black politics once again gained the initiative, which they managed to retain for decades, even after the black nationalist revival of the late 1960s. Only now, after twenty years of aimlessness and defeat, do those currents find themselves cut off from much of their supposed constituency, giving Farrakhan his golden opportunity.

Bringing hundreds of thousands of black men to Washington does not, on its own, mean that Farrakhan's neo-Garveyism will sustain a mass movement. The throngs on the Mall displayed little immediate interest in joining the Nation of Islam; it remains unclear how much of Farrakhan's message they actually bought. Still, history offers little comfort to those saddened by Farrakhan's sudden success. In the 1920s, American liberalism was at low ebb, but there were at least some signs of revival, like Robert La Follette's Progressive Movement; and, even so, it would take decades for the liberal departures that began with the New Deal to embrace fully the black struggle for civil rights and economic improvement. Today, liberalism is once again at low ebb, but there are hardly any hopeful fresh departures in sight and only the vaguest sense that the nation's enormous political blockages might be soon overcome. Without some dramatic redirection, what has become orthodox rights-based Democratic liberalism offers little to combat the economic despair and spiritual alienation that has gripped much of black America and that feeds Farrakhan's appeal.

Equally important, whereas Garveyism attracted withering polemical attacks from black liberals and social democrats, the neo-Garveyism of the Million Man March attracted widespread support from more mainstream black politicians, intellectuals, clergymen and others, all of whom vainly attempted to separate the event from the fanatics who originally planned it. Seventy years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois called Garvey "the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race in America and the world ... either a lunatic or a traitor." A. Philip Randolph's *Messenger* described Garvey as "the supreme Jamaican jackass," "an unquestioned fool and ignoramus." By contrast, many of today's would-be Du Boises and Randolphs have either deluded themselves about Farrakhan, concluded that *they* can manipulate *him*, or (at least temporarily) lost their nerve. Some of them marched; others came up with excuses for not marching; still others stayed silent. If the march's newfangled Garveyism was a piece of old historical news, the complicity of so many veteran black democrats and integrationists marked a genuine rupture with the past.

There were, of course, some notable dissenters: female leaders like Mary Frances Berry, along with the black feminists and gays, some of whom excoriated Farrakhan for his views on race as well as on gender; intellectuals like Stanley Crouch (who, sounding like a reborn Randolph, denounced the march as an effort led by "a racist, anti-Semitic nut leader of a nut cult"); stalwart African American heroes like Representative John Lewis; as well as the beleaguered national leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other aging (and recently troubled) organizations. The best thing to come out of this affair for black America (and for white America, which has produced its own ample supply of nuts and complicit "mainstream" figures) might be if black leaders, invigorated by Farrakhan's challenge, can somehow help re-establish the primacy of democratic politics over authoritarian revitalization—and help to restore élan to what still remain the most radical of American egalitarian ideals: integration and interracial democracy. For the moment, though, the drift of American politics, on both sides of the racial divide, leads in the opposite direction, more so after the Million Man March than at any time since the 1920s. •

Wrestling with October 16.

ONE MAN'S MARCH

By Glenn C. Loury

Try to understand my problem. I am a black intellectual of moderate to conservative political instincts. Unlike many of my racial brethren, I have been denouncing the anti-Semitism of Minister Louis Farrakhan for over a decade. (My virgin Farrakhan denunciation was in this very magazine in December 1984.) To judge from the volume of press inquiries in past few weeks, I must have been one of the few black men in America willing to state for the record my reservations about, and objections to, the Million Man March. I promiscuously expounded my view that it would not be possible to separate the message from the messenger and that, in any case, a race- and sex-exclusive march would send the wrong message. In short, my cre-

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dentials as a "deracinated Negro," able to steadfastly resist the call of tribe, are impeccable.

Imagine my surprise, then, when on the day before the march, as I walked along the Mall from the White House toward the Capitol encountering other black men in town for the event, I found myself becoming misty. I watched these "brothers," in clusters of two or three or six, from Philadelphia and Norfolk and my own hometown of Chicago, wandering among the museums and monuments like the tourists they were, cameras in hand, and the sight brought tears to my eyes. The march had not even begun, and already powerful sentiments, long buried inside me, were being resurrected. I knew then that I was in trouble.

