Greg Hicks  

I’m Professor Greg Hicks of the faculty here at the Law School. And I want to say first of all our Dean Kellye Testy can’t be here to join us this evening. She wanted very much to be here but as many of you may know she is chairing the search committee for the new president of the University of Washington and some search events prohibited her from being here tonight. But on behalf of the Dean and our faculty I’d like to welcome all of you other members of the Law School community, the University community, the community at large for joining us here tonight on this very special occasion. We are hoping that the Law School increasingly is going to become a venue for very consequential conversations and this is certainly one of them. So thank you for being here with you, our donors our alumni all of you who have made time on kind of a sloppy day to come out tonight.

And as I said we are going to have a rare opportunity tonight to have the thoughts of Julian Bond, very distinguished civil rights advocate with a life of commitment. We sometimes forget how very young he was when he began his significant work in desegregation in Atlanta one of the founding members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and then on and on from there. Elected at a quite young age to the Georgia House of Representatives and of course that led to a dust up. He was denied a seat I think chiefly because of his opposition to the Vietnam War and it took a federal court action for him to finally be seated. And a long distinguished career as a legislator in Georgia, as a member of the House. And then a member of the Senate-twenty years in the legislature. And this was forming kind of the background for a long career of engagement. Where there was a need for advocacy, where there was a need for wise counsel, he was there and just lived those times. And is singularly well-equipped to speak to us about the meaning of Dr. King’s legacy what those times were about, where we find ourselves today, and what the road ahead might look like.

Our format here is going to be pretty straight forward Dr. Bond...Mr. Bond and I will sit down and have an exchange there will be some questions and he’ll have the prerogative as our honored guest to refrain any of the questions that I may choose to ask and make them fit his understandings -I trust those more than I trust my own understandings. And then at the end of that there will be an opportunity for members of the audience. We’ll have a nice block of time at the end where you can pose questions. We have a couple of mics set out on the floor so when that time comes just come to the mics and ask a question. And then afterwards we’ll have a reception and we hope that you’ll all be able to linger and join us for that.

So maybe just a few other introductory comments about Julian Bond. He is a former chairman, ten years or more, of the NAACP. He’s been designated by the Library of Congress as a Living Legend. And a recipient of the National Freedom Medal. He is currently a distinguished scholar in residence at American University in Washington DC and a professor of history at the University of Virginia. I mentioned already he’s a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and has been involved with more charitable boards and advisory councils than you can imagine. I just refer you to his biography it’s just a stunning thing to see how he’s found the time and energy to provide counsel and engagement to so many, many organizations over many years. And so if I
could welcome Julian Bond to the chair and we will start. Please join me in welcoming Julian Bond.

[Applause]

Greg Hicks

So are our microphones on? I guess they are.

So glad you could be here with us this is just a very special event for us I mean so far...

Julian Bond

Let me tell you this is a great event for me. I’m accompanied by my wife who is an attorney, sitting in the front row there, a supreme court case winning attorney with some years of practice at the Southern Poverty Law Center it’s a great place to be anywhere with her-Seattle or where we live in Washington. Great, great pleasure to see Judge Johnson there in the second row. He served with great distinction on the NAACP board of directors for many years and was just a stalwart at making sure that the NAACP maintained its reputation as the legal arm of the civil rights movement. He played a great role in that. Then to see Rita Bender whom I saw recently at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was formed in April of 1960 in Raleigh, North Carolina at a conference. And this past year in April last year, we had a reunion conference and we expected 300 people to come. About a thousand came and I was telling Rita, I won’t say it was the best experience of my life, but it was a wonderful, wonderful experience to see these thousand people with whom I enjoyed this incredible experience when we were all young and knowing that I’d not see most of them ever again. I hadn’t seen many of them for many, many years. It was just a wonderful occasion. It was great to see her and it’s great to be here.

Greg Hicks

We are just hugely gratified. Thank you for being with us and for noting those in the audience. I was thinking perhaps we could begin or might begin with your thoughts on what might be called the long arc of Dr. King’s career. He was engaged in so many fights over such a long time and the complexion of the work that was done changed over time. There was this mixture of fights he chose to fight and methods he used and perhaps some reflection on just that arc of his career and what it might teach us?

Julian Bond

Well I was thinking when you mentioned that you might ask a question of this nature before. I began to think about it a bit and a couple of things went through my mind. I teach at the University of Virginia, teach civil rights history at the University of Virginia, and we’re planning next week to celebrate the anniversary of Dr. King’s speaking in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia. As a matter we’ve looked into the occasion: where he came, why’d he come, who was there, who heard him speak and so on.

