

POLITICS



A billboard in Chicago plugs Louis Farrakhan's Saviour's Day.

Black Muslims join Jackson's coalition

By Salim Muwakkil

CHICAGO

“THESE PEOPLE REPRESENT a revolutionary new sense of unity between the spiritual descendants of Martin Luther King and those of Malcolm X,” said one observer last week as he surveyed the crowd of about 1,000 that had gathered at City Hall here. They had come to watch presidential candidate Jesse Jackson accompany Louis Farrakhan to the third floor, where the Black Muslim minister would register to vote for the first time in his 50 years. Farrakhan, a Chicagoan since 1975, is leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI), a group that formerly shunned electoral politics.

But that was before Jackson. Now Farrakhan is in the forefront of black Chicago's voter registration campaign, and his well-publicized change of heart is intended to encourage his followers—as many as 100,000 nationwide—to follow suit.

There's more to Farrakhan's registration than numbers. For Farrakhan, it's a step back into the public view. For Jackson, it's an endorsement far more important than the numbers of NOI's members suggest. And for everyone else, it's a chance to see some of the complexities—the ironies, some would say—underlying the campaign being waged by Jackson.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad (a.k.a. the Messenger of Allah), the NOI patriarch who died in 1975, counseled his flock to eschew electoral politics because they were dominated by a race of devils—that is, white people. But he made one exception: in *Message to the Blackman*, the definitive book on Black Muslim dogma, Muhammad wrote, “There are many black men and women who make splendid politicians.... If our politicians are to serve us, they must have no fear of the white man when they plead our case....” When they come along, Muhammad said, “we must give good black politicians the total backing of our popula-

tion.” Farrakhan, who boasts unwavering adherence to the dogma of his late leader, apparently believes Jesse Jackson is a good politician.

Who is Louis Farrakhan? When he first met Elijah Muhammad, in the early '50s, Farrakhan was a college-educated calypso singer from the Caribbean. He says he was instantly converted. As Louis X Wolcott, he rose rapidly through the ranks, gaining considerable in-house fame for writing, directing and starring in *Organa* and *The Trial*, two message-laden plays performed in Black Muslim mosques around the country. Farrakhan also wrote and recorded a song—“A White Man's Heaven Is a Black Man's Hell”—that became a monster hit in black nationalist circles. (He's since updated the song in accord with contemporary music standards and the NOI has it on sale.) When Malcolm X was assigned to Mosque No. 11 in Boston, Farrakhan was his assistant. Malcolm grew to trust him and when the Messenger moved Malcolm to the prestigious New York post at Mosque No. 7, Farrakhan was given Malcolm's old Boston job. Elijah excommunicated Malcolm in 1963 and Farrakhan was instrumental in helping to quell the internal dissent the action provoked.

After Malcolm was assassinated in 1965 by members of the NOI's Newark mosque, Farrakhan was appointed minister of the New York mosque and soon became Muhammad's national representative, as Malcolm had been before him. His position in the limelight was the perfect showcase for his oratorical skills. Employing his college-trained tongue, his melodious voice, his flair for the theatrical and a nimble, disciplined mind, Farrakhan developed an extremely polished presentation. All of that, combined with his light-skinned good looks and the tenor of the times, produced a genuine black nationalist star.

In the late '60s and early '70s, his voice was almost omnipresent in the New York City metropolitan area. His Sunday mosque sermons were broadcast live over the city's largest black-oriented radio station.

His name would pop up as keynote speaker at just about every black-oriented event in the New York area. Black Muslim rallies featuring Farrakhan drew crowds in the tens of thousands. One incident graphically illustrated the esteem in which the NOI was held by the black community of New York. Police, summoned by what later proved an erroneous report, invaded Farrakhan's mosque in Harlem and one cop was killed, shot by his own gun. The mostly white cops who responded to their colleagues' distress signals began making menacing moves toward the mosque as if they were going to retaliate. Word spread throughout the neighborhood that the Muslims were being attacked by police and folks began pouring into the streets to protect the mosque and its occupants. Thousands of Harlem residents surrounded the mosque and refused to obey repeated police demands to disperse.

