

What was King like as a father and husband?

[\[Audio Link\]](#)

Could you talk a little bit more about King's relationship with Coretta Scott King as well as his role as a father?

Dr. Clayborne Carson: I think from the beginning of his leadership – actually, from his beginning of his relationship with Coretta Scott, he understood that she was a very unique partner in that he was obviously in love for the typical reasons. That she was attractive. She was someone who he felt he was compatible with.

But he also felt that their politics were compatible. That they both wanted to bring change to the south. They both had a broad vision of social justice which extended beyond civil rights. Both of them felt that it was necessary to bring economic justice to the country. They talked about socialism and other kinds of radical ideas when they were dating. And you can see that in the letters they wrote to each other.

So, that when the Montgomery Bus Boycott started, she was a supportive partner from the beginning. I think looking back, you can see that Martin Luther King was somewhat sexist in his attitudes about her role. And I think there was some tension over that. I think she would have probably preferred to be more active. But once they started their family, then she was the one who stayed at home while he was the one who played a more upfront role in the movement. At least until the early 60s when she took the lead on speaking out against the Vietnam War. She was involved in Women's International Strike for Peace.

And at that time, Martin Luther King did not want to speak out on the war because he felt that that would harm his position as a civil rights leader. So, she often spoke. Also, he might have expressed in public long before 1967 when King took the public stand in his speech at the Riverside Church in New York. Now, with respect to the family, as the children got to the point where they could travel with their parents – for example, in the Chicago campaign in 1966, Coretta insisted that the family come with him when he moved into a ghetto in Chicago. You know, the kids were with them.

And from -actually, from the point – from the summit of the Montgomery March on, you often see pictures of Martin and Coretta marching together at the head of protest campaigns. And this continues until the end of his life. And indeed, when he goes to Memphis, and he's assassinated during the sanitation worker's strike. It is Coretta who insists that she and the kids come to Memphis after his assassination and make sure that the march takes place there.

So, you know, later on when I got to know her, I think it was quite clear that in some ways, after his death, she came into her own as a leader. She no longer had to play a subordinate role. By that time, the kids were old enough so that she could take a major role in disseminating a lot of ideas about civil rights, feminism, her anti-war stance. Later on, she became a proponent of gay

rights and many other issues. In fact, there would be no Martin Luther King holiday except for the role of Coretta Scott King promoting the idea of a King holiday.

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