

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

**Interview with Hollis Watkins**

**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. Watkins reviewed the transcript for accuracy.

### Biographical Note for Hollis Watkins

Hollis Watkins [b. 1941] is a native Mississippian who became involved in the Southern freedom movement during his teen-age years and later, while at Tougaloo College, arranging and leading a "walk-out" of African American students from Burgland High School in McComb, Mississippi to protest racial segregation in 1961. Watkins soon became a leading local organizer in Southern Mississippi, organizing sit-ins and other protests of local area businesses. Having helped form the Pike County Direct Action Committee after meeting Bob Moses, he became a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and traveled throughout rural Southern Mississippi encouraging local African American residents to register to vote. Watkins was jailed repeatedly but never relinquished his effort to advance African American freedom in Mississippi. The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, a state-funded agency that spied on local civil rights activists during the 1950s and 60s, viewed Watkins as one of SNCC's bravest and most formidable organizers, keeping a file on him of almost sixty-five pages. In 2015, Watkins published his memoirs, *Brother Hollis: The Sankofa of a Movement Man*.

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American University**

**Hollis Watkins Interview (11-JBOHP)  
December 14th, 2018  
Jackson, Mississippi**

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

**Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Hollis Watkins [HW]**

GI: Today is Friday, December 14th, 2018 and I am sitting in the historic Woodworth Chapel on the campus of Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi with Mr. Hollis Watkins to conduct an oral history interview for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, 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 Director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project. A copy of this transcript, along with the video interview, will be available through the Special Collections Division of the Bender Library at American University. Mr. Watkins, I'm delighted and honored to have this time with you, and I appreciate you sitting down with me this morning to have this conversation.

HW: You're welcome.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

GI: Why don't we begin at the beginning? Can you tell us about your background and how you developed your sense of social and political awareness?

HW: My parents were sharecroppers. I am the youngest of twelve children. I would say my beginning, the thing that started me off, was a very few words that my father said to me. And those words were, "Son, you must always stand up for what is right. Even if you are the only one standing." Looking at those words and trying to see them deeper in terms of human relations, I realized that in order for me to stand up for what was right, I had to stand up against all of that which was wrong. So, I would say that was the very beginning. Those words, along with him saying to me, that you must always tell the truth. Regardless, tell the truth. So, as far as I'm concerned, that was my beginning. It was those words that shaped me in my early life and continue to impact my life ever since, guidance through the civil rights movement up until now. And that still to me is good enough to continue to give me guidance as I go on in the future.

## **GROWING UP IN SEGREGATED MISSISSIPPI**

GI: Can you tell us a little bit about where you grew up in Mississippi and how growing up where you did influence the way that you began to see the world?

HW: I grew up in Lincoln County out in the rural area. I went to school at Lincoln County Training School in Bogue Chitto, Mississippi. I had to ride the school bus to school because we lived out in the country, and it was about twelve miles from the school. So, if you weren't on time and missed your bus and didn't have your own transportation, then that was a day that you missed. My father also taught me that everything that seemed to be right all the time was not right, so it needs to be considered, it needs to be analyzed and then a decision and conclusion reached after doing that. My father, being a sharecropper, bought his own land when I was about eight years old. He and my older brothers cut the trees off of the land, carried it to the sawmill, and had it converted into lumber. They built our first house.

Then, in addition to building the house, my father and my brother took pick shovels, ax hoes, dug up the stump to create a space for us to begin to do farming for ourselves rather than farming for someone else in the form of, as they called it, sharecropping. My father was the kind of man that would say, "If you can do it, there's no need to seek others to do it for you. If you can do it, then you do it." And that's the spirit and attitude that I've taken. If I can do it, then I want to do it. If I can do it. I need to do it. That's the spirit that I come from. That's the spirit that I'm bring and hold on today.

## **ENTERING THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT**

GI: When did you begin to hear about the Southern freedom movement. Was there a particular person or event that led you to make the choice to become involved?

HW: There was this thing about the NAACP. People were afraid. Most people were afraid to let other people know that they were members of the NAACP.

GI: And this would be in the 1940s and 50s when you were coming up?

