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## Bank Street Graduate School of Education to Honor U.S. Representative John Lewis with Honorary Doctorate

### *Congressman Lewis to Deliver Commencement Address to Class of 2017*

**NEW YORK, NY, MAY 11, 2017**—U.S. Representative John Lewis, D-Georgia, will receive the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa from the Bank Street Graduate School of Education during its annual commencement ceremony on Thursday, May 11, 2017. During the ceremony, Congressman Lewis will deliver a keynote address to the class of 2017.

“We are honored to welcome Congressman Lewis as our keynote speaker at this year’s commencement ceremony and are proud to recognize his courageous role as a leader of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and in Congress since 1987. As we enter a new chapter in our nation’s history, there are important lessons we can all learn from Congressman Lewis about how to challenge injustice and generate meaningful social change,” said Shael Polakow-Suransky, President, Bank Street College of Education.

### **About John Lewis**

Congressman John Lewis is a heroic civil rights leader who worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to pioneer the use of non-violent direct action as a tool for social change. In 1961, he was one of the 13 original black and white Freedom Riders who fought segregation by sitting together on a Greyhound bus from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans. The goal of this action was to pressure the federal government to enforce the 1960 Supreme Court decision that declared segregation unconstitutional on interstate bus travel. Lewis and the other Freedom Riders were beaten by angry mobs, arrested, and taken to jail several times. After months of violence against steadily growing numbers of Freedom Riders and a chorus of international condemnation, the Kennedy administration issued orders to desegregate the buses. More importantly, this helped catalyze and expand a social movement that began to draw more and more people into the fight for civil rights.

In 1963, Lewis became the Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and played a central role in organizing “The March on Washington.” At 23, he was the youngest speaker that day and he is the last remaining living speaker. In 1964, Lewis recruited student participation and support for the Mississippi Freedom Summer, a campaign to register black voters across the South. In Selma, Alabama in 1965, Lewis led marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, pushing for the right to vote. When they stopped to pray, the unarmed protesters were attacked by police with clubs in what became known as Bloody Sunday. Lewis’s skull was fractured, but these actions led later that year to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, one of the most important accomplishments of the civil rights movement.

Since his election in 1986, Lewis has been a progressive leader in Congress, challenging Democrats and Republicans alike to live up to the vision of an equitable and just society. Just last year, he helped organize a sit in on the floor of the House demanding that the leadership allow a vote on gun safety legislation in response to the massacre in Orlando’s Pulse night club.

Lewis currently represents the 5th District of Georgia and has generously spent time meeting with students from the Bank Street School for Children on their annual visit to Washington, D.C., answering their questions and sharing his experiences.

### **About Bank Street College of Education**

Bank Street College of Education is a recognized leader in early childhood education, teacher and leader preparation, and the development of innovative practice in school systems across the country. For one hundred years, Bank Street’s focus has been improving the education of children and their teachers by applying to the education process all available knowledge about learning and growth, and by connecting teaching and learning meaningfully to the outside world. Learn more about Bank Street’s Children’s Programs, Graduate School of Education, and Division of Innovation, Policy and Research at [bankstreet.edu](http://bankstreet.edu).

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