

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

Interview with Lonnie C. King, Jr.

**Special Collections Division
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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.

Biographical Note for Lonnie C. King, Jr.

Lonnie C. King, Jr. was the founding president and chair of the 1960 Atlanta student movement, which was the first concerted campaign by students from the city's historically black colleges to attack racial segregation in public accommodations. In late winter and early spring 1960, King organized the sit-ins at downtown businesses and oversaw the selective boycott campaign through the city. King recruited, among others, Julian Bond into the movement and worked closely with him during this period. King was arrested in October 1960, for leading a sit-in at Rich's Department Store in downtown Atlanta, an incident more famous for the arrest of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who King persuaded to join the students. That arrest led to the famous telephone call from then presidential candidate John F. Kennedy to Dr. King's wife, Coretta Scott King, to express his sympathy for her husband's arrest.

Lonnie King moved to Washington, D.C., after the Atlanta student movement reached its apex in the early 1960s. He worked for the National Urban League, but later returned to Atlanta and continued his commitment to civil rights enforcement and education, serving at one point as the president of the Atlanta branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

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American University**

**Lonnie C. King, Jr. Interview (01-JBOHP)
July 24th, 2018
Atlanta, Georgia**

Interviewer: Gregg Ivers

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Lonnie King [LK]

GI: Today is July 24th, 2018. I'm at the home of Lonnie C. King, Jr. [in Atlanta, Ga.] to talk about his memories and his observations on the formative years of Julian Bond. Mr. King, thank you so much for agreeing to sit with me this afternoon and talk about this important era and to talk about Mr. Bond. Why don't we start at the very beginning? How and when did you meet Julian Bond? And you're welcome to talk about how you got to Morehouse and how the two of you first crossed paths.

MEETING JULIAN BOND

LK: Well, I didn't know him when I got there. I met him when I was in the registration line and I came back to school in 1957. I came back from the Navy. During those days you had to get in line and you ended up taking a whole day to register. So if someone is behind you or in front of you, you are usually friendly and so you talk to them, you learn more about them, you carry on a conversation because you are going to be there for eight or nine hours, more sometimes. So Julian was next to me and it was during that conversation, a series of conversations that lasted for hours, that I learned a lot about him. His father was a professor and his mother was, I think, a librarian – I believe. But anyway, I didn't forget that. So, when we decided to launch the movement in Atlanta [in 1960] after those Greensboro fellows my position was that we need not allow the young people in Greensboro to be out here alone.

BEGINNING THE ATLANTA STUDENT MOVEMENT

Segregation exists throughout the South and a whole lot of other places. And battles are . . . wars are fought by young people. And what we need to do is organize – don't let the Greensboro boys be by themselves. Let's organize. I think we can do it and it is going to multiply even more so than Greensboro because of Atlanta's central location and all these schools here. So, Joe Pierce and I got with Julian and he was a little reluctant at first. I talked to him about getting involved. He said, "Well, I think somebody will get involved." I said, "Yeah, well, why don't you get involved?" So he finally said okay and so I took one part of the Yates and Milton [drug store], Joe took another part and Julian took another part. And we called a meeting for the Sale Hall annex up at Morehouse. A few days later about twenty-three, twenty-four persons came to that meeting. Not

a single woman. I was a little surprised that everybody was from Morehouse, a male, or Clark [University]. Well, one of the things that I said to the group was that we can't do this without the ladies. First of all, they're being segregated just like we all were in those days. So we agreed to call another meeting later and try to get the girls from Spelman and the girls from Clark to come. Before we could have that meeting, I got a call from Dr. [Benjamin] Mays's secretary wanting me to come to a meeting on the third floor of the administration building at 3 o'clock that same afternoon. And so, she said, "... and if you see Julian Bond you bring him too." Oh, Lord. Anyway, we got there, and Joe was there – of course, he [Julian] came with me. Marian Wright [Edelman] was there. You know, there were three or four ladies from Spelman, three or four folks from Clark, all the different schools. And so Dr. Clement, Rufus Clement, who was the chairperson of the [Atlanta University Center] Council of College Presidents, ran the meeting and he made his opening statement, which was basically: "Go back to class. Let's let the NAACP handle this matter."