HW: Yeah, this is when I was coming up. Yeah, I was born in 1941. The time we were talking about, 1959, is actually when I first got involved to any degree in terms of this movement. And it was with the NAACP. At that particular time, most people were afraid to let others know that they were members of the NAACP. I bumped into or saw Medgar Evers and he invited me to come to a meeting of the young people, which was really the youth chapter in NAACP. And I went. A few days later or a short time later, a friend-girl of mine told me that Dr. Martin Luther King and some other big people were having meetings out in McComb [County, Mississippi]. She told me exactly where it was. I went to see what was happening at these meetings. When I got to the place where they were having their meetings, I went and I'm looking for Dr. King. Don't know him and don't have any idea what he looks like, but I'm fixated on something in my mind as to what I thought he should look like.

When I opened the door and went into the building, I saw this little man. And I'm saying to myself, "This can't be Dr. King but maybe it is." And I asked him, "Are you Dr. King" and he said, "No, I'm Bob [Moses]." Okay. And I asked him what he was doing in McComb. He explained the whole process of trying to get people registered to vote and how he was not Dr. King. He was doing something the same things and he invited me and my friends out in the country.

There were four of us that kind of hung together and did things. The four of us met with Bob and decided that we would do what we could as a part of that process. After, I would say, about a week, a week and a half, another young man came into town. He told us his name was Marion Barry. He was the person that was a part of SNCC responsible for direct action. I asked him, "What is 'direct action?'" He explained that whole process and asked if we would be willing to set up a chapter and do some of the things that young people were doing in other areas, which was having sit-in demonstrations, wade-in demonstrations, what have you.

We told him that we would. We created our own organization, the Pike County Nonviolent Direct Action Committee. We investigated to see where those places were located that wouldn't let black folks have the same kinds of privileges of whites. And one of those places was a library. We decided that we would have our first sit-in demonstration in the library.

We didn't do our research too good [smiles]. We all got ready to go to the library. However, when we met, the twenty-two that had said they would be ready to go was not twenty-two of us anymore. It had been reduced to two and that was myself and Curtis [Hayes]. We decided that we were, as one of the songs says, "Ain't Gonna Let No One Turn Us Around." And the two of us proceeded to the library. Had not done the research too good because the library was closed. Some people thought it was closed because they got the word that we were coming to have a demonstration but that was not the case. It was closed because that was the day of the week that the library was closed.

We were determined not to allow anyone to turn us around. And we went back down the street looking for another place, which we found very easily because we had some idea where it was and that was the Woolworth's lunch counter. We decided that we would go there and try to get a cup of coffee. And that's where we were not served. That's where the police were already in the store and arrested us. Carried us to jail. My first time going to jail, which was that time, I spent thirty-four days in jail.

GI: How old were you at the time you were first in jail?

HW: The time I was first in jail was nineteen.

GI: So 1960, '61, somewhere around there?

HW: It was 1961.

## JOINING SNCC

GI: Okay. Getting involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was that more appealing than getting involved with any of the other groups? What was it about SNCC that was appealing to a young person like yourself?

HW: Activities. Young people like to be involved in active things. And to me that's what SNCC was about. They were active. Getting young people involved with aid and assistance coming from the older people. You could clearly see where there was a direct role for young people to play. And they could help determine which of these roles they wanted to hear now and play for them. So it was a part of the appeal with young people who were in charge of young people rather than older people.

Being in charge of young people and then telling them what they should do. Well, for the most part this was about young people being in charge of programs themselves. They had no problem with older people being involved as part of that price. But the most important thing is we saw was that this is something that young people decided that they will go do. We don't have all the people standing and saying we should wait a while you can do that right now for this reason. So we saw this program as a program that gave a certain degree of freedom to young people to speak. How they saw things. Then to do what they feel was necessary to help correct the situation.

GI: And would you consider the initial involvement that you and Curtis Hayes and others had in McComb to be maybe in some way the beginning of the student movement in Mississippi?

HW: I guess so. You know there were things young people were doing but as a full-fledged movement I would say that was the beginning of the student movement in Mississippi.

GI: Is there anyone other than Curtis that you can remember being part of the energy of that movement? I don't like to use the word "leader" because I know everyone was considered a leader in some ways but who were some of the others that were involved in McComb when you first got involved?

HW: There were twenty-two of us. That was the twenty-two that was supposed to be going, but the parents stopped twenty of the twenty-two. I often wonder if I had told my parents the truth and the details of what I was really asking them, I probably would not have been able to go for that sit-in demonstration because I told my parents and I had just finished high school. I told my parents I wouldn't be back. I was going to spend the night out in McComb with some of my friends. Which is, if you take the "s" off friend, then it hits it right on the head because it was only Curtis and I.

