
MESSAGING THE BLACKMAN

John Woodford

H. Rap Brown was in jail in Louisiana on trumped-up charges. The Black Panther Party was striding around northern California declaring it the right and duty of our ethnic group—the African-American people—to defend itself with arms against brutal police. And there sat I, in what I thought would be a good position to cover the freedom movement, as an editor/writer for *Ebony* magazine in Chicago.

The problem was, in 1968 both Rap Brown and the Panthers were strictly **verboten** as topics for our country's biggest magazine aimed at African-American readers. *Ebony's* publisher, John H. Johnson, not only regarded the Panthers as bad apples, but also considered covering them as not worth the financial risk. The advertising leash constrains most mainstream media in the land of the avowed freedom of the press, and a black publisher runs on the shortest leash. (Which is not to say that there have not been many dauntless and high-principled black publishers who have sacrificed riches to carry the real news, from Joseph Russworm's *Freedom's Journal* in 1827 and Frederick Douglass's *North Star* in 1857, to Robert S. Abbott's *Chicago Daily Defender* in the early decades of this century, to Carlton Goodlett's *Sun Reporter* in Oakland, California, and Andrew W. Cooper's New York *City Sun* today.)

Regardless of the rationales behind *Ebony's* censorship, all I knew was that it was barring me and other young writers from covering two of the biggest stories for black Americans in 1968. I was 26 years old, the same age as Huey, and there he was showing the guts to defy a bunch of "racist pigs," and here I

Copyright © 1990 by John Woodford

Woodford is executive editor of The University of Michigan's News and Information Services, where he produces *Michigan Today*. He is also a member of the board of the National Alliance of Third World Journalists.

was, muzzled while working for a black publication when I could have worked anywhere else in the country. I'd quit grad school and law school to enjoy the satisfaction of being in on "the action" via journalism. I knew something had to give. (The *Ebony* staff did get some meaty assignments, but none of them was near the battle zones; any story with teeth was usually historical.)

I'd already been bugged by an earlier demonstration of *Ebonyesque* servility that has never been reported until now. *Ebony* had surveyed its readers in 1967 on their preferences in the 1968 Democratic presidential primaries, promising to report the results. President Lyndon B. Johnson and his aides didn't like the results of the poll, however, because it indicated African-Americans strongly favored Robert F. Kennedy over LBJ. The story was written, and the ear of the front cover (the ear is a headline summarizing a key non-cover story) announced that the issue contained the results of the poll. Suddenly the presses were stopped. The poll was cut out of the issue, and the cover was reprinted with a new ear. This maneuver had to cost Johnson Publishing Company plenty in production charges. I don't cite this incident to knock Mr. J. personally, however, for he was following the same pocketbook-first principles of U.S. journalism as the heads of publications like New York *Times* and *Time* magazine, both of which received evidence of the killing of the *Ebony* readers poll, but chose not to follow up with an investigation and news story.

In any event, these and similar practices of American mainstream "free" journalism—whether the owners of the presses were black or white—were goading me to seek an employer with more guts to cover stories that needed to be told. One late spring day I picked up another Chicago-based publication that I'd previously enjoyed reading only for its **kookiness—Muhammad Speaks**, a weekly tabloid published by the Nation of Islam (a.k.a. the Black Muslims) under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

I'd read with a sort of scoffing amazement the newspaper's religious columns that explained the Messenger of Allah's distinctive mythology—how people who considered themselves to be whites were somewhat artificial beings created by the superb surgical grafting and bioengineering of the arch-scientist and chief devil, Yakub. Yakub had accomplished this feat 6,000 years ago by engineering pig genes, or portions of pig anatomy—something like that. This passage from "Muhammad's Message to the Blackman" offers a sample of the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Messenger of Allah:

Their history shows **troublemaking, murder** and death to all darker people from the far-off islands and mainlands of Asia as well as the South Seas and the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

All have been touched by their destructive hand and evil way of civilization and finally the bringing of my people to make their destruction sure.

Actually it was suicide for them to have brought our fathers in slavery. This act was charged to them by the Divine Supreme Being as being the most wicked people on the earth. Now we see the results in the fight of the ignorant among our people to gain sincere love from a people who have no sincere love among themselves.

And then there was the Mother Plane, an invisible aircraft that would take all true-believing Original People to paradise on Judgment Day. One cartoon that appeared every week showed Uncle Sam as the head of the World Serpent—the European and Euro-American coil around the peoples of the Third World.

Another regular-running cartoon showed **mini-skirted** black and white women, and denounced this revealing fashion as "the filth that filth produces." Another doctrine held that all natural disasters were unleashed by Allah to weaken, and ultimately to destroy, the rule of the Devil. The doomsday disaster would mark the arrival of the Mother Plane, which got you your ticket to ride via Islam.

The word among the more privileged ranks of the "so-called Negroes," as the Muslims dubbed them, was that the Black Muslims were ignorant, fanatic, violent, a haven for ex-cons and confidence men who could get by in any setting that let them perform their special form of salesmanship. The women were said to be better educated than the men, but appreciative of a **rigid** system that would prescribe a husband's behavior and, presumably, punish a husband who strayed from the *Quran's* moral code.

THE BLACK PANTHER TABOO

I'd been as indoctrinated as the next person to accept the mass media's simplistic image of the Black Muslims. But I felt the poetic force, and poetic accuracy, in much of Elijah Muhammad's prose. Furthermore, any condescending smile that broke my face as I read this particular issue slid away when I saw an interview a **Muhammad Speaks** correspondent had conducted with Rap Brown in prison, detailing the racist practices in Louisiana that had drawn Rap and other civil rights fighters to challenge the brutal bigotry and other apartheid customs. Other articles in the same issue told about the Black Panthers' fightback against police violence in **Oakland**, California; about liberation struggles in Africa; about evidence that showed African voyagers had landed in Mexico and other parts of the Americas long before Columbus. Fascinating stuff, and in a publication circulating at 300,000 copies a week,

which rivaled, if it didn't surpass, **Ebony's** figure. (*Muhammad Speaks* had the largest circulation of any weekly newspaper in the country except **Grit**, a rural weekly that has never made any journalistic waves strong enough to bring it to general attention.)

In one of those fateful coincidences, not many weeks after I'd begun to read *Muhammad Speaks* with real interest and respect, I learned that the Nation of Islam was looking to hire more aggressive, skillful young journalists to further boost its circulation and reputation. I learned about this plan from what may seem to non-Chicagoans to have been an unlikely source. He was a Chicago black Republican associated with certain Black Muslims in a number of businesses, one of which was rumored to be fencing stolen goods. In many ways, the Nation of Islam was a microcosm of the nation at large; in other ways, influenced by the separatist ideology of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, it was an anti-nation.

