

Chapter Nineteen: John vs. Julian

Chapter Nineteen: John vs. Julian - Summary

John Lewis and Julian Bond, former best friends, find themselves in a starkly competitive race for Congress, presenting a rich contrast in backgrounds and styles. Bond, the son of an eminent educator, comes from affluence and is characterized by his confidence, charm, and high-profile lifestyle. In contrast, Lewis, who grew up in poverty as the son of sharecroppers, battles personal challenges like a speech impediment and a rural accent, embodying resilience and hard work.

As their campaigns unfold, Lewis struggles to gain traction while Bond enjoys significant backing from powerful figures and hefty donations. Lewis's steadfast independence earns him both loyal supporters and political enemies, leading to feelings of betrayal when allies, including Andrew Young and Coretta Scott King, favor Bond. Media coverage often criticizes Lewis's speaking style, diminishing his efforts and confirming class biases that paint him as an unrefined candidate compared to his polished friend.

Lewis's campaign benefits from his genuine interactions with everyday citizens, contrasting with Bond's elitist demeanor. He utilizes his humble beginnings to resonate with voters, emphasizing his unwavering commitment and work ethic as he tirelessly campaigns, unlike Bond, who has shown a tendency towards laziness. The race turns ugly, with discussions of Bond's rumored drug use surfacing and both candidates resorting to negative campaigning. Tensions escalate, impacting their families and friendships, particularly affecting their wives, Lillian and Alice.

The chapter also delves into the hot-button issues Lewis faces, including his decision to support the Georgia 400 highway extension, a move that risks alienating some constituents while attempting to address increased traffic concerns. This strategic pivot leads to both backlash and increased campaign contributions.

As election day approaches, Lewis rallies support through grassroots efforts, contrasting his determined door-to-door campaigning with Bond's initial strong lead in the polls. The narrative crescendos with Lewis's determination leading to a surprise victory in the runoff election, despite the campaign's toll on relations with Bond. Ultimately, their friendship is strained but not completely severed, leaving the door open for healing as both navigate their political futures in a divided landscape.