

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

Interview with Courtland Cox

**Special Collections Division
Bender University Library
American University
Washington, D.C.**

2018

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. Mr. Cox reviewed the transcript for accuracy.

Biographical Note for Courtland Cox

Courtland Cox (b. 1941) joined the Nonviolent Action Group in 1960, the Howard University chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], during his fall of his freshman year. For the next seven years, Mr. Cox worked throughout the South on behalf of SNCC, and held leadership positions on SNCC's Coordinating Council and Executive Committee. He was a member of the March on Washington Steering Committee and a key participant in Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 and the Lowndes County Project in Alabama. He also and served as SNCC's delegate to the War Crimes Tribunal organized by Bertram Russell in 1967. Mr. Cox was the co-owner of Spear and Drum Bookstore, the first African American owned bookstore in Washington, D.C. President Bill Clinton appointed Mr. Cox to serve as the Director of the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) at the Department of Commerce. Mr. Cox is currently the president and member of the Board of Directors of the SNCC Legacy Project.

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American University**

**Courtland Cox Interview (04-JBOHP)
August 31st, 2018
Washington, D.C.**

**Lead Interviewer: Gregg Ivers
Production Assistant: Lianna Bright
Videographer: Gracie Brett**

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Courtland Cox [CC]

GI: Today is Friday, August 31st, 2018 and we are in Washington D.C. at the home of Mr. Courtland Cox to conduct an oral history interview for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, an undertaking sponsored in part by the School of Public Affairs at American University. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am a Professor of Government at American University and also the director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project. I am joined today by American University students Lianna Bright and Gracie Brett, who will provide production assistance for our interview. This video interview, as well as a written transcript, will be available through the Special Collections Division of the Bender Library at American University. Cox has spent his life and career dedicated to the cause of African-American economic, social and political empowerment dating back to his student days at Howard University and his work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960s. He is currently the president and member of the Board of Directors at the SNCC legacy project. We'll learn much more about Mr. Cox's work as well as his observations on the life and legacy of Julian Bond.

Thank you so much for having us into your home and taking time out of your schedule to meet with us. It's an honor and we really do appreciate it.

CC: You're welcome.

ENTERING THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

GI: I guess the easiest place to start is for you to tell us how you got involved in the freedom movement.

CC: Well, I'd gotten involved as a student at Howard University. I came to Howard University in 1960 and found Washington, D.C. the capital of the United States as one of the most segregated places in the country. Housing was segregated in Washington, D.C. The Redskins football team for Washington had no black players. Public accommodations were segregated. No black people could drive buses because O. Roy Chalk [who owned the Washington D.C. public transportation system] said that black people would steal the money. So almost every aspect of life in

Washington was segregated. In addition to that, if you wanted to travel between Washington and New York – because they didn't have I-95, at that point, they had [Highway] 40 – public accommodations were segregated. Same if you went to Baltimore or any of the places surrounding it. I got involved because I found myself in a very segregated environment which I did not want to tolerate.

GI: And you joined the Nonviolent Action Group?

CC: Yes. The Nonviolent Action Group [NAG] was a group that was the SNCC group at Howard. SNCC was once, at the beginning, actually, as the name says, a coordinating committee of student groups. So you had groups here in Washington, you had groups in Atlanta, you had groups in Maryland, in Baltimore, you had groups across the country. I was one of the people who belonged to the Nonviolent Action Group, which was the SNCC group in Washington at Howard University.

GI: Was there ever a debate over whether the Howard group would get involved with SNCC?

CC: The Howard group *was* SNCC. Basically, you had chapters, SNCC chapters, at different universities. SNCC evolved to be something different in 1962. But in 1960, when I joined, you had the civic interest group in Baltimore, you had the group here [at Howard], you had the group in, say, Tennessee, groups in Georgia and so forth. And combined they were SNCC. It was mostly just students; they were not field secretaries. They were just students.

GI: There were different approaches to attacking segregation within SNCC that reflected some interesting philosophical differences. How would you describe NAG's approach?

