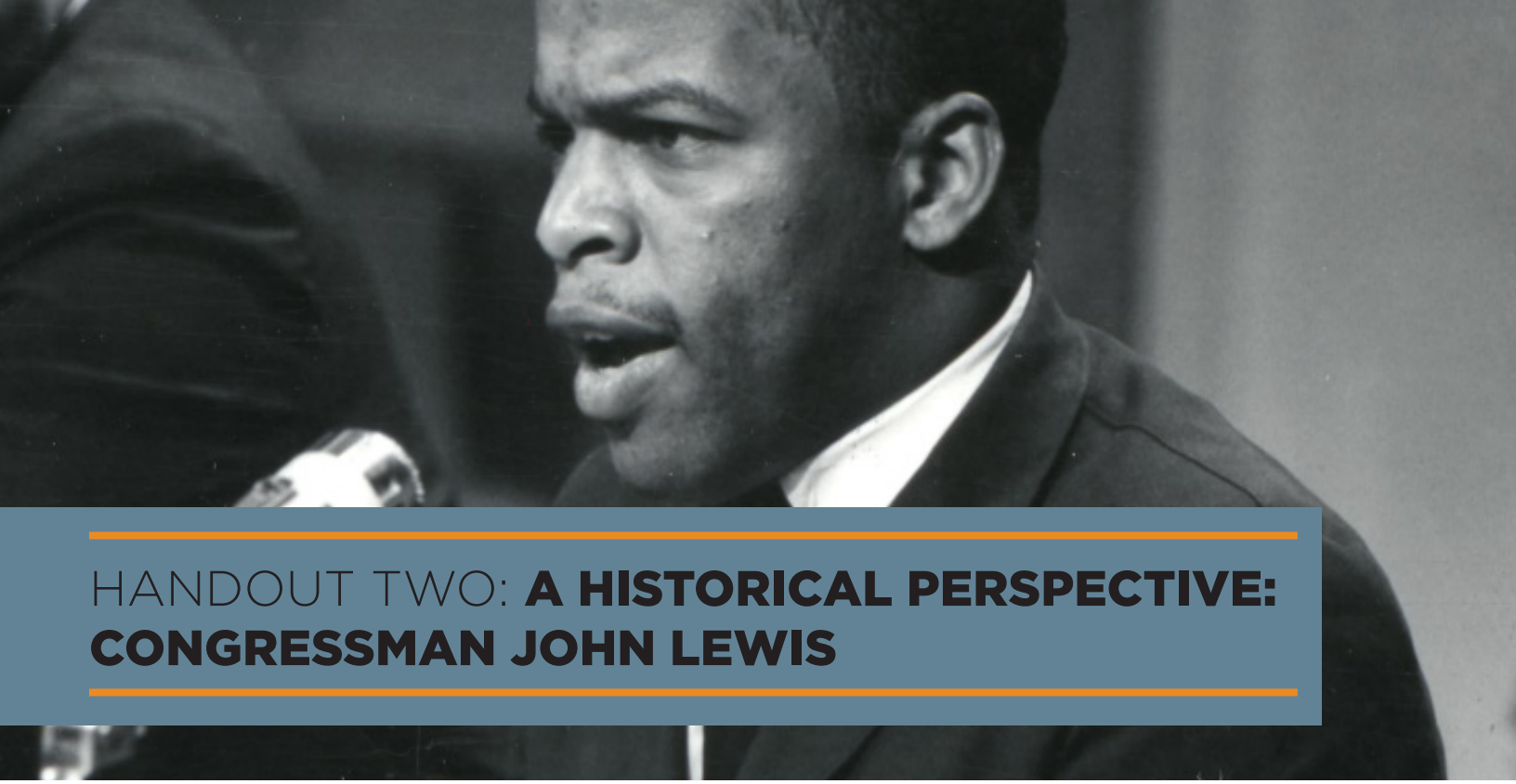


HANDOUT TWO: **A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS**

To deepen students' historical understanding and broaden their perspective on the idea of believing in things we haven't seen, students will continue to learn about the journey of another important leader in the Civil Rights movement, Congressman John Lewis. Elected in 1986 to represent Georgia's 5th District, he continues to hold this seat today and serves on the House Ways & Means Committee, and is Ranking Member of its Subcommittee on Oversight.

Circulate or project the selection of photographs documenting moments in John Lewis's life included on **Handout Two - Part I**. It may be helpful for students to do a visual analysis exercise using these prompts:

- What do you see in this image?
- What story does this photograph tell?
- What questions remain?

