

**Julian Bond Oral History Project
“The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-68”**

Interview with Charles Black

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PREFACE

This interview is part of an oral history project entitled, "The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-1968." Unless otherwise indicated, the interviewer is Gregg Ivers, Professor of Government and Director, Julian Bond Oral History Project, American University.

The reader is encouraged to remember that this transcript is a near-verbatim transcription of a recorded interview. The transcript has been edited for minor changes in grammar, clarity and style. No alteration has been made to the conversation that took place.

Notes, where and when appropriate, have been added in [brackets] to clarify people, places, locations and context for the reader.

Biographical Note for Charles Black

A native of Miami, Florida, Charles Black joined the Atlanta student movement in 1960 when he was a second-year student at Morehouse College. Mr. Black was a key organizer and publicist for the movement, helping to organize sit ins, demonstrations and boycotts throughout the city. He later became an editor of the *Atlanta Inquirer*, which was founded in July 1960 by local businesspeople sympathetic to the students' point of view. The *Inquirer* was written and edited by students, including Julian Bond. At one point, Mr. Black served as the editor of the *Morehouse Maroon* and the *Inquirer*, and chairman of the Atlanta student movement.

Mr. Black worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and later, with Julian Bond and John Lewis, the Voter Education Project. Later, Mr. Black became an actor and voiceover artist, appearing in such films as *Selma* (2015) and numerous television commercials. He has remained active in Atlanta as an ambassador on behalf of the Atlanta student movement and the struggle for Black freedom in Georgia.

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American University

Charles Black (26-JBOHP)
February 21st, 2020
Atlanta, Georgia

Interviewer: Gregg Ivers
Videographer: Jessica Merriman
Production Assistance: Jessica Merriman

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Charles Black [CB]

GI: Today is Friday, February 21st, 2020, and in the office of Councilman Michael Bond at City Hall in Atlanta, Georgia, to conduct an interview with Mr. Charles Black for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, sponsored by the School of Public Affairs at American University. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am a Professor of Government at American University and Director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project.

Mr. Black, let me first thank you for taking time this afternoon to talk with me about your role in the Atlanta student movement and your relationship with Julian Bond. Thank you very much for doing this.

CB: You're welcome. Please call me Charles.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

GI: Why don't we begin by having you talk about your personal background, your family background and then your path to Atlanta?

CB: I was born in Miami, Florida, on Fifteenth Avenue, in Liberty City, at home, delivered by a midwife, Mrs. Cooper. Is that as far back as we need to go [laughs]?

My parents and the four of us were an intact family that had dinner at 6 o'clock every day. We also went to church on a regular basis. My father was a lay leader in the church, as was one of his brothers. We went to Sunday school – morning service, Bible study and evening service on Sunday. And then on Tuesday nights, we had Bible study. On Thursday nights, we had "Song Breakfasts." So I was "religious-ed out" almost [laughs].

But the effect of that upbringing was that I grew up with a strong sense of right and wrong and good and bad because my parents were vocal, and believed very strongly in doing the right thing, being good, doing for others. We had a grocery store. Quite often, folk would

come in who didn't have money for what they wanted to buy. And my folks had one of these black and white speckled books that you learn how to make your alphabet in, and that was called "the book." Folks would come in and say, "Would you put it on the book?" I remembered that when the store closed up, there were still a lot of people "on book." But my parents never sought to make anybody pay. They were just kind and generous people. That was a big influence for me. I wanted to be like them.

I came to Atlanta to go to college because there was no college in Miami that I could attend because of race. The next year after I left, they started Miami Dade Junior College and they had the black students on our high school campus and the white students on a white high school campus. But various recruiters came to our school, including from Morehouse and Clark (Atlanta) and Hampton and some others. Morehouse offered me an early admission scholarship when I was in eleventh grade. I declined that offer because I'd been elected student body president for the next year, and I thought I'd stay around and be the big man on campus!

I also assumed that they wouldn't have a twelfth grade as I needed it. That wasn't true, but at the same time they offered a young man who was in tenth grade who had been elected vice president of the student government for the next year. His name was Donald Hopkins. He accepted his scholarship from tenth grade. So instead of being a year behind me, as he was in high school, he was a year ahead of me when I got to Morehouse. He became Dr. Donald Hawkins and is largely credited with eliminating smallpox and the Guinea worm. He worked for the World Health Organization, he worked for CDC [Centers for Disease Control], and he worked for the Carter Center.¹

So that's how I got here. I remember my arriving in Atlanta on the train, at the Terminal Train Station, in my first stop here.

GI: And this would be what year?

CB: September of 1958. I saw for the first time the Confederate battle flag on prominent display on the side of a building. I also saw red brick buildings for the first time in my life. There were cobblestone or red brick sidewalks on some streets, some streets still had cobblestone. All this was very new to me. Houses, in Miami, were built with "CBS construction" they called it – concrete, block and sand. I'd never seen brick homes or anything like that. That was my coming here. The Terminal Train Station sat on the site where the Richard Russell Federal Building stands now. That station was also the first was that I was arrested for sit ins. A.D. Williams King, Martin's [Luther King, Jr.] brother, and I took a large group into the white waiting room. Some of us were arrested there.

