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Maya Angelou

*Remarks at the Memorial Service for Coretta Scott King*



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In the midst of national tumult, in the medium of international violent uproar, Coretta Scott King's face remained a study in serenity. In times of interior violent storms she sat, her hands resting in her lap calmly, like good children sleeping.

Her passion was never spent in public display. She offered her industry and her energies to action, toward righting ancient and current wrongs in this world.

She believed religiously in non-violent protest.

She believed it could heal a nation mired in a history of slavery and all its excesses.

She believed non-violent protest religiously could lift up a nation rife with racial prejudices and racial bias.

She was a quintessential African-American woman, born in the small town repressive South, born of flesh and destined to become iron, born a cornflower and destined to become a steel magnolia.

She loved her church fervently. She loved and adored her husband and her children. She cherished her race. She cherished women. She cared for the conditions of human beings, of native Americans and Latinos and Asian Americans. She cared for gay and straight people.



She was concerned for the struggles in Ireland, and she prayed for nightly for Palestine and equally for Israel.

I speak as a sister of a sister. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on my birthday. And for over 30 years, Coretta Scott King and I have telephoned, or sent cards to each other, or flowers to each other, or met each other somewhere in the world.

We called ourselves "chosen sisters" and when we traveled to South Africa or to the Caribbean or when she came to visit me in North Carolina or in New York, we sat into the late evening hours, calling each other "girl." It's a black woman thing, you know. And even as we reached well into our 70th decade, we still said "girl."

I stand here today for her family -- which is my family -- and for my family and all the other families in the world who would want to be here, but could not be here. I have beside me up here millions of people who are living and standing straight and erect, and knowing something about dignity without being cold and aloof, knowing something about being contained without being unapproachable -- people who have learned something from Coretta Scott King.

I stand here for Eleanor Traylor and for Harry Belafonte, and I stand here for Winnie Mandela. I stand here for women and men who loved her -- "Dinky" Romilly. On those late nights when Coretta and I would talk, I would make her laugh. And she said that Martin King used to tell her, "You don't laugh enough." And there's a recent book out about sisters in which she spoke about her blood sister. But at the end of her essay, she said, I did have -- "I do have a chosen sister, Maya Angelou, who makes me laugh even when I don't want to." And it's true. I told her some jokes only for no-mixed company.

Many times on those late evenings she would say to me, "Sister, it shouldn't be an 'either-or', should it? Peace and justice should belong to all people, everywhere, all the time. Isn't that right?" And I said then and I say now, "Coretta Scott King, you're absolutely right. I do believe that peace and justice should belong to every person, everywhere, all the time."

And those of us who gather here, principalities, presidents, senators, those of us who run great companies, who know something about being parents, who know something about being preachers and teachers -- those of us, we owe something from this minute on; so that this gathering is not just another footnote on the pages of history. We owe something.

I pledge to you, my sister, I will never cease. I mean to say I want to see a better world.

I mean to say I want to see some peace somewhere. I mean to say I want to see some honesty, some fair play.

I want to see kindness and justice. This is what I want to see and I want to see it through my eyes and through your eyes, Coretta Scott King.

Thank you.