Of course, Mays, Dr. Mays, echoed that same language and the gentleman from Clark was an embarrassment – Dr. [James P.] Brawley was his name. He said if you all go down there you will embarrass me. I couldn't believe that guy said that. Dr. Manley from Spelman was a little wishy-washy. The man who stood up and said that the students [were] right, we need to end this, was Dr. Harry Richardson, who was the president of ITC [Interdenominational Theological Center] -- the religious school. He's a preacher. Because he was from Harvard or someplace . . . he's a highly educated man but he also had a presence. When it was his time to speak he just had to speak because all the folks before him, the other presidents, had done this. Dr. Richardson waited about a good eight to ten seconds before he said anything and as I recall it the first thing out of his mouth was, "I believe the students are right." Man, you talk about some presidents being upset. He had broken ranks with them, and he went on and drove home his point. He had a Ph.D. from Harvard and he could spend his money all over the place in Atlanta, Georgia, but if he wanted to go to a restaurant or get a sandwich or something, he had to go all the way down at Rich's [Department Store] into the basement next to the colored bathroom down there. He said there was something wrong with that picture.

To make a long story short he was the one who opened up the door and then next to him was Dr. Cunningham, Frank Cunningham, who was the president of Morris Brown. Before Dr. Mays and the rest of them could gain their composure, Dr. Cunningham knocked the ball out of the park. He was just great. Supported us completely. And so at that point you've got the presidents split. Therefore, what do we do next? It was Clement's idea, Dr. Rufus Clement, who said, "Well, if you've got to do this you need to have some kind of a manifesto as to why you're doing it." He said, "You're in Atlanta, you know, with all these schools which are known for providing a good education. So why don't you write up a full-page ad and we'll raise the money. And we'll run it in all of the papers, a full-page ad." And I said okay, we'll do that.

So I appointed Roslyn Pope, who was the president of the SGA at Spelman, along with Albert Brinson from Morehouse. I believe, I think, I put Julian on that committee, too. But the bottom line, though, is that on the night before we were supposed to present it to the presidents the next day Roslyn called me up to say the next day to say, "Lonnie, I haven't been able to find anybody to help me." And I said, "Roslyn, write the damn thing. I don't have time. I'm organizing."

GI: And you're referring now to what would become "An Appeal for Human Rights?"

LK: Yes, it was the "Appeal."

See, it was Clement's position that before you strike somebody you need to give them notice. It's . . . how should I put it, I understood why he said that because he knew we were going to be stepping out completely. And I think he wanted to just have a historical record as to why we did what we were going to do and so on. Roslyn wrote "An Appeal for Human Rights," which you probably have seen.

GI: Of course. Yeah, let me let me just ask you. Let's go back just a little bit. You mentioned that you met Julian in the registration line when you were both registering for classes. That was your freshman year? Your first year?

LK: No, that was my first year back. Because I had gone to Morehouse for a year. I was in the military and then came back.

GI: So, this is 1957 and you meet Julian while you're in the registration line for classes. Was there anything about him you noticed? Did you talk with him? Was there any previous encounter?

LK: There was no way you could not talk to anyone because you were in that line for eight or nine hours. We talked. The one thing that I remembered was the fact that he had been an intern for *Time* magazine in high school. I remembered that, and I knew enough about *Time* magazine to know that he wouldn't have gotten that job as an intern or whatever if he wasn't smart.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

And so when it was time to pull together the movement . . . that's when I said to Joe Pierce, "See that guy over there? He was an intern for *Time* magazine and I met him when we came back. And we need to get him involved." We went over to talk to him. His first reaction was, "Well, somebody is gonna to do it." I said, "No, no, no . . . we're gonna make it happen." And so that's kind of how we got going . Now what flowed from that was the "Appeal for Human Rights" and what flowed from that also was the creation of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. Most people do not know that the idea of SNCC came from the Atlanta movement. We went to see Dr. [Martin Luther] King, [Jr]. and asked him to call the meeting up in Raleigh and he agreed to do that. And he used his resources and five hundred bucks that he had in his treasury to hold [the meeting]. Now, you have people who were claiming that he wanted to take over the movement. That's a flat out lie. The man wasn't trying to do that.