Like most young African-Americans, I had been captivated by Malcolm X's sharp refutations of mainstream racist lore in his speeches, TV appearances, and interviews in the print media. The fearless eye-for-an-eye militancy of Malcolm X, who was the Nation of Islam's chief minister, and Robert Williams, the North Carolina freedom fighter and author of *Negroes with Guns*, was inspiring to a generation that was not going to do any stepping, fetching, or "yassuh-ing." This new militancy also had an international component. Blacks were no longer going to kill so willingly or proudly for Uncle Sam overseas for "freedom" we didn't have at home. As Muhammad Ali had put it when he rejected his draft notice inducting him into the U.S. Army: "No Viet Congs ever called me nigger." Ali's pithy expression of political wisdom soon became a political aphorism in the black community, and it remains so to this day despite efforts to subvert it via slick armed forces recruitment ads, movies like *Glory* and *A Soldier's Story*, and the elevation of General Colin Powell to head the joint chiefs of staff.

I was well aware, however, of the contradictions within the Nation of Islam. I'd heard Malcolm X lecture at Harvard four years earlier, in 1964. This was before he'd gone to Mecca and decided that counter-racism was a poor excuse for a revolutionary or uplifting ideology. He'd laced his lecture with a lot of spiteful reverse-racist and cultural separatist talk that continues to be recirculated today, though in ever-cheaper coin.

Before his self-proclaimed enlightenment in Mecca, Malcolm had been most effective when he spoke on talk shows with plenty of arrogant whites whom he turned into straight men, hoisting them on the petard of their own blind bigotry. But Malcolm had no straight men at Harvard that evening. Much of his speech was disappointing.

Even if my own beloved classmate, Elizabeth Duffy (we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary in 1990), had not been of Irish-Bulgarian ancestry, I would have been repulsed by Malcolm's or anyone else's efforts to unite blacks by fomenting enmity against whites, Jews, Asians, Latinos, or any other ethnic groups. When the person closest to you in the world is described as being of "another race," it makes the concept of "race" pretty silly, if not considering the damage under the myth of race-downright disgusting. Progressive organizations can't be built on mirror-image-of-the-oppressor dogma.

That's not to say I was a Martin Luther King devotee. To me, nonviolence as a strategic principle is wimpy, attractive only to those who don't mind being psychological and physical whipping-boys. I'm not one for turning the other cheek, which is why in the summer after Malcolm's speech, following graduation, I went to Mississippi with a group other than the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I wanted to make sure I'd be around black Mississippians who would bear arms and return fire in a situation calling for self-defense.

But back to the Muslims and me. I had reviewed *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for Johnson Publishing Company's literary journal *Negro Digest* (later *Black World*) in 1965, during my first stint at *Ebony*. I argued that Malcolm's significance to blacks and the nation at large was being trashed by establishment journalists like the columnist Carl Rowan, a favorite of the white media barons because he espouses their foreign policy line. A black American doesn't get far up the media ladder unless he or she is something of a my-country-right-or-wrong America-Firster in international affairs, or shuts up about any differences with the establishment save those that are conceded to be "black issues," such as South Africa. The network of enforcement of this hush-your-black-mouth policy is tangled. I consider it no coincidence that, just as Malcolm X was trashed by the Rowans, he was also ejected from the Nation of Islam, or driven to leave it, after he described the assassination of President Kennedy by a screwball FBI-informer and CIA-maverick as an example of "the chickens coming home to roost." Malcolm meant that the United States under JFK had attempted to assassinate Fidel Castro, had attacked Cuba, and was keeping in place a violently repressive and impoverishing stranglehold throughout the Third World and on the African-American citizens of the "land of the free."

MALCOLM X MUZZLED

Malcolm's barnyard aphorism-like Muhammad Ali's summing up of black America's relationship to the Vietnamese was met with overwhelming assent by most blacks I've known, even those who disap-

proved of his audacity in saying so publicly. But, his comment upset the Black Muslim leaders, who followed the unwritten policy that they should not “interfere” in mainstream American politics. Elijah Muhammad ordered Malcolm to make no more public comments. I’ve always interpreted this harsh punishment by the Nation of Islam as evidence that some influential Black Muslims, perhaps the same ones who accepted donations from the American Nazis and other white racist-separatist groups, didn’t want the group to become a **politically** militant force. Separatist propagandizing was OK, but independent political organizing was a no-no. For example, Black Muslims were under orders not to vote in any U.S. elections. And the Muslims never did use their economic base to support independent African-American political mobilization. (I’m convinced that African-Americans will gain the leverage to attack and change the systemic causes of racism only after we form a grassroots-based, militant, programmatic, democratic but non-preacher-led organization like the African National Congress of South Africa.)

Malcolm soon defied the Messenger’s gag order, however, and was ousted from the Nation as a “hypocrite,” a category, under Muslim terminology, that puts one in the position of other renegades from secret organizations, from the Mormons to the Scientologists to the Mafia: that is, the position of being marked for death. For several months, Malcolm escaped a few assassination attempts and founded a quasi-Pan Africanist/socialist organization; men linked to the Muslims killed him as he was delivering a speech in Harlem in February 1965. Whether any of the triggermen were also in the FBI, or were pawns of an agent inside the Nation, has not been proved; but neither of these scenarios strains credulity. J. Edgar Hoover’s writings and sundry freedom-of-information documents show that the FBI had several operatives in the Nation—and who could expect it to have been otherwise, for this was a powerful organization capable of affecting the sailing of the ship of state.

These individuals, events, and intrigues formed the background against which I had to decide whether to go for a job on **Muhammad Speaks**. And if I hadn’t already known what a mixed bag the Nation of Islam was, all I had to do was take a look at the news of the day. As I contemplated joining **Muhammad Speaks**, the Black Muslims were punishing Muhammad Ali for his “No Viet Congs ever called me nigger” statement. Like Malcolm X before him (and it was Malcolm who had converted the Champ to Islam), Ali was being shunned and silenced by his co-religionists under Mr. Muhammad’s orders. One friend of the Champ’s told me Ali was too vulnerable psychologically to break away from the Nation as Malcolm X had. That may have been true. But Ali may also have felt much more vulnerable physically than Malcolm had been. A healthy percentage of his many multimillion-dollar prize fighting purses went to his managerial team of Muhammad family

members and their top aides, so Ali was the chief money-earner for the entire elite of the Nation of Islam, far surpassing rank-and-file tithers and contributors from white separatist groups.

So what was I to do? I’ve never been one to idolize or idealize the sources of my paychecks. I had no reason to hold Mr. Muhammad to a higher standard than I’d held John H. Johnson of Ebony. In subsequent years my labor power has been owned by a Marshall Field of some numeral (a Harvard classmate unknown to me, but who happened to inherit the Sun Times), the New York Times’ “Punch” Sulzberger; and Henry Ford II, among others. Does being a worker of the brain oblige you to identify with and share the ideological thinking of your employer, any more than working in a mine or factory does? I say an emphatic “no,” so I didn’t feel that working for the Black Muslims would pressure me to espouse separatism any more than working on the **Christian Science Monitor** would force me to back the tenets of that sect. I have found, nevertheless, that almost everyone, black or white, who learns of my association with **Muhammad Speaks** assumes I’ve gone through a series of integrationist-separatist-integrationist transformations—identity crises or something of that sort. I never bought into the widespread, simple-minded integrationist-separatist pseudo-paradox. I’ve always been for desegregation as a means of improving democracy, which is a horse of another color-plaid.