Here were young black guys, the same ones occasionally mistaken by belligerent police officers or frightened passersby for threats to public safety because of the color of their skin and the swagger of their gait, scrambling up the steps and lounging between the columns of the National Gallery building, some even checking out the "Whistler and His Contemporaries" show on display inside. And there were others, sharing an excited expectancy with Japanese tourists and rural whites as we all waited in line to tour the White House. Taking in these various scenes, an obvious but profound thought occurred to me: this is their country, too. So, embarrassed that I needed to remind myself of this fact, I wept.

The next day, as I beheld hundreds of thousands of black men gathering in a crowd that ultimately stretched from the steps of the Capitol back toward the Washington Monument, I would be even more deeply moved. Everything that has been said about the discipline and dignity of the gathering, and the spirit of camaraderie that pervaded it, is true. It was a glorious, uplifting day, and I was swept up in it along with everyone else. It almost did not matter what was being said from the podium. For the first time in years, as the drums beat and the crowd swayed, I heard the call of the tribe, big time.

Mingling in that throng, my thoughts drifted back to my late Uncle Moonie, the husband of my mother's sister, who, as head of the extended household in which I was raised, exerted a powerful influence on me in my formative years. Uncle Moonie, so called because his large, round eyes protruded like half-moons beneath his often-furrowed brow, was a barber, part-time hustler and admirer (though not a follower) of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam. My uncle kicked a nasty heroin habit in his youth and went on to achieve what was for his generation of black men an impressive degree of financial security. Fiercely proud and independent, he constantly railed against "the white man," and he never tired of berating those blacks who looked to "white folk" for their salvation. Occasionally he would take me with him to the state prison for his monthly visits with one or another of his incarcerated friends. "There, but for the grace of God, go you or I," he would say. He encouraged me in an intelligent militancy and even sought to extend his influence from beyond the grave by bequeathing to me one of his most cherished possessions—a complete set of the recorded speeches of Malcolm X. Had Uncle Moonie lived to attend this march, he would have thought it the greatest experience of his life.

To be sure, my uncle would not have understood my public criticism of the march or of Minister Louis Farrakhan, for that matter. He was no great fan of the nonviolent philosophy of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. He much preferred the straight-backed, unapologetic defiance of Malcolm. He would have been puzzled that I could find the opinions of "white folks" worth taking into account. He would have rejected the notion that there are ethical and political principles, my fealty to which could transcend my sense of racial loyalty.

In short, were he alive today, I fear that Uncle Moonie would be profoundly disappointed in me. Still, those tears welling in my eyes at the sight of "our brothers" on the Mall might have given him hope that I could yet be redeemed. The tingle that ran up my spine as I beheld that massive assembly of beautiful black men seeking unity and spiritual upliftment caused me to hope, for a fleeting moment, that I could, at long last, go home again.

My pre-march analysis was a tight little piece of amateur political theory that ran as follows: the problem with the Million Man March is that it mixes communal and political activities inappropriately. As a communal matter, a religiously motivated gathering of men seeking to commit themselves to reconstruction and renewal in their personal lives and in their respective neighborhoods, it is highly commendable. However, as a political matter, gathering on the Mall at the site of the great 1963 March on Washington—but now as black men and not as Americans, under the leadership of a Louis Farrakhan not a Martin Luther King—this is deeply problematic. The sacrifice of liberal democratic ideals and the separatist message is too high a price to pay for getting our cultural trains to run on time.

Yet, when put to the test on the Mall, this elegant bit of theory seemed to collapse instantly under the weight of a single fact: nearly one-half million African American men had solemnly, prayerfully assembled to affirm their intention to take responsibility for the condition of their people.

As a social critic, I have called for many years for the civil rights leadership to reorient itself from a focus on the "enemy without," white racism, toward the "enemy within," the dysfunctional behaviors of young black men and women that prevent too many from capitalizing on existing opportunity. Well, here were some 5 percent of the age-adjusted national black male population, together in one place, supporting this very idea. Standing there, and listening to their collective affirmations, I found it hard to deny that the conception and execution of this event had been a work of genius. In the heat of those moments, I felt confused about my ideals and commitments and deeply ashamed to have spoken against the march.