Farrakhan has lived in Chicago's Beverly since he moved here from New Rochelle, N.Y., in 1975 to serve as an assistant to W.D. Muhammad, who assumed power after his father's death and whom Farrakhan initially vowed to support. In November 1977, he announced his split with W.D., explaining he could no longer support the younger Muhammad's interpretation of his father's teachings. Some charged that Farrakhan merely felt stifled by W.D. Muhammad's de-emphasis of personality worship and that, having once been the star of the show, he grew increasingly envious of W.D.'s stature.

Since 1977, Farrakhan has been traveling around the country spreading the message that the NOI is back. His split with the American Muslim Mission is probably irreconcilable (their differences run deep), but so far both sides have kept the friction at a relatively low level. There have been times when things heated up.

Last year Farrakhan called W.D. “the Hypocrite” (a high curse in the Islamic world). This year, W.D.'s followers are ridiculing Farrakhan's entrance into electoral politics as just another grab for national stardom.

In 1982 the NOI purchased and renovated an old funeral home on 79th street and named it the Final Call Building—after the official NOI newspaper, which in turn is named after the first newspaper the Messenger ever published. It seems fair to say that Farrakhan's star is once again rising. He's asked to speak at functions as varied as the NAACP's Freedom Fund dinner, the Jack the Rapper's convention (a music industry gathering), Rikers Island (a New York jail) and the National Bar Association convention.

His mark has yet to be made in Chicago. But that may soon change. His followers will vigorously assist the Jackson campaign and he will make several public appearances on Jackson's behalf. Also, his Saviour's Day convention (held February 24-26) featured dozens of prominent blacks who, taking the lead from Jesse, embraced the Farrakhanites.

Farrakhan's face will soon be familiar to black Chicagoans, and tales of his oratorical gifts are already at large. He is often described as black America's most dynamic speaker. But he has long been dogged by the same criticism that perennially is made of Jackson: he is all talk and no organizational action. All in all, though, he and Jackson are arguably the two most charismatic black Americans.

Farrakhan's endorsement is an important one for Jackson. Farrakhan is the heir of Malcolm X—and the nationalist strain of black politics—in almost exactly the same way Jackson is the heir of Martin Luther King and the civil rights strain. Their working together has tremendous symbolic value. Jackson needs a crusade, and the best way to start one is to heal the rifts between the nationalists and the civil righters. Moreover, the Black Muslims have the reputation of being tough, cynical and hard to fool.

Their approval puts the seal of black righteousness on a campaign that's been marked from the start by reluctance and hesitation on the part of mainstream black leadership. And the NOI, with its message of black superiority and black

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self-help, is particularly influential among disenfranchised urban blacks—the black underclass—who would be least likely to participate in the election otherwise, even though they are a group Jackson is vitally interested in.

But the underclass vote is a tricky proposition for Jackson. Already the public—and even Harold Washington—has jumped on Jackson for this segment of his support. It's fine for Jackson to reach out to the poor, but God help him if he's soft on gangs. The NOI, of course, has a considerable appeal for some of the gangs and quasi gangs.

NOI's traditional beliefs pose additional problems for Jackson. Not least among them is this: how can the "rainbow coalition" openly embrace the support of people who believe that one of the colors in the spectrum represents evil incarnate? But that's just the beginning. Come the Democratic convention, Jackson isn't likely to find himself the presidential nominee. He'll then be bargaining with other candidates, trying to win concessions for his constituents in return for their votes. That's not likely to appeal to Farrakhan and his supporters, who are less interested in issues than candidates—and the race of candidates. The question is whether Democratic leadership will perceive Jackson's support as undercut because of Muslim participation.

The Farrakhanites presumably like Jackson because his approach to black problems matches well with their own. At heart, Jackson believes in black responsibility and black self-help. He isn't a conventional liberal. He's running as a relatively conventional liberal, however, and when he sits down to deal with the party, he's likely to be bargaining for conventional liberal payoffs—job programs, aid to schools and the like. That won't sit well with the NOI, whose position on contemporary issues (anti-welfare, anti-abortion, anti-Darwin, pro-nuclear family, anti-homosexual, pro-strict discipline in school, anti-forced integration, pro-entrepreneurship, etc.) is more in line with the Republican platform of 1980 than it is with any Democrat's program—including Jackson's.

