

Nation of Islam minister claims LA police beat him

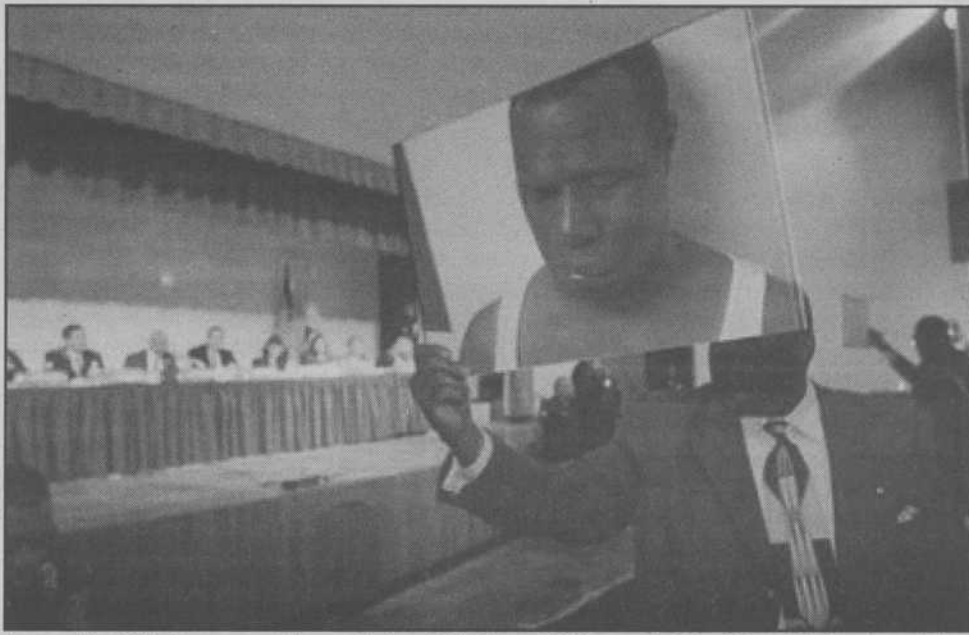
By Gene Johnson Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - In his first public comments since his Aug. 25 arrest in which he was allegedly roughed up by police, Nation of Islam Minister Tony Muhammad told a filled-to-capacity crowd at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church recently that he wouldn't have changed a thing in the events leading up to his arrest.

"If Jesus can pay a price for defending the poor, then who I am to not want to pay that same price to defend the poor Black and Brown man?" Muhammad said to an appreciative crowd. "I will give my life to what I love. And for that, I don't apologize. I would do it all over again. The same way. With the same spirit."

What Muhammad and several others who either sat or stood with him in the pulpit would like to change is what happened to him once he was in police custody, arrested on suspicion of battery of a police officer.

"You [police] waited until you got the handcuffs on me and you kicked me in my



An unidentified man carries a photo of Nation of Islam minister Tony Muhammad that was taken after his release from police custody. The Los Angeles Police Commission listens to community comments last week about the attack at the LAPD headquarters.

face," said the 47-year-old minister who was advised by his attorneys to "not go into talking about the case."

Nevertheless, Louis Farrakhan's said that the Nation of Islam is prepared to fight any charges that Muhammad faces.

"We aren't running from this fight in the street, and we aren't running from it in the courtroom," said Farrakhan, while flanked by Michael Jackson's defense attorney

Thomas A. Mesereau Jr. and Carl Douglas, a member of O.J. Simpson's "dream team" of attorneys.

With the backing of the Bethel AME Church's pastor, the Rev. Lewis E. Logan II, and others who make up Community Call to Action and Accountability, organizers circulated a petition asking that all charges stemming from Muhammad's arrest be dropped and that officers involved in the minister's al-

leged beating be fired.

Moreover, the man who helped secure Muhammad's bail, Celes King IV, called for the firing of Police Chief William Bratton.