¹ The Carter Center was established in 1982 by former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Roslyn, at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. The Carter Center supports programs that promote peace and conflict resolution, public health and cross-cultural integration.

COMPARING RACIAL SEGREGATION IN ATLANTA WITH MIAMI

GI: What were some of the differences between Miami and then coming to Atlanta, given that both places at that time were legally segregated?

CB: Yeah, Miami was very different, though. Miami was much more cosmopolitan. You had a lot of folk from the Northeast that had second homes in Miami, and many would move there. You also had large Jewish population concentrated mostly on Miami Beach, but you also had a lot of folk from the Caribbean, from Puerto Rico, folk from Bahamas, not so many from Jamaica. But Bahamas and Puerto Rico were the largest groups that I was aware of growing up there. Segregation was a little bit more polite I would say. I don't remember anybody calling me awful names or being really rude and crude. It was just understood that the races were separate. We did have signs on the buses that said, "Coloreds Seat From Rear. Whites Seat From Front." There were black and white water fountains. Blacks could not go to the restaurants and hotels. There were separate taxicabs. Black folks rode in jitneys that connected to the bus lines. It was all separate.

GI: For younger people, what's a jitney?

CB: A jitney is like a taxicab, except that has prescribed routes. And there was a big DeSoto Dodge vehicle that had a middle fall-down seats and seats in the back of all that. They were all black. They essentially connected the black communities near the bus lines, the bus stops and all that. I don't recall black taxicabs. I'm sure they're were. What I discovered years later after I'd left was that if you were black, I mean, physically black but spoke a different language, which was the case with many Cubans that were there – that was the other large population – you could go into the theaters and the hotels and restaurants. It was just American blacks that were not good enough. Interesting, right?

ARRIVING AT MOREHOUSE COLLEGE

GI: So you arrive at Morehouse in 1958 and you begin your first year . . .

CB: And I saw snow for the very first time. We had snow in late September and October. All the guys from Florida came running out of the dorms to look at this mystery stuff. My roommate grabbed some it and took it inside to try to look at it under a microscope to see the patterns that you always see, and of course it melted. That was my first snow. I always remembered that. I decided, as a matter of fact, my first two weeks, probably by the end of the first week here, that I would live in Atlanta because I had not seen so many pretty Black women before in my life. I said, "This is a place I can live [laughs]." And I did. I've stayed ever since.

GI: In the fall of 1958, when you arrived at Morehouse, what was the campus climate like? Were people thinking about change at that point? Were people just going about their business? What was it like for you as a new student in a new city?

CB: Well, it was an environment that was, I don't know, enlightening and inspiring in a broad sense. Dr. Mays, Benjamin Mays, was president at the time. He addressed the student body once a week. Of course, his messages were always progressive messages. He had written a book called, "Born to Rebel." But we also had visiting speakers from across the country who were people of note. I remember the guy who invented penicillin was there.² The guy who wrote, "Cry the Beloved Country" was there.³ People like Masters and Johnson, the sex therapists, were there. Some of the great Morehouse alums came and spoke.

You had this invigorating kind of intellectual environment. We also, living on campus, we would have bull sessions at night. We studied together, kibbitzed a bit.⁴ We studied a lot in the dorms. That was a good thing. But there was no talk of rebellion or revolt against the status quo in those earlier days. We were busy with things on campus. I immediately got involved with the newspaper on campus. I was in the Atlanta Morehouse-Spelman chorus. I was on the yearbook staff. I was on the student court. Later on, I was on the debate team. Eventually I was editor of the school newspaper for my junior and senior year and then president of my senior class, and then chairman of the Atlanta student movement. Three of those things were concurrent – senior class president, editor of the newspaper and chairman of the movement all at same time.

Our most important thing, of course, was to try to spend as much time on Spelman's campus as possible because if you were a student anywhere in the Atlanta University Center you could attend classes at any of the other campuses and the credits went directly to your school. Julian [Bond] and I both spent a lot of time over there. We had a creative writing class that involved three or four us in the faculty person's home on campus. But I took a lot of English classes and the like there. There was a nickname for people like me during those days. Our dinner line closed at six o'clock. Visiting hours at Spelman ended at six o'clock.

So you're trying to stay on Spelman's campus until that last possible second and also make it to dinner before the line closed. So the name they gave us was, "Will-He" – will he make it [laughs]? I was a "Will-He?" Those were fun days. We had nice social events on campus. I'll tell you a secret about me and Julian at football games. We would often go together. Julian had a silver flask in which there was rum. I would buy the rum, and we would make our rum and coke drinks. And at Julian's urging, when everything was quiet in the stadium, the two of us would stand up and go, "Heyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy," and said nothing in particular. My fondest memories of Julian are silly stuff. We had a lot of silly times together. He's the greatest joke teller ever. I repeat a number of his jokes a lot to people now. So that's not what you asked me but that's where it led [laughs].

