

Coronet

April, 1970

Negro leader Julian Bond: "That cat's shook 'em up good, man!"



"He's beautiful! Wow, I'd fight for Julian for President!"
LIFE, NOV. 8, 1968.

"A dangerous upstart!"
SOUTH CAROLINA BUSINESSMAN; 1969.

*"... an asterisk in the long history of the
fight for free speech."*

NEWSWEEK, DEC. 19, 1966.

*"That cat's shook 'em up good, man!
He's goin' all the way!"*

NEGRO TAXI DRIVER IN ATLANTA, GA.; 1969.

"The gentlest of men . . ."
EBONY, MAY, 1969.

*"... the clearest, sanest, most responsible voice from
the New Left."*

18-YEAR-OLD WHITE GIRL IN MASSAUCHUSETTS; LATE 1969.

From time to time, certain young politicians suddenly capture the attention of their fellow Americans. One such individual is 30-year-old Julian Bond, a Negro legislator in the state of Georgia House of Representatives.

After the 1968 Democratic Convention, when Julian Bond led a group challenging the seating of the Georgia delegation and later heard his name placed before the convention as candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the United States, the young legislator emerged as one of the nation's most significant black leaders. He has addressed more than a hundred university or college audiences, and countless other groups. What Bond says is almost always controversial and quotable. Last September, for example, he accused President Nixon of "political adultery with the Cinderella bridegroom from South Carolina, Mr. Thurmond," and spoke of the pressing need for a black-oriented political movement.

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At CORONET's request, I flew into Atlanta some weeks ago to talk to the legislator. My wife and I had already asked a fairly large number of persons in some 15 northern and southern states for their reactions to the young man. Replies ranged all the way from intense black and white approval to equally intense white—and black—dislike. Elements

Meanwhile, the case had been taken to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a unanimous decision, the Court decided the Georgia House had erred in denying Bond his seat. It was a precedent - making opinion, since state legislatures have traditionally been permitted to decide on their members' qualifications. Bond quietly took office in January, 1967.

I took a cab to Julian's small, modest home, and found him in a tiny office, a closed-in front porch. He was talking to a heavyset Negro who was running for some local office and had come to seek Julian's advice. Julian had changed into slacks and a sport shirt, and looked more like a university student than a legislator.

Down through the years, I've interviewed U.S. Presidents, major political figures, leading educators, and a host of other prominent persons. All have shown an ability to listen, offer their views calmly and modestly, and put visitors at ease. It seems to me that Bond, who never shows boredom or visible annoyance at a stupid question, has this same rare quality of absolute poise, sympathy, and real interest in others.

While Julian talked local politics, I reviewed what I knew about his family. His father had been president of Fort Valley State College in Georgia and Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. From five until 17, Julian attended George School, a Pennsylvania Quaker institution and in 1957, when Dr. Bond became dean of the School of Education at Atlanta University, he entered Morehouse College. Julian married Alice Louise Clopton during his last year and didn't finish college. They now are busy raising five children.

Julian helped found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1960, and was Snick's communication director until the fall of 1966. He was also a reporter and feature writer on the *Atlanta Inquirer*, and ended up managing editor in 1963. Julian's poems and articles have been published in a number of magazines and anthologies.

After the political guest had left, I asked Julian what had sustained him during the fight for the seat in the Georgia House. "My father and my brother-in-law Howard Moore," he said. "My father kept saying, 'Stick to it! Stick to it!' Howard's married to my sister Jane, and he's also my

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attorney. He said the case was in court not for my sake but for the sake of the principle. That's about what Chief Justice Earl Warren said—that it's an obligation of legislators to feel free to take positions on controversial questions."

One of the children, Phyllis, opened the door between the office and the house. "I don't want you to do that," Julian said firmly. "If you want to go outdoors, use the back door. Hear?" The child nodded obediently. I could hear the uproar of other kids playing in the next room.

Thinking of the children, I asked Julian if he thought there was an age when children became aware of race. "I've sort of forced it on my kids," he replied. "When a Negro's on TV, I say, 'Look, there's a Negro,' and make them know there's at least a physical difference. I don't want them to find it out in the street. In my time, kids had white friends until they started school. Then they went to one school and their 'white playmates' went to another. If there's any age when kids get race-conscious, I guess it's around six."

"How about you?" I asked.

