

OPINION

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The Power of Louis Farrakhan Minister prepares for last major address

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS
On Sunday, Feb. 25, Minister Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam, will deliver what is likely to be his last major speech, "One Nation under God",



at the Nation's annual convention in Detroit. Several months ago, faced with major health concerns, Minister Farrakhan relinquished most of his day-to-day duties as head of the Nation's Board of Directors.

Out of respect for the minister's commitment to social justice and empowering African-Americans, every one of us who is able should travel to Detroit to be a part of Saviors' Day 2007 and bear witness to what is sure to be a historic, life-altering address.

Saviors' Day is usually held in Chicago, where the Nation's headquarters is located, but it is fitting that the event be held in Detroit this year. The Nation of Islam was founded in Detroit in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad with the goal of uplifting the spiritual, social, and economic lives of black men and women.

After Muhammad disappeared mysteriously in 1934, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad took over the reins of the organization. Under his leadership and that of Malcolm X, the organization reached international prominence. After Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, his son Warith Deen Muhammad moved away from the Nation's original purpose, opening the organization up to whites and renaming it the American Muslim Mission.

In 1979, Minister Farrakhan broke away from the Mission, re-establishing the Nation of Islam which restricts membership to blacks and calls for a separate economic and social structure for blacks. Over the years, the Nation has had its fair share of controversy, but the group has long been a transformational force in the black community. The Nation has worked to clean up drug addicts, kept young black men out of the gang life and help newly released prisoners make a fresh start. During the 1980s, when crack cocaine first hit the scene and violence in black communities escalated, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development contracted several private firms run by members of the Nation to provide security in housing projects. The Nation stepped up and did what the country's law enforcement would and could not do. And, as part of what is sure to go down as one of the Nation's defining moments, more than one million black men gathered in Washington, D.C. in October 1995, at Farrakhan's request, for the Million Man March, a day of unity, protest and atonement. After the event, the number of black male voters increased dramatically and black men all over the country began to become more active participants in their families and the larger society.

Over the years, The Nation has had its fair share of controversy, but the group has long been a transformational force in the black community.

Black Americans owe it to themselves to experience, in person, the power of Minister Louis Farrakhan. And we owe it to the minister's commitment and his legacy, to make this the most successful, impactful Saviors' Day in history.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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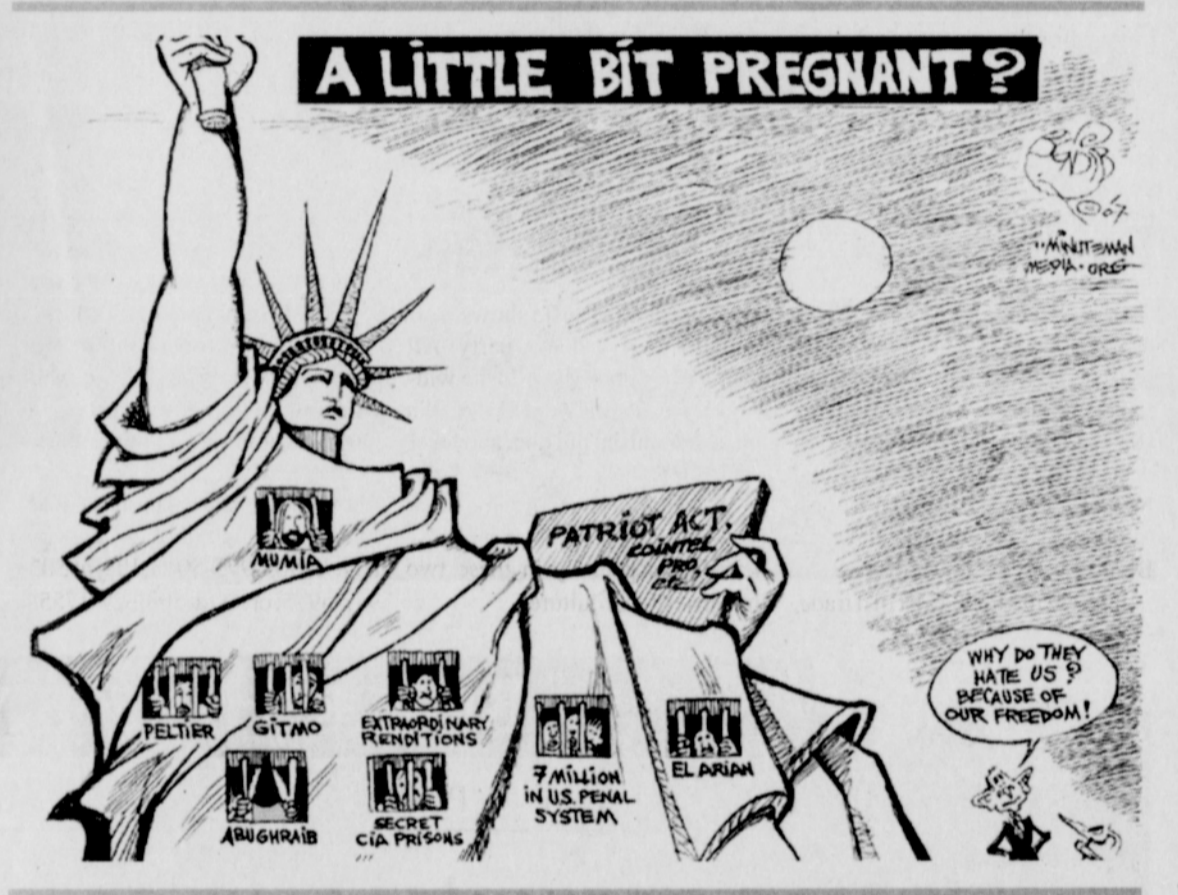
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Supporting Black-Owned Businesses