Bratton was in Sacramento with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. On Monday, Bratton met for two hours with Nation of Islam Minister Don Muhammad of Boston.

In a telephone interview, Villaraigosa said: "I'm not

here to defend either party [police or Muhammad]. [Authorities] are reviewing the entire process and will get to the truth. We can't lose our focus. We need to unite [in the battle against] gang and gun violence. I've had to hold the hands of too many grieving mothers."

During the community meeting at Bethel AME Church a "Tony Muhammad Defense Fund" totaling \$3,970.19 was raised. Muhammad said that "none of this money will go to personal use. It will be used for the little man who has no attorney, who doesn't have money to defend themselves against police brutality.

The organizers also promised in two weeks that they would orchestrate a "10,000 person march" to the Los Angeles Police Department, headquarters at Parker Center, in their pursuit of justice.

Muhammad was arrested Aug. 25 in Hyde Park where many people had congregated for a candlelight vigil for Nahum Beaird, 21, who was shot and killed in a gang-related shooting the night before. Many neighbors were angry at paramedics who re-

sponded to the Aug. 24 shooting, saying they ignored signs that Beaird was still alive to attend to two others who were wounded in the attack.

During the vigil, police requested that two vehicles, reportedly belonging to the Nation of Islam, be moved. Muhammad and two bodyguards "became very belligerent and uncooperative" after the request, according to LAPD Assistant Chief Jim McDonnell.

The Police Department released an audio tape of the events leading up to the controversial arrest of Muhammad.

On the tape an officer could be heard telling someone, apparently Muhammad, not to walk behind me, don't walk behind me."

Muhammad replied: "I'm not doing nothing. I'm not going nowhere."

After the officer told him to "back up," Muhammad responded by shouting, "make me."

The transcript ends with the officer calling for additional units and the dispatcher asking for clarification. (See NOI, Page 14)

Relief personnel: Rapes in city were preventable

By Nancy Cook Lauer
Special to Sentinel-Voice

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (WOMEN'S E-NEWS) - Overwhelmed by the utter challenge of quickly moving tens of thousands of hurricane survivors to safe ground, Louisiana and federal officials had no time to ensure the security of New Orleans' most vulnerable: children, women and the elderly.

Following unconfirmed reports that girls as young as 10 were raped inside the Louisiana Superdome and convention center, relief workers now say they've taken steps to ensure that large shelters such as the Houston Astrodome will provide a safe haven for survivors.

"We have been hearing about episodes of violence, including rape," said Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to Reuters.

That is unacceptable to organizations such as Amnesty International, which monitors governments, shelters,

prisons and refugee camps around the world for human rights violations. Relief groups have an obligation to make vulnerable populations a top priority when planning and operating shelters, said Sheila Dauer, director of women's human rights for Amnesty International USA, in an interview.

"The authorities are responsible for making sure these vulnerable populations are protected," Dauer said. "With thousands of people thrown in there together, there are people extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse, the very young, the very old, women, children, and they have a human right to be protected."

A key ingredient of this new protection is a very visible presence of law enforcement officers in the Astrodome, something that was lacking in the Louisiana Superdome and shelters during the early stages of the disaster, said Margaret Pepe, client services administrator for the American Red Cross.

"In the shelters that are being established for evacu-

ees, we are very well aware of the vulnerability of this population," Pepe said. "By a very large visible presence of law enforcement keeping a much higher profile, we hope to avoid some of the problems these supershelters pose."

Until recent days, the few police monitoring the Superdome, for example, primarily guarded the perimeter and didn't mingle with the evacuees inside. Police at the Astrodome will be inside, talking with people and watching for telltale signs of abuse or potential abuse such as antisocial behavior and grownups who spend too much time following, hanging around or playing with children who are not their own.


Crisis counselors and psychologists will also be a big part of the mix in the new shelters being opened to take in evacuees, Pepe said.

"We are very vigilant," she said. "We are very protective of our shelterees."

The sheer size of the shelters and their many hiding (See Rapes, Page 8)


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