². Alexander Fleming, a Scottish born physician and scientist, invented penicillin in 1928.

³. Alex Payton, a South African writer, published *Cry, the Beloved Country* in 1948, which was among the first literary works to draw attention to South African apartheid.

⁴. *Kibbitz* is a Yiddish word meaning, in the polite sense, to make small talk. In reality, it means to offer unsolicited advice, commentary and points of view on topics of no significant importance.

FORMING THE ATLANTA STUDENT MOVEMENT

GI: When did things begin to change? When did the movement come to Morehouse and how did it all begin?

CB: Well, immediately after the [February 1st, 1960] sit ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, Lonnie King was over at the local hangout, which was Yates and Milton Drug Store, where they had a soda fountain and booths. He and a guy named Joe Pierce initially had a discussion about what had happened in Greensboro. Then he went over to Julian and Lonnie asked Julian – he had the newspapers – he asked, "Have you seen the story in the paper?" Julian later said he thought [Lonnie] was asking [him] if [he] read the newspapers because everybody reads the newspapers. Then Julian said, "Yeah." And then [Lonnie] asked him, "Well, don't you think something like that ought to happen here?" Julian's response was, "I'm sure that someday we'll probably do that. And Lonnie said, "No, no, I mean about us." The three of them agreed to take the store and go to talk to people around there. They invited some folks to a meeting that very same night, as I recall.

Then we had this meeting over at Morehouse's campus at the Sale Hall annex, a one-story little building there. There were, I think, eighteen to twenty of us there. Lonnie pitches the whole thing about doing something here. At the end of it all, he asked those who were not willing to participate not to talk about it. Just go about your business. Well, somebody talked. As a result of that, the presidents of the schools called some of us in with the mission of talking us out of doing this thing because they were responsible for us – for our education, for our safety. Of course, they had to answer to the Board of Trustees. They didn't want to cut the money off. We spent a lot of time talking back and forth. When they were convinced that we were going to do these things anyhow, Dr. Rufus Clement, who was president of Atlanta University, which was separate from Clark at the time, suggested that we should let the public know why we were doing what we were doing. The suggestion was made that we publish a document and they would raise the money to run it in a newspaper as a full-page ad. The document became known as "An Appeal for Human Rights."

Lonnie appointed a committee that was to do this document. Roslyn Pope, Julian Bond, myself, and I think Albert Brinson. Our cell phones weren't working that well in those days [laughs], so Roslyn apparently had difficulty reaching all of us. She calls Lonnie like a day or so before this document is to be presented back to the presidents and tells him that nobody is helping her, so Lonnie told her, "So just write the damn thing." So Roslyn wrote the damn thing. I refer to her as "Dr. Dr. Dr. Roslyn Pope" because she has three Ph.Ds. She wrote this seminal document which spelled out all the areas of discontent that we had, which included places of public accommodation, transportation, education, police activity, religion, church and segregation.

I remember the line that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in the city. It was signed by either the president or some officer of the Student Government Association from all of the schools in the Atlanta University Center. There were one or two who were afraid to sign. It should be noted that a lot of the students did not participate because they were local, and their parents might lose their jobs. They were teachers or

whatever, but they could lose their jobs. Their parents didn't want them to participate. Others similarly situated did participate against their parents' wishes. That was the nature of the beginning.

GI: I'd like to talk a little bit about the Appeal and its significance? What was the response to it in the larger community?

CB: The governor at the time was Governor Ernest Vandiver. He went on TV and declared that this document was extremely well written, and it could not have been written by any student in the state of Georgia. He didn't say black students. He said any student in the state of Georgia. He said it was most likely written in Moscow. That was a high praise for Roslyn's work, but an indictment of the whole system of education in the state of Georgia. I don't think he realized at the time. The document was read into the Congressional Record by Senator Jacob Javits of New York. It was picked up by *The New York Times* and run free of charge as a full-page ad there, and also by a paper in California. I think was the *Los Angeles Times*. It had that kind of impact.

Later on, folk in Birmingham published almost the same document, just changed Atlanta to Birmingham and made a few other changes. It had an impact. The general community, of course, understood our message because it was very clearly stated. I mention there was another organization in town called the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action. Those were the generation between us and the older established black community. It was your Jesse Hills, your Carl Holmans, Clarence Coleman . . . people like that. Johnny Johnson. They had published a document called *A Second Look*, and it spelled out a lot of factual stuff that was used in the *Appeal for Human Rights*. She [Roslyn Pope] drew upon that for some stuff. It was one week later after the document was published that we had our first sit ins.

