

## Martin and Coretta King awarded Congressional Gold Medal

Written by Freddie Allen, NNPA Washington Correspondent  
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – During a recent ceremony on Capitol Hill, lawmakers from the United States Senate and House of Representatives celebrated the anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King with the Congressional Gold Medal.

"The Civil Rights Act of 1964 did more than help end discrimination in America," said Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio). "The Civil Rights Act established that legal discrimination would no longer be a barrier to what one could achieve; but that achievement should be solely determined by one's ability and ambition."

Fudge added that Dr. King and President Lyndon B. Johnson exemplify the principles on which our nation was founded.

Rep. John Lewis, former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), called Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, his brother and sister and said that they taught civil rights activists of the day the way of peace, the way of love, and the way of nonviolence.



"Through their actions, their speeches, and their writings they helped create the climate for the passage of the Civil Right Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965," said Lewis, the last living speaker from the historic 1963 March on Washington.

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Lewis also said that without the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson, there would be no Barack Obama as president of the United States.

Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) sponsored the legislation that honored the Kings with the Congressional Gold Medal and called on lawmakers to work together to ensure equal access to the ballot box for all Americans.

"If the Reverend and Mrs. King could speak to us now, if our predecessors who passed the Civil Rights Act could speak to us now, would they not challenge us to come together across lines of party and geography in a great cause?" asked Levin. "Would they not encourage us, for example, to pass legislation restoring the protections of the Voting Rights Act?"

Fudge agreed.

"The Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established equal opportunity and equal protection under the law for every American. Together we must protect it," said Fudge. "We must fulfill the promise of the Civil Rights Act by ensuring every American's right to vote is protected. Let's pass the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014."

Lonnie Bunch III, the director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, where the medal will be housed, said that he was humbled and honored to help preserve the legacy of the Kings.

"As a result of their sacrifices and their commitment to a fairer America, many of us have experienced possibilities once unimaginable, said Bunch.

Bunch continued: "There is nothing more powerful than a people, than a nation, that is steeped in its history and there are few things as noble as honoring all of our ancestors by remembering [them]. With the acquisition of this medal, the Smithsonian will ensure that as long as there is an America the courage the impact and the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King will be honored, preserved and remembered."

Martin Luther King III, Dexter Scott King, and Bernice A. King accepted the award on behalf of their deceased parents.

The King siblings have sparred publicly in recent years over their father's documents, including his Bible and his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize medal. Martin III and Dexter sued Bernice to force her to relinquish the Bible and peace prize medal. The King children have also drawn criticism for reaping millions by licensing their father's seminal "I have a Dream" speech.

None of the King siblings spoke during the ceremony.

In an opinion piece for *The Hill*, a newspaper focused on Congress, Martin Luther King III said that Americans should be doing more than simply memorializing his parents and their work.

"Instead of recalling the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts that gave this nation

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its long-promised 'new birth of freedom,' why are we not further expanding civil rights and voter participation in this country?" wrote Martin III. "There is no denying that we have made great strides in the 50 years since the Civil Rights Act. This ought to give pause to those who assert that no federal law ever did any good. That is why I hope that by next summer, when we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, Congress will have worked with me in seeking federal legislation to make it easier for every citizen to vote."