GI: And you're referring to Dr. King, now?

LK: Yeah, but that came from people who were not necessarily friends of his. But it was a lie. Martin King never tried to take over what later became SNCC at all. All he did was use his resources to get us all together and then we in turn . . . we began to organize and move forward.

But it's amazing how people have rewritten history. There are certain people that, if they didn't like you, then they'll besmirch you when they get a chance. But it's totally unfair to do that to King because he was a wonderful guy. He was, yeah, such wonderful guy, and so forth and so on. But let me let you do this.

ORGANIZING THE ATLANTA SIT-INS

GI: No, that's fine because I do want to talk about the Easter Weekend in 1960 when the meeting up at Shaw took place and get an idea of the role that Julian played, that you played, and the Atlanta students played when you went up there. But I want to back up a little and talk about the publication of the "Appeal," which was on March 9th, 1960, and the first sit-in, which took place shortly after that on the 15th. And, from what I understand, Julian made his first effort to lead an actual sit-in over at City Hall.

LK: That's correct.

GI: Can you tell me a little bit about Julian getting into that part of it. And you mentioned, and many people understand, that he was a very talented young writer. He could communicate with a lot of different kinds of folks but there was always this thinking that, okay, given the background that he had, for him to actually go over there. . . Did that surprise you? Did you encourage him to do that? Is that something he did on his own?

LK: Julian could have never led the [sit-in] movement. Julian would have to have been a key component of the movement . . .

GI: Which is always what he told me.

LK: He did not have . . . people had a lot of respect for him, especially his intellect, in those early years. Where Julian was, what Julian became I should I say, was an intellectual leader as opposed to being among the ground troops. Am I making sense?

GI: Absolutely.

LK: He was a little nervous about some of the things that we did. In fact, that's why he used to break out in hives [laughs] because he was a little nervous about it. But in general Julian worked best on a team. So when you pulled together whatever you're trying to do you got to figure out who's going to do what and how does it all fit into an overall orchestra that you try and pull together.

GI: The orchestra is a great analogy or it's like lining up a baseball team. You don't want nine of the same people. You don't need thirteen of the same instruments in a big band. You take the Duke Ellington approach – every instrument has a different voice and bring those together.

LK: That's exactly right. That's exactly what we did. Now I can't tell you where all of this [referring to his own organizing and leadership qualities] came from except that I think I was born with it, okay? Whatever that is. My grandfather was a preacher. He was my mentor.

I think I was two and a half years old when my mother and father broke up. Down in little Arlington, Georgia. And my grandfather gave my mother five dollars and told her to go to Atlanta and get herself a job. I'll raise this boy. Now mind you he'd already raised seventeen children. And so I ended up being the eighteenth. But I was I was destitute. Follow me?

GI: Yeah. I think I once I once heard you say something like, "I wasn't born on the bottom. I was born looking up at the bottom."

LK: That's true. That's right. But what I should have said – I remember that – what I should have said, though, is that [referring to the gospel hymn] "His Eye is on the Sparrow." Because, but for the prayers of my mother, grandmother grandfather and whatever intellect I was born with, you know, I could have been like the rest of the rest of the kids. But I knew at an early age that I had a role to play that was going to be a little different from my friends. We have so much to talk about including the formation of SNCC.