BY ERVIN MILTON
America is filled with communities of ethnically and racially diverse people groups. The people in these communities, understandably, love and support one another spiritually, physically and financially. That support is apparent to me when I visit most of these communities. I expect to see places of worship that reflect the ethnic makeup of these cultures. I even expect to hear remnants of the lan-

guage of the dominant ethnic group. Most importantly, however, I expect to see independent businesses that are heavily supported by the communities they serve.

Now, after more than 30 years of integrated life, the buying power of blacks has risen tremendously. According to the newest edition of a The Buying Power of Black America, black households spend more collectively than Hispanics or other minorities in virtually every consumer product and service category. Economic wealth flows from our communities, yet there are fewer black owned businesses in black communities than ever before.

Economic development is vital for the well-being of every community. If a community's residents do not support its businesses, then who can be expected to support them? Who will supply the food, clothing and materials needed for the cultural experiences that are unique to a particular ethnic group or culture?

How can that be? Internal racism has taught blacks that supporting their own is against the American way. Blacks have been taught to tear down one other rather than build each other up. Jealousy, envy and strife flourish within the black community. However, if we look around at other racial and ethnic groups that prosper, we can see that they support their own whenever possible. Blacks offer more support to the businesses of other racial and ethnic groups in the black community than to their own. I am not saying that other minorities or anyone that chooses to put businesses in the black community should not have the right to do so. I am saying that black people should be creating jobs, putting economic development and wealth back into their own communities with the money that they earn, control and spend.

If a community's businesses are not supported, then how can the community survive and thrive and make a positive impact on the greater society? It should be expected that the community will supply its own needs and purchase from its own people whenever possible. That is the only way a community can remain viable.

As we move into a time of remembering the history of blacks in America, let us recommit ourselves to changing the course of history for the future by pursuing greater economic wealth and development for the black community. By doing so, we will make life better for all.

Yet, when I visit black communities, I see very few black owned businesses. Many of the black businesses I do see are obviously not fully supported by their own people. Before the beginning of integration, black businesses did very well in their own communities. Black businesses served the needs of people who were unable, for the most part, to assimilate, and were not welcomed into the greater society. Purchasing options for blacks were limited, so black businesses provided almost everything black citizens needed for their upkeep. Black people supported one another, not only in businesses, but in the whole of community life. When one rose, the whole community felt the positive movement. Likewise, when one fell, the community supported that person and helped him or her become more stable.

Ervin Milton is the team leader and director of Franklinton Center at Bricks in eastern North Carolina.

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