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HUFF
POST POLITICS

Stephen Colbert Awed by Congressman John Lewis

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Stephen Colbert is a master at the "put on" interview with famous people, but [last night](#), for the first time I can recall, he was practically speechless, so in awe of civil rights hero and Congressman John Lewis, that he wasn't able to poke his usual fun at his guest.

Lewis -- one of the people I profile in my new book, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame* -- described his first meeting with Martin Luther King and the almost fatal beating he endured (by state police) on the Edmund Pettus Bridge during the Selma-to-Montgomery march in 1965.

Colbert tried several times to mock, or find humor, in some part of Lewis' story, but Lewis didn't take the bait. Lewis remained serious, although somewhat playful. And Colbert had such obvious respect for the courageous Lewis that he couldn't summon his usually brilliant satirical bite.

Colbert's best moment was when he told Lewis that he had attended the famous 1963 March on Washington (at which Lewis spoke) in his mother's womb. He proudly displayed a banner from that historic event that his mother had saved.

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Peter Dreier is professor of politics and chair of the Urban & Environmental Policy Department at Occidental College. His new book, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame*, will be published later this month by Nation Book.