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"KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE": CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS'S PROVERBIAL ODYSSEY FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Abstract: While this is a scholarly study of the proverbial language in John Lewis's (born 1940) three books *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (1998), *Across that Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change* (2012), and *March: Book One* (2013), it is also a somewhat personal laudation of this U.S. Congressman from the state of Georgia, who is the last surviving member of the six major leaders of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. He was the chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) that played a significant role in getting students and others from the North and the South of the United States actively involved in the slow process of desegregation and the advancement of civil and human rights for African Americans and the population at large. His impressive sociopolitical rhetoric is informed by the traditional sermonic style of Baptist preachers and by the rhetorical prowess of his idol and friend Martin Luther King. Lewis's language is replete with proverbs from the Bible, quotational proverbs from the American democratic tradition, and folk proverbs as well as proverbial expressions. Numerous examples are cited in context accompanied by interpretive comments, showing that this proverbial language is part and parcel of his highly informative and emotive style. In fact, his autobiography *Walking with the Wind* with its proverbial title is not only a classic personal account of the experienced civil rights movement but also an extremely well written document due in large part to its numerous proverbial metaphors. Following a bibliography is a complete index of the 742 proverbial text included in the three books.

Keywords: African American, America, autobiography, Bible, civil rights, desegregation, human rights, John Lewis, politics, proverb, proverbial expression, rhetoric, segregation

There is an old American folk song called "Gospel Plow" with the alternative titles of "Hold on" and "Keep Your Hands on that Plow", with the latter being an allusion to the Bible passage "And Jesus said unto him [a man], No man, having put his hand to the

Variants of the song have been registered in John and Alan Lomax's famous collection *Our Singing Country* (1941), in Cecil James Sharp's and Olive Campbell's *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1917: II, 292), and in Newman Ivey White's *American Negro Folk-Songs* (1928: 115). It is generally assumed that the song had its origin in the African-American diaspora, with part of the lyrics stating:

> Got my hands on the gospel plow,
> Wouldn't take nothin' for my journey now.
> Keep your hands on that plow, hold on.
>
> Hold on, hold on
> Keep your hands on that plow, hold on
> (Lomax 1941: 44-45)

The song probably originated from the African-American gospel tradition, and it is thus not surprising that an adaptation of this popular song of hopeful struggle by African Americans towards equal human rights became a battle hymn of the civil rights movement during the middle of the twentieth century. In fact, one Alice Wine is usually credited with having changed the lyrics during the early 1950s to express in an even stronger way that the fight for equality must go on despite strong opposition. There might have been others at work on creating the lyrics of the modern adaptation, but Wine changed the title of the old song to "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" that perhaps is an allusion to the Bible passages "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:14) and "Keep your eyes on those who live as we do" (Philippians 3:17). The names of Paul and Silas in the song calling for the continuation of the struggle for equality and liberty are also an allusion to their survival in the face of adversaries in the Bible (Acts 16:19-16). But here is the song from the civil rights movement that helped to keep its participants focused on the ultimate goal of equal civil rights:

> *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize*
> Paul and Silas, bound in jail
> Had no money for to go their bail
> Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

Paul and Silas began to shout
Doors popped open, and all walked out
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)

Well, the only chains we can stand
Are the chains of hand in hand
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

Got my hand on the freedom plow
Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, darling

Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on (hold on), hold on (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keep_Your_Eyes_on_the_Prize)

With the song being an inspirational battle hymn of sorts to keep "plowing" along towards the ultimate "prize" of liberation and freedom, it is little wonder that its leitmotif of "Keep your eyes on the prize" became a proverbial slogan for the civil rights movement (Williams 1987). As John Lewis recalls in his book *Across that Bridge. Life Lessons and a Vision of Change* (2012), this song kept him and other civil rights proponents going as they found themselves jailed as Paul and Silas had been centuries ago:

> Soon, the cells all around me were full of [freedom] riders, and we began to sing songs of freedom to remind us of our purpose and keep our spirits high. We sang: "Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on," and "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." We sang "Woke up this

> morning with my mind stayed on freedom," and many other songs that reminded us of our faith. The songs seemed to aggravate prison officials who ultimately took away our Bibles, our toothbrushes, and even our mattresses and bedding, leaving us to sleep on steel cots, all to snuff out the joy in our hearts. (B36; all references from this book will be cited with the letter B followed by the page numbers)

Later in this book, John Lewis returns to the proverb "Keep your eyes on the prize" that can also be employed as the proverbial expression "To keep your eyes on the prize" in a telling paragraph about the nonviolent civil rights struggle of which he was one of the great leaders:

> Even though we had been rejected by society, we believed that all people had the capacity to be good. We believed not only we, but the perpetrators of violence, were victims as well, who began their lives in innocence but were taught to hate, abuse, and draw distinctions between themselves and others. We held no malice toward them and believed in the power of the truth to penetrate that negative conditioning and remind people of their innocence once again. We focused on the end we hoped to see and kept our eyes on that prize. We could not waste time harboring bitterness or resentment. We knew that our focus had to be on what we hoped to create, not the indignities we were pressing to leave behind. Hating our aggressors was like looking back when we wanted to move forward. We had to use our energy to manifest our dreams, and entertaining animosity would have given more power to the status quo. (B105-106)

1. The proverbial Congressman John Lewis from Georgia

But who then is this John Lewis who has made the nonviolent struggle for civil and human rights his mission as a fellow citizen and as a longtime Congressmen of the United States of America? And how does this modest, courageous, and forceful small man tower above others in simple language and benevolent deeds? As will become clear, his humanitarian philosophy is deeply grounded in his religious faith and his simple and poor upbringing that is void

of any signs of grand standing or intellectual snobbism. In fact, he expresses his thoughts and opinions in ordinary language that is accessible to all, and he enhances his rhetoric like other great civic leaders before him with plenty of proverbs and proverbial expressions from the Bible and folk speech.

Three relatively short biographies for juvenile readers have appeared, to wit Christine Hill's *John Lewis. From Freedom Rider to Congressman* (2002), Ann Bausum's *Freedom Riders. John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement* (2006), and Jim Haskins' and Kathleen Benson's *John Lewis in the Lead. A Story of the Civil Rights Movement* (2006). While these books present a vivid account of John Lewis as a poor sharecropper's son in rural Alabama who became a leading activist in the civil rights movement and who since 1987 serves as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from the state of Georgia, they cannot possibly measure up to the informed authenticity of John Lewis's detailed autobiography *Walking with the Wind. A Memoir of the Movement* (1998). This is not the place to trace the fascinating life of John Lewis in the detail that such an account would deserve. Suffice it to say that he was born on February 21, 1940, at Troy, Alabama, into a family of sharecroppers with ten children. After High School he attended the American Baptist Theological Seminary in the hope of becoming a preacher. He subsequently attended Fisk University, also located in Nashville, Tennessee, where he majored in philosophy and religion. Already as a student he became very interested in the philosophy of nonviolence as he participated in sit-ins at Nashville that brought about the desegregation of lunch counters in that city. In 1961 he became one of the first Freedom Riders (six blacks and seven whites) who rode a bus from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans to uphold the new law that forbade segregation on interstate bus travel. Together with others he was beaten and jailed, but he continued to push forward on his nonviolent mission for civil rights. From 1963 to 1966 he was the influential chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), and at the mere age of twenty-three he was one of the speakers on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., where his hero Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his unforgettable "I Have a Dream"-speech. In fact, his speech was quite aggressive in comparison to those of the older civil rights icons. Using the proverbial expression "To pay the price for something",

he declared that the civil rights revolution must move forward no matter how high the price might be:

> To those who have said, "Be patient and wait," we have long said that we cannot be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now! We are tired. We are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again. And then you holler, "Be patient." How long can we be patient? We want our freedom and we want it now. We do not want to go to jail. But we will go to jail if this is the price we must pay for love, brotherhood, and true peace.
>
> I appeal to all of you to get into this great revolution that is sweeping this nation. Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes, until the revolution of 1776 is complete. We must get in this revolution and complete the revolution. [...]
>
> We will not stop [...] We will march with the spirit of love and with the spirit of dignity that we have shown here today. By the force of our demands, our determination, and our numbers, we shall splinter the segregated South into a thousand pieces and put them together in the image of God and democracy. We must say: "Wake up America! Wake up!" For we cannot stop, and we will not and cannot be patient.
>
> (http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/lewis-speech-at-the-march-on-washington-speech-text/)

And on Lewis marched with thousands of others, gaining even more prominence as one of the most eminent civil rights advocates when on March 7, 1965, he led hundreds of marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on the march to Montgomery. As they reached the end of the bridge, they were brutally beaten by Alabama state troopers, making this day the "Bloody Sunday" of the civil rights movement. Even though Lewis had his skull fractured, he continued on his nonviolent crusade with Martin Luther King as his guidepost. King has remained his idol to

this day, as can be seen from remarks he made on November 13, 2006, at the King Memorial groundbreaking ceremony at Washington, D.C. He used the proverbial expressions "To get in the way of something", the proverb "All men are created equal", and Martin Luther King's own proverbial quotations "We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools" and "A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" to express the need to continue the work of the civil rights movement:

