

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

Interview with Taylor Branch

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

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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. Mr. Branch reviewed the transcript for accuracy.

Biographical Note for Taylor Branch

A native of Atlanta, Taylor Branch (b. 1947) is the Pulitzer Prize winning author of the landmark narrative trilogy on the civil rights movement, *America in the King Years, 1954-1968* (*Parting the Waters* [1988], *Pillar of Fire* [1998], *At Canaan's Edge* [2006]). Mr. Branch began his writing career in 1970 as a staff journalist for *The Washington Monthly*, *Harper's*, and *Esquire*. After graduating from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1968, where he been active in civil rights and anti-Vietnam causes, Mr. Branch returned to Atlanta. There, he first met Julian Bond and worked closely with him to organize a challenge to the official delegation representing Georgia at the 1968 Democratic Convention. They maintained a personal relationship up until Mr. Bond's death in August 2015. Mr. Branch holds honorary doctoral degrees from ten colleges and universities. His professional honors include a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship (1991), the National Humanities Medal (1999), the Dayton Literary Peace Prize (2008) and selection to the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame (2015).

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**Taylor Branch Interview (05-JBOHP)
September 7th, 2018
Washington, D.C.**

**Lead Interviewer: Gregg Ivers
Videographer: Gracie Brett
Production Assistants: Lianna Bright, Audra Gale, Colleen Vivaldi**

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Taylor Branch [TB]

Today is Friday, September 7th, 2018 and we are on the campus of American University in Washington, D.C. with Taylor Branch, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of the landmark trilogy on the civil rights movement, *America in the King Years, 1954-1968*, to conduct an oral history interview for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, sponsored in part by the American University School of Public Affairs. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am a Professor of Government and the Director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project. I am joined today by two undergraduate American university students, Audra Gale and Gracie Brett, who are assisting with the recording of this interview. We will have a chance to hear Mr. Branch talk from a personal vantage point about Julian Bond's emergence as a national figure and his contribution to the civil rights movement as well as his lasting legacy. Taylor, thank you so much for coming out of your way to stop here this afternoon and speak with us. We really do appreciate it.

TB: Thank you, Gregg.

WITNESSING THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

GI: My pleasure. I'd like to begin by having you tell us how you developed your interest in the Southern freedom movement.

TB: Well, I developed an interest in the movement gradually over the course of many years and I don't think that it would have happened but for the fact that the movement lasted a very long time and wore me down through my entire formative years. I was not born to be interested in politics, let alone black and white politics. I grew up in Atlanta. I wanted to be a doctor. My father taught that people who are interested in politics couldn't find honest work. So we were decidedly apolitical. But it so happened that I started first grade in the year [1954] of the *Brown [v. Board of Education]* decision. I skipped a grade and it turned out that I graduated from college the spring that Dr. King was killed. All during my childhood the movement was relentless. And as I was

growing up I saw how people reacted to it. And it attracted fear, constant fear, but also inquisitiveness about how adults were behaving because adult white Atlanta behaved as though they had this all under control. It excited my sarcasm and my skepticism. Everything. So, the short answer is that the civil rights movement converted me over the course of a long time.

I remember telling my mother, I think it was in 1963, that this had been going on for as long as I could remember. I remember the Atlanta Temple bombing.¹ I remember the photographs of the early sit-ins, seeing the Klan downtown. Ironically, the first time I ever saw Klansmen in person was in College Park, Maryland in 1966 when I was in college. But I saw the pictures and I wouldn't go downtown. It was scary, so it made you think about how deep those issues went. Everything was framed in terms of religion. You would hear Dr. King's sermons. I knew he was there in town. I knew he made all of the – what we called in Atlanta, “the power structure,” the only city in America where they refer to themselves openly as “we in the power structure” – uncomfortable. They were rattled by Dr. King and when he got the Nobel Prize [in 1964] they had a conniption about how they should honor him without ruining all their businesses.

So anyway, over the course of this I told my mother that this was really serious and that it went to a lot of deep issues and that I was kind of ashamed at being frightened of it because it was scary. And that when I got really old, like thirty, I was going to do something about this and it seemed cruelly that, within a week, on the TV and into the newspapers came the pictures of the little girls, mostly girls, marching in Birmingham in May of '63. I spent four chapters in *Parting the Waters* writing about the development of those children's marches because I do think that it was a pivotal event.² I was just stunned. I said, “Why aren't these girls waiting? You know, they're singing songs that we sing in Sunday school and they're marching right through these firehoses.” Now, I'm saying I need to be thirty. I do think events like that kind of captured my interest against my will. By the time I got to college, the civil rights movement was cresting, and the Vietnam anti-war movement was coming on. In my sophomore year I dropped my premed courses and started looking for courses that would explain where this came from. I wanted to know where it came from and I wanted to know what motivated these girls so that they could move and have an effect on me. And so I started studying those things.

I think the first political idea I ever had was that I told some people in the antiwar movement, which was overwhelmingly white and campus based, that we were copying the civil rights movement in a dangerous way, kind of like Pat Boone would copy Little Richard songs. We were covering it. We got the idea that young people could be important, which was a new idea. You know, the civil rights movement pioneered that you could have large numbers of young people, down to these eight year-olds in Birmingham. The anti-war movement on campus basically got the idea that you should have lots of meetings and have a press conference to list your demands

¹. In October 1958, The Temple, the largest Reform Jewish congregation in Atlanta, was bombed, in large part due to the outspoken support of Rabbi Jacob Rothschild for racial reconciliation and his condemnation of violence and resistance to school desegregation in other parts of the South. Rothschild was not deterred by the bombing. In years forward, he openly supported Martin Luther King, Jr. and worked with local officials to encourage peaceful desegregation of schools and public accommodations. In 1964, he would co-chair a gala dinner honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

². *Parting the Waters* (1988) is the first of the three volumes of the *America in the King Years, 1965-1968* trilogy, for which Mr. Branch won the Pulitzer Prize.

and then raise hell. That's about as far as we got. We were in danger of prolonging the war by being undisciplined in our protests. So I don't know where the civil rights movement came from, but I think it was more complex than that. That's how I got interested in it. It became an obsession in a way. I wanted to know where it came from. All the books I read were too analytical. I wanted a storytelling narrative to help me feel where it came from all the points of view of the people you, from FBI agents to the demonstrators themselves.

