

The Reverend Doctor Joseph E. Lowery

B.A., B.D., LL.D., D.D., L.H.D.

Convenor, Coalition for The Peoples' Agenda

Chairman Emeritus, Black Leadership Forum, Inc.

Co-founder, President Emeritus, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

When Ebony Magazine named Dr. 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 with their lifetime achievement award at its 1997 convention, he was hailed as **"dean of the civil rights movement"**.

He was internationally acclaimed in the context of **"speaking truth to power"**, when he delivered eulogies at the funerals of Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King in Detroit and Atlanta respectively. **"He prophetically, and poetically memorialized a life devoted to peace and justice at the funeral of Mrs. King before presidents, governors and lawmakers and a world wide television audience, in an unprecedented opportunity to speak truth directly to power"**, one commentator noted.

As part of the celebration of his birthday-October 6, 2001, Clark-Atlanta University announced the establishment of the *Joseph E. 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 commencement (2003) the University of Alabama 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.**

He is co-founder, with Martin Luther King, Jr. of the SCLC in 1957; served as vice president (1957-67); chairman of the board (1967-77); and as president and chief executive officer from Feb. 1977 – Jan. 15, 1998. Dr. King named him chairman of the delegation to take demands of the Selma-to-Montgomery March (1965) to Gov. George Wallace. Wallace had ordered the marchers beaten ("Bloody Sunday") but apologized to Lowery in 1995 as he led the 30th anniversary re-enactment of the historic march, which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

His genesis as a civil rights advocate was in the early '50's in Mobile, AL. where he headed the Alabama Civic Affairs Association, which led the movement for the desegregation of buses and public accommodations. While in Mobile, his property was seized by the Alabama courts in an historic libel suit: *Sullivan v. NY Times, Abernathy, Lowery, Shuttlesworth, & Seay*. The U.S. Supreme Court vindicated the ministers in a landmark ruling on libel. (Read *Make No Law* by Anthony Lewis, 1964)

Lowery led the historic Alabama to Washington pilgrimage (1982) to free Maggie Bozeman and Julia Wilder, falsely convicted of voter fraud. This march helped gain the extension of provisions of the Voting Rights Act to 2007. Nationally recognized as a strong proponent of affirmative action (intentionality in closing the gap) he also led the movement in Nashville to desegregate public accommodations. In Birmingham, he served as president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, which spearheaded the hiring of Birmingham's first black police officers, etc. As a United Methodist minister, he was elected as delegate to three General Conferences, and presided over an Annual Conference (acting bishop) in 1966. His prophetic voice was instrumental in moving the church toward the goal of inclusiveness. He served as pastor of United Methodist Churches in Mobile and Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, GA where he pastored Central Church (Clark College was organized in this church) for 18 years. Thousands of members were added to the church, and a 240-unit housing development was constructed for low and moderate-income families-Central Methodist Gardens). He served as pastor of Cascade United Methodist Church from 1986-92 leaving the church \$1 million, ten acres of land, and blueprints for the new edifice when he retired.

He is a co-founder and chairman emeritus of the Black Leadership Forum, a consortium of national black advocacy organizations, and served as third president following Vernon Jordan and Benjamin Hooks. As president of SCLC, he negotiated covenants with major corporations for employment advances and business contracts with minority companies. One of the first protest campaigns he led was against the Atlanta based Southern Company for contracting to purchase ten million tons of coal from South Africa (1977). He was among the first five persons arrested at the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. in the "Free South Africa" campaign (1984). He co-chaired the 1990 Nelson Mandela visit to Atlanta following his release from prison and awarded Mandela the SCLC/Martin Luther King, Jr. Human Rights Award. He was keynote speaker at the African Renaissance Dinner in Durban in 1998 honoring Mandela's retirement. He was invited to keynote the dedication of a school and hospital in East Germany honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. He led a peace delegation to the Middle East and met with the president of Lebanon and Yassir Arafat to seek justice in the Middle East by non-violent means. He led a peace delegation to Central America. He led protests against the dumping of toxic waste in Warren County, N.C., and was arrested twice in this campaign which gave birth to the *environmental justice* movement.

