

Funeral for Mrs. King Shows Changing Times

By Austin Scott

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ATLANTA, July 3—It was the same anguished grief, the same red brick church hallowed by generations of black struggle as Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr. was laid to rest today, six years after the burial of her famous son.

But somehow it was all different.

Hours before the 11 a.m. service, with the temperature in Atlanta building toward another sweltering day, small knots of people gathered on the corner of Auburn and Jackson to stare silently at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Its call board still carried the announcement of last Sunday's 10:45 a.m. service, the fatal one where Mrs. King and Deacon Edward Boykin were killed by a man who stood up firing two pistols not six feet from them.

This was the church Mrs. King's father built, the church her husband has served as pastor for more than 40 years, the church she devoted much of her life to, that nurtured her best-known son and the nonviolent movement he created, that spilled over with the mourners of the world when he died, and that now, for the last time held her, and those who love her family.

The two-hour service spoke volumes about how times have changed, about the sources for the inspiration and strength that fueled the Southern civil rights movement in those active and difficult days, the decade of the 1960s, and about what has come along to replace it.

It was a moving and deeply religious funeral. It was more personal, less po-

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lemical, less devoted to social issues than the service in the same church for Martin Luther King Jr.

It was both tearful and joyous, overwhelmingly joyous toward the end, with tears turning into a shouted celebration of all that Mrs. King had been to so many of those present.

"We come to give thanks for a loving person . . . for her triumph over life for some 70 years," said Rep.

Andrew Young (D-Ga.), one of many government-workers-turned-politicians who drew on the stretch of the King family.

"Today we gather again from every sector of this country to celebrate triumph out of tragedy," said the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, who took over the Southern Christian Leadership Conference after Dr. King Jr. was shot dead in April of 1968.

And the Rev. Sandy F. Ray of Brooklyn, N.Y., a long-time family friend, said, "We are here today not to weep, we are here to applaud."

"He will remember me," sang the choir that Mrs. King organized nearly 40 years ago and taught until she retired in 1973.

The crowd was very different from the one six years ago, when the famous and the ambitious from around the nation took up so much space inside the small church that the common people for whom King gave his life had to stand outside in the broiling sun.

This crowd was much smaller. Mrs. Gerald R. Ford, wife of the Vice President, and Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter were the only dignitaries who had no connection with either the movement or black politics.

There were not many people who were very young. This crowd seemed mostly to be people who came up together through those difficult movement days of the 1960s, who prayed together and cried together and shared moments of joy and moments of overwhelming spiritual weariness over the plight of the nation.

That formal movement is almost gone now, its successes, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, helping to recycle its force into local politics. There were black mayors and congressmen and city officials in the audience. Since their participation in the movement a decade ago, many blacks in the audience have become elected officials.

But the movement's spiritual leadership is very much alive in the hearts and minds of people who knew it when. And for today it

was back. They rhythmic cadences from generations of Baptist preaching, the biblical exhortations to reject despair and take just one more step, the appeals to morality in signs throughout the church:

"I'm Tired of Violence;" "Discrimination Is Violence"; "Poverty Is Violence"; "Love Conquers Hate"; "Keep the Dream Alive."

The overflow audience at times cried and at times urged speakers on with shouts of "that's right," and "Oh yes." It responded enthusiastically to the Rev. Otis Moss, of Lockland, Ohio, who said Mrs. King's life had been "sanctified" when she was born in 1903, "beautified" with her marriage in 1926, "then multiplied and then He didn't stop there, He glorified what He had multiplied and gave us Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

"When we look at the glorious pages of the life of Mama King, we see an interesting fact," said Mr. Moss his voice beginning a long rise that would have him nearly shouting at the end.

"It reads Alberta Christine Williams King, 1903-1974. She had no control over her birthdate in 1903, and little or no control over . . . 1974. That little dash in between was her moment in history. She didn't choose it, she wouldn't refuse it, she did not abuse it, she would not lose it, and God knows she used it . . . that little dash in between is what God gave to Mama King."

One of the "tragedies of life," Mr. Moss said, "is we overestimate the power of a bullet, and we underestimate the power of a human soul in the hands of God."

The old movement and the new came together most dramatically when Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's first black mayor whose political success is a culmination of what the movement was all about, delivered one of seven brief tributes.

He said earlier he had known Mama King since he was 7, and considered her a close personal friend. "She whispered in my ear many times, 'Keep on keeping on . . .,'" he said.

Many tributes were like that, testimonials to what was repeatedly referred to as Mrs. King's quiet strength that she freely gave for others, not limited to her family, to draw on.

Unlike her famous son who was a world figure, winning the Nobel peace prize in 1964, Mama King was pictured as very much a part of

Atlanta, of her church, and of the movement's support troops, a source of constant renewal for all those who died a thousand spiritual deaths, and, on occasion, a temperal one in Albany and Selma and Montgomery and little towns throughout the South whose names made headlines all through the 1960s.

"Those of us in the movement know it," said John Lewis, one of the first leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the early '60s. "Martin called her at least once a day from wherever he was, no matter how busy . . . they [Dr. and Mrs. King Sr.] were second parents for all of us, more than just a mother and father of Martin Luther King."

"They loved so well," said his wife, Lillian. "They shared that love without fear or jealousy, and they allowed themselves to be loved. They were tested so often . . . I'm too broken up to talk about it."

Mr. Abernathy said it was Mrs. King who told him after the 1957 bombing of his home and church, "Ralph, you can't give up now. You have come too far to turn around." He called her "the most peaceful warrior of the 20th century."

Dr. King, suffering from a weak ankle, was helped to the stage of his church for a closing statement.

"I knew I was going to be strong enough to stand here today."

" . . . I'm not going to quit, I'm not going to let nothing stop me . . . Martin is gone, but I've got my name in Martin Luther King III, thank God . . . Though my hair is white and getting whiter all the time, I thank God I've got a head left."

Then, as he started to walk off the stage, he turned to the flower-draped casket and spoke directly to it:

"So Bunch [short for Honeybunch], I'm going to miss you, you know that . . . I know one thing, you're resting. You were tired, I am, I'm tired. Let him [the killer] come on back, he can't do nothing but kill this old broken body . . . We shall overcome. It's in my heart, and it's in my soul, and I really believe we shall overcome."

The choir and the audience then stood, clasped hands and, swaying together, sang, "We Shall Overcome," as Dr. King was helped back to his front-row pew.

Burial was in Atlanta's Southview Cemetery.