GI: Well, before we get to SNCC I'm going to read you something that Julian said in an oral history interview from 1991. And it was something I thought was interesting to hear him say. I'm going to read some snippets from an interview he once did. In talking about the strategy for the sit-ins in Atlanta, he said, "We didn't go to private places where there were some legal questions about the proprietors right to refuse service. We went to public places where taxpayer dollars were involved, or the Interstate Commerce Commission was involved where there seemed to be no doubt that we had a right to be served there. And I think we expected either they would say you're right, 'come on in' or lawsuits would be filed appealing our convictions and the eventual result would be a court order ordering these places to be integrated. Looking back on it now it gives rise to a theory (which can't be a theory – it's got to be true) that not only did the sit-in movements take on the character of the people who began them, in this case Lonnie King, who remained the leader of the sit-in movement here for a number of years, but they also took on the character of the black communities from which they sprung. In this case they took on this heavily mercantile character of Atlanta. Our vision of Atlanta is that Atlanta is a place where higher education for Blacks is supreme. But the actual vision of Atlanta is that Atlanta is a place where Booker T. Washington's dream is supreme: Black business; black capitalism. So all the people in the Nashville movement thought they could love segregation to death – nonviolent suffering, through redemptive suffering – we thought we could nickel-and-dime segregation to death [laughs and nods his head]. And other movements in other places had a mix or different versions of these approaches. So I don't know if we had anything planned after that. Maybe Lonnie did, but I wasn't thinking beyond that day."

Julian said that the movement was very much reflective of who you were. Your organizing, your willingness to be direct [and] not shying away from confrontation. Is that an accurate assessment? Do you think that movements take on the personalities of people who lead them?

LK: Yeah, but it's an incomplete story, okay? I mean, I was an economics major, business administration minor. My major professor was Dr. E.B. Williams. Dr. Williams used to always say in my courses that if we could ever find a way to harness the vast dollar and use our purchasing power to get our freedom we'd be in great shape. He must have taught me in four or five courses.

And he said that in almost every course. So therefore I understood how the economic system worked because of him and I remember he once said that we do not have a lot of wealthy African Americans [in Atlanta]. He called us Negroes at the time – that was the time – he said but what we do have thousands and thousands of people who don't make that much money but collectively though it makes a difference. I was listening to him. So when time came for us to form this movement my position was that we needed to organize this community in an economic way. I said that Atlanta is a leader in the South. And if Atlanta holds out [boycotts] other folks are going to hold out. We've got to break Atlanta's back and the way you do it is economically. I said the margin of profit for a department store is roughly eight to ten percent. The margin of profit for other stores also falls into the same category.

We don't have to close down the store. We just need to impact that bottom line. And our theory was to get enough people to buy into our program of selected boycotts. So we picked the big kahuna – Rich's Department Store – and our position was that if we can break down Rich's the rest of the town – the rest of the town and the rest of the South to a great extent who may not have already integrated – will integrate because Rich's is a style leader and that was true. But let me just say this to you. I hope you will consider the role of those college presidents.

GI: I find that very interesting and very important.

LK: They had to run with the foxes and chase with the hounds, okay? They had a responsibility to us students, so they could not afford to have people question whether they had the right kind of wisdom. So it was a delicate thing for them as well as us. And if you go back and look at the records you will find that didn't a whole lot of things happen between the first big sit-in and really September. Because what we had to do . . . we had marches. We had to find a way to keep it going. And during that summer when we [referring to the Atlanta student movement] moved down to Auburn Avenue. And that's when we ended up starting *The Atlanta Inquirer*. And what happened on that was that a man by the name of Mr. Kossuth Hill came on the scene. A very, very important person who doesn't get enough credit for what he did back then. We started something called "The Student Movement and You."

PUBLICIZING THE ATLANTA STUDENT MOVEMENT

GI: I was going to ask you about that.

LK: The reason we started it was because number one we needed to tell our story. And number two was that Julian needed a job, okay? So we had plenty of money. The adults had about five thousand dollars that they had raised for us. We had about five thousand dollars that we [the students] had raised. And then Dr. Rufus Clement had raised twelve thousand. So, so we had plenty of money to spend so we started. So we started . . . so Julian was the person that I told, "I want you to tell this story" and there came a time when he made the decision – he and Alice [Bond's first wife] made the decision to get married. And so I said, "How are you going to support a wife?" He said, "I don't have a clue." I said, "I've got you writing "The Student Movement and You." Mr. J. Lowell Ware had started *The Atlanta Inquirer*. He and Mr. Kossut Hill. I said, "So why don't I just get them to hire you over there. And you can still keep writing and, instead of writing

just “The Student Movement and You,” just write that article in the new *Atlanta Inquirer*.” And so that's kind of how that thing happened.

