

Point of View

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ALONG THE COLOR LINE

"SHOULD FARRAKHAN BE ALLOWED TO SPEAK?"

By Dr. Manning Marable

For more than a decade, the anti-Semitic speeches of Louis Farrakhan have been a sore point which has fostered divisions between the Jewish and African-American communities. Only last January, to cite a recent example, Farrakhan declared in a two-hour speech in Harlem that Jews were deliberately exploiting the statements of his controversial lieutenant, Muslim Minister Khalid Abdul Muhammad. Farrakhan declared: "They're trying to use my brother Khalid's words against me to divide the house... They don't want Farrakhan to do what he's doing. They're plotting as we speak."

These remarks were vigorously condemned by the Reverend Benjamin Chavis, leader of the NAACP, and by Jesse Jackson, who characterized Farrakhan's January address as "racist, anti-Semitic, divisive,

untrue and chilling."

But a new controversy involving Farrakhan erupted only weeks ago, when the NAACP extended an invitation to the Muslim leader to participate in a national black leadership conference. Liberal Jews were outraged that Chavis had agreed to permit Farrakhan to join the discussions, which were held in Baltimore. Michael Lerner, the editor of liberal Jewish magazine, *Tikkun*, called for a public protest at the NAACP's national headquarters. Lerner explained that the picket was not "a protest against the NAACP. What we are asking is that the black leadership publicly condemn anti-Semitism in the black community and disassociate themselves from Farrakhan and others who preach anti-Semitism..." Several prominent blacks, including Princeton University philosopher Cornel West and Michael Meyers, the leader of the New York

Civil Liberties Coalition, attended the protest.

Although I agree with Lerner's commitment to the fight against anti-Semitism, the strategy of picketing the NAACP for permitting Farrakhan to speak and to engage in a dialogue with other African-American leaders has to be vigorously opposed.

The black freedom struggle in the United States, at its best, has always joined together a political demand for equality with a moral and ethical critique of all forms of social injustice and bigotry. We should have no reservations in condemning anti-Semitism. Statistically, anti-Jewish harassment and violence is on the increase throughout the U.S. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith reported over 1800 anti-Semitic acts in 1993, the second most in a fifteen year survey.

But the question which must be asked is why hundreds of

thousands of African-Americans support Farrakhan, while hundreds gather to attend lectures by Khalid Muhammad? Denouncing Farrakhan does not explain the fact that he does have "legitimacy" within a section of the African-American community.

There are two basic reasons that African-Americans in large numbers are listening to Farrakhan. First, traditional black middle class leadership, both within the civil rights establishment and inside electoral politics, has failed to articulate the rage and anger of the Hip Hop Generation, the unemployed and marginalized black workers. Second, some of Farrakhan's primary arguments—black self-sufficiency, vigorous opposition to drugs and black-against-black violence, and black-business ownership—are generally constructive and positive.

We need to make a critical

distinction between black "militancy" and "radicalism." Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam is indeed "militant" and "anti-white," but it is hardly "radical." In fact, Farrakhan is essentially a "militant conservative," a leader who strongly favors economic solutions within the framework of American capitalism, just like Booker T. Washington a century ago. Farrakhan supports sexism and homophobia. Nothing in this entire program would radically transform the real power relationship between blacks and those who control the American corporate and political system.

And this is exactly why Farrakhan must be invited into dialogue with other African-American leaders. If we refuse to speak to Farrakhan, we are saying that we do not value the



DR. MANNING MARABLE opinions or perspectives of those thousands of black people who support him, or the millions who reject his anti-Semitism, but who do agree with part of his program.

If Israelis can dialogue with Yasser Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization, certainly African-Americans can dialogue with each other, despite very real differences on ideology and ethics which may divide us. Farrakhan must be allowed to speak, and black progressives must be ready to critique his program and to reject his anti-Semitism.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor

I was shocked and sickened by the Tom Powers article which appeared in the Sports Section of the Las Vegas Review-Journal on Monday, June 20, 1994. The heading alone was so offensive, it actually made my stomach feel ill. For those of you who had the pleasure of missing this disgusting article, allow me to enlighten you.

The headline reads - "It's too bad Simpson didn't commit suicide." It then went on to discuss how many O.J. fans expressed sympathy for his situation. Mr. Powers, (and I use the term Mister loosely), claims O.J. Simpson is "the most dysfunctional Simpson since Bart" and could have saved the taxpayers money by "driving directly into a telephone pole," saying it was

"the least he could do for society." Only a sick and tormented mind could have the audacity to call for another human being to take his own life. No matter what crimes O.J. may or may not have committed, suicide would not be a final solution. Ours is supposed to be a civilized society. A place where you are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Each of us is entitled to his or her personal opinions; however, the manner in which we choose to express these opinions separates us from four legged creatures with curly tails. Reading the Tom Powers article does indeed shed light on the author's breeding.

Sincerely,
Robyn Fonte'
N.L.V. Resident

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

A New Agenda For New Democracies

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

On the evening of Saturday, June 5, I was honored to deliver the keynote address to the National Council of Black Studies, whose annual meeting - attended by 250 people - took place this year in Georgetown, Guyana (the only English-speaking country in South America). President Cheddi Jagan welcomed the participants in an opening session. On the day of my presentation, President Jagan graciously received me in a face-to-face meeting at his offices.

I very much welcomed the opportunity afforded me by the Council to speak with so many distinguished intellectuals and educators from Guyana, the rest of the Caribbean and the United States about "A New Agenda for New Democracies" and its implications for the empowerment of people of African descent everywhere in the world.

I told the sisters and brothers in Georgetown that, given the powerful and historically anti-democratic role of the United States in international affairs, there can be no consolidation of democracy and economic development in Africa, in Latin America, in the Caribbean, in

Asia and throughout the developing world without a democratic revolution in the United States that puts political power more directly into the hands of the American people, and redirects U.S. domestic and foreign policy for the benefit of all.

The great Pan-Africanist, W.E.B. DuBois, speaking half a century ago, taught us about the close connection between the state of American democracy and the liberation of Africa. Writing after World War II, DuBois recognized that the U.S. had stepped into the shoes of the European colonialists in terms of playing a determining role in the future destiny of Africa. DuBois argued that it was in America's own self-interest to "release" Black Africa, and "by that act release ourselves."

He wrote: "Just as far as any part of a nation or of the world is excluded from a share in democratic power and self-expression, just so far the world will always be in danger of war and collapse. If this nation could not exist half slave and half free, then the world in which this nation plays a larger and larger part also cannot be half slave and half free, but must recognize world democracy."

We know now that America did not "release" Black Africa. On the contrary, European colonialism, gave way to Cold War neocolonialism. The anti-communist imperatives of the Cold War distorted U.S. relations with the developing world and undermined the socialist experiments in Africa in ways that are difficult to overcome even now. The corruption and oppression, the proliferation of arms - this legacy remains to undermine and complicate the future of African countries in the post-Cold War era as they attempt to move toward democracy and a "second independence."

But as this century of colonialism, neocolonialism, capitalist decline, socialist revolution and its collapse comes to a close, a scenario that Brother DuBois could not have envisioned has presented itself: as it turns out, America cannot "release Africa" unless and until America itself is released. The U.S. must become fully democratic, our government must become fully accountable to the decent and humane instincts of all of the American people, before we will see a progressive change for African Americans, for all people of African descent, and for Af-



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rica itself. That "release" of America is just now beginning, led by the independent democratic political movement that crystallized in the founding of the Patriot Party in Arlington, Virginia two months ago.

There are signs that the changed political environment - the rise of the new democracy movement, and an unprecedented level of unity among Black leaders - is already producing positive dividends for African democratization.

The existence of the independent political movement is proving that it can be a source of strength to more traditional political players who want to challenge the status quo - for instance, the Congressional Black Caucus, several of whose members have shown that they (See *Blk Empowerment*, Pg 5)

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