But that question wasn't raised when the followers of Elijah's dictums descended on City Hall to publicize their entry into the political arena. Joining the folks from the NOI were a host of Jackson's political supporters, members of Operation PUSH and a group from several Islamic-oriented street "organizations."

As Jackson and Farrakhan maneuvered through the crowd, there was a sudden influx of sullen-faced men with dancing eyes. In addition to Jackson's Secret Service entourage, there was Farrakhan's Fruit of Islam and the security team from the El Rukn gang. They created a lane through the crowd and the two stars were whisked toward a closed office where Farrakhan presumably registered. After about 10 minutes, the two emerged and made a few grand statements to the press.

"Legislators, high school students, college students, the El Rukns, the Islamic Lords, a broad cross section of people have come together to overcome the brokenness and the fracture that has kept us apart this long," said Jackson.

Farrakhan said, "Elijah Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam, found it very difficult to advise his followers to take part in the political process because of the corruption in politics. But he said that if a black candidate stood up...and would plead the case of the oppressed, then he deserved the full support of the entire people. We have a man I believe will not sell out the poor."

"The tinderbox of violence is in every urban ghetto in America," he added. "I would rather see black people register to vote and march to the polls and unseat those candidates who are undeserving of political power.... We have no choice between violence and voting. I would rather see us vote."

The pair left the third floor, pausing for more statements on their way out. As the large crowd assembled on the steps and in the lobby of the hall's northwest entrance, Jackson took a swipe at Rea-

gan's brutal shelling of West Beirut, then tried to interest the crowd in singing "We Shall Overcome" before they left. The nationalists may have broken tradition and registered to vote, but it was another thing altogether to get them to sing a song they've long derided as a "slave melody." Jackson soon abandoned the effort. ■

Salim Muwakkil is a Chicago freelance writer.

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Europe

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Andreas Zumach of ASF warned that the results could be demoralizing. But the referendum was defended by the SPD and by the DKP, groups that like to keep their militants busy with respectable mobilizations. Still, only a slim majority of the Cologne conference approved organizing the "People's Referendum" to coincide with the June 17 European parliamentary elections.

At the conference, an "independent spectrum" (with anarchist leanings) naturally preferred direct action, such as the proposed non-violent hindering of NATO maneuvers in Fulda Gap on the East German border in the fall. Independents and Greens support a campaign to extend conscientious objection to rejection of all war preparations. The movement was scarcely united, but the disintegration was relatively harmonious.

An element in this harmony is unanimous acceptance of non-violence. A resolution to "condemn violence and terrorism" was almost unanimously rejected after a speaker said it would be "absolutely absurd" for the movement to lend credence to the slanderous notion that it contains terrorist tendencies.

Beyond its "minimal consensus," the movement postponed several thorny questions for further discussion and possible decision at its next meeting in early May. One of these was the "appraisal" of the "countermeasures" taken by the Soviet Union after deployment of NATO Pershing II and Cruise missiles, the SS-20 missiles stationed in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, whose range covers Greenham Common Cruise base in England (but not Comiso in Sicily). The DKP was, as usual, defensive of the Eastern bloc, but agreed readily that the "countermeasures" should be withdrawn whenever the Pershing II and Cruise missiles are removed.

The only clash came over a proposed resolution in support of independent peace activists arrested in East Germany. But even here the DKP was more conciliatory than it has been in the past, accepting a compromise resolution of solidarity with all activists, East or West, arrested for peace actions.

Still, the disproportionate presence of the DKP (estimates ranged upward of a third) is felt by many as a heavy weight that could drive spritelier groups away from such conferences. Perhaps Volkmar

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Deile had this in mind when he said that the "radical action groups are the salt in the soup of the peace movement," and he did not want them to go off and dry up.

