

News

[CORETTA SCOTT KING, MARTIN LUTHER KING'S WIDOW, HAS DIED AT THE AGE OF 78](#)



Jan. 31, 2006 — Coretta Scott King, widow of slain civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., has died. She was 78.

Scott King was admitted to Atlanta's Piedmont Hospital on Aug. 16, 2005, suffering from a stroke that left her weakened on her right side, unable to walk, and barely able to speak.

Family Blazed Trails

Coretta Scott was born April 27, 1927, on a farm in Heiberger, Ala. Though the family owned the land, it was often a hardscrabble life. The young Coretta, her sister, Edythe, and brother, Obie, all had to pick cotton during the Depression to help the family make ends meet.

The Scott family was resourceful and blazed trails for blacks in its small corner of the world. Her father, Obediah, was the first black person in the area to own a truck, and he eventually opened a country store. Her mother, Bernice, hired a bus to drive all the black children to and from Lincoln High School — nine miles from Heiberger.

An intelligent and hard-working student, Scott King played trumpet and piano, and graduated from Lincoln High at the top of her class in 1945. She followed her older sister to Antioch College in Ohio, where Edythe had been the first full-time black student to live on campus.

At Antioch, Scott King majored in music and education. When she graduated, she decided she wanted to pursue music instead of teaching. She received a scholarship to study violin and voice at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where she met her future husband, Martin Luther King Jr., who was studying theology at Boston University.

The Kings were married in 1953, and the following year, they moved to Montgomery, Ala., where King began his ministry.

Civil Rights Activists

Scott King spent much of her life devoted to raising their four children — Yolanda Denise, Martin Luther III, Dexter Scott and Bernice Albertine — and to supporting her husband's work in the civil rights movement.

Scott King was often seen beside her husband during freedom marches, traveling abroad and giving speeches. Though she had essentially retired from her music career, she conceived of and performed in the Freedom Concerts, which combined the poetry, stories and music of the civil rights movement.

Scott King became an activist in her own right, as well, carrying messages of international peace and economic justice to organizations around the world. She was the first woman to deliver the Class Day address at Harvard University and the first woman to preach during a service at St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

When King was assassinated outside a motel room in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968, Scott King channeled her grief into action. Days later, she led a march through the streets of Memphis, and later that year took his place as a leader of the Poor People's March in Washington, D.C.

Scott King continued working for equality, peace and economic justice for the remainder of her life, both in the United States and

abroad. Her travels took her to Latin America to speak out against poverty, South Africa to fight apartheid, and back to Washington, D.C., to mark the 20th anniversary of the historic March on Washington with a second massive gathering of human rights groups.

Honoring Martin

Scott King has also devoted much of her time to developing the Atlanta-based Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change as a memorial to her husband's life and dreams. Scott King served as the center's leader until 1995, when she turned over the helm to her son Dexter.

She also led the campaign to make King's birthday, Jan. 15, a national holiday in the United States. By an Act of Congress, the first national observance of the holiday took place in 1986.

Scott King focused much of her energy during the last decade of her life on AIDS awareness and curbing gun violence.