



Coretta
Scott King

Coretta Scott King (1927 – 2006)

Civil Rights Activist

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.”

Coretta was an activist and author in her own right who came to be known as the “First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Born in Alabama, the great-granddaughter of slaves, hers was the first generation in her family to receive an education. She met Martin Luther King Jr. while attending graduate school in Boston. They married in 1953 and Martin took up a pastorate at a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama, shortly before the pivotal bus boycott began. As her husband became increasingly more involved in the protest movement, Coretta realized her own calling to the cause despite the hardships she endured, including the bombing of their home, Martin’s imprisonment, and the relentless fear that her husband would be killed for his work.

When Martin was finally assassinated in 1968, Coretta carried on his work. She took his place at a rally in New York that was held shortly after his death, delivering a speech that she had written based on his notes. When performer Josephine Baker turned down her request to take over for Martin as the leader of the movement, Coretta made the decision to take the helm herself.

Under her leadership, the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change was founded in Atlanta. She expanded the civil rights platform to include women’s and LGBT rights and came out against the Vietnam war.

In 1985, she was arrested in DC for protesting against the South African apartheid. It was through her relentless petitioning that we now commemorate MLK Jr. Day each January.

In 2004 she was awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize by the Government of India. After her death in 2006, Antioch College (her alma mater) dedicated the Coretta Scott King Center for Cultural and Intellectual Freedom to “facilitate learning, dialogue, and action to advance social justice.”