CC: Our approach was much more political. The Nashville group, John Lewis, Diane Nash and so forth, really believed in the question of nonviolence because they were highly influenced by the teachings of Gandhi and others. They believed that you could appeal to men's hearts and that basically they wanted to form the beloved community. The Howard group, our group, felt that we were faced with a political situation that was untenable for us. We knew we had to embrace nonviolence, but it was not because we believed in the beloved community. It was that they [the opposition] had too many guns and therefore we needed to figure out ways that we could move the discussion. Appealing to men's hearts and getting them to change their mind so that we could have a better situation was never going to happen.

GI: Was there a philosophical tension between students who were coming out of the South versus students who were coming out of the North?

CC: I wouldn't say that. I would say there was a difference, a philosophical difference, between people who were coming out of Nashville, and I would say ultimately of Southwest Georgia, than people coming out of Howard University and other places. But I think the two big poles in the organization were the Nashville group and the NAG group.

MEETING JULIAN BOND

GI: So how and when did you first meet or hear of Julian Bond?

CC: I was a member of the Coordinating Council and the Executive Committee of SNCC when it was a student organization.

GI: Did you attend the April 1960 organizational meeting of SNCC in Raleigh?

CC: I came later. I was not there in April of 1960. No, I came later.

GI: My understanding is you began Howard in the fall of 1960?

CC: Yes, that's correct. Frankly, I can't remember when I first met Julian. I probably know where I met him; it was probably 8 1/2 Raymond St [SNCC headquarters in Atlanta], sitting down smoking a cigarette at a typewriter. But I cannot tell you when I met Julian.

GI: Do you recall your first impression of him, what his role was in SNCC, and his role in the early stages of the movement?

CC: Yeah, I mean Julian was the communicator. He was the person who understood what the organization meant. He was the person facing out. He was the person delivering the message out and that was particularly important because it meant our lives would be a little bit safer because things were not done in the dark. There was some sense that other people knew what was going on. I mean, I think his ability to communicate and, at this point, I'm talking about writing, not in terms of his voice on television. That success came later on. But his ability to communicate clearly and quickly was very important to the lives of many of the students who were, at that point, engaged in demonstrations. In the early days, SNCC dealt mostly with sit-ins and freedom rides so that we were really talking about things that centered around public accommodations.

COMMUNICATING THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

GI: Communicating the message of the movement on any particular given day meant the need to build relationships with the white media. What was the most important part of Julian's work, that, or building a strategy to communicate what SNCC was trying to do to a world that really didn't understand what the civil rights movement was all about?

CC: I don't think that level of sophistication existed. We were trying, I think, to stay alive. I would say, well, it's 50/50. I would say for the Nashville people, John Lewis and Diane and so forth, the ability to communicate to the world what was going on and so forth was particularly important. I must say that relating to people like Claude Sitton at *The New York Times*, Nelson, I believe, I forgot his first name . . .

GI: Jack Nelson.

CC: . . . and Jack Nelson, the advent of television and the ability for people to see what was going

on, was extremely important because it became a national issue and people had to see it. The other thing that was important at that time -- and we were very conscious of this -- was that you had the newly independent states in Africa coming into being in the question of the Cold War; that is to say, which states, which side would be able to relate to Africa favorably. And that's one of the reasons that the Kennedy people wanted to desegregate Route 40 was because it was embarrassing the United States that African diplomats who were travelling between Washington and New York, or New York and Washington, were discriminated against. So basically, you had come up in a public environment where you had, at one layer, the beginnings of television in terms of becoming a mass medium.

You had really good print reporters like Claude Sitton and Jack Nelson and then you had the international discussion, where, at the end of the day, whatever happened in the United States was reflected at the United Nations in Africa and Asia. So while we did not consciously go after trying to develop a strategy to deal with *The Times* or deal with [*The Washington*] *Post*, the communications environment was so dynamic that engaging in it allowed us to do a number of things that probably we could not have done if we tried to consciously construct something that was non-dynamic.