GROWING UP IN SEGREGATED ATLANTA

GI: Could you talk a bit about how racial segregation affected how you, growing up in Atlanta, viewed the world and the world presented itself to you?

TB: It was very difficult. It was a segregated world. I don't really remember seeing any white and colored signs when I was growing up because our whole world was organized so that we wouldn't. Of course, that's still true today. Where we live is determined largely by race, who we interact with. The interactions across racial lines are intentional and relatively rare. You have to go out of your way for them. The pattern of our cities, where we live, who we have dinner with, who we marry, and everything is driven by race and so are our politics. My dad was in the dry cleaning business. I had a strange upbringing because we were kind of working class. He had several laundries. I started working in the laundry when I was five years old. But then I got recruited off a Little League field to go to Westminster, which is this fancy school there in Atlanta. They said they didn't have athletic scholarships, but I assure you that . . . I mean, the head of the history department came to the Little League field to get me to come there. So I went there with the sons and daughters of the Atlanta elite.

I knew that none of my friends at Westminster had any contact with any black people at all, except maybe the maids in their house. But all of my Dad's employees were black, and I lived and worked with them. He would take me to funerals. When the [civil rights] movement started, one way for me to feel segregation in a way was to talk [to my father's employees]. I couldn't talk to them [about the movement]. If I talked to them about protest they wouldn't acknowledge it. It would be scary to them.

GI: They were afraid to talk to you?

TB: They were afraid to talk to me about that, but they weren't afraid to all but spank me and tell me what to do. They would scold me, they would tell me what to do, they would show me how to iron a shirt, they would show me how to do all this. I saw that my dad joked with them. We went to Atlanta Crackers games with some of them. That was the name of our baseball team, believe it or not. And then they would have to go sit in the colored section. In my whole life, in my early life, that was the only time I really felt, personally, the color line, is when we would go down to Ponce de Leon ballpark and we'd have to split up to go to the game. To this day, I can remember probably thirty of my dad's employees and I knew them. But as I got older, like when I got in high school, I began to realize I knew what songs they sang, I'd been to their churches, but I'd never been in their homes. I didn't know much about their lives. That there were these veiled curtains and I think that's to a large degree the way we still are.

GI: Were any of the major civil rights events of the 1950s such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Little Rock, discussed in your home growing up?

TB: I don't remember it. You know, I was 10 years old. My mom was kind of a "UN Liberal." She's proud of the letters that she had written to Coretta [Scott King]. But I don't really think that distinguished me from a lot of people, even with the Westminster kids. We were all taught to be polite and not to use racial epithets and that sort of thing. That was terrible. And that was something only that tobacco chewing sheriffs did. But we were taught to leave that alone. Those issues were not issues that concerned us, so it was it was an issue of distance, really. I don't really remember the start of the sit-ins. I was in the ninth grade. I mean, I knew the Freedom Rides were going on, but I don't remember anything particular. I have vague memories of all these things, but I wasn't political. The first one that really pierced me were those pictures of the children in Birmingham in May of '63. I'm 16 years old. I could finally drive a car and go out in the world, so I could have driven across town if I wanted to, but I didn't know where to go. So I didn't. But I was profoundly affected by the picture of those kids.

MEETING JULIAN BOND

GI: Do you have any recollection of the controversy over the Georgia legislature refusing to seat Julian Bond in 1966 after he made a public statement supporting SNCC's position on the Vietnam War?

TB: All I can remember from pure memory, as opposed to reliving it with him, was he was very proud of being friends with [James] "Sloppy" Floyd and all these guys in the Georgia legislature.³ I remember the Supreme Court case, that it was an embarrassment that our legislature was throwing him out and pretending that it was only because of Vietnam, which would be bad enough to say we can't have somebody that disagrees with us about a war. But it was also racial, and that was obvious. It was all bound up. It was around the time or just before Lester Maddox, the year before Lester Maddox. I was in college then and I remember it. It was interesting because by the time I got to college I was out of Atlanta. I was in Chapel Hill most of the year and the world was shifting from civil rights already to Vietnam. Some of the civil rights protesters were already doing anti-Vietnam protests so I don't really remember. I certainly knew who Julian was very well. By the time '68 came – that's my senior year in college – I went looking for him. That was my job. I don't know how I found him. But I found him and went looking for him.

GI: Why did you go looking for Julian Bond?

TB: I had been involved in my senior year with the [Eugene] McCarthy campaign because of Vietnam. We were looking for somebody to run against Johnson to end the war. I went out to Kentucky for McCarthy. I went to Indiana, and I met some of the student leaders, Sam Brown, David Mixner, David Hawk of the Vietnam Moratorium Committee. They were just a couple of years older than I was and they sent me out. I met people in the McCarthy campaign. They

³. James H. "Sloppy" Floyd served in the Georgia House of Representatives from 1953 until his death in 1974 from a heart attack. He led the effort to deny Julian bond his seat in the legislature after his election in 1965.

were the first ones who told me we should mount a challenge in Georgia. I talked about that with them.