However, I have been an economist for more years than I have been a social critic. As such, I have learned well the art of tenaciously holding on to a theory that, by virtue of its elegance and appeal to intuition, "ought to be true," even when it seems inconsistent with the facts. The key is to find another way of looking at the evidence that casts one's favored theory in a better light. That is not difficult in the case at hand, for what seemed at that march like the salvation of black Americans is, upon closer examination, no such thing at all.

Begin with a simple question: How did it come to pass that this great moment in American cultural politics was orchestrated by the demagogic leader of a black fascist sect, while no other nationally prominent black leader could have pulled it off? The answer is two-fold. First, Farrakhan, whatever one thinks of him, is a *religious* leader, speaking to a flock desperate to hear an explicitly spiritual appeal. The Nation of Islam has a track record of "turning the souls" of a great many underclass men, especially in prisons. In contrast, liberal black political leaders, ironically drawn substantially from the clergy, have checked their theologically conservative Christian witness at the door of the Democratic Party. In coalitions with feminists, gays and radical secularists, and in reaction against the politics of the religious right, they have muted their voices on social issues, leaving a void in black public life that Minister Farrakhan has adroitly filled.

LOUIS FARRAKHAN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Secondly, Farrakhan's message of spiritual uplift is deeply rooted in a white-man-has-done-us-wrong grievance politics. He does not ask blacks to give up the latter as he proffers the former. In this, he is being faithful to his teacher, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, who taught that the white man is a blue-eyed devil, a mutant breed created by the mad scientist Yakub and allowed by God to rule over the superior black man until such time as the black man would return to the true faith. No serious persons, inside the Nation of Islam or out, could take this literally. But the premise that blacks find our reason for being in the fact of our enslavement and subsequent persecution anchors all that the Nation of Islam undertakes. This narrow, reactive self-conception is glorified as manly, truth-telling, clear-eyed realism.

Thus, forcing myself to listen carefully to what the speakers at this massive gathering actually said, I began to fear that, notwithstanding the emotion of the moment, nothing will really change. We all pray that one-half million inspired black men will return to their cities and towns, redouble their efforts and with the help of their women create nurturing families and community-based institutions that will change the awful facts on the ground. But do we have any warrant, based upon what was said from the podium, much of it clichéd, resentful and conspiracy-laden, to believe this will transpire?

Uncle Moonie has been dead nearly fifteen years now. His was a different, harder time for black men. That he admired Elijah Muhammad is not surprising, given the context of his life. Now, removed from the passions of the march, and having had the opportunity to reflect, I believe that my passionate rejection of racial essentialism was right for me and, given the context of our lives today, for "my people." The American people, that is.

There are now one and a half million Americans behind bars. This seems to me a tragedy of enormous proportions. Our cities are filled with poor, uneducated young people, wandering the streets aimlessly and without hope. This is a blight that graphically reveals the failure of our political leadership. We now celebrate in our politics the state-sanctioned, eye-for-an-eye taking of human life via capital punishment and the arbitrary locking away for a lifetime of those who have made but three mistakes. I think that this is an abomination unworthy of a civilized nation. So do the organizers of the march. But, unlike them, I do not believe that our outrage should depend on the racial identity of those who

suffer. What is morally significant is that they are human; their claim on our attention derives from this fact alone.

The call of the tribe is seductive, but ultimately it is a siren call. As comforting as the prospect may seem, the truth, for all of us, is that we can't go home again. For blacks, as Ralph Ellison has taught us, "our task is that of making ourselves individuals.... We create the race by creating ourselves and then to our great astonishment we will have created a culture. Why waste time creating a conscience for something which doesn't exist? For you see, blood and skin do not think."

This is the fundamental point. Skin and blood do not think, or dream, or love or pray. The "conscience of the race" must be constructed from the inside out, one person at a time. I did not hear this sentiment expressed by a single speaker at the Million Man March. •

Queen for a day?

Against my wishes, the Million Man March proceeded as planned. The organizers did not notice that Minister Louis Farrakhan's anti-Semitic, anti-intellectual, sexist and homosexual-baiting racism had left me "unable to support" the march. Not "opposed to" it, but unable, in good conscience, to let its supporters have any peace. A million brothers united for peace and atonement is every sister's dream. But under a banner borne by Benjamin Chavis and Farrakhan? Surely we demean ourselves and insult our fellow Americans with such company. And why must those they claim to be honoring remain behind; why not apologize to our faces?

