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# OPINION

## Broken Bootstraps on Path to Making It Rich

### The tragedy of childhood poverty

BY M. LINDA JARAMILLO

"Making it big" in this country means being worth a lot of money. It is not easy to get rich (in money) if you do not have wealthy parents or grandparents. It is doubtful that someone who was born and grew up in poverty can become wealthy.

The assumption that a person "came from poverty, but worked hard and pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and made it big" is an unlikely reality in our current economic system. The problem is our capitalistic culture regularly measures our importance and

success by how much money we make rather than the moral and ethical values by which we live our lives.

A Pew Research Study found that a child in the lowest income range has only a 4 percent chance of changing that to the highest range when he or she becomes an adult. There are more than 16 million children who live below the federal poverty level now and this number has grown by 23 percent since 2007.

Pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps is a myth, because bootstraps in this country are not only weak, they are broken.

The National Center for Children in Poverty at Colum-

bia University indicates that 22 percent of children in the United States are part of families whose incomes are less than \$23,550 a year for a family of four. Basic expenses like housing, nutritious food, transportation, and health care and child care cost twice that much annually.

Taking these basic needs into consideration, this translates into the fact that 45 percent of children live in low income families. The most vulnerable are children under the age of 6 years old; 48 percent of children at this age are in low-income families.

Sadly, we often blame the situation on parents. We accuse them of either not working hard enough or not managing their money well. The truth is that many of these parents are working in jobs, often

more than one that pay very low wages and are part-time or unstable. It is very difficult to make ends meet under these circumstances and impossible to manage money you don't have. Bootstraps are broken and the children we say we value are paying the price.

Research also proves that poverty is the single greatest threat to the well-being of children. To turn the tide on the tragedy of childhood poverty, we must demand that every child's basic needs are met regardless of their family's income.

Every child must have access to early childhood education programs and quality public schools, no matter where they are located. They must have nourishing food and safe shelter to thrive rather than just survive.

We cannot just take care of our own little neighborhood or community. We must invest in the future of ALL our children if we are to claim that we are a moral and just society. This is a problem with our economic system and not the fault of our children.

In the current flurry of political positioning by presidential candidates, I want to hear them describe how they will address this national tragedy of childhood poverty that is growing by leaps and bounds each year. I don't want to hear about how hard work helps you get rich. It's not about pulling up your bootstraps at all. It's time for us to commit to the well-being of all families.

*The Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister for Justice and Witness Ministries in the United Church of Christ.*

## Never One to Shrink Away from a Worthy Fight

### Julian Bond leaves a lasting legacy

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Julian Bond lived his life as a tireless champion of the oppressed and maligned, a battle-worn warrior for civil rights, equality and social justice.

Bond fought the good fight, and at the still-youthful age of 75, he completed his course.

His longtime dedication to equal rights for African-Americans—and for all—are to be celebrated. But we must guard against fossilizing his life and legacy in tributes or textbooks.

Bond lived a life of action, clear mission and steadfast service. There could be no worthier tribute to him than to pick up the baton he has passed and re-dedicate ourselves to the struggle to make the promises and opportunities of our democracy true for all its citizens.

That struggle is an ongoing one that neither begins nor ends with one movement or personality. Individually and

collectively, we must take up the baton to bring an end to the deadly scourge of police brutality, close persistent economic inequality gaps and address destructive disparities in our nation's education system.

We must do it, because as Bond once famously reminded us all: "Good things don't come to those who wait.

They come to those who agitate."

Bond was a student in a philosophy class taught by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Morehouse College in Atlanta. It was there, during the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, that Bond began to agitate in earnest, co-founding the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee along with other Morehouse students, including now-Congressman John Lewis.

He served as the group's communications director for five years. Bond was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1965, but was not allowed to take his seat because his white colleagues objected to his opposition to the Vietnam War. It took a year, a

protest march led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and a Supreme Court order, but the legislature finally allowed him to take his rightful seat in 1966. He spent 20 years in the Georgia Legislature, serving in both the House and the Senate.

In 1968, Bond became a national figure after delivering a fiery speech at the Chicago Democratic National Convention. His performance was so impressive; his name was placed into the nominating process for vice president—a position he could not qualify for because he was too young.

Bond went on to serve as the first president of the Southern Poverty Law Center, remaining on its board for the rest of his life after his tenure came to an end in 1979. Later, he would also serve as chairman of the NAACP.

No matter the capacity, Bond was first and foremost an activist for equal rights. In addition to his political career and his work as a civil rights leader, Bond was an accomplished writer, he was a lecturer and a professor, a television show host and he narrated "Eyes on the Prize," an iconic documentary on the civil rights

movement.

Bond never stopped agitating because he fundamentally believed that, "the humanity of all Americans is diminished when any group is denied rights granted to others." He never limited his philosophy to any community, region or nationality. He fought against segregation on our shores and apartheid in South Africa. He devoted himself to equal rights for all, including, most recently, the rights of the LGBT community.

Bond left a lasting legacy for us to explore, celebrate and continue. Whether it's

challenges to voting rights or inequity in education funding, many of the challenges he faced yesterday continue to plague our nation today.

His lifelong fight for equality and justice must become our lifelong fight for the same. We can all become a part of his vision to create a more perfect union in our nation. Our prayers and heartfelt sympathy are with his family, along with our promise to continue Julian's fight.

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