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Barack Obama

Senate Floor Speech on the Passing of Coretta Scott King



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Thank you very much, Mr. President. Today, we mourn the passing of Coretta Scott King.

And when I think about Coretta Scott King, I think about the little girl who walked five miles to school on those rural Alabama roads and felt the heat of racism each day she passed the door of the Whites-only school, so much closer to home. It didn't matter, because she studied and succeeded and excelled beyond most of her classmates, Black and White. She earned a college degree, and an acceptance to a prestigious graduate school up North.

And one day she met a young preacher from Atlanta, and she fell in love with him. And he told her his dreams -- and she believed in those dreams. And she decided that she would help to make them real -- not just as a wife or as a friend, but as a partner in freedom's cause.

Over the next years, Coretta Scott King did that in so many ways we can't even imagine. She raised a family, she marched through the streets, she inspired through song, she led through speech -- even dodged the countless attempts on her family's life. And when one of those attempts finally took her love from this world, she made the selfless decision to carry on.



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With no time to even cry or mourn, to wallow in anger or vengeance, Coretta Scott King took to the streets just four days after the assassination and led 50,000 through the streets of Memphis in a march for the kind of justice that her husband had given his life for. She spent the rest of here marching for that same justice -- leading the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, and spreading her family's message of hope to every corner of this world.

You know, I had the great honor of knowing Mrs. King, and the occasion to visit with her in Atlanta last year. She was an extraordinarily gracious woman. We sat and chatted in her living room. She showed me an album of photographs of her and Dr. King and the children. And then she told me what her husband had said to her once, at a time when she was feeling burdened, understandably, by all the stress and strain that had been placed on the family as a consequence of his role in the Civil Rights Movement.

She said her husband suggested that:

When you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone because you will have divine companionship and the support of good people.

That was her husband's advice to her -- that when you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone.

Coretta Scott King died in her sleep last night. She certainly was not alone. She was joined by the companionship and support of a loving family and a grateful Nation -- inspired by her cause, dedicated to her work, and mournful of her passing.

My thoughts, condolences today are with her children.

And I ask that she and her husband now rest together in eternal peace.