

COMMENTARY

Farrakhan 'confession' no new news at all

Lee Hubbard
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The story was billed as a first ever confession, but it was more like journalistic sensationalism. I am referring to the CBS-TV "60 Minutes" segment by Mike Wallace dealing with the killing of Malcolm X, a fiery Black militant in the 1960's.

The show purported to have Minister Louis Farrakhan, admit for the first time that his words played a role in the assassination of Malcolm X.

The newsmagazine's 15-minute segment is based on a four-hour meeting Wallace mediated between Minister Farrakhan and the oldest daughter of Malcolm X, Attallah Shabazz, at Farrakhan's Arizona winter retreat.

Shabazz was 6-years-old when she witnessed her father get shot down by three gunmen at the Audubon Ball-

room in New York City, on February 21, 1965. Although later accounts say five men were involved, three with ties to the Nation of Islam were convicted of the slaying. Attallah called for the meeting, at Minister Farrakhan's house, to find out his role in the death of her father.

It was at his house that Minister Farrakhan said, "As I may have been complicit in words that I spoke leading up to February 21, I acknowledge that and regret that any word that I have said caused the loss of life of a human being."

Leading up to the show, the CBS network ran with it, blasting it all over its Website. The Associated Press also ran a story based on the alleged "confession." The topic created a firestorm of activity on talk shows and Black Web sites.

But while it has led to debate surrounding the death

of Malcolm X, and the possible involvement of Minister Farrakhan, no one has asked the big question: Is the story new?

The answer is: No.

On numerous occasions, Minister Farrakhan has said that his public words may have helped to create an atmosphere that may have influenced others to carry out the assassination. This is something that Minister Farrakhan has said in 1994 to Barbara Walters, and on at least two other public occasions.

One thing it has done is bring up the death of Malcolm X, and the events surrounding his death, which read like a Greek tragedy. Malcolm X was a thief and prison convict who was helpless—until he discovered the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the NOI's leader, while in jail. This event turned his life around.

After corresponding with Muhammad, the two developed a kinship. Malcolm began to study the Bible, and the Koran, and changed his name to Malcolm X upon his release from prison.

Malcolm X rose through the ranks of the Nation of Islam to be one of Muhammad's most trusted followers. Through national speaking engagements, television appearances and by establishing *Muhammad Speaks*—the NOI's first nationally distributed newspaper—Malcolm X helped to put the Nation of Islam on the map.

The NOI's message of Black self-determination and Black nationalism attracted thousands of members and sympathizers to the group, and it was the lyrical force of Malcolm's words that attracted thousands of followers. Malcolm would become a mentor to a younger Louis

X (Farrakhan) and a feared man.

But while Malcolm X was one of Muhammad's brightest students, jealousy would seep in amongst members in Muhammad's inner circle, as his popularity slowly eclipsed Muhammad's.

Upon learning that the NOI's moral and spiritual leader had fathered children by former secretaries, Malcolm became disillusioned with Muhammad. The tensions became publicly visible when Muhammad silenced Malcolm for remarking, of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, that it was a case of the "chickens coming home to roost."

After being silenced, Malcolm X left the NOI, causing a split in the organization. Verbal spats would continue through the media between Muhammad and Malcolm X, when Farrakhan upped the ante by writing in a

Muhammad Speaks column, "such a man [Malcolm X] is worthy of death, and would have received it if it were not for Muhammad's confidence in God that he would be given victory over his enemies."

Two months later, on Feb. 21, 1965, Malcolm X was killed. Farrakhan has denied having any connection with the shooting, and he has never faced any charges related to Malcolm X's death.

But if Farrakhan was involved in the assassination, the FBI should know. They were spying on Malcolm X and Muhammad for years, looking for ways to lead to the deaths of these two, and the ending of the NOI.

COINTEL-PRO (the FBI's domestic counter-intelligence program) spied on Black organizations and leaders, including Martin Luther King, the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam. (See Farrakhan, Page 15)

Voting crucial to Blacks

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Internet is a wonderful source of information and has revolutionized the way many of us do our work, our studies and even our shopping. But everything that one reads on the internet is not gospel, and for the past year or so there has

been one troubling piece of misinformation going around about voting rights for African-Americans. That story says that the Voting Rights Act will expire in 2007 and that therefore blacks will lose our right to vote that year. That story is just not true.

After receiving that internet warning several times myself, and hearing it in my church, I decided to find out from the Justice Department's Civil Rights unit what the reality was. I found out that this rumor is false, and was reassured that first the voting rights of African-Americans are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Voting Rights Act and that those guarantees are permanent and do not expire.

The Justice Department pointed to the 15th amendment to the Constitution, under which no one may be denied the right to vote. In addition, the Voting Rights Act itself does not expire in any year. What will expire in 2007 are certain provisions of the Voting Rights Act which contain extraordinary remedies that applied to certain areas of the South because the right to vote illegally had been denied for so long. The provisions, for example, authorize the Attorney General to send federal registrars to register voters in those areas, as well as federal observers to monitor elections. In addition, these special provisions require certain counties to gain the approval of the U.S. Attorney General before implement-

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



ing new voting practices. These special provisions of the Voting Rights Act were originally set to expire in 1970, but were extended that year and again in 1975 and 1982. They are now set to expire in 2007, if they are not further extended. Even if these provisions expire, however, they can be reinstated by court order if there is evidence of discriminatory practices in these counties.

Over the past few years I have watched carefully to see what the percentage of African-Americans voting across this nation has been. I tried to get the percentage of blacks who voted in the recent presidential primaries, but so far have been unsuccessful.

But in 1998, according to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, the black share of the vote was 10 percent, the same as in 1994.

I know that African-Americans are more than 10 percent of the U.S. population and I remember the 1984 and 1988 campaigns of Rev. Jesse Jackson, who helped us see the potential power of the black vote in determining not only who is president, but who represents us in the U.S. Congress and in state houses. If every person who sent that false internet warning about the Voting Rights Act was registered to vote and voted, if every African-American who is eligible

(See Voting, Page 13)

The Birmingham church bombing: "You never quit looking for justice"

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The news broke last month with a stunning suddenness.

A grand jury in Alabama had indicted two white men, now in their 60s and 70s, for their role in one of the most dastardly crimes of violent white racists committed during the civil rights years of the 1950s and 1960s: the Sunday, September 15, 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala.

That bomb, set to detonate at the time when the teachers and pupils of the church's Sunday School were gathering for their service, killed four young girls: Denise McNair, 11, Addie Mae Collins, 14, Carole Robertson, 14, and Cynthia Wesley, 14, Twenty-two others in the church at the time were injured.

(The killing of black youths in the Birmingham area that day was not done, however. In the aftermath of the bombing, when a grieving, angry black community filled the city's streets, 13-year-old, Virgil Ware was shot to death by a group of white youths in a suburban neighborhood; and the 16-year-old Johnny Robinson was shot and killed by Birmingham police who said he refused their orders to stop

To Be Equal

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stoning cars.)

The two men indicted now, Thomas E. Blanton, 61, and Bobby Frank Cherry, 69, allegedly were part of a four-man ring of white racists whose willingness to commit acts of violence to try to derail the civil rights movement was well-known to local Birmingham law officials and even ordinary citizens at the time.

One of the four participants of the bombing, the ringleader, Robert "Dynamite Bob" Chambliss, had been indicted for the crime in 1977. Convicted of murder, Chambliss died in prison in 1985 at age 81. Another suspect, Herman Cash, was never indicted for the crime. He died in 1994.

Now, the two remaining suspects will face justice.

The Birmingham indictments are the latest in a series of indictments and trials in the Deep South of whites ac-

cused of murdering the black civil rights activists and other African-Americans during those years when the movement for America's freedom swept over the region.

That these cases—which some, perhaps many, thought, would never be truly pursued—are being brought to justice show a determined refusal on the part of black and white prosecutors and other law officials, and ordinary citizens in the South to let the great crimes of the region's past go unpunished.

They are weaving a remarkable new pattern in the fabric of America's history, one that demands a reconsideration of what white Southerners actually felt about the segregation and racial discrimination that barred their black fellow citizens from participating fully in American life.

No, this isn't to say that as (See Birmingham, Page 15)