WORKING FOR EUGENE MCCARTHY IN 1968

TB: When I went to Indianapolis I had a semi-famous incident. I was canvassing for Gene McCarthy. I was flying home from Indianapolis after McCarthy lost to Bobby Kennedy in the first head to head race on May 7th, 1968. I was flying home for my draft physical because I'd been drafted. And it was full of drama, as only people who lived through that era know. I was engaged, and I had told my parents and my future wife's parents that if I passed the physical that I was not going to go. I wasn't going to go be a medic and I wasn't going to Canada. I was going to refuse induction. But I didn't expect to pass the physical because I'd had a terrible automobile accident and had a large part of my right hip taken out. In any sane year they wouldn't even have looked at me, but this was right after the Tet Offensive and the word was that they were drafting anybody who can stand up.

I'm sitting in the airport in Indianapolis dejected because McCarthy's lost to Kennedy and that I missed my flight. I've got to get an early morning flight, and I don't have any money for a hotel so I'm sitting on my suitcase all night. Somebody tapped me on the shoulder and I turn around and it was Bobby Kennedy, who I had just been seeing on TV all day. He saw that I had a McCarthy staff badge on and said, "Excuse me, would you have breakfast with me?" It was like midnight. Anyway, I said, "Sure." I was dazzled. Somehow the breakfast place was a Dobbs House in the Indianapolis Airport and it opened up.

We went there and, I kid you not, at 4.30 the next morning we were still arguing about Kennedy's name and why he didn't get in earlier. He wanted to know why he was getting the C students [and] the frat boys and McCarthy is getting the A students, and why don't those students realize that he would be a terrible president? And he was closer than you are, and we were just like this, going back and forth all night. I was utterly dazzled by it. There was a student from Pembroke, a female student, that I've never been able to find.⁴ We were so dazzled together. We held out for McCarthy, but we were mightily impressed with Kennedy. I've never had an experience like that with anybody in politics that was so raw. He would just say, "I can't help what my name is. All I can help is what I can do with it. And, yes, [referring to Kennedy] I was for the Vietnam War and I think people who were for it understand how hard it is to change and how having a leg up on persuading people who are still for the war."

Anyway, we went back and forth and when it was all over, she and I sat and rehashed everything on a legal pad and went over and told Kennedy how much we admired him and what an amazing experience it was. It shows what a different world it was. He told us that he was staying in the motel across the way because he was flying out the next morning, too. We walked over and slid

⁴. A *New Yorker* article published in June 2019, nine months after this interview, actually tracked down Mr. Branch's co-campaign worker on that trip. David Margolick, "The Campaign Worker Whose Brilliance Haunted Bobby Kennedy," *The New Yorker*, June 6th, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-campaign-volunteer-whose-brilliance-haunted-robert-f-kennedy>.

our manifesto that basically rehashed everything we talked about for hours under the door of his room. That's what the security was like. No wonder he was killed a month later.

This is May of '68, a month after Dr. King was killed. I, of course, have vivid memories of that, and a month before Kennedy himself was killed. And I did flunk my draft physical, so I did go ahead and get married, then, almost instantly. I taught that summer at Westminster in the summer school. And that's when I had all these contacts from the McCarthy people. They said, "Can we do something in Georgia?" The only way to do it is to get a coalition of the other campaigns. There was the Humphrey campaign. I think McGovern was just beginning to start. "Can we find people can we find a coalition of people who would know how to mount a challenge?" Our model was what the Mississippi Freedom Democrats had done in 1964, and by that time I was very interested in that. So, it was those people from the presidential campaigns who said we need a spokesperson of color to be a leader for this group, and you guys go find him. So Parker – and I don't know whether I did it by myself or whether I did it with Parker – we did a lot of stuff together.

GI: Who is Parker?

TB: Parker Hudson. He was somebody I didn't know very well. We went to [the University of] North Carolina together. He was a year behind me in high school at Westminster, so I didn't know him at all. And he was not a football player or a jock. I didn't know he was younger, but he went to North Carolina and graduated in three years. He was very smart. He won a Marshall Fellowship [to attend] the London School of Economics. We were leaving at the same time in '68 and when I got to Atlanta – I don't know how he got interested in it; you'll have to ask him – but the two of us became like the Bobbsey Twins. We would go all around. We met Ben Brown, we met John Lewis. And Julian.

Some of them were divided in their presidential sympathies for that year. Some were already for, like John, Bobby Kennedy. But then Bobby Kennedy was killed, so he was at a loss. But the idea of having a challenge against Lester Maddox, people have a hard time remembering how undemocratic it was. He appointed all the delegates. And, if I'm not mistaken, all but two or three were men. And they were all white. And they were all for the Vietnam War. [Vladimir] Putin couldn't have been more autocratic than Lester Maddox was. So everybody, even Humphrey, who was considered to be the most conservative of the Democratic contenders – Johnson's vice president, because he wouldn't openly denounce the Vietnam War – even Humphrey's people did not want to be on the wrong side of a challenge against Lester Maddox. And there were the people from the labor unions.

Anyway, we went and asked Julian, "Will you lead this? Here's our plan. We need to have a convention that's modeled on the convention that they had in Jackson with Ella Baker speaking in '64. [We need] to draw people from all over the state to have an election and go through and elect delegates and make it black and white, although it's going to be predominantly black. And then go up there and challenge." He eventually said yes.

So then then it was a question of frantic work on weekends and playing hooky from my teaching job. The job that Julian gave me was to go around the state of Georgia to speak in black churches

and recruit people to come to our convention in Macon. We had this big convention in Macon in early August of '68. People came from all over Georgia. It was like a [regular] convention. What you would see at this convention was, you would see spokespeople from the various campaigns and activists. A lot of civil rights activists were there. Because Parker and I had done so much of the leg work – we were basically the chief "gofers" for this thing. There were five or six hundred people at this convention, at a minimum, in this hotel when we elected these delegates.

Most of them were poor, and I had had these eye-opening experiences driving around Georgia going into black churches appealing to people to come to this convention. Why come to this convention? What does it mean? What's our motto? What did they do in 1964 with Fannie Lou Hamer and how we were planning to do that for Georgia. Why our cause was right, and why the supporters of several different presidential candidates. While they had their differences over which person they wanted to nominate for president, they all wanted to cooperate in this challenge delegation. Charlie Nagarro was the main organizer of all this, from the McCarthy campaign.

