

JULIAN BOND FOR PRESIDENT IN '76

Gordon French

Andrew Young is now the most influential black political leader in the history of the American republic. He wields that influence today because of the decision of another man seven years ago, a man who has yearned to be in Young's position.

Jimmy Carter is now the foremost leader of the Western world. He has attained that goal because the same man made a crucial decision two years ago clearing the path to the White House for Carter.

The source of Young's power was a daring political stroke committed in the spring of last year--the endorsement of long-shot candidate Jimmy Carter. Young's support, more than any other event, endorsement, shift or fluke, was responsible for the Presidential election of Jimmy Carter.

The on-going sagas of Carter and Young are now public lore. But there is another story here, interwoven with their's--the story of a man whose decisions dictated the success now enjoyed by Carter and Young. These men owe a debt of gratitude to another, to one who looks on from the outside at a newly burgeoning Southern power structure which he helped create, but the fruits of which will unlikely reach his lips.

This man is Julian Bond, erstwhile folk-hero of the 1968 Democratic convention, national lecturer and member of the Georgia State Senate. It has been over the carcass of his career that Andrew Young and Jimmy Carter have strode as they reached for the heights of power and prestige. This is not a story of political cannibalism, but one of political suicide.

The promising career of Julian Bond has fallen victim to self-inflicted wounds.

There was a time in the not-too-distant past when Julian Bond was the fastest rising black star on the political firmament. Opinion researchers reported that he was the choice among blacks to be America's first minority President. In the early seventies, he ranked with Ralph Nader and Dick Gregory as one of the three most sought-after speakers on the national lecture circuit. Whenever liberal politicians wanted to influence the black vote, Bond's phone began to ring.

At the apex of his political and financial success, Bond began making crucial misjudgments which presaged his current decline. In 1970 Andrew Young approached Bond with an offer to support him if he would run for Congress. Bond's refusal to enter the race opened the door to Young's political career. Most interested observers believe that Bond could have won the seat if he had manifested the necessary interest in it.

Later, in 1975, most observers expected Bond to run in the Presidential campaign in an effort to win delegates to broker at the nominating convention. In the earliest polls he showed remarkable strength. Bond's decision to stay out allowed fellow blacks such as Young and M. L. King, Sr. to support Carter, a support which most surely would have been withheld if Bond had run.

As a final irony, Bond chose to back the failing candidacy of Morris Udall. The man who so easily could have barred the

White House door to Jimmy Carter now became his most vociferous opponent.

For seven years Bond had been awaiting the time when he would be old enough to pursue his fortunes as a national candidate. In March of 1975 he appeared in Chattanooga for a lecture. He was pondering the future and searching for support to make a run for the Presidency. Bond would have his own Southern strategy designed to garner solid support from the black community in an effort to build a block of delegate votes for the convention. Tennessee would be an important start in that plan, for only 15% of the popular vote would allow him to take a portion of the state's delegates. Bond needed money and volunteers, which were two of his reasons for coming to Chattanooga.

Bond's speech in Chattanooga to the Southeastern Council on Family Relations is the focal point of this paper. Before one can fully appreciate the appeal of Julian Bond as a politician, it is necessary to understand the man and how he developed a national image.

Horace Julian Bond was born in Nashville (14 January 1940) into a well-educated, middle-class family. His grandfather had ministered in the Congregational church in Nashville and had served on the faculty of Fisk University. As a member of the Berea College Board of Trustees he was involved in a 1908 Supreme Court case which unsuccessfully attempted to end segregated education in Kentucky.

Julian's father, Horace Mann Bond, was one of the leading black educators of the mid-twentieth century. He served as President of two black universities and was widely published. He helped write the brief that culminated in the landmark Supreme Court desegregation decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

Julian's mother holds two masters degrees and has just recently retired from the library of Atlanta University.

Julian Bond modeled his own speaking after his father's academic style. Writer Howard Romaine traced many of Bond's qualities to his father: "The seeds of the younger Bond's incisive speech, his sardonic humor and gentlemanly demeanor can all be found here."¹

The academic community provided an insulated environment which protected Julian from the harsh realities of being a black youth in the forties and fifties. He grew up in Pennsylvania, attending a private prep school during his high school years. Julian was the only black student in the school and it wasn't until his senior year that an incident involving a white girl made him realize what it meant to be black in America. "That," Bond recalls, "was really a blow to me; that was like somebody just stopping you and slapping you in the face."²

In 1957 the Bond family moved to Atlanta and Julian was overwhelmed with terror at the prospect of living in the South.

