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Coretta Scott King Goes Home
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Guest Commentator

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Like millions around the world, I watched the funeral of Coretta Scott King with fond remembrances and pain. When I was a struggling doctoral student, Mrs. King and Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr. were very kind to me as I did my research and wrote my dissertation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Rhetorician of Revolt." My initial interviews at the King home came at considerable inconvenience to the family, because Dr. King was sick with the flu, and soon had to leave his sick bed to attend the funeral of President John F. Kennedy who had been assassinated a few days earlier. Nevertheless, Dr. King, the great man and great humanitarian that he was, allowed me to sit at his bed side and conduct my interviews. Mrs. King brought our meals to his bed side. I shall never forget her grace and kindness. I was to interview her several times more.

The death of Coretta Scott King brings back all the memories of the marches, the bombing of their home, the church bombing that killed four innocent Black children, the beatings, the dogs, the water hoses and the stabbing of Dr. King in Harlem. It brings back the memory of Dr. King's assassination and the wound it left in me that has never healed. I remember the march we took from his funeral, through Atlanta to Morehouse College, the march that brought some small measure of relief.

When I learned that President George W. Bush had changed his plans and intended to attend and speak at the funeral of Coretta Scott King, I was reminded of the phone call presidential candidate John F. Kennedy made in 1960 to Martin Luther King, Sr. to give his support to his jailed son, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was said that Kennedy's phone call tipped the balance. Daddy King threw his support to Kennedy, who received the majority of the Black vote and won a close contest against Richard Nixon.

However, in the case of the present president, Black voters must not be fooled. We must not be deceived by President Bush's decision to go to Atlanta. A president whose government allowed thousands of people, mostly Black, to suffer without food or water, without medications, to die in New Orleans and the Gulf states;

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a president whose budget had severely cut the allocation to reinforce the levees; a president whose elections were stolen by disenfranchising Black voters in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004; a president whose budgets have made savage cuts for education and health; a president who has appointed two justices to the Supreme Court who are likely to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a woman's right to choose, and who are likely to attempt to return America to the pre– Brown days of overt racism and disenfranchisement; a president who defends the right to invade personal privacy; and a president who sends our young men and women to die in an immoral and illegal war, is no friend of people of African descent. Kanye was right.

Importantly, we also cannot be fooled by the Black Faith–based, self–anointed "Bishops" of mega churches who seduce and beguile depressed, often defeated African Americans, whose largess allows them to fly their private jets, drive Rolls Royces and live baronial existences. Instead of advocating to their congregations that they should organize and take direct political action, even civil disobedience as Dr. King consistently urged to secure the "blessings of liberty " to which they are entitled, these "Bishops," whose already sizeable incomes are supplemented by the Republican government's Faith–based Initiative grants, use powerful propaganda oratory to convince their congregations that God will take care of their needs, and, not incidentally, to support President Bush and vote Republican.

"Bishop" Eddie Long, in whose New Birth Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia where Mrs. King's funeral was held is typical of the increasing number of money driven Black preachers. It is a cruel irony that the funeral was held in Long's church rather than Ebenezer where Coretta Scott King was a member, where Dr. King was pastor and where his funeral was held. Preacher Eddie Long is the very antithesis of what Dr. King and his wife, Coretta, stood for. In 2004, Bishop Long led a demonstration in Atlanta to the tomb of Dr. King to protest a woman's right to choose and to denounce the right of individuals to marry persons of the same sex. Among the thousands of supporters who marched with preacher Long was Dr. King's daughter, Bernice, a minister at New Birth. Instead of the social justice and freedom advocated by the Kings, preacher Long endorses the conservative mandates of the Republican government. Coretta Scott King opposed the march, and reaffirmed her stance for human rights and social justice.

"Bishop" T.D. Jakes, whose mega church in Dallas has a reputed congregation of 30, 000 members, and who sells "blessings" for \$50, \$500 or whatever larger sum he can persuade, was also a speaker at Mrs. King's funeral, though his brief words were hollow, unlike the bombastic oratory for which he is well known. Like Bishop Long, Bishop Jakes is a friend and supporter of President Bush and the Republican government's Project for a New American Century. Simply stated, PNAC is a plan conceived by powerful white Republicans in the early 1990s for the United States to control the world. PNAC's creators included Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Jeb Bush.

