

# Chapter Twenty-One: The Clinton Years

In "Chapter Twenty-One: The Clinton Years," we explore the early presidency of Bill Clinton and the relationship he developed with Congressman John Lewis. Shortly after Clinton's inauguration, he extended an invitation for a casual movie night at the White House to Lewis, marking a significant moment of camaraderie. Lewis's excitement was palpable, as this marked a departure from previous Republican administrations, injecting hope into the Democratic Party and highlighting Clinton's image as a personable and youthful leader.

The chapter recounts the atmosphere around the Clinton administration, particularly during significant events like the 1994 State of the Union address, where Lewis proudly hosted Hillary Clinton amidst a buzz of energy and anticipation. With Lewis supporting Clinton's ambitious and pragmatic legislative agenda, he championed initiatives such as higher taxes on the wealthy, health care reform, and crime prevention.

However, Lewis also remained steadfast toward his principles, voicing opposition to certain Clinton policies he deemed harmful, like the North American Free Trade Agreement, which he feared would adversely affect American manufacturing jobs. His commitment to social justice was pronounced, especially regarding the struggles against apartheid in South Africa, highlighting his long-standing advocate role, including an attempted congressional delegation to South Africa in 1994.

As the narrative unfolds, it details the complexities Lewis faced as crime rates surged in urban areas during the 1990s. He wrestled with the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which proposed a multifaceted approach including policing, social programs, and a stark increase in the death penalty. Although party pressure mounted on Lewis to support the bill, his deep moral belief against capital punishment ultimately led him to abstain from endorsing it.

The chapter culminates with insights into Lewis's experiences with both the intricacies of legislative politics and personal ethical dilemmas, capturing the essence of a tumultuous yet hopeful period in American history. It underlines Lewis's unwavering commitment to justice and equality while navigating the ramifications of being a pivotal player within the Democratic Party during Clinton's presidency.