GI: So you make this conscious effort to go find Julian Bond and you do.

TB: And we met in hotels. I don't know if it was the first meeting or not, but I remember a long meeting when he brought Ben Brown, who had been elected to the Georgia Senate, I think.⁵ He brought John [Lewis]. So it was Julian and Ben Brown and John Lewis and Parker and myself and maybe [labor organizer] Charlie Nagarro was there. I mean, we had a lot of them once they got committed. But early on when we were trying. Are you on board? Does it matter that you're supporting different presidential candidates? Is it a waste of your time if you're in the Georgia legislature or not? What will your role be? We had a lot of these meetings and that's when Julian and I became acquainted.

JULIAN BOND AND THE 1968 DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

GI: Can you talk about the beginning of your personal and professional relationship with Julian Bond?

TB: I was star struck by him. I'm 21 and I just graduated from college. He's already had two cases go to the [United States] Supreme Court. So, I was working for him. I was doing a lot of the leg work. It was wonderfully fulfilling for me because when you're trying to do something for which there is no model and there is no law, you're inventing. What do we need to do now? Where are we going to get the money? What do we need to do next? Who do we need? Now that we've elected this challenge delegation we are saying that it's a challenge delegation but how do we present our case in Chicago? We had to find some lawyers. We had to find expertise. We had to find grown-up. Julian was kind of a grown-up but even he was he was only twenty-eight -- to present a case to the Democratic convention.

⁵. Ben Brown was among the student leaders of the Atlanta student movement than began in the spring of 1960, shortly after the February 1st sit-in by the North Carolina A&T students in Greensboro, N.C. He later went on to serve in the Georgia House of Representatives (1966, 1969-77), resigning before his final term to take a position at the Democratic National Committee after the election of former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter to the presidency in 1976.

We had a list of delegates that we had elected in Macon. Then we got together and then it expanded. You had these lawyers and people from the AFL-CIO. Who's going to go to Chicago to present this case? Because we assumed that the odds were overwhelmingly negative that we would not be seated. Our model was like Mississippi [in 1964] in that we wouldn't be seated in '68 but that we might be seated in '72 if we presented a good case about how anti-democratic, non-democratic, the Georgia procedures were. So the shock troops went up to Chicago. I don't know how we paid our way [laughs]. But that was just Parker and myself and Julian and the lawyers and Al Kehrer from the AFL-CIO. Ben Brown didn't go. John Lewis didn't go.

By that time, by the way, I worked for John Lewis at the Voter Education Project the next summer, the summer of '69, and that grew out of all of this. So anyway, it was a very small group that went to went to Chicago. I went with Julian and that's when we started to become close because he was kind of our spokesperson. We were always moving around. He was already giving press interviews. And I did everything. I joked, and he remembered this, that I ironed his shirts and that sort of thing. He was very busy, and he assigned me to talk to his wife, Alice, back in Atlanta. He told me that I needed to know what the top songs were on the R&B charts [laughs] to talk to her to keep her entertained. I did that. And then we went through all of these hearings and I showed you that photograph. I had never seen it before of us. We were strategizing. What are the best arguments? Who's on the committee? What are they asking us?

And then much to our surprise, they split the delegation and awarded us [seats]. They basically said, "We're seating both delegations." Lester Maddox and his delegation and the challenge delegation. We called ourselves the Georgia Loyal Democrats, but we were the challenge delegates. We were trying to say we were loyal because the Lester Maddox people were going to vote for George Wallace. They weren't even going to support the nominee of the Democratic Party. So, when we got seated, it rang a big alarm: How are we going to get sixty-five delegates – I'm not sure of the exact number – mostly poor, who are back in Georgia and had no expectation that they had done anything except have a weekend adventure in Macon because we didn't think we were going to get seated. Now, all of a sudden, they're seated. The convention starts next week. And how are we going to get them up here? And where are they going to stay and where are we going to raise the money?

That's when I was frantic. I went around, I bet, to twenty-five hotels in Chicago and they were all booked up. They'd been booked up forever. I finally got so desperate because Julian would say to me, "You're in charge of logistics. Find the money and fly the people up here. I've got to I've got interviews to do." He's very droll like that. He assumed that I could do anything. I finally went back to him and said, "We're not going to get a hotel even if we can find the money to get the airplane tickets. I've made the airplane reservations, made a down payment. We were trying to get people up here, but we don't have a place for them to stay." And so he said he was going to go see Elijah Muhammad, head of the Nation of Islam. I did not get to go because Elijah Muhammad would not have white people in his house. Julian says that they didn't even take me over there.

My memory is that I went and kind of sat on the outside. I know I didn't go in. He's right about that. I didn't go in. He was gone for a long time. He came back with a big stash of cash from the Nation of Islam to help fly these people up there. So now we could pay for the airplane

reservations. The next morning, he a big, burly black guy comes over and Julian told him that I was the logistics man. And he said, "What hotels have you gone to?" I had this long list. And he said, "Let's go to the Del Prado," and I said they're going to laugh at us because I told them we went there. He walks up with me and says we need thirty-five or forty rooms – I forget what it was – for the whole convention. And the guy says, "Let me get my manager." Walter! I remember his name now. He was Elijah Muhammad's "fixer."

I didn't get to go into Elijah Muhammad's house. Julian described all of that. At the dinner, the women sat over here and the men sat over there. They said, "Why should we help this boy?" Because Elijah Mohammad taught that they shouldn't be involved in politics. Why should we help this man, because American politics are corrupt? We teach our people to be out of it. I think he said the men were against it and the women were for it. Elijah Muhammad said, "Only one vote counts and I'm going to help this young boy even if he doesn't know what he's doing," or something like that. But anyway, he helped him.