I had full intentions for it to be a number of us and I was going to spend the night with them in jail. I didn't explain all of that. But as it turned out, it was all right with my parents that I did what I did. So you grew. There were people right now, for example, there's a young man who is on the City Council in Summit [Mississippi]. That was one of the students that walked out of the

Burglund High School.<sup>1</sup> I'm not sure who also still around. Brenda Travis is still alive. Still here.

## **MEETING VERNON DAHMER**

GI: So how do you end up going to Hattiesburg and getting involved with that work there? Can you talk a little bit about that?

HW: The way I got involved in going to Hattiesburg is Vernon Dahmer heard about all this stuff that C.C. Bryant and his folks had going on over in Pike County. So he came over and talked with C.C. Bryant. And they talked about some of those young people coming to Hattiesburg and working with him. Curtis and I were chosen to go to Hattiesburg and work with Vernon Dahmer. So that's how we got there. He came over to McComb and talked with C.C. Bryant and let him know that he liked the good stuff that he was doing and wanted to know how he could get some of the young people to work with him to do some similar things. So, I was one of the two [laughs] that was sent to Hattiesburg and that's when I met Mr. Dahmer, who was the number one person that I would be working with.

And as it turned out, I lived, while I was over there, with Mr. Dahmer because he was very instrumental. We didn't have a vehicle. He provided us with a vehicle to go and do things that needed to be done pertaining to redistricting and voting. So, that was really good. If we had a break in the time when we were supposed to be doing something then we worked and aided Mr. Dahmer in terms of his farm, his farming. He had large acres of land, large in reference to the size of plots that black people had. He had lots of cattle. Most every year he'd produce somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred bales of cotton. He was a good farmer, a good civil rights worker and just a good man.

GI: Many people outside Mississippi, especially younger people that will be watching us don't know much about Vernon Dahmer. What made him so special and so important for so many of the younger people who were involved in movement during that time?

HW: The thing that made him special was he was willing to take a risk on his life. He was willing to let young people lead their own movement and had no problem with that. He would serve as an adviser and saw some things that young people did not or perhaps did not know. He would call them, and he would talk to them about it and explain to them why he was saying what he was saying. So, just like now, people who want to be a part of something, if they see those who have a status above them but is not willing to close the gap but let them have the right which they should already deserve to move forward, they make the final decisions and he serves as an adviser, an aid and a helper. When young people saw Mr. Dahmer operating from that perspective, naturally they fell in love with him. They wanted to be part of the work that he was doing. And he had so many people from the community that loved him, believed in him, that would speak on his behalf.

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<sup>1</sup>. Joe Lewis, a senior at Burglund High School and a leader of the walkout, serves on the Town Council of Summit, Mississippi at the time this oral history was taken. Summit has a population of about 1,700 people and is located in Pike County, Mississippi.

GI: Can you talk a little bit about the obstacles that were in your way when you began voter registration work in Hattiesburg?

HW: The obstacle that was in our way in Hattiesburg was the same obstacle that was in our way all across the states, which was the obstacle of fear. Many times, people attempted to go register. As a result of attempting to go register, the house may be firebombed. They may be even shot, wounded or in some cases possibly killed. So that was the biggest obstacle. What is it that I have to lose? So am I willing to run the risk of having this happen to me? Or whether, as some folks would say, "come Hell or high water," I'm going to go ahead and do this because I know it needs to be done. And if we don't do it, then who is going to do it? And if we don't do it, fifteen, twenty years from now we will have that same problem. So that was the biggest problem. Fear that the Klan and other white organizations and/or individuals instill in the mind of people who were either involved or considered being involved and instill fear in them to prevent them from doing what they had a right to have and to do.

### **THERON LYND**

GI: Theron Lynd . . .

HW: [laughs] Don't give him all of that, Thu-ron Lynd . . . [laughs]. Theron Lynd.

GI: I'll let you take it from here [laughs].

HW: Okay [laughs]. Theron was the circuit court clerk over in Forrest County. And they are the ones that determine when you go in and attempt to register whether you pass the test. And at that time the very vast majority of black people that went to take the test flunked the test. As a result of that they could not become a registered voter. White people, if they got the word about black people, any black person, etc., coming trying to register they would start some intimidation. That there was a process by which. If you attempted to register before you got the word as to whether you passed the test, your name had to be published in the paper for a certain period of time.