Lowery was arrested in Atlanta in 1968, fighting for the rights of city garbage workers. During the missing and murdered children's crisis in 1979, he was a leader in working for calm in the community, and in urging federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to maximize efforts to arrest the culprit(s). His message on "let us turn TO each other not ON each other!" was heard loud and clear. He also provided offices for the "mothers" until they were able to secure their own space, and helped initiate a fund for the mothers with Citizens Trust Bank.

He served on the board of directors of MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) for 23 years, and was chairman for three years (during the '96 Olympics), and was instrumental in securing million\$ in contracts for minority businesses. Since retiring from SCLC in January 1998, he has helped black farmers secure a federal court decree valued at \$2 billion against the Department of Agriculture for discrimination. He assisted

black auto dealers to seek redress from discrimination claims against auto manufacturers. He has supported black concert promoters in their fight against exclusionary policies of talent agencies.

He is married to Evelyn Gibson Lowery, an activist in her own right, founder of SCLC/W.O.M.E.N. He is the father of five children. As convener of the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda (GCPA), he is active in election reform and voter empowerment, economic justice, criminal justice reform, including alternative sentencing and a moratorium on the death penalty. In frequent demand as a speaker across the nation and on college campuses, he has delivered addresses in the first quarter of the year at Michigan State, William and Mary College, Clark Atlanta University, Albany State, the College of New Jersey, and the University of Alabama.

(He preached at the Washington National Cathedral, Sunday, November 18, 2001, at the 11 a.m. worship service when the state of Georgia was lifted up in prayers.)

Educational Studies

Alabama A&M University

Knoxville College

Payne College & Theological Seminary

Chicago Ecumenical Institute

Honorary Doctorates

University of Alabama (2003)

Morehouse College

Clark Atlanta University

Alabama State University

Central State University

Miles College

Beloit College

Atlanta U*

Dillard University

Paine College

Clark College*

*prior to merger

Awards and Honors

1992 Boston University's First Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Award

1984 and 1994 Ebony Magazine, “Fifteen Greatest Black Preachers”
1989 and 1990 Ebony Magazine Black Achievement Award
1993, Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church Justice Award
1997, National Conference of Black Mayors “Tribute to A Black American” Award
NAACP LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
1999, Wayne State University first Walter Reuther Award
Progressive National Baptist Convention Martin Luther King, Jr. Award
United Auto Workers Civil Rights Award
Southern Regional Council Life Fellow
Kappa Alpha Psi Humanitarian Award
Alpha Phi Alpha Justice Award
Alpha Kappa Alpha Civil Rights Award
Black Methodists for Church Renewal Leadership Award
George Washington University Martin Luther King, Jr. Award
World Peace Council Award
National Urban League’s Equal Opportunity Award
Nation of Islam’s International Affairs Award
Operation PUSH/Rainbow Coalition’s Achievement Award
OIC’s Clergy of the Year Award
Southern Center for Human Rights Award
Committee to Abolish Death Penalty Award
Black United Fund Chairman’s Award
Martin Luther King Center Peace Award
2002, National Newspaper Publisher’s North Star Award
2002, Black Leadership Forum’s Lifetime Achievement Award
2002, Concerned Black Clergy Salute to Black Fathers Lifetime Achievement Award
2003, Faces of Triumph Award, Center for Democratic Renewal
2004 NAACP Lifetime Achievement Award
2004, Good Choices, Inc., Crystal Bell Award
2004, Remy Martin Louie XIII Award
2004, National Visionary Leadership Award
2004, National Urban League’s Whitney M. Young, Jr. Lifetime Achievement Award

2005, April 4th Foundation's I AM A MAN Award