> Martin Luther King Jr. inspired me and thousands of other Americans to get in the way. He inspired us to get in trouble, but it was good trouble, necessary trouble.
>
> It seems it was only a few years ago that I stood with Martin Luther King Jr. and eight other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement as he spoke just a short distance from here on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. And in that now historic speech, that included the words, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal."
>
> In that speech when he said, "I have a dream today, a dream deeply rooted in the American dream," Martin Luther King, Jr., the moral leader of the nation, transformed those marble steps into a modern day pulpit. He spoke to the conscience of us all telling us that the way of peace, the way of love, the way of non-violence is a better way, a more excellent way.
>
> He spoke to the noble idea that we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools. Through his life and through his actions, he moved the mountains of our faith by declaring that a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
>
> [...] this monument will inspire generations yet unborn to get in the way. It will help them see that one human being can make a difference.
>
> (http://johnlewis.house.gov/press-release/november-13-2006-rep-john-lewis%E2%80%99s)

John Lewis is one of those human beings who has been making a difference all of his life! After he left SNCC, he had various jobs until he was elected to the Atlanta City Council in 1981. Five years later he made the jump into national politics by becoming a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, an elected position that he began on January 3, 1987 and has maintained ever since. While he has been called the "conscience of Congress" (Kemper 2006), he also acts as an esteemed and acclaimed voice of the struggle for world-wide human rights in front of young people. In speeches on university campuses, he often makes use of his repertoire of proverbs and proverbial expressions to bring his views across effectively, to wit the following remarks of August 26, 2005, to the students of the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, Virginia. With the power of proverbial rhetoric, he advises the students "to get in the way", and he tells them that he kept his eyes on the prize throughout his life, and then he adds the two proverbs "Keep your eyes on the prize" and "Walk with the wind" as wisdom of an engaged life. The message is that the students should focus on achieving a positive end result in their pursuits and that they should move with the wind of change for a better world:

> So I say to you students, lead us into the 21st century. Find a way to get in the way. Find a way to get in trouble. Find a way to make some noise, to make our country and our world a better place. [...]
>
> When I got in trouble, I began to accept nonviolence as a way of life, as a way of living. I got arrested a few times and went to jail, was beaten and left bloody and unconscious at the greyhound bust station in Montgomery in May of 1961, got a concussion at the bridge in Selma 40 years ago, March 7, 1965. But I didn't give up. I didn't give in. I kept the faith. I kept my eyes on the prize.
>
> And I say to you, never give up. Never, ever, consider giving in. Keep your eyes on the prize, keep the faith and walk with the wind.
>
> (http://web.wm.edu/news/archive/?id-5125)

It has been my good fortune to have been present at one of these incredible speeches that Congressman John Lewis has delivered on numerous campuses and elsewhere. It so happens that he was our special commencement speaker on May 20, 2007, at the University of Vermont in Burlington. After receiving an honorary doctorate degree, he spoke to a spell-bound audience of students, faculty, staff, parents, relatives, and friends, and I recall vividly that he touched me so deeply with his wise words that I had tears in my eyes. Once again he employs several proverbial phrases to encourage the graduates to embark on a life of civic engagement:

> The most pressing challenge in our society today is defined by the methods we use to defend the dignity of humankind. But too often we are focused on accumulating the trappings of a comfortable life—the big house, some new clothes, and a shiny, new car. But, if you want a better, more just, more fair society then you have to get in the way. You cannot wait for someone else to create change. [...]
>
> What it is you care about—whether it's getting to the truth about the war in Iraq, global warming, shrinking economic opportunities for the middle class, or the injustice of poverty—you have to find your passion and make your contribution. [...]
>
> The journey through life is difficult, but it is more meaningful when it is fueled by a vision, a dream, a determination to make life better for someone other than yourself. You have the power to change the social, political, and economic structures around you. You have the power to lead. Just find a way to get in the way and make your voices heard. So with that I say to you walk with the wind, and let the Spirit of History be your guide.
>
> (http://www.uvm.edu/~cmncmnt/commencement2007/?Page=commencementaddress_lewis)

When I finished my book *"Making a Way Out of No Way". Martin Luther King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric* (2010) three years later, I included part of this address in my preface (x-xi) and then went on to say that it is a great honor to dedicate my study to this

special person who has told thousands of people to find a way to get in the way of injustice and inequality:

> Just as his friend Martin Luther King had before him, John Lewis explained to us [at the University of Vermont] what is meant by the African American proverb "Making a way out of no way" [Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 102] standing in front of us as the epitome of dedicated and unselfish service in the cause of others.
>
> It is, then, my distinct honor to dedicate this book to John Lewis in recognition and admiration of his commitment and dedication to create a better world based on civil and human rights. He is a model of courage and dignity for us all, and it is my sincere hope that John Lewis will help guide humanity for many years to come by his exemplary insights and actions.
>
> (Mieder 2010: xi-xii)

And one of my great personal treasures is a letter of June 10, 2011, from Congressman John Lewis that has left a lasting impression on me as I continue my scholarly work on proverbial rhetoric. I have reread his kind words many times, and they have become a guiding light in my small contributions to a kinder world:

> Dear Professor Mieder:
>
> First and foremost, I was deeply touched that you dedicated your most recent book, *"Making a Way Out of No Way": Martin Luther King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric* to me. I was surprised and delighted to see that you also included parts of my 2007 commencement speech at the University of Vermont in the text.
>
> You have researched the phenomenon that is ingrained in African American culture, especially in the pulpit. I will never forget sitting in the congregation when Dr. King was preaching at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. His father, who co-pastored the church with him at that time, would be sitting in the audience, and when the spirit began to move, Daddy King would say, "Make it plain, son. Make it plain." The way he, and other Baptist ministers did that, was by telling the stories, using the sayings and

> language that people used everyday to discuss religious principles and ideas. The proverbs you have so lovingly researched help us even today to make it plain.
>
> Besides our love of good public speaking, you and I also have something else in common. You began as a visitor to this country, and I actually visited your homeland last year just about this time. I had a chance to meet some activists there [in Germany], and I was deeply moved by their devotion to Civil Rights history. They knew so much about the movement. I was very impressed and deeply moved.
>
> Thank you, Professor Mieder for the signed copy of your book and for keeping the language of freedom and justice alive. I wish you all the best with your future academic endeavors and literary publications.
>
> Keep the faith!
> John Lewis
> Member of Congress

Taking out the time from his busy schedule as a Congressman to write such a kind and meaningful letter to a professor in Vermont shows that John Lewis is indeed a considerate and compassionate person who knows how to bring his message across in plain words filled with emotional strength.

This can best be seen in his inspirational autobiography *Walking with the Wind. A Memoir of the Movement* (1998) in which he tells two stories. The one recounts his personal Odyssey from childhood in the segregated South of the United States to respected and admired Congressman, and the other represents the experienced account of the civil rights movement. When I read this moving personal and historical biography, I was immediately struck by its accessible and plain language informed by a richness of proverbs and proverbial expressions. But while the book received much deserved praise in numerous journalistic and scholarly reviews, this colorful metaphorical language is hardly ever mentioned. At least Jon Meacham remarked in *Newsweek* that "The strength of Lewis's powerful new book is not only the witness he bears but also the simplicity of his voice" (1998: 69), Mary McGrory called the book "a literary event, for sure" (1998: C1) in

The Washington Post, William Chafe of *The New York Times* declared that Lewis had written a "powerful memoir [and] compelling account" (1998: 14), Zachary Dowdy paid Lewis the compliment that his autobiography "is superbly written, with Lewis's searing honesty showing through" (1998: D4) in the *Boston Globe*, and Joseph Dolman considered the book "beautifully written" (1998: 20) in *The New Leader*. Jack Nelson of the *Los Angeles Times* even prophesized that this book would become a "classic in civil rights literature" (1998: 8), and it has in fact reached this status. But what do these general accolades from the mass media mean as far as John Lewis's expressive rhetoric is concerned?

The more scholarly reviews from journals also do not go beyond superficial statements, if they mention the language or style of the memoir at all. Thus Garry Wills, Kathryn Nasstrom, and Bill Whit say nothing about the language of the book in their reviews (1998, 1999 and 2000). Mike Miller speaks at least of a "powerful narrative" and acknowledges Lewis's "strength of character and conviction as he tells this tale" (1998: 46) but says nothing about how the tale is told. John Salmond calls the book an "at times intensely moving and always lively memoir" (2000: 167), and Enrique Rigsby ends his insightful review with the following paragraph: "As a witness of history, Lewis reminds the reader that the civil rights movement was rhetorical. Scholars of public affairs should drink deeply from his book. John Lewis is an American treasure; and few such treasures remain who can offer a rich personal perspective on some of the most important years in United States history" (2000: 681). Indeed, John Lewis by now is the only surviving major leaders of the civil rights movement, but since Enrique Rigsby published his review in the *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* journal, it would have been welcome if he had commented on the sociopolitical rhetoric and ethical rhetoric that distinguishes John Lewis as a reformer whose political language is informed by proverbs and proverbial expressions (for proverbs in politics in general see Louis 2000, Mieder 1997, 2004: 137-139, 2005, and 2008, Nichols 1996). As will be shown, he is part of a tradition of African American politicians who have used proverbial speech to enhance their expressive and at times sermonic rhetoric, to wit the well-documented linguistic prowess of Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama (Mieder 2001, 2009, and

2010). With the respect and admiration that John Lewis feels for Martin Luther King, with whom he also shares his religiously informed language, it should not be surprising that he echoes his friend's proverbial rhetoric in particular.