We felt that this was to let the white people know which black people were attempting to register, as they say which one were stirring up trouble. Therefore, they could do whatever they needed to do and wanted to do or felt like they should do to intimidate them because they had the right to withdraw their name if they wanted to, so a number of people withdrew their names. But a lot of them decided what they wanted to do, was attempting to do it was fair and right and just. Yes. And they that let it be. So that was one of the big obstacles was trying to fight back and stand up against the Ku Klux Klan.

GI: How did you and a couple of others get involved with the CBS Reports program on Theron Lynd to expose some of the stuff he was doing? How did that come about?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>. On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1962, CBS Reports broadcast a special, "Mississippi and the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment," which focused on Theron Lynd's efforts to prevent black citizens from voting in Hattiesburg. Mr. Watkins and a few others participated in the



HW: I'm not sure how that originated. I was told they were coming and wanted to make a movie. I didn't see anything wrong with it so my feeling was that however I can aid and assist and participate then I'm willing to do. So that's how I saw it. That's how I initially got involved. And things were basically done through Mr. Dahmer and his local chapter of the NAACP. SNCC, Bob and some of the other folks that were a part of SNCC they were working doing some things with them. But here again SNCC's attitude and feeling was that it would not come into an area and take the credit of what's taking place away from local community people for our organization. We were always there to aid and assist, to help the local organization become strong, to do what needed to be done and eventually get to the point where we would as our organization, SNCC, wouldn't necessarily be needed at all because the local [organization] would be able to take charge and do what needed to be done. That's how we looked at it and how we dealt with it.

GI: What was that experience like? You went into register to vote or you went in to see Theron Lynd and you were wearing a microphone, an undercover microphone of some sort?

HW: Yeah. I had an undercover mic and this was one of those situations where we wanted to get Theron Lynd on tape. They wired me up. In addition to having Theron Lynd's words and him talking, they wanted to have a photograph of his office and of him and some of the cohorts that were working with him. I agreed to be wired up and they were a couple of blocks down the street recording everything that went on. They told us, "Now, when you go in with this camera that you got" – it was like a briefcase – "when you go in and you speak, and you flash not in a way that people would know you're doing something different." We practiced on that a little bit. I had it down pat.

When the day came, they wired me up and I went in. In the conversation with Theron Lynd about voter registration and turning people down as part of that he changed the subject and asked me, "Did I know what a cowles blade or bush ax was? Had I ever used one? Did I know what a hoe was?" When he started asking those questions my instincts said, "it's time that you begin to go towards the door to get ready to get up on out of here." It seemed as if he wanted to know whether I could use them as a signal to let me know that these are the things that you will be using in just a little bit when we put you in jail and have you to start working out on the road gangs. That was kind of interesting but overall it turned out to be all right.

## **MUSIC AND THE MOVEMENT**

GI: You like to sing [smiles]. What role did music play in the movement?

HW: Music played a *big* [emphasis by HW] role in the movement. Music played a big part of my culture. Singing was a part of my culture. Still is. When you go to most black communities, if not right there in that community, in close proximity of that community, you will find churches. In

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network's effort to expose the discriminatory behavior of Lynd and others to intimidate and refuse to allow African Americans to vote. In 1965, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously ruled in *United States v. Theron Lynd* (1965) that Lynd and a succession of registrars in Forrest County systematically denied black citizens their rights under law and issued an injunction against the appropriate parties from any further such action.

most of those churches, they start their programs or their service with singing because singing is an instrument or tool that is being used to bring people together, to help people forget about some of the problems that they are facing and it helps in creating a bond, a good relationship. That's what it does in the community every day.

We wanted to make sure we didn't kick that part out, which is one of the most powerful parts and that's also why we decided that we have to keep that tradition of singing in the movement. Just change some words some songs to make them more appropriate for the movement than the regular church singing. That's how we looked at it and some of the same verses that were used in some the church songs we those as a part of bringing us together as a part of civil rights movement. Bonding people through the singing of the songs. The songs help people to forget some of the hardships, some of the problems that they're faced with that allows them to be able to go on just a little bit further.

