

A New Southern Accent

Julian Bond, renowned black legislator from Georgia, was speaking in San Francisco recently when a Jewish self-flagellant rose to ask: "Why are Jews becoming less liberal?"

Under the circumstances, it was a classic when-did-you-stop-beating-your-wife question. If there had been any more Jews than there already were in the room the meeting would have had to end with the singing of the *Hatikvah*.

Julian Bond was talking about the Southern Elections Fund, which helped elect three new black mayors in Mississippi last month. One of the fundamental tests of the American democratic process is quietly going on in the South and it's just possible that America is going to win.

In 1960, only five percent of the voting-aged blacks in Mississippi were registered to vote as compared with 64 percent of the whites. In 1970, 71 percent of the blacks were registered to vote, as against 82 percent of the whites. In Arkansas in those years, the proportion of blacks registering to vote rose from 38 percent to 82 percent—while the white percentages went from 61 to 74. In all eleven deep Southern states, about a quarter of the blacks and about two thirds of the whites were registered to vote in 1960. In 1970, about two thirds of both the blacks and the whites were registered.



Raab

Now, that's rather spectacular progress—born out of the civil rights movement; out of marches in the South (a lot of San Francisco Jews were on that trip), pressures in the North and West, legislation in Congress. And it's not just paper progress. Increasingly, blacks are being elected in the South.

But electing blacks is not quite the main point. The Southern Elections Fund assists white as well as black candidates for local office, if they are interested in a biracial approach to problems. The effect of the black voters registration is not just to elect black candidates—although in many cases, that's the only way to begin—but more fundamentally to give the black population appropriate attention from *whoever* is running and wins.

Of course, in order to get to that point, it's necessary to win some victories. And one of the remaining problems is that many of the biracially oriented black and white candidates just don't have enough money to mount an effective campaign. In the South it hasn't become necessary to legislate a limit on local campaign spending, such as was just passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. In many campaigns, a few hundred dollars can make the difference. And this has been provided, with marked results, by the Southern Elections Fund, whose Board of Trustees include both Republicans and Democrats on the national scene.

The mint julep climate still needs a lot of changing. Paul Cobb, a former editor of *The California Voice* in Oakland, now on the staff of the Southern Elections Fund, was in a severe automobile accident while working last month's Mississippi elections. He lay in one hospital for several hours without treatment before a friend arrived and had him driven to a hospital 50 miles away where he could get prompt attention.

But, Julian Bond pointed out, even that climate is changing—and one of the main reasons is the Southern Elections Fund. No wild rhetoric; no global politics; no panaceas; just the hard work of winning local elections on the basis of a new black vote and a new biracial spirit. America is making one of its new and hopeful beginnings—at the source. The story is not making headlines, but it may be one of the most important that's happening for all of us, and our children.

There was at least one less frivolous question asked at the San Francisco gathering: the address of the Southern Elections Fund. Julian Bond's answer: 87 Walton St., Atlanta, Ga.