GI: Was there a conscious decision within SNCC to create a strong, very disciplined communications department?

CC: Yes. I mean one of the things that you have to realize is that, in 1960, I'm 19 years old. Julian might have been 20, 21 at most. I mean if you were 26 years old you were considered old -- oh, I mean like Bob Moses -- and Jim Forman was ancient [laughs], so you're really dealing with young people who were somewhere between 17 and 22 years old. You have to understand that. We not only established a communications department, we not only had *The Student Voice*, we had a photography department. We also had a printing press we created when we moved to the new building that printed its own materials. So, we were very conscious that we needed to organize.

We also had the WATS line, which was very important. In the age of today young people would laugh, but we had the WATS line, which was wide area telephone service. That was a lifeline to us. It was not only cheaper but allowed us to communicate with the world. It was the Twitter of its time [laughter]. We know what the ability to reach anybody anywhere means so we had the WATS line, which was new technology. We had *The Student Voice*, which was our own. We had our own photography department. Later on, we had our own printing press. We also had our own Gestetner [mimeograph] machines that published stuff before we got the press. We're talking young people between 17 and 22 years old having this consciousness and understanding. I tell a lot of "millennials" these days that we would [have] considered them very old when we were twenty [laughter]. I just joke with them. I'm not serious about that [laughter].

GI: What made Julian Bond such an effective communications director?

CC: You have to realize that Julian comes from a different background than most of us. Most of us were first generation college. Julian came from a family that was at the university. Julian, when he was young, he knew Paul Robeson and he knew [W.E.B] DuBois. And he knew everybody. The kind of environment that Julian was raised in was a very sophisticated environment. So, by the

time Julian got to SNCC, dealing with people who were very smart, who had a lot of experiences in the world, people who had done a number of things was not a big deal to Julian. His father moved about to the various universities, so he was not someone who came up in a singular environment. He came up in many environments so his ability to communicate with many people was probably baked into his upbringing.

THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

GI: I'd like to talk to you about the March on Washington.

CC: Okay.

GI: You were on the steering committee?

CC: Yes.

GI: You also had a hand in John Lewis's speech?

CC: Yes.

GI: So there was input from multiple people for the Lewis speech?

CC: Right.

GI: Can we talk a little bit about John Lewis's speech and the controversy around it when the day came to deliver it?

CC: Well, let me say before the March on Washington I had to really drag SNCC kicking and screaming to participate in the March on Washington. Their view was what we were doing in Mississippi and Alabama at that time, and in southwest Georgia, working with people [who] were doing things there were rooted in the communities. The 1963 March on Washington seemed like a very far off event. Usually, SNCC's approach to it is, if you advocate for it fully, they said, "Well, you go do it." Forman's position was, "If you think that the March of Washington is that important, then you go represent the organization and then we will deal with the rest." This was in the early days when no one knew what it [the March] would become. As the March grew bigger and became more important SNCC became more organized and involved in it. Now, in terms of the John Lewis's speech, I'm sure – I was not at the writing end because I was in New York – but I'm sure that Julian and Dorothy Zellner and others were involved in it.¹ And I would even say somebody like Jack Minnis, given some of it, was involved in the construction of the speech.²

What happened is that the speech was sent to me maybe three or four days before the March on

¹. Dorothy Zellner was interviewed for this project (JBOHP-07).

². Jack Minnis, an attorney by training, served as the Research Director for SNCC from 1962-1966. He was instrumental in creating the concept of "opposition research" to counter misleading claims put out by opponents of the civil rights movement.

Washington. I wanted to make sure that John's speech was out in the press and that people would have a chance to read it and see it. What happened is I made it available to the press. And what happened was that we had a lot of pushback, particularly from the Kennedy administration, and that pushback was expressed through the Catholic Church. Now, there were a number of things that I think that were in it that they said they had a problem with. Well, one was the criticism of the Kennedy administration as doing nothing, or not doing sufficient [on civil rights]. I think that was the first part. I think the second part, which they put out there, was that John talked about how we're gonna march to the South. But one of the things that I think they objected to, but probably was not really articulated in John's speech, is that you had a line, "one man, one vote is the African cry. It must be ours." In 1960 that was a helluva a radical statement to talk about "one man, one vote" in the United States, given the segregation that existed in the South.