GI: What were some of the more popular songs that became movement songs, some of the songs that came out of the church that ended up becoming movement songs or freedom songs? Were there any songs in particular that were more meaningful to you than some others or were they all equally meaningful?

HW: No, they weren't all equal. For example, "This Little Light of Mine" was one of the more popular ones. And one of the [songs] that we used which helped us to overcome this fear was "Ain't Scared of Nobody 'Cause I Want My Freedom." That became very popular. Another one that we sang was "Get on Board" [and we changed it to say, "Little Children Let's Fight for Human Rights." And the one, for example, "Ain't Scared of Nobody." See, that was one of the things that the white people at that time were attempting to do. To instill fear. But we knew if you weren't afraid you wouldn't let nobody turn you around [laughs]. You keep on doing what needed to be done and that's how we dealt with it. Verses were added because when they would change their tactics and the way they will come at you. You ain't scared of nobody. Sometimes they go and they get a dog or two. Most young folks were afraid of dogs. So that was another verse that we added to the songs. [starts singing] "Ain't scared of no dog 'cause I want my freedom!" And then there was another verse where we'd say, because they talked about putting us all in jail, so we added a verse for the jail, "Ain't scared to go to jail 'cause I want my freedom." We did those to try to take away the tools they had so that they became a tool for us, to use to give us strength.

## **JAIL AND FEAR**

You see, this whole thing about jail, it was very crucial because a lot of people didn't realize this but there were so many black men, and especially young black men, that had been killed in the jail. And the way they would kill young black men is that they were sold on being afraid and getting out of there. They tried to pull that trick on me. The jailer told me, he said, "Okay, Hollis, we gonna let you go. See, you ain't give us no trouble so we gonna let you go." So I asked him, I said, "Well, who put up my bond money?" He said, "Nobody. You've just been a good nigger, haven't 'caused us a lot of trouble so we're gonna let you go." I say, "I know I haven't served my time. And if no one put my bond money up, I don't have a right to leave, so I'm going back into the jail." He stopped me and said, "Wait a minute. Don't make another step. You do, I'll blow your brains out." And he said, "You better be glad you didn't walk down the steps because if you had I

was gonna whistle. And them boys was come from around the side of the building with them bloodhound dogs and them bloodhound dogs was gonna have dinner in your backside." I just simply kept on walking and said, "I'm not afraid of dogs. My daddy taught me how to kill dogs."

Now, the trick that led to so many deaths around that was that young men mostly will be excited about trying to get out. And when they're told, "We gonna let you go." They say, "Okay, thanks." And they started walking off, and once they get down the steps out on to the lawn of the jail they shoot 'em in the back and kill 'em. They publicize it that they we're trying to escape. And when they yelled to 'em and said, "STOP" they didn't stop. They kept on running. So we ended up having to shoot 'em to stop 'em." That was the end piece about not being afraid of the jail because of what that jailhouse represented. Death to so many black young men.

GI: That's, I mean, that's a very powerful story. I just want to stop because I don't feel like going right into the next question.

## **JULIAN BOND**

GI: There is a somewhat famous picture of you standing out in a field with Bob Moses, Amzie Moore, Julian Bond and E.W. Steptoe. What's the story behind that picture?

HW: The story behind that picture – and I don't remember the name of it – but there was a large event that was taking place down in Amite County, and it was taking place on E.W. Steptoe's farm. The weather was very cold for Mississippi [laughs].

GI: You're all wearing coats.

HW: The weather was very cold, and we had on some of our medium size coats. And we decided that we wanted to just take a little stroll at the edge of the of the farm, and having E.W. give us a little bit of the history of his farm and that indeed had to give us a little bit of that process. As we went through that process, we got off into the farming aspect of being out in the rural area and how that took place. Where we where we are right now, it's in the morning. We had spent the night with E.W. Steptoe. And it was cold. His heating in his house, as most of us would say, was not proper for real cold weather.

However, we were determined that we would be all right and made to be all right. So that's what we are doing, a kind of overview with one another about some of the things that we had been working on, some of the problems that we felt we had and needed to overcome and also discussing things that we could do. In the future to make things a little bit better and more progress come about. So that's kind of where we were.

To keep from having everybody to be involved in that discussion, we got up early and then we ventured out in the field. Just by virtue of those two things a lot of a lot of people wouldn't be interested in being a part of the sideline discussion because they want to get as far as they can away from the field because they had a bad experience there and definitely did not exactly like the real cold weather.

