



Coretta Scott King

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I will always be out here doing the things I do, and I'm not going to stop talking about Martin and promoting what I think is important in terms of teaching other people, particularly young people, his meaning so they can live in such a way to make a contribution to our advancement and progress.

— Ebony, 1968

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Quick Facts

- * 1927-2006
- * African-American memoirist and Civil Rights activist
- * The American Library Association named an award in her honor

Biography

Bernice McMurry Scott, a housewife, and Obadiah Scott, a lumber carrier, gave birth to Coretta Scott on April 27, 1927, in Heiberger, Alabama. With the beginning of the Great Depression came a time of great difficulty for African Americans in the South. Coretta Scott grew up walking three miles each day to school while school buses carrying white children drove by, blowing dust in her face. Such occurrences, while difficult, led her to strive for equality and the best for herself.

Coretta Scott King went on to graduate from high school and in 1945 entered Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, on a scholarship. Majoring in Education and Music, Coretta became alarmed when she was not able to teach in a public school because she was African American. At this time she became involved with Civil Right Groups and joined the Antioch chapter of the NAACP, and the college's Race Relations Committee, and Civil Liberties Committees.

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Coretta Scott King

Biography continued

In 1951, King was accepted and offered a scholarship to continue her musical training at the New England Conservatory in Boston before finishing her degree from Antioch College. Upon her arrival in Boston, she had a life changing experience when she met her future husband, Martin Luther King Jr. , a young minister who was studying for his Ph.D. at Boston University. Two years later, June 18, 1953, Martin Luther King Sr., Martin's father, married Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott. The newlyweds returned to the South to work on the civil liberties of black Americans.

By 1964, King was the mother of four children: Yolanda, Martin Luther King III, Dexter Scott, and Bernice Albertine, and her husband had won the Nobel Peace Prize. She had become active with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, giving speeches and coming out from the shadow of her husband, Martin Luther King Jr. Though usually at her husband's side, often King made solo appearances at various civil rights functions that her could not attend. She also performed at benefit concerts by lecturing and even singing to the audience. On April 4, 1968, King received the worst news she could ever imagine. Her husband was shot and killed while on a hotel balcony. This news broke King's heart, but she knew that she had to be strong for her children and to continue the work of her husband.

In the years immediately following her husband's death, King was involved in many things. For example, in June of 1969 Coretta Scott King published her first biography, *My Life with Martin Luther King Jr.*, which focused on their relationship with their family, civil rights, and activism. This book is a detailed story of the life they shared until the assassination of her husband. The years following Martin Luther King Jr.'s death, King focused on the raising of her children and continued her and her husband's dream of equality for all. After many years of speeches, fundraising, and building, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non Violent Social Change was opened in 1981 in Atlanta, Georgia. King and her family worked hand in hand with the Center, for which she was the president as well. In a 1993 speech to the National Press Club in Washington D.C., she said, "Racism is the single most destructive force in American life." King has done her part to combat this problem of racism by speaking out against youth violence, the disparity in the number of minorities who hold public office, and other race related issues. From her beginnings as a civil rights activist, to the eulogy of her husband, to her most recent public speeches, Coretta's message has remained the same. Coretta has always spoken out for human rights and freedom for all people.



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Biography continued

Later in her life, King has become involved in opposition of the death penalty. She contributed an essay to *Young Blood: Juvenile and the Death Penalty* regarding the execution of Westley Allan Dodd, the nation's first legal hanging in 28 years. In her writings, King noted that at least 25 Americans who were later found innocent have been executed in the century. Although King has lost her husband and mother-in-law to gunmen, she can not accept the judgment that their killers deserve to be executed. She believes the death penalty continues the cycle of violence and destroys all hope for a descent society.

Since the assassination of her husband, King has earned numerous awards over the years for her commitment to activism. One of the more prominent awards was that she was named "Woman of the Year" two times, first in 1960 from the Utility Club of New York City, and then again in 1968 by the National Association of Radio and TV announcers. Perhaps, the greatest award King has ever received was to have an award named after her. The Coretta Scott King Award, which is presented by the American Library Association, is presented annually to a black author and a black illustrator for their outstanding inspirational and educational contributions published during the previous year.

Another one of King's passions is the International Peace Movement. In 1985, she was arrested while protesting the South African Government's policy of racial segregation known as apartheid. In 1986, Martin's birthday, January 15, became a national holiday because of King's dedication to the acknowledgements of her husband's achievements. Currently, King is planning a new book about her work in the Civil Rights Movement and continues to give motivational speeches across the country.



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