



REVEREND DR. JOSEPH E. LOWERY
CO-FOUNDER, PRESIDENT EMERITUS, SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
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When *Ebony* Magazine named Joseph E. Lowery one of the nation's "15 Greatest Black Preachers," he was described as the "consummate voice of biblical social relevancy, a focused prophetic voice, speaking truth to power." When the NAACP honored him at its 1997 convention, he was hailed as "dean of the civil rights movement," and in 2009 was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom- the nation's highest civilian honor.

As part of the celebration of his birthday in 2001, Clark-Atlanta University announced the establishment of the Lowery Institute for Justice & Human Rights. In addition, the Atlanta Board of Education instituted the Joseph E. Lowery Lecture Series on Civic Participation and the Atlanta City Council voted to change the name of Ashby Street to Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard. At the 2003 commencement of the University of Alabama, he was awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. Boston University gave him its first Martin Luther King, Jr. Award, and Wayne University gave him the first Walter Reuther Humanitarian Award.

Lowery is one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 and served as vice-president until 1967 when he was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to serve as first chairman of the board. In February 1977 he was named Acting President and in August 1977 was unanimously elected SCLC's third president at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. He served as President and Chief Executive Officer until he retired at the 1997 convention in Atlanta, yet served as president until 1998 when his successor, M.L. King, III assumed the office and was then unanimously elected President Emeritus.

During those 21 years he led the organization to new levels of vigor, vitality and visibility—including a 2000 mile pilgrimage from Alabama to Washington to free Maggie Bozeman and Julia Wilder, two Alabama African American women wrongfully accused of voter fraud, and to gain extension of a vital section of the Voting Rights Act. The pilgrimage passed through five states and 70 cities, registering voters and helped gain the extension of provisions of the Voting Rights Act to 2007.

He led protests against firms doing business with South Africa, long before it was popular to do so. He was among the first five African Americans arrested at the South Africa Embassy in DC in 1984 in the continuing Free South Africa campaign.

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Under his leadership, SCLC/WOMEN launched the first educational program by a major advocacy group about the danger of HIV/AIDS in the black community. In the fall of 1990, he was invited by the head of the FBI to conduct a seminar for the top 50 officials of the Bureau about the image of the FBI in the black community.

His genesis as a civil rights leader began in Mobile, AL, almost a half-century ago where he led the desegregation of buses and other public accommodations. He was one of four Alabama ministers sued by Alabama government officials for \$3 million and his property was seized to satisfy judgments of the Alabama courts. Eventually, the US Supreme Court reversed the Alabama decisions in the landmark ruling on libeling public officials in *Sullivan vs. NY Times, Abernathy, Lowery, Shuttlesworth, and Seay*. The case became the subject of a book by Anthony Lewis, *Make No Law*, in 1991.

Following the famous Selma to Montgomery march in 1965, Lowery was named by Dr. King to lead a delegation to take demands from the march to Gov. Wallace. A dramatic confrontation between Alabama State troopers and the federalized National Guard took place as Lowery led the delegation up the capitol steps. Under orders from the Guard, the delegation carried the demands to the door of the capitol only to be met by the Governor's secretary. Lowery refused to give the demands to the secretary so no meeting took place that day. A few days later the Lowery delegation met with the governor for 90 historic minutes. In 1995, as Lowery led the 30th anniversary reenactment of the march, Wallace came out to the city limits to meet and greet the marchers and apologize for 1965 when he ordered troopers out to beat the marchers.

Lowery is one of the founders and chairmen of the Black Leadership Forum, a consortium of 25 national advocacy organizations and at-large leaders, and has served as chairman three times. He is consultant to the Black Promoters Association seeking to eliminate the discriminatory policies of talent agencies in the promotion of concerts by major artists. *The African American Confidential Report*, a bi-monthly Washington, DC based newsletter targeting black executives reports that a 1997-98 poll of black execs and leaders around the nation named him "the most trusted/respected civil rights leader and has been listed several times in *Ebony's* 100 Most Influential Black Americans.

TOPICS

- Civil Rights: Then and Now
- "Everything has Changed, Nothing Has Changed": Our Progress in the Fight for Social Justice