some kind of revolution.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Q: Mary, you want to deal with that?

A: I'm not sure that I understand the question. Are you asking the value of a nonviolent revolution?

A: Yes.

A: Well, I happen to believe in the philosophy and the discipline of nonviolence and I happen to believe also that in the long run, violence tends to create more problems than it solves. As Americans, we've said, well Americans proceed in violence when we talk about the American Revolution. A few days ago, I was in (inaudible) and visited those historic places. I think humankind must evolve to a much higher level, not just Americans but people all over this planet and all over this world. We lay down the tools and the instruments of violence and some people would say and maybe you would say that is too idealistic. As Dr. King would say, it is nonviolent and nonexistent. No one in the long run wins in a war. A war is messy. It is bloody. It kills; it harms; it divides and it destroys. We have to find a way to say no more war.

Q: Do you know who killed Dr. King? (inaudible)

A: I don't know who killed Dr. King. A colleague of mine from one of our southern states came to me on the floor just yesterday and wanted me to meet with him and come and visit a family who says they had some information about someone who participated in the assassination or knew something about the assassination of Dr. King. He doesn't know if this is legitimate or whether this is valid. I don't know. I believe until the day that I die that it was a conspiracy to remove Dr. King from America. I do not think that any one person acted alone. Some of the things that happened during the 1960's and what

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Mary said about the FBI, it is unbelievable. It is to think the unthinkable. We had this whole thing going on in America during the Cold War that there was _____ members coming inside and we were under the Dukes of Marksville. If you saw a sign saying white waiting and colored waiting, you did not need anyone from Marksville, New York, Philadelphia or Washington to tell you that sign had to go. So, somehow and some way, this mentality is creeping back into this segment of America. There has been an attempt on the part of some of us to remove Mr. Hoover's name and have another respected American's name put on there.

Q: Brother Lewis, it is so good to see you again. My name is James Steele. I remember the situation quite well. I was a young student here at the college when you were beaten on the Selma Bridge; 1954 just would not make it to Selma. Right down the street, a young man was pastoring a church by the name of Reverend Ezekiel Bell in the 1960's. I was with the first steering committee that launched the movement here in Huntsville. Some of the student nonviolent coordinating persons and the Congress of Racial Equality along with a young lawyer here at Alabama A&M by the name of Randolph Blackwell that some of you may know of. There had not been much talk about Reverend Bell and Blackwell, but they were spark plugs in the movement here. I started with the movement about 1954. I don't want to tell how old, I mean how young I am Dr. Lewis, but what has concerned me is that was a great movement. People were together. I must admit that we had a number of people shucking and jiving in the movement back then. My question is about 1980. What I believe is going to go down in history is the saddest part of our history, one who kept his eye on the Civil Rights Movement and the Human Rights

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

Movement in Huntsville, Alabama. I believe that I have seen more shucking and jiving starting in the 1980's to the present time. My question is from your vanish point, do you see that and what we may do to overcome this go with the flow, flip-flopping type leadership that we see now across the nation. Somebody ought to stand up and tell the truth where it relates to real freedom, justice and equality. I won't share that scripture with you now, but it is in Isaiah 56:10.

Douglas Turner: What is the question?

A: I am getting to that. Go ahead and answer my question. They called time on me.

A: Only thing I would say my friend is that during the days of the height of the movement, it was my philosophy not to engage in name calling, not to put anyone down because it was keeping with the philosophy and the discipline of nonviolence. There are roles for people to play. Everybody can go in a sit-in. Everybody can go on the Freedom Ride. When I was a student in Nashville, there were guys who played football and they said, "Oh, John. I can't go. If I go down, I may fight and I can do something else. Maybe, they just did not have the courage to sit-in unless someone put a lighted cigarette out in their hair or down their back. So, I just do not think it is in keeping with the philosophy of nonviolence to sit in judgment on the role and the function of anyone. So, I don't want to call anyone shucking and jiving or put someone down because they may be marching to a different beat.

Q: I would like to know was it pure luck that Ramsey Clark with feds monitored the Selma to Montgomery march or was that a request.

A: Was it pure luck that Ramsey Clark?

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

A: Monitored the Selma to Montgomery march.

A: I do not know. I really do not. It could have been his role and maybe there was something that he wanted to do. I have said in the past that there are such individuals in the Kennedy/Johnson administration. There was a young man by the name of John Door who was a Republican. He was held over from either house administration. He was a tall, lanky guy from the Midwest. He played a major, major role and I consider some of these individuals as sympathetic referees in the struggle for civil rights. I think you had in the department of justice that said Edgar Hoover was this and that. There were certain individuals. It did not matter what time of night or what time of morning. You could pick up the telephone and call them at home instead of Ramsey, Burke or Marshall or whoever saying this is our problem; there is a problem in Alabama or there is a problem in Mississippi. Some of these guys would say today. Some of you may not know this. On the Freedom Ride, there was this brave, courageous man representative by the name of Floyd Mann, who was the public safety director for the state of Alabama during the freedom ride. When we were being beaten by this angry mob in Montgomery, it was Floyd Mann. This white gentleman, native of this state and from this part of Alabama, had to leave. I think he took a job as a security person maybe for the Goodyear plant. He stood up with a gun and he said, "There would be no killing here today. There would be no killing here today." It was Saturday morning, May 20, 1961, at the greyhound bus station in Montgomery and the mob dispersed. If it had not been for this man, I probably would not be here today and others probably would not be here. I saw him for the first