It is not possible to comment in detail on all of the proverbs, proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, and other types of phraseologisms contained in John Lewis's three books, i.e., his voluminous autobiography *Walking with the Wind. A Memoir of the Movement* (1998), his small philosophical book *Across that Bridge. Life Lessons and a Vision for Change* (2012), and his graphic novel for juvenile readers *March. Book One* (2013; two more volumes are planned). All proverbial references are listed in their basic paremiographical form in the attached "Index of Proverbial Texts". While his first book contains 654 proverbial texts on 503 pages (1 per 0.8 pages), the second book includes only 71 on 180 pages (1 per 2.5 pages), and the third book features but 17 texts on 121 pages (1 per 7.1 pages) due to its graphic nature with little text. Clearly Lewis's autobiography is of special interest as far as his proverbial rhetoric is concerned. In fact, the phraseologisms included in the graphic novel for the most part are repetitions from the memoir. However, there are some proverbs and proverbial expressions that appear only in his small philosophical treatise, and some of these will be included in the following discussion that deals primarily with the rich proverbial rhetoric of John Lewis's autobiography. While most proverbial texts occur only once or twice, some have multiple occurrences, as for example "To get down to business", "To throw down the gauntlet", "To be in the middle of nowhere", "To get (see) the big picture", "To roll up one's sleeves", "To be a team player" (all 3 times); "To strike a chord", "To be dead set against somebody or something", "To take into one's own hands", "To play by the rules", "To be the last straw" (4 times); "To hold (stand) one's ground", "In the long run" (5 times); "To be in the air", "The rank and file", "To take someone to task", "To rub someone the wrong way" (6 times); "To open someone's eyes" (7 times), "To draw the line" (8 times); "To work behind the scene" (9 times), and "To put on the line" (11 times). In the following two sections, especially relevant Bible proverbs, folk proverbs and proverbial expressions will be discussed in their context, showing that this proverbial rhetoric

plays a major role in the books and speeches about civil and human rights by Congressman John Lewis.

2. Biblical proverbs and proverbial expressions

Before John Lewis became involved in the civil rights movement as a student, he had envisioned himself to become a preacher. He certainly went to church with his parents, he preached to his flock of chickens, he delivered a sermon as a youngster, he studied religion and philosophy at college, and he has remained to this day a deeply religious person with a social conscience that led the preacher to be into politics. It should not be surprising that he is well-versed in the Bible and that he relies on its proverbial wisdom to express basic human issues. He does so without becoming overly didactic but rather compassionate, as when he explains why his parents were not at all pleased about his turn towards revolutionary social changes. The following paragraph merely alludes to the Bible proverb "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14) to describe the simple but poor existence of his sharecropper parents who were filled with anxiety about their young son's intent to turn the world upside down, as Lewis comments proverbially:

> Change, as I learned back when I was growing up, was not something my parents were ever very comfortable with. And who could blame them? They, like hundreds of thousands—no, *millions*—of black men and women of their generation, worked harder than seemed humanly possible, under circumstances more difficult than most Americans today could possibly imagine, to carve out a life for themselves and their children in a society that saw them as less than fully human. Theirs was, as the Bible says, a straight and narrow way. There was little room for change in the world my parents knew, and what change there was was usually for the worse. It's not hard to understand at all the mixture of fear and concern they both felt as they watched me walk out into the world as a young man to join a movement aimed, in essence, at turning the world they knew upside down. (9)

In his book *Across that Bridge* Lewis includes a similar paragraph in which he describes how he somewhat deviously pursued his

strong desire to get an education, with his parents being caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place in trying to understand his drive while needing his labor in the field. The proverbial phrase certainly adds much metaphorical emphasis to their ambivalent situation:

> Sometimes when I was needed in the fields to help my parents pick cotton, peanuts, or corn, I would get up very early. I would get dressed and then hide under the front porch until the school bus stopped at my house. Then I would hop on the bus without my parents knowing. They were always angry when they discovered I was gone, as most parents would be, but they never punished me for going to school. We were all victims of the narrow limitations our society had proscribed for us. They were trapped too, between a rock and a hard place that required them to pit their survival as sharecroppers against the education of their children. (B129)

In yet another telling passage replete with proverbial language, Lewis explains that while he understood his parents' resigned attitude of not actively fighting against the injustice of segregation, he could not accept that many of the Baptist ministers did nothing to fight against this social evil. As so often in his autobiography, he amasses proverbial language to add metaphorical color to his discourse, to wit the twin formula "right and left", the Bible proverb "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24), and the proverbial expressions "To be a pie in the sky" and "Between the cradle and the grave":

> My parents' attitude toward injustice didn't bother me nearly as much as the attitude I saw among the ministers at church. Our minister at Macedonia Baptist lived in Montgomery and traveled out to preach to us once a month. It always bothered me that he knew, as we all did, how sharecroppers were cheated by our landlords right and left, underpaid and overcharged every year, but not once did he ever speak about this in his sermons. Sunday after Sunday he'd talk about an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, how the soul must be saved by and by for that pie in the sky after you die, but hardly a word about *this* life,

> about *this* world, about some sense of salvation and righteousness right *here*, between the cradle and the grave. It also did not escape my notice that that minister arrived and departed in a pretty nice automobile, and that he went back to a very comfortable home in Montgomery, more comfortable than the homes any of us lived in. (44)

Regarding the infamous proverb from Exodus, it expresses a vindictive philosophy that John Lewis with his uncompromising commitment to nonviolence could not possibly agree with. In fact, when the peaceful civil rights movement came under attack by more aggressive forces led by Malcolm X, Lewis cites the Bible proverb to voice his strong opposition to militant action:

> I respected Malcolm. I saw him as a very articulate, very forceful spokesperson for what he believed in. But I never accepted his ideas. I didn't—and I don't—have any sympathy with black nationalism, separatism, the attitude of an eye for an eye or violence of any sort. I can respect a person and understand what he's saying and still not be sympathetic to it. As far as I was concerned, Malcolm was not a civil rights leader. Malcolm was not part of the movement. The movement had a goal of an integrated society, an interracial democracy, a Beloved Community. What Malcolm X represented were the seeds of something different, something that would eventually creep into the movement itself and split it apart. He was not about integration, not about an interracial community, and he was not nonviolent. To his credit, he preached personal independence and responsibility, self-discipline and self-reliance. But he also urged the black man to fight back in self-defense—"by any means necessary," as he famously put it. And I just could not accept that. (205-206)

Later in the autobiography, Lewis returns to the more militant advocates of the civil rights movement, notably H. (for Hubert) "Rap" Brown who in 1967 "grabbed headlines with quotes like 'Violence is as American as cherry pie'" (395). He varied the standard proverbial comparison "As American as apple-pie" during a SNCC press conference on July 27, 1967 (Shapiro 2006: 107), perhaps changing the apples to cherries since the red color

fits well to the violence (blood) that he was talking about. It is interesting to note that Lewis quotes this proverbial "slogan", having no choice but to agree with this unfortunate characterization of American society:

> I would actually agree with this statement. Violence has always been endemic to American culture. Dr. King said the same thing. We are, and have always been, a very violent society. But that doesn't mean we have to accept it. It doesn't mean that we have to respond to the worst of America with the worst of ourselves. We have something better to offer. I have always believed that. I have always believed it is possible to show ourselves a different way, a better way to solve our problems. This is what Gandhi tried to do in India. It is what Dr. King tried to do here, and it goes far beyond civil rights alone. It extends to all of the conflicts we face among ourselves and among other nations. There are simply other and better ways to solve our differences than through violence. (395)

No wonder that Lewis's disapproval of the Old Testament "eye for an eye"-proverb of forceful retribution becomes a leitmotif in his nonviolent struggle for equal rights, as can be seen from yet another powerful paragraph in which he argues against the ills of uncontrolled riots by also questioning the proverbial claim "Anything goes" and the equally proverbial insistence on "to let it all out":

> That's what a riot is—just letting it out. Nothing is held back. Anything goes. Burning. Looting. Killing. Even one another. Part of the movement was to tame the madness of men, to take the beast that lives in all of us and turn it toward love, to show humankind a different way, to teach the way of compassion, of connection and community, of peace and nonviolence. Yes, we are human, and yes, there is a savage side in all of us. The first impulse of man has always been to react like an animal, to respond to attack in like manner. If someone hits you, strike back. If someone bombs you, bomb back. But there have been teachers, men and women throughout history, who have stood and said, No, you can't take an eye for an eye. If you do, we

> will all be blind. At some point we have to lift ourselves to a higher plane. And it is possible. Men have shown throughout history that it is possible. (409)

And Lewis is consistent in his view against this ill-conceived wisdom from the Old Testament, as can be seen from its dual appearance in his more recent book *Across that Bridge. Life Lessons and a Vision for Change*:

> For those who could not find their dignity in the actions of nonviolent resistance, especially after the assassination of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. [...], black power or the ideas of self-defense grew in popularity. They were advocated as quicker paths to self-respect and an appreciation of one's self-worth through retaliating against the wrongs brought against us. It may have worked for some people. I would never question the value of affirming oneself, or recognizing and utilizing collective strength to make our voices heard. However, I would say that the danger of matching threat for threat, violence with violence, resistance with force, is that it has the potential to create the same spiritual deficit the victim is struggling against within him or herself. The notion of an eye for an eye, though biblical, only lowers an individual to the level of his or her attacker. (B155-156)

In his final condemnation of this Bible proverb, Lewis even adds the related proverb "Blood asks (for) blood" (Genesis 9:6) to it, scolding all those "who want to spill blood for blood, ravage an eye for an eye, or rip out a tooth for a tooth" (B176).