He came by himself, flew by himself, was met at the airport by a professor and his two children. No word in the city paper about this man coming. The student paper noted him as a noted figure of the NAACP, which of course he was not. He couldn’t fill the main auditorium at the University, I think of course he would easily do that now if he were able to. But he couldn’t fill the main auditorium.

And one of the two people who met him recalls walking across what they concede at the University of Virginia is to call the campus, “the grounds” (I can’t get used to it but that’s what they do). They were walking across the grounds and a car backfired [claps] and King jumped like that and one of
the people with him grabbed him to protect him (a black guy going with him: a student, you know, to protect him) from what he assumed was a shot. White guy who was with him passed a professor, a distinguished professor now at UVA, didn’t think it was a shot thought it was a backfire. A shot was the last thing on his mind.

So I thought all these thoughts were going through my mind about how different King would have been in 1963. To travel by himself all alone from his home in Atlanta to Charlottesville, Virginia and to not have any kind of protection at all and he usually had. As time went on he had someone travelling with him all the time a companion (a man named, I can’t think of his name now, but anyway) and how different he became over the years that I knew him.

I met him in 1960 when the sit-in movement began. And one of my treasures is a photograph of myself and people from the Atlanta Student Movement sitting in his office on Auburn Avenue talking and laughing with him about various kinds of things because he was so approachable so open, so accessible. Unlike many prominent figures today he was an easy person to get to see to and get to know and I thought how much more we know and are learning about him now than we know or knew about him then.

I teach civil rights history and civil rights history is on the one hand familiar and the arc of that history is fairly well known. It goes like this: there used to be segregation, then Martin Luther King came along, then there were protests and marches and demonstrations, some people went to jail, some people got killed, then it all went away and we’re all a happy country. And that’s the message my students know when they come to me and I hope it’s not the on that they have when they leave but that’s the one when they come to me. And I think it’s a common American message about what the move was all about. And in some senses that’s true that’s what it was but we are learning so much more about King now and we are learning so much more about the movement.

Just a brand new book written about women, black women in the movement, I can’t remember the name of it, but it starts with a passage about Rosa Parks. And you know our image of isn’t of our grandmother distinguished sort of grey-haired woman too polite to dispute with the driver that she had a right to be there she and strong enough to fight against him, but surely wouldn’t get in any kind of argument with him. But we now know so much more about her we know that Rosa Parks was a great investigator of sexual crimes against black women in Alabama and the two decades before she sat down on this bus who would have thought that this woman, whom I knew very slightly. This demure, quite, peaceful woman would do this kind of thing, would travel through rural Alabama investigating rape charges or complaints of black women who had been raped and encourage them to file complaints to take the brave step to file complaints.

And we know so much more about King now. So we see King come through this arc. This sort of young minister in Montgomery in 1955 falling into the leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott almost by chance in part because some of the older figures said, ‘why don’t we choose this young guy so if everything fails we can blame him-good idea’. So they chose this young guy and he was the person most equal to the challenge and did such a wonderful job at it they couldn’t have chosen anybody better than that. So you see him develop from that sort of young person feeling his way, finding his way, knowing almost nothing about nonviolence, about the philosophy of nonviolence. Having to have Bayard Rustin tutor him teach him what this all meant. Learning about other things that he really didn’t know much about and develop into this sophisticated, erudite, wonderful, wonderful scholar student of world history into the man we all know and revere today.

The King papers are now owned by Morehouse College in Atlanta, the city of Atlanta. And one of the things they bought was these two shoe boxes full of 3x5 cards that King used to write quotations. He’d read books and he’d write a little quotation with the books on them. And when he was getting ready to write his sermon he’d go in there and pull out a handful of these things and apparently he’d say that’s the way he developed his sermons. And I went to, these papers had been
on display only for a short period now they’ve been put away while a building is being built to house them. And they had his library. And my parents who are college educated people, father a college president and my mother a school librarian, told me never write in a book, never do that. And I never wrote in a book. And I looked at King’s library and it’s just full of writings, scribblings, underlining this and that. And on display they had two books were open and passages about dreams were underlined. And you could just see him saying, ‘you know, I could use that sometime, I could say something about dreams sometime’.

So we learn so much, know more about him now and are going to know more about him in the future. You know I think we think of these figures like him that as we get older and as they get older and they get more distant from us as their deaths recede that we won’t know more about them but we do more about them we’re going to know more about them we’re going to know more than we know now. I know that was kind of rambling, I’m sorry.

**Greg Hicks**

No, no, that’s just splendid, what could be better? And you think about that too from where we sit events seem so compressed in time. As you see you kind of wind up with this little outline in the margins in the book, with this little outline of time. And of course the days must have extended for those folks as they’re trying to get together discover who their allies will be almost maybe accidentally discover which things you’re going to be engaged in. It must have been a remarkable thing just to be on the ground just living those days. I was struck by the fact that you yourself were so very young at that time younger than most of our students right now when some of these titanic events were unfolding. And can you share something of how those events struck you at that time? You were twenty-five at the time of the passage of the ‘65 voting rights act, twenty-four in 1964, and even at the date of King’s assassination in 1968 not yet thirty-a very young man. How did those events feel for you as such a young man, yourself being deeply engaged in these matters?

**Julian Bond**

Well they sort of came upon me as I think they came upon many people I got involved in the movement in 1960 when I was twenty. I was a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta the premier men’s college in the United States, you know that don’t you?

[laughter]

**Greg Hicks**

Yeah, yeah.

**Julian Bond**

And I was sitting in a cafeteria where we used to go between classes, or instead of classes. And a student came up to me and held up a newspaper and he said, ‘have you seen this?’ And I thought he meant, ‘do you read a newspaper’? And I thought every college student reads the newspaper but he meant, ‘have you read this story?’ And the story was ‘Greensboro students sit-in for third day’ and it told how Greensboro, black students in Greensboro North Carolina, for the third day in a row had gone to the local Woolworth’s department store and had taken seats at the lunch counter. Were refused service but refused to leave when they were refused service. And after about an hour moved away and another group took their place and after about an hour they moved away and so on and so on and they kept the lunch counter occupied for the full day. And the paper described how they did this, how they were dressed, how they behaved. It was like how-to-sit-in and this guy told...whom I knew only slightly, he was older than I was, an older student than I was and a football player at Morehouse which I’m none of those things.
And he said, ‘have you seen this?’
And I said, ‘yeah, I’ve seen it.’
And he said, ‘what do you think about it?’
‘Well I think it’s great.’
He said, ‘Don’t you think it ought to happen here?’ In Atlanta, he meant.
And I said, ‘oh it’s gonna happen here.’
He said, ‘why don’t we make it happen here?’
And I said, ‘what do you mean we?’
He said, ‘you take this side of the cafe I’ll take the other and we’ll call a group together.’

And we did that and our group got bigger and bigger and bigger. And that’s how I got in to the
movement for civil rights and really became engaged in it from that moment on.

So much so that eventually I dropped out of Morehouse College to my parents’ great dismay and
didn’t graduate for another ten years to their great, great dismay. But I did graduate and I became
engaged in this Atlanta student movement and in this new organization called the Student
Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And it was almost like a narcotic. It was irresistible. The
people who were engaged in it were so bright so interesting you wanted to be with them. You
wanted to be a part of them. They were doing things that you wanted to be a part of. You wanted to
join with them in what they were undertaking. It’s hard for me to explain it but it just seemed like
something I had to do, or we had to do because I was not alone there were hundred...dozens of us
then hundreds of us doing the same thing.

Which was why this thing in Raleigh was so great this summer to see these people again and to
look at them and you know how you go to your high school reunion, “oh it’s you”, and you’re so
happy to see them. That’s how I got involved.

Greg Hicks

And to think about the, just the nature of the changes I mean I was kind of a kid at the time I do
remember that horrible spring of 1968. I was still in high school at the time and just the sense that
something wrenching and horrible had happened with the assassination of Martin Luther King. And
then this confusion that many people were feeling about the change in his agendas or what felt like
a change as he went there and was fighting this not only racial but an economic for the garbage
men there in Memphis. And it just felt like such a dark confused time and then you are catapulted
in to the events of the early summer and the assassination of Robert Kennedy and the chaos of the
Chicago convention. There was so much going on it was as if the...that first impetus of the civil
rights movement had been somehow turned and we were all feeling very confused especially those
of us who were very young and wondered what lay ahead. I don’t know if you have reflections on
just that particular moment?

Julian Bond

Well I have very real memories both Kings’ assassination...I was living in Atlanta then and I
remember hearing about it on television just being so shocked. I think many of us thought he would
be shot at or shot or killed but when it actually happened it was such a astounding thing just
thunderstruck. And even though I knew him and had a good relationship with him I can’t say we
were best friends but I felt as if I’d lost a best friend someone with whom I had a real relationship
with like a brother someone like that.

