

# Chapter Twenty-Two: Ambitions

In Chapter Twenty-Two, titled "Ambitions," the narrative centers around John Lewis's political journey, focusing on the late 1990s as he aims for higher leadership roles within the Democratic Party. By 1998, with a decade in Congress, Lewis is recognized as a significant moral authority, dubbed "the conscience of the Congress." His wife, Lillian, is a critical supporter of his ambitions, pushing him to pursue a run against Republican Senator Paul Coverdell, although polling suggests he wouldn't win. Instead, he turns his attention to a potential whip position in the House.

As the political landscape shifts, Lewis positions himself for the whip job amid rising Democratic fortunes. However, the entry of Nancy Pelosi, a formidable candidate with a strong support network, complicates his ambitions. While Pelosi actively campaigns and consistently gains endorsements, Lewis's campaign lacks the aggressive fervor needed to compete, despite his widespread popularity and strong moral legacy.

Lewis grapples with feelings of reluctance and uncertainty regarding the nominations, which contrast with his commitment to civil rights and public service. He dreads that a leadership failure could overshadow his contributions to the civil rights movement. As Lewis organizes his campaign, his staff notices his lack of enthusiasm, emphasizing Lillian's stronger ambition for him. Despite attempts to present himself as a unifying candidate who bridges factional divides within the party, Lewis struggles to secure the endorsements necessary for a successful campaign.

When push comes to shove, and as Lewis acknowledges limited support, he ultimately withdraws his candidacy, endorsing Hoyer instead. This decision reflects his acknowledgment of the political realities and the deep ties that dictate the alliances within the party. As the Democrats fail to regain the House in the 2000 elections, Lewis remains a chief deputy whip, while Lillian's support remains unwavering.

The chapter not only highlights Lewis's political struggles but also illuminates Lillian's significant role as his advisor and motivator, showcasing her impact on his career despite their physical distances and individual pursuits in life. Lillian's ambition and protective nature underscore their interconnectedness, revealing the strength of their partnership amid the demands and pressures of political life.