

Pride and prejudice

Coretta Scott King tells the crowd at Atlanta Pride: gay-bashers and church burners "drink from the same poisonous well"

by Richard Shumate

Calling Atlanta's lesbian and gay Pride celebration an "impressive demonstration of solidarity and hope," Coretta Scott King made her first appearance at a major gay rights event on June 30.

"One of the reasons I am here is to affirm my whole-hearted support for freedom from discrimination," King said. "I do so because I believe all forms of discrimination are wrong."

A crowd that Atlanta Pride organizers estimate at 180,000 waited for several hours in blazing sun and 95-degree temperatures for King's appearance, the emotional highlight of a three-day celebration that may have drawn as many as 250,000 people. Those on hand offered an extended standing ovation when King was introduced.

In her remarks, King stressed the need for the gay and lesbian rights and civil rights movements to work together because of common interests—and common enemies.

"The church burners and the gay-bashers drink from the same poisonous well," she said. "And very often, they are one and the same."

"The civil rights movement I support believes in unity and inclusion, not division and exclusion."

King endorsed, by name, ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act that has been introduced into Congress. That bill would outlaw employment discrimination based on sexual identity. She also issued a call for universal guaranteed health care, more money for job training programs and a commitment to environmental protection. She urged the audience to be sure to register and vote during the 1996 election cycle.

"Let's make 1996 the year we put tolerance and human rights for all people in the forefront of the national agenda," King said. "Let no candidate get your vote without expressing support for these issues."

King has long been supportive of gay-rights issues, speaking out strongly in favor allowing openly gay and lesbian people to serve in the

military. Her longtime press aide, Lynn Cothren, is an openly gay man now running for the Atlanta City Council. But her appearance at Pride marked the first time that King, who lives in Atlanta, had ever addressed a large gay gathering.

Linking the gay and lesbian rights struggle with the struggle led by her late husband, Martin Luther King Jr., was particularly symbolic in Atlanta, known as "the cradle of the civil rights movement," the city from which King led his struggle and where he is buried. Mrs. King vowed that she will continue to speak out on gay and lesbian issues.

"I will continue to support elimination in this



Coretta Scott King

nation of all forms of bigotry—of racism, of sexism, of homophobia," she said. "With this commitment, together we shall overcome."

The Atlanta Pride celebration also featured a performance by the Indigo Girls, who are Atlanta residents. This year's Pride parade, which preceded King's speech, had 130 entries and lasted longer than two hours.

Ban on vulgar T-shirts fails

Last April the Virginia Beach, Va., City Council passed a law banning the open display of vulgar T-shirts and other sexually explicit souvenirs, according to the Norfolk newspaper *The Virginian-Pilot*. Among the more popular items on display in the Oceanfront shops were two shirts with slogans ridiculing lesbians and gay men.

Shopkeepers were given 30 days to comply with the new ordinance, however, the newspaper's recent survey of shops showed that merchants have generally chosen to ignore the law. More than a dozen stores continued to display the offensive T-shirts.

Kristine Chatwood

Clinton says, don't boycott Mickey

President Clinton, a lifelong Southern Baptist, does not support the recent action by the Southern Baptist Convention to boycott the Walt Disney Co. due to the company's actions in the area of gay and lesbian rights.

The Southern Baptists voted to boycott Disney if the company continues to extend domestic partner benefits to the same-sex partners of employees. The Baptists also object to Disney's production and release of R-rated movies.

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