

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
COMMITTEE ON HONORARY DEGREES
(Final; Action)

HD.20.12 Nomination for Honorary Degree Award – Lewis

The Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees is pleased to nominate the following individual for an honorary degree award to be conferred at the May 2020 Commencement exercises:

- John Lewis

Information relative to the background and achievements of this nominee is attached. Based on the criteria approved by the Senate, the Committee has selected this individual for Senate consideration.

The Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation to all who participated in the process, particularly those who spent considerable amounts of time and effort in preparing documentation for these nominees.

COMMITTEE ON HONORARY DEGREES
Matthew Wheeler, Chair
Fred Johnson Asiimwe
Larry Fahnestock
Ane Icardo Isasa
Prasanta Kalita
Susan Koerner
Laura Wilhelm-Barr, *ex officio*

John Lewis
U.S. Representative
Georgia's 5th Congressional District

EDUCATION:

American Baptist College, 1961
B.A., Religion and Philosophy, Fisk University, 1963

Nominated by: Christopher M. Span, Associate Dean for Graduate Program, Professor of the Department of Education, Policy, Organization and Leadership, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

BASIS FOR NOMINATION:

Congressman John Lewis has been a member of the United States House of Representatives since 1987. He is in his 17th term serving Georgia's 5th District. He was a leading profile of courage in the Civil Rights Movement, the chief organizer of the Freedom Rides that disrupted and dismantled segregation law in the American South, and is a humanitarian, statesman, and prolific writer, educator, and role model for our youth. For the last six decades, his efforts have transformed our nation, even the world, into a more just, humane, inclusive, and responsive space for humanity.

EXCERPT FROM THE NOMINATION LETTER:

"For over 50 years, Congressman Lewis has tirelessly fought for peace and sought justice, equality, and voting rights for everyday citizens in the United States. He was a leader and activist during the Civil Rights Movement, often called, "one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced," and he has dedicated his life to public service, protecting human rights, and securing civil liberties.

Congressman Lewis continued his life of public service following the Civil Rights Movement. In 1977, he was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to direct more than 250,000 volunteers of ACTION, the federal volunteer agency. In 1981, he was elected to the Atlanta City Council, and in 1986, he was elected to Congress as the U.S. Representative of Georgia's Fifth Congressional District, of which he continues to serve.

Congressman Lewis's story is empowering and truly one of perseverance. He continues to inspire and unite humanity, and continues to serve as guide and teacher for us to our better selves. He is an example for all, a leader among leaders, and one of the most inspiring profiles of courage our nation has ever produced. Our university will be enhanced by him receiving an honorary degree. He embodies all the values that we hold near and dear at our university and is an excellent candidate for the most prestigious honor we offer."

HONORS/AWARDS (NOT INCLUSIVE):

| | |
|------|--|
| 1999 | Wallenberg Medal, University of Michigan |
| 2001 | Profile in Courage Award, John F. Kennedy Library Foundation |
| 2002 | Spingarn Medal, NAACP |
| 2011 | Presidential Medal of Freedom |
| 2016 | Liberty Medal, National Constitution Center |
| 2017 | Coretta Scott King Book Awards |

EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

Ronald S. Rochon, President, University of Southern Indiana

“Because of freedom fights like John Lewis and those who marched throughout the civil rights movement, I and so many of my peers now are free to occupy those change agent positions never considered even possible when he was a child. His steady march to the Congressional halls of our nation’s Capital, has been a labor of sacrifice and love, that has impacted millions. I myself, live and lead as a result of his contributions in constructing a socially just society. It is truly a privilege to reflect on his body of work and the legacy of his accomplishments such as: leading the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s efforts to register African American voters and organize communities in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer project; playing a key role in the March on Washington; and leading the Voter Education Project as its director. He has receive prestigious awards such as the Martin Luther King Jr. Nonviolent Peace Prize and the President’s Medal of Freedom. As a pre-eminent research university, with a land-grant mission, the University of Illinois affirms that it is the best at what it does, defined by the objective, “a matter of excellence in achievement.” The Honorable John Robert Lewis is the epitome of that excellence. With all the challenges presented by a 21st century society, galvanizing our university’s passion to enhance social justice, reminds us of the importance for “marching” further as we celebrate John R. Lewis. Throughout his entire career, Mr. Lewis has taken an unwavering position that equality for *all* is non-negotiable.”

Maurice J. Hobson, Associate Professor, African-American Studies, Georgia State University

“Congressman Lewis is one of the most remarkable human beings that the world has witnessed and one of the most courageous persons that I have had the privilege of engaging and working with in my lifetime. As a historian of the African American experience, the Black South—including the global south, civil and human rights, and the politics of Atlanta, I can readily attest to his contributions to humanity and American democracy.

The first thing about Congressman John Lewis that should be noted is that he represents the best of what the United States of American has to offer to the world. He is an outstanding and committed statesman and activist, who maintains a grounded and service-oriented perspective. He believes in the United States of America, the state of Georgia, and all of humanity. The second important thing about him that should be noted is that his faith and discipline, which gained traction while he was a college student at Fisk University and was enhanced during the modern Civil Rights movement, has followed him for a lifetime.”

Jon N. Hale, Associate Professor, University of South Carolina

“Representative John Lewis remains committed to the ideals of the Black Freedom Struggle and the struggle for human rights. In addition to supporting a bevy of legislation aimed at expanding access to the ballot, health care, and quality education, Representative Lewis has gone the extra mile as a statesman. In 2016, at the age of seventy-six, Lewis led a sit-in on the floor of the House of Representatives, intentionally disrupting business as usual to demand action on common sense gun reform legislation. He remains an inspirational role model for our students. Publishing the popular graphic novel, *March*, Lewis continues to reach young people and prepare the younger generations for a life of critical and moral leadership. As a proven humanitarian, committed statesman, and lifelong educator, Representative John Lewis has an unmatched record that warrants the highest accolades from our nation’s premier universities.”