

How's it hangin'?



Datar Sahi, a freshman business major, hangs upside down on the "velcro wall" that was in the EMU courtyard Wednesday.

MATHEW STIFFLER/Emerald

Farrakhan says march caused drop in crime

By Beth J. Harpaz
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, gathering 10,000 black men, women and children on the first anniversary of the Million Man March, said Wednesday that last year's rally led to a national drop in crime.

"I know Clinton wants to take credit for it," said Farrakhan, speaking from behind a podium ringed with bulletproof glass. "I know the police want to take credit for it. The real truth is that the spirit of the Million Man March should take credit for it."

At last year's march on the nation's capital, Farrakhan led black men in a pledge to "never raise my hand with a knife or a gun to beat or cut or shoot any member of my family or any human being."

The spirit fostered at that rally of at least 400,000 black men contributed to a national decrease in crime, Farrakhan said. FBI figures reported murder was down 7 percent, rape down 5 percent and violent crimes down 3 percent in 1995.

The crowd packed Dag Hammarskjold Plaza outside the United Nations for a "World's Day of Atonement."

It opened with a Muslim prayer and a memorial to influential blacks throughout U.S. history: Harriet Tubman, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X and recently slain rapper Tupac Shakur.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani stayed away, saying the demonstration would be overshadowed by Farrakhan's "rhetoric of hatred." Some in the crowd disagreed.

"It's not about Farrakhan," said Jerry Walter, 56, a retired city worker from the Bronx. "It's about respecting yourself, your family and your community."

Farrakhan told the crowd, "I come not as an enemy, but as a friend." He then launched into his topic: "Can the United Nations avert the war of Armageddon?"

The rally would issue a world-

wide appeal against exploitation and violence, and call upon nations to repent and atone for injustice, organizers said.

The Rev. Al Sharpton told the crowd they should take credit for New York City's drastic drop in crime since 1993.

"Crime is down because love is up," said Sharpton, who plans to run for mayor next year. "Crime is down because hope is up. Giuliani didn't lower crime. Crime is down because we lifted ourselves up."

Winnie Mandela, the ex-wife of South African president Nelson Mandela, appeared on stage, but didn't speak. Former NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Chavis spoke later that day.

Chavis accused Giuliani Tuesday of "racial insensitivity," for saying he would boycott the rally.

"It appears Mayor Giuliani needs atonement," Chavis said. "If he would avail himself to meet ... Farrakhan, his views would change."

Last year the Million Man March attracted hundreds of thousands of people to Washington for a day of racial solidarity. Organizers of the New York rally expected a far smaller crowd and got permits for only 50,000 participants.

Police had no estimate by early afternoon, but the crowd seemed to be at least 10,000.

"They couldn't give us a fair count" last year, activist Dick Gregory told the audience, echoing complaints that the Million Man March crowd was underestimated by officials.

Some supporters of last year's march who were not participating this year cited confusion about this year's message. Last month in St. Louis, fewer than 500 people attended a conference organized by the same people.

A Jewish group unsuccessfully tried to get a court to either override police and let it demonstrate outside the rally or revoke Farrakhan's permit.

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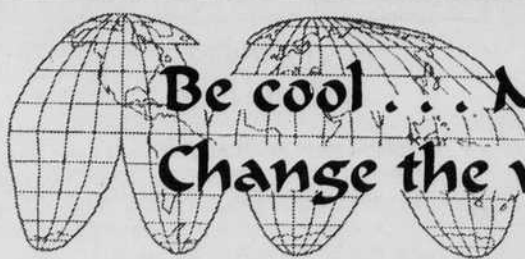
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