While the peace movement was meeting in Cologne, Defense Minister Manfred Wörner (called a key architect of the Rogers Plan by the U.S. *Armed Forces Journal*) was host to a high level conference on "challenges to the alliance" in Munich. Wörner said West Germans had no reason to fear war and called for more spending on conventional weapons. This was the main message sent by Vice President George Bush and read to the Munich conference by Texas Senator John Tower, reportedly in line to succeed Caspar Weinberger at the Pentagon. British deputy defense secretary Geoffrey Pattie called for greater support by all NATO countries to alliance member nations that undertake military commitments outside the NATO area. Such talk confirms the impression that, now that the missiles are in place, the East-West scare can be dropped and NATO can turn its main attention to the central business of arming to put down Third World revolts.

Wörner has a lot of reassuring to do in his own armed services. It is widely rumored that the real reason for the early retirement and attempted disgrace of Bonn's ranking NATO officer, Gen. Gunter Kiessling, was not his alleged dallying in gay bars, but his opposition to Air-Land Battle and its non-nuclear component for European consumption, the Rogers Plan. ■

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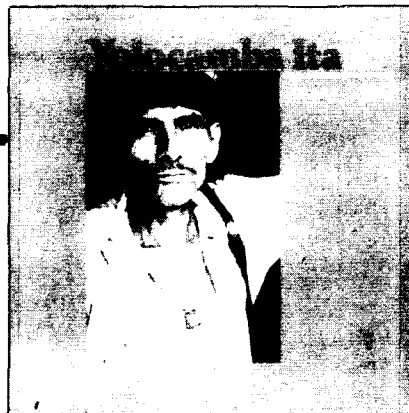
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By David Moberg

MANCHESTER, N.H.

IN THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, this was not supposed to be Jesse Jackson country. A state that is politically conservative and renowned for its inhabitants' phlegmatic personalities, a state with almost no blacks, New Hampshire seemed inhospitable to Jackson's civil rights history, his strongly liberal views and his fiery brand of evangelical political oratory.

But everywhere Jackson has gone in this state, a lapel pin of a rainbow with a little figure astride it on his three piece suit, the crowds have turned out and even been swept into a New England version of enthusiasm. Curiosity may have drawn some, but many come away moved, impressed, ready to vote for him or at least wavering in their old loyalties. A late January *Boston Globe* poll of New Hampshire voters and a mid-February national Gallup poll showed him nip and tuck with Sen. John Glenn for second place.

What may be strangest of all, many of the converts are not choosing between Jackson and McGovern or Jackson and Cranston, who are politically most similar. Often they are erstwhile supporters of Walter Mondale or even Glenn, people who had never been interested in politics before, disgruntled old-line Republicans or even soft-core supporters of Ronald Reagan. The appeal seems greatest to the better-educated or the young, less among blue-collar workers and moderate among the traditionally conservative poor who are numerous here despite the state's enviable 4.3 percent unemployment rate.

Jackson's peculiar appeal that goes beyond ideology draws on more than his powerful speaking style that typically builds from a low-key introduction through an alliterative, catchy recitation of what ails—and might heal—America to a feverish exhortation to hope and action. The link between his Baptist emotion and the cool Congregationalism of New England is an old Yankee-style faith in the power of the individual to achieve anything with enough effort, if the barriers to equal participation in society are removed.

Jackson, oddly like his nemesis Reagan, harnesses to his campaign old hopes about America's ability to do great things. It also invokes a hope that America can care for "the least of these" at home—"the young in the dawn of life, the old in the sunset of life, the poor in the pit of life"—while it defends one standard of human rights throughout a more peaceable world. There America wins influence by friendly competition, cooperation and inspiring example, not by military force and threat.

Much of his campaign speeches, especially for younger audiences, are invocations of traditional values, both personal and social, that attempt to transcend politics even though they are obviously rooted in a critique of Reagan (who is infrequently mentioned by name). Jackson becomes the latest outsider or non-political politician. Like Reagan, but from the left, Jackson also appears to be a man of firm convictions who is willing to act decisively. And there is no question about his skill at capturing the TV eye.

