

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 170 – February 7, 2006

Freedom Rider
Coretta and Endesha Ida Mae
by Margaret Kimberley

[click here to become a](#)

bc PAID SUBSCRIBER

(Use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page)

Printer Friendly – PDF Format



Copyright © 2002 - 2006
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved

Endesha Ida Mae Holland and Coretta Scott King passed away within days of one another. They both fought to end the evil of America's apartheid. Like most of those who struggled against that system, they paid a high price for their activism.

Coretta Scott King was an icon viewed with the same love and respect that most of the world's people felt for her husband. It is sad that she is viewed more as a saint and not as a woman, a wife, and a mother. The hurts she endured are rarely mentioned in her obituary.

Coretta was a child of privilege. At a time when few southern blacks received even high school educations, she attended mostly white colleges in the north in the 1940s. She was fortunate not to suffer the indignities that most black Americans endured in the south.

Ida Mae Holland's story was quite different. She lived in the Mississippi delta, the headquarters of hell on earth for black people in America. At the age of 11 she was raped by her white employer. The traumatized child reacted the way traumatized children often do. She believed she was synonymous with the abuse she had suffered. The young girl became a prostitute.

While following a man she thought might be a john, Holland walked into the local offices of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC was in need of literate local residents to assist with voter registration efforts. Holland's life turned around when she joined the movement but it is also when her suffering began anew. The KKK firebombed her mother's home in an act of revenge against the young Ida Mae. After having her childhood and her mother taken away by race hatred, Holland left Mississippi for good.

The Black Commentator – Freedom Rider: Coretta and Endesha Ida Mae

She earned undergraduate and graduate degrees and took the Swahili name Endesha, which means one who is a driver. Dr. Holland became a college professor and an author. Her life story was told in the play *From the Mississippi Delta* and in the autobiography of the same name. The telling of Holland's life story was not just a personal victory for her. Lest anyone think that segregation caused mere inconveniences like giving up a seat on a bus, Holland's story revealed the experiences of unnamed millions who endured violence and degradation on a daily basis.

Mrs. King's trials were of a different nature. After graduating from the New England Conservatory of music she began her married life expecting to be the perfect first lady of an upper crust Baptist church. Instead her husband decided to lead a movement.

Coretta King's life with her husband was both charmed and painful. The charm is well known, but the frequent absences and full time parenting responsibilities must have taken a toll. Their family's home was bombed in Montgomery, King was stabbed by a deranged woman. Those events were ill omens of things to come.

In one of the most infamous acts instigated by J. Edgar Hoover, Coretta King was cruelly confronted with her husband's infidelities. The FBI sent her an audio tape of her husband in flagrante delicto with another woman. They also sent him a letter advising him to commit suicide.

When King didn't succumb to this indignity and to constant threats against his life, the decision of whether he would live or die was made for him when he was murdered. Coretta King became a widow with four children to raise. Those children had the burden of living under the shadow of their father's name. Like their mother they are ordinary people who were left with a legacy that was both wonderful and painful.

Recently the King children became embroiled in a very public dispute over the future of the King Center. It isn't surprising that everything their mother worked for began to fall apart. Despite the grandiosity of King birthday celebrations, the powers that be have moved the country further and further to the right, and embraced a return to the bad old days that Coretta and Endesha fought against. King's true dream of ending poverty, racism and militarism seems very distant.

Even some of King's confidantes turned their backs on the movement they once fought for. The late Ralph Abernathy exposed his friend's private life to public ridicule in order to make a fast buck with a book. Andrew Young joined the civil rights hall of shame. The vote thieves are using voter ID requirements to disenfranchise millions of Americans. They now do so with the Andrew Young seal of approval.

History does not happen by osmosis. It is made by the actions of people, not saints and icons. Coretta and Endesha should be seen for what they truly were. Women who chose to make a new history, even though the consequences of their actions would fall hardest on them and those they loved.

*Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in **BC**. Ms. Kimberley is a freelance writer living in New York City. She can be reached via e-Mail at margaret.kimberley@blackcommentator.com. You can read more of Ms. Kimberley's writings at freedomrider.blogspot.com.*