What cinched my decision to seek a job on **Muhammad Speaks**, despite most of my family’s and friends’ advice that a job there would be a foolhardy step “career-wise,” was the hard fact that it was presenting more stories about issues and events that concerned African-Americans and Africans than any other publication, and that it was doing so in a more forthright, more “together” way (to use a term that was popular back then and that still expresses the material and spiritual quality of integrity) than any other highly circulated publication in the country—black or white.

A trivial flare-up at **Ebony** was the spark that shot me toward my new objective. I can’t remember the episode, but an editorial decision in the censorial mode led me to post a Martin Luther-like manifesto, defiant and full of invective, on several walls in **Ebony’s** offices. I left the building and didn’t return (at least not till a visit 12 years later, when I patched things up with Mr. J., who tolerates expressions of youthful rage surprisingly well, perhaps because he, himself, had bottled up his own emotions and remain coolly disciplined to build and sustain a successful publication).

I went to **Muhammad Speaks’** storefront-size office on 79th Street near Cottage Grove in the heart of the South Side for an interview with its editor-in-chief, Richard Durham, a former union organizer in the C.I.O. Durham was a playwright and author (he wrote Ali’s autobiography, **The Greatest**), as well as an outstanding journalist. He hired me and said I would

begin to draw a paycheck, but that I couldn't work in the office until Elijah Muhammad had interviewed me personally. In the meantime, he arranged for me to spend several days in New York with our United Nations correspondent, Charles P. Howard, while he arranged for the interview.

Howard was one of the nation's greatest unsung newspapermen. He covered the African liberation movements for *Muhammad Speaks* and for those few other black newspapers who continued to print his column and articles despite pressure from the anti-communist Thought Police who objected to his viewpoint. Howard consistently analyzed events as they affected the interests of the oppressed, not how they affected the line of the State Department, Pentagon, White House, and the fat cats' twin holy cows, the "two-party system." Several of the toughest-minded black journalists and literary figures, including the cartoonist Ollie Harrington, had been forced into exile by the anti-Communist Redbaiting witchhunt spearheaded by Senator Joseph McCarthy, which prodded many an employer to bar "subversives" from jobs. Thanks to Durham's guts and sawy, Howard enjoyed an income that permitted him to stay in the States without compromising his politics.

"WHAT ABOUT YOUR WIFE?"

When I returned to Chicago and began going to the editorial office, my first story was an interview with the African-American poet Ted Joans, who'd been living in Timbuktu, the village in Mali that before its decline was the most renowned city of medieval Africa. Meanwhile, I awaited my official hiring interview with the Messenger of Allah, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, which I thought would be a mere formality. On the appointed day, Durham accompanied me to the Messenger's splendid brick home in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood near the University of Chicago. **Security** was efficient and tight at the Messenger's house. As we made our way toward the den where the meeting would take place, I saw out of the corner of my eye several tall, attractive women in full-length dresses and unveiled Muslim headcloths, who seemed to be sizing me up from half-concealed vantage points like schoolgirls peeking at the new boy in town.

Durham, Mr. Muhammad, and I chatted for awhile. The Messenger said he was happy to see that a young black person who had had considerable economic and educational advantages wanted to work with him "to free our people." Then he asked me where I was working now. I said for *Muhammad Speaks*. "Oh, no **you** don't, brother," he said with a reproachful look. "You can't be working for **my** newspaper because I haven't hired you."

I almost blurted out that I'd already received a paycheck, but I looked at Durham, and luckily I read

in his face an expression of regret that he'd failed to tell me something. "Well, I really don't have a job now," I said. "I recently quit *Ebony* and I'm looking for work."

"And are you married?" he asked me.

"Yes."

"Well, what about your wife? What is she?"

"Her father is of Irish ancestry and her mother Bulgarian, although her mother's father probably migrated to Bulgaria from Albania." (I **had** been coached in this area, so I knew that the Messenger's view of "race" was by no means as simple as the mass media made it out to be and that the wandering orphan Nikolai Subev's likely Albanian origin would put him in Mr. Muhammad's racial pantheon rather than its bestiary.)

"Those are Asiatic peoples," the Messenger said, "and many of the people in Bulgaria and Albania are Muslims and followers of Allah, as we are. They are part of the Black Asiatic people, the Original People, as we call them, but some don't know it or admit it. Anyone can be a black man or woman to us who recognizes that man and woman arose in Africa, which was one with Asia then. Anyone who accepts their ancestry as from the Black Asiatic people-and not from the Devil's grafting-is one of us."

"I think pretty much the same thing," I said quite truthfully, for I took this part of his doctrine as essentially anti-racist; it was a rejection of the pseudo-scientific concept of races and an assertion of the historic role of the Afro-Asiatic peoples in human history.

"My wife agrees with this, too," I continued. "We don't see each other as belonging to different races. Our ancestors had to arise in the same place, Africa, long ago."

"Well, brother," the Messenger smiled. "Your wife is fine with me. I hope you will accept a job on our newspaper. All we want you to do is tell the truth and bring freedom, justice, and equality to the black men and women of America. The Devil has built his empire on lies, and we can destroy it with the truth."

And so began my very exciting and rewarding four years. *Muhammad Speaks*-which was at that time a 4%page weekly-sent reporters to Cuba, the Soviet Union, Puerto Rico; to Africa to tell of the freedom struggles of South Africans, Mozambiquans, Zimbabweans, and Angolans; to England, Mexico, and both Germanys-any damn place we wanted to go, even North Vietnam and North Korea and other places our government said Americans were not permitted to go.

I was especially happy, too, because now I was part of a news staff that didn't just oppose the war against the peoples of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, it openly supported and rooted for the victory of these nations targeted for near-destruction by the U.S. money-bags who today are calling the ravaged economy of these countries proof of the failure of socialism. (Oh

yeah? Then what are Puerto Rico, Harlem, Brazil, Zaire, and the Philippines proof of the failure of?)

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend," was one of the Messenger's favorite expressions, meaning he and his newspaper were enemies of all enemies of the Third World struggling against racist-imperialism. The Third World was our friend and-by syllogism if nothing else-the socialist-communist camp, to the extent that they supported the interests of the Third World, was also our friend.

