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MLK's anti-gay daughter shocks crowd, refers to LGBT rights in a speech

By GoPride.com News Staff
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ATLANTA -- The Rev. Bernice King, who has rejected gay and lesbians' calls for inclusion in her father fight for equality, shocked an audience by actually mentioning lesbians and gays in a Martin Luther King Jr. Day speech.

In her speech, the Georgia Voice reported that King said all people -- black or white, "heterosexual or homosexual, or gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender" -- should unify against oppression.

Lesbian and gay audience members, who have long been accustomed to Bernice King's homophobia, were flabbergasted.

"People grow and people change," Rev. Maressa Pendermom told the Georgia Voice. "Sometimes we don't let them. I wasn't expecting that. And I was already ready to shut down but I challenged myself to listen and I'm glad I listened."

Bernice King, the youngest daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, once famously told LGBT supporters that "my father did not take a bullet for same-sex marriage."

Others in the audience were equally surprised.

"What Bernice's turnabout ...spoke to is potential to change. We still have to remember they too are human," said Craig Washington, an Atlanta-based LGBT activist.

In 2005, Bernice King led a march to her father's graveside while calling for a constitutional ban on gay marriage. She was joined by Bishop Eddie Long, former senior pastor of New Birth Missionary Church in Georgia. She stepped down as elder at the Atlanta megachurch after Long settled out of court with four young men who filed lawsuits claiming he coerced them into sexual relationships.

Her mother, Coretta Scott King, was a vocal supporter of gay rights.