

OUR VIEW

Very Sad State

President Bush began Tuesday's State of the Union address on a positive note: "Mr. Speaker, Vice President Cheney, members of Congress, members of the Supreme Court and diplomatic corps, distinguished guests and fellow citizens. Today our nation lost a beloved, graceful, courageous woman who called America to its founding ideals and carried on a noble dream. Tonight we are comforted by the hope of a glad reunion with the husband who was taken from her so long ago, and we are grateful for the good life of Coretta Scott King."

He ended it on a sound note, too: "Before history is written down in books, it is written in courage. Like Americans before us, we will show that courage, and we will finish well. We will lead freedom's advance. We will compete and excel in the global economy. We will renew the defining moral commitments of this land. And so we move forward, optimistic about our country, faithful to its cause, and confident of victories to come."

It's in the 5,154 words sandwiched between the opening and closing where the problems lie. Rather than confront the myriad problems facing the country—an up-and-down economy, soaring deficits, swirling ethics storms (Tom DeLay, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Jack Abramoff), the Social Security privatization debacle, concern over Medicaid's long-term health, rollbacks in affirmative action, the erosion of privacy rights, failed foreign policy, the attack on abortion, No Child Left Behind's unfunded mandates, etc.—Bush made Iraq the centerpiece of a message that was long on promises but short on plans.

Bush's pronouncements drip with idealism: "Abroad, our nation is committed to an historic, long-term goal: We seek the end of tyranny in our world." "Far from being a hopeless dream, the advance of freedom is the great story of our time." "To overcome dangers in our world, we must also take the offensive by encouraging economic progress, fighting disease and spreading hope in hopeless lands. Isolationism would not only tie our hands in fighting enemies, it would keep us from helping our friends in desperate need." But reality bites.

His fifth State of the Union lacked the gravitas of previous addresses, primarily, because he's lacked the compunction to live up to his promises. Grandiloquence only gets you so far. Rhetoric must be matched with action. In Bush's case, his action—and inaction, i.e., the federal response to Hurricane Katrina—have put America in a more precarious position, one which has the country on the precipice of an internal meltdown and in the crosshairs of nations—both rogue and ally—that want nothing more than to knock America from its perch.

A King's Queen

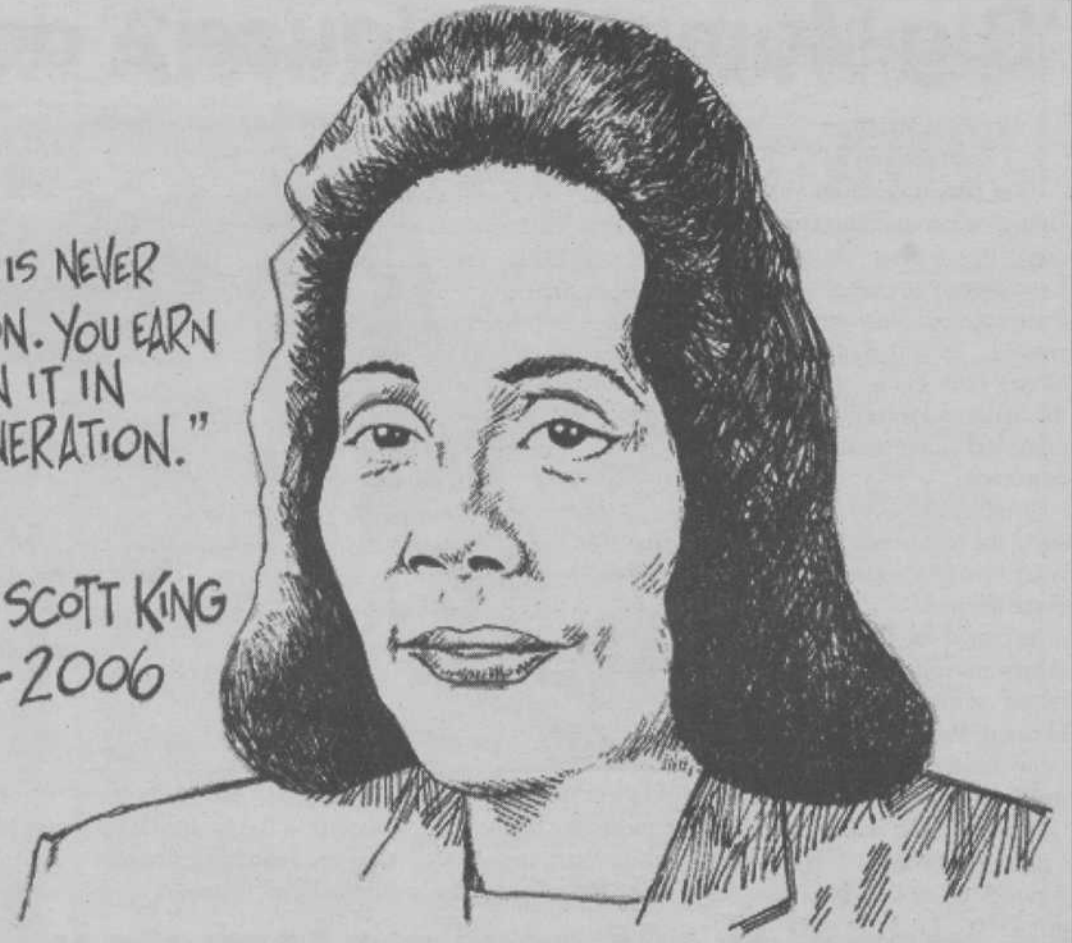
Fitting that President Bush would mention Coretta Scott King in this State of the Union address. Fitting because we should all be so blessed as Martin Luther King Jr. to have shared a life with such a beautiful soul. If King was the leader of the civil rights movement, then his wife, born Coretta Scott in Marion, Ala., in 1927, was his backbone, taking care of home so he could help take care of a divided, struggling nation.

