

An EMPOWERMENT Interview

by Rhoda McKinney-Jones

The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan

It's not often that one gets to interview an icon. Someone called by a singular moniker and everyone knows of whom you speak—a person who can walk into a room and cause pause because of his physical presence and historical significance. That's exactly what I was privileged to do a few days ago from my humble kitchen perch. I interviewed the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan by phone on everything I could think to ask in 15 fleeting minutes.

The Minister's voice was strong, smooth and steadfast, giving no hint of the health challenges that have plagued him the last few years. He talked about the future of the Nation of Islam, his hope for the faith, his pride in African American people, his love of music and the state of Black America. Then of course, when prodded, he talked of his legacy. I asked questions in quick succession and he willingly responded, eloquently quoting biblical scripture, speaking in parables and peppering his answers with references to the Quran, Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. He spoke and I couldn't help but listen and learn.

"When Minister Farrakhan speaks, Black America listens," says the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, likening the Minister's influence to the E. F. Hutton commercials of old. "Everybody may not agree with him, but they listen...His depth on analysis when it comes to the racial ills of this nation is astounding and eye opening. He brings a perspective that is helpful and honest.

"Minister Farrakhan will be remembered as one of the 20th and 21st century giants of the African American religious experience," continues Wright. "His integrity and honesty have secured him a place in history as one of the nation's most powerful critics. His love for Africa and African American people has made him an unforgettable force, a catalyst for change and a religious leader who is sincere about his faith and his purpose."

The Louis Farrakhan story is one most of us already know, but that does not diminish its import or impact. Born Louis Eugene Walcott, 73-years ago in the Bronx and raised in Roxbury, MA, the

former Calypso singer and classically trained violinist, knew there was a greater calling on his life. That calling began with his joining the Nation in 1955 and changing his name to Louis X. Since that time, the rest, one could say, is history.

The Minister helped breathe new life into the Nation after the death of Elijah Muhammad, attracting thousands upon thousands of young, eager, African American men who found a home in the faith, pride in themselves and a leader in the Minister. From the streets of Chicago's South Side to the Million Man March and to the greater Islamic world, the Minister has and is making a difference. But that road has not been an easy one, as his friend Father Michael L. Pflieger of St. Sabina Church in Chicago explains.

"Minister Farrakhan is probably one of the most misunderstood and mis-defined leaders of our day," says Pflieger. "When you don't want to deal with someone's truth, you try to destroy their character or redefine them...That's what the media has sought to do with Minister Farrakhan. His truth causes America to face its racism and its hypocrisy."

"Minister Farrakhan has been a personal friend for more than 20 years," continues Pflieger. "His leadership has evolved, and I believe the coming days will see him as a unifying force, calling real Christians, real Jews and real Muslims to come together on principles of truth and justice... Contrary to those who want to make him anti-white and anti-Semitic, I believe Minister Farrakhan is presently building the umbrella for people of conscience to come together no matter the race or creed. I am honored to call him my brother."

Because of the Minister's influence in the African American community, *Trumpet Newsmagazine* honors him this winter at its Sounds of the Shore gala with an Empowerment Award. It seemed a fitting tribute for a storied life well lived. And as our brief interview drew to a close and he thanked me for taking the time to talk to him, I could not help but think, the Minister, the man with whom I had been so casually speaking, truly epitomized greatness.

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