And then I was at the convention in Chicago in ‘68. And have many memories of various sorts
about that the terrible, terrible violence in the streets, “the police riot,” as it became to be known. I
remember walking down the street with Taylor Branch whose name may be familiar to some of
you. Won the Pulitzer for writing Parting the Waters this great, great trilogy on the civil rights
movement. Taylor Branch, another guy named Parker Hudson, and myself had been part of a Georgia Challenge Delegation put together to challenge the regular Democratic delegation to the Chicago convention because we thought they were undemocratically chosen. And we wanted to replace them.

And Taylor and Parker and I came to Chicago to get hotel rooms and buses to transport our people from Georgia to Chicago and then once in Chicago to the Convention Hall. We went from hotel to hotel and there were no rooms to be had. And this well-dressed black guy who must have recognized me came up to me and said, ‘Can I help?’ And we explained the problem to him.

And he said, ‘Have you asked this hotel?’
And we said, ‘Yeah, we’ve been to this hotel.’
And he said, ‘Let me ask.’ And he went in and he came out in about fifteen minutes and he said, ‘I have sixty rooms.’
And I said, ‘wow!’ I said, ‘This is great.’ I said, ‘You know we can’t pay for sixty rooms, we don’t have any money.’
He said, ‘Why don’t you ask my boss?’
I said, ‘Who’s your boss?’
He said, ‘Elijah Muhammad.’
I said, ‘Elijah Muhammad? Why would Elijah Muhammad, who was practicing a doctrine of racial separation who believed that white people were blue-eyed devils. Why would he pay to have a group of blacks and whites from Georgia, and who forbade his own members to register or vote, why would he pay for a black and white delegation to come from Georgia to Chicago to a convention whose main idea was voting? why would he do that?’
He said, ‘Why don’t you go ask him?’

So he arranged for me to have dinner with Mr. Muhammad. And I wisely left Parker and Taylor at home just I went to see him. And he lived in the house where Louis Farrakhan lives today. Louis Farrakhan’s grandson plays basketball for the University of Virginia so next time you tune the Wahoo’s take ‘em out—they’re great. So I had dinner with Mr. Muhammad and I explained what the problem was and he invited me to come back the next night, and he didn’t answer. And so I came back the next night. And this is a patriarchal religion and a patriarchal household the men sitting here, women over here. And he told them what my dilemma was. He said, ‘This young man’s come from Georgia wants us to give him some money to bring some people to Chicago for the convention what do you think I should do?’ And he asked the men and he asked the women. And the women almost to a woman said, ‘we don’t know this guy he may give the money to the white people he might give it to the devils should give him any money? No.’ And he asked the men some of the men said, ‘yes’ and some of the men said, ‘no’ And he said to me, he said, ‘Mr. Bond in the nation of Islam we listen to the women but we do what the men say do.’ He gave me three thousand dollars in hundred dollar bills and I sent that money to Georgia and it paid for our delegation to come to Chicago. And that’s how I got nominated for Vice President of the United States on Mr. Muhammad's bill.

Greg Hicks

And were compelled to decline the nomination.

Julian Bond

Yes, yes I ran into constitutional prohibition and age discrimination.

[laughter]

Greg Hicks
As you look at our own time I mean there’s this sense, of course, of a lot of unfinished business. And are there aspects of King’s career and legacies of his methods that might help us identify maybe what the critical pieces of that unfinished business are and how we may go about it as a people addressing it?

**Julian Bond**

I’ll tell you something that Taylor Branch talks about a great deal but most other people don’t, I think. And one part of King’s legacy that is almost...is talked about a great deal and taught a great deal but not imitated at all, is the use of nonviolence as a powerful weapon in achieving social change. We can look back at our own movement here and see what it did and how successful it was and how much change was created because people adopted this method these techniques. But almost no one today does that. Almost no one today uses nonviolence. And it’s such a powerful thing when you use it and it’s so effective as we’ve proven time and time again. That’s something I think that just has gone, gone away. I’m not sure why why it is that younger people or older people for that matter don’t do anything about it. One thing I’m fond of saying when I talk about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is we were the last mobilization of black young people in the twentieth century. Think about that the last mobilization of black young people in the twentieth century. I don’t see any young black people today here, but the few I can see who I think are young why is...it’s true why is it people? I’ll be seventy tomorrow, my seventieth birthday tomorrow, ah seventy-first birthday tomorrow why does a seventy-one year old man have to tell you you’re not doing what you should be doing? Why is it taking...why have you not done anything from your time my time to this to imitate what we did? Why are we the last group of young black people to engage in a massive mobilization, why is this? I have no idea but that’s part of King’s legacy that has fallen down. There’s a lot of unfinished business of the civil rights movement.