GI: How important was this consciousness about African independence and the awareness of larger events in the world in shaping SNCC's vision?

CC: I think it was huge. I think probably Jim Forman, who was the oldest, might have been somewhere between 32 and 35 years old, had come up in Chicago and was very knowledgeable. And one of the things we did early on, and I can't remember what year we did it, but it was probably somewhere around '61, '62, we went to the United Nations on the question of "We Charge Genocide," picking up on some of the things that other people had been doing. My sense is that a number of the people in the organization were fairly sophisticated and knowledgeable about what was going on in the world. I remember growing up in New York, where, on the street corner, people would talk about the Bandung Conference, guys I hung out with. It was a kind of level of sophistication where jazz was . . . you had Coltrane coming in, you had a whole bunch of things going on where you had kind of a lot of explosion going on and then you had Afro-Cuban music with the Mongo Santamaria and Willie Bobo and so forth. I mean there was within the black community, generally, an awakening and a consciousness that included Cuba, Africa, the Mau Mau [Uprising] with Jomo Kenyatta. That was the general atmosphere.

It wasn't actionable in the sense that somebody said, "Well, we're going to do this." If SNCC decided they were going to do something, that was the big difference. But in the atmosphere, there were a whole lot of various things that were going on that people had just become aware of. The other thing that you have to understand there was also important, back to communications and television, that, on grainy black and white television we watched what was going on in Little Rock. In grainy black and white television, we watched what was going on in Montgomery, Alabama. In grainy black and white television and *Jet* magazine, we saw what was happening with Emmett Till. In terms of communications, America was just moving into a different world. It's almost like if everything before the 50s, really '55, '60, really came into being in '60 with Kennedy using television and so forth is that there was a great transformation from radio to television in, say '55 to '60. And that really made a big difference in letting us know what was going on in the world.

GI: A popular view of the March on Washington is that it was the highwater mark of the civil rights movement. Do you agree with that?

CC: I think I take a different view – that it was not the highwater mark, but I think it was an

important point. Before 1963 every time we went on a demonstration or any time we spoke and so forth, basically we would hear the question raised, "What do you Negroes want?" Because that's the term that people used [referring to Negroes]. "What do you Negroes want?" "What are all these demonstrations about?" "What is all of this?" "What are the Freedom Rides about?" "What do you Negroes want?"

Let me also say a couple of things about the March on Washington. The Kennedy administration was terrified of the March on Washington early on and they tried to really stop it. But we had it ready to go. A. Philip Randolph had already not done it 1941, and he was going to do it in 1963. And he had Bayard Rustin, who was really good about a number of things.

For white America they kept asking the question, "What do you Negroes want?" I think why King's speech was so important and so popular is that he answered that question, and the answer to that question is we have a dream that is deeply rooted in the American dream. King's speech answered the question for white America that they had been posing. So, basically, I think it was an important occasion for that reason. I also think that it really kind of spelled the end of the whole discussion of the big battle for public accommodations, and that we particularly as SNCC started moving in terms of voter registration and so forth.

So my sense is that I think it answered that question. I think it was relevant and important the kind of event. But it was hardly the high mark, the high watermark of the civil rights movement. Here is one of the things I've learned, and especially in today's world. The narrative never has to be associated with any facts. People have narratives and then there are facts [laughter]. People have their narrative and they believe in the narrative. And you know one of the things I tell my daughter is that anytime somebody says, "I believe," just end the discussion because it's never based on rationality or facts.

SNCC AND SHAPING THE NARRATIVE OF THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

GI: I want to talk a little bit about Julian's role in shaping the narrative of that period of the civil rights movement, from let's say '60 to '64 through '65. How did the communications operation really work? He's based in Atlanta, for the most part, and yet things are happening all over the South. How are people able, given the technology of the day, to know what was happening, to get a story out, to communicate with this or that person and how were people able to do their communications work so effectively?