Our staff never fantasized the Third World into realms of utopia, the way Joan Baez, Jane Fonda, and the others who've recently flagellated themselves for "sins of their youth" seem to have done, judging from their "recantations" in this period of Inquisition by the powers that be. We never supposed that the nations we supported were chock full of selfless, flawless peasant heroes and heroines. We supported their right to get Uncle Sam & Co. off their backs.

In my early months on the job, the issue that I took aim at as my very own was the Nigerian civil war. The U.S. media were proclaiming that Nigerians were trying to commit genocide against the "Biafrans" (I always put the term in quotation marks for reasons that will soon become clear). I'd first tuned into the situation during my pre-hiring visit with our UN correspondent, Charles Howard. I told Howard that the "Biafrans" must be in the right because the Chinese were backing them, while the Soviet Union supported Nigeria. I can see now in hindsight that, confronted with events I knew nothing about, I resorted as readily to simple-minded racist, or racialist, formulae as the next yahoo: The Chinese were "colored people"; the "Russians" were near-white, at the least; therefore, the "Biafrans" cause was probably just.

Howard looked at me impassively. "You know," he said, "these conflicts can be really interesting when you study up on them a bit. Have you ever read any literature that either side put out, or talked to a representative of either side?" I said no, I hadn't, that I'd only read about the war every now and then in the New York Times and seen some of the starving children on TV programs and in the appeals for money by several charities.

"Well, since you're in New York for a few days," he said, "why don't you spend some time at the UN talking to the representatives of both sides?"

Without my knowing it, Howard had just given me the most fruitful lesson in my profession I've ever had. Despite my Ivy League "edgy-cation," this was the first time I was made to think for myself from scratch. I went to the UN and spoke to key public information specialists from the "Biafran" secessionists and from the Nigerian federal government. I also spoke to unofficial supporters of both sides. I became convinced that the mass media's "Biafra" story was a hoax, as was the "Biafran" cause. In my first series of articles on the war, I explained why none of the

readers had ever heard of the so-called "Biafran" people before the secession. The "Biafrans" were in reality the Ibo nationality. A section of the Ibo elite wished to secede with the richest Nigerian oil fields and form a small wealthy state. They had support from such champions of African progress as the CIA, Israel, South Africa, and Portugal-plus China.

What the U.S. media weren't reporting was that the Ibos had invented the name "Biafrans" for their nationality because Biafra was the name of the bay holding oil deposits, wells, and refineries. These oilfields and other key "Biafran" resources did not lie in the Ibos' home state, however, but on territory of the minority nationalities in the Eastern State-the Effiks, Ijaws, Ibibios, and others. The Ibo rebel government suppressed, jailed, terrorized, and starved these minorities; meanwhile, they drew the "Biafran" boundaries around their victims' territories. Most of the starving children used in hype photos by "relief agencies" (some of which were later exposed as swindlers) were non-Ibo. But the phony name "Biafran" concealed to the uninformed non-African public the fact that the Ibo plotters used the starving "Biafran" photos to raise money for weapons and for their own food. The more starvation, the less resistance by the nationalities opposing the Ibos, and the more relief money via the charity-conspiracy. (Gladys Riddle, a woman from my hometown of Benton Harbor, Michigan, died in a "relief" plane that the Nigerians shot down. The pilot, her male friend, was a CIA/mercenary-type hoping to strike it rich ferrying weapons in "relief" shipments to "Biafra," her friends told me.)

The U.S. media refused to report the ethnic, historical, and political facts that would have shed light on that complex civil war; nonetheless, the African-American community never swallowed the "Biafra" story. *Muhammad Speaks* played a key role in building up an immunity to this specific germ carried in the constant, infectious spewing of disinformation and brainwashing that our press and TV networks disguise as "news." Sometimes I traveled to community organizations or college campuses with Nigerian graduate students. As part of this volunteer truth squad, I found that most African-Americans were naturally skeptical of and suspicious about the "Biafran" genocide story. They knew by mother-wit alone that the racist American establishment had never showed concern for starving blacks at home or abroad before "Biafra," just as they know today that there's bound to be a lot of bigoted bunkum and pure baloney spread in the Ethiopian starvation story and every other feature story about Africa.

Blacks knew that the Africans struggling against apartheid and against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola, and against the British in Zimbabwe, were as hungry as the "Biafrans," whoever the people so-named might be, but none of these

starving people were receiving publicity or aid that approached "Biafran" levels.

We didn't cover only international events at *Muhammad Speaks*, however. We covered hot domestic stories, too, and not just the Black Power movements but also big strikes and union-organizing drives, the campus and antiwar movements, the fightbacks against policebrutality, and the activities of U.S. organizations formed in solidarity with the Third World.

THE ANGELA DAVIS STORY

Our biggest national impact was probably the Angela Davis story. Sometime after the capture of this leader of the Communist Party, Joe Walker, our New York editor (as well as one of the nation's greatest unsung journalists) got permission to interview her in prison. It was the first big story with Davis, who had been accused of taking part in the assassination of a California judge by Jonathan Jackson, the deranged brother of George Jackson, a prison activist Davis was involved with. Many news organs picked up this interview, and a special reprint was snapped up across the land and overseas.

The Muslims didn't agree with Angela Davis' political philosophy, and not a few of them were displeased to see *Muhammad Speaks* spearhead a media campaign to defend her; they felt it might draw extra scrutiny and perhaps intrigue from the FBI, CIA, or some other arm of the secret right-wing political forces in the Land of the Free. What's more, the Nation saw Davis' Communist class analysis viewpoint as an incompatible ideology competing against nationalist separatism for the allegiance of African-Americans. But to the Muslims' great credit, they never said, "Don't defend her" or "Cool down your free-Angela stories." I doubt any publishing group in this country has honored freedom of speech, information, and publishing with more integrity than did the Nation of Islam in the Angela Davis case.

The story built tremendous sympathy for Davis and led to wide-based popular involvement in her defense committees. The photograph our New York freelance photographer Joe Crawford took of her, which Crawford and *Muhammad Speaks* released at no charge, became the main image for the buttons sold by her defense committees. (When I visited Mongolia in 1971, I occasionally wore one of the several dozen "Free Angela" buttons I'd brought as gifts, and even shepherd families living in isolated yurts in the vast and near-empty plains recognized Angela Davis and were overjoyed to get a memento. Billions of people probably recognized Angela Davis in those days.) It was a great day when Davis was released from prison. My wife and I dined with her and the Rev. Ben Chavis—who'd overcome similar trumped up charges in North Carolina—in Chicago not long after she was

set free. To have played a part in the Free Angela movement remains one of my most satisfying journalistic experiences.

Perhaps *Muhammad Speaks*' most distinctive feature, the one that aroused most animosity in the political and journalistic establishment and in various black cultural nationalist groups, was our appreciation of the positive traditions and socioeconomic accomplishments of the socialist countries. Here was an exercise in real press freedom, for we were rebutting the Red boogey-men demonology spread by the U.S. brainwashing mass media and educational system.

