

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

Million Man March: An Analysis Of Black Protest

By Manning Marable
Part One of a
Two-Part Series

The national mobilization to build support for the "Million Man March" on Washington, D.C., scheduled for October 16, is rapidly building momentum. Led by Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam and former NAACP national secretary Benjamin Chavis, the march has captured the awareness and interest of thousands of African-Americans. The call for the Million Man March comes at a critical moment of crisis in the political history of our people. We can understand and appreciate the meaning of this mobilization, its possibilities and its problems, by grounding ourselves in the historical traditions of black struggle.

The best historical parallel with the Million Man March is provided by the famous "Negro March on Washington" mobilization on June, 1941. On the eve of the Second World War, black trade union leader A. Phillip Randolph issued a series of demands against the Roosevelt administration. His chief aims were: the outlawing of government contracts in defense-related industries which practiced racial discrimination in hiring; the abolition of racially segregated units in the US armed forces; and an executive order abolishing Jim Crow segregation in every department of the Federal government. To obtain these demands, Randolph promises to bring one hundred thousand black people to

Washington, D.C.

The March mobilization was all-black. White progressives could offer political and material support, but they weren't allowed to join the protest. Randolph explained: "We believe that Negroes need an all-Negro movement, just as the Jews had a Zionist movement. We believe that Negroes should supply the money and pay the price, make the sacrifices, to break down the barriers to a realization of full citizenship rights of America." At the last moment, the Roosevelt administration agreed to sign Executive Order 8802, desegregating employment in wartime factories, an action creating hundreds of thousands of jobs for African Americans. The March was called off, but it achieved a major political objective.

We must assess the current effort to mobilize African Americans today against the historical standard of Randolph and the events of 1941. To date, the March has been endorsed by a broad spectrum of African Americans. On the left, Harvard professor Cornel West, author of *Race Matters*, has expressed solidarity for the March. West states: "This march is for anyone who has been disrespected, denigrated and disregarded. It's about us coming together for the sake of the true, the beautiful, and the good."

NAACP acting executive director Earl Shinnholster informed *The Final Call* that he endorsed the March and planned "to be an active participant." Civil

rights veteran Dorothy Height and the National Council of Negro Women endorsed the March, as have Washington D.C. Mayor Marion Barry and Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton. An impressive network of local organizing committees has been formed across black America.

Black progressive organizer Bob Brown has been hired to coordinate the March's office in Washington, D.C. Chavis has traveled tirelessly throughout the country promoting the March. Yet the real authority behind this mobilization is one man—Louis Farrakhan. While many African Americans respect Farrakhan's individual charisma, oratorical skills and his message of racial pride and self help, one can exaggerate his organizational clout. By comparison, the soft-spoken Islamic leader Warith D. Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad, has a much greater following among black American Muslims.

The fundamental problem which advocates of the March must address, however, is its agenda and message. Chavis has defined three specific objectives for the March: "atonement with God and one another; a drive to register eight million new black voters, and a search for black fathers for 25,000 children, mostly male, who need families."

Let's consider this agenda. Spiritually is at the center of the black protest tradition: all of us certainly favor the development of strong black extended families, communities and institutions. But self-help and individual effort, while important, don't fully address the structures of power which perpetuate black oppression. Black people don't

own the companies which produce millions of firearms which kill thousands of our young people. We don't control the banks which deny us credit and capital; we don't control the tons of drugs pumped into our communities. We don't control the courts and prisons which "warehouse" hundreds of thousands of black men.

Instead of "atonement", we should march to Washington to indict the real criminals: the racist, reactionary Republican Congress; the failures of the Clinton administration; a bankrupt two-party system; the corporation and the wealthy who profit from black unemployment, imprisonment and exploitation. Remember that in 1941, Randolph challenged the government. Today, we need a March which has a progressive public policy agenda, including demands for full-employment, universal health care, housing, and a vigorous defense of affirmative action. This is part of the reason that Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, among others, have been noncommittal about the March. To be effective, the March should have a much broader character, reaching blacks in organized labor, national formations, women's groups, and a whole range of organizations.

The March's position on African-American women is equally problematic. Telling our sisters to "stay home and pray" while brothers march seems anachronistic and reactionary. We should remember the unique contribution and insights of sisters like Ella Baker, who helped to define the Civil Rights Movement. We need to challenge the organizers of this March to recognize that only on

the basis of unity and action, as full partners and participants in struggle and resistance, can African American overcome sexism and women's inequality.

The 1941 all-black March on Washington tells us that struggle is the best and only means for an oppressed people to gain their freedom. Hopefully in 1995, we will struggle to achieve that same level of commitment to political resistance.

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RAY WILLIS REPORT

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athlete and the lack of other types of Black role models.

The bottom line is, if we think we're being misrepresented in the media and in society, we must take action to change things. At the same time, it needs to be clearly known that it is unnecessary to diminish our high regard for the successful Black athlete in order to acknowledge those of our race who are successful in other fields of endeavor.

To know is to grow. Until next week.

WESTSIDE STORY

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racist, and the same government officials say that because he says he is a racist doesn't mean you can let THIS admission into the case?

Because the judge wouldn't let in the cop's own statements, the defense has no choice but to ask the cop if he made these statements. Of course he says "NO." Since all of America knows of his past conduct, why isn't a cop lying on the stand a big deal? Because white America feels that if he lies calmly, it gives him credibility.

Here lies the real problem in black America. Today, if you are a racist, it's not a big deal to whites. If they throw mothers and children into the streets, it's their own fault for being poor. If cops have Nazi swastikas on

their desks, it's no big deal. If blacks are the most unemployed group in society, why not take away affirmative action also?

The race card is really a "race" against time. The right wing has decided to divide the country along color lines. They must assume that blacks are going out without a fight!

Well, that has never been the case, and today is no different. Today, the white right holds Goldwater as the ultimate conservative legend. We remember him. Crush riots keeping blacks in their place, crush civil rights, and live separate lives. Racists will soon realize that those days will never come. Because black power is too strong and it is, as always...eternal!
peace...

BY GENE REDDEN

SOME-WHERE OUT-THERE



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