

Comics roundup: A civil rights legend, Congressman John Lewis, visits Durham in comics and real-life form

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“Durham Reads Together” and The Durham Comics Project



A major public figure with an connection to comic books will be in Durham this weekend: [Georgia Congressman John Lewis](#), the legendary Civil Rights Movement leader who is the last surviving speaker from the 1963 political rally in Washington, D.C. where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech.

Rep. Lewis’ life and experiences have been adapted into the [graphic novel trilogy March from Top Shelf Comix](#), which has published acclaimed works such as Alan Moore’s *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and Craig Thompson’s *Blankets*. The first volume of *March* was chosen by the Durham County Library to kick off its “[Durham Reads Together](#)” program in July.

March is a lyrical, impressionistic work based on Lewis’ memories of his early years and the Civil Rights Movement. The first volume deals with his impoverished childhood and the challenges of training for the passive resistance practices favored by King and other leaders. Lewis was inspired to join the movement based on a [comic book about King, which has also been reprinted by Top Shelf](#).

There are a whole slate of events coordinated with Lewis’ visit ([the full schedule is here](#)). On Saturday, Oct. 4, Lewis will lead a march from the Durham County Library’s main branch on Roxboro St. to the Civil Rights Mural by the Durham Arts Council building. Lewis will hold a rally at the mural with Andrew Aydin, an aide who helped adapt Lewis’ story into comics form with artist Nate Powell.

Lewis also holds a reading and discussion of *March* at NC Central University’s B.N. Duke Auditorium at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, followed by a dessert reception at Hill House at 7:30 p.m. Tickets to the reception are \$75 and will benefit the Durham Library Foundation. On Sunday, Oct. 5 at 3:00 p.m., Lewis appears at the Hayti Heritage Center for “Durham Remembers Together,” talking about the Civil Rights Movement and the 1963 march with The State of Things host Frank Stasio.

If you can’t make it to Lewis’ events, the Durham County Library will host a discussion of *March* with Gail Williams, called “Visual Imagery and the Civil Rights Movement,” at noon on Friday, Oct. 10 at the Bragtown Library Family Literacy Center. And *March* co-author Aydin returns to Durham to talk about “Martin Luther King Jr. and the Comic Book that Changed the World” at the Southwest Regional Library on Oct. 26.

On Saturday, Oct. 11 at 3:00 p.m., the Sanford L. Warren Branch Library screens the documentary *White Scripts and Black Supermen: Black Masculinities in Comic Books* by Georgia State University professor of African-American Studies Jonathan Gayles. The film explores how portrayals of African-Americans in

comics are tied to the racial attitudes of their eras, from politically incorrect African-American sidekicks such as The Spirit's Ebony White in the 1940s to the sometimes-awkward attempts at introducing black superheroes in the 1960s and 1970s to more nuanced depictions such as Milestone Media's books for DC comics in the 1990s and beyond.

The Durham County Library has several other comic book events planned for October, including an event with illustrator Eric Knisley at the East Regional Library on Oct. 23 where he'll show teens how to draw events from their lives as autobiographical comics, plus a session with Jared Axelrod on Oct. 24 on "Teen Costuming."

On Friday, Oct. 24 at 7:00 p.m., the library holds an event at Cocoa Cinnamon to premiere [The Durham Comics Project](#), a special collection of comics by local cartoonists depicting events in their everyday lives and community that has been put together over the past year. It will be followed by "ComicsFest" on Saturday, Oct. 25, which will feature a variety of guests and comics-related panels that will be announced closer to the event.

NCComicon and ComiQuest

November will also be a major comics month for Durham, with the [NCComicon](#) returning to the Durham Convention Center along with the [ComiQuest Film Festival](#) at the Carolina Theatre on Nov. 15 and 16. [As we previously reported](#), NCComicon faces new competition from the corporate-owned Wizard World chain of conventions, which opens a celebrity-studded event in Raleigh next March. Perhaps in an effort to step up to the challenge, NCComicon has countered by bringing in several cult celebrities as guests.

For fans of the cinema-skewering Mystery Science Theater 3000, they've got Trace Beaulieu and Frank Conniff, who previously visited Durham with the Cinematic Titanic troupe a few years ago. In an even bigger coup, they've gotten John Barrowman, star of the Doctor Who spinoff Torchwood and costar of the CW's Arrow. Barrowman's presence isn't completely surprising, as NCComicon co-owner Tommy Lee Edwards, a comic book artist, illustrated a Torchwood comic co-written by Barrowman and his sister Carole Barrowman, who also appears at the convention.

The ComiQuest film festival [lineup has also been announced](#). Films this year include Tim Burton's Batman from 1989, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze, the anime classics Akira and Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind, 1980's Flash Gordon, 1982's Conan the Barbarian, 1999's cult animated favorite The Iron Giant (animator Stephen Franck, who worked on the film, will be in attendance), and last and definitely least, the 1986 mutilation of Marvel Comics' classic satirical character Howard the Duck, which has gotten renewed attention thanks to Guardians of the Galaxy.

Please, for the love of God, check out the original comic by Steve Gerber. This film does not even come close to doing it justice.

Foundation's Edge anniversary

And finally, if you're a comics fan looking to save a few bucks, [Foundation's Edge](#) on Hillsborough Street in Raleigh celebrates its 27th anniversary with a sale on Oct. 4 and 5. It's a good chance to pick up a few early Christmas gifts, or something for yourself, such as that Deathlok the Demolisher trade from Marvel that just came out. Just don't grab them all, as certain reporters have a copy on their wish list.