

# Chapter Seventeen: ACTION

**\*\*Chapter Seventeen Summary: ACTION\*\***

In April, the job offer for John Lewis came, marking a pivotal moment post his congressional bid loss. President Jimmy Carter, a complex figure balancing Southern populism and technocracy, appointed numerous individuals from diverse backgrounds, including liberals and activists. Sam Brown, an advocate for anti-war efforts, was tasked with leading ACTION, an umbrella agency joining various volunteer programs. Recognizing Lewis's lost congressional bid, Brown and his team suggested him as the associate director for domestic operations.

Lewis contemplated options like writing a memoir or fishing, but the ACTION position excited him, promising a substantial salary and the opportunity to fulfill his lifelong mission of community building based on love and peace, leading to his acceptance of the position.

Shortly after his acceptance, tragedy struck as Eddie Lewis, John's father, passed away. This profound loss was marked by a significant turnout for his funeral in Pike County, with John honoring him in a heartfelt eulogy.

By July, Lewis's Senate confirmation hearings proceeded smoothly. He adeptly handled queries, displaying familiarity with the process. Georgia senator Herman Talmadge, once a segregationist, referred to him as "eminently qualified." Lewis expressed his vision for ACTION to replicate his grassroots work on a national scale, emphasizing engagement and community involvement.

Transitioning into his role by August, Lewis appreciated ACTION's unique ambiance reminiscent of the 1960s, characterized by a youthful, casual energy. He quickly settled into office life, managing a new home in a challenging neighborhood, while Lillian and their son, John-Miles, remained in Atlanta. Lewis fostered a close-knit family atmosphere among his staff, prioritizing inspiration over administration.

Despite the positive aspects, controversies plagued Lewis's term. Criticism came from Republican figures targeting ACTION for its perceived radical affiliations, echoing sentiments from the War on Poverty era. Lewis confronted relentless scrutiny regarding funding and program direction, likening it to experiences from his time with SNCC.

Tensions heightened when Lewis intervened in internal disputes, notably within the Peace Corps, highlighting ideological divides regarding activism versus traditional service roles. His compassionate approach to these controversies endeared him to colleagues, albeit amidst rising political strife.

The dynamics within Congress were exhausting, with persistent GOP attacks draining Lewis's spirit. As he navigated these challenges, he faced introspection about returning to Georgia. Lewis's sense of discontent grew, overlapping with disappointments in Carter's administration amid socio-political struggles.

In summary, the time in ACTION for Lewis was a blend of fulfilling mission-driven work and navigating the turbulent waters of politics, combined with deeply personal experiences that shaped his continuing legacy in civil rights advocacy.