

# Chapter Six: Open City

In Chapter Six, titled "Open City," the narrative centers on John Lewis and the Civil Rights Movement during the summer of 1961, particularly in Nashville. After the Freedom Riders left Parchman Penitentiary, Lewis gained minor celebrity status, notably speaking at the "Freedom Jubilee" in Pittsburgh, where he was honored for his bravery, although he humbly remarked, "I feel as if I have done nothing." This chapter highlights the dynamic activities surrounding the Nashville movement, which became a hub for student conferences and protests, involving participants from across the United States and overseas.

The chapter details a symposium held at Fisk University, which gathered over a hundred participants eager to discuss plans and strategies for civil rights activism. Lewis, still in need of legal guidance due to his Mississippi conviction, highlights emerging differences among students regarding tactics—specifically between those favoring direct action and those endorsing voter registration initiatives proposed by the Kennedy administration. These divisions culminated in a significant meeting at Highlander Folk School, where Ella Baker mediated a compromise that led to the establishment of two wings within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): one focused on direct action and the other on voter registration.

As the summer saw an influx of protests, tensions arose between seasoned activists, like Lewis, and newcomers who sometimes disregarded nonviolent principles. A notable flare-up occurred during a demonstration against H.G. Hill supermarkets, where confrontations with hostile locals led to arrests and highlighted the necessity of adherence to nonviolent strategies.

Lewis's leadership continued as the chapter transitions to the launch of "Operation Open City," targeting desegregation and equal hiring in Nashville. Despite dwindling participation from peers, he remained committed to the cause and led a core group, eventually dubbed the "Horrible Seven," in sustained protests against segregation. Their efforts yielded mixed results; while some campaigns succeeded, others, like the attempt to integrate upscale restaurants, ended in failure and arrests.

As summer transitioned into fall, Lewis's commitment remained strong, facing personal and organizational challenges as SNCC began expanding its focus beyond Nashville to include rural efforts, particularly in Mississippi. The chapter ends with Lewis's dedication to the movement, illustrating both the triumphs and struggles that defined this critical moment in America's civil rights history .