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

time later, in all these years, at the dedication of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery. He came up to me and I think by this time I was on the city council or maybe in congress and he said, "John Lewis, do you remember me?" I said, "Mr. Mann, I do remember you. Thank you for saving my life." We both started to cry. So, you had people there.

Q: Congressman Lewis, you mentioned about the woman in Atlanta who came out of nowhere and won governor.

A: The mayor's office.

Q: Okay, the mayor's office. Don't you think it is about time for a dark horse to come out and run for president? When are you going to run for president?

A: Who me? No, I'm happy being the congressperson from Atlanta, Georgia.

Q: It was a pleasure hearing you speak and I had the pleasure of being in Selma at the last election for the run off and some of the same things are going on as far as getting people the patient register to vote. My question is this. With the incident that took place down at Auburn University, do you think that is an isolated incident? Or is there something that should be addressed to the governor, to the people of Alabama and to the nation as to that incident? The other thing is that there are young people that need to take up the struggle. Do you think that it would be befitting? In the state of Alabama and in the United States of America, they teach history. They teach so-called American history. Do you think they should teach civil rights and the Civil Rights Movement in the state of Alabama and all the other states so that they will know the history of this movement because this movement is what gave life to the whole constitution?

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

A: Well, I think it is important that we tell the story. To me, I am so gratified and so pleased to see what these two institutions are doing. I wish other institutions, not just in Alabama, all across the south and all across the nation, would do this. It is to help educate, to synthesize all of our people about the contribution that people made and the changes that have occurred. I think it is a must. I think we need to be teaching the philosophy and the discipline of nonviolence, not just when people get to college, but we need to start teaching it in daycare, in Head Start and in first grade. We need to teach people the way of love and it may sound strange for a politician or for people to talk about love. We need to teach that the way of love and the way of peace is a much better way and much more excellent way. Maybe, we would not have some of the problems that we have. Maybe at Auburn, a group of students could start conducting nonviolent workshops saying we just don't do this; we live in a different time; we live in a different period. We respect diversity. We respect people. We respect the worth and dignity of every human being. I think too many young people in our society today are growing up, and too many of us, because of something that is happening that we have this almost disdain for just common decency and respecting the worth of a fellow human being. People bump into you and do not even want to say excuse me; I'm sorry. So, to be nonviolent is not not hitting some, but it is also attitude. Words can be very violent. Words can be very destructive. So, it is a way of love and the way of nonviolence that we have to get over to our people. Maybe, during this time of sort of national healing, we can sort of turn towards each other as a national community and talk about love and nonviolence and peace in the sense of community and in the sense family. Don't be afraid

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

to say it to somebody. It's nothing weak about saying to somebody, "I'm sorry I said that. I'm sorry I did that." A lot of times, I call my colleagues and they say, "Hello, brother. How are you?" It's not just a black brother; it's the white brother and the brown brother who happen to be Hispanic or an Asian American brother or sister. In the congress, you see us on the floor. We argue like cats and dogs, but I bet you one thing, when something happens to us, we are there for each other. We are family. The same people that get up and arguing on C-span or arguing on the floor, the next moment they are working out together in the gym or having a meal together in the member's dining room. I wish sometimes that the larger community could see the sense of family that we try to exercise even in Washington even among politicians. Can I go for one other moment? We have a group in Washington, and I am the co-chair, called Faith and Politics. I am the Democrat co-chair. There is a young man by the name of Amo Houghton who is the Republican co-chair. I am one of the poorest members of congress. This guy is one of the richest members of congress. He is very, very... You know Steuben Glass, CorningWare. That's the family in upstate New York. We get together, members from Alabama, white members from Alabama, white members from Mississippi, black members from Mississippi, Alabama or Georgia, Hispanic members from Texas, California or Florida or Asian American members from California. We get together in our offices, in our little hideaways and in our homes and we have what we call a _____ on race and we talk about it. We debate it. During the past four years, we have been taking (some of you probably read about it) we have been taking groups of members from Washington, starting in Birmingham to Montgomery and to Selma, over a weekend during the

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

anniversary of the march across the bridge. It has been unbelievable. Some of the members walked through Sixteenth Street Baptist Church or went to the site where Rosa Parks was arrested or might go to the museum there or go to Birmingham and walk through the park. They would walk across the bridge and breakdown and cry. It helps to educate and helps to synthesize. It is making us better. We always need to reach out to each other.

