

Million Man March:

A Different Dream Stirs This March On Washington

WASHINGTON - In 1963 it was blacks and whites together calling for civil rights in a massive march on Washington that tried to usher in an era of true racial equality.

This time — 32 years later — it was blacks alone calling for a different programme, one of self-help, self-reliance and self-respect that would free them finally of the legacy of slavery and the burden of racism.

It was called the "Million Man March," and its organisers claimed that more than a million black men came from every corner of the country to take part. Police put the figure at 400,000.

But that would still be a record number for a civil rights demonstration and almost double the attendance figure for the historic 1963 march, and it was certain to be one that will resonate in black communities for weeks, months and maybe years to come.

One tall black man turned the corner of a sidewalk and could not believe what he saw — tens of thousands of people spread across the mall from the halls of Congress to the Washington Monument. In sheer delight, he exclaimed, "All you can see is black. Just look at us."

And that feeling was felt by all. "What do you think?" a black man asked one of the few whites at the demonstration. "Big," the white man replied. "Not big," the black man said with a broad smile, adding, "Huge. And completely safe. No drugs. No guns. No booze. This is great.

MARCH

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the 11-hour event at 400,000 — short of the million-man goal and less than the largest Washington protest crowd in official annals, 600,000 at a 1969 anti-war march. March organisers, however, claimed some 1.5 million had turned out.

Clinton had chosen this day to make a personal appeal for racial harmony in a speech in far-off Texas, praising the lofty goals of the Washington rally but repudiating "one man's message of malice and division."

Farrakhan spoke in sparkling autumn sunshine from the west slope of Capitol Hill, just under the west face of Congress, to an audience spread out a mile or more beneath him like a human carpet far down Washington's Central Mall. His words about "a sick society" boomed over loudspeakers set up for the day. Many in the crowd responded as he ripped into "the slavemasters" with calls of encouragement, in chant-and-response style.

He also offered an olive branch to American Jews who have been his frequent targets and his fiercest critics, calling for a conciliatory dialogue between them. "And I guess if you can sit down with (PLO leader Yasser) Arafat, and there's rivers of blood between you, why can't you sit down with us, and there's no blood between us?" he asked.

Jewish leaders responded sceptically, saying Farrakhan would

This is what we need."

Many Americans remember the 1963 rally for Martin Luther King Jr's stirring "I have a dream" speech, a speech in which King told of dreaming, "that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

This time the dream of black and white friendship took second place to a dream of blacks rebuilding their own tattered and

FARRAKHAN: U.S. SOCIETY STILL SEPARATE, UNEQUAL

WASHINGTON - Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan told a vast rally of black men Monday that America remains two racially divided societies "separate and unequal" and shrugged off President Clinton's call for racial harmony.

"There's still two Americas, one black, one white, separate and unequal," Farrakhan said in paraphrasing a phrase made famous by 30 years ago by a presidential commission on racial tensions in the United States.

"The president spoke today and he wanted to heal the great (racial) divide, but I respectfully suggest to the president he did not dig deep enough at the malady that divides black and white in order to affect a solution to the problem," Farrakhan said in addressing the "Million Man March" of black men he and his backers organized in Washington.

torn society by themselves.

Speaker after speaker, from black separatists to close associates of Dr. King's, told of the terrible shape American black society is in — 60 percent of households with children headed by single parents, one in three black men in their 20s in jail, on probation.

"The idea of a million men has touched a nerve deep in the heart of people yearning to breathe free. Big meetings were not allowed on the plantation.

He referred to an appeal for racial harmony Clinton made in a speech in Texas earlier Monday.

Speaking in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol to a crowd of hundreds of thousands gathered on Washington's central Mall, Farrakhan described a history of

Congressman Seeks Probe Of March Funds

WASHINGTON - A congressional critic of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan Wednesday sought a federal investigation of fundraising at the black leader's Million Man March on federal property.

Rep. Pete King, R-N.Y., wrote to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt saying that Farrakhan violated federal regulations about soliciting funds at public gatherings on the Washington Mall where U.S. Park Police said some 400,000 black men gathered on Monday.

Park Police and the National

We've always yearned for a big meeting. Today we've left the plantation," said civil rights leader Jesse Jackson as the crowd chanted, "I am somebody. I am God's child."

The day's big speech came not by an integrationist like Dr. King but from black separatist firebrand Louis Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam, who told the hundreds of thousands present that his dream was of blacks turning around their own lives without white help.

white supremacy he said had been perpetuated by U.S. presidents from slave-holding George Washington and Thomas Jefferson through Abraham Lincoln, who freed the slaves in 1863.

He also claimed personal credit for inspiring the rally,

Park Service which oversees federal parks fall under the Interior Department jurisdiction.

Separately, Farrakhan on Tuesday ordered his lawyers to file a federal court lawsuit challenging the 400,000 figure Park Police and two other police agencies estimated was the attendance.

Farrakhan said more than one million black men attended the "day of atonement" for past misdeeds and also promote black self-reliance. "Political correctness reared its ugly head on Oct. 16th," King wrote to

"Black man you don't have to bash white people. All we have to do is go home and turn our communities into decent safe places to live, dot the black communities with businesses and then white folk, instead of driving by using the 'N' word, they will say 'Look at them, they are marvellous,'" said Farrakhan in a 2 1/2 hour speech that both inspired and mystified many of his listeners. The controversial messenger roamed from arcane discussions of the meaning of

waving aside controversy over whether its message could be separated from a messenger whom critics have accused of race-baiting and anti-Semitism.

"Today whether you like it or not, God brought the idea through me and he didn't bring it through me because my heart

Babbitt. "Once again, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam have received special treatment from the federal government."

He pointed to National Park Service regulations prohibiting solicitations on national park grounds and said the permit for the gathering also specifically banned solicitation. Penalties for any alleged violations were not immediately available, King's office said.

numbers and obelisks, to telling President Clinton to "clear the scales from your eyes," to mocking powerful Republican Senator Jesse Helms and House Speaker Newt Gingrich as racists to finally defending his own image. He wondered if his heart "was so dark" why was the message of the day so bright.

Many in the crowd that cheered him said they did not support him on many things but added that his call for self-help and self-reliance was right.

was dark with hatred and anti-Semitism," Farrakhan said. "He didn't bring it through me because my heart is filled with hatred of white people ... If my heart were that dark, how is the message so bright, the message so clear and the response so magnificent?"

During the massive rally, Farrakhan's associates solicited funds from participants in large cardboard boxes and an organizer of the march, Benjamin Chavis, told a news conference Tuesday afternoon that so much money was raised that the funds were still being counted.

King wrote it was "a flagrant violation" to collect thousands of dollars "to finance Farrakhan's empire of hate." He asked Babbitt to investigate the matter.

RECOUNT

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Democratic Rep. John Schumer and Charles Rangel of New York, John Lewis of Georgia and Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia and Republicans James Leach of Iowa and Bill McCollum of Florida. Rangel, Lewis and Norton are black, the others are white.

White House spokeswoman Ginny Terzano said Clinton was aware of the letter. "We'll review it carefully," she said. Meantime, black leaders said Farrakhan's march had raised his stature in the black community but the jury was still out whether race relations would be improved.

But Tuesday he credited Farrakhan for the event. "It was more than a traditional civil rights protest. It was a religious meeting, a revival, it was a spiritual thing," Lewis Lewis said.

Jewish leaders, however, refused to talk with Farrakhan. The Anti-Defamation League said it would not hold any meeting with Farrakhan because it says he remains unchanged in his bigotry.

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