Jackson's talent for inspiration breaks through the jaded despair of many voters, but they are excited not simply because they see him as a strong leader or as delivering their message to Reagan, Mondale or whoever will listen. He inspires them to a belief that they can make a difference, that they should be "empowered," even if that is no more than registering and voting as a first step. As usual, there seems to be inadequate organization to mobilize the momentary euphoria for the long haul. But even in New Hampshire, Jackson's campaign has boosted registration and spurred some of "the rejected stones" to become "the corner stones" of his projected Rainbow Coalition.

At a time when Richard Viguerie and

others on the far right are staking out a claim to "populism" (the real battle is the people versus the establishment, Viguerie says), Jackson represents another populist appeal that may yet find its army. Jackson blends a stern lesson of individual responsibility, hard work and restraint on hedonism with a social gospel. He calls on government to cut military spending, protect the environment, promote the less fortunate or excluded (blacks, Hispanics, women, Asian, youth and the handicapped are most often cited), enforce "corporate integrity" and social responsibility and settle international differences through negotiation, showing special attention to the ignored Third World majority.

"It's not enough to get a new president," Jackson told a Susan B. Anthony celebration in Claremont's opera house. "We need a new direction. To get off an elephant onto a donkey going the same direction a little slower is no improvement."

Clearly Jackson's candidacy has a special appeal for many blacks, and in New Hampshire some of the standard appeals to black progress were dropped. Women—or at times a new generation of youth—are more likely to symbolize the Rainbow Coalition. Attacks on acid rain and nuclear power (Jackson would phase out all nuclear plants) assume a special prominence along with the overriding general themes of peace and justice.

Push for excellence.

Yet at Contoocook Valley High School near Peterborough, Jackson delivered what sounded like a ghetto high school "push for excellence" inspirational talk. "There is nothing more damaging to the psyche than a sense of nobodiness," he told the 800 students and 300 people from the surrounding community before leading some of his classic responsive chants ("My mind/ is a pearl/ I can learn anything/ in the world") and a few new ones ("I can register/ I can vote/ I will/ make a difference").

But now, he warned, your "options—unemployment, no scholarships, kill or be killed—do not represent a bright future for a civilized nation.... America's strength is not in guided missiles but in developed minds." He added admonitions against drugs, alcohol, violence in school and casual sex. Jackson contrasted the star basketball player's disciplined practice and casual homework. "To make education in the U.S. better we need more than more money, more than a new president, more than a change from Republican to Democrat," he said. "Education is a matter of individual responsibility."

With a carefully calibrated set of appeals, he concluded the afternoon with what had become a standard routine—getting everyone 18 or over who had not yet registered to stand up, come to the front and give his or her name, presumably to be contacted later. Hundreds sheepishly lined up. Jackson berated registrars for not coming to schools and urged passage of postcard registration: "The politics should be in who we vote for, not in registration."

"It was on target," principal Ronald Pacy said later, including the remarks on drugs, alcohol and sex in this semi-rural, all-white high school. "A lot of people are excluded, and teenagers are among them. He told them they counted, they

can change things. This was our best pep rally since I've been here. The students didn't know who he was before he came, but they knew he was black. Some said maybe I should wear my white sheet or we should serve watermelon and chicken. But I saw some kids who were talking about the white sheet who were doing the chant and cheering and applauding at the end."

Jackson impresses more than the youngsters. David Cleverdon, a ruddy-faced retired businessman with a wispy white beard, was there as a Jackson campaign worker. Cleverdon has been a registered Republican and his only previous political involvement had been serving on a school board. "He has brought a new dimension to the primary campaign," he said. "He represents a person who can talk to the Third World and get results. Most of all, he makes us aware of society's responsibility to the disadvantaged, whether domestically or any place in the world. But it's linked with efficiency, rather than just throwing more money at social problems. You notice Jackson didn't say the solution to our lousy education system was more money, but he did say teachers had to be paid well."