Maybe, in retrospect, we sometimes leaned too far the other way to counterbalance the weight of the domineering Daddy Warbucks culture. Maybe there were aspects of life in the socialist countries that we should have probed more deeply. In my five or so trips to the Red lands of the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, Mongolia, and the German Democratic Republic, I got glimpses through the cracks of officially sanctioned and arranged tours to sense the rising resentment against thought control, the lack of freedom to travel, the punishing of free thinkers in art and politics, the economic backwardness, animosity among nationalities, manipulation of Third World progressive groups, the rise of yuppie-type careerists in the supposedly vanguard revolutionary parties, and a sort of craven fawning for approval from the anti-communist elites of the West. Yet I never interwove these observations in my stories. I suppose I assumed that such problems were atypical and/or curable, and also that to open up such subjects would provide ammunition for the enemy and make me indistinguishable from the mammoth stable of kneejerk anti-communist journalists.

But that's proverbial 20-20 hindsight. The key point to me is that we strengthened the democratic principle of freedom of the press by exercising it against the Big Brotherism still ruling the roost in the mass commercial media. Therefore, from the standpoint of the interests of our country, I'd say we practiced patriotic and anti-totalitarian journalism of the highest order because we kept out of the rut dug by the Sacred American Two-Party Big Biz establishment, which is that, in the formation of the United States, humankind has exhausted the possibilities of democracy. This attitude does to the body politic what cholesterol does to the human bloodstream.

One of the *Muhammad Speaks* staffs main objectives was to inform blacks and other citizens about the harm their government was doing in their name to many millions of people in other countries. In a healthy democracy, citizens know what The State is doing in their name. Such information is always hard-won because in virtually all countries the political and military groups pulling the levers of state power condone secret diplomacy and try to conceal their intrigues from the people.

by John Woodford

Charles Greenlee, a giant Black physician, sat behind the desk in his austere office on Franktown avenue in Pittsburgh's Homewood-Brushton area. He pounded the book on his desk and launched into his attack:

"DO YOU KNOW how these white colleges and universities are supported? By government grants of all our money. The Harvard Medical School alone received a **\$31,000,000** research and development grant. That's just the medical school.

"But the Black schools in the United Negro College Fund don't receive that much money combined! The U.S. gave someone else a \$2 million R&D (research and development) grant to check a rectal temperature of a hibernating bear. But Black colleges don't have one R&D grant. They spend more to check a bear's a- than they do on the Black man.

"The thing that's important is that this shows how the Black man is planned out. So when the U.S. began to plan the Black man in several years ago in their big birth control programs, Black people should have known to GET OUT OF THE WAY."

Dr. **Greenlee** paused and opened the book he had pounded on. "There is lots of evidence you can dig up to support the claim that there is a conspiracy to get rid of the black and other dark races of the world," he said as he leafed through *Population Crisis, Part 4-1966: Hearing before the...Committee on Government Operations, U.S. Senate*.

"And one of the handy things," he went on, "is that they give you all the evidence you need themselves. " Then he read a section of the report describing how the absurdly named "maternity and infant care program" was jammed into every Afro-American community. The program's name is absurd, he said, because the goal of the program is to prevent motherhood and infants from existing and not to care for them at all.

"**WHEN A BLACK woman** has a baby, under this program she is then tricked or brainwashed into getting her tubes tied or a birth control device inserted in her. " (Tying and cutting the fallopian tubes ends a woman's fertility.)

The result of this program, said Dr. **Greenlee**, is that the 1966 U.S. population growth reduced the 1965 level by 0.4 per cent, and the 1967 growth rate was 1 per cent lower than the 1.7 per cent 1966 rate.

Yet, as the United Nations **Food Production Committee proved**, there is no "population crisis" or "food crisis" at all. **Dr. Greenlee said the food committee found that if the population and food supply continue to grow at the same rate in 1979, the problem** will be, "What will we do with all this food?"

This view is supported by the exhaustive study, "The Dimensions of World Poverty" in the November 1968 *Scientific American*. That magazine article reports a study which shows that there is actually a surplus of basic calorie-requirement food in the world. But 1.8 billion peo-

ple live in caloriedeficient countries. The "food problem," the article concludes, "is really a distribution problem rather than a production problem. "

But the "maternity and infant care officialsdo not work to distribute food or medical care to Black families. Instead, the costly program has tied the tubes of Black women only 23 years old. And when two Black women drug addicts came under this federal program, they received no treatment designed to end their addiction. They got their tubes tied.

Dr. **Greenlee** said that women all over the nation are subjected to films designed to convince them that they should stop having children. These films are frequently shown to women right after they are wheeled out of the delivery room where they have been doped up after enduring lengthy contractions. The federal program also pays for babysitters while Black women go to one of the "pill mills." And if they can't get out of the house, the government pays female aides to go with Black bags full of every kind of birth control device right to the Black women's homes.

Although Dr. **Greenlee** (who is not an opponent of birth control but of the genocidal use of birth control) has offered to pass along his information to students at Black colleges, no Black college administration has, as yet, allowed him to lecture before its students. Dr. **Greenlee** said that this certainly indicates that top government officials do not want Black Americans to begin analyzing the programs.

The U.S. government has not always openly pushed birth control. In fact, President Eisenhower said in 1959 that he thought that no political concern of this sort was justified. So, Dr. **Greenlee** s a theFord Foundationkept

W A S K E N N E D Y
Greenlee

runs
the U.S. birth control program in foreign lands. To the U.S., Dr. **Greenlee** noted, developing another land "means nothing but birth control. " He cited statistics showing that the U.S. gave 900 jeeps to Turkey, and pays the upkeep and the drivers for the jeeps. The jeeps are used to take women to birth control clinics.

"The U.S. gave \$4 million in birth control pills to Egypt. At the same time, Israel received Phantom Jets.

"In white nations AID is studying to explain the differences in the levels of European versus United States infant mortality rates. But in all the Black and Brown nations, the AID programs are run to prevent infants from being conceived."

It takes a different kind of economy to feed a large and healthily expanding populace than it does to feed a class of elitist exploiters. The U.S.

government and ruling class do **not** want the ~~nations~~ control to have to devise economics based on cooperation and an end to exploiting classes. Therefore, as Dr. Green-

nation, the Black communities in the USA are victims of the same kind of extermination policy-and for the same economic reasons.

On the domestic front, U.S. politicians and their agents in college and university sociology departments conduct studies of "trends of illegitimacy" or of Black infant mortality rates or of child disease in the Black community.

AFTER PILING up enough "negative" data they ignore the racism and exploitation which attack the Afro-American colony. They tell the brainwashed public-Black and white-that children born out of wedlock are by that very fact alone exposed to ill-health. To combat high infant mortality rates and diseases afflicting children, they tell the U.S. public, the main weapon is to keep babies from being born or conceived in the first place.