Oft buried under the legacy of her husband is that she had a fully formed history: high school valedictorian, bachelor's degree in music from Antioch College in Ohio; studied concert singing at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston; degrees in violin and voice.

After marrying King on June 18, 1953, she hopped into the passenger's seat and helped drive the civil rights movement, helping him organize sit-ins and marches and fundraising for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (mostly reading poetry and singing). All the while, she raised four children, Bernice Albertine, Dexter Scott, Martin Luther III and Yolanda Denise. After her husband's assassination in 1968, Coretta Scott took the mantle of freedom fighter, spreading the gospel of civil rights. She opened the King Center, wrote a memoir and built on her husband's advocacy by championing economic justice, fairness for women, gay rights, children's issues and other causes. King was blessed. So were we.

"FREEDOM IS NEVER REALLY WON. YOU EARN AND WIN IT IN EVERY GENERATION."

CORETTA SCOTT KING
1927-2006



Why either? Nigger or Nigga

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

For many, no other word carries as much venom—after the still-stinging injection of centuries of slavery and oppression—as the word Nigger. It's a dangerous and provocative word. It's violent, and it breeds violence. It's a word that our ancestors gave their lives for to keep us from being subjected to it. It's easily the most historically inflammatory, shocking word in the American language and has smoldered in the nation's collective psyche for over a century.

It has evolved from a connotation of hate, degradation and embarrassment to a term of endearment used by many African-American comedians, beginning with Richard Pryor. Vaulting into superstardom with his comedy album "That Nigger's Crazy," Pryor later denounced the word and even came to regret his overuse and abuse of the word after a trip to South Africa where he had an epiphany. He witnessed Black folks in positions of power and authority, which caused him to ask himself: "Do you see any niggers here?" When he answered in the negative, he realized that he had been wrong to use the word himself for so many years and resolved to never use the word again.

Later, hip-hop and rap musicians began to reinvent the word by using it in songs and lyrics. Nigga, with its



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

softened ending is even a casual greeting among some Black youth. They reason that 50 years ago it was an ugly, ugly, ugly word but now it is starting to lose a lot of its definition and is becoming a part of some people's normal vocabulary.

If so, this is the question to ask: How did a word rooted in so much tragedy and racial animosity become a term of endearment just a few generations or so removed from Jim Crow?

Could it be that the use of the word nigger or nigga amongst the many races of young people lost its power to insult and enrage because we failed to convey to them the origin of the word and the denigrating epithet that it firmly became? While all racial and ethnic groups have been victimized by racial slurs, no American group has suffered as many racial epithets as have Blacks: coon, tom, savage, pickaninny, mammy, buck, sambo, jigaboo and buckwheat are other typical symbols of White racism. But none carried the hatred and repulsion directed toward Blacks as strongly as the word nigger.

Historically, that term defined, limited and mocked Blacks. It was a term of ex-

clusion, a verbal justification for discrimination. Whether used as a noun or adjective, it reinforced the stereotype of the lazy, stupid, dirty, worthless parasite. No other American word carried so much purposeful venom. Given the word's continually shifting use, the word nigger or nigga is a brave and bold confrontation of the taboo, exploring the history and relevance of the word and the social status within and between races.

When the word nigger was devised, the meaning it implied was of a debased, ignorant, or very low person. Then, Blacks dropped the 'er' and added an 'a,' thus forming a new word, nigga. This word has been accepted and approved with the ob-

noxious and invalid rationale that says, "The word now has a new meaning; we mean it a different way." This is the same word that was used against our ancestors, who died for us not to be called nigger, now being accepted and used (daily) by the same people it was used against!

The term is meaningless in reality but has become a useful word for those who help perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Blacks worldwide. Why would we choose to use a word that degrades Blacks everywhere and turn around and call someone who looks just like us a nigga?! We can't possibly believe that we have the power to change the meaning of a word and expect other people to follow along with this mentality; this isn't progress, folks.

For every race, history tells a people who they are, where they came from and what their potential is as a people. The name that a
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