Walter Turner shows up, and we went to the Del Prado hotel. He disappeared into the back room and this guy that I hadn't seen before wearing a coat and tie comes out about five minutes later and said, "Well, I think we found you forty rooms or however many . . . [laughs]." You could have knocked me over with a feather. I do remember Julian and I after that we went out on the town with him a couple of nights between the hearings and when the convention started. When you walk into a nightclub with Walter Turner, it was like the Red Sea parted because he had this huge wad of money. I mean it was like a gangster thing. Everybody just would quake around him. But anyway, he got us these rooms. Then the convention started. I was with Julian the whole time. We would walk together. He got nominated for vice president. That was an important moment in Julian's life. We would talk about it later.

GI: So this was a tremendous moment for Julian. Can you talk about that?

TB: A big moment. The convention was chaotic. It's really only remembered in history for the violence that broke out late in the convention. Early in the convention we were trying desperately to have a plank against the Vietnam War and a stronger plank on civil rights. There was a lot of contention going on. One vehicle for saying that the convention was being too scripted by Humphrey's people and Lyndon Johnson not to make a break with what Johnson had been doing, even though this was that pivotal year of '68, was that they wanted to nominate Julian for vice-president as a symbol of change and youth.

We're still challenging Humphrey and hoping we can break through and somehow shatter his delegates and get them to switch. There were demonstrations on the floor. Most of Lester Maddox's delegates left by the way. They refused to sit with us because we were integrated. So, we basically had all the seats that were on the floor and we were running around letting other people in and swapping our badges. We had badges to get on the floor.

One of the plans was to nominate Julian for vice-president. I think it was an important moment for Julian, not just because it was an honor, but because it was a national audience for his natural gifts. I was standing next to him for a lot of these interviews and he took it as kind of a joke, but it was very serious. He was a militant civil rights leader who didn't take himself too seriously. He

could joke. He had this mild voice and he would laugh and that sort of thing. People would say you're too young and he said, "Well, I guess they'll have to change the Constitution if they really want me but I'm flattered to be here." He just took it with such grace that I think he won over lots and lots of people who said, "Well, maybe he can't be vice president but that's somebody we are going to need to get to know."

From the standpoint of a national audience, I think a lot of people who may have remembered that there was a story about a Supreme Court case over whether he should [be seated in the Georgia legislature]. Nobody cared about the Georgia legislature. Again, this is before all of the violence [that] broke out towards the end of the convention and it really didn't involve us very much. We're inside the convention. There was one night after the vice-presidential thing but once Julian was nominated for vice president he's getting interviewed anyway. He became kind of a go-to person for the press. So, he got to comment on things. And whenever he got to comment he would. It would give him a chance to [show] his mixture of wisdom and humor.

When the violence broke out the only thing I remember, and I was with Julian, we had a march of delegates by candlelight all the way from the amphitheater down to Grant Park, which was where most of the violence was. We would go into the . . . the Palmer House, where the presidential candidates were staying. A lot of the violence was around there. I saw somebody get thrown through a plate glass window. There was tear gas down there. But we were marching with candles and we were all in suits. So, we were separated. We weren't out in the violence. But some of the people who were delegates got beaten up and all of us got tear-gassed.

Julian did not like violence. I mean, that's one of the things he would say right from the beginning. He would say, "I did one demonstration in 1960 and I didn't want to go to jail anymore. I don't want to get beaten up anymore. But I would support the people who were." That was his upfront persona. He would say that to John Lewis, he would say that to anybody in the movement. "My expertise is running the communications. I'm a poet. I'm a spokesperson. I'm in the legislature." So anyway, that's about all I remember about the convention.

MASTERING THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

GI: To what would you attribute Julian Bond's ability to say some pretty radical things, but not come across in a way that was the least bit threatening, especially to whites who were still unsure of what the civil rights movement was all about?

TB: Well, part of that was his voice. He had a very mellow voice and it was soothing. He would often speak with a little hint of a smile, even when he was not making a joke. I think those things were effective in the way he communicated. But he was spontaneously eloquent. Very early on, I was, as I said, star struck. I would ask him about his association with Dr. King. I think it was very early that he told me that he had written some poem about Dr. King on the basis of his interaction with him something like . . .

GI and TB: [laughing, together] "Look at that girl shake that thing/We can't all be Martin Luther King."

TB: He said, "That's how I knew Dr. King." He could be disarming. Now, his favorite speech then – he was developing his stock speech – was "The Fire Next Time." You know, "God gave Noah the rainbow sign/No more water the fire next time," so it was like, if white America doesn't shape up there's going to be fire next time. So he gave kind of blistering speech, but he would give it in such a way that he was constantly in demand for white audiences. But I didn't go on many of those speeches.

THE INFLUENCE OF JULIAN BOND'S FAMILY BACKGROUND

GI: What influence do you think Julian Bond's family background had on his evolution from an Atlanta student activist and SNCC communications director to a national figure?

TB: Well, I don't know too much about his work with SNCC. I know what it was and I know what he was doing. But I spent more time interviewing Bob Moses and people like that [for his *American in the King Years* series], out-in-the-field organizers. He's in the [Atlanta] office. Most of the people that I interviewed said – and it makes sense if you know Julian – was that he had kind of a natural educated bearing. Oh, I remember that one of the first things he told me was that [laughs] when I drove around Georgia to try to recruit people to come to the Macon convention and go to black churches. I was stunned because I had just met Julian and he was on big [RC Cola] ads. Big circles. [RC Cola] ads nailed to the side of a barn, smiling. He was very handsome. Julian Bond was Harry Belafonte handsome. He told me that he got to do those things because he was so light skinned, that they wanted to have light skinned people, light skinned black people, to market [soda] to black people.