CC: Given the antiquities [laughs], I would say the WATS line. I think the WATS line was the key because you have to remember that things were coming to Julian. You almost have to have a concept of FedEx or the way you travel these days. It's like a spoke and wheel, where everything is coming in to one point and then they're going out. I think the ability to have the WATS line was probably the single most important thing that we had because we were able not only to get information to Atlanta but also for Atlanta to get the information out. I think without the WATS line we could not have survived.

GI: Do you think that SNCC was among the first organizations to maximize the power of the WATS line?

CC: Yes, I would say that. This really was a life and death situation. The other thing that was also important was the CB radios. People often laugh at this point but if you look at the old SNCC cars – I think they were Chryslers, brown Chryslers – they had this big thing [antennae] in the back. The ability to communicate through WATS and CB radios was particularly critical to what we were doing.

Let me also say that Julian turned out not only to be the editor of *The Student Voice* and so forth, but he was also probably more importantly SNCC's *griot*.³ He was the person that was able to express historically the whole SNCC experience in the ways that the griots in Africa would. He could do it from memory. He didn't have to go back to books and stuff. He knew it. He could recite it to you. And he not only knew the specifics of the history, but he also knew SNCC's attitude and what it meant to be in SNCC. Those two things were very important to SNCC. I remember when we met for the 50th [anniversary of SNCC] in Raleigh [in 2010] at Shaw [University], he was the one that opened up the meeting by giving people the sense of their history. When I say a sense of their own history I don't mean just this happened on this day or that day. He gave us a sense of who we were and involved all the things that were done. It's actually on the SNCC Digital Gateway [website]. The other time I heard him do something that was quite similar was in 2014 at the Fiftieth Anniversary of Freedom Summer '64. So I mean so basically because he was at the center where things came in and he was able to get those things out, the whole history of SNCC became part of his being that he could tell without any references or cards or books. It became part of his DNA.

GI: How did Julian and the communications team "personalize" the experience of what was happening in the South for a larger audience, particularly during Freedom Summer?

CC: I think it was a little deeper than that.

GI: Okay.

CC: It was clear that after our work in 1962 [and] '63 that the state apparatus of Mississippi had decided to use all its might to begin to lock us up – the SNCC people – and kill its own residents. So that was important, and that Mississippi seemed very far. I remember hearing Roy Wilkins talk about how the only thing you could do with Mississippi is make it a parking lot, pave it and make it a parking lot, because there was a sense of despair that nothing could ever change in Mississippi. In 1963, Bob Moses, in discussion with Allard Lowenstein and others, talked about bringing the country to Mississippi so it did not become so isolated. "The country" did not mean some poor guy who had a job somewhere. "Bringing the country" meant bringing the sons and daughters of the elite to Mississippi. And so what happened was that a number of people – again the changing times – a number of people from Yale and Stanford and those other places, Harvard, came down to Mississippi.

GI: [Here, Mr. Cox discusses how Julian Bond and his brother James recorded short interviews with Freedom Summer volunteers and sent those recordings back to their hometown radio

³ . In West African countries, a *griot* is a historian and storyteller.

stations for broadcast].

CC: I think what Julian and James did was taking that general concept and began to amplify it by sending the voices back home so that the connections were much deeper between the people who were down in Mississippi and say Flint, Michigan or Saginaw, [Michigan] or some other place in Iowa, it was important. I think that what James and Julian did in 1964 amplified the whole concept of "bringing the country" to Mississippi because, isolated, it was very destructive in terms of its own people and those of us who worked there.

SNCC AND THE JULIAN BOND CAMPAIGN FOR THE GEORGIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

GI: Let's talk about SNCC's role in getting Julian Bond to run for the Georgia legislature in 1965. My understanding is that Ivanhoe Donaldson and Charlie Cobb made the decision to "draft" Julian for that race as part of SNCC's plan to expand into electoral politics.

CC: That's correct. Julian was not the most energetic person in that regard. I think it was a big break for SNCC. While SNCC was involved in the vote and while SNCC was involved in the political process it was not generally involved in the electoral process. So, running Julian was a big break because you also have to remember that the first black mayor of a major city was like 1968.⁴ So black people in general were not involved in a lot in electoral politics. I think we had four black congressmen – [Robert] Nix, [Charles] Diggs, [Augustus] Hawkins and somebody else.⁵ It was really a beginning of a break in terms of electoral politics. Ivanhoe, who, as you know, became very much involved in the electoral world and one of the brightest people in that world really. And Ivanhoe was a person that had a lot of energy – a lot of energy [laughs]. So you're correct. It was Julian, Charlie Cobb and Ivanhoe who were really the backbone of Julian's campaign.

GI: Did the success of Julian's campaign give SNCC the idea that it could take that model and use it to elect black candidates to state and local offices elsewhere?

CC: I don't think so. I really don't think so. I think that the dominant thing after Julian got elected was the Vietnam War. As I said earlier, a lot of us were between 17 and 22. A lot of us, myself included, had "1-Ys." That is to say, the draft board said we were not to be called except in cases of "extreme national emergency." They didn't want us anywhere around [laughs]. But a number of people that we worked with were impacted by the Vietnam War. And when Julian tried to get sworn in and they refused because of the Vietnam War, that was probably the narrative that took over the discussion about Julian's race.

But you also have to realize something else that was important. SNCC changed dramatically from '64 to '65 – the SNCC veterans, that is – because of the Atlantic City experience. We talked about '63, the question of the high mark in terms of answering the question, "What did Negroes want?" But in 1964 the question again of the narrative of America, the question of fairness, the question

⁴. In November 1967, Democrat Carl Stokes became the first black mayor of a major American city, winning the Cleveland mayor's race over Republican opponent Seth Taft with 50.5% of the vote.

⁵. There were two other black members of Congress in 1968, John Conyers and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

of democracy, the question of all these kinds of things, that if you play by the rules you'll be able to prevail as opposed to those who break them, those who didn't play by the rules and so forth.

In 1964 at the Atlantic City convention, where the people from Mississippi [referring to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party] played by the rules, listened to all of what the narrative of America was in terms of democracy and so forth. They did all of that and they were met by opposition because the powerful wanted to prevail. Not only the powerful wanted to prevail but all of their allies, including Walter Reuther – and I would include Martin King – everybody sided with power against the things that were right and wrong.

And then we decided that we had to look at the world differently. In 1964, I'm 23 years old. I learned the lesson about what America was really about in that discussion. And not just myself. All of us learned a lesson. My sense is that we began to look at politics differently and we began to do a number of things differently. And one branch was with Julian in terms of electoral politics; the other branch, well, there are several things that happen ... electoral politics with Julian; independent political organizing in Lowndes County, Alabama and other places and continued support of the MFDP in terms of the Democratic Party. So those three things happened in 1964, carrying on into 1965.

GI: Were you involved in drafting the SNCC statement about Vietnam that resulted in Julian initially being denied his seat in the Georgia legislature?

CC: No. We had a number of things going on. I'm sure that everybody in the organization supported it. As you know, SNCC was very much involved in the democratic process. We wanted to know who made that decision, why they made that decision, and so on. Everybody knew the decision was made. So, Charlie Cobb went to the draft board and said he's prepared to submit himself to the draft if he understood who had made the decision to draft him, and why they made it to draft him. When [H.] Rap Brown went down there, he engaged with them in such a way that they told him that he couldn't even join the Salvation Army [laughs] because they didn't want him anywhere around. Willie Ricks, the same thing. So, when Stokely [Carmichael] and myself – we had the same draft board on the same day, and I told you we got a 1-Y – we refused to answer the questions about whether we were drunks, addicts or homosexuals. They assumed we were not drunks or addicts, but they didn't know about homosexuality. And in 1960 that was a big scare. Even today I'm sure it is. While we had not made a statement as an organization, all of us resisted in every way that we could being drafted to Vietnam.

LEAVING SNCC

GI: Why, in 1966, did Julian Bond leave SNCC?

CC: People left for many reasons. I left because I got to be 27. Getting \$9.64 a week when you got it, after taxes [laughs] wasn't going to make it. The other thing that was different about Julian from us is that Julian had five kids and a wife. We didn't have any of that. Even though SNCC paid him a little more money he needed to make more. People left for a lot of reasons. When I left SNCC, I went literally from Lowndes County, Alabama to London to a meeting with Bertrand Russell and John Paul Sartre [in Europe]. And then I decided, "Well, you know, I've done a lot, I've

been engaged for seven years." It was time for me to do other things. The answer to why people left SNCC I cannot tell you. I know for a lot of people it was just life. You needed to do some other things. SNCC always talked about working themselves out of a job. SNCC viewed itself as much more of a movement than an organization. And it was at its best when it was on the movement side. People left for many reasons. I couldn't tell you why Julian left.

But I do know at his memorial service Pam [Horowitz, Julian Bond's second wife] said – there was a question of who would be speaking and stuff – always said that Julian felt much closer to SNCC than anybody else. He was also the vice president of the SNCC Legacy Project. I mean, nobody ever leaves SNCC. At the end of the day, that's the only reason the SNCC Digital Legacy Project can exist. Have you had a chance to go to the SNCC Digital Gateway?

GI: Sure. I use it all the time.

CC: The reason that we can do that is that nobody ever left SNCC. I can call anybody in SNCC at this point. I got a call yesterday. A SNCC veteran [recently] died [and] we're trying to get his son to the funeral. We all have an obligation to be there. So the answer is, while people left the organization, and the organization doesn't exist [anymore], nobody ever leaves SNCC. That's just how it is.

GI: Organizational lines seem much less well drawn by individuals who were on the ground during the height of the freedom movement than by people viewing these organizations from the outside. Can you comment on that?

CC: Well, here's is the deal: the more we were in a combat situation, the more that is true. There was a story that Bob Moses tells where he says he met this man in Mississippi and he says I'm part of SNCC, I'm part of CORE, I'm part of the NAACP, I'm part of SCLC, I'm part of anything that is going to change this environment for me. The other thing that is also important is when we started going into Mississippi they started talking about Communism, and that we were Communists. And I met this woman, and she said to me, "I'm sure glad you Communists are here to help us." People needed help. If you were in New York, then the distinctions between CORE and SCLC and so forth became much more pronounced.

But when you were in that situation when you were trying to deal with it, there were no big distinctions even with SCLC, even big James Orange, who was SCLC, and all those guys, they were part of doing things. There was a camaraderie that made it clear that these organizations that had these names didn't make any difference. Who was going to do the work made the difference. I think that's kind of why the experience is so different in a lot of places.

THE LEGACY OF JULIAN BOND

GI: Did you see Julian Bond becoming a national figure after his election to the Georgia legislature?

CC: If I were sitting in 1965, I am probably not sure. But Julian was not an unattractive person. Julian was not only was good looking, he also had a great voice. He was very personable, very

knowledgeable, as we talked about before. In that environment where Julian, now at 25, 26 – he now becomes part of this environment, on the Vietnam War, which is a big issue, on civil rights, which is a big issue – I think it is not a surprise that he became a national figure because he was at the center of the two big issues of the day, and he was articulate, he was good looking, and so therefore America brought him into national prominence.

GI: Did this new prominence and Julian Bond's rise as a national figure lead to any compromise of his commitment to either of these big issues?

CC: Not that I know. I mean Julian was Julian. The other thing about Julian was that he was a very easy person. He didn't have a lot of pretensions. There are a lot of people who have a lot of pretensions. He was not that. He would rather tell a story, sit and talk to you about something that was not all that political stuff, just very personal. He wanted to be a comedian. He loved a good joke. I mean he was very personal. To me it didn't change him as a person, in terms of the way he interacted with people.

GI: How would you summarize his contribution to the period of the civil rights movement from 1960-68?

CC: I think first and foremost, as I said earlier, that Julian was the *griot*. He was the person that embodied what SNCC the organization was about, and he was able to transmit that to everybody in all arenas. Second, he was at the center, actually he was the hub, I guess I would call it, that made the difference in communicating with the world the kind of danger that we faced in Mississippi, Alabama and southwest Georgia. He was essential to making sure that the country knew what was going on. And I guess, third, with *The Student Voice*, he was able to document and have the historical record of what was accomplished. Now, I don't think we appreciated it then. And it's interesting. Now, I appreciate what was done by Julian much more.

For us, I mean, I won't say for us, I'll say for me, it is a big difference when you're looking from the inside out than from the outside in. For me this was just my life and it wasn't a big deal in terms of that. I was always very much surprised and shocked when young history guys or young academics say, "Well, I just did my Ph.D. on something you did," and I would say to myself, "Why would you do something that stupid [laughter]?" I didn't understand. It wasn't a big deal that this was history-making. It was just something that we did. It was important, and we have more work to do. So, I was focused much more on the work than the history. I think Julian was able to focus both on the work and the history. And so therefore I appreciate much more today that he was able to focus on both as opposed to just focusing on the work.

JULIAN BOND AND GAY RIGHTS

GI: Were you surprised that Julian, when he was president of the NAACP from 1998-2010, often came out in favor of positions that were not always consistent with what the membership might have wanted, particularly gay rights?

CC: I would have been surprised if he didn't do it. And the Southern Poverty Law Center. For us, I mean you kind of have to realize that, again, people never left SNCC. SNCC is an idea and a sense

of the world and a sense of fairness and a sense that all of us should be included. We had people who were gay in 1960 who headed up you know projects in Mississippi. A person who was a big mentor to us was Bayard Rustin. So we really didn't care; it wasn't a big deal. Sometimes, I find sometimes when somebody says well, I'm gay and such and such, and I'll say to myself, "Well, why are you telling me that?" Really, it's like somebody telling me they're heterosexual. I don't really care. Some of the stuff that people make a big deal over, for us, it wasn't a big deal. A big deal is that we don't have one man, one vote. That's a big deal.

Going back to this discussion –and I tell young people all the time as I try to summarize some of this stuff – we did a lot of what was necessary, but we know it's not sufficient. And it's important for them to understand that, while the World War II generation set the stage for us to let us do certain kinds of things, we have set the stage for them.

But even the World War II generation, people set the stage for them. Julian and others like Julian are part of a continuum. From Julian's family and his upbringing, his father Horace Mann [Bond], his father's connection to Paul Robeson and all these people. They set the frame of reference for Julian early on. Meanwhile, people look at things as a one-off, where this or that happened while he was at the NAACP. No, Julian's position was established when he was a kid. My sense is just, looking from the inside out, Julian had no other course but to take that position. If you look from the outside in and don't see all that was his life, then you're surprised that he did it. But Julian taking that position had nothing to do with the NAACP and so forth.

The other thing is, back to the Vietnam discussion, when we took the statement, made that statement [from SNCC about Vietnam], and then King later made the statement in New York – [at] the Riverside [Baptist] Church – the reaction from the white establishment and some of the black leaders of these organizations was, "We have allowed you to speak on civil rights. You have no right to speak on any other topic." There was a mindset that, first of all, we didn't want you to speak on anything. But we've now allowed you to speak on civil rights, now you want to talk about Vietnam? You have no right [to do that]. Go back and talk about civil rights." We never had that perspective. I think Julian had never had that perspective. And his father never had that perspective. And DuBois never had that perspective, and Robeson never had that perspective. And when you look at Julian, you're looking at all those people. You may not see them, but they are inculcated in who he is. At the end of the day, Julian is part of a legacy that is not only Julian but part of the things that go back as far as his father and beyond that. That's the way I see Julian.