



NAME tribute to Rev. C. T. Vivian & Congressman John Lewis

The [National Association for Multicultural Education](https://www.nameorg.org/) (NAME) mourns the loss of two civil rights giants — the [Rev. Cordy Tindell “C.T.” Vivian](#), 95, and [U.S. Rep. John Robert Lewis](#), 80. Vivian died of natural causes; Lewis died after a battle with pancreatic cancer. Each worked and marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s prior to King’s assassination on April 4, 1968, in Memphis. They strived with diverse groups to change the nation through nonviolent protests so that people of color would finally be included in the constitutional guarantees of the United States. Lewis, who served as the [U.S. Representative](#) for Georgia’s 5th Congressional District from 1987 until his death, characterized these struggles as “[good trouble.](#)” He has been called the conscience of Congress. For their life-long labor for social justice, each received the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, from President Barack Obama, the nation’s only Black president.

In addition to marching with King during the Civil Rights Movement, Lewis and Vivian represented the hope for equal rights growing out of the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision, ending legal segregation. But they also symbolized Black people’s impatience to the foot-dragging and outright resistance of the U.S. to become a fully integrated and inclusive nation.

In his lifetime, Lewis was arrested dozens of times in protests against racial and social injustice. He participated in sit-ins to integrate lunch counters in the South and was among “Freedom Riders” whose trips on Greyhound buses into the South were an organized push to integrate buses nationwide. At age 23, Lewis was thought to be the youngest speaker during the Aug. 28, 1963, [March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#). The March led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. On March 7, 1965, Lewis was among marchers attempting to cross the [Edmund Pettus Bridge](#) and walk 54 miles from Selma, Ala., to Montgomery in a national protest for voting rights. In spite of Alabama Gov. George Wallace’s promise to prevent the march, about 600 people gathered for the nonviolent protest. They were led by Lewis, a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leader, and Southern Christian Leadership Conference leader Hosea Williams. The marchers encountered heavily armed state and local police who attacked the peaceful gathering with clubs. Lewis, who was among the injured, suffered a skull fracture. Like the police killings of Eric Garner on July 17, 2014, in New York City and George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis — both pleading, “I can’t breathe” — law enforcement’s [“Bloody Sunday” assault 55 years ago](#) on marchers stunned the nation and gave President Lyndon B. Johnson the political support he needed for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. King attempted to lead a second march on March 9, 1965, but he ended the civil disobedience action when law enforcement officers again blocked the road. On March 21, 1965, with the protection of U.S. Army troops and federalized Alabama National Guardsmen, the march proceeded. Initially about 300 people were in the march, but thousands joined them on the journey with King addressing the crowd in front of the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery.

Vivian was also a powerful advocate in the struggle for racial justice, working with King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Like Lewis, he also was among the “Freedom Riders,” seeking to integrate buses and terminals in the South. With other ministers, Vivian also helped found the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference, an affiliate of the SCLC. The group organized marches and sit-ins. In addition to the Civil Rights Movement, Vivian helped create a college readiness program for children kicked out of school for protesting racism. It was so successful, it became the model for the U.S. Department of Education’s Upward Bound program, whose purpose was to improve high school and college graduation rates for underserved students. In the late 1970s, Vivian also founded the National Anti-Klan Network, dedicated to monitoring the Ku Klux Klan.

NAME and our members know that Lewis’ and Vivian’s passing needs to be answered with more people becoming equity and social justice activists to continue the work that these civil rights giants started. Lewis and Vivian cannot be replaced and certainly will be missed. However, the stories of their work will live on forever in the historical teachings of multicultural education, inspiring more people to work for a better America. Indeed, today’s protests against anti-Black violence continue in the footsteps Lewis and Vivian took. To truly honor these great men, we must act, as they did. We must, engage. Engage in your community, engage with NAME and other social justice organizations. We must vote and help get out the vote. And we must lead with love, even when hate is easier.