He said at Morehouse that he could go – he said we have a problem of colorism within the black community – and that he could go to parties that he called paper bag parties at Morehouse where they would have a [paper] grocery bag nailed to the door. If you were darker than the color of an ordinary grocery bag, you couldn't get in. And he said I was always able to get in anywhere because of my light skin. He would make fun of himself. But he wouldn't make fun of his education. I learned very early, he told me his father was a college president and the son of a college president, that education was really important.

It was only later when we got to be closer personally that he told me how much it hurt his father and his mother that he dropped out of school. They wanted him to be a professor and an educator just like his heritage. And he talked about being literally baptized into the "Talented Tenth" by W.E.B DuBois in a ceremony in their home. This is like, you're being baptized into the "Talented Tenth" black elite. You're light enough to go on the [soda] ads and you're educated enough to be a leader of your people, and the best way to lead them is through education. His family was disappointed [that he dropped out].⁶

Years later, in 1994, Julian and I drove from Atlanta to Jackson for the 30th anniversary of Freedom Summer with Pam [Horowitz, Julian's second wife]. We took Julia, his mother. In the car, I'll never forget Julia saying that she wished that her husband had lived long enough to see Julian as a university professor like he always should have been. To them, it was, however famous he could get as a civil rights leader, it was a detour from what he was meant to do, which

⁶. Julian Bond eventually returned to Morehouse and completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1971.

was to teach in school.

JULIAN BOND AS AN ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

GI: How important do you think his education was in informing his later positions on everything from gay rights to women's rights to other causes?

TB: I think a lot of it was his education, you're right. But gay rights were not a big issue to his family or most Americans [at that time]. Most Americans telescope our memory of gay rights. I mean, thirty years ago, marriage equality was not in the imagination of the most radical person there. So, things have moved really rapidly. But there were gay people in SNCC. There was Bayard Rustin, who was all around.

I knew Bayard fairly well. Bayard was kind of closeted even to the very end of his life. Everybody thinks that he was out his whole life. It was a very powerful, constraining and nasty force. I would have been surprised if Julian hadn't said this is wrong and been sympathetic and protective of people who were gay. But he was also funny about it.

We got honorary degrees [in 1999] at Dillard University the same year. Julian and I and John Lewis – the three of us. What I remember is that I had interviewed the president of Dillard for *Parting the Waters*. He called me and said that one of the reasons he wanted to do this was to try to heal the breach between John and Julian from the 1986 election, which was real. That was a brutal, nasty personal campaign. There were elements of class and education and personal failure and drugs and everything else in it. The president of Dillard wanted to know if I could try to be a mediator between the two of them. So we went down there and we went out to a restaurant together . . . have you heard this story?

GI: I have, but the people watching this have not.

TB: We were at Lucky Cheng's. I didn't know anything about Lucky Cheng's. And I think Julian and Pam cooked this up to get John because John is very, very conservative and proper. Julian and Pam are cosmopolitan and comfortable in all kinds of settings. And so we went there. But I do think this was really instrumental in helping to heal the breach between the two of them. I don't think the word transvestite is proper anymore. But in those days all the waiters at Lucky Cheng's were transvestites. Our waiter was clearly a man in a dress and high heels and stockings and flamboyant makeup. The waiter came and plopped down in John Lewis's lap at our table. I think the waiter had an instinct for who the most squeamish person was and picked on him that way. And John, to his credit – I mean, he was uncomfortable – talked to him and asked questions and everything.

When the waiter left John scolded Julian, well, actually all of us, and said, "Whose idea was this?" But it really kind of broke the ice. I know – and I'm pretty sure Pam and Julian and I talked about

it afterwards – we admired the way John handled it because it's not something that he would have sought out to do. By this time, I guess, he's been in Congress for a long time and he was more accustomed to dealing with odd situations. So, yeah, that was Lucky Cheng's. But see that was easy for Julian. He loved things like that.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JULIAN BOND

GI: How did your relationship with Julian changed over the years?

TB: I had a big gap in my relationship with Julian. After Chicago in '68, I went to graduate school. I didn't get to see him very much, except when we were in Atlanta. But I did work for John Lewis and the VEP [Voter Education Project] in the summer of '69. When I was in Atlanta, I would go see Julian and I saw him into the '70s. But then he's in Atlanta and I'm in Washington, [D.C]. I didn't get to see him very much.

GI: Is this when you began working for Charles Peters and the Washington Monthly?

TB: Yeah, at the *Washington Monthly*, then at *Harper's*. I'm all over the place, writing, trying to be a freelance writer. It was very difficult. I saw him when I started I started the King work in 1982. In the 70s, I didn't see a lot of him. He was in the state senate. He was busy in Atlanta and I would only run across him occasionally. When *Parting the Waters* came out, I got invited to do a lot of speaking engagements. I was at the Schomburg [Center for Research in Black Culture] in New York at a speaking engagement. I had seen Julian a little bit and met Pam. But we hadn't really renewed our acquaintance because we'd been apart in many ways for a good bit. I remembered Alice and the strains in his marriage from that. I had done all these interviews for *Parting the Waters* on the relations between men and women, black men and white women, and white men and black women, that sort of thing.

I interviewed an awful lot of women, black women, who said that the relationship between the genders were totally different across the racial lines, that for black women the odds were so much against them if you're an educated black woman to find a comparably educated black man. That it'd been a constant for virtually the entire twentieth century that black families invested scarce educational resource in women and not in the men. That three quarters of the women of [black] college graduates were females and not males.

And sure enough, when I went to interview Professor Sam Cook, at Dillard [former president of] years before we got the honorary degree he had his class roster there and it was seventy percent female. He said it's always been seventy percent female. I talked at the Schomburg about the hidden sociology of the relationship between women and we talked lightly about whether there was flirting and interracial affairs during Freedom Summer and all that business. But it was a profoundly serious subject. A lot of black women told me that their personality was, "I don't need a man. I'm on my own. If I do have children, I'm probably going to have to raise them by myself."