GI: Bob's in Mississippi at this time. You're all from Mississippi except Julian. Do you remember why he was there?

HW: Julian was kind of like the secretary/reporter for SNCC. So, as I mentioned, there's a kind of big event that's taking place down on E.W. Steptoe's farm. So, Julian has come over, which he did periodically, coming through bringing news, sometimes good news, sometimes not-so-good news, but bringing news about what is happening in other areas, what people are doing.

In many instances, Julian served as the newspaper, served as the radio announcer, and bringing news about what's happening over in Alabama, what's happening over in Georgia, to us in Mississippi. Now, when he goes back, as he works his way back through, he delivers a message to those on his way back of what's happening in Mississippi.

GI: Was this the first time you met Julian Bond, or had you met him before?

HW: I had met him before. That was the first time that we had been together for that period of time, spending the night at someone's house. It was the first-time-thing for me, but it worked out to be real, real good. One of the things that I learned was to what extent, to a greater extent, the role that farmers were playing in the civil rights movement.

GI: You learned about that through Julian or you learned about that through this meeting?

HW: I learned about that through the event and our dialogue.

GI: What was your impression of Julian Bond when you met him during that period?

HW: Well, I had a very good and positive feeling about him. Mainly, I think because he was a young man. That was always good as I saw it, to have young people. And he seemed to have been interested in the role that he was playing and that what he was doing was so very important, which is kind of like someone gathering all the information about this, about that, that's going on here. I don't have [any] idea that that's even going on. And just to have the attitude, the spirit and the willingness to do that kind of thing meant a whole lot to me. I felt, "Hey, this is a good brother. He's doing a very, very important thing, playing a major, major role in our movement because we know that, from time to time, based on what happens in one area impacts what is happening in the next area." He, even though a lot of people might not see it, but being, as some folk might say, being the "message boy," he's doing a lot of good and keeping us informed. Because in many cases our degree and whether we are informed or not determines life and death.

GI: So he was an important person to relay information within SNCC, among people within the Southern movement as well as represent the movement to the outside world?

HW: Yes. Very much so.

GI: When you met him, did you ever anticipate that he would become famous, that he would one day run for office in the state of Georgia and then everything that would happen with that, his case would go to the Supreme Court. And then by 1968 he's a very well-known national person.

He's nominated for vice president at the Democratic convention even though everyone knows he's too young to do it.

When you first met him did you ever see that happening? Or was this a surprise to you to watch his career through the 60s take the route that it did?

HW: I looked at that from the perspective of we are fighting and working to create possibilities. And I realize that any and all of these possibilities were standing there, waiting there for us to take them on. At any point in time based on his willingness, based on his ability to report, express, different situations, circumstances, I knew that he could become any and all of that. I knew for example right after Marion Barry that he could become famous]. I knew Bob, if had wanted to, he could become [famous]. It just depended on what the person was willing [to do]. But knowing that they had the capability to do. One of the ways that I would judge progress in the broader society was how many of us would elevate ourselves to these important positions, coming at different times. I knew it could happen. I wasn't surprised when it did come about.

GI: By his own admission Julian Bond was not a very good singer but you managed to stay friends with him anyway. Is that right? [laughs].

HW: Of course [laughs], of course [laughs]! A lot of the workers who were afraid of singing wanted to be seen as someone who could not sing. But what they were really afraid of being put on the spot and forced to be one of those who led the songs. Because if you had the opportunity to stand close by them in a meeting or out in the field with where folks together for something, if you had the opportunity to be close, right next to that person who can't sing, you'd say, "Boy, he's gettin' down today!" You know, that's the piece that most people who feel that they can't do this in terms of singing. They're basing their ability to sing against someone else's ability. But it becomes a think like, "I can't sing or lead songs like Fannie Lou Hamer. I can't lead songs like so-and-so-and-so." And they are trying to be protective of themselves of being put on the spot and sing. "So-and-so wants you to come out and lead us in a few. I'm a singer, I sing with people. But I haven't reached the point where I can do a successful job in leading." And that's where a lot of folks are.

GI: How would you describe Julian Bond's legacy during those years in the Southern freedom movement?