It is obvious that a nonviolent person would argue against these Biblical proverbs, but Lewis also feels himself forced to cite positive Bible proverbs to show that their humane messages are unfortunately not adhered to by those who preach them in the segregated South. A good example are his thoughts about the proverb "Love thy neighbor as thyself (Matthew 22:39) that he had studied as a student of religion and philosophy at American Baptist Theological Seminary and Fisk University in Nashville:

> I had never heard anything like this [the enlightening lectures]. Except for Dr. King's speeches. I had never been exposed to religion beyond the bounds of the Good Book.

> Now my brain was crackling as it strained to assess and absorb these new ideas [of Plato, Socrates, St. Augustine, Kant, Hegel, etc.]. Now I saw philosophical and theological underpinnings for what I'd sensed and deeply felt all my life—that there was a contradiction between what was and what ought to be. This contradiction extended even to training people to preach the Gospel. For the most part, white Southern Baptist churches didn't even want black people to step inside their buildings. Yet within these very institutions, people were being taught that Jesus Christ says to love thy neighbor as thyself. How could that be? How could people reconcile that belief with the way they lived? It was illogical. It was contradictory. I was more convinced than ever that Dr. King was right and the white South was wrong. (63-64)

Again and again in his writings and speeches, Lewis returns to his mentor and friend Martin Luther King, whom he met in 1957 at the young age of seventeen. In 1955, the young John Lewis had heard a sermon by King on the radio that "set him on fire" proverbially speaking and influenced him from then to now:

> This was the first time I had ever heard something I would learn was called the social gospel—taking the teachings of the Bible and applying them to the earthbound problems and issues confronting a community and a society. I was on fire with the words I was hearing. I felt that this man—his name was Martin Luther King Jr.—was speaking directly to me. This young preacher was giving voice to everything I'd been feeling and fighting to figure out for years. (45-46)

Later in his autobiography, Lewis writes this touching testimonial about King and uses the proverbial expression "To open someone's eyes" to indicate that King showed him the way of the social gospel. The short paragraph is a touching indication of how two of the greatest Americans of the modern age were soul-mates in their struggles:

> Dr. King was my friend, my brother, my leader. He was the man, the one who opened my eyes to the world. From the time I was fifteen until the day he died—for almost

> half my life—he was the person who, more than any other, continued to influence my life, who made me who I was. He made me who I *am*. To this day I owe more of myself to him than to anyone else I have ever known. It's difficult to express in words. I have never believed in any man as much as I believed in Martin Luther King. When he was killed I really felt I'd lost a part of myself. (412-413)

King, just as Mohandas Gandhi, is for Lewis the epitome of nonviolence. Giving hope for a better life to disadvantaged people by turning the social gospel of the New Testament into nonviolent action is always present, as can be seen in the following comments with that hopeful proverb "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5):

> Dr. King would often say that we've got to love people no matter what. Most of all, he would say, we must love the unlovable. Love the *hell* out of them, he would say. And he meant that literally. If there is hell in someone, if there is meanness and anger and hatred in him, we've got to *love* it out.
>
> I had no doubt that this could be done. Gandhi showed it could be done. This one little man [like John Lewis!], armed with nothing but the truth and a fundamental faith in the response of human society to redemptive suffering, was able to reshape an entire nation without raising so much as a fist. And he did it not by aiming high, at the people in power, but by aiming low, at the downtrodden, the poor, the men and women and children who inhabited the streets and the fields of his country. It is an ancient theme, as old as the Christian Bible: "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth. ... Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (78)

It is perhaps somewhat surprising that John Lewis does not cite the so-called golden rule of the proverb "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12) that is part and parcel of all the major religions of the world (Hertzler 1933-1934; Griffin 1991: 67-69; Burrell 1997: 13-27; Templeton 1997: 8-12).

Other social reformers like Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama all made use of it as the most basic law of human life. But Lewis does at least refer to it in a rather intriguing way when he recounts the story of the first thirteen Freedom Riders of 1961, of whom he was one:

> There was [also] Albert Bigelow, a big, rugged-looking guy from New England who looked as if he belonged on a sailing ship a century ago. In fact, he *had* been a sailor, a Navy captain during World War II, and that experience had turned him into a committed pacifist—so committed that he was arrested in 1958 for steering a skiff he called *The Golden Rule* into a nuclear testing zone in the South Pacific as a protest against the use of the atomic bomb. (131)

In any case, Lewis certainly employs the proverbial triad "Faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 13:13) as yet another underlying Biblical principle of the civil rights movement, altering it slightly to indicate that courage was a major component for its participants as they confronted brutal force:

> Faith, hope and courage—these were all essential ingredients for the work SNCC was doing in the Deep South in those early years. And anger, too. Yes, there was anger among us in SNCC, but it was good anger, a healthy anger, at least in that early stage. It was a positive, constructive type of anger. We were rebels, absolutely. We were all about rebellion, but it was a rebellion against an evil thing, the whole system and structure of segregation and racial discrimination. If the old guard leadership of our own black community was holding us back, then we were rebelling against them, too. (188)

And Lewis also cites the Biblical proverbial phrase "To be a thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) to describe the positively rebellious SNCC which he expanded into a massive organization of young blacks and whites pushing for desegregation: "We were created, in a way, to be a thorn in the flesh of the American body politic and of the established, traditional civil rights movement" (284).

Being not only a "preacher" by nature but also a natural teacher, Lewis is quick to call on Biblical phrases in support of his inspirational "Life Lessons and Vision for Change" (Arthurs 2003). In the introduction to the book that carries this statement as its subtitle, he cites the expression "To have the scales fall from one's eyes (Acts 9:18) to stress the importance for people of all walks of life to be wide awake and keep their eyes open at all times so that the social revolution never ceases:

> This book is for the people. It is for the grassroots leaders who will emerge not for the sake of fame or fortune, but with a burning desire to do good. It is for all those willing to join in the human spirit's age-old struggle to break free from the bondage of concepts and structures that have lost their use. It is for the masses of people who with each new day have the chance to peel the scales from their eyes and remember it is they alone who are the most powerful agents of change. It is for anyone who wants to reform his or her existence or to fashion a better life for the children. It's for those who want to improve their community or to make their mark in history. This book is a collection of a few of the truths that I have learned as one who dreamed, worked, and struggled in America's last revolution. (B2-3)

And finally then, he draws on the Biblical phrase "To be a voice crying in the wilderness" (Matthew 3:3) to warn people that standing up for social change can be a lonely business, but it must be faced in a courageous, informed, and nonviolent way with faith, hope, and love for all people:

> It is only through examining history that you [people] become aware of where you stand within the continuum of change. you may find you are the "voice crying in the wilderness" who will have to walk alone. Or you may find only a few devotees who will join you throughout the whole period of your activism. This does not mean your work is not important. It means the part you must play is simply different than those leaders who stand at the front lines of a mass movement. Every contribution is important to the work of change, and it is only when you

> study the history of activism that you can perceive what your role may be and how others managed in the same kind of position years and decades before. It is through study and preparation that you can increase the power of your work. (B70)

Indeed, much can be learned through study as especially the highly educated Martin Luther King showed in his sermons, speeches, writings, and actions. This can be seen from his integration of the three proverbial quotations "Truth crushed to the earth, will rise again" (William Cullen Bryant), "No lie can live forever (Thomas Carlyle), and "The arc (arm) of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (Theodore Parker), the Bible proverb "As you sow, so shall you reap" (Galatians 6:7) as well as the folk proverb "The truth is marching on" into one powerful paragraph in one of his most important speeches on March 25, 1965 at Montgomery, Alabama. It was a high point of civil rights rhetoric at the time, and its repetition by Lewis in his autobiography is not only a tribute to King but also a central message that he wants to give to his readers:

> I [Martin Luther King] know some of you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to the earth will rise again.
> How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.
> How long? Not long, because you will reap what you sow.
> How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.
> How long? Not long, because mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the faithful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on.
> Glory hallelujah! *Glory hallelujah!* (360; the entire speech in Washington 1986: 230)

In the final chapter of his book *Across that Bridge*, John Lewis reminds his readers that the proverb "All men are created equal"

and the proverbial triad "Life liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" from the Declaration of Independence should forever be the social compass with its message deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of citizens (see Aron 2008: 91-96):