They said there was this sense of strong independence in black women that was really undercut if they ever found somebody like Julian or somebody that was eligible. There was a streak of

desperation. Underneath all of that, if a white woman came and waltzed away with a Harry Belafonte or a Julian Bond, as was common, they felt an impulse of rage against them because they didn't feel that the white women had any sense of what the acculturation was for black women in the marriage market, basically. I gave this little talk, which was totally out of my depth. But they were asking me things about the personal side of the movement. And I said, "Julian Bond has just married a white woman and I guarantee you that there are a lot of black women in Atlanta that are upset about that and I don't really know what Julian thinks about it or whether he cares."

I shouldn't have said that. I was just trying to talk, saying this is a really interesting subject that nobody talks about. White society is so hard on black men. That they're so disadvantaged. You look at the ones that are in prison and the ones who died, the ones that are uneducated. The fact that white society has cut off a lot of other professions that would be open to educated black men. Over time, meaning many generations, this has an effect on culture, not just on politics. Joanne Grant was at this talk.⁷ She called Julian within five minutes of walking out of there, saying that this guy was talking about his marriage and who he married and the fact that he married a white woman and how significant this was and so forth.

I got a call from Julian out of the blue. He said, "You shouldn't be discussing my personal affairs." I said, "Well, Julian, I was talking about what I had learned in the larger issues of sociology and the relationship between men and women across the racial divide. I'm sorry that I mentioned you." Anyway, we had a long conversation about it, and the irony is that across the divide that re-connected us.

This is like thirty years ago. Our relationship started fifty years ago. We had an intermittent relationship for a long time because we were separated and we were in different careers. And then, of course, after '86 he moved up to Washington, so it was much easier to get together. By way of apologizing for mentioning him at the Schomburg [laughs], and getting off into sociology, Pam and Julian and Christie [Mr. Branch's wife] and I started seeing each other a lot and even going on trips together. We went to the Freedom Summer reunion twice. I think I told you about one in 1994, the 30th anniversary, when his mother, Julia, went with us, and was wonderful just to be around. If you're around Julia Bond, you could see where Julian came from. Just such a sense of dignity. A beautiful command of the language. An immense pride in him but saying that she wished that her husband had lived long enough to see Julian to be a professor like he was supposed to have been all along. That was really great.

Then, in 2014, just a year before Julian died, we went back for the 50th anniversary together and spent some time with them. By then, all my books were out. I spent a lot of time with Bob Moses. Julian usually found the odd things like [Lucky Cheng's], but I found one down in Mississippi because we were driving around in Jackson and I found this restaurant. I was looking for an odd restaurant, and it was closed. I talked my way in there. I forget the reason. All I remember about it was that I insisted on driving Julian and Pam and Christie all across town to this restaurant even when it was closed. I knocked on the door and got them to let us in so that I could take Pam,

⁷. Joanne Grant (1930-2005) was a prominent African American journalist and political activist. She is author of a book and about the civil rights activist, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound*.

take all three of them into the men's restroom [laughs], because it was the Elvis Presley men's restroom.

GI: [Shows Mr. Branch a picture of Julian and Pam in the Elvis Presley men's restroom]

TB: Yes, that's it! Where'd you get that [laughs]? I must've taken that picture. I was the instigator because I found that, and I thought it was so neat that they had handlebars over the urinals so that the urinals were like a motorcycle. There were quotes all around the bathroom. It was painted in all these exotic colors. Everybody gave a quote about Elvis, Albert Einstein and Lady Gaga, Bob Dylan, everybody gave a quote about Elvis and it was all around the room. Pam and Christie, I mean, they were excited to be in a men's restroom. They asked, "Are all the men's restrooms like this?" and I said, "No, they're not." But it was a riot. So that was 2014, just the year before he died. But Julian loved that. He liked things that were off-beat, that would make you think a little bit, and that were funny.

JULIAN BOND'S RELATIONSHIP WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

GI: Can you talk a little bit about Julian's relationship with Dr. King and some of the other more senior members the civil rights leadership during the 1960s?

TB: He was always very droll about Dr. King. He was not snide. It was fashionable to call him "de Lawd" and to be cynical. There were an awful lot of people in SNCC who would elevate themselves by treating King as a pupil who was learning or as somebody who was frightened. Julian never did that. But he was very droll about how he was intimidated by Dr. King. He never said anything that was other than admiring of him. He wasn't in the hardcore radical [wing of SNCC].

JULIAN BOND'S OPINION OF THE KENNEDY AND JOHNSON ADMINISTRATIONS

GI: What did Julian Bond think of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations?

TB: He was very tough on the Kennedys, though. He just thought the Kennedys got far too much credit for civil rights relative to what they did, particularly President Kennedy. But the fact of the matter is that civil rights was moribund in the water when Kennedy was killed, and that his death gave it a bigger impetus. He was pushed into everything he did. On the other hand, I thought, I thought that Julian was in the mainstream of being critical about the Kennedys.

I thought he was out of the mainstream, and I sympathize with him, because the more I studied it, the more I agreed with him. He was more sympathetic with [President Lyndon] Johnson than most people. Not on the Vietnam War, but on civil rights. It was fashionable to say that Johnson was a big cracker and he only did what he had to do. I don't think Julian felt that at all. And at the time, where it came out for me the most was his description of going to the opening of the Johnson Library. Julian went to the Johnson Library, and said it was the only time that he had ever been physically in Johnson's presence. He didn't go to any of those meetings [with Johnson during the 1960s]. And Johnson was an old man. It wasn't long before he died. It was in '72 or '73.