GI: What was the response of the *Atlanta Daily World*?

CB: The *Atlanta Daily World's* publisher, C.A. Scott, was a very conservative Republican who incidentally endorsed Nixon and Goldwater when all the Black papers in the country were not supporting them. He editorialized against the movement and did not give us fair coverage. He agreed to publish the ad but had to be paid in advance. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* billed the presidents for us.⁵ [Scott] had to be paid in advance. The nature of his attitude with that paper is what led to the need for a new organ, and that became the *Atlanta Inquirer* newspaper.

GI: Did it surprise you that the *Journal* and the *Constitution* published it?

CB: No. It was paid advertising. They would not have done it for free, that's for sure. But in the general community, I think we had gotten a lot of support in the Black community because as you know, everybody read the newspaper in those days. We didn't do a lot of

⁵. The *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* were separate newspapers until 2001, when they merged and became the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The *Constitution* was the morning paper and the *Journal* was the afternoon paper.

texting and tweeting in those days because our cell phones weren't working that well [laughs]. We got the message across to the community, the broad community, and the Black community in particular, because everybody was reading the newspaper. We had a lot of support right from the start when we had our first sit ins.

CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE VOICE: THE ATLANTA INQUIRER

GI: My understanding from Lonnie King is that the *Atlanta Inquirer* was a direct response to the *Daily World's* refusal to support the student movement.

CB: Yes.

GI: You were involved with the *Inquirer* . . .

CB: Yes.

GI: Can you talk about that? How it began, what you did, who came on to write for it and so on?

CB: I'll tell you how you got involved with the *Inquirer*. It was a guy named Julian Bond, who talked me into joining the staff.

GI: Why don't we talk about that a little bit?

CB: He was there, and he was like an associate editor or something. Not very long after Julian talked me into joining the staff he left. He went to work for SNCC getting paid, probably more than at the *Inquirer*, but that's how I ended up there. The paper was originally printed by J. Lowell Ware, who subsequently founded the *Atlanta Voice*. The. There was a guy named Kossuth Hill, who had an office supply place on Auburn Avenue. For a brief period, the Atlanta student movement had offices on Auburn Avenue. Kossuth Hill was a very white-looking gentleman who walked into the office one day when Lonnie was there and the receptionist escorted him back to where Lonnie was, and Lonnie was wondering, "Who is this white man coming in here?" He was afraid there was going to be a problem. When we told him that was Kossuth Hill, Lonnie realized who he was.

He had the *Atlanta Inquirer* name and he also had a printing press. He volunteered to give the *Inquirer* to the students as an organ and he would print the initial copies. That's how that got started. Prior to that time, we were mimeographing flyers. Kids today don't know what a mimeograph machine is. You crank the handle and you did one copy at a time. Eventually, you might get an electric one and it did one copy for you. So that's how we were getting our word out. Julian was editing something called, *The Student Movement and You*, a flyer that we put out. It was distributed mostly to churches, but also some door-to-door distribution. The *Inquirer* replaced that. After I'd been there with the *Inquirer* for a while, I became the managing editor. I served for about three years.

GI: How important do you think getting this paper off the ground was to building support for the movement?

CB: Well, it was very important because we had the *Atlanta Daily World* giving bad publicity of what we were doing and editorializing against us. It was important for us to get our message out. In addition to the distribution that you mentioned that Julian and Lonnie talked about, we had at that time the Atlanta Negro Voters League, which was organized down to the block level. You had ward captains and you had block captains or whatever, ward leaders, whatever. We tapped into that structure to some extent. We also put it in barbershops and beauty shops and restaurants and all the places that Black folk would frequent. That was a part of our distribution system as well. But we had our organ.

Julian Bond, a very interesting fellow, was an extremely good writer. He typed his material with two fingers, was extremely fast doing it and served as a PR guy for the student movement during Lonnie's term and mine as well. He was getting out press releases right and left. He would sometimes tell us what we had said [laughs]! He would create the message and quote you, and then tell us that you said that! He became the PR guy for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I would visit with him regularly over there. He was constantly sending out press releases and pictures of what was happening with SNCC.

GI: I want to back up just a little bit and ask what do you think contributed to Julian's talents as a writer?

CB: Well, of course, his father was a president of a college.⁶ His mother was a librarian, as I recall. Julian had more books than I had seen anywhere outside of the library. I would visit with them at his home and his mom would make sandwiches for us. We would sit around and chat and all that. I remember the first night I went into his room or wherever it was and saw this whole wall covered with books. I said, "Julian, have you read all those books?" He said, "Yeah." I'm talking hundreds of hundreds of books. I think I'd read two books by then!

He was extremely well-read, very intelligent, very knowledgeable guy. His writing talent was probably enhanced by having so much in his head already and being in an intellectual environment at home. But he was super writer.

GI: Do you think it was a particular gift that he had, to talk to people at different levels?

CB: Yeah. I think it was something of a natural talent, perhaps genetic to some extent as well. But if you grew up in that kind of environment, you're always on college campuses.

⁶. Horace Mann Bond was the first African American president of Lincoln University, a private, historically Black institution located about forty miles southwest of Philadelphia from 1945-1957. Prior to that appointment, Dr. Bond was the president of Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia, a Black public institution, from 1939-1945. Dr. Bond is considered one of the most influential and accomplished African American scholars of the twentieth century.

You're around people like [Albert] Einstein. His father had awarded him the first honorary doctorate. Other schools wouldn't do so because Einstein was Jewish. He grew up in that kind of environment with all these intellectuals around him. It's natural that he would like to express himself well, verbally as well as in writing. He could do it with such ease. You know, you just sit down and boom, there's a story. He was my role model.

GI: How important do you think the *Inquirer* and other publications were in communicating the message and creating an environment for change in Atlanta?

CB: Julian also edited a literary paper on campus called Pegasus, so he was into literary expression. But it's one thing to write instructional kind of material or technical material, [but] it's another thing to write a message that communicates to the spirit and the soul of a person so that you understand what the emotions, the sentiments are and where you're coming from and Julian that knack for doing that. He did that extremely well. He could speak from his heart to your art. Where that comes from entirely, I'm not sure. But he did it extremely well. It was important in the community because this was something new and different for the Black community. Before [then] our battles [were] in the courts with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. That's how things got changed. Except the generation before us, unbeknownst to me, had taken some direct actions, you know bus boycotts, some strikes to get teacher pay increased and things of that sort.

John Calhoun went to jail for refusing to give up the membership rolls of the NAACP.⁷ A lot of those things we didn't know about. Anyhow, that was more the way of doing things, the courts, before we came along. You had to get people to understand that this was a new and different way of getting change more rapidly because we were interested in revolutionary rather than evolutionary change. Communicating all that was very important.

CREATING THE STUDENT REVOLUTION

GI: Can you talk about the differences between an evolutionary, more gradualist approach and then what you describe as a revolutionary approach? Was there any tension within the movement on which path to take?

CB: There was definite tension between us and the older established leadership. You get the reaction that, "You know, these things take time. You've gotta be patient." We didn't really want to hear that too much more. You have to understand that we were the generation that followed what Tom Brokaw called "The Greatest Generation," our parents, uncles and all that, going overseas to fight to make the world safe for democracy, all right?

7. John H. Calhoun was a long-time civil rights activist in Atlanta. In 1940, Calhoun was among the founders of the Atlanta Negro Voters League, which was crucial in making Atlanta one of the first Southern cities where Blacks could actually vote in meaningful numbers. By 1956, Calhoun's persistence in pressing local officials to desegregate golf courses and parks, and his decision to file lawsuits when they refused, led to his selection to head the Atlanta branch of the NAACP. Thurgood Marshall argued the case on behalf of four Black golfers who were refused access to a white's only city-owned course. The case ultimately went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which decided in favor of the Black golfers in the case of *Holmes v. City of Atlanta* (1955). Calhoun later served on the Atlanta City Council from 1974-1978.

But they came back and they were called niggers. Some were beaten. Some were even killed wearing their uniforms. But they had no rights that they were fighting for [for] other people]. We were born a bit unhappy. Or, as Dr. Mays said, "Born to rebel!" It was kind of in our makeup that we were not going to go for this gradual thing for too much longer. We thought that there should be some "here and now." We'd like to enjoy these benefits in our lifetime and for our children, to prepare things better for our children. We were not that patient anymore.

GI: How important was the murder of Emmett Till in shaping your consciousness?

CB: We were only a few months difference in age at the time that he was lynched, so that struck me at the time. Here is a guy my age being murdered in this fashion. I remembered that for all the rest of my life. We had seen enough and heard enough to know that things were not good, and we wanted things to be better. What made the difference in our moving to the revolutionary rather than evolutionary approach was an example that the guys in Greensboro gave. We'd always wanted things to change sooner, but they showed us the way to do it, and we seized upon that. Also, the example of the Montgomery bus boycott. Civil disobedience, nonviolent civil disobedience. We saw that kind of approach could change things and could change things much more rapidly than through the courts. So that's what gave us our push.

REMEMBERING ATTORNEY DONALD HOLLOWELL

GI: Well, speaking of the courts. Can you describe the relationship that the student movement had with Donald Hollowell and his role in all this?

CB: Attorney Donald Hollowell was our lawyer. Some other lawyers helped with different things, but he was our lawyer. He was King's lawyer here, as well. He was a big guy, not extremely tall, but he had a very commanding presence. He had a big, strong, booming voice and big hands and big feet. He addressed the judge, he used to say, "But your Honor, I submit to you that such and such was the case . . ." He almost always do much more law than any judge that appeared before. He was our guy. Fortunately, we have named a street for him, which was Bankhead Highway, now Donald Lee Hollowell Boulevard. I should mention too that Horace Ward was his partner at his law firm, and he also worked with him on some of the cases, as did Bill Alexander, who became a state legislator. Howard Moore, who married Julian's sister, Jane, was also a part of that law firm. Horace Ward, of course, became a federal judge. He and Hollowell also did the case of the University of Georgia with Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter-Gault, desegregating the school there. So that was a big deal. Horace had been denied admission to that school, as I recall, earlier on, so it was poetic justice that he was the lawyer who broke that barrier.

JULIAN BOND IS ELECTED TO THE GEORGIA LEGISLATURE IN 1965 AND DENIED HIS SEAT

GI: Let's talk about Julian's run for the Georgia legislature in 1965. What happened?

CB: Well, that year was the first time we had a group running for the state legislature. Leroy Johnson had been elected to the state senate. As I recall, Horace Ward had been elected as well. Maybe he was in that group. I worked with Julian in his campaign. The thing that impressed me most about the way the campaign was run was – and I guess this was probably Julian's idea, but I helped him – we had "coffee klatches" in folks' homes. What we would do would ask them what their concerns were, what problems they were experiencing. We had people working on the campaign who would get on those problems the very next day. If it was a city matter, they called City Hall. If it was a county matter, they called the courthouse. If it was a state matter, they called somebody at the Capitol and got some resolution that many of the problems that people were facing. That was a large part of the success of his campaign. That's why he was elected. He wasn't just promising what he was gonna do; he showed people that would do it. And it didn't matter that it wasn't a state matter. It could have been a city matter it didn't matter. If folk needed help, we had some people ready to get on the case the next day. He was elected along with the rest of them. The reason he was not seated was because SNCC issued a statement critical of the war in Vietnam and it referred to the U.S. as murderous in that situation. Julian had not seen that statement at the time that he received a phone call from a reporter on radio – I forget what his name was – asking him if he agreed with the statement by SNCC and he said, "Yeah." All hell broke loose.

Jesse Hill and some of us had a meeting at Herman Russell's house with Julian and several of us, and we were discussing what should be done.⁸ I made the suggestion that Julian should issue his own statement which might not be as caustic but still supportive on the same message. Everybody agreed that was the thing to do. Julian and I and somebody else go into another room and we drafted a statement that Julian was going to issue. Well, the next day, when I think Julian was going to issue the statement, he changed his mind and decided he would not issue this statement. He would stand by his support of the SNCC statement. That's what got him booted out of the House. I was there with him at the time they refused to seat him – up in the colored section of course, up in the balcony.

GI: Why did the legislature continue to have segregated seating in 1965 and '66 when the 1964 civil rights act made segregation in public accommodations illegal?

CB: Well, you have to remember that the state legislature represented trees and hogs more than it did people. The state has one hundred and fifty-nine counties. We used to have what they called the county-unit system, which meant that the smallest county in the state had the same representation as Fulton County, which was the largest, which made no sense. Atlanta was willing to be more progressive because what was good for business was good for Atlanta, which was their slogan. The rest of the state was pretty bad, very racist in most places around the state. It was not surprising at all that you would have that racism still

⁸. Jesse Hill and Herman Russell were among the most successful Black businessmen in Atlanta. Hill founded the Atlanta Life Insurance Co., which became the largest and most profitable Black insurance company and greatly reduced Black dependence on white firms. Russell founded H.J. Russell & Co., which became the largest Black-owned real estate and construction company in the United States. They were also civil rights activists, very supportive of the student movement, and the effort to get African Americans elected to local office.

there. When we had sit ins at the state capitol, I remember when [James] "Sloppy" Floyd, for whom the towers are named, stood in the well of the house and pointed up at the top of the balcony and said, "Get those niggers out of the white section of the balcony."⁹ That's the guy we have the towers named for. But anyhow I was there when Julian was refused his seat. He did not stand. He was not called to stand. After they refused to give him his seat, I remember he asked me to take him home to get some pills because he would break out in a rash. Prior to that time, Julian did not want to walk picket lines anymore. He wanted to stay at the office. He broke out in a rash on a picket line, and I was convinced it was because of the heat and all that sort of thing. When he broke out in a rash in the air- conditioned state capital, I teased him. I said, "Julian, that had nothing to do with the heat. You just break out if you're nervous or afraid or something." He kind of laughed it got to laugh it off, but that's what would happen to them. He also had problem with psoriasis. He would break out on his hands and all. But yeah, I was there on that day when they refused to seat him.

GI: That led to a whole year.

CB: And it was appealed to the Supreme Court.

GI: Do you remember how that all shook out?

CB: Well, I'll tell you one thing that's important to note. Many black folk crossed the street rather than encountering Julian on the sidewalk during that period, because, you know, folks say he's a bad guy. Black folk were buying into that. I don't know if that's ever been reported much, but I witnessed that first-hand. You'd see people coming down and going to somewhere, you don't know where they're going and [they] would literally cross over the street rather than encounter Julian and speak to him. It became national news, worldwide news, that he had been denied a seat and his appeal won in the Supreme Court, which ordered that he be seated. At this point, he was a rock star. He was big hero of young folk all over the country and I guess in many parts of the world.

GI: Do you think that decision backfired and elevated his national profile? How important was that series of events was to the next step, which was the Democratic convention in 1968?

CB: Oh, yeah. Well, Julian had become famous, I mean really famous all around, especially college campuses. He was eventually a regular speaker on college campuses all over the country. He was signed by the William Morris Agency. They would get these gigs for him. They would book him. They would send him a stack of airline tickets bound together. And he would just book at one place after another. They were paying good money to have Julian Bond on campus. He tried to get me to travel with him, write speeches and all that. But I didn't do that. He was very famous by the time the convention came along. There was a push to nominate him for vice-president, ignoring the fact that he wasn't old enough. He

⁹. First elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1952, Floyd became one of the most powerful legislators in the state until his retirement in 1974. After Bond was seated in 1967, Floyd left the chamber in protest. He never apologized for his decision to exclude Bond.

and I and John Lewis were off to the side to talk about what to do and all that. We agreed that he should accept the nomination to make a speech. He did get a chance to address the convention.

GI: So you were at the 1968 convention?

CB: I was there with him, yeah.

THE RISE OF JULIAN BOND TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE

GI: Did you see him going from a mild-mannered student to student leader to a national figure?

CB: No. Never. Not at all. He was shy then. Did I see him breaking out of that? No, not at all. Julian was born to become a college president. He was going to teach English and become a college president. That was a natural route for Julian. He was not very outgoing. He was a pretty shy guy and not at all a self-promoter. He would not have projected himself into what happened to him. It was because of what he stood for and what happened to him that made him into a superstar. He had to embrace that. But he grew into it and became as big a star as he should have been. But at that convention, people were gathered around him like he was a rock star, especially young white folk, trying to encourage him. He was regarded like a big superstar at the time.

I remember going somewhere with him – I we were on the University of Georgia campus in Athens – when somebody asked me for my autograph because I was with him. That's how big he was. You know the expression that some men are born great, some men attain greatness and others have greatness thrust upon them? That was the case with Julian. He had this greatness thrust upon him. But he was inherently great. He was not seeking greatness, not projecting greatness. Folk insisted on promoting him and to "pedestalize" him for who he was and what he stood for. It was more thrust upon him than being pursued. Nobody ever would have predicted that Julian would have been in any way notable. He would be somewhere quietly doing his thing. Writing, teaching. But on stage, addressing thousands of people and leading things? No.

REMEMBERING JULIAN BOND – THE FRIEND

GI: Let's switch gears a bit and talk about your friendship with Julian Bond. What was he like as a person?

CB: Julian Bond was a fun guy and I just enjoyed being with him all the time. He always had jokes. We formed a corporation together called Frontiers Unlimited Consulting Firm. Julian Bond, Lonnie King, John Lewis and myself. I ran the firm for a decade or so. I bought them out after a year or so because most of what they were doing was sending me SNCC people to hire for the most part.

GI: What was this firm? What were you consulting about?

CB: Okay. We formed the firm really at the behest of the Office of Economic Opportunity [OEO], formed in 1969. The first contract that we had was with OEO to assist community action programs in the South with community organization because we were known for doing that sort of thing. So that was our first contract. Then an interesting thing happened. Folk who competed against us – it was a firm called Wright, Jackson, Williams and Stephens, Black friends of ours, who were a PR firm. Lonnie surmised later it was they who started this whole inquiry. Charges were made that we were using this \$158,000 contract that we'd gotten [for community work] to run Julian Bond for Congress against the Republican, Fletcher Thompson. There was no truth to that at all. It results in a major investigation of our firm that lasted for like four months. Our activities were suspended. We ended up going to OEO, the Office of Economic Opportunity. At the time, the director was [Donald] Rumsfeld. His deputy was Dick Cheney.¹⁰

When this investigation of our firm [began], it just happened that Julian was running against Fletcher Thompson. They claimed that we were using the funds of this contract to do that, so they spent about four months and about \$500,000 by conservative estimates investigating us. We had Army intelligence investigating us, the CIA investigating us, the FBI, even the Government Accounting Office and the investigative arm of OEO. All these folk were investigating us at one time. So when they'd send investigators down, I just gave them the key to the office and the files and said, "Help yourself. I'm going to lunch." We just turned them loose in the office and had long lunches. This went on for [a while]. At that point, we had assisted about forty-two different agencies. We're in the beginning stages for the most part. They checked with all these people and nobody said anything. Anyhow, after this had gone on for so long, Fletcher Thompson or somebody who had asked for the investigation, got [Senator] Richard Russell [D-Ga.] to support this investigation.¹¹ We asked for a meeting with OEO and we called Richard Russell's office and asked him to call OEO if he was done with all this. We went to Richard Russell's office first and talked to his people. By the time we got over to OEO his folk had called OEO. We go into the meeting. Donald Rumsfeld was the head of OEO at the time, who later became Secretary of Defense or Secretary of Disaster [laughs]. Dick Cheney was his deputy, who later became Vice President Dick Cheney. Cheney was conducting the meeting. Our attorney from Arnold and Porter was [Clifford] Alexander, who became the first Black Secretary of the Army.¹² He is our attorney. We have Julian Bond, Lonnie King, John Lewis and Dick Cheney is running the

¹⁰. Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney were long-time high-level figures in Republican politics. Each had controversial tenures in the George W. Bush administration – Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense (2001-2006) and Cheney served as vice-president for both terms (2001-2009), most notably for their support of the Iraq War, association with doctored intelligence to support the invasion of Iraq, defense of torture and warrantless wiretapping by the National Security Agency.

¹¹. Richard Russell was first selected to the United States Senate in 1936 and served until his death in 1971. At the time of his death, he was the senior-most member of the Senate. Russell was a life-long segregationist and leader of the Southern segregationist coalition that dominated Congress until early 1960s, when Congress, in response to the civil rights movement, enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, over the vociferous objection of the Southern Democrats in the House and Senate.

¹². President Jimmy Carter appointed Clifford L. Alexander, Jr. Secretary of the Army in 1977. He served until 1981.

meeting. Rumsfeld came in to meet Julian because Julian was the most famous person on this whole crowd.

GI: What year is this?

CB: That was still 1969. Yeah, but he specifically came into the room just to meet Julian because Julian was the big man in the crowd. Isn't that something?

THE LEGACY OF JULIAN BOND

GI: What features of his personality made him such an important person in your own life? What do you see as his legacy as a person, for the civil rights movement and more broadly the country?

CB: Well, the major contribution that Julian made to SNCC, for example, was to raise their profile significantly because he was constantly putting stories out all day, every day. He was doing press releases and then getting pictures sent to all the news media. Nobody would have known about SNCC if it hadn't been for Julian Bond. He also became very active with the Voter Education Project. He and John Lewis ran around the South doing that. They had major impact in that respect. Politically, you know, when he got involved in politics directly, his presence meant a lot that at the state capitol.

I remember asking him once, "Julian, why don't you introduce more legislation?" He said it was because his name was the kiss of death on anything he was sponsoring.

GI: Why?

CB: Because they hated him. These are racists. The legislature was a racist place. All these guys represented trees and hogs.

GI: Was there almost like a special hate for Julian as opposed to other Black members in the legislature?

CB: Well, of course, he had to be singled out because he beat them. He forced them to seat him. They didn't want to, and the Supreme Court made them seat him. So they hated him more than anybody else. He felt that any legislation that had his name on it would automatically be the kiss of death. He later started advocating more.

The fact that he spoke on college campuses a lot for years was really important. He influenced a generation of college students, probably actually two generations, if not more, of college students, because he continued to do that quite a bit. When he became Chairman of the Board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), he had a tremendous influence that way.

But all that is secondary to me. What was most important to me was Julian the person, because I enjoyed him so much. He had a great sense of humor and he liked having fun. One

thing I remember in particular. He and John Lewis and I took our wives to the Royal Peacock on Auburn Avenue to see The Temptations and it took weeks for us to get Julian to stop singing, "I guess you say . . ." He would make every motion with every word [laughs].¹³ So that was one thing. Another time we were at Donn Clendenon's place on what was Hunter Street and Red Foxx was there.¹⁴ During the break, because Julian was famous – John really wasn't yet – he came back to our table to chat with us, to chat with Julian, actually. And everybody's gathered around the table to see what was said, assuming there will be something funny Red said.

Julian's public legacy has always been secondary to me. Him as a friend has always meant so much to me. I was telling Phyllis earlier that they all show up in my dreams regularly, and that has been the case for many years¹⁵. There were always kids, and the original family was intact. I just dream about them a lot because I just admired Julian so much and just enjoyed being with him so much. He was, in fact, one of my favorite people in the world.

¹³. Mr. Black is referring to a hit song of The Temptations, a popular Motown singing group, from 1965, "My Girl."

¹⁴. Donn Clendenon attended Morehouse from 1952-1956, where he counted Martin Luther King, Jr. among his friends. Clendenon played Major League Baseball for twelve seasons (1961-1973) and later became an attorney. Red Foxx was one of the most popular African American comedians of the 1950s and 1960s, developing a reputation for his raunchy humor. He became popular with white audiences when he starred in the NBC situation comedy, "Sanford and Son," which ran from 1972-1977.

¹⁵. Phyllis is Phyllis Bond McMillian, Julian Bond's oldest daughter, who was present at the interview and also arranged it.