

# Chapter One: The Boy from Troy

In Chapter One, titled "The Boy from Troy," the narrative centers on John Lewis's early life, detailing his unique childhood in Pike County, Alabama. Born on February 21, 1940, John was distinguished among his siblings for his love of reading and an affinity for education, as reflected in his father's comments about him being a "peculiar boy." His family, notably his father, Eddie Lewis, and his sister, Ethel Mae, emphasized his passion for books, including works by Robert Louis Stevenson and biographies of notable African Americans, with Booker T. Washington's "Up from Slavery" becoming a favorite.

The chapter also explores John's background, tracing his family lineage back to enslaved ancestors. His great-great-grandparents, Tobias and Elizabeth Carter, were granted a modest plot of land after the Civil War, highlighting a complex history of emancipation and land ownership. While the Carters initially prospered, by the time John was born, his parents were struggling as tenant farmers for a white landowner, Josh Copeland.

John's domestic life was marked by poverty and the stark realities of survival, reflecting the hardships faced by many Black families in the South. The Lewis household lacked modern amenities, compelling them to adapt creatively to their circumstances, such as boiling water for baths and using outdoor toilets. Despite these challenges, Eddie prioritized providing his family with a sense of dignity, emphasizing the importance of food and safety amidst the threats of violence from groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

As John navigated his childhood, he encountered the deep-rooted segregation and racism of the Jim Crow South, which profoundly shaped his worldview and activism. The chapter presents poignant vignettes of his experiences, including limited access to education and public facilities due to racial discrimination. These formative experiences fueled his growing awareness of social injustice and solidified his resolve to pursue a life devoted to civil rights advocacy.

John's religious upbringing, heavily influenced by his mother, Willie Mae, fostered a sense of hope and moral conviction in him. His early ambitions centered on becoming a minister, a goal he pursued passionately, preaching in local churches and engaging in community activities. The chapter culminates with John's aspirations for higher education, motivated by the desire to effect change for his community, leading him to seek admission to a seminary school. This desire for education and equality became defining themes in his life, laying the groundwork for his future activism .