Q: Good evening, Ms. Stanton and Mr. Lewis. I would just like to thank you all on behalf of the student body for making your appearance and sharing with us your experiences this evening. Mr. Lewis, I would just like you to, if you could for just a moment, speak about your current struggles with historic preservation in the African-American museums, which we did a lot of work on this past summer. Ms. Stanton, my question was there is no doubt to anybody in here that Viola Liuzzo was a remarkable woman and a remarkable individual and what happened to her was disgusting and reprehensible to say the least, but we hear about a movie, books and all these types of things. I have seen documentaries on her and her existence. Do you believe that if Viola Liuzzo was an African-American woman that she would be remembered today?

A: That's a good question. It's a hard one to answer because in many ways Viola Liuzzo was not remembered. If she was an African-American woman, the obvious answer is probably no.

A: In Washington, for the past twelve or thirteen years, I've been leading in an effort to create a national African-American museum on the mall. As a matter of fact, I had a meeting today with J.C. Watts, my Republican colleague from Oklahoma, who is the

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

chair of the Republican conference. We had more than one hundred and thirty-five members, cosponsors, Republicans and Democrats in the house, and thirty-two members of the senate of cosponsor. All of the leadership on the house side and the senate side are cosponsoring this legislation and I think one day, we will have in Washington a national African-American museum that tells the whole story of the struggle of African-Americans from the days of slavery to the present. It will happen.

Douglas Turner: I have been instructed to allow a few more questions, although time is running out and I know our guests would like to, you know, get away and rest tonight. Two more questions. Go ahead.

Q: (Inaudible)

Q: I am the president of 2000 Freedom Fighters out of Decatur and my question is that we have had a hard time getting the ministers involved. I know way back when the church was the foundation and the ministers was the backbone. So, what would you have to say today that would encourage the ministers and the churches to get involved with the civil rights because certainly there are so many injustices in the state of Alabama and all over the country?

A: Well, it is a very interesting question. I do not know about how strong the African-American churches are in the African-American community, but there was no institution that ran parallel in the poor white communities when people were trying to organize. I think that strength moved the movement, the incredible thrust and the power that the church has, not only through faith but also through organizing skills training people and

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

bringing people together. Maybe, you can speak to that Congressman Lewis. Is it as strong as it was or are we losing ground?

A: I would like to think that the church in the African-American community is still strong. From what we gather, more people in both the African-American community and the white community are going to church. You must keep in mind that during the 1960's and during the height of the movement, all of the ministers were not involved. All of the churches were not involved. There were certain churches even in the city like Atlanta did not even want Dr. King, when he left Montgomery, to come back to Atlanta. There were churches in other parts of the south. There were certain places where the ministers were afraid to speak out or speak up. So, you do not give up because some group is saying, well, I cannot do this. You just keep going, four year and five there, ten there, fifty here and one hundred there, but you be consistent, be persistent and just hang in there and do what you can do. You are never going to have everybody. During the original Freedom Ride, the original Freedom Ride group that left Washington, DC, on May 4, 1961, it was only thirteen of us, seven white and six blacks that left Washington, DC, on May 4, 1961. Later, three hundred people got arrested and went to jail over the summer of 1961. So, you do not have to have the whole nation or the entire community. Sometimes, there are only a few that come together in one accord committed, dedicated, believing in an idea and they change things. So, do not be discouraged.

Q: (inaudible)

A: Well, I would encourage people, especially young people. There is a young man who is a history teacher out in the bay area of California and he (inaudible). He was able to get

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

the state legislature of California and others to get the necessary money, but he started off just having a fundraiser, bringing one hundred students to Washington. They go to the Lincoln Memorial. They listen to Dr. King's speech on an old boombox, "I have a Dream." Then, they fly to Atlanta. Then, they travel by bus to Montgomery, Birmingham, Selma, Little Rock and to Memphis. They go to Central High and they meet with some of the former students of Central High. During the past four or five years, he has brought over eleven hundred students. In some cases, there were superintendents, parents and members of the board of education, but a whole generation of high school students. They are black; they are white. They are Asian American. They are Hispanic and Native American. In this state, there is so much history; it is unbelievable. I say to the young people in Atlanta, to the students there sometimes, go and visit the King Center. Go and visit Dr. King's grave. Go and visit Ebenezer Church. There are kids growing up in Atlanta that have never been in the home of where Dr. King was born. So, we encourage young people and people not so young to take advantage of this history here. There is a lot of rich history here in this state dealing with the whole question of race and civil rights.

Closing: We have gone over our usual time, but I think that most of you would agree that it has been a productive and memorable evening. Once again, how about a round of applause for Ms. Mary Stanton and Congressman Lewis. Do not forget too that next week, the lecture series continues at UAH in Roberts Recital Hall at 7 p.m. The topic will be "Turmoil in Tuskegee." The lecturer will be Frank Toland of the History Department at Tuskegee University. Thanks for coming out and see you next week.