



Civil Rights Icon U.S. Rep John Lewis Tells Stockton Graduates: 'You Can Change World'

Kristen Grimm is Speaker in 1st of 2 Ceremonies on Saturday, May 11

For Immediate Release: with photos attached; grad list link

Saturday, May 11, 2013

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Galloway, NJ – “Find a way to get into trouble,” U.S. Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, a founder of the American Civil Rights movement, told some 662 graduates receiving Baccalaureate degrees Saturday afternoon at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

Lewis, a Democratic congressman from Georgia’s 5th District, said when he was inspired to civil rights activism by Rosa Parks’ actions and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s words on the radio, he was told by his elders: “ ‘Don’t make trouble, don’t get in the way.’ ”

“It inspired me to get in the way – it was necessary trouble,” said U.S. Rep. Lewis, a Freedom Rider and founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which organized student sit-ins protesting racial discrimination.

“By sitting down, we were standing up for the very best in the American tradition,” Congressman Lewis said of sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in the South.

“I urge you – I plead with you – to do your part, not with bitterness...but with love,” he said.

He told the graduates, “You, too, can go out and change the world.”

He also told the gathering, “We’re all one people, we’re all in the same house and we must find a way to save this little piece of real estate we call Earth.”

Congressman Lewis recognized his past colleague, former U.S. Rep. William Hughes, who had represented New Jersey's 2nd District and was in the audience Saturday. "It's good to see you – thank you for your service," Lewis said.

Stockton's Hughes Center for Public Policy is named for Hughes, who also served as U.S. ambassador to Panama.

Rep. Lewis, a noted author, theologian and political leader, spoke at the second of two graduation ceremonies held at the college's campus here on Saturday, May 11. Another 140 Stockton graduates received Master's and Doctoral degrees on Friday, May 10.

President Herman Saatkamp presided at all three commencement ceremonies at the college's Sports Center, known as Big Blue.

At the afternoon ceremony, where students from the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and the School of Social and Behavioral Science received Baccalaureate degrees, President Saatkamp said, "Our students are promises we make to a future we will not see, and at this graduation, with these fine students, you can see that we are delivering on our promises."

He went on to say that "each Stockton student is now an international student, connected to a global community and economy as never before."

"This is a day of celebration, of joy, of appreciation for those who made it possible of us to be here and hope for the future," President Saatkamp said, while issuing "a challenge."

"Here is an important message to our graduates: having a college degree is not enough," he said. "Having a college degree gets you a long way because you have the ability to continue to learn and the likelihood of living well."

"Even so, there are no guarantees," President Saatkamp said. "What is ahead of you is the delight of moving forward into a new life but it also includes persistence, diligence, hard work, and the task of getting along with others who may be different from you in a cosmopolitan world."

"When you leave this graduation, you will enter a society that is as divided as perhaps we have ever been," he continued. "We have one of the greatest disparities of income, our zip codes depend on our economic status, and our living and occupational isolation means we often do not come into contact with those less well off, or those with different social and political views."

"You are our hope for our future," President Saatkamp said. "The Stockton spirit of education and values will carry you a long way. When you leave this graduation today, do not forget the lessons learned at Stockton in building communities, in joining hands with others who may have different backgrounds and different views. You are our best future."

Valedictorian Linwood Donelson of Lower Alloways, Salem County, spoke in the afternoon.

Donelson graduated with a degree in Political Science and is heading for Rutgers Law School in the fall. He dedicated his speech to his late grandfather, Linwood Donelson Sr.

“Stockton has truly been a wonderful environment to learn,” he said. “The relationships and interactions established with the faculty and staff creates a very rare and special environment. The professors are excellent teachers, always accessible and willing to help. This creates an environment unique to Stockton that builds a sense of community from which all students benefit immensely.”

“However,” Donelson said, “the great faculty and staff is not the only part of Stockton that creates this unique learning environment. Our students are a group of intelligent, collegial people that are always willing to help others succeed.”

He thanked his parents, grandparents and teachers, particularly Associate Professor Linda Wharton and Professor Alan Arcuri, who were instrumental in his success, he said.

“I would like my fellow graduates to leave Stockton with a vitally important goal,” Donelson said. “Always be eager to help those that come after you and give back to those that gave to you. Community activism is the life blood of democracy and you should always fight for what you believe in with unwavering vigor.”

John Alexander, of Franklinville, NJ, was the salutatorian at the afternoon ceremony, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry with minors in Biology and Holocaust and Genocide Studies. He will be attending UMDNJ/Rutgers for his Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies.

U.S. Rep. Lewis, born to sharecroppers in 1940, authored “Across That Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change” in 2012. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civil honor, presented to him by President Barack Obama.

On Saturday, he was awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters degree recommended by President Saatkamp and conferred by Stockton Trustee Dr. Clarence Hoover.

Student Jeffrey Hebron sang the “Star Spangled Banner” at the afternoon ceremony, and students Elizabeth Kang and Rebecca Rodriguez performed the alma mater, “Our Stockton,” with words by Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Creative Writing Stephen Dunn, who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2001; the music is by musician and reviewer Ellen Grolman.

Four longtime members of Stockton’s faculty who are retiring were given Emeritus/Emerita status at the two ceremonies: Dean Jan Colijn of the School of General Studies, Dr. Michael Geller, associate professor of Environmental Studies of the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Dr. Robert Helsabeck, professor of Sociology of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Associate Professor Mary Ann Trail of the Bjork Library.

Kristen Grimm, president and founder of Spitfire Strategies, a leading national public relations firm that helps foundations and nonprofits create positive social change, gave the keynote address at Saturday's 10 a.m. ceremony.

She advised the graduates to find their passion.

"Don't spend time on stuff you feel "eh" about," Grimm said. She noted that her father wasn't happy when she decided not to go to law school after having been accepted.

Instead, she worked at a mall on weekends so she could intern at a public relations firm that advocated for human rights. Eventually she became the head of the firm, but by then, "I wanted to start my own company."

After 10 years, Spitfire Strategies has 40 employees, for whom she provides benefits even though firms with fewer than 50 workers are not required to do so, she said.

"I do not get my values from the federal government," she said. "I know what is right."

"If you can make America cleaner – do it," she told the graduates. "If you see hate – stand up to it."

Grimm's Spitfire Strategies has worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, AARP, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ford Foundation, among others.

She was awarded the college's Distinguished Service Award for her human rights activism and philanthropy.

John G. Emge, executive director of the Atlantic and Cape May Counties United Way of Greater Philadelphia and South Jersey, spoke at Friday's commencement, only the second year in which the college has conferred doctoral and master's degrees. He also was awarded the college's Distinguished Service Award.

Captions:

Former Ambassador and Congressman William J. Hughes, left, meets with U.S. Rep. John Lewis, the keynote speaker, and Stockton College President Herman Saatkamp, right.

Some 662 graduates from the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and the School of Social and Behavioral Science received Baccalaureate degrees Saturday afternoon at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

List of Graduates for all 3 Ceremonies: [Click here](#) for Excel file.

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