

# Farrakhan tells Richmond audience: Cultivate yourselves and read

by Nancy Spannaus

Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, addressed a crowd of 8,000-9,000 African-American men and women in Richmond, Virginia on June 11 with a message that challenged the philosophical foundations of the former capital of the Confederacy. The appearance was part of a national speaking tour which the minister has been making under the theme of stopping the killing in the black community. Richmond, which like many large urban centers has a majority black population, was a prime target for the organizing drive, which has signed up tens of thousands of black men to take a pledge to improve themselves and their community, as an alternative to street life and violence.

It is a testament to the political environment in Richmond that none of the city's black political officials showed up at the rally, all claiming prior scheduled events. This author was present for the entire proceeding.

But anyone who was looking for a simple rally against violence, or an emotional hype for black unity, had to come away disappointed. Minister Farrakhan devoted the bulk of his more than two-hour speech to a dialogue with the audience on the question of the development and cultivation of the human species. Farrakhan laid out one basic philosophical imperative in his lengthy speech, one which he punctuated with many specifics and which is applicable to all racial groups. As he stated from the outset, all God's creation naturally tends to evolve toward perfection. This is the meaning of being alive: to be in motion toward perfection. But to do so, you must cultivate yourself, especially your mind.

The minister heavily relied on biological images to convey his point. Every individual begins with sperm, or as a clot, he noted. As an undeveloped individual, he or she doesn't amount to much, or is even ugly and repulsive. But God and His messengers tell us that we have to develop ourselves.

God provided Moses as the messenger to Caucasians, Farrakhan said, and Caucasians developed civilization, including the ability to go into space. But Caucasians were also tested with the responsibility of dominating the world, and they didn't do a very good job. The sorry condition of African-Americans, for example, testifies to the problems with the way the Caucasians handled this trust. Caucasians can hardly afford to complain about the situation in the black

community when they created the problem. But Farrakhan did not let his black audience off the hook. Yes, we know what the white man did to us, he said; but we have to go from there. Why do black men hang around the street corner and do nothing, just because the white man doesn't give them jobs? That's why Caucasians call you "boy," he chided the audience; because you act like an underdeveloped child.

Muhammad, God's messenger to the black race, was an illiterate peasant, Minister Farrakhan said, but the first command which God gave him was: "Read!" White people used to make it unlawful for our ancestors to learn to read, the minister said. Today, I believe there is a conspiracy in America to rob not only blacks, but also the poor and others of the ability to read. Because all you want to know about anything can be found in books, but if your mind can be controlled through TV and radio, then you can be controlled.

## Muslim, Christian, Jew

Minister Farrakhan underlined his ecumenical approach by making a personal statement. I am a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim, he said. And in some cases, I'm better than you are. For example, to be a Jew is not a matter of race. As St. Paul said, it's a matter of being circumcised in your heart. To be a Christian, is not just to repeat what Christ said; it is a matter of changing the way people act and think according to Christ's teachings. And just look at how much I am persecuted, the minister noted.

There is a party among you, he added, who want me dead. This is dangerous. If you want yourselves to live, leave Farrakhan alone, because I am your last chance. The attempt against Khalid Muhammad, he noted, was part of a grand conspiracy, whose aim was against Farrakhan himself.

Without naming the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith directly, Minister Farrakhan said that there was a party among Jews which was seeking to kill him. He noted that a bomb had been placed in the rally's location, which could have polluted the air conditioning system, creating sickness and panic among those attending. This would have created a situation where people could say that it was not safe to come and hear Farrakhan. What I have to say is good for all people, the minister emphasized; you shouldn't play with me.

Minister Farrakhan concluded by touching on various of the major organizing thrusts which the Nation of Islam has been making in the recent period, including a proposed march of a million black men to Washington, D.C. during 1995. He also alluded to the Nation's campaign to develop businesses in the black community, by urging those present to spend their money in the right place.