"I was pretty well protected as the son of a college president." Julian, a chain smoker, stubbed out a cigarette and lit another. His fingers are long and graceful in their movements. Bond makes few gestures during speeches or private conversations, apparently depending for emphasis on his fine, low-pitched voice. Parenthetically, he has no trace of a Southern accent. He went on, "At Fort Valley, our house was on the campus. I remember thinking it was a mansion with a hundred rooms. Probably it had eight. I also remember my father's annual Ham and Egg Festival. Farmers would display their hams and other produce. One year they actually had guys lay railroad tracks on the stage while they sang.

"It was in George School that I became aware of race. Not at first, although I was one of only two black boys in a white school. The thing that troubled me was that I was the smallest kid in my class. That bothered me, not the racial fear, and I didn't know how to dance or play soccer or basketball." Julian added sadly, "Prep - school boys can be quite cruel. I remember one kid who had a record collection, and some boys tied him up and scratched through all the grooves; it seemed particularly bad to me. But I'm glad I went there. It was a better education than I'd have had in the local schools."

I realized that Bond's compassion and hatred of violence — all violence—had developed very early. His Vietnam protests had been centered not so much on American involvement (although that aspect was

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important) as they were on war, any war. I asked if he had modeled himself on his father, a man he obviously loves and respects.

"I don't believe so," he said thoughtfully. "He taught me to read at four, taught me to respect books. Then Julian added wistfully, "I've always regretted I'm not my father's kind of scholar. I simply don't have his love for research."

I had wondered if something or someone in Bond's childhood had influenced him toward politics, so I asked about early ambitions. Julian laughed. "I wanted to be a movie director," he said. "Not an actor, a director. Later, I wanted to be a writer. I thought of doing that in addition to whatever else I did, but I didn't know what the 'whatever else' was. Then I became interested in journalism. I still have a dream of owning a newspaper."

I was puzzled at why a gentle, sensitive man had decided to go into politics, particularly to run for a seat in a bitterly hostile, predominantly white legislature.

"A number of friends in Snick urged me to do it," Julian said. "I didn't want to at first, but Snick had never had experience in an urban setting. I thought that if someone ran for office and Snick became involved, it would be an interesting exercise. Nothing more. Until we swept the primary, we didn't expect to win."

Bond was swept into political life by a fight he disliked, the battle for the Georgia seat. It wasn't a matter of selling out to the establishment; rather, it was a gradual discovery that he could best serve his people from a post within the establishment.

This doesn't mean that he has any admiration for the existing Republican and Democratic parties. We talked about the possibility of a third party—perhaps a black-white liberal coalition. Bond said he thought it was possible, but it would have to start at a local level and in those parts of the South where there's a large black belt.

I detected an unusual tinge of anger in Julian's voice when he added, "I don't think the young people are really interested. It irritated me to see black and white students deride Charles Evers' election as being meaningless. I went down to his inauguration as mayor of Fayette, Miss. It's just a little town, but people came from miles around, some on muleback, some on foot. If you live in the rural South, having a Charles Evers as mayor is the difference between night and day."

Implementing his belief that action will have to start at a local level, Julian is involved in a drive called Southern Elections Fund, the immediate aim of which is to raise \$100,000 for allocation to campaigns

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in the South. I said I didn't think it was very much.

"Difference in standards," Julian observed. "If the fund gave a Northern candidate \$500, it wouldn't make any difference, but if we give \$500 to some guy who's running for county commissioner in a rural Southern county, it can mean all the difference in the world." He laughed and added, "Maybe there's something to be said for the lower standards, but not much."

Julian's opposition to violence is almost an obsession. This puts him at odds with the black militants but he understands their frustration. To explain the feeling, he sometimes quotes Henry McNeal Turner, one of the Negroes expelled from the Georgia legislature about a hundred years ago: *"The black man cannot protect a country if the country doesn't protect him; and if, tomorrow, a war should arise, I would not raise a musket to defend a country where my mankind is denied . . ."*

While Julian answered the phone again, I reflected on brief flashes and impressions that might indicate his goals.

Clearly, the welfare of his family came first, followed by service to his constituents, even such basic efforts as getting garbage collected. Without question, he will continue his speaking engagements; he now gets fees up to \$750 or more.

Again without question, he will support black political campaigns in the South. He feels the South offers the greatest potential for change. Will he eventually run for Congress? He says he has no plans, but I think he doesn't really know. He may be forced into a campaign by Georgia admirers. Newspaper ownership is doubtless more of a dream than a definite goal.

Of one thing, I'm sure: the family comes first. As I left in the silky twilight, Julian was horsing around and playing games with the kids in front of the house.

William B. Hartley

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