By 1960 Bond had been enticed into the germinating civil rights struggle and was a coorganizer of the first wave of sit-ins to hit Atlanta. In the spring of 1960 the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee was organized at the behest of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Bond became Director of Communications. While national attention focused on King and his causes, SNCC was doing the fundamental organizing throughout the South, building the foundations for later political victories. Bond travelled throughout Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and west Tennessee helping to organize and to make contacts with the press. His efforts to organize Southern black votes built a solid political base which remains with Bond to this day.

This early political orientation in SNCC led to Bond's decision to run for public office. He joined the first wave of blacks to be elected to the Georgia House of Representatives since Reconstruction.

Four days before the legislature convened, Bond's old cronies at SNCC released a strongly worded anti-war and civil rights statement which urged young blacks to stay home and fight the civil rights struggle instead of fighting on foreign soil. Bond expressed support for the sentiments expressed in the SNCC statement, pointing to his own pacifism and arguing that the American government was being hypocritical by fighting for Vietnamese liberties while not ensuring liberty for

black Americans. In 1966, most Georgians believed Julian Bond's position was tantamount to treason.

The House convened a trial and voted to exclude Bond from their midst. He became the target of wrathful legislators who were angry because the group of six blacks had been forced upon them by reapportionment. Bobby Pafford summed up the emotions of his colleagues: "...reapportionment ousted noble and distinguished statesmen from our midst, and has shoved in their stead, ...the infamous Mr. Bond. Jones Lane joined in the chorus of condemnation: "I'm scared of him. ... I'm scared of all those people."³

The United States Supreme Court later in the year ruled that the Georgia House had violated Bond's right to free speech.⁴ As Bond was finally sworn-in, "Sloppy" Floyd walked out of the chamber, explaining, "This has nothing to do with race. We've got other nigger people in the House and seated them."⁵

Bond's expulsion from the Georgia House made him a minor hero among civil rights activists and liberals, but by 1968 he was living the role of an "asterisk in history," as he was characterized by Newsweek.⁶

The turning point of Bond's career was the 1968 Democratic convention. Bond led a challenge delegation to Chicago with hopes of unseating the hand-picked slate chosen by Georgia Governor Lester Maddox.

The Democratic Party had been embarrassed in 1964 by the calls to conscience of the Mississippi challenge delegation led by Fannie Lou Hamer. The credentials committee was virtually committed to seating the Mississippi challengers in 1968, but no one expected that any of the other numerous challenges would be honored. But as the committee met during the week before the convention, the press began to publicize the confrontation between what became known as "the Bond delegation" and "the Maddox delegation." The contrast between the unabashedly racist Maddox and the calm, thoughtful Bond provided ideal fodder for the press and a testing ground for the party. A compromise solution was struck allowing both delegations to be seated in full with all members given one-half vote. Bond refused the compromise and asked for a convention vote on the issue.

The first "event" of the opening night of the convention was created by administrative bungling. The Georgia regulars had been allowed to fill the seats on the floor. Bond scrounged enough passes for his challengers to storm the delegation claiming their seats. Sympathetic delegates and spectators sent up cheers while police and reporters besieged the challenge delegates. In all the confusion there appeared Julian Bond on home television screens talking to reporters and charming the viewers.

When the Georgia question was finally broached by the assembly, Bond's effort to have only his delegates seated was defeated by the closest vote of the convention as party

regulars were asked to vote for the credentials committee compromise. As the vote total was announced to the delegates, a spontaneous roar of disapproval rose among the defeated forces. The opening session was gaveled to adjournment at 2:40 a.m. as the floor rang to the chant "Julian Bond, Julian Bond." The scene was rebroadcast the following evening in prime time on all three networks.

"An exciting moment at this Democratic convention, and perhaps a significant moment," intoned Walter Cronkite.

"Julian Bond is knowingly or unwittingly a full-fledged Communist or Communist dupe," huffed Lester Maddox to the cameras.

Bond made such an impression on Eugene McCarthy that the candidate asked him to offer a seconding speech for his nomination. As Bond delivered his speech, police were attacking Yippie protesters in Grant Park--a stark, impression-making contrast for the television viewer.