> The Declaration of Independence expresses the purposes of human community by affirming this [basic freedoms] as a fundamental root of our founding: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Inalienable means that no law, no man, no woman, no child, no power can separate us from this divine quest. (B170)

Towards the end of his autobiography, Lewis says something quite similar, stressing that the country must pay special attention to instill in its young poor and often black people the belief in a better existence for all. As he continues, he broadens his uplifting little "sermon" to include the disadvantaged of all age groups, urging them proverbially that they must think about how their lives can improve "in the long run":

> I truly believe that if we don't invest more in our young people, we are headed for disaster. And this is where the [modern] revolution must begin. A revolution of values. A revolution of attitude. A revolution that instills the sense of *possibility* in these young people's minds and hearts, a belief that this nation does indeed offer to them the opportunities of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
>
> The people, young and old alike, in these [poor and largely black] communities need to organize, to form a movement, a movement fueled not just by anger and rage, but by moral *authority*, by a sense of human righteousness fueled by the spirit. First, however, that spirit must be kindled within and among these communities—in these homes, in these neighborhoods, among the poor and the outcast themselves. I have been poor. I know what it is like. And I know that it is possible to pool our interests, to gather our resources, as cant as they might seem. And I

> am not talking just about money. I am talking about courage and strength of character, about stepping back and deciding what is important and valuable about life in the long run, not just how to make ourselves happy today, or maybe tomorrow. [...]
>
> Replace them [elected officials] with people who will do what is demanded, what is needed. People are too quiet, too patient. In the great words of a nineteenth-century civil rights fighter, Fredrick Douglass, we need to "agitate, agitate, agitate." (488)

I am surprised that John Lewis does not cite Douglass's other dictum here, namely "If there is no struggle, there is no progress" that he stated in a powerful abolitionist speech of August 3, 1857:

> Let me give you a word of philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all the tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. (Blassingame 1985-1992: III, 204; Mieder 2001: 456-457)

I took the liberty of shortening Douglass's proverbial quotation to "No Struggle, No Progress" for the proverbial title of my book *Frederick Douglass and His Proverbial Rhetoric for Civil Rights* (2001), hoping that it might catch on as a new proverb in time.

But to return to our proverbial muttons, it should be noted that at the beginning of his book *Across that Bridge*, John Lewis also refers to the lesser known proverbial quotation that follows the proverbial triad of "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", namely "No just government can be formed without the consent of

the governed". He might have done well to point out that this truth was penned by Thomas Jefferson as well in the Declaration of Independence, but be that as it may, Lewis as the humanitarian politician did well with the following statement, echoing the repeated us of it by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in their struggle for women's rights in the nineteenth century (see Mieder 2013):

> Nothing can stop the power of a committed and determined people to make a difference in our society. Why? Because human beings are the most dynamic link to the divine on this planet. Governments and corporations do not live. They have no power, no capacity in and of themselves. They are given life and derive all their authority from their ability to assist, benefit, and transform the lives of the people they touch. All authority emanates from the consent of the governed and the satisfaction of the customer. Somehow it seems leaders have forgotten this fundamental principle, and we must right ourselves before the people withdraw their support. (B6-7)

In a later chapter on "Truth" in this book, Lewis appears to be creating a string of pseudo-proverbs based on the fourteenth-century proverb "Familiarity breeds contempt" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 198). They all maintain the simple structure of "X breeds Y", giving Lewis a multitude of ways to show how people get drawn into a downward spiral of disrespect and hate:

> What will it take for each of us to learn from the lessons of segregation and separation and apply them liberally to our own lives? If we are truly to learn the lessons of the Civil Rights Movement, the Holocaust, or the conflict in Northern Ireland, we must concede that discomfort breeds dislike, dislike breeds disdain, disdain breeds contempt, and contempt breeds hate. We cannot afford to relegate the victories in the struggle between love and hate to one group or another, whether they happen on American shores or not. The truth is, as long as we see life in terms of its duality, instead of its commonality, our lives will always demand we overcome. (B101)

John Lewis is well aware of the fact that the United States like any other country has its problems and faults, but there is hope for improvement, as is implied by his quotation of Bill Clinton's dictum "Mend it, don't end it" that causes Lewis to also employ the proverbial expression "To throw the baby out with the bathwater" that first appeared in a satirical literary work in Germany in 1512 and subsequently was translated into English in the late nineteenth century to express the idea of getting rid of the good together with the bad (Mieder 1993: 224):

> To all these determined critics of affirmative action [and other important civil rights legislation for that matter]: I agree with President Clinton. I say, "Mend it, don't end it." Yes, there are problems with some aspects of affirmative action programs. Adjustments can be made. Solutions can be found. But we should not end affirmative action simply because the system has problems. Its principles are sound. They are healthy. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. (492)

Lewis also cites Mother Teresa's "To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it" (501) to keep people's spirits up and to take care of those less fortunate:

> Talk is fine. Discussion is fine. But we must respond. We must act. Mother Teresa acted. She reached out to those who were left behind—the forsaken, the poorest of the poor, the sickest of the sick.
>
> And where did she find her strength, her focus, her fuel? She was asked that question back in 1975, for that *Time* magazine story on "living saints" [of whom John Lewis was one!]. Her answer was succinct. The fuel, she explained, is prayer. "To keep a lamp burning," she said, "we have to keep putting oil in it."
> Prayer. (501)

Of course, this type of "prayer " does not imply only a *vita contemplativa* but rather a *vita activa* filled with words turned into action, or, as the folk proverb going back to the early seventeenth century has it: "Actions speak louder than words" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 7). Actually, John Lewis says all of this

much better in the very last paragraph of his classic autobiography, citing a piece of traditional African wisdom:

> There is an old African proverb: "When you pray, move your feet." As a nation, if we care for the Beloved Community, we must move our feet, our hands, our hearts, our resources to build and not to tear town, to reconcile and not to divide, to love and not to hate, to heal and not to kill. In the final analysis, we are one people, one family, one house—the American house, the American family. (503).

The proverb is also cited as a separate piece of wisdom at the end of the chapter on "Faith" in *Across that Bridge*: "*When you pray, move your feet*.—African Proverb" (B39). It should be observed, however, that the African origin of this proverb has not been established. The earliest printed reference found thus far is from 1936, indicating a probable Quaker source, even though "in recent times, it is regularly referred to as an African or an African American proverb" (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 84-85).

Clearly all people have their responsible roles to play on the world's stage, as John Lewis states by borrowing the proverbial wisdom of William Shakespeare in his treasure of personal life lessons:

> What Shakespeare wrote in *As You Like It* is not only poetic and beautiful, it also expresses a profound truth: "All the world's a stage," he says, "and all the men and women merely players." Life is like a drama, and any person who is truly committed to an ideal must believe in the authority of a divine plan. Not a rigid, micromanagement of human behavior that predicts every step of every individual, but a set of divine boundaries that governs the present, the past, and the future—a set of principles humankind does not have the capacity to override, no matter how far we attempt to stray from its dictates. (B20-21)

To add even more proverbiality to this at the end of this discussion of Bible proverbs and a few quotational proverbs as well, it can be stated that what is needed for all people is to keep their eyes on the prize and to struggle towards it with optimistic hope while keeping the golden rule ever in mind.

3. Folk proverbs and proverbial expressions

This section too can start with a reference to John Lewis's family. He is well aware that he broke away from his parents and siblings who remained in the rural South, but he assures his readers that he remains humble despite his political successes that have brought him into close contact with members of Congress, the presidents and vice presidents since John F. Kennedy, other American politicians, and also foreign dignitaries. He returns to his native Troy, Alabama, as often as he can when he is home from Washington, D.C. in Atlanta, Georgia. He loves these large family gatherings, valuing all of his relatives as they try to deal with his accomplishments and fame. The proverb "There is nothing like family" amply describes his allegiance to the clan:

> It's quite a crowd when we all get together, along with our spouses and children. The energy, the closeness, the comfort —there really is nothing in the world like family. When I come home like this, I'm not a congressman anymore making speeches on national television. Nor am I a civil rights warrior quoted in history books. Or a "living saint," as *Time* magazine once called me years ago, to the unending amusement of my closest friends. No, by the time I step onto my mother's front porch, all those labels have faded away and I'm just plain Robert [his middle name] again, third oldest of Eddie and Willie Mae Lewis's ten children. (8-9)

As he explains the hardships that his poor family as sharecroppers endured working in the hot sun with the proverbial comparison "the air as still as death" adding colloquial expressiveness to the misery, he mentions that they lacked almost all modern amenities but were happy just the same. After all, as the proverb says, "It is hard to miss what you have never had (known)":

> There is really no way to describe how hot and heavy the summer months get in a place like south Alabama. You work all day, outside, under that broiling sun, the air as still as death, then you come home to a house that is hardly cooler inside than out, even with the shade, even at nighttime. We had no fans; we had no electricity. Air-conditioning would have sounded like something out of

> science fiction—if we had even heard of it, which we had not. Still, again, it's hard to miss what you have never known. What might sound like hardship today still holds a happy, sentimental place in my memory. (20)