And I’ll tell you one thing that gets almost no attention except it does in cities it doesn’t on the national level and that’s housing segregation. We have a tremendous problem of segregated housing in the United States. And segregated housing means segregated jobs, and segregated schools, segregated everything. If you don’t have integrated housing then you don’t have integrated jobs, you don’t have access to jobs, you don’t have access to schools, but almost no one makes this a great priority. I’m sorry to say the NAACP whose board I chaired for eleven years doesn’t do it and I don’t think other civil rights organizations do it at all. It’s something that badly needs to be done. So there are lots of things that weren’t accomplished during the King years and aren’t being accomplished now and badly need to be and I’m sure there are many others.

**Greg Hicks**

And what we may do right now, we’ve been going for about half an hour you know very happily and want to make sure, though, that we have time for questions.

And I may ask one question it’s more of a personal one but speaks to things we’ve been talking about. After you were to be seated in the Georgia House of Representatives there was this moment when you walked in to the chamber for the first time what was that like? What did that feel like your colleagues on the floor, I’m sure not everybody was delighted to have you there and how did that feel and maybe shape your thoughts about just what it was going to be, to be a legislator?

**Julian Bond**

Well, I tell you I enjoyed the twenty years I spent in the Georgia House as much as I have any other job I’ve had and I’ve had quite a few. I enjoyed the company. I enjoyed my colleagues, many of them who didn’t want me to be there, who were not happy to see me there, but many who didn’t care whether I was there or not. I think that was the general feeling of most of them. And for many of them I was a vote. I could vote for them, I could vote against them but I was a vote. And if they
acted one way, I’d be for them, and if they acted another way, I would be against them. They are not stupid people they knew this was true and they acted accordingly. And you know we used to joke and say, ‘this is the finest body of men that money could buy.’ But they were wonderful people seldom politicians are...you know they really are. I don’t know how to say it, I can’t remember who the writer was who said that, ‘during the 30’s and 40’s they were so grotesque it seems impossible they could have been elected to public office’. And a couple of my colleagues were like that but some of them were just good people, funny people, happy to be with, glad to be with, funny people funny nicknames, great pleasure to be with. And it was great training to be chairman of the NAACP. NAACP has a board of 64 members I shouldn’t say this with Judge Johnson here because he served on that board with such great distinction, But it has been described by some people as a ‘circular firing squad’. But my training in the Georgia legislature was great training for being chair of the NAACP board of directors because...at the end of every day in the House and the Senate somebody would say, ‘I move we adjourn.’ and somebody would say...and the house, this is very peculiar say, ‘all in favor let it be known by saying aye.’ And of course no one would say aye. And, ‘all opposed say nay.’ And everybody would say, ‘nay.’ And the speaker would say, ‘The ayes have it, the ayes have it.’ They did this everyday and you’d see these school kids up in the gallery saying, ‘I don’t know why they did that’. And then at the end of the session the speaker...

And we had in Georgia until three or four years ago the longest serving state house speaker in the country, in the United States, Tom Murphy, who was there when I came and was there when I left. And he was just a wonderful politician. And for some people that’s not much to say about somebody but there’s a certain art to this and if people do it well, you know, you look up to them, at least I do anyway. If they do it well you look up to them. I think about Lyndon Johnson at his best there’s a certain finesse and art to doing these things in a good way.

At the end of the session the speaker would knock down his gavel. He would run from the podium where he was sitting out to the front, down the well, where people were when they sat, and he’d bow to the left, he’d bow to the right and he’d bow to the center and he’d run out the door right there with the sheriff of the house behind him. Now we were told that the reason this is done is because in the English parliament there was danger of assassination of the speaker and so this came...and you Georgia was settled by English convicts and accordingly this tradition followed. And in the Georgia legislature today they still do this and the school children will say, ‘what is this?’ Next time you go to Atlanta if you go when they are in session go and see it, it’s a sight.

**Greg Hicks**

How can we fail to? If I could just invite you please come to the mics wonderful to have your questions and just extend the conversation little bit here.

**Audience 1**

Don’t all rush, kind of like to fight for the mic. Good evening my name is also Julian Wither Class of 2004 and my question for you is regarding Dr. King and his work I always understood that his emphasis was always a shifting emphasis that he was beginning to kind of draw attention to economic issues. Had he not been taken from us what do you think he would have accomplished?

**Julian Bond**

You know it’s really hard to say and it’s counter-factual you can’t really say but I think he would have accomplished great things. Were he with us today we’d be a very different country now, than we are now different in so many ways better in so many ways than we are now. But it is a mistake to think that he only talked about economic issues as his life progressed. He began talking about economic issues from the very first. When the Montgomery bus boycott began, they’re not only
asking for integrated bus seats, they’re asking for bus drivers’ jobs. They want black people to be able to drive those buses and that’s a demand that they abandoned too soon. But they asked for it from the very first. And in every one of his campaigns there was some economic component so it wasn’t something that came on him gradually, I think it became more pronounced over time but it didn’t just come on him gradually it was always there.