The following evening Julian Bond became the first black offered for the Vice Presidential nomination of a major political party. The nomination was a ploy by anti-war forces to secure the microphone with the intent of protesting the conduct of the convention. Bond withdrew his name from consideration when it became clear that the effort had not been successful.

The Bond name contained magic throughout the convention. Even Norman Mailer was almost at a loss to describe it:

"Bond was extraordinarily--no other adjective--popular in this convention, his name alone possessed an instant charisma--people cheered hysterically whenever it was mentioned from the podium, and the sound 'Julian Bond' became a chant."⁷

The image of Julian Bond created by the television coverage of the 1968 Democratic convention transformed him into a national figure. By 1970-1971 he joined Dick Gregory and Ralph Nader as the most demanded speakers on the national lecture circuit. His views were sought by newsmen and his presence requested by television talk shows. In short, he became a celebrity.

Memory of Bond's performance at the convention as well as his regular speaking stops around the country made Bond a consideration during early speculation about the 1976 Presidential campaign.

In 1970 a Maryland research organization reported that Bond would be the choice among blacks if they could select a black President.⁸ In a November, 1974 Gallup Poll to determine the choice among Democrats for the Presidential nomination, Bond ranked sixth of thirty potential contenders suggested by Gallup. All those ranking higher (George Wallace, Hubert Humphrey, Henry Jackson, Edmund Muskie, and George McGovern) had developed national reputations by previously running for President.⁹ Clearly, there existed some popular support for his candidacy.

A Bond candidacy would have had a clearly defined and sizeable political base upon which to build. Blacks are

particularly important in the Democratic party, which attracted 94% of the black vote in the 1968 election and 93% in the 1972 election. The result is that black influence in the Democratic party far exceeds the 11% national population percentage. If Bond could have added liberal support to the black vote which would have naturally belonged to him, then he could have conceivably taken a healthy block of delegates to broker at the convention.

However, in July 1975, Bond determined that there were too many obstacles facing his campaign and that it would require too much effort to overcome them. The most pressing need was money-- too little of which found its way into his coffers. His youth and race would have made it difficult for him to establish the seriousness of his candidacy. Further, he holds a low profile public office that generates little national attention and that provides him no major political base within his own state. Finally, Bond's philosophy which is considerably to the left of most Americans on most issues would have become a handicap.

And yet, within weeks of his withdrawal, he confided regrets that he had not committed himself to a more serious effort beginning earlier in the campaign.

When Bond appeared in Chattanooga in March of 1975, he was still testing the potential of his candidacy. Whatever potential that was, it was wholly the result of the image, or ethos, which he had developed during the preceding ten years of public life.

For Julian Bond the most important factor within the political campaign setting is his ethos. More particularly,

that aspect of ethos which I choose to call image, defined as the preconception the audience holds of Bond. This image is responsible for Bond's lecturer career as well as the popularity he showed in those early Presidential polls.

Four factors have influenced the creation of Bond's image:

(1) The Personal Dimension. Bond's attractiveness and personality have been constant factors throughout his career. He epitomizes the low-key, casual disposition that Marshall McLuhan calls "cool." His dress is conservative, his voice quiet, his demeanor reserved and gentlemanly. His face makes him appear younger than his years, thus accentuating the impression on young people and adding impact to his accomplishments.

Articulateness, good education and family tradition have given him a reputation for intelligence.

(2) The Historical Dimension. In the late sixties Julian Bond was a symbol for the peace, youth and civil rights movements. There was perhaps no other person who personified those forces of change so totally as the young black from Georgia. His role as a symbol for the potential of black America continues to be the most important.

(3) The Relational Dimension. The people who have opposed Bond have added perspective to Bond's image. The battle over his seat in the Georgia House showed vividly the difference between the young black who represented the future in race relations, and the legislators who were clinging to a discredited past. Given that juxtaposition, most Americans chose to side with Bond.

At the Democratic convention, he found himself in a centrist position between Lester Maddox and Richard Daley on the right and the riotous peace demonstrators on the left. Subsequently, the rise of revolutionaries like Carmichael, Brown, and Cleaver on his extreme left caused Bond to appear moderate by contrast. In recent years, the political spectrum seems to have shrunken, leaving him once again on the far left, although that tilt appears to be less pronounced in the black community.