This is part of our bonding because I met Johnson in '72 when Bill Clinton and I were the campaign managers in Texas for George McGovern. So, we're down there. Johnson is the old man, you know, the old figure. We went out to the ranch to get him to endorse George McGovern -- barely. He barely endorsed him because McGovern was so anti-war. Bill Clinton never forgave me. He claims that I cheated him out of going into the meeting with Johnson! I was just there for the introduction. They met privately. Johnson had long hair like a hippie.

Shortly after the election, he opened his library and the first collection that he opened was the civil rights collection, and therefore Julian was invited. He said Johnson made a huge fuss over him. But more than that, in the sessions he said why civil rights was the most important thing that he did. That he had made a lot of mistakes, but he thought this would last. Julian, I think, was moved by Johnson. I think he felt that Johnson was utterly sincere. That this was a part of his life that had been consistent from the time when he taught Mexicans in Cotulla [Texas], starving Mexicans. That Johnson had a poor person's humanistic [perspective], not an abstract, but a very personal sense of what black and white relations ought to be. That he deliberately wanted to make that the first part of the opening.

Julian said he went out of his way to be nice to him at this opening. I'm sure you can find the date. Julian told me that he was there, and he described it elaborately. We had a lot of talks about this because he had this personal interaction [with Johnson]. I'd listened to hours, hundreds of hours of Johnson's telephone conversations, many of which still haven't been transcribed thirty years later. And I talked to him about how, as a scholar, I listened to all these things and what I could feel from Johnson and in the conversations about race and civil rights. Or even about Vietnam, for that matter. Johnson knew what was happening in Vietnam. He was not stupid. He knew we were going to lose the war. It was ripping him apart. But he said if I get out of the war there'll be a revolt. Americans will not accept somebody who loses a war. He was afraid to pursue peace. And you can feel that in these conversations. We had a lot of conversations about Johnson. In a way, he and I were, I think, maybe out of the mainstream, for different reasons, of a lot of people who were very critical of Johnson.

GI: What led him to this position about Johnson?

TB: In our conversations, what he emphasized, in his two or three days at the Johnson ranch, when they were opening the LBJ Library, he said Johnson pulled him aside and he had direct conversations with him. We had long talks where I'm talking about how, particularly listening to those tapes and going to the records, changed my opinion of Johnson. He said the same thing from that long weekend when the library opened. Now, I don't know whether he had ever been, "Hey, hey, hey LBJ / How many kids did you kill today?" Or kind of a, "Johnson is a bloodsucking capitalist monster." I'm sure he wasn't ever that. But he may have been more cynical about Johnson than he ended up.

THE LEGACY OF JULIAN BOND

GI: What do you think Julian's major contribution was to the 1960-68 period of the civil rights movement and, more broadly, his legacy as a human rights' activist?

TB: Well, I think [for] the '60 to '68 period, aside from being a link to an almost forgotten America, it wasn't shocking that a legislature would refuse to seat a black person for being black and for being "uppity" I guess, for criticizing a war. That's hard for most Americans to imagine. And then when that person, who was so primitively mistreated, becomes famous because of the Supreme Court decision, America's introduction to that person revealed him to be erudite, funny, well-read, eloquent and tough all at once, which was a mixture that really was unknown. And his mellifluous voice and his humor. I think he's a transitional figure from a totally segregated America all of a sudden to one of the first people to crossover. He's not a crossover figure like Sam Cooke was in music, but he is in politics. All of a sudden, he's a person coming out of black politics, out of movement politics, who is a household word in white America.

He's like Harry [Belafonte]. I've been friends with Belafonte almost as long as Julian. If you go out to dinner with Harry Belafonte, old white ladies [laughs] are going to come up swooning all over him from a from a long time ago. Julian is like that. There are an awful lot of white people who admire him. So I think [from] the '60s period he is a transitional celebrity in cross-racial culture. Mass culture. And that's an important role. But that would have died out. I'm ignorant of what his legacy is from the work in the Georgia legislature. That was the period where we were separated.

I do know from the time he went into the NAACP that he was immensely proud of the work there. It was a mixture. To be honest, Julian said the NAACP is an unwieldy, nasty [laughs] difficult organization. I think he said the board had sixty-four people on it. It's a monstrous board designed not to get things done but to plan the next celebration He used to joke that there were more people in a lot of his meetings than there were in the audience. That it was a difficult organization to move. Yet, he and Pam would always talk about that work at our dinners. It meant an enormous amount to him to have that job as an elder statesperson. He never thought he could get the NAACP to endorse marriage equality. I think that was one of the crowning moments of his achievement, where he could take an old fashioned, kind of stolid civil rights group and get them to take an advanced position that really had an enormous impact – that the NAACP was for marriage equality.

I think a lot of traditionalists were counting on the fact that there are a lot of conservative ministers in the NAACP who didn't go along with that. I think Julian and Ben Jealous kind of stared them down together. He introduced me to Ben Jealous, and we were talking about how, in the same year, they got marriage equality, the DREAM Act and the end of capital punishment through in referendums in Maryland. That was a big deal. The governor at that time, Martin O'Malley, said it wouldn't have happened without the NAACP. It wouldn't have happened without Julian. He talked endlessly about how they got the resolution through.

There was one particularly crabby old guy who wasn't there or something like that, but he still didn't think it was going to work. He said it was like the boldness of stating a position on the basis of objective truth. If anybody is hated, we're risking all of us being hated. It kind of shamed the people that he assumed were against marriage equality. And it surprised him that it went through. I think that kind of reconnecting the protest legacy at a level that is so far advanced. I mean one day I think Americans will be amazed by how rapidly we went from homosexuality being illegal – criminal – and something that people couldn't talk about [to marriage equality]. There were people in the civil rights movement who committed suicide out of fear that they

would be outed as gay. That's how powerful that was, and to go from there to where we went and to have the NAACP be an instrument for that through Julian and his work there is a great part of his legacy. And, of course, Obama. I think all of those things meant a lot to him.