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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

## Thousands mourn Coretta Scott King

### Special to Sentinel-Voice

Coretta Scott King, the civil rights icon who died last week at age 78, was eulogized Tuesday by a stream of dignitaries including four U.S. presidents, who hailed her courage and quiet dignity as she carried on the legacy of her slain husband, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Saying he had come to offer the sympathy of the nation, President Bush told mourners at her funeral service near Atlanta that the woman known as the "first lady of the Civil Rights Movement" had become "one of the most admired Americans of our time."

He was followed to the lectern at the packed New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga., by, among others, three former presidents: his father, George H.W. Bush; Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

It was Clinton, appearing with his wife, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., who received the loudest ovation, before challenging Americans to carry on the legacy of Coretta Scott King and her late husband. Sen. Clinton also spoke, calling on people to "take up her burden" and continue "the work of peace."

The eulogies for King, who died Jan. 30 after battling ovarian cancer and a stroke, were not without political references, as speakers pointed to the unfinished business of advancing civil rights and alleviating poverty.

With President Bush sitting behind him as he spoke, Rev. Joseph Lowery, a longtime civil rights activist, lamented in verse that millions of Americans lack health insurance and that billions of dollars are being spent on war, "but no more for the poor."

Carter delivered some of the most pointed comments, noting that Martin Luther King Jr. had been "the target of secret government wiretapping and other surveil-



The body of Coretta Scott King is carried to a burial site as King's children, along with supporters and admirers, look on.

lance" in his day. The remark raised the issue of a controversial eavesdropping program that President Bush authorized to combat terrorism but that some critics have charged violates U.S. law.

Carter also said the funeral serves to "remind us that the struggle for equal rights is not over." He added, drawing a standing ovation, "We only have to recall the color of the faces of those in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi — those who were most devastated by Katrina — to know that there are not yet equal opportunities for all Americans." He referred to widespread complaints that a bungled federal response to Hurricane Katrina last year had a disproportionately heavy impact on Blacks and exposed the harsh realities of Black poverty.

In a eulogy laden with religious allusions, President Bush called Coretta Scott King a courageous and dignified woman who persevered in the struggle for civil rights alongside her late husband in the face of threats and intimidation.

"Her journey was long and only briefly with a hand to hold, but now she leans on

everlasting arms," Bush said, standing before the flower-bedecked casket of the woman he described as "a beautiful soul."

Speaking in the vast cathedral of New Birth Missionary Baptist, Bush said, "I've come today to offer the sympathy of our entire nation at the passing of a woman who worked to make our nation whole."

"As a great movement of history took shape, her dignity was a daily rebuke to the pettiness and cruelty of segregation," Bush said. In decades of prominence after her husband was assassinated in 1968, he added, "her dignity drew others to the unfinished work of justice."

Recalling the threats and bombings aimed at intimidating her husband, and the rifle shot in Memphis that ultimately ended his life, Bush said, "Rarely has so much been asked of a pastor's wife, and rarely has so much been taken away."

Before introducing Bush, the pastor of the church, Bishop Eddie L. Long, said that because of Coretta Scott King, "We are all in a better place, doing better things. Doors have been opened."

He quoted her as telling

him once that when she married Martin Luther King Jr., she understood that "I did not marry just a man. I married a vision. I married a destiny."

An estimated 10,000 mourners attended the funeral at the church just east of Atlanta. In addition to Bush, first lady Laura Bush and the three former presidents, more than a dozen U.S. senators and numerous other dignitaries from the

worlds of politics, civil rights, entertainment and literature attended the ceremony.

Thousands of other people lined up outside the church but were unable to enter after an announcement was made that it was filled to capacity.

"Who could have brought this crowd together but Coretta," said Lowery, the former president of the

Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

"She was the quintessential African-American woman," said Maya Angelou, the renowned poet and longtime friend of Coretta Scott King. "She was born a cornflower and destined to become a steel magnolia."

Coretta Scott King and Martin Luther King Jr. "led a successful battle to alleviate the suffering of Blacks and other minorities," said Carter. "In promoting civil rights in our own country, they enhanced human rights in all nations."

Former president George H.W. Bush said, "Our world is a kinder and gentler place because of Coretta Scott King."

Former President Clinton, who is widely popular among African-Americans, told the gathering, "I don't want us to forget that there's a woman in there." Gesturing toward the casket, he said King is more than "a symbol" who embodies her husband's legacy.

"What are we going to do with the rest of our lives?" he asked. "You want to treat our friend Coretta like a role (See Coretta, Page 15)



A program for the funeral of Coretta Scott King is held at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga. Civil rights "first lady" Coretta Scott King was given a fond farewell with hymns and lively prayers at a funeral attended by four U.S. presidents.