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## Background

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*The following background report on the Nation of Islam was submitted by Lawrence K. Freeman, Democratic primary candidate for governor of Maryland.*

The Nation of Islam is arguably the most significant organization in the U.S. black community. In the late 1930s, Elijah Muhammad, its founder, began teaching among the then so-called Negro populations in Detroit and Chicago. During the late 1950s, Malcolm X was recruited while in prison, and became the Nation of Islam's most dynamic recruiter and best-known personality around the world. Through various political manipulations, Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam in 1964, and was later assassinated in 1965. Louis Farrakhan has recently been blamed for the assassination, but, despite the widely publicized feud between him and Malcolm, there is no evidence to support that claim. It is far more likely that Malcolm X was actually killed by U.S. government intelligence agencies.

After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, his son Warith Dean Muhammad took control of the organization and attempted to dismantle his father's movement. In the late 1970s, Louis Farrakhan split off and on his own began to restore the Nation of Islam to its original purpose. Today, Minister Louis Farrakhan is its recognized leader, and is considered the legitimate heir to the late Elijah Muhammad. During the 1980s and 1990s, under Farrakhan's direction, the Nation of Islam has become the most visible organization in the African-American community, and as a result wields tremendous influence. Its support has grown to such an extent, that the Nation of Islam, and in particular Farrakhan himself, have become a serious threat to the political-financial establishment.

One of the programs for which the Nation of Islam is best known, is its war against drugs. In 1988 in Washington, D.C., they launched a program to clean drugs out of the black ghettos with a highly trained group of NOI members who became known as the Dopebusters. To the surprise of many, and the consternation of those in the Bush administration involved in the drug trade, the Dopebusters were successful—so successful, in fact, that the security forces associated with the Nation of Islam have been awarded multimillion-dollar contracts from federal and local governments to patrol dozens of housing projects around the country to keep the

areas safe from drug pushers.

During this same period, Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad, the national spokesman for Minister Farrakhan, spoke out against the deliberate spread of AIDS as part of a program to commit genocide against black people around the world. After returning from Kenya in 1991, where he met with leading scientists pioneering the use of low doses of oral alpha interferon to treat AIDS patients, Dr. Muhammad and the Nation of Islam began offering the Kenya-developed treatment for those suffering from AIDS in the United States.

Although these programs sponsored by the Nation of Islam have gained them respect and support, it is ultimately the message delivered by Minister Farrakhan that has most profoundly affected the African-American community. Over the last few years, Farrakhan has gone into dozens of cities across the United States, regularly attracting enthusiastic audiences of between 10,000 and 20,000, unlike any other speaker in America today. Farrakhan preaches a powerful message designed to lift black men and women out of their degradation and give them the foundation for a positive identity after having suffered generations of slavery and racism. It is this spiritual quality, and its effects on tens of thousands of black men and women, that has made Farrakhan so dangerous to those wishing to control and enslave black people.

Due to the growing influence of the Farrakhan movement, in 1993 Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.), who chairs the Congressional Black Caucus, enlisted support from the civil rights movement, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Congressional Black Caucus itself, to form a working relationship, "a sacred covenant," with Minister Farrakhan. This effort profoundly changed the American political landscape.

### ADL goes bananas

As a result of Farrakhan's increasing prominence, the ADL escalated its long-standing attacks on the NOI, with an all-out assault to destroy the organization and isolate, imprison, or assassinate its leader. The ADL pounced on an inflammatory speech which a leading NOI member, Khalid Muhammad, acting against the guidance of Minister Farrakhan, had given in November 1993 before a small audience on a New Jersey college campus. Fully two months later, ADL reprinted Khalid Muhammad's inflammatory remarks in a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, at a cost of \$50,000, in an attempt to build a hate campaign against Farrakhan himself.

Farrakhan, however, brilliantly turned the tables on the ADL on Feb. 3, when he told a packed Washington, D.C. press conference that he was demoting Khalid Muhammad for his unacceptable language, but then attacked the ADL for being anti-black and anti-American. His remarks have helped rally forces around the country to go on the offensive against the ADL, whose illegal spying on American citizens and lobbying for Dope, Inc. have become notorious.