

## **MLK Observances This Year Include Gay-Positive Coretta Scott King For First Time**

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(Atlanta, Georgia) Observances of Martin Luther King Day across the country will include for the first time memorials for King's widow, Coretta Scott King, who died last January 31.

"Her commitment and her accomplishments were equal to his," said William Jelani Cobb a history professor at Spelman College. "To view her as an equal in helping to establish racial democracy in America would be fitting."

Until she was disabled by a stroke last August King frequently spoke out, often to the anger of some Black pastors, in favor of LGBT civil rights.

King called her critics "misinformed" and said that Martin Luther King's message to the world was one of equality and inclusion.

In 2003, she invited the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** to take part in observances of the 40th anniversary of the March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech.

It was the first time that an LGBT rights group had been invited to a major event of the African American community and drew the ire of some of the other speakers.

King said her husband supported the quest for equality by gays and reminded her critics that the 1963 March on Washington was organized by Bayard Rustin, an openly gay man.

**When she died last year NGLTF executive director Matt Foreman, who spoke at the 2003 anniversary, called her a model for equality.**

**"Our community has lost a dear and courageous friend, someone who was there for us when virtually no one else was," Foreman said last January.**

**"From the beginning Mrs. King understood that homophobia is hate and that hate has no place in the Beloved Community that she and Dr. King envisioned for our nation and our world."**

In March 2004, she told a university audience that same-sex marriage is a civil rights issue and denounced a proposed amendment to the Constitution ban it.

"Gay and lesbian people have families, and their families should have legal protection, whether by marriage or civil union," she said in a speech at The Richard Stockton College in Pomona, New Jersey.

"A constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages is a form of gay bashing and it would do nothing at all to protect traditional marriages."

In her speech King also criticized a group of black pastors in her home state of Georgia for backing a bill to amend that state's constitution to block gay and lesbian couples from marrying.

Coretta Scott met Martin Luther King Jr. while she was studying at Boston's New England Conservatory of Music.

They were married in June of 1953 and a year later moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to take on the leadership of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

When Dr. King was assassinated she was a young widow with four young children to raise.

The killing instantly thrust her to the forefront of the civil rights movement. She took up her husband's mantle of social justice crusader speaking in forums across this country and around the world.