

BLACK HISTORY MONTH and the American Experience

OPINION

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Honor Coretta Scott King by Continuing Her Legacy

Bush critics at funeral were not out of line

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In stark contrast to her husband's funeral, Coretta Scott King's homegoing services were extravagant. Dr. Martin Luther King's services were held at Ebenezer Baptist, an Atlanta church that is much smaller and older than New Birth Missionary Baptist in suburban Atlanta, where Mrs. King's services were held. Then-president Lyndon B. Johnson didn't attend Dr. King's services; the current and three former presidents attended Mrs. King's. This is not to say Mrs.



It is more than hypocritical for President Bush to laud someone with values so very different from his own without acknowledging those differences.

King didn't deserve the ceremonies—a woman of her stature and grace, with her legacy, most certainly does. But, as yet another icon of the Civil Rights Movement passes on, we must do more than honor them with lavish funeral services. A truer, and much more fitting, tribute would be to ensure that Mrs. King's commitment to social justice and nonviolence lives on.

Several of the speakers at Mrs.

King's funeral drew outside criticism for being too 'political.' Inside, however, I witnessed rousing ovations after each political remark. What was Mrs. King if she wasn't political? She didn't serve as an elected official, but she worked within and against the political system, along with Dr. King, to tear down racist Jim Crow laws and, after his assassination, to have his birthday declared a national holiday.

The Rev. Joseph Lowery, who

co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Council with Dr. King, was not out of line for criticizing the war in Iraq and America's treatment of the poor during his remarks. Mrs. King was a woman who firmly believed in nonviolent protest. She worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor and underserved. Rev. Lowery's comments served to remind everyone just who Mrs. King was and what she believed in. When former President Jimmy Carter spoke of Hurricane Katrina and the way the government handled the disaster, he meant no disrespect. And, when he pointed out that the King family was once secretly wiretapped by the government, he didn't intend to be rude.

Hurricane Katrina shined a much-needed light on the state of race and poverty in this country and

President Bush's illegal domestic spying program has come under fire in recent months. Carter was simply pointing out how much more work remains to be done in the fight for social equality.

If there is anyone who should apologize for their remarks, perhaps it is President Bush himself. He stood before thousands of mourners and praised Mrs. King for her commitment to social justice and equality. The comments are well-deserved, but it is more than hypocritical for President Bush to laud someone with values so very different from his own without acknowledging those differences.

Though her public appearances declined in recent years, it would be safe to say that Mrs. King did not approve of the war in Iraq; she was appalled at the way so many Afri-

can-Americans were forgotten in New Orleans as the flood water rushed in after Hurricane Katrina and that she was opposed to the President's domestic spying program. By speaking as if he and Mrs. King had shared ideals and a common vision for America, President Bush, in effect, insulted all she worked for.

As we celebrate Black History Month, let's take time to not only remember but honor—through our actions—Mrs. King and all of the soldiers from the Freedom Movement, past and present. True heroes should continue to live on long after they are gone.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Living Up to America's Ideals

Coretta Scott King and a call to action

BY ANISHA DESAI

Every politician, news anchor and newspaper eulogized Coretta Scott King after her Jan. 30 death, praising her commitment to civil rights. But how much attention did we pay to Mrs. King's words and actions when she was alive?

Must it only be upon the passing of our iconic leaders that we pause to grasp the depths of racial inequality around us—a real and present danger which we ignore at our own peril?

Mrs. King's commitment was not just to a narrow definition of civil rights as legal freedom from discrimination. She spoke up for economic justice and peace, both before she met her late husband Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and after his death.

In June 1968, she called upon American women to fight the three evils of racism, poverty and war. In 1974, she formed the Full Employment Action Council, a broad coalition that advocated full employment and equal opportunity. Recently, she urged President Bush to ask American corporations to put their resources behind the effort to help the poor. She recognized the economic consequences of militarism and considered money spent on weapons, rather than education and health care, money wasted.

How sad that she did not live to see her vision become reality! At the time of her passing, the African American unemployment rate was more than double that of whites; the job-

less recovery has been more jobless for some races than others. The massive layoffs in the auto industry and the overall decline in manufacturing have affected black workers especially hard. Black families who had painstakingly risen from poverty through education and hard work are falling backwards, losing health coverage and losing homes to foreclosure. Federal programs that have boosted prior generations into the middle class, such as Pell grants and housing subsidies, are being cut to pay for war and for tax cuts for the rich. And despite President Bush's lip service to narrow-

Though more and more jobs are located in the suburbs, beyond the reach of public transportation, one in four black families owns no car, compared with one in 14 white families. This disparity was tragically obvious during Hurricane Katrina, as those left behind were overwhelmingly black and poor.

Mrs. King's death comes right after Dr. King's national holiday, one which she fought so hard to achieve, and right before Black History Month. This brief reflective time of the country's calendar sparks a variety of valuable national forums about civil rights. But too often our focus is on a few great historical figures, which obscures the need for all of us to call on our country to live up to its ideals.

All too often we wait blindly for the one or two golden leaders to lead us from the storm. We spend too much time lamenting the loss of charismatic leaders of the past. But as a Hopi teaching reminds us, "We are the ones we have been waiting for." Our everyday interactions and observations are enough of a rudimentary tool kit to begin the work of spotlighting racial injustice.

Everyday people made possible the victories of the Civil Rights movement, and everyday people can take the lead today. We can best honor the memory of Coretta Scott King, Dr. King and Rosa Parks by committing ourselves to challenge and close the racial wealth divide.

Anisha Desai is program director at United for a Fair Economy, a non-profit group that shows how concentrated wealth and power undermines the economy, corrupts democracy, deepens the racial divide and tears communities apart.

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ing the divide after Hurricane Katrina, he once again proposed cuts to the ladder of opportunity in his recent budget proposal.

How sad that the last five years of Coretta Scott King's life were years of backsliding on the progress she worked for all her life. While median income has fallen since 2000 for every racial group, it has fallen fastest for African Americans. While the typical white family gained six percent in net worth from 2001 to 2004, rising to \$136,000, the typical black family gained not at all, remaining at a dismal \$20,000, according to the Federal Reserve.

Letter to the Editor
Shooting at Benson

As I watched TV, suddenly the flash "Drive by shooting at Benson High School" came across the screen. I found myself beginning to shake and my heart beating at a fast pace. Why, because not only did a friend of my daughter attend Benson, she was a cheerleader and was at the school's basketball game with Jefferson on the night of the shooting. I waited 20 minutes until the news came on, hoping that I would not hear that 10 or more children have been shot, as has happened to other schools across the nation. If I was going through this, I could only imagine what some parents were going through.

With summer coming, will there be more shootings? What can we do as people of the community to stop this madness? Something must be done to stop youth on a killing rage. We cannot spank a child. Yet we live in a system that will beat our children, lock our children up, or talk our children into going to war to kill other people over a lie by President Bush.

The youth cannot find work in the community they live. They want to dress nice, have a nice car and want love and respect. So they get caught up in the drug game and with that comes jail, killing or death.

I feel that we live in a system that cares less about the youth, especially with cuts for education and schools closing down. What can a youth do? If you have a business, adopt a youth and teach the child your trade. If the system really cared about youth, you would receive a tax write-off for doing this.

We must become self-dependent when it comes to our youth. Parents, you should know if your child is talking gang talk or wearing gang colors. Don't wait until it's too late and you end up looking at your son or daughter in a casket. If you do find your child representing the so-called hood, teach them that a better alternative would be becoming a lawyer or doctor, something the hood needs. Let there be peace.

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No Care for Our Own

Last night I watched a PBS program that detailed the devastation on the Gulf Coast, specifically focusing on the shortage of basic health care. The video was graphic

in my mind—throng of people milling around on a dusty lot, waiting their turn to have their most basic health care needs met.

While I watched, a mixture of anger and disgust welled up in me in a way I cannot fully express. The experience these people are living through is so pathetic and wrought with shame that I hurt for them. What struck me most is these are Americans, our people, being subjected to such a complete disregard that it is utterly unfathomable. While billions of dollars are pumped into the Middle East, little is being done to care for our own people. While billions of dollars fill the pockets of the President's friends on what I believe to be suspect contracts, my son's education suffers.

It is no longer the dirt poor people who feel the brunt of our President's foolishness—it is all of us who choose to look. I am a middle-class, college educated business owner and I am disgusted beyond belief. I can afford health care and could remove my son from public school, if I so chose. But that's not really the point.

The President budget proposal is not only a slap in the face to Americans, is not only laughable in its care and concern for all of us—rich, poor and in between, it is the derailing of the America that as a child I thought of as great, just and true.

There is nothing great, true or just about a country that allows its children to get lost in the poorly funded public school system or its elderly to suffer because they cannot afford their medication or it's citizens to stand in the hot, dusty heat, shamed and defeated as they wait to get the care of a doctor. That is not my America, Mr. President.

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