(4) The Affectional Dimension. Bond emerged from the 1968 Democratic convention as the lone hero for liberals. Subsequently, the media projected an idealized image of Bond which intensified the hero impression. In the vernacular of the day, he was believed to have charisma. Although this strong affection has mellowed with time, he is still greatly admired in the black community, particularly in the South.

Bond's image is a crucial element affecting his political stump speaking. It not only works as a selecting factor determining his audiences, but it also affects his strategies during the speech. He does not find it necessary to contribute overtly to his ethos with a great deal of ethical proof, and his delivery is purposely de-emphasized in an effort to focus attention on his message.

While Bond professes concern that his audience focus on the message rather than the person, his style is designed to

appeal more to the ear than to the intellect, as suggested in this excerpt from his Chattanooga address:

The reins of government have been seized by a national political movement whose acts are characterized by nothing less than the national nullification of the needs of the needy, the gratuitous gratification of the gross and greedy, a victory for the politics of penuriousness, prevarication, impropriety, pious platitudes and self-righteous swineishness.¹⁰

Bond is also fond of the metaphor. This vivid statement appeared in his Chattanooga speech following a call for new federal involvement in welfare and child care services:

What is needed now is not the inception of old ideas, but the conception of new realities. We must halt the contraception of new ways of dealing with old problems and begin now to promote the birth of tomorrow's dreams. The incestuous relationship between government and America's affluent must cease, and we must halt the sterile relationship between the needy and their needs.¹¹

Like every politician, Bond seeks to exploit the good will and rapport that humor brings. In Arkadelphia, Arkansas he was asked about the choice of a running mate should he become the Presidential nominee.

It must be a white woman from the Northwest. She needs to be Catholic and married to a Jewish oriental who speaks Spanish.¹²

Indeed, he is much more effective with extemporaneous humor than he has been with prepared material (as in recent forays onto NBC's "Saturday Night Live"). In introductory remarks he specializes in self-deprecatory humor:

I have just been sworn in to the Georgia Senate. As you know, I have moved from the House to the Senate, and they say it has improved both bodies. I'm just proud to know that I belong to the greatest deliberative body of men money can buy.¹³

While entertaining his audiences with humor and style, Bond advocates the causes of minorities and the disadvantaged. His solutions are liberal by today's standards, and leaning toward the left. In responding to a question concerning the changes in his personal philosophy, he recently told me: "I make much more of a Marxist analysis of these large economic forces which are controlling us all."

Bond attempts to summarize his philosophy by closing with a quotation, as he did in Chattanooga, quoting from W.E.B. DuBois:

I believe in God who made of one blood all the races that dwell on the earth. I believe that all men--black and white and brown--are brothers, varying through time and opportunity in form and gift and feature but differing in no essential particular, alike in soul and in the possibility of infinite development. I believe in the devil and his angels who wantonly work to narrow the opportunity of struggling human beings, especially if they are black; who spit in the faces of the fallen; who strike them that cannot strike again; who believe the worst and work to prove it, hating the image that their maker stamped on a brother's soul. Finally, I believe in liberty for all men, the space to stretch their arms and their souls, the right to breathe, the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, to enjoy the sunshine, to ride on the railroad uncursed by color, thinking, dreaming, working as they will in a kingdom of God and love.¹⁴

Where does Julian Bond go from here? Bond faces this question frequently, but really does not know the answer himself.

He continues to earn an above average income on the lecture circuit, although he has become bored with the routine. He has taken a fling into entertainment, acting in a movie called "Greased Lightning," as well as television appearances. Critics suggest he doesn't have much future there.

Bond had hoped to succeed Roy Wilkins at the NAACP, but was passed over in favor of the more moderate Benjamin Hooks.

A recent poll in Atlanta suggested that he could run well against incumbent Wyche Fowler (who won Andrew Young's seat) in the 1978 Congressional elections. But most observers feel he could not win and that he will not try.

Although his future is uncertain, one thing is abundantly clear--Julian Bond does not like Jimmy Carter. Perhaps if blacks continue to be disenchanted with the Carter administration, we may yet see Julian Bond make a symbolic race for President.

NOTES

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1

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2

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3

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4

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5

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6

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7

Norman Mailer, "Miami Beach and Chicago," Harper's CCXXXVII (November 1968): 123.

8

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9

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10

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11

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12

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13

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14

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