GI: Julian has said everything that you just did. But he also once said in an earlier interview:

“And so we began a newsletter called “The Student Movement and You” and Ruby Doris Smith and Marian Smith and myself distributed I think hundreds of thousands of copies of this on Sunday morning.”

LK: Every Sunday, mm-hmm. That's right.

GI: “. . . through a variety of churches. We'd take it to churches and people would pick it up as they left. We developed a radio program called, “The Student Movement and You” and we got two radio stations that serve black Atlanta to let us have an hour a week to have a weekly series called, ‘The Student Movement and You.’ We developed a sort of dog and pony show called ‘The Student Movement and You.’ We took it around to civic clubs . . .

LK: And all over town.

THE ATLANTA INQUIRER

GI: “of which there are dozens in Atlanta. And we began to develop a constituency and when *The Atlanta Daily World* lost its advertising from A&P [grocery store] [laughs] to pressure the *World* started to put additional pressure on us to stop the picketing. And when the *World* did begin putting pressure on us, when they began to lose money some business people stepped forward and founded a newspaper called *The Atlanta Inquirer* and Lonnie King began a column which I occasionally helped with that appeared in that paper. And I think it was called “The Student Movement and You.”

[Pause]

LK: Where were we?

GI: I had just mentioned *The Atlanta Inquirer* and that Julian had once said in an interview that “Lonnie King began a column (which I occasionally ghost-wrote) that appeared in that movement. I think it was called “The Student Movement and You.”

LK: That's true.

GI: Julian then wrote, “We spent the summer picketing the A&P and building support in the community. And when the students came back in the fall [of 1960] we began a fall campaign that, among other things that featured the arrest of Martin Luther King, and the famous telephone call from Kennedy to Mrs. King that resulted in Kennedy not Nixon winning that election.”

LK: That's true. Julian went over there, and he used *The Inquirer* to spread our message. He did the same thing for my columns. In other words, he was our PR guy. So he went over there and

started working for Mr. J. Lowell Ware. And also, for Bill Strong, who was the editor, and Mr. Kossut Hill, who was the publisher. Mr. Hill fell out [laughs] with his editor. Here you have a situation where you have a new newspaper just getting on scene carrying forward the message of the movement and all of a sudden, we've run into a dead end. So, Mr. Hill – Kossut Hill – came by the office one day and told me he wanted me to help him in some way. I said okay. So what we did was this. We got Julian to go over and start writing. In other words, instead of writing “The Student Movement and You,” he basically just wrote in *The Atlanta Inquirer*. And he ghost-wrote several articles for me because I didn't have time to write it. I never intended to write at all. When you're running a movement that's that large you don't have time to sit down and write. Plus, that was his forte, not mine. He was just so talented. So anyway, Julian went over there. He took John Gibson with him.

John was the person in charge of circulation. Then Mr. Kossut Hill, who owned the paper, fired this other guy who was the editor. His name was Bill Strong. And so he brought in M. Carl Holman from Clark [University] to be the editor. So Holman came in. Julian and a group of young folks who had a lot of respect for Mr. Holman came in to work for the paper. So they did a heck of a job in advertising and in writing. John Gibson, for instance, he took the crime situation. Jondelle Johnson, she did the society page. It was a really good team. But it was great for us because it was the it was the vehicle that we needed in order to carry forward the message. So I got a chance to see first-hand the role of a publisher. The publisher can make the decision about what's going to happen. You may not even know the person made the decision. But if you're the publisher you make the decision. Anyway, we started the paper and Julian wrote, as I said, most, if not all, of my articles. He also wrote other stuff, too. John Gibson wrote the crime beat. Jondelle Johnson wrote the social beat. A guy named [Eddie] Billups from Birmingham. He was the advertising person. And then he brought in John Smith, who was the . . . who ended up owning the paper later on. But essentially, we shook up everybody around here with that paper.

I have to tell you this. This is a little comical anecdote.

GI: Those are the best kind.

LK: Yeah. I got a call from the C. A. Scott, who was the publisher of *The Atlanta Daily World*. He called me into his office because he wanted to talk to me about shutting down the newspaper. I listened to him respectfully.