As the march neared, I feared the worst: whites, whipped into a post-O.J. frenzy, blowing something else up; swaggering black youths expressing their newfound pride as racial and sexual aggression; our women working that much harder while our men attend male-only meetings. In this pre-election year, I dreaded the political fallout most of all. I foresaw a direct relationship between the number of marchers and the number of new prisons planned. And then, just before the march, I went shopping.

My sister, her husband and my nephew had driven in from St. Louis so I needed something in the fridge besides beer and portabello mushrooms. Laden with packages, I struggled from the supermarket behind three young black men who looked back briefly when one of my bags toppled. One of them stopped, grabbed the other's arm and gestured toward me. "We should ... do something?" he whispered with almost comic intensity. He looked 18 and scared to death of me.

The others stopped, blocking my path and looking stupidly around. Brainstorm. "The door! I'll hold the door!"

The pattern kept repeating itself. Black men stepping aside with exaggerated courtesy to let me pass, black men giving me their Metro seats, black men calling me "sister" instead of "baby." Not all, not even most, but a very noticeable few.

I followed the march's progress in the media and my own excitement grew; clearly, we were groping not for Minister Farrakhan but for unity and self-respect. And maybe we should keep Farrakhan's venom in perspective. After all, aren't blacks constantly required to look past the Founding Fathers' slave-mongering? By the time my family arrived, I was still "unable to support" the march, but much less vigorously. We stayed up all night while they told me of the caravans heading for D.C. and the camaraderie they shared with these strangers on the road. People had helped each other with repairs and places to sleep; they'd shared food, childcare, directions, life stories. My criticisms seemed non sequiturs to them.

"We didn't come to join The Nation," my brother-in-law told me in a tone that suggested I might actually be misinformed.

At the march, my sister and I roamed that ocean of black manhood for eight transfixed hours. It was the happiest, most peaceful solemnity I will ever witness. We saw no alcohol, no empty liquor containers (although I did smell marijuana once). There was almost none of that male horseplay and loud talk that characterizes typical social situations—the brothers were serious and subdued.

There were so few women, we turned heads all day. We grew hoarse returning the respectful greetings, we starred on camcorders and posed for innumerable photos. Few seemed to resent our presence, rather, their eyes widened, their feet stumbled and their hands grew awkward. They were embarrassed. All our dirty little secrets were being aired today, and there didn't seem to be a man on the Mall who could look at us without seeing the women they'd left at home to do the scut work. Paths opened before us; chairs appeared from nowhere; men yanked their sons aside saying, "Boy, let your auntie by." For an entire, righteous day I was "auntie," I was "sister," I was "daughter." Not "bitch," not "ho," not "sweet thang."

Strangely, Monday kept reminding me of a very different gathering—the Gay Pride celebrations I attended last summer. Since Gay Pride and the Million Man March have little in common, it was a while before I understood why one reminded me of the other. Then it clicked. At both, I was completely relaxed. Both lacked one element intimately associated with the life of every urban American woman: fear. Fear ranging from the snatched bag to the grabbed ass, past pubic hairs on Coke cans and dead ahead to full-scale gang rape. Fear is a low-grade fever American women live with every day, banked but ever present. But, on both these occasions, women were given a one-day, fear-free grace period.

Like last summer, within minutes, unconsciously, I let my guard down. If a man brushed against me, I knew it was only to steady me as he passed. Both times, my purse swung loose and unzipped as it bulged with souvenirs. I had no fear of drunken brawls, no dread of macho confrontations, no insults to be borne silently. Today, I could initiate conversations, meet my brothers' eyes and smile as they neared. Or, what was even better, chastise that lone disrespectful man, confident that he would slink away ashamed.

America is right to hold us responsible for the company we keep, and our answer must be the same it gave us about Afrikaner apartheid—concerted, sincere constructive engagement. Farrakhan is not the best we can do, he's just, unfortunately, the best we can do right now. Deserving leaders will emerge, and we'll stabilize our moral core again. One rally won't cure black America of its ills, but, when all was said and done, I found myself standing proud, unafraid and disobedient among 1 million of my brothers—and finally able to support the march.

DEBRA DICKERSON

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