Therefore, said Dr. Greenlee, when President Johnson said that "our response (to the problems of poverty, disease and joblessness in the Afro-American community) must go to the root causes," he was backing a program aiming to sterilize mothers with no husbands and to spread birth control and sterilization programs throughout Black communities whether the men and women, husbands and wives, wanted them or not.

A large and growing Black population is a force potentially strong enough to rearrange the U.S. exploitative economic system so that the real causes of high infant mortality, disease, and joblessness can be attacked. With

things going on as they are now, Dr. Greenlee said, the combination of birth control and sterilization programs joins with the conditions causing disease and infant mortality "to exterminate our people."

"I might be wrong," Dr. Greenlee said, with his voice carrying his discouragement with most Black people's willingness to accept the whiteman's "solution," "but I get the idea that someone is smart enough to understand this sort of thing."

The U.S.'s massive investment in improving the delivery and power of birth control and sterilization devices is only matched in intensity by its efforts to improve the delivery and power of atomic missiles.

Dr. Greenlee said that "they have already a serum which will cause prolonged sterility after one injection. In five to six years, they'll be able to sterilize a person for 15 years with one injection, almost a generation.

"Now consider the fact that there are only 5,000 Black doctors in the USA because there is a definite limitation on the number of Blacks allowed in the medical field. This means that 95 per cent of us go to white doctors and institutions where only one injection can take you out. And, of course, I've talked to some Black men who support the extermination of poor-that is most-Black people, too."

Greenlee relaxed for a moment: "You know, the more I learn about this the more I think that there is no difference in these white people in power; they argue about methods of killing niggers, not whether they should do it.

I believe they have every intention to get rid of us and our brothers and to take over the world."

NOTE

1. From *Mohammad Speaks* (24 January 1969): 7-8, 37.

The mass media usually abet this secrecy by publishing stories whose "spin" meshes with the Official Story. In this situation only a truly oppositional press can defend democracy, and we were that opposition, using the weapons of hard-hitting prose, strongly editorialized but accurate stories, potent cartoons, reprints from people's organizations from around the world, and lots of action photos. We also provided prolonged coverage of key issues so that the systemic context, the many strands of an issue, could be untangled and analyzed. This practice enables readers to learn about the causes and possible cures of societal problems, rather than to present readers with a media world in which events are disjointed, arbitrary, and, therefore, seemingly beyond understanding and correction.

Jimmy Breslin, the New York columnist and author, was scanning a *Muhammad Speaks* issue beside our triple-threat New York editor-reporter-photographer Joe Walker at a press conference one day. After reaching the last page, he turned to Joe and said, "Hey,

you guys don't ever let up, do you?" One of the most controversial subjects we never let up on was population control. We didn't oppose birth control in principle, but we did attack the unusual Population Control alliance among our country's liberal-moderate-conservative-reactionary elite. Around no other issue-not even in their opposition to Nazi Germany-have these strata reached such unanimity as they have concerning the genocidal "eugenic" and Malthusian policy of population control. I'd held the standard liberal view on this subject, that any birth control program is by definition progressive, until I studied the politics and arguments of the originators and continuers of the U.S./West European population control programs.

Anyone who examines the record of the founding of the international Population Control programs (they are so-named) will be struck by a big fishy fact: The pushers of population control have funded the pill, intrauterine devices, surgical abortions, and **sterilization**—**bet**hey ever so expensive-to the nations containing most of the world's large, poor, dark-skinned

families. But when these same population controllers put on their World Bank and heir/heirss hats, when they vote for party platforms in their own countries, they deny funds that would help the Third World stand on its own feet technologically and economically (see sidebar 1).

The same forces that have looted the poor countries, driving people off self-supporting farms and into shanty towns, sold them rotten food and inferior medicines, while propping up their repressive military and police-these are the people who ask us humans they regard as "lesser breeds" to believe that they want to improve our living standards by limiting our numbers. Nonsense! First let them pay back the wealth stolen over 500 years of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. Then let's talk about population control and conservation and curbing growth and all the rest of the sanctimonious ecological doomsday blather. When they talk about making sure Starship Earth can fly in ship-shape, they are thinking about jettisoning the excess baggage, the dead weight of "marginal populations" (how gentler a term than "lesser breeds"). Why else are the American plutocrats more eager to build additional prisons than to recognize the human rights of black Americans to education, housing, and jobs?

Any black person in America can testify to the world that the African-American people are limited to housing in *de facto* prescribed areas/compounds of this country. This territory makes up less than five percent of the habitable real estate in this land that is your land, my land, the land of the free. Except in certain middle-size, middle-class liberal cities, any black Americans who venture to live outside these black compounds-in "white" territory (assuming a housing purchase or lease can be obtained)-subject themselves and their families to constant anxiety, for Uncle Sam condones this separatism, this apartheid, and the intimidation and violence needed to maintain it.

This is the American Reality that has given and will give rise to nationalist, separatist, and radical black organizations; this is what sparked in the Black Muslims that emotion that the sociologists and headline writers called in their first articles about the Nation of Islam: "The Hate That Hate Produced."

But before Elijah Muhammad formed the Black Muslim movement as a negation of Christianity, of the two-party straightjacket, and of the food, the music, and other mores of the self-styled Judeo-Christian America, no white sociologist looked at white racist America and wrote about: "The Hate That Produces Hate." And none has to this day. Yet it is the white skin/feature fetishism and psychosis that is the cancer rotting this nation at the bone; that is the root hatred. But the racially obsessed, from the Wall Streeters to John Doe, still point the accusing finger first at African-Americans, who are reacting to racist ignorance, insanity, and hatred as "the problem." Too many

European-Americans avoid looking in the mirror. A culture that entertains such terms as "mixed-race" children, of "mixed marriages," of "biracial" people, of "someone of a different race" (in scholarly circles, they now call it the "problem of the other") is sick in its heart and mind.

"DO THE OPPOSITE!"

I'm trying to convey the mystique of **Muhammad Speaks** here, so you, friend reader, can understand its popularity among blacks as well as the reasons why blacks keep their affinity with these sorts of doctrines private, or may even disavow them in public. And I want you to understand why, if you are young and white and perhaps studied the sixties and seventies in high school or college, or if you've read the many media rehashings of those days, you have never heard of **Muhammad Speaks**. I would paraphrase the appeal of **Muhammad Speaks** and other African-American nationalists to African peoples everywhere-including those who migrated long ago to India, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, as well as those in South, Central, and North America-in this way:

Look at the White power structure and White masses. The majority of them hate us. They don't want us to breed. They don't want us to read. They don't want us to act reserved and proud. They don't want us to unite and plan among ourselves. And they want us to love them in the name of Jesus Christ. That's a hell of a system to buck, and there are no guarantees of success in changing it. But there is one thing we can do that is likely to give us some leverage, and that is, DO THE OPPOSITE!