Thank you very much. You might be my namesake but I’m not sure, I’ll look into it.

Julian Bond

Please do.

Audience 1

Thank you.

Julian Bond

Shy crowd.

Audience 2

I worked in Georgia as a VISTA volunteer in the late ‘60s in rural Georgia and how...I’ve only been down there once or twice since then, but in terms of rural South how do you say things have changed racially over the last forty years?

Julian Bond

Well politically they’ve changed fairly dramatically, that’s to say you will see black people serving in public office in small small towns. In places you never dreamed this would happen. And you’re so surprised to see a black mayor, a black city councilman, school board members and so on, black sheriffs, policemen and that’s all very good. At the same time, you know, this is being accompanied by general decline in the rural economy so it’s like things are going up here and down here [gesturing] at the same time but if you, if you went back...where were you where did you work in Georgia?

Audience 2

Well I was in Eastman for a year and then I was up in Appalachia in Gainesville.

Julian Bond

Yeah, well different, you know, places with different politics and different populations. But generally speaking if you went back today you would find that the races are more likely to be less hostile to each other than was true when you were there and more likely to be friendly to each other, at least to have the appearance of friendliness to each other, but not necessarily to have made a great thing out of this. It’s a better thing, but it’s not a great thing. Come back they need you.

Audience 2

Yeah, thank you.

Audience 3

Other than civil rights was one of the things that you and Dr. King had in common was your opposition to the Vietnam War. And I recall the time when Dr. King came out against the war. That
was quite a controversial situation both on the left and on the right. And I was wondering, if for a
civil rights leader to have done that, I was wondering A: if you have any insights into what Dr.
King struggled with in terms of going through that and B: what you struggled with as a civil rights
leader in deciding to take this step in coming out against the war?

Julian Bond

Well both he and I had similar struggles. And we had to face the knowledge that taking this
position meant that people opposed to this position immediately branded us as being communist or
communist dupes or idiots of some kind who didn’t know enough to make up our own minds.
Therefore some communist had told us to do this and we said, ‘okay we’ll do it’. It’s so insulting.
And we also faced the innate conservatism of sectors of black America particularly the black clergy
which were conservative then and are conservative now. And you know King’s own organization,
which is composed almost entirely of ministers, was fierce opposition to his taking this position.
And because Lyndon Johnson was so popular among black people, with some justice. The fear was
his position would be heard and he would become an enemy of the movement rather than a
supportive friend if King persists in this. So King had to face all of these things but he was strong
enough and principled enough to say, ‘I don’t care I think this is the right thing to do and I’m going
to go ahead and do it.’ And if you read his speeches, it’s remarkable to read his speech, you know
we’re so used to hearing his speeches that we almost never read them. And many of them are on
tape and you can get them and they just sound great but if you read them and think about how he
put words together it’s just remarkable that he could take the most complicated thing and make it
understandable to people of limited understanding or people who needed a greater understanding
who weren’t of limited understanding but didn’t have sufficient understanding to understand what
he was saying he was just marvelous at that and so there is a lesson to be learned from reading his
speeches not just listening to them and his anti-war speech the Church, Riverside Church speech
it’s a marvelous speech, “The United States is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.”
Strong, strong and he was always unafraid, never fearful of saying what needed to be said when it
needed to be said. He was a remarkable man I don’t think we’ll see another one like him for a long
time.

Audience 4

So my question kind of speaks a little bit to what you were saying about an array of topics about the
youth in the movements and the issue of segregation. And one of the things that I’m wondering
about is tapping into some of your wisdom and experience in terms of the movement now. And
how, you know, on some level we don’t have the same sort of opportunity to do a sit-in. I don’t
know that a tent city, trying to do racial segregation for housing, would somehow work the same
kind of imagery or movement. And I sort of exist in this place where many of the laws have
changed. And so there can be this argument that we live in like a post-racial society, which I don’t
think anyone in this room sort of believes, but how do you sort of make change around issues
around segregation or the school to prison pipeline or movements like that when so many points of
access have been either changed through laws and then persist and like our courts aren’t letting us
make sort of race conscious decisions? And what kind of movement and how, how...what kind of
vision would you like to see youth or people not as quite as young or something do to make
change?

Julian Bond

Well I think you have to be innovative. You have to think of ways in which you can use old
techniques to do new things you know, I think I’m right about this, I’m willing to be corrected if
I’m not, but under No Child Left Behind let’s suppose this section of the auditorium here [gestures]
is the city of Seattle. And under No Child Left Behind I”m told that if the people, the children in
the third row there [gesturing] were going to a bad school that they’re able to transfer to a good
school in Seattle. But they can’t transfer to a good school out of district and that’s where the good schools are. All the good schools in Seattle are filled up so the children in the bad school have no good school to transfer to. So suppose we got all those children in the bad school and just marched them on opening day to this school. And they came up to the door and say, ‘here we are we want to learn take us in we are ready to go’. What would happen? I don’t know, but it’d be interesting to see. And I think there are other ways where you can use old techniques to make points that were made sixty, fifty, a hundred years ago and make them again now you just have to think about it. And you can do it, you’re a bright person, I know you can do it.

[laughter]

Audience 5

Thank you it’s an honor to be with you today. You made an allusion to the possible inspiration for the Dream Speech and I guess I have two questions for you. One is how do you feel we’re doing in terms of realizing the dream of a world where the content of some one's character is a bigger indicator than the color of their skin? And perhaps the second part of the question would be what is your dream for America now vis-a-vis race?

Julian Bond

Well I’d like to, you know, I think it was pretty much King’s dream and he articulated it so much better than I can ever hope to do. That notion, you know, that content of the character more important than the color of the skin. That was good when he said it and it would be good if we say it twenty, fifty years from now. And we’re coming with this notion tremendously slowly and not moving quickly enough to make it a reality. We’ve not been able to come to grips with it often we’re satisfied with these things by saying, ‘well we’ve elected this black guy so how bad can things be?’ And for some people, sadly enough, that’s it, that’s enough for them. That’s a great thing for to have happened but it’s not the thing, it’s not the important thing. And the objective circumstances in which most Americans live, white, black, yellow, red tell us that there’s so much more yet to do and we’ve got to develop the ability to do it. I listened to President Obama speak the other day in Tuscon and thought, ‘you know, this is a wonderful speech’. And I wondered how many people listening to this speech are going to say, ‘well I’m going to do something about it’. And I don’t how many will or enough will but I’d like to hope that more and more people will. You know, you see this foolish thing that happened in Tuscon and, you know, the main reason it happened is because we have this plethora of guns. That’s the main problem, is we have these guns everywhere. Does anybody think we have enough guns in the United States? Anybody think we have too many guns in the United States? Why can’t we stop having all of these guns? Why is it we’re…the congress, our city councils, our state legislatures are doing…You know two members of congress started carrying guns. A guy used to be the cheer…not the cheerleader, that was George Bush…the quarterback for the Redskins, Shuler, he’s sure going to carry guns when he visits his constituents. I don’t know maybe he’s that unpopular that he should carry a gun. You know, just the idea. And the worst thing that’s happening nowadays that people are saying, ‘well if those people at Columbine had had guns this wouldn’t have happened’. How idiotic is that? How stupid is that? And of course there are people who say that and people who believe it. I don’t know, I don’t know. It’s distressing but I think you just have to keep pushing, and keep on pushing, keep on pushing, and keep on pushing.

Audience 5

Dream. What’s your dream for America now?

Julian Bond
Well I dreamed to have it get better and better and better and I think it is getting better but it’s getting better slowly and I want it to get better faster, quicker.

Audience 6

number of people in this room had the privilege of being here last year when we heard the author of the New Jim Crow speak about her book, arguing that the effect of the drug war in this country has been to create conditions that are equivalent to Jim Crow. I would be interested in any thoughts you have on that.

Julian Bond

I know the book, I can’t say that I have read the book from cover to cover, but I know the book and it makes a convincing argument. I think she’s absolutely right. And again, this is just one of many, many problems that we are capable of fixing, capable of solving but I think for one reason or another we think, ‘maybe they’ll do it, maybe these people over here will do it’ it’s nothing I have to worry about maybe these people over there will do it’. but seldom do we say, ‘why don’t we do it’. And I was just thinking, you know, my father used to always irritate me when he used to say, ‘when I was your age,’ ooh I hated that. But I think we tend to say that now to others around us both younger people, ‘when I was your age’. But still I feel like saying it to everybody else in the country, ‘when I was your age, when I was younger, I was doing things how come you aren’t doing them now? I don’t know it’s distressing.

Audience 7

Knowing Dr. King as you did could you tell us what you think he would be doing if her were alive today? How he would be involving himself in the things we’re talking about?