So when he finished I said, “Mr. Scott let me tell you my response to your request. I said we're in a revolution now, we're in a movement now. And if you go back and look at history people get hurt in movements. Sometimes unintentional but nevertheless there will be some casualties.” I said, “so in this instance this is your time to be a casualty.” I mean, that man hated me until the day he died [laughs]. But he was trying his best to jawbone us into supporting segregation basically because he was getting all these ads from these white guys and what have you and that was impacting his bottom line. And I guess he wasn't prepared to lose any money. And so what he wanted to do was to kick me in the butt. He went to his grave hating me. But you know what though? I don't mind that certain people hate me [laughs].

GI: It's kind of badge of honor is some ways.

LK: Yeah, yeah, that's true [laughs].

THE INFLUENCE OF JULIAN BOND'S FAMILY

GI: I want to backtrack for just a bit. You've mentioned Julian's family and I think it's fair to say that you and Julian came from very different backgrounds. They were about as opposite as they could be.

LK: Oh, yeah [laughs].

GI: How did Julian's decision to get involved in the movement go over with his mother and father? Were they put off by it? Did they caution him? Were they supportive? Do you remember?

LK: I don't know what happened initially. But I'm assuming though that they were less than thrilled [laughs] about what he was doing which may be one reason why he only went to jail one time.

GI: That was the [Atlanta] City Hall cafeteria sit-in.

LK: That was the City Hall cafeteria, right. So I think that they had an impact on him. But Julian though, when you look at it in retrospect, he was able to, how should I put it? He was able to run with the foxes and chase with the hounds.

His mother, in my opinion, was more militant than his father. And she demonstrated that to me after Dr. Bond died. You know, Julian came up on a college campus. His dad had been president of two colleges. So, his whole upbringing was entirely different from mine. He was able to, I think, continue with his upper middle-class background with his family. But, at the same time, he got along very well with us poor folks [laughs].

FORMING SNCC

GI: Let's talk a little bit about the formation of SNCC.

LK: Okay. Let's do that.

GI: There are so many different stories about that.

LK: Well, you got a bunch of lies out there.

GI: You have a bunch of different versions out there. Tell me how SNCC began.

LK: Okay, okay. You probably ought to talk to Dr. Otis Moss. Do you know who that is?

GI: I do not.

LK: We held a meeting. By *we*, I mean the Atlanta movement in the early spring of 1960. At that meeting we talked about how we needed to organize throughout the South. This “spot stuff” is not going to work. The question became who has enough prestige to call a South-wide meeting. And so we decided that the person who could do was Martin King, Jr. Because by this time he had been in Montgomery and had moved to Atlanta. And I knew him from the time I was eight years-old being a member of that [Ebenezer Baptist] church. So we called M.L. [Martin Luther King, Jr.] and he agreed to have a meeting with us. He had hired Ella Baker as acting secretary. When we met with him it was me, Otis Moss, Marian Wright . . . I don’t think Julian was there.

But the bottom line is that we met with him and I told him we needed to organize South-wide because the Virginia legislature had passed anti-trespass laws. Because they all meet in the first part of a year. I said the next thing it’s Maryland and then before you know it is all way over in Texas. I said so these folks [segregationists] are organized across racial lines so we got to be organized, too. He agreed with that and he agreed to call a meeting up at Shaw [University]. They chose Shaw because that is where Ella – Ella Baker – had gone to school. He put up five hundred dollars of SCLC’s money to pay for it. Now, I don’t know what happened between the time of the meeting because Ella was opposed to what we were trying to do. But I think that’s what got her fired by him to be honest with you, okay? By the time we got to Raleigh, King had fired her, so she was extremely hostile because she’d been fired. And she made friends with Connie Curry.

Connie Curry and Ella became very close. They have some revisionism about how the movement got started. That’s another story. Ella came in and to her credit, even though she hated King for having fired her, she worked hard with the students, okay? I wanted to know more about . . . who is this lady named Ella Baker? And as I learned more about her about how I was able to ascertain the fact that she had been working hard. She had worked with CORE, the NAACP and at almost every last one of those jobs she had done something to get fired.