This is both an emotional and intellectual appeal, one that has had an impact on how black people analyze population control and other programs launched here and abroad by social engineers-including those Mr. Muhammad called the "mentally dead Negro"-that is, the non-Muslim black. The objective of this do-the-opposite tactic (and like components of any mythological mode of thought, it has severe limitations) is not so much to make all black people shun birth control, or even pork flesh, for that matter, as it is to endow them with a central nervous warning system that can alert them to the genocidal aspects of so many of the experiences they will encounter, given the socioeconomic and political realities of American life and other coils of the World Serpent.

Nationalistic consciousness is not a be-all, end-all, but a prerequisite in "the world as it is." It arms the black individual against the media and academic and political establishment. It helps them "Do for self," another one of Mr. Muhammad's pithy slogans, one

that is much more healthy and positive than Jesse Jackson's pitiable moan out of an inferiority complex: "I may be black, **but** I am somebody."

(Speaking of phrase-making, Mr. Muhammad coined many terms that a scholar interested in the politics of psycholinguistics would find an illuminating subject of study. He advocated book-learning and study, but he warned of the Devil's "Tricknology"—the abuse of knowledge through trickery, especially trickery of a racist sort, such as the pseudo-theories on genetic racial intelligence. His essays in the centerspread of *Muhammad Speaks* were full of rhetorical wonders, such as this title of one of my favorites, about the psychology of the White Western Free World: "Disagreeable to Live with in Peace.")

When I joined *Muhammad Speaks*, there were no Muslims among the central writing crew in Chicago; we heard that Mr. Muhammad didn't want a second coming of Malcolm X, who had used the newspaper to increase his popularity within and outside the Nation at the expense of the movement's founder, the man who Malcolm had said "taught me everything." Malcolm had launched a magazine called *The Messenger* in 1960, and it was vastly better than two short-lived publications started a year earlier by other members of the Nation—the *Islamic News* and *Salaam*. Malcolm had written a column for the *Amsterdam News*, following a precedent set by Mr. Muhammad, who had published a column from time to time in many African-American newspapers for the previous dozen or so years. (Publishers of these papers found their circulations rose dramatically **when the Messenger's** column ran because Muslims bought all available copies and resold them, at no mark-up, to disseminate their faith. Mr. Muhammad probably saved or prolonged the life of many a black newspaper, although white advertisers and politicians occasionally succeeded in intimidating the black publishers into dropping the column because of its vilification of "the Devil.")

In 1960, Malcolm got the green light from the Messenger to edit *Mr. Muhammad Speaks to the Blackman* in Harlem, where he headed the mosque. Soon the publication became simply *Muhammad Speak*. Malcolm was succeeded after a couple of years by Dan Burley, a veteran Chicago journalist, and the news offices moved to Chicago. Dick Durham took over around 1964.

By 1969, one might say that *Muhammad Speaks* **was** no longer a paper that fit the description of an unidentified critic quoted in R.E. Wolseley's *The Black Press, USA*: ["It is] a shallow publication playing upon racial feeling in such a way as to be nauseous even to some Muslims." Interesting, isn't it, how such critics, black or white, are so disturbed when African-Americans dare to "play upon" feelings of solidarity, of nationalistic identification and pride-feelings that are assumed to be natural and beneficial to other ethnic groups. I would say that if the paper indeed had been

narrow, not "shallow," for awhile, it had improved considerably before I got there. Nauseating we might still be, but not to anyone whose stomachs we had any regard for.

No CIGGIES, No PORK

By 1969, the Nation was solvent enough to buy its own 4-color press and a plant to hold it and the editorial offices on 23rd Street, and we moved from our storefront office on 79th Street between State Street and Cottage Grove into the new building just south of the Loop.

Before the move, no meal was sweeter for us half-dozen or so "mentally dead" (Mr. Muhammad's term for black non-Muslims) staffers than to spend an afternoon chewing through a heap of barbecued pork spareribs hidden in our desk drawers to escape visual detection by Muslim visitors. We complied with the ban on alcoholic beverages, however, and with other prohibitions, such as curbing profanity around the Muslims and especially avoiding "loose talk" around Muslim women. Anyone who has labored under any authoritarian-cum-puritanical party, church, or boss will easily understand how good forbidden hog tasted under these circumstances. The smokers, however, didn't compromise. The little office was as hazy as any other newspaper room back in those days when the Marlboro Man still meant something.

But with the move to the new plant came direct surveillance by the Fruit of Islam—the Nation's semi-military fraternity to which all men belonged (the women were in the Muslim Girls Training Corps, or MGTC, as it was usually known) and by all of the other Muslims, who were trained to keep a vigilant eye on everyone and everything happening around them at all times. For the mentally dead, this meant no more pig flesh on the property, a prohibition all of us could adjust to since we could still work the afternoon with plenty of ribs inside us **from** lunches in local soulfood restaurants. But no more smoking? This was the ban that unexpectedly propelled me after only a few months on the job into the editor-in-chiefs spot. Marlboro Men were not to be fenced in back then!

Cigarette puffs must be included among the ill winds that can blow some minimal good. At least it worked that way for me. The smoking ban riled our chief, Dick Durham, and the three top editor-writers who had seniority over me. Another irritant was the psychological atmosphere: Being spied on, and being glared at as if one were hopelessly fallen, are among unsung sources of the blues. I didn't like having to be so cautious any more than my colleagues. I spent considerable time in sophomoric debates with Muslim co-workers about devils, and grafted races, pork, and so on. They had received readings from many sources that supported their views and did a lot of side reading

on their own. They had excellent memories and were good arguers, and in puritanical movements, bull sessions become a chief form of the devotees' entertainment.

I think the Lost-Found, as the Muslims called themselves, enjoyed getting a chance to hear someone voice so many views counter to their orthodoxy-not that they all had only one line of talk or analysis, for they were individualistic within the orthodoxy and entertained a full range of views from left to right. They knew I didn't claim that my views were better, that I wasn't biased against them individually or collectively, that I shared some of their critiques of American society, and that I admired the achievements of their organization in rehabilitating prisoners, building a successful economic complex, stressing literacy and high education, and introducing new ground to the debate on "race" with those whites who proclaimed or exhibited white **supremacism**.]

So I was working and gabbing, digging the scene, while my colleagues were laying escape plans. After a month or so in the new plant Durham surprised me one day by saying he'd been granted an indefinite leave from the chief editorship for reasons of health (and he did have a bad heart, which brought his premature death). Bossette, Landry, and Casimere-the veterans-insisted to management that they be free to smoke at their desks, or else they'd go work someplace where tobacco was honored. The Muslims said walk. They walked. That left me. The last one in the pool. I just wasn't a heavy enough smoker to be motivated to hunt for a new job, always an unpleasant experience.