After reviewing the images, distribute **Handout Two - Part II: The Perspective of John Lewis**. Have students read this passage from John Lewis's biography *Walking with the Wind* and discuss using these prompts:

- What do you learn about John Lewis's life from this passage?
- Does the idea of believing in things you haven't seen appear in John Lewis's life? How? Where?

PART I - IMAGES OF JOHN LEWIS

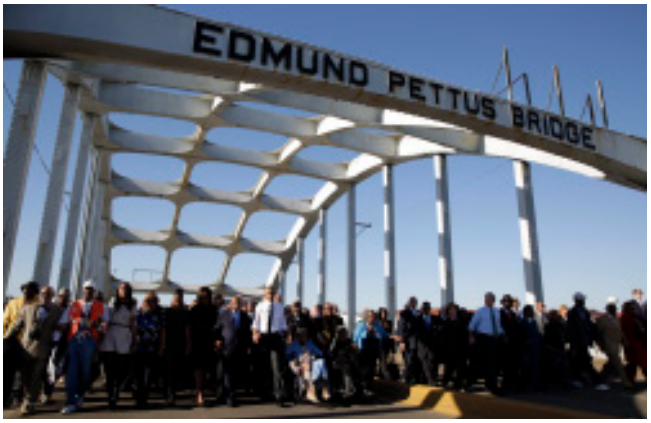
1963

1965

"At the moment when I was hit on the bridge and began to fall, I really thought it was my last protest, my last march. I thought I saw death, and I thought, "It's okay, it's all right —I am doing what I am supposed to do."

-John Lewis, who was beaten at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge
in Selma, Alabama, on Sunday, March 7, 1965

Bloody Sunday
March 7, 1965



50th Anniversary of the Selma
to Montgomery March for Voting
Rights, March 8, 2015.

PART II - THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Directions: Read these excerpts from John Lewis's biography, *Walking with the Wind* and discuss your understanding of how his vision of hope and justice was shaped and how it continues today.

CHAPTER 3 - PILOT LIGHT

I was shaken to the core by the killing of Emmett Till. I was fifteen, black, at the edge of my own manhood, just like him. He could have been me. That could have been me, beaten, tortured, dead at the bottom of a river. It had been only a year since I was so elated at the Brown [Brown v. Board of Education] decision. Now I felt like a fool. It didn't seem like the Supreme Court mattered. It didn't seem like the principles of justice and equality I read about it my beat-up civics book at school mattered. The messages I heard in church, the songs we would sing—"In Christ there's no east or west, no north or south"—declarations of absolute equality in God's eyes, didn't seem to matter either. They didn't matter to the men who killed Emmett Till. They didn't matter to the jury that deliberated for a mere hour before delivering the verdict of not guilty. Nor did they matter to the country that continued to send me to a school separate from white children and forbade me to eat at the same drugstore counter or even use the same public restroom as they.

By the end of the year, I was chewing myself up with questions and frustration and, yes, anger—anger not at white people in particular but at the system that encouraged and allowed this kind of hatred and inhumanity to exist. I couldn't accept the way things were. I just couldn't. . . My parents, and millions of other black men and women just like them, bore their load through an age of unbelievable oppression with a grace and a dignity I could only hope to come close to. Theirs was not a time nor a place for turning and facing the system.

But as I began to come of age in the mid-1950s, the landscape had begun to shift. The time had come. I could feel it. I could see it. I saw it up north, in the rulings that were coming down from the courts. I saw it at home, in the South, where the lines of white backlash and violence were being drawn in response to these rulings. And, in December of that landmark year, 1955, I saw it just up the highway, in Montgomery, where that man, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., took the words I'd heard him preach over the radio and put them into action in a way that set the course of my life from that point on. With all that I have experienced in the past half century, I can still say without question that the Montgomery bus boycott changed my life more than any other event before or since.[43]

CHAPTER 21 - ONWARD

It really does seem like only yesterday that I was sworn in as a freshman member of the 100th Congress. I remember looking around at the inauguration ceremony, at some of my fellow first-term colleagues—former professional basketball start Tom McMillen; a lawyer from Mississippi named Mike Espy; Bobby Kennedy's son Joe; Ben Nighthorse Campbell, who likes to call himself a "half-breed Indian from Colorado—and I marveled at the fact that only in America could you have an Indian, a black man and a member of the Kennedy family standing together to take the oath as newly elected member of the U.S. House of Representatives.[44]

43 John Lewis, Walking in the Wind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), p. 47-48
44 Ibid., p. 480-481.