Once John Lewis left his home for American Baptist Theological Seminary in 1957, he became involved in a string of sit-ins that succeeded in desegregating the city of Nashville. In his memoir he describes a visit at that school almost forty years later, where an older student pays Lewis a compliment by using the relatively new African American proverb "If you want to talk the talk, you've got to walk the walk" whose earliest written record comes from 1967 (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 250):

> He [the student Mike Flippin] admitted he didn't recognize my name at first, but he knew about the movement that had begun here four decades before.
>
> "I don't know if we today would *have* that kind of courage," he said. "We might talk the talk, but people like you all, you walked the *walk*." (60)

Recalling his first reluctant and then unsuccessful attempt to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1977, Lewis in a bit of self-analysis returns to this proverb:

> I still had several reservations [about running for national office], several reasons to wonder if I was really ready for this. First, I had no background or experience whatsoever in politics at any level, not at a school board, not on a county commission, not on a city council—nothing. And I was not charming or charismatic [...]. I always preferred to walk the walk rather than talk the talk. But politics is about walking and talking. Give me the room to talk, to actually spend some time with people—whether it's making a speech or having a real conversation—and I can make the points and have the effect I desire. But the same qualities that can come through so strongly in that kind of setting—earnestness, sincerity, substance—can come across in ten-second sound bites on the evening news as just plain dull. And as everyone knows, modern political

> campaigns are, unfortunately, steered largely by sound bites. (441)

John Lewis has walked the walk determined to make a difference for many decades, but by staying away from opportune sound bites, his voice has become recognized as one of compassionate reason stressing "the essence of the nonviolent way of life—the capacity to forgive" (77). Perhaps recalling Martin Luther King's triadic warning "Hate begets hate, violence begets violence, and toughness begets a greater toughness" (King 1958: 87; Mieder 2010: 337-338) that King might well have based on the structure of the common proverb "Money begets money", Lewis talks of the evil of violence, hate, and anger with words that are anything but mundane or "just plain dull":

> And it [nonviolence] is a way of life. [...] It is not something you turn on or off like a faucet. This sense of love, this sense of peace, the capacity of compassion, is something you carry inside yourself every waking minute of the day. It shapes your response to a curt cashier in the grocery store or to a driver cutting you off in traffic just as surely as it keeps you from striking back at a state trooper who might be kicking you in the ribs because you dared to march in protest against an oppressive government. If you want to create an open society, your means of doing so must be consistent with the society you want to create. Means and ends are absolutely inseparable. Violence begets violence. Hatred begets hatred. Anger begets anger, every minute of the day, in the smallest of moments as well as the largest. (77-78)

Lewis returns to the proverbial wisdom "Violence begets violence" when he describes how nonviolent behavior eventually had positive results during the confrontational sit-ins in Nashville. The phrase "To egg someone on" adds a colloquial element to this description, and one almost wishes that Lewis would have added the proverbial expression "To have egg on one's face" to it to describe how the violent segregationists lost out in this situation:

> I got back on my stool [at the lunch counter] and sat there, not saying a word. The others did the same. Violence does beget violence, but the opposite is just as true. Hitting

> someone who does not hit back can last only so long. Fury spends itself pretty quickly when there's no fury facing it. [...] They continued trying to egg us on, but the beating subsides. (99-100)

It is of interest to note here that Lewis has kept parts of this proverbial paragraph in his graphic novel *March. Book One* that by its nature uses only minimalistic prose with its illustrations: "Violence does beget violence, but the opposite is just as true. Fury spends itself pretty quickly when there's no fury facing it" (M100-101).

The nonviolent students of Nashville had every reason to be proud of their accomplishment, but as Ella Baker from the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) told them, this really was only the beginning of a much larger struggle to desegregate the South. As John Lewis describes her caveats, he seems to quote her as stating that the young people should stay focused on the prize, i.e., "Keep it pure" and "Keep it real". If in fact Baker did say "Keep it real" in 1960, this proverb would be fifteen years older than the 1975 first documented use of it in the *Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 132), or is Lewis's linguistic memory playing a trick with him here. Of course, "Keep it real" could well have been in oral use by 1960. But no matter, here is the actual account from the memoir:

> [Ella] Baker herself, in a speech titled "More Than a Hamburger," praised our success so far but warned that our work had just begun. Integrating lunch counters in stores already patronized mostly by blacks was one thing. Breaking down barriers in areas as racially and culturally entrenched as voting rights, education and the workplace was going to be much tougher than what we had faced so far. She had another warning as well [...] Don't let anyone else, especially the older folks, tell you what to do. Think and act for yourselves. Hold onto your energy and your vision. Keep it pure. Keep it real. (108)

She might just as well have added "Keep your eyes on the prize", and that is, of course, exactly what John Lewis and students did in the years to come. It should also be noted that John Lewis has a good ear and memory for proverbs used by others. Thus he recalls

one of the SNCC members of having used the proverb "A bird needs two wings to fly" (180) as a fitting metaphor for the two sections of that organization, the one going primarily after voter registration, the other sticking with the drive for desegregation.

Lewis agreed to this two-prong approach as a compromise even though he firmly believed that they "needed to push and push and not stop pushing" (180). His political pragmatism is indeed impressive, but so is his non-flamboyant leadership style in the civil rights movement. He never minded taking a back seat, he did not push himself into the glaring limelight, and he didn't care about getting credit. These three proverbial expressions plus the proverb "Here today and gone tomorrow" and the proverbial phrase "To be a flash in the pan" used to characterize those who do things only for the sake of getting attention without having staying power are a clear indication of the rich proverbial rhetoric of Lewis's autobiography. The following five paragraphs certainly exemplify his lively and authentic style that makes his account such an invaluable experience for the readers:

> From the beginning, people were coming at me from all sides, trying to force me into a more politically active role, to be more conscious and forceful in dealing with other civil rights organizations. [Jim] Forman and Marion Barry kept pushing and saying, "Take on this person, take on that organization." Infighting and one-upmanship was the game, they told me. "Don't take a back seat," they'd say.
>
> When I returned from that July meeting in New York, Forman took me aside and pointed at a newspaper photo where I'm at the end of the group, almost out of the frame. "You've got to get out *front*," he said. "Don't let King get all the credit. Don't stand back like that. Get out *front*."
>
> I just never thought that way. Trying to get out front and worry about who's getting the credit, that's just never been my concern. Let's get the job done—that's how I feel. That's how I've always felt. Don't worry about the limelight. Get the job done, and there will be plenty of credit to get around.

> I realize that attitude has sometimes—some would say often—resulted in my being overlooked now and then through the course of my life. I've never been the kind of person who naturally attracts the limelight. I'm not a handsome guy. I'm not flamboyant. I'm not what you would call elegant. I'm short and stocky. My skin is dark, not fair—a feature that was still considered a drawback by many black people in the early '60s. For some or all of these reasons, I simply have never been the kind of guy who draws attention.
>
> And I'm thankful for that. It's always seemed to me that the people who are fed by and who focus on visibility and notoriety and getting the credit don't have what you might call staying power. They rise and fall in the public eye, here today and gone tomorrow. Too often they become flashes in the pan, winding up in those "Where Are They Now?" columns. It's sad. Dr. King used to talk about this. He said individuals who fall in love with public attention are not worthy of it. People who hunger for fame don't realize that if they're in the spotlight today, somebody else will be tomorrow. Fame never lasts. The work you do, the things you accomplish—that's what endures. That's what really means something. (211)

Wish that such humility could be found in more public figures. If as a paremiologist I will ever have the honor of meeting John Lewis in person, I would have three proverbs at hand to tell him that he is one of the best politicians of this time: "Handsome is as handsome does", "Black is beautiful", and "Good things come in small packages". And I would also tell him that his speeches and writings win the prize any time when it comes to the political rhetoric of today.

