

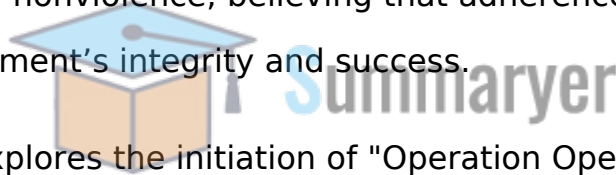
# Chapter 6: Open City

Chapter 6: Open City delves into the intense and transformative summer of 1961, exploring John Lewis's prominent role in the Civil Rights Movement, particularly in Nashville. After the Freedom Riders' release from Parchman Penitentiary, Lewis gained a newfound public visibility, receiving significant recognition for his courage. His invitation to speak at the "Freedom Jubilee" in Pittsburgh was a testament to his growing influence. Despite the accolades, Lewis remained humble, stating that he felt he had accomplished little, reflecting his selfless dedication to the cause. The chapter also emphasizes the vibrant and growing Nashville movement, which became a focal point for student activism across the country and even internationally, drawing passionate individuals ready to stand up against racial segregation and injustice in public spaces.

The narrative also highlights a pivotal moment at Fisk University, where over a hundred activists convened to discuss the direction of the Civil Rights Movement. During this symposium, Lewis, who was still dealing with legal challenges from his involvement in Mississippi, recognized the growing division between those focused on immediate direct action and those leaning towards voter registration initiatives endorsed by the Kennedy administration. This divide ultimately led to a critical gathering at the Highlander Folk School, where veteran activist Ella Baker played a pivotal role in bridging the gap. The result was the formation of two distinct wings within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—one focusing on immediate direct action and the other on broader voter registration efforts. This strategic shift expanded the movement's goals and provided clearer paths for engagement with both political and social challenges.

As tensions mounted throughout the summer, particularly between the older, more seasoned activists like Lewis and the newer, younger members, the debate about the

best approach to civil rights activism intensified. Lewis's commitment to nonviolence was increasingly challenged by those who believed more radical methods were necessary to achieve quick change. A notable instance of this conflict occurred during a protest at H.G. Hill supermarkets in Nashville, where confrontations with hostile locals escalated, resulting in multiple arrests. These events highlighted the difficulty of maintaining nonviolent discipline in the face of aggression, a struggle that was part of the broader tension within the movement. Despite these challenges, Lewis remained a strong advocate for nonviolence, believing that adherence to peaceful protest was crucial to the movement's integrity and success.



The chapter also explores the initiation of "Operation Open City," a campaign aimed at desegregating public spaces and securing equal employment opportunities across Nashville. Despite the decline in participation as the summer progressed, Lewis stayed committed to the cause, leading a small, dedicated group known as the "Horrible Seven." Their work was not without its challenges; while some campaigns were successful, others, like attempts to integrate high-end restaurants, resulted in arrests and frustration. These struggles illustrated the complexities of activism and the unpredictability of success, reinforcing the importance of persistence and strategy in the fight for civil rights. Lewis's leadership during this time was instrumental in keeping the movement's goals alive, even in the face of daunting opposition.

As summer turned to fall, the narrative shifts to the increasing focus of SNCC on rural areas, especially in Mississippi, where voter registration efforts faced even more severe resistance. Lewis, ever the optimist, believed that expanding the reach of the movement was essential for achieving lasting change. Despite the difficulties faced, his commitment to the cause never wavered. The chapter concludes with an affirmation of Lewis's unwavering dedication to the broader civil rights struggle, emphasizing his ability to overcome both personal and organizational challenges. It highlights the complexity of his leadership as he navigated the evolving landscape of activism, grappling with internal disagreements, external pressures, and the ongoing struggle to secure justice and equality for all.