

## John Lewis: Good Trouble

The filmmakers who came up with idea for a feature-length documentary on the life of John Lewis, Georgia congressman and civil rights icon, for release this summer could be deemed prescient for featuring a man who, though 80, is so very much of this moment in the summer of 2020. A sympathetic review of his life and accomplishments, directed by Dawn Porter, was released in Washington July 3<sup>rd</sup> on demand platforms and will later appear on CNN

Using interviews and rare archival footage, “John Lewis: Good Trouble” chronicles Lewis’s 60-plus years of social activism and legislative action (actions which Lewis himself has labelled “good trouble”) on civil rights, voting rights, gun control, and health-care reform. Porter’s film is a tri-partite mix. The first part is a lengthy studio interview with Lewis surrounded by historic images as backdrops (filmed at Arena Stage in DC). This is accompanied by historic stills and footage from his fascinating life, and, finally, current coverage of his everyday congressional activities. The studio sequences, with the earnest Lewis directly addressing the audience, sets the narrative of his early life and influences, capped by his early exposure to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the nonviolence movement.

The historic footage highlights his early life as a sharecropper’s son in Troy, Alabama and his position as a young man with influence in The Movement and involvement with the Nashville sit-ins, the Freedom Riders, the Student Non-Violent Coordination Committee (which he led), the March on Washington, and his contribution to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This material reaches its zenith in detailing the infamous 1965 Selma March, whose outcome left him and colleagues cruelly assaulted by local police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Montgomery.

Other parts of his biography between the mid-1960’s and the 1980’s are covered more cursorily, except for his tough electoral battle with friend Julian Bond in the 1986 Georgia congressional race that changed his life. But that third element of the film, done in *cinéma vérité* style, places the man in his current context, an *eminence gris* of the Congress and of our national politics.

Lewis’s story is rounded out by reflective interviews with Lewis and family, political leaders, Congressional colleagues and, in a nice touch, devoted staffers who worked closely with the man. In total, it is sweet documentary of a gentle but resolute man who talked in whispers but could, as necessary, bellow for his causes.

*(The film is rated "PG" and runs 96 minutes.)*

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