Julian Bond

Well I was very happy to see that before she died Mrs. King began to say that the celebrations that we have for him ought not be a day off but ought to be a day on. That we have to spend that day, the day, the holiday, doing things that we think he would want us to do. Engaging in some kind of community improvement or some kind of activity doing things he would want us to do. Rather than say, just having speakers, you know, I go about the country making speeches this day and I’m happy to do it and I enjoy it but I often wonder, ‘is that the best use of my time, is that the best use of time of the people who come to hear me? I hope they enjoy it, but come on couldn’t we be doing something a little better?’ I don’t mean you shouldn’t come here ‘cause you’re at a bar, but think about it. So I’m sure if he were alive today and remained the man he had been when he was alive he would be awfully upset at our inability to summon the effort to do great things as he once did when he was alive. And we did it then no reason we can’t do it now?

Audience 7

Let’s go back to Atlanta when you were on the...one of the state senators here and when you moved to run for congress. You won the primary and for some reasons you didn’t win the general election. And I know what those reasons are, and I won’t discuss them, but I basically think you would have been in congress. And my question is would there have been major changes in your life beside John Lewis, in terms of what’s happening there, and also speak to the HPCUs as well.

Julian Bond

Well an answer to the question about...I’m happy John Lewis is in congress. I think he does a wonderful job there, I’m not happy he defeated me not for a minute, but I'm happy he’s there. I'm
happy he’s doing, what I consider, a wonderful job. He and I have maintained a friendship over these years. He’s a wonderful, wonderful guy I’m always happy to see him. I think a great deal of him. Had I won, again these are you know these counter-factual questions, hard to answer, I don’t know. I would be a different person. I would have a different life and in some ways, I think, it would not be as good a life as I’m having right now. I would be doing different things. I never thought I would be a university teacher. My father was a university professor and a university president and I didn’t think his life was an attractive life. It wasn’t a bad life but I didn’t think...it wasn’t anything I wanted to do and now I find myself doing it and I’m glad I do it. I enjoy it a great deal. So if I had won that seat in congress and had remained there all this time I wouldn't be teaching at University of Virginia and American University now. I would be a different person doing different things. I’m not the kind of person who looks back at things and says, ‘I wish I had done this I wish I had done that’. I’m doing it now and that’s it.

Greg Hicks

I think we have time for one more question and then...please.

Julian Bond

That’ll be you.

Audience 8

Hi I’m blind and I use a guide dog and I often travel between Seattle and Portland on Amtrak. So this is going to sound really bizarre but over Christmas break I went to take the train. And when I got on the bus there wasn’t a place for me to sit with my guide dog because Amtrak will no longer reserve a flip-up seat for a service animal. And so when I got on the bus, on the train, they told me I’d have to get off without being willing to talk about my ever being able to get on the train to get to my family. And I stayed on the train for half an hour going through various phases that these people, they called the police to try to get to remove me. And after half an hour of this I reached a point where I felt like I could be causing harm to all these people on the train who had connections to make and to get to somewhere and so I got off the train. And I’ve really struggle with whether or not I did the right thing and, to get off, and I’m wondering what would you, what do you think Martin Luther King would say about that?

Julian Bond

I don’t know what Martin Luther King would have said. I’ll tell you what I would say, those other people should have been helping you. They should have been helping you.

[applause]

Julian Bond

If they felt you were going to make them late they should have said, ‘come on, give her a seat, get something for the dog, let’s go, let’s go’. They should have been on your side.

Audience 9

It was really abusive. They were two able bodied people in the disabled seating and they refused to get up unless someone paid them to. And people in my car were saying things like, ‘well you’ll be a horrible attorney and I don’t think you are really blind’.

Julian Bond
Are you a law student?

Audience 9

No one, none of the people around offered to tell the people who were in uniform, trying to get me off, that they were doing the wrong thing.

Julian Bond

Are you a law student?

Audience 9

Yeah.

Julian Bond

Oh you’re going to make a great lawyer

[applause]

Julian Bond

But you won’t be as good a lawyer as you could have been if you’re going to let bus drivers push you around, okay? Next time if this happens again, and if this is Amtrak’s policy it probably will happen again, you need to make a bigger fuss.

Audience 9

I will.

Julian Bond

Okay?

Audience 9

Thanks.

Julian Bond

Alright, good luck.

[applause]

Greg Hicks

Well thank you everyone for being here for this wonderful conversation. And it was just hugely improved by all of your contributions and questions and thoughts. And if you’d join me please in thanking Julian Bond for not only for his being here but I guess in a bigger sense his presence. His presence among us and the generosity and grace that he’s offered us here this evening. And please stay for the reception join us for some refreshments, food and drink, and more conversation. Julian Bond.

[applause]