Education is a recurring theme. "Schools at their worst are better than jails at their best," Jackson says. But every candidate, including conservative John Glenn, hitches on to this safe but salient issue. Jackson often skirts the ticklish questions of precise programs and their costs in his calls for attention to the elderly, the poor, the handicapped and others. Or program does not match rhetoric: he demands that health care be a right, for example, but rather than push for a national health care system, he supports the modest Kennedy-Gephardt health cost containment legislation. Yet he consistently argues that whatever the cost of nutritional programs for children or comparable worth salaries for women, it is cheaper and socially more desirable than the consequence in poorly educated, badly motivated, unhealthy or criminally inclined young people.

Jackson draws the sharpest line between himself and most of the other candidates on foreign policy, however. "The first step in foreign policy is to be able to count," Jackson told an overflow audience of more than 1,000 in Keene. "We are 6 percent of the world, 6 percent. Ninety-four percent of God's children are beyond us. Six percent consume 40 percent of the resources, but you cannot count us by our appetite. Most people in the world are black or brown or yellow or red, poor, non-Christian and don't speak English. Our foreign policy must count the people in the world and measure human rights by one yardstick, because human rights is the key to peace."

So Jackson advocates recognition of the revolutionary front in El Salvador as a legitimate force (a U.S. representative, Arnaldo Ramos, spoke briefly at several campaign stops) as well as Cuba's government. He also supports the Contadora initiative, favors withdrawal of U.S. troops from Honduras and an end to the CIA-financed war against Nicaragua. While traveling in New Hampshire, Jackson debated going to Nicaragua for the 50th anniversary of the Sandino uprising, but decided against it. (Some of the considerations apparently were staff objections to the interruption of the campaign as well as Jackson's desire to meet with a

broad range of religious leaders, opposition figures and leaders of neighboring countries when he does go.)

Russians are people, too.

Jackson hits U.S. Central American policy hard in virtually every speech. While not defending all aspects of Nicaragua's government or other revolutionary regimes, he urges his audience to be patient and understanding, reminding them it took more than a decade for the revolutionary U.S. colonies to hold elections and nearly 200 years for everyone to be assured of a right to vote. "We must be patient with other folks, because we have not become a perfect democracy ourselves," he told a packed Friday morning gathering at a 250-year-old Rochester church.

In the same vein, he repeatedly urges talks, trade and empathy with the Soviet Union. The most important image from Andropov's funeral, he said, was Mrs. Andropov crying. "Russian women cry when their husbands die," he said in Keene. "Russian children cry when their daddies die. They are people, too."

If Jackson has any general solution for international problems, it's talk. "If we do talk, we may fail," he says repeatedly. "If we do not talk, we are assured we will fail." That means talking with such unpopular groups as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or the Syrian government. Jackson rarely mentions the PLO, yet most reporting on his campaign focuses overwhelmingly on his relations with Arab nations. But both George McGovern and Jackson share similar views: the Palestinians and Israel deserve secure homelands in the Mideast and discussions must include the PLO.

At Keene for the first time Jackson called for a 20 percent cut in the military budget, thus joining McGovern as the only candidates favoring reduced arms spending. Like nearly all the others, he favors a bilateral nuclear freeze: "We must freeze the weapons or burn the people and freeze the planet." He would also support unilateral initiatives to declare the U.S. would not be the first to use nuclear weapons, to delay further deployment of Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe for six months (an earlier draft of his talk called for withdrawing missiles already deployed), to suspend nuclear testing for six months (longer if the Russians reciprocate) and to cancel the MX program.

While riding with Jackson between campaign stops, I asked why he had not called for military cuts earlier. He responded with a revealing discourse on his role: "People are not looking for a statistician in a president. They are looking for a conduit through which they can convey their message. They're looking for a conduit that's believable and trustworthy. They're looking for a conduit that can inspire them. Once you start dealing with billions of dollars, those numbers are not comprehensible to people and thus are not very relevant."

"People feel themselves into a way of thinking more than they think themselves into a way of feeling. When people feel that you have the right instincts, that your instincts are consistent with their instincts, then they'll vote for you."

"My campaign stresses values, and people like that. The idea of treating children right, poor folks right, old folks right, a willingness to risk for peace—