There are other such paragraphs in this moving book, of which one more must be cited here. It is where John Lewis draws on the proverbial expression "To stand on the shoulders of giants" that goes back to Isaac Newton (Deutscher 2006; Mieder 2011: 4-5) to express with sincere humility that every new generation is indebted to the accomplishments of the previous one and that there are many unsung heroes who paid their dues to bring about positive social change:

> We have problems. We will always have problems. A free and open society—a democracy—is by definition an eternal work-in-progress. [...] Each generation stands on the shoulders of the previous one. This is the way we move ahead, as individuals, as families and as a nation. Without the years of struggle of the civil rights movement, without people like Dr. King, without the unsung heroes of the movement, without the people who came before them and the people who came after, we would not be where we are today. The barriers that have fallen down would still be up. (494-495)

And yes, there will always be problems and there were plenty of them even among and within the various civil rights organizations! As with most organizations, SNCC had its share of infighting, causing John Lewis plenty of anguish and anxiety especially when he returned from a trip to Africa in the fall of 1964. Members of the inner circle accused him of having been away too long in his role as the chairman. Lewis remembers the pain of management meetings and the accusatory use of the folk proverb "While the cat's away, the mice will play" by some of the top SNCC members:

> As soon as I got back [from Africa], my friends—people like Charles Sherrod, Bill Hansen, Bob Mants, Laverne Baker and Julian [Bond]—rushed to let me know what had happened while I was gone. They chastised me, telling me I had stayed away too long. I should have been more savvy, they said, more politically astute. "While the cat's away, the mice will play"—all that. I shouldn't have been so naive, they said. I shouldn't have been so trusting. But there was no other way I could be. There is no other way I can be. I always begin with an attitude of trust. I assume that your word is good until you show me otherwise. I refuse to be suspicious until I have *reason* to be. Yes, this sets me up to be burned now and then, but the alternative is to be constantly skeptical and distanced. I'd rather be occasionally burned but able to connect than always safe but always distant. "A circle of trust"—that's what it is all about. (308)

As the civil rights movement faded in the 1970s, old SNCC friendships also faltered over time. This certainly happened between Julian Bond and John Lewis, with the latter citing the proverb "Out of sight, out of mind" to explain their drifting apart that eventually led to them vying for the same seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in the election of 1986:

> And Julian? He was different now, too. Our relationship was different. During the time I was in Washington, something of a gap grew between us. Part of that was the geographic separation—out of sight, out of mind. But we had grown apart in other ways as well. We had always been different in our lifestyles and personalities, but that had never affected our friendship. In fact, our differences were part of what we appreciated in each other, part of what attracted each of us to the other. Now that we were in the same line of work, however—politics—the differences in how we saw our own roles as elected officials—how we approached our *jobs*—could not be ignored. (461)

The campaign between the two friends became rather unpleasant, with John Lewis, while trying to take the high road, also being drawn into aggressive rhetoric as he tried to differentiate himself from Julian Bond. It got especially confrontational during a televised debate between them, with Bond accusing Lewis of having accepted two small campaign contributions that supposedly represented a conflict of interest. As the latter recalls it in his memoir, Bond employed the modern proverb "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck", with the year 1948 being its earliest written recording thus far (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 64), in an accusatory fashion. It was a decisive moment during the event, as can also be seen from Lewis's use of the proverbial phrase "You could have cut it with a knife":

> "If it looks like a duck," he deadpanned, "and quacks like a duck and waddles like a duck, then it must be a duck."
>
> I [John Lewis] was stunned. I could not believe he [Julian Bond] was questioning my integrity, of all things. And he *knew*, he *knew* this was not true. [...]

> It's not in my nature to let my emotions rise up. It's not in my nature to strike out. But this was a time when it happened. This was the time when I hit back.
>
> "Mr. Bond," I said. "My friend. My brother. We were asked to take a drug test not long ago, and five of us went and took that test. Why don't we step out and go to the men's room and take another test?"
>
> The room was dead silent. You could have cut the tension with a knife.
>
> "It seems," I went on, "like *you're* the one doing the ducking."
>
> Julian was flabbergasted. (477)

What an incredible come-back by Lewis in the heat of an emotionally and metaphorically charged debate. It is difficult to retort to a proverb well placed, but he succeeded in doing so splendidly by turning the "duck"-metaphor around and accusing his opponent of "ducking" a drug test. A bit of linguistic mud-slinging, yes, but it gave Lewis the upper hand in this case and there was no way to stop him from winning the election to Congress in due time.

On a higher note, Lewis includes a paragraph from a campaign speech that deserves to be cited here not only because of its important message, but also because of the inclusion of the two proverbial phrases "To have come a long way" and "To have a long way to go". I would conjecture here once again that Lewis is remembering a great speech from his hero Martin Luther King. Actually, King used both expressions numerous times (Mieder 2010: 527-533), but it was in his speech with the title "A Long Way to Go" that he delivered on April 27, 1965, on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles, that stands out. Not only does the speech have a proverbial title but the two phrases as individual and combined leitmotifs (always with the emphatic double use of "long") inform the structural and rhetorical mastery of this address. The two folk metaphors are part of the dual structure of the lecture that talks about how far the civil rights struggle had come but how far it also still had to go. As expected from this rhetorical genius, King began his memorable speech with a skillful juxtaposition of the proverbial phrases to set the stage for their

repeated use to make his dual point of successes obtained and challenges to face:

> Many of you want to know, are we making any progress? That is the desperate question, a poignant question on the lips of millions of people all over our nation and all over the world. I get it almost every day. It is a question of whether we are making a real progress in the area of race relations. And so I'm going to try to answer that question and deal with many of the issues involved using as a subject from which to speak, the future of integration.
>
> Now there are some people who feel that we aren't making any progress; there are some people who feel that we're making overwhelming progress. I would like to take what I consider a realistic position and say that we have come a long, long way in the struggle to make justice and freedom a reality in our nation, but we still have a long, long way to go. And it is this realistic position that I would like to use as a basis for our thinking together. (for the text of the speech see Smith and Robb 1971: 183-204; for its interpretation see Mieder 2010: 175-180)

But here is John Lewis's profound and inclusive statement that he made during his first congressional campaign that includes his unshakable belief in the "Beloved Community" that Martin Luther King used to speak about and which Lewis defines in his book *Across that Bridge* as "a society based on simple justice that values the dignity and the worth of every human being" (B11):

> We have come a long way in recent decades in terms of our treatment of blacks and women and gays in America—and Hispanics, and Native Americans, and the poor. But we still have a good way to go. And we must not tolerate the kind of backlash that has gathered in recent years against each of these movements—the attempts to repeal affirmative action, the hard-heartedness of wholesale welfare reform, the rising complaints of that newly emerging "oppressed" class of Americans, white males. Those complaints might well be, to a certain extent, justified. But there is a difference between fixing something and throwing it out. We must never lose sight of the distance

> we have traveled in recent decades in pursuit of a just, fair and inclusive Beloved Community, and we must not let the kinks in the programs we have created along the way blind us to the worthiness of what those programs aim to achieve. (468)

It is noteworthy that Lewis changes ""a long way to go" to "a good way to go" even though it might be argued that they mean pretty much the same thing. Nevertheless, I would argue that it fits John Lewis's entire being and philosophy of life to employ the "good"-adjective because the necessary way ahead is a good one, a humane one, a compassionate one, and an ethical one. And John Lewis is willing to walk the whole way; he even literally declined to climb into a long white limousine that was supposed to take him to his election celebration: "We needed to *walk*. [...] This was the best. I was walking with the wind" (479).

The last chapter of the autobiography is appropriately entitled "Onward" as it describes Lewis's work ever since beginning his dedicated service in the U.S House of Representatives in early 1987. As he describes his beliefs and activities, he again and again relies on proverbs and proverbial expressions to add metaphorical power to his statements. To describe the beginning of his regiment to "at least a twelve-hour day" (480) of concentrated work for his Georgian constituents, he turns to the proverbial phrase "To hit the ground running":

> [When I arrived at Washington, D.C. as a newly elected Congressman] I hit the ground running, attending every caucus meeting and every briefing session, accepting every invitation to speak, and never, not once, missing a vote during that first term. I was one of only twelve out of the 435 members of the House to compile a perfect voting record that session, and I've continued close to that pace during the ensuing decade, casting my vote more than 95 percent of the time. My constituents might not agree with every vote I make, but I make them. I'm there. And they appreciate that fact. (481)

On a more philosophical level, stressing that Americans represent one giant whole, he relies on the phrase "To be all together in something" to express this important claim:

> The struggle for such [human] rights is a global one, and we must approach it that way. Just as we must recognize that as Americans we are all part of a connected community, so must we see that America is inextricably linked to the rest of the world as part of a global community. Simply put, we are all in this together. The principles we apply to ourselves we must apply to others—including the principles of nonviolence. (482)

In yet another telling paragraph, he repeats this positive expression at the very end after he cites the proverb "Every man for himself" as well as the proverbial phrases "To have a stake in something", "To turn one's back on somebody or something", and "To circle the wagons" to explain the challenges on the way towards broader human rights:

> The poor, the sick, the disenfranchised. We cannot run away from them. We're all living in this house. When we move away from community and connection and live instead in a climate of "every man for himself" we are sowing the seeds that will lead to the destruction of American society as we know it. If we are not going to become divided and balkanized, like Northern Ireland or Lebanon or Rwanda or so much of Eastern Europe, we must push and advocate and make real the policies and decisions that can pull us together, that recognize our dependence on one another as members of a family. If we continue to allow hundreds of thousands of young people—black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, white—to grow up without a feeling that they have a stake in this society. if we let them come into young adulthood without ever holding a meaningful job, without any sense of hope, I think we are asking for trouble. We can't retreat from them. We can't turn our backs on them. We can't circle the wagons in suburban developments with armed guards at the gates and believe that we are safe. The people, the masses, will eventually arrive at those gates, angry and upset, and then it will be too late. We must reach out to one another *now*. We must realize that we are all in this together. Not as black or white. Not as rich or poor. Not even as Americans or "non"-Americans. But as human beings. (486)

