

# March book one and march book two: an analysis of the struggles of congressman jo...

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The recent history of my country, as depicted in the memoirs March Book One and March Book Two, is both fascinating and humbling. Seeing the struggles of Congressman John Lewis through the Civil Rights Movement has made him a new hero of mine. It only aches me that even with access to his story and the principles he sets forth on non-violent protests, many people in the modern generation do not always take these to heart and therefore hurt their own cause. As an amateur historian, I believe that rediscovering the Civil Rights Movement through these books or other mediums is the best way to apply the lessons they impart to our future.

In the beginning pages of his memoir, Congressman Lewis depicts to us the inequality and fear shared amongst members of the black community in America. One of the more prominent ones being with the segregated lunch counters downtown. Both black and white people could purchase items at the same prices at stores, and yet only white customers were allowed to eat there-with or without white customers. John Lewis describes this particular segregation as utterly humiliating. This area of segregation would later be one of the starting points for the movement in the later years to come.

Before the demonstrations began, however, Congressman Lewis went to meetings held by Jim Lawson in order to learn how to protest. Jim Lawson was, at the time, a representative of F. O. R. (The Fellowship of Reconciliation) a pacifist group dedicated to teaching non-violence. Along with many others his age, John Lewis trained with both white and black people in the ways of peaceful protest. They would take part in exercises that involved them shouting offense names and insults at each other, pushing each other, or throwing things at another person. All of this was in <https://assignbuster.com/march-book-one-and-march-book-two-an-analysis-of-the-struggles-of-congressman-john-lewis/>

effort to teach the young members not to respond in violence to their abuse during protests. It was of the utmost importance that they did not strike back at their abuser. These teaching were not without help to the protesters though, as they were also taught self-defense tactics and ways of protecting their fellow protesters without violence. John Lewis makes point that one of the hardest parts was learning to love your attacker. No matter how brutal the attacks became, students were told to look their attacker in the eye and appeal to their humanity. This was a method of emotionally disarming your attacker and to show them that they would love them and not hate them.

This training was, in my opinion, the key to their success in the movement. When the protesters were ready to go out and demonstrate at the lunch counters they face horrific abuse. The best case scenario for them would be constant insults, uttering the term “ nigger” to tarnish their spirit, and having items in the store thrown at them. The worst case had the manager of one store wait until closing to shut off the lights, lock the door, and turning on the fumigator with John Lewis and a fellow protester inside! This man would have knowingly killed them if it hadn't been for the intervention of the fire department coming to the rescue. To my knowledge, that store manager was not even arrested for attempted murder. These horrific in-store acts could not eclipse the attempted bombing of the Looby Family's house. While it was a miracle no one had been killed, John Lewis and fellow protesters knew that their government could not tolerate this violence. They went straight to Mayor West about these matters, who in turn swore his determination to act with discrimination, bias, or bigotry. Then when asked if he would recommend store managers desegregate lunch counters, Mayor West

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replied, “ Yes.” The violence done by those against their cause did not stop the protesters, and the use of violence harmed their side of the movement and gave the protesters a political ally in Mayor West. This was a great victory for the movement.

The non-violent tactics of the Civil Rights Movement are still relevant to us today. No matter what the cause, protesters will be derailed by any sort of violence or crude manner on their part. If a protester was lobbying for a safer work environment in a factory, the first thing you’d want to know are the facts surrounding this and what the protester recommends for the issue. A good protester would be an informed person, capable of answering questions in regards to the protest, and does so in a way respectful to the person asking questions-whether or not they ultimately agree with them. However, if a different protester arguing for the same thing lashed out at you because you were unaware of the issue or didn’t agree with them their position would be hurt. The factory in question may be in serious need of improved safety regulations, but no one will trust a rude or—worse yet—violent person to bring forth these issues to the public. People might assume that person is just an angry, and perhaps ignorant, individual simply trying to incite anger in the public. The bottom line is that violent individuals being involved in a protest only hurts the cause, because no one can ethically trust them.

As the protests continued, the previous successes of demonstrations had sparked interest in the public for future protests. The members of the movement moved on from lunch counters to segregated movie theaters. These demonstrations involved the protesters going in line to purchase

tickets to a movie, and then when they were inevitably refused would go back to the end of the line and try again. These protests, though just as prone to attacks as the demonstrations at the lunch counters, were successful in bringing about desegregation and the rapid increase of new members in the movement. Unfortunately, this came with the consequence of being unable to train newcomers in the same way John Lewis and his colleagues were. New protesters either did not know the rules of protest or disregarded them as unimportant. My grandfather, a retired police officer, recently recalled to me that during the Civil Rights Movement some of his colleagues reported having beer bottles thrown at them from the tops of apartment buildings during their shifts. In March Book Two, John Lewis laments that he often had to pull people aside and explain to them how the protests were run.

This problem seems to prevail in modern times. In 2011, the protest commonly referred to as “ Occupy Wall Street” fought against economic and social inequality by camping out at Zuccotti Park. Camping out seems harmless until you find out that the protesters were acting horrendously to the residents living there.

“ They are defecating on our doorsteps,” fumed Catherine Hughes, a member of Community Board 1 and a stay at home mom who has the misfortune of living one block from the chaos. “ A lot of people are very frustrated. A lot of people are concerned about the safety of our kids.” (Saul 2011)

In the same article, residents reported that they had been harassed on their way to work by the protesters shouting insults. Homeowners told the New York Post that they would not refuse protesters the right to demonstrate, but only that parameters had to be set for everyone's safety. This request only met with more insults from protesters.

No matter where you stand on the issue of social and economic inequality, behavior like this is unacceptable. More importantly, it flies in the face of protesters like John Lewis who was dedicated to keeping protests non-violent. When numbers swelled during the movement, Congressman Lewis made a list of Dos and Don'ts for newcomers who hadn't attended the workshops on non-violence. In a recent interview, he was quoted to say that young people should only get into "necessary trouble." In the case of Wall Street, I do not think defecation and harassment qualifies as the "necessary trouble" Congressman Lewis meant.

One of the most powerful parts of the memoir was Lewis's recollection of making eye contact with your attacking, loving your attacker, and not letting their abuse shake his belief in non-violence. This kind of love for our neighbors needs to be remembered, not just for protesters but especially for them. My friend told me once of her Pro-Life demonstration outside a Planned Parenthood. She made it very clear though that no exits/entrances were blocked, no property damage done, and no harassment to patients going in or out was made. It is possible to be a peaceful protester and, such is the case of the Civil Rights Movement, be successful. If only you can love and respect those around you.

In conclusion, the principles of love and non-violence demonstrated by John Lewis and his colleagues are incredible. His dedication to those principles strengthened his cause and ultimately led to the success of the movement. I feel it would be beneficial for protesters of today to read these books and understand what it means to fight for your rights. Senseless violence is not the answer and only necessary trouble is acceptable.