HW: To me, Julian really was the information man. He was the information person. As far as how I looked at him, I looked at him as someone who knew how to get in-depth information. Most of the time who to get it from. And then could display it, project it to those that needed it and to those, once they get it, would use it as a tool that they're using in their repertoire. He would give out good information. Talk about it. If he knew someone who, for example, was a halfway decent singer who could lead a few songs, he would request that person to come and do it. I think he knew and understood that this, what I have, will go along easier and better if it has someone to stir the pot, as we say, and bring forth a higher spirit. So that's how I see him. And I saw him as a person that was not selfish. He would go with you. He would help. He would share in that which needed to be shared.

I think he understood, and caused a lot of others to understand, that information, information, information is so important. And it needed to be shared among all of us to the fullest extent as possible among all of us that were a part of this movement so that we all can grow in the way that we need to grow, and will grow if we get good, positive, correct information. I think he saw having the good reports and dealing with those. As they say, "Does the man that's hunting realize that he's got a couple extra shells in his bag?" So, therefore, since he's got that bag, I got something to do that would need to be done. I can walk a little bit further. I can talk a little bit more. And that's kind of how he went down. That's how I see him.

GI: Do you have any other final thoughts about Julian Bond's legacy from that time?

HW: One of the things that says Julian didn't have a problem letting people know and understand where he stood. To me, that's very important. Because, if you are part, of a group, then everybody in the group should know exactly where you where you're coming from and what your ideals and thoughts are. And Julian didn't mind presenting his, displaying his, and if, necessary, do a little nudging and putting the pressure on you to do, not as I say, but as I have done.

### **BROTHER HOLLIS: THE SANKOFA OF A MOVEMENT MAN**

GI: I know you mentioned in your book – and if you'd like to hold up your book for the camera so that people can see it and maybe order it. There it is – Mr. Watkins's book. You want to tell us about that title before I ask you my question [laughs]?

HW: The title is *Brother Hollis: The Sankofa of a Movement Man*. I took that title because I decided that it was time for me to do a book because it was so many great people, and especially women, that were involved in the civil rights movement that had not been mentioned in books. So I decided it's time to come forward, starting with my early life as the youngest of twelve children who were born to sharecroppers. And bring some of that above ground so people would know that it was more than just a handful of us. So, there I am!

GI: There you are. Now, for people who don't know the word "Sankofa" means, what does it mean?

HW: That's the term that we got out of Africa. And it's generally identified as being a bird. Being a bird, a bird flies. Travels over large periods or areas. That's what I have been doing. That's what I'll continue to do for the most part. As I said, it came out of Africa. Here again, when you relate that to where we are now, it's important for you to look back and see where you came from. Knowing where you came from helps you to be able to determine the obstacles that you might have to go through and how much time to get to where it is that you want to go. That Sankofa bird does that. We've got a bird in here. See, there's the bird right there. That's the bird, the Sankofa bird. Anytime you see a statue, a photograph of a Sankofa bird they'll usually be looking back so that they can have a true assessment of where they came from and what's going to be needed, necessary for them to get to where they're trying or need to go. I say trying or need to go because we do make mistakes sometimes. Sometimes we're trying to get to where we don't need to go. I just wanted to put that there in those terms.

I want to encourage all the young people out there to dig a little bit deeper in knowing the history that your uncles and grandparents have had to deal with and decide which direction you are going to take. And I pray that it will be to help still resolve some of the problems and conflicts that we have in this country today. So just want to ask you to do that and join me in singing a verse or two of one song or maybe a verse of two different songs.

GI: You gonna sing for us now?

HW: I'm going to do it right now.

GI: Okay.

HW: There's a song that I wrote in honor of Nelson Mandela. It goes like this [begins singing]:

Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
We gonna set Mandela free!

Mandela! He crossed the land  
Shouting, "People take a stand"  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela/Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela/Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
We gonna set Mandela free!

Cape Town! Soweto!  
Freedom come, then apartheid go.  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela/Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela/Oh, Mandela, Mandela  
We gonna set Mandela free!

The rich said yes! The poor said no!  
We wondered where did Botha go?  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela/Oh, Mandela, Mandela.  
Oh, Mandela, Mandela/Oh, Mandela, Mandela.  
We gonna set our people free!

So, that gives you a little bit, a taste of what we do, how we do it. We'd love to hear from you!

GI: That's great. Brought tears to my eyes. Thank you so much.

HW: Okay [smiles and laughs].