



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ACCESS, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ACCESS, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY MOURNS THE PASSING OF TWO CIVIL RIGHTS ICONS: REPRESENTATIVE JOHN LEWIS (D-GA) AND THE REVEREND C.T. VIVIAN

Organization of equal opportunity and diversity professionals conveys its condolences for the loss of two icons of civil rights, equal opportunity and justice for all

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Washington, DC, July 18, 2020 - The American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity (AAAED), an organization of equal opportunity, diversity and affirmative action professionals, mourns the loss of two civil rights champions, Congressman John R. Lewis (D-GA) and the Reverend C.T. Vivian. Both Rep. Lewis and Rev. Vivian passed away on Friday, July 17, 2020. Rep. Lewis was 80; Rev. Vivian passed at the age of 95.

"This is a day of sadness and reminiscence; of mourning and deep respect," said AAAED President Dr. Richard Anthony Baker. "Today, we have lost two icons of civil rights whom we call Drum Majors for Justice," he added. Both Rep. Lewis and Reverend Vivian stood beside Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Rep. Lewis was the younger lieutenant and led activists representing the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Inspired by the words of Dr. King while he was in high school, John Lewis became the head of SNCC, the "front guard" of the movement. At the March on Washington in 1963, Mr. Lewis exclaimed that "If we do not get meaningful legislation out of this Congress, the time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington ... We must say, 'Wake up, America, wake up!' For we cannot stop, and we will not be patient."¹ Lewis is best known for his advocacy in support of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and for the violence he suffered while marching on March 7, 1965 from Selma, Alabama to the State Capital of Montgomery. On the Edmund Pettus Bridge outside Selma he and 600 other marchers were attacked by police and deputized "posse" men. Lewis was hospitalized with a skull fracture. Since then, that day is recognized as "Bloody Sunday."²

"We met Rep. Lewis in 2019 at the inaugural meeting of the Congressional Caucus on Black-Jewish Relations," recalled AAAED Executive Director Shirley J. Wilcher. "His blazing charisma was muted by his gentle graciousness and we talked about another icon whom we both knew, Rep. Augustus Hawkins."

¹ *Washington Post*, "John Lewis, front-line civil rights leader and eminence of Capitol Hill, dies at 80," July 17, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/john-r-lewis-front-line-civil-rights-leader-and-eminence-of-capitol-hill-dies-at-80/2020/07/17/54a67e1a-c3ad-11ea-b4f6-cb39cd8940fb_story.html

² *Ibid.*

AAAED honored the Reverend C.T. Vivian at its 2015 Annual Conference, where he received the association's highest honor, the Drum Major for Justice Award. Reverend Vivian was a Baptist minister and led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1963 - 1966. Rev. Vivian led sit-ins, protest marches and other activities and was a stalwart supporter of non-violence. Rev. Vivian reportedly said, "Nonviolence is the only honorable way of dealing with social change, because if we are wrong, nobody gets hurt but us."³

"For us at AAAED – Equal Opportunity, affirmative action and diversity practitioners tasked with implementing the civil rights laws that Rep. Lewis and Rev. Vivian fought hard to enact, these beloved individuals are as athletes running a race and handing the baton to us. It is now our charge to take the baton and lead America through the next heat, closer to the dream of Dr. King and his faithful lieutenants," stated President Baker.

At the AAAED 46th National Conference – Virtual on October 8, 2020, the association will honor Rep. Lewis, Rev. Vivian and the late Reps. Elijah Cummings and John Conyers. The conference, which begins on October 7, 2020, is open to the public and the press. For more information, go to: https://www.aaaed.org/aaaed/Conference_Agenda1.asp. Email: virtualconference2020@aaaed.org.

Founded in 1974 as the American Association for Affirmative Action (AAAA), AAAED is a national not-for-profit association of professionals working in the areas of equal opportunity, compliance and diversity. The longest-serving representative of individuals in the equal opportunity and diversity professions, AAAED has 46 years of leadership providing quality professional training to practitioners and promoting understanding and advocacy of affirmative action and other equal opportunity laws. Nearly one-half of its membership is composed of EEO professionals working for academic institutions.

For more information about AAAED, go to: www.aaaed.org.

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³ *New York Times*, "C.T. Vivian, Martin Luther King's Field General, Dies at 95," July 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/us/ct-vivian-dead.html#click=https://t.co/yTagL8ThEq>