How should I put it? Ella Baker was a woman of great intellect who didn’t know her place. You follow me? Because at the time, in those days, she was raising sand and – these were some old-school traditional men running these organizations – she was supposed to be in the kitchen cooking and doing other stuff. And that upset some of these men that she was outside of her lane.

GI: Who were the delegates from Atlanta who went up to Raleigh for that meeting besides you and Julian?

LK: Mary Ann Smith from Morris Brown. Julian from Morehouse. I was there from Morehouse. I think that was it from Atlanta, okay? From Nashville you had Diane Nash. Sterling Diane Nash. She was something. You had Marion Barry from Memphis. You had this gentleman – I’ve forgotten his name now. He’s around Atlanta. He’s still around. He was there. Nashville had around ten people, if I remember correctly. A lot of other people came from other places. You had a good contingent from North Carolina because we were in North Carolina where the meeting was being held. What was the guy’s name who was going to divinity school in Nashville?

GI: Jim Lawson

LK: Jim Lawson. Jim was there. In fact, he was the only graduate school person that I saw there

come to think of it. Jim Lawson. Another important figure. Is he still alive?

GI: Yes, he is.

LK: Mm-hmm. Okay.

GI: Yes. I was in Memphis for the King Commemoration week in April [2018]. He actually gave a great, powerful speech. He sounded great. He's eight-nine years-old.

LK: Yeah, he's has to be up there.

GI: He's up there.

LK: The last I heard he had a church in Los Angeles or someplace like that.

GI: That's right. So, Jim Lawson was at the SNCC conference?

LK: He was there, yeah. There were about three hundred people there. But the student leadership that made themselves, I guess you would say conspicuous, was a group from Atlanta, a group from Nashville and the group from Alabama State down there in Montgomery. Wait. . . I've got one more group. The home group. Was it [North Carolina] A&T? I think it might have been A&T college because the guy who was the leader of that movement is still alive.¹ He just retired not long ago from being the pastor of a church. But I have talked to him since he retired. But let me let you keep on asking me some more questions.

GI: Did it seem like a natural fit that Julian became the communications director of SNCC?

LK: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

GI: Was there any real method to select someone for this job? Was it, okay, it could be this person, this person or that person, or was he just the logical person for that job?

LK: It was a dictatorship [laughs]. I appointed him. Yeah. Because Julian Bond . . . he was an unusual person. Impeccable integrity. Highly skilled, in my opinion, and totally intellectually committed to this movement. Now why do you think I say intellectually?

GI: I'll give it a shot. Was it that, because he was such a "natural" writer and, even at a young age, such an effective public face that this was a natural fit for him?

LK: Close [laughs]. Yeah. You are what you grow up to be. Rarely – this is unfortunate but just the way it is for most folks in this country – rarely do you move too far beyond your upbringing. Julian Bond was just a natural fit. Julian Bond was . . . the best way to put this is that if I had to choose between Julian Bond and Roslyn Pope you had to just flip a coin because both of them were such brilliant writers. She wrote the "Appeal for Human Rights."

¹. Ezell Blair, Jr. In 1968, he changed his name to Jibrell Khazan.

GI: Did she write most of it?

LK: She wrote all of it.

GI: All of it, okay.

LK: And Julian typed it on Dr. [Howard] Zinn's typewriter. She actually wrote it. Well, what happened is that when the [college] presidents wanted us to put out a manifesto when they saw that they couldn't talk us out of what we were doing, going downtown [to sit-in], Dr. Clement said I'll raise the money and we'll put a full-page ad in the paper. But in my mind Roslyn Pope and Julian should have written it, along with Albert Brinson and Charles Black. Well, it was due at the college presidents for their review the following day. So Roslyn called me up the following day and said, "Lonnie, I haven't been able to find anybody to help me." And I said, "Roslyn, will you just write the damn thing [laughs]? We can't go into that meeting tomorrow without anything. We've got to have that document."

So she wrote it. She told me that she got Dr. Howard Zinn to help out. It was actually written at his kitchen table. And she said that Julian typed it for her because she couldn't type. Now, I never asked him about this, but I think, knowing Julian, he probably participated in the draft in some way, maybe adding or changing something small here and there. Julian was just so smart. But he said she did it. And she said she did it, so we may as well take it like that.

