4-16-2004

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Congressman Lewis Speech 'Powerful'

4/16/04—Congressman John Lewis, the keynote speaker for Diversity Month at BC Law, delivered one of the most powerful and moving speeches ever heard at the school, according to Professor Robert Bloom and Professor Ruth-Arlene Howe. The Congressman abandoned his prepared text at the outset, choosing instead to engage his audience personally, repeatedly moving out from behind the podium while stating that he was just going to ‘go with the wind.’

“He engaged the audience from the time he first opened his mouth,” said Howe. "Through his rendition, he repeatedly challenged students to use their legal skills, with passion, to make the kind of difference and impact that will enable this country and its diverse populations to realize the promise of the founding fathers. He gave examples of how the young lawyers who represented the movement were able to craft arguments to remove proceedings to federal court to be heard by Eisenhower appointees who granted permissions to continue the march from Selma to Montgomery. He charged the students at the end of his talk to come together as one, to appreciate that although folk and their ancestors may have arrived in different boats and in different circumstances, that today we are all in the same boat. He ended with a story about his aunt who lived in a 'shot-gun' house in Alabama. All his siblings and cousins were visiting one afternoon when a huge storm arose. She called all the children into the house and had them all join hands. As the storm winds rose and threatened to literally lift the house off its moorings - his aunt would have them all run to one corner to hold the house down. As the winds shifted, they would all run to the other corner. He stressed, however, that they never broke ranks, they stayed together and weathered the storm.”

"John Lewis not only lived and experienced this period of our nation’s history but was one of the persons whose deeds actually appear in the telling of this story,” Bloom said. "It was a unique opportunity for our students to hear a first hand account of the march from Selma to Montgomery, the creation of the freedom riders, and the wisdom conveyed by Lewis’s great teacher Doctor Martin Luther King Junior. Lewis's courage and commitment to equal treatment was an important lesson for us all. He is an American hero who helped influence the course of American history.”

Congressman Lewis is a civil rights activist and leader, and author. Described as “one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced,” John Lewis has dedicated his life to protecting human rights, securing personal dignity and building what he calls “The Beloved Community.” His sense of ethics and morality has won him the admiration of many of his colleagues in the United States Congress.

After his speech, Congressman Lewis signed copies of his new book, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement.