

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

JOHNN LEWIS INTERVIEW
TRUE JUSTICE: BRYAN STEVENSON'S FIGHT FOR EQUALITY
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

JOHN LEWIS
U.S. Representative, Georgia
October 04, 2018
Interviewed by Teddy Kunhardt
Total Running Time: 10 Minutes

START TC: 01;00;00;00

01;00;16;19

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Thank you so much for sitting with us. It's an honor.

01;00;19;18

JOHN LEWIS:

You're more than welcome. No, thank you.

01;00;22;02

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

So a lot of people who are going to be watching our film on Bryan Stevenson don't know who Bryan is. I'm hoping you can tell me who is Bryan Stevenson and why is he so important for this country?

01;00;34;11

JOHN LEWIS:

Bryan Stevenson is one of a kind. This young man probably should be looked up on as maybe one of the founding fathers of the new America. He's one of commitment, dedication, brave, courageous, and bold. For someone to have grown up like he grew up, get a great education; as a lawyer to come and cast his lot with the people that are suffering, people who may face the gas chamber and to go and live in Alabama and do what he has done and accomplish so much—he's not known all over America and around the world because he has the capacity and the ability to see a need and try to meet this need.

01;01;45;10

JOHN LEWIS:

He—he's saving lives. He's trying to rescue people. Poor, many of the people he's trying to help out or save receive very little education and unfortunately maybe some didn't have good leaders. Yep. And Bryan and his fellow lawyers have been able to come to their rescue.

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01;02;18;21

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

He is amazing, Bryan Stevenson. I mean I really think he is a mix of King and Thurgood Marshall. I mean he—he's got the law and the spirit.

01;02;28;21

JOHN LEWIS:

Right—that's a good way to describe him, through law and the spirit.

01;02;46;19

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

I'll set you up. We were just talking about Bryan's mix of spirit and law.

01;02;54;18

JOHN LEWIS:

You're so right. Bryan is a mix of the spirit and the law. Sometimes he can come across when he really gets all wind up as a minister preaching the gospel of hope, the gospel of saving human kind, especially people who are facing unbelievable hardship without money, without a lawyer. So many of the people that he's trying to help are really almost on their own. I admire Bryan. I admire this young man. He's gifted, talented, brave, courageous, bold. He's one of the few people that have emerged during the past few years.

01;04;03;05

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

So, one thing Bryan's also trying to do is change the narrative of racism in America. He's trying to eradicate racism in America and in order to do that, he's saying that the country must address racism head on. And he says that if we do it—if we face it head on, we will achieve reconciliation. Can you explain what he means and the importance of this. And what I'm getting at is you are the living embodiment of changing the narrative of racism in America when one example we're using in the film is when the police officer in Selma apologizes to you.

01;04;42;03

JOHN LEWIS:

Well Bryan believe in we can be better, that we can be a little more human. I've heard him speak on so many occasions talk and when he been honored, the way he responds. He believes deeply in his heart and his soul that we must eradicate racism, that we must create what Dr. King called the beloved community, that we must have the power and the capacity to redeem the soul of America. And he's living that—he is the essence of it. He is the

embodiment with the ability, the capacity to move closer to ending racism, as we knew it, in America and create one family. He just (Inaudible) talk about it but he lives it. He's an embodiment of yes, that we have to do it and we must not be afraid to lay down the burden of racism and create one America. One family, one house. He would say we all live in the same house, the American house, the world house.

01;06;03;02

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Bryan has said that the prisoners he represents are broken, but after decades of work, he is quote, "broken, too." And I'm having a hard time understanding what he means by that because he seems to have everything. You know, he's got the education. He's got a job he loves. What does he mean by he's broken too or what do you think he means?

01;06;28;10

JOHN LEWIS:

I believe what he is saying to America and to the world that we all are broken, 'cause when you see fellow human beings down and out, broken

spirit, somehow and somehow you have to walk in their shoes, you have to become them. And you deal with yourself and with other selves, you become brothers and sisters, you become a family. So he's saying in effect as long as one segment of the world family is in trouble, we're all in trouble.

01;07;16;08

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Bryan's work at EJI, the Equal Justice Initiative is trying to change the narrative of racism in this country. He's asking for big change. But what can we do on an individual level? What can I do to help make that change? What can we all do?

01;07;33;05

JOHN LEWIS:

We all can help; we all can make a contribution by living what Bryan is talking about. Living that change, becoming part of that effort to change. Become the embodiment of change. When we see something that is not right, not fair, not just, we have to say something. We have to do something. We cannot afford to be quiet. We have to speak up and speak out and get in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble.

01;08;08;23

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And what do you think lies in the future for Bryan Stevenson?

01;08;15;00

JOHN LEWIS:

Well I'll tell you one thing. I truly believe that Bryan can write his own ticket, but I think he's so committed, and so dedicated to his mission, maybe just maybe he didn't want to write another ticket. Maybe he sees this as his lifelong calling, his mission. Yes, to eradicate racism, to be prepared in willingness to walk in other people's shoes. And I think that's what he's doing. He can be a strong and mighty light for a generation yet unborn. He can teach our children the way to live, the way to make a contribution.

01;09;05;21

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And you think he would make a good Supreme Court justice?

01;09;08;17

JOHN LEWIS:

Oh, I think he would be a wonderful member of the United States Supreme Court. I would love to see him. If I was in the position to appoint him or recommend him, I would do it. He would be brilliant on the Supreme Court as

a member fighting for all humankind. And for him, it doesn't matter whether you're black or white, Latino or Asian American, Native American, straight or gay. He would say that we're one people, we're one family. We must learn to live together. If not, we will do as Dr. King suggested, we'll perish together.

01;09;50;15

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

My one last question on Bryan is, you knew Dr. King intimately, do you see any similarities between the two?

01;09;57;15

JOHN LEWIS:

Oh I see a great deal of similarity between Dr. King and Bryan Stevenson. They just go about their business of doing their work without a great deal of fanfare. Know in the last days, Dr. King, he delivered a sermon saying he wanted to be a drum major for justice. And I think that's what Bryan is all about, being a drum major for justice for what is right and fair.

01;10;32;11

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

That's great. Yeah, I remember one of the lines in King, it said, "He was the quietest person in the room yet he held all the power."

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01;10;39;11

JOHN LEWIS:

Yes.

01;10;39;22

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And that reminds me of Bryan because he's so quiet but when you speak—
when he speaks, you're just glued.

01;10;45;18

JOHN LEWIS:

Yes.

END TC: 01;10;47;02