JULIAN BOND'S 1965 CAMPAIGN FOR THE GEORGIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

GI: When Julian decided to run for the Georgia state legislature in 1965 did this surprise you? Did he talk with you about it?

LK: By this time, I was up in D.C. But you see we left some unexploded bombs in Atlanta. One of them was Ben Brown. One of them was Julian. By unexploded bombs I mean smart, talented people who were prepared to keep going. And there were some others that got on the bandwagon at the last minute. Of course, there was Leroy Johnson. But it was a very, very challenging, changing time. And as more and more people got on board you found that your support expanded.

GI: When you met him was there a part of you that wondered if this guy three or four years from now was going to run for the legislature?

LK: No, not really. Because he was such a laid-back guy. Julian Bond, in my view, was a thinker. Often times he didn't necessarily say what was on his mind. But if you pushed him he'd tell you what's on his mind. I had never met anybody like him.

GI: What do you mean by that, you'd never met anybody like him? You've met just about every kind of person there is. That's a pretty big statement to say that you'd never met anybody like him.

LK: Well, Julian had this capacity to be comfortable in almost any surrounding. If we were at the White House, he'd be comfortable. And if we were down there in the alley he'd be comfortable. That's just the kind of guy he was.

One of the tragedies with Julian – and I mean “tragedy” in quotation marks, not in the . . . you know what I'm trying to say – was the fact that he had so much that he could offer, and I don't think we ever got the chance to fully appreciate just how brilliant this guy was. In his life, Julian Bond was many things to many people. He knew so many different kinds of people. But above all he was just a brilliant guy. Absolutely brilliant. We were really tight back then, man. Really tight.

GI: What do you mean by that?

LK: Well, in my experience with him I never found him off-base on any issue. Now, he may not have talked about it. But if you got into it he had already read it. He was one of kind. Just like his dad, who was quite a man. And so was his mother. Just something else. Julian was very much a product of the environment he came up in.

GI: Let's talk a little bit about Julian's run for the Georgia legislature and its subsequent refusal to seat him. You were in D.C. at that time. Did you follow it?

LK: Oh, yeah. I did.

GI: Then it ends up in the Supreme Court.

LK: Well, Julian was a reluctant tiger. He didn't necessarily go out and stir up things. That wasn't his way back then. But if, per chance, there was some stirring he was nearby. He wasn't going to back down. Julian Bond was, in my opinion, an intellectual radical as opposed to the radical who is constantly to get in the way of whatever. He would . . . Julian would use the power of the pen to be his sword. That's the way I saw it.

JULIAN BOND'S LEGACY

GI: I just have a couple of more questions.

LK: That's fine. I'm good. Go ahead. I'm enjoying my time with you. I'm glad we're doing this.

GI: Julian later became the president of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and served in that role for a while. Was that, to you, something that was like – and we keep using this phrase – a natural fit for him to be the head of an organization like the NAACP? Was he, in your view, more inclined to have been a professor and a writer and journalist?

LK: Julian, in my opinion, was never in the right pew at the NAACP. That's just my opinion. What I mean by that is this. He was an intellectual activist. Does that make sense to you?

GI: Tell me more.

LK: You know he was not the type of person who was going to say, "Let's organize a hundred people and go down there and kick some butt." That wasn't him. Now, he served as chairman of the board or something for eleven years. They may be some kind of record, when you think about it. But there's an old expression, "They died too soon. He died too soon." Julian died too soon. Way too soon.

GI: I'm going to ask you one last question, Mr. King, to finish up our time together. And it's a big question and I know you're up to answering it. Where would you place Julian in the movement in the 1960s? What was his legacy? He was integral to so many things, as you've mentioned.

LK: Julian was the intellectual force behind the Atlanta movement, although I don't think he sought that role. You just don't know what life has in store for you. You didn't always know what the next day would bring. Then he just became an intellectual force. Period. When he said or wrote something, you listened. You just don't know what life has in store for you. He was one of a kind. One of a kind.

GI: Thank you very much.

LK: Sure. My pleasure. Nice to see you after so many years.