INTO THE LION'S DEN

I functioned as editor for a week or so, and then in the spring of '69 some top aides of the Messenger said he wanted to see me. Durham and one or two of the Muhammad's sons and sons-in-law, the National Secretary, and the Captain of the Fruit of Islam accompanied me to the Messenger's home. After several minutes of pleasant chatting about how we were kicking one side of the Devil's rear end with the newspaper while Allah was kicking the other side with tornadoes, droughts, avalanches, and other natural disasters, Mr. Muhammad said, "Well, I understand we are getting a new chief editor. Now who might that be?"

I remembered my earlier premature statement of employment and remained silent. He looked at me and said, "Why aren't you speaking up, Brother Editor? This is the den where lions roar." I said I would be proud to serve as editor-in-chief and thought I could handle the job quite well. The main qualification for the post, Mr. Muhammad said, repeating his admonition from my hiring-in day, was "to tell the truth and

to fight for freedom, justice, and equality for the black man and woman."

He said he'd decided to start publishing a 16-page insert "advertising" the Nation of Islam. The Nation would also continue to take up four or so news pages with religious essays and the Messenger's centerspread column. I was to see that these were typeset accurately, with no spelling or grammatical errors. An error of any kind in the Messenger's column would bring immediate dismissal to the editor and anyone else found responsible. The rest of the 28 or so pages were to be filled with coverage of the Black World (which was, by doctrine, the Whole World) as I saw fit. What I saw fit was fit to print.

I made few changes in the regimen set by my predecessors. I used more freelance correspondents, including those from the Nation of Islam, to increase on-the-spot reporting of the struggles in the American cities. I also began to hire members of the Nation as staff writers, a move that Mr. Muhammad never objected to and which the rank-and-file greatly approved. It didn't make sense to me to have a non-Muslim caste of writers and a Muslim crew of typesetters, keyliners, layout people, and pressmen, Diane Nash Bevel, the civil rights heroine of SNCC days, and anon-smoker, continued as librarian, as well as a source of wisdom and courage and information. Lonnie Kashif was our Washington correspondent; Joe Walker remained in New York.

Many of the former freelancers are still writing today; some are still presenting themselves as former full-time staff members or editors of **Muhammad Speaks**, and getting jobs via this exaggeration. I point this out only to indicate the newspaper's strong reputation at home and abroad in the African states, among African peoples in other lands, and among other resurgent peoples of the Earth.

Muhammad Speaks' circulation rose to 650,000 copies a week during my three years as editor-in-chief. We were widely known on college campuses, military bases, prisons, and in the neighborhoods, marketplaces, and transportation centers where the street salesmen hawked it. The Muslim men had to buy the papers at a discounted price, and therefore were strongly motivated to sell it for 25 cents. Some felt coerced, far more seemed motivated by zeal and a drive to augment their incomes, which were hardly conflicting motives to the highly Calvinistic Muslims. These salesmen were a significant force behind our mighty circulation. In addition, almost every leader of every liberation group or progressive Third World country subscribed to **Muhammad Speaks** in those years.

The Muslims didn't like European-American **leftist** hippies or African-American radicals very much (in fact, Mr. Muhammad tried to dissuade the Black Panthers from taking the revolutionary-leftist course they chose), but I covered some of these groups more often and more sympathetically than had been the case

previously. We subscribed to the Liberation News Service (LNS), used many of its international stories and graphics, and published its credit. I chatted with some of the LNS folks by phone from time to time, especially Alan Howard, and felt that on some fronts we were comrades in arms, using the weapon of the pen. We also had good ties with the Venceremos Brigade movement, with various offshoots of the socialist movement-for it was the biggest and strongest foe of the racist establishment-and with black, Africanist, and Third World groups of all kinds except two: Bible-thumping preacher-hustlers and mean-spirited ultra-nationalists, virtually all of whom fall into two of three categories: screwball reverse-racists, police informers, or agents-provocateurs (see sidebar 2).

There were countless satisfactions on the job, from relatively personal ones like helping Ladelel McBride, a soldier from my hometown of Benton Harbor, Michigan, avoid being swept into combat in Vietnam despite his debilitating back injury; to publicizing the research of Dr. Tom Brewer of San Francisco about the increase in low-birth-weight babies in the African-American community. Dr. Brewer showed that inadequate prenatal and infant care was so widespread and systemic that the fatal results smacked of genocide, and in fact should be pursued as such under the UN Treaty Against Genocide.

Many world leaders visited our offices, including Oliver Tambo of the African National Congress of South Africa; Shirley Graham, the widow of W.E.B. DuBois and a powerful thinker and freedom fighter in her own right; and Sam Nujoma, the South West African People's Organization leader who returned from exile in September 1989 to head Namibia's government. We also got suspicious visitors. Once a guy called me up and said he and some fellow Nebraska wheat farmers were in town on business and wanted to talk about the diet articles in *Muhammad Speaks*. When they arrived-five well-fed men with flat-top haircuts and clad in conservative suits-they opened up on a different topic: Did I really think that giving Ritalin to unruly black schoolchildren was making them hyperactive?

Soon the conversation shifted to questions about my views on the economy and whether they squared with Elijah Muhammad's. And what about Mr. Muhammad, what was he like, they wondered. Did I find him intelligent? Was he healthy? Was he senile? I still don't know who these visitors were, but I treated them as if they were really good, honest, curious Nebraska farmers. (I still like to believe they were, for their sake. It's possible.)

Another odd visitor was a young white man who'd been in Europe with a self-styled revolutionary group. He called to say he'd liked my editorial condemning Nixon's bombing of Cambodia (it was titled, "Those Who Wink at Murder Swim in Blood!") and wanted

to drop by to talk. Soon after sitting down in my office, he said he wanted to tell me about the Soviet-Chinese border dispute, so I'd know why I should condemn the Soviets. The TV clips showed Soviet troops turning water hoses on the Chinese to drive them back across the Amur River, he noted, neglecting to mention earlier Chinese assaults on Soviet-Asian farmers.

"You know what I couldn't help thinking?" he said in a patronizing tone, as if he were drawing a picture for a schoolchild. "I couldn't help thinking that the Russians were white, and they were turning hoses on a colored people-just *like Bull Conner did in Alabama.*"

He figured this was the right bait for someone in my position, but my experience with the Chinese-Soviet split over the Nigerian civil war had immunized me to color-coded political analysis. I told him, on the way to showing him the door, that, except for the usual lunatic fringe within any nationality, African-Americans had a more complicated outlook on international affairs than he gave us credit for. I was never surprised in the following years to find the Chinese government praising Pinochet in Chile, funding the CIA-supported black traitor-guerrillas in Angola and Mozambique, slipping support to the Nicaraguan Contras, and aiding and abetting the phony Pakistani-U.S. "holy war" against Afghanistan's Sandinista-type government.

(Today, a stratum of Chinese students-many of them trained by the U.S./NATO academic establishment-parade around as champions of liberty, but they have never criticized their government's repression of Tibet, its attacks on Vietnam, or its funding of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and other renegