

Farrakhan's Crusade

Ten years ago I had the opportunity to debate one of the Nation

of Islam's leaders before the group held its Million Man March here in Washington, D.C. Articulate and poised, clean cut and well-dressed, the Nation's freshly minted communications director was positioned to project a new image for the organization. His predecessor had been so vehement with anti-Semitic rhetoric he was publicly silenced. The march was important to the Nation because it would place its leader, Louis Farrakhan, in the mainstream of the black community's leadership.

Inside his state-of-the-art television studio, a nationally known talk-show host sat with a Jewish spokesperson, this Nation of Islam representative and me. Although the debate was intended to be informative and conversational, it evoked strong reactions from viewers.

After I read racially incendiary comments directly from The Final Call and other Black Muslim publications, I was barraged with calls from African Americans who claimed I wanted to keep blacks from doing something "positive." The communications director said repeatedly, "The Nation has changed."

The next day, I was interviewed on a nationally syndicated radio program with the same man. Before the interview, one of his bodyguards tried to persuade me to change my stance against the march. He quoted the Bible, questioned my blackness and even attempted to intimidate me. I secretly asked the Lord to allow the true colors of Black Muslims to be revealed.

During the interview, I told of my father's experiences with lynching. Dad had seen several men's bodies hanging from trees. On the other hand, benevolent whites were the first to encourage him to attend college. The host sat in rapt attention as I talked about the power of forgiveness. My Black Muslim counterpart listened as long as he could before he countered: "I don't forgive my enemies; I destroy my enemies!"

An outpouring of hate followed. What a departure from the conciliatory demeanor he had projected for two days!

Despite my protests and those of others, many churches endorsed the original march. Surprisingly, as Farrakhan prepares for his Millions More March next month, several nationally known pastors are again lending their support.

Though I share Farrakhan's concern about such issues as the breakdown of the black family, I object to the march on three grounds.

First, the Nation of Islam has a long history of inciting racial division. One foundational tenant of its faith is that whites are evil—which is ironic considering that its founder, Master W. Fard Muhammad, was white.

Second, the Nation has historically advocated violence as a legitimate way of solving national race problems. Though it claims to be a religion of peace, the organization reached the height of its popularity in the 1960s when former leader Malcolm X urged blacks to gain their freedom "by any means necessary."

Finally, the Nation seeks to blur the lines between Muslims and Christians. Its leaders quote the Bible when it meets their needs, yet they believe Allah is the only true God and Jesus was merely a prophet. The Nation even claims that Master W. Fard Muhammad was the Messiah!

Second Corinthians 6:14 clearly warns us not to be yoked together with unbelievers. It's time for the black church to resume its social and civic leadership. But this leadership is not simply for blacks—it's for the whole nation. We must sidestep the Millions More March and other causes that will mute our voice and dim our vision.

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