As I listen to the oratory and read the writings and statements of the religious leaders of the Black Faith–based Initiatives, I recall the social doctrines of the late Pope John Paul II. The Polish Pope John Paul II silenced and excommunicated priests who espoused liberation theology of social justice to the poor of Latin America. Interestingly, Pope John Paul II had been elected Pope after his predecessor, a more liberal Italian Pope John Paul I, mysteriously fell ill and died one month after installation. Not incidentally, the architect of the harsh social doctrines of Pope John Paul II was the present German Pope Benedict XVI. The Haitian priest Jean Bertrand Aristide, later to become president of Haiti, resigned his priesthood in protest of the Vatican's support for the Haitian church's complicity with brutal dictatorships.

When Pope John Paul II visited New York City in 1979, my teaching schedule allowed me to listen to every major televised address he gave in the city: St. Paul's Cathedral, Yankee Stadium, Shea Stadium. Of special significance was the outdoor address he gave in Harlem. His Harlem message was to live a good Christian life and prepare for the next life. There was no hint of urging resistance to the oppression of racism and its effects in education, employment, health, housing and political participation.

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Complicity with brutal dictatorships and the use of religion to attempt to silence resistance is the model for present day Faith-based Initiatives and their self-serving innovators in Black pulpits. President Bush and his paid friends in Black pulpits are the enemies of the Black masses. The mesmerizing sermons these ministers preach dull the awareness of the oppression their congregants face daily and instead promise them a better after life. The religious induced docility is intended to silence and prevent any revolt of the Black masses as witnessed in the 1960s.

People of African descent are better advised to support ministers who, like Dr. King, preach the social gospel of Rheinhold Niebuhr and its modern version of liberation theology which exhorts its congregants to oppose tyrants who suppress descent and to organize politically and economically to bring about social justice. The self-anointed multi-millionaire "Bishops" of the silver oratory who serve the interests of the world conquering imperialists should be exposed and deposed. They are not our leaders and we are not fooled.

As hard as Bishop Long, the ultra conservative Reverend Bernice King and the Republican Party sought to control the funeral discourse, denying the likes of civil rights veterans Jesse Jackson, John Lewis and Reverend C.T. Vivian the opportunity to speak, as well as preventing Reverend Al Sharpton and Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, in whose district the funeral was held, from speaking and – the unkindest cut of all – disinviting Harry Belafonte who marched with Dr. King, who gave large amounts of money and who consoled Coretta Scott King when her husband was assassinated, nevertheless the truth was heard. As Dr. King said many times, "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again." And truth did emerge from the mouth of President Jimmy Carter who underscored the present controversy of wiretapping American citizens by reminding the mourners of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's wiretapping of Dr. King, whom he had threatened with disclosure of intimate information. President Carter was the only one of the four presidents who spoke of the government's mishandling of the Katrina tragedy, and he stated that the nation has not yet "achieved equal opportunity for all Americans." And truth emerged from Reverend Joseph Lowery, co-founder with Dr. King of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who said there were no weapons of mass destruction and that Coretta Scott King had criticized that money spent for the war should have been spent to fight poverty in America. And truth came from the poetry of Maya Angelou who made a point of saluting Harry Belafonte. The truth was told.

The most that can be said about the tortured, illogical eulogy/sermon delivered by Mrs. King's daughter, Bernice, is that those four King children deserve our pity and love for the tragic circumstances of their childhood. When Bernice King, possessor of three degrees, including degrees in divinity and law, said "God is not looking for another Martin Luther King or Coretta Scott, the old has passed away, there is a new order that is emerging," I hardly knew what to think, as many of the mourners must have been puzzled. Did Bernice King imply that she is the new emergent order, along with her "mentor" Eddie Long? Heaven help us.

The Black Church can be an important instrument of Black liberation as it was during the 1960s under the leadership of selfless men like Dr. King and Rev. Ralph Abernathy. The Black Church can also be the new oppression led by preachers who become enormously wealthy by deluding the Black masses who suffer the daily indignities of racism. It is the responsibility of Black intellectuals, degreed or non-degreed, the enlightened Black media, like BlackCommentator.com and enlightened Black politicians like Cynthia McKinney and John Conyers to help our people to know the difference.

We have lost the great warriors, Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr., Malcolm X Shabazz, Rosa Parks and now Coretta Scott King. We must teach our children forever the meaning of the sacrifices, the teachings, and the love of these noble ancestors. Our liberation depends on it.

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