Surely this is proverbial rhetoric at its best, and if Lewis had wanted to avoid his second use of "To be all together in something", he might well have chosen the classical proverbial expression "To be in the same boat" that goes back to Cicero's "In eadem es navi" from 53 B.C. (Mieder 2005: 199-200). After all, he used it twice as an expression of solidarity at the beginning of his autobiography as "We were all in the same boat" (14, 34). Also, since Lewis refers to the "house"-metaphor, it is somewhat surprising that he does not quote the Bible proverb "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mark 3:25) here that became Abraham Lincoln's proverbial leitmotif as he struggled to keep the young nation to drift into the Civil War, to wit his famous "A House Divided"-speech of June 16, 1858, at Springfield, Illinois:

> If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it.
>
> We are now far into the *fifth* year, since a policy was initiated, with the *avowed* object, and *confident* promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation.
>
> Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, *not ceased*, but has *constantly augmented*.
>
> In *my* opinion, it *will* not cease, until a *crisis* shall have been reached, and passed.
>
> "A house divided against itself cannot stand."
>
> I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*.
>
> I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved*—I do not expect the house to *fall*—but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided.
>
> It will become *all* one thing, or *all* the other.
>
> (Basler 1953: II, 461-462; for an interpretation see Mieder 1998: 63-74; and Mieder 2000: 10-18)

Besides Lincoln, such political figures as Frederick Douglass, Barack Obama, and others made repeated use of this secularized Bible proverb (Mieder 2001: 287-288; Mieder 2005: 90-117;

Mieder 2009: 245), and it seems strange that it does not appear to belong to John Lewis's active proverb repertoire. It also does not play a part in King's rhetoric either, even though both civil rights leaders were steeped in Biblical metaphors.

Just as Martin Luther King, John Lewis believes with all his heart and might in the African American proverb "God will make a way out of no way" and its secular variant "Making a way out of no way". Its earliest appearance in print is in Coe Hayne's *Race Grit: Adventures on the Border-Land of Liberty* from 1922: "God can make a way out of no way. Pray to him, and he will open a way" (Hayne 1922: 109). It has predominantly been found in the sermonic literature and secular speech of African Americans (Daniel 1973; Daniel, Smitherman-Donaldson, and Jeremiah 1987; Prahlad 1996), and it might possibly have started as an allusion to the Biblical passage "I [God] will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43:19; Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 102).

Interestingly enough it is Barack Obama, in his book *Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006), who offers convincing proof of this proverb playing a significant role in African American church services:

> I was drawn to the power of the African American religious tradition to spur social change. Out of necessity, the black church had to minister to the whole person. Out of necessity, the black church rarely had the luxury of separating individual salvation from collective salvation. It had to serve as the center of the community's political, economic, and social as well as spiritual life; it understood in an intimate way the biblical call to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and challenge powers and principalities. In the history of these struggles, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death; rather, it was an active, palpable agent in the world. In the day-to-day work of the men and women I met in church each day, in their ability to "make a way out of no way" and maintain hope and dignity in the direst of circumstances, I could see the Word made manifest. (Obama 2006: 207; Mieder 2009: 337)

To be sure, King's predilection towards this proverb helped to establish it beyond African American parlance. Here is but one example from a chapter on "Desegregation at Last" from his acclaimed book *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (1958) that Lewis without any doubt has read. King speaks here of God being part of the struggle during the bus boycott at Montgomery and that it is the faith in God's omnipotence that will give participants the strength to carry on. So when King writes "We must believe that a way will be made out of no way," the hidden subject of this sentence in the passive mode is in fact God Almighty who can find a way out of no way, as the proverb has it:

> The evening came, and I mustered up enough courage to tell them [the boycotters] the truth. I tried, however, to end on a note of hope. "This may well be," I said, "the darkest hour just before dawn. We have moved all of these months with the daring faith that God was with us in the struggle. The many experiences of days gone by have vindicated that faith in a most unexpected manner. We must go out with the same faith, the same conviction. We must believe that a way will be made out of no way." But in spite of these words, I could feel the cold breeze of pessimism passing through the audience. It was a dark night—darker than a thousand midnights. It was a night in which the light of hope was about to fade away and the lamp of faith about to flicker. We went home with nothing before us but a cloud of uncertainty. (King 1988: 158-159)

This statement bears witness to how King's proverbial rhetoric gave hope to thousands, with his typically optimistic message being enhanced by the allusion to the folk proverb "The darkest hour is just before dawn" (for a discussion of King's other uses of the "way"-proverb see Mieder 2010: 181-186).

John Lewis's rhetoric is, of course, equally footed in the sermonic art of Baptist preachers with their rhetorical use of Biblical passages, proverbs, leitmotifs, and anaphora (see McKenzie 1996; Rosenberg 1970). Even though the proverb "Making a way out of no way" does quite surprisingly not appear in *Walking with the Wind*, it is present in his *Across that Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change* that was published six years after Barack

Obama's *Audacity of Hope*. I can imagine that Obama's book might well have influenced Lewis in writing his small volume, but no matter what, these two treatises bear wonderful witness to their continuation of Martin Luther King's dream of an America and a world based on human rights in which "the better angels of our nature" (Basler 1953: IV, 271; last words of Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural address of March 4, 1861) make us live together in peace as brothers and sisters.

In the introduction to his book of hopeful wisdom, Lewis writes with compassion and empathy about people who have not been as fortunate as he has been. As he does so, he remembers his own impoverished and underprivileged youth in the segregated South, declaring proverbially "We made a way out of now way to free ourselves":

> I understand the sense of helplessness and hopelessness that can surround a people who feel thwarted at every turn. I could not have been further away from the halls of Congress or the chambers of the Supreme Court as a small boy in Alabama. Back then I could not choose my seat on a bus or sit down at a lunch counter to eat, and blacks certainly didn't have the access to vote. No provision had been made for me and others like me to communicate the dictates of our conscience to the leadership of a nation. We had to build that road ourselves. We made a way out of no way to free ourselves from oppression and bring an American society one step closer to realizing its pledge: "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." (B12)

Not surprisingly, the proverb "Making a way out of no way" becomes a threefold repeated leitmotif in his chapter on "Faith" that has as its motto the Bible passage "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It appears twice in a paragraph in which Lewis explains how he and other young students broke away from the status quo of their suppressed parents with the proverb becoming their verbal compass for the absolutely necessary and long overdue struggle against segregation and all the ills that came with it:

> In the [civil rights] movement, we had very little money, no political influence, no military force, and very few in the society around us believed in our capacity to contribute even the most basic of human gifts—to think with any clarity, to learn new things, to invent or create, to understand the world around us, or even to stand up to defend ourselves. We had no safety net, no one to turn to. We were born into the unfair circumstances that most people find themselves facing only temporarily at some point in their lives. We began stripped down to the bare minimum. We started out our lives dangling by a tenuous thread, so many of us came to the work of change already deeply experienced in the transformative power of faith. Our mothers and fathers had prayed us through the dire circumstances of living in the Deep South—poverty, hunger, grinding debt, a system of sharecropping stacked against us, illiteracy, limited educational opportunity, not to mention the terrorism of the nightriders and mob violence. So many of our parents stayed on their knees and made sure we leaned to pray that we were already familiar with the power of the divine grace that would meet us in our darkest hour and somehow, someway seemed to stretch the span of our universe to make two short ends meet. This was so much part of our everyday lives that we had a name for it. We called it "making a way out of no way." So when we were standing in protest facing police dogs and fire hoses, we knew without any doubt that somebody who was greater than us all would make a way out of no way and protect the defenders of the truth. (B30-31)

The two proverbial expressions "To hang on a thin thread" and "To make ends meet" do indeed help to underscore the tenuous situation the young protestors found themselves in as they moved forward with the faith that God would help to make a way out of no way. The deeply religious John Lewis believes in the transformative power of the faith in God (see B38), but he realizes on a more secular level that people must pray by moving their feet, i.e., they must actively work on making a way out of no way with faith, hope, and love giving them strength. The old folk proverb "God helps them who help themselves" comes to mind here. But

the last proverbial word belongs to the secular saint John Lewis, as he addresses his readers directly in his last paragraph on "Faith"—not just religious faith but a belief in the goodness of humankind as it strives to continue its walk towards universal civil and human rights:

> You will discover that no government, no teacher, no abusive parent or spouse, not even torture or terror has the power to define you. Once you find within you the true ability to define yourself according to the dictates of your conscience and your faith, you have come a long way down the path that can lead to social transformation. Faith will be the lifeblood of all your activism, and it has the power to make a way out of no way. You may be in your darkest hour, it may be darker than ten thousand nights on your path to lasting change, but there is something in you that keeps you moving, feeling your way through the night until you can see a glimmer of light. That is the power of faith. (B39)

Index of Proverbial Texts

The following list of proverbial texts alphabetically arranged according to keywords registers all 742 occurrences in the three books by John Lewis:

Walking with the Wind. A Memoir of the Movement. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998. New York: Harvest Book, 1999 (paperback edition). Page numbers without any preceding letter refer to this book written with the assistance of Michael D'Orso.

Across that Bridge. Life Lessons and a Vision for Change. New York: Hyperion, 2012. The letter B with a page number refers to this book written with the help of Brenda Jones.

March. Book One. Mariette, Georgia: Top Shelf Production, 2013. The letter M with a page number refers to this graphic novel produced together with Andrew Aydin and Nate Powell.

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