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## UVA Law Alumnus and History Professor Recall Relationships with Martin Luther King Jr.



Michael Cody '61 (right), who represented Martin Luther King Jr. during the Memphis sanitation workers march, spoke alongside Julian Bond (far left), a civil rights leader and UVA history professor, at the Law School at an event remembering King's final days.

University of Virginia School of Law alumnus Michael Cody '61 and civil rights leader Julian Bond, a history professor in UVA's [College of Arts & Sciences](#), shared their personal stories about Martin Luther King Jr. in a discussion Tuesday night at the Law School.

Presented by the Law School's [Center for the Study of Race and Law](#) and UVA's [School of Continuing and Professional Studies](#), "The Final Days of Martin Luther King Jr." capped more than 30 events at the University in January remembering King. Law professor [Kim Forde-Mazrui](#) moderated Tuesday's talk.

Cody's law firm represented King during the Memphis sanitation workers march, and Cody – a 1961 graduate of the Law School – met with King the day before his death. Bond, a former NAACP chair who teaches in the [Corcoran Department of History](#), knew King while a student at Atlanta's Morehouse College and was socially acquainted with him throughout the course of the Civil Rights Movement.

Having taken the only class King taught, "I'm one of eight people in the world who can say honestly that I was a student of Dr. King's," Bond said.

Inspired by his role model, and more directly by the Greensboro, N.C., lunch counter sit-ins of 1960, Bond co-organized some of the first sit-ins in Atlanta. But he said he didn't always think of King as a hero.

"I went through a period in which I was antagonistic to him and the way in which he operated, and suspicious of him, and wanted not to have anything do with him," Bond said, adding that there were also times "when I admired him and held him in great respect and affection. It was sort of an up-and-down

relationship over a period of years."

Cody, who would go on to become Tennessee's attorney general and a U.S. attorney for the Western District of Tennessee, was a young attorney at the Memphis law firm Burch, Porter & Johnson in 1968 when the firm was hired to represent King. Along with a senior partner and several colleagues, Cody represented the civil rights leader to reverse a federal injunction against a planned march in support of striking sanitation workers.



The march was intended to undo at least some of the damage of a previous march, not planned by King, in which violence erupted and people were killed. It would also serve as precursor to a planned "poor people's march" on Washington.

In retrospect, Cody joked, the assignment was probably "somewhere above my pay grade."

He recalled being "knee to knee" with King and his personal advisers at the Lorraine Hotel on April 3 as King articulated his position for counsel. The lawyers sat on one twin bed while King and his team – Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, Ralph Abernathy and Jim Lawson – sat on the other. Afterward, Cody heard King giving his famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech at the Mason Temple.

"It was the last speech of his life and one of the most dramatic, eerie evenings of my life, certainly," Cody said.

The next day, after the legal team presented its arguments, a federal judge agreed to lift the injunction against the march. Cody then dropped Andrew Young back at the motel, and before he could reach his house "four or five miles away," he heard on the car radio that King had been shot.

He said his first thought was, "All heck is going to break out in Memphis. What are we going to do?"

He knew the potential for further violence was very real, and in fact he was called by the police chief to help defuse an incident in which an angry group of men were throwing paving stones at police from high up within a union building. The intervention was successful, he said.

Bond was at home in Atlanta when he heard the news of King's assassination.

"It was just such a blow," Bond said. "I felt as if a family member had been killed. Somebody extremely precious to me had been taken away from me, and I wanted it not to be true. But of course it was true."

Today, in addition to Bond's position with UVA's history department, both he and Cody continue to share their knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement as lecturers for the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Cody returned to Burch, Porter & Johnson following his years of public service, where he currently focuses on mediation and arbitration of complex commercial disputes.