



Georgia Congressman John Lewis in Cleveland, compares Occupy Wall Street movement to civil rights era

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By **Tonya Sams, The Plain Dealer**

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Georgia Congressman John Lewis, one of the founding members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and one of the Freedom Riders of the 1960s, sees the Occupy Wall Street movement much like the civil rights movement.

"They represent a growing discontentment in America and around the world," said the 71-year-old Alabama native who was in Cleveland on Tuesday to speak at the Legal Aid Society's annual dinner.

He was so impressed with the Occupy Atlanta rally, which was just a half-block from his Atlanta office, that he stopped by to tell them to keep the faith and to encourage them, he said.

But organizers decided that they didn't want him to speak.

Lewis said that he was not offended, but the Atlanta group has since apologized and invited him to come and speak. He was invited Tuesday to speak at the Occupy Cleveland rally but because of his busy schedule turned down both invitations.

Elected to Congress in 1986, Lewis was the keynote speaker at the society's annual community report dinner at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Cleveland.

The Legal Aid Society represents those in the community facing issues such as domestic violence, divorce and home foreclosure who are unable to afford legal counsel.



Lisa DeJong, The Plain Dealer

Georgia Congressman John Lewis said, during an interview, that he was not offended when Occupy Atlanta organizers wouldn't allow him to speak at their rally and feels that the movement is similar to the civil rights movement. The civil rights leader was in Cleveland as the keynote speaker at the Legal Aid Society's Annual Dinner on Tuesday at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Cleveland.

A humble man, Lewis was one of the organizers of and speakers at the March on Washington in 1963. He said he grew emotional when he spoke at the MLK monument dedication Sunday in Washington D.C.

"It was very moving. To see this man, arms folded, looking over at Jefferson, I teared up," he said in a soft voice. "He was the founding father of the new America, a liberated nation."

Lewis also pointed out that King did what no president was able to do in this country, yet he never held a political office. He mentioned how touching it was to have President Barack Obama, an African American, speaking at the dedication.

He said he does not share the view that President Obama is doing little to help African Americans, a view that is expressed by some in the black community.

"Obama is not an African American president, but a president of all Americans," Lewis said. "It doesn't matter if you are black, white, Hispanic, he's the president of all races."

The congressman supports Obama and believes that he is doing the best he can, but he stresses to Americans to do their part to help.

Despite what today's youth may believe, Lewis said that the civil rights movement is as relevant today as it was in the 60's. But he said the younger generation has to be educated on the movement.

To drive home the point, he referred to a study that showed that Alabama and New York were the only states that received "A's" in teaching about the movement and that students in other countries know more about it than students in this country.

Lewis said that young people "have to speak up, make some noise and not just the young people, but adults, too. We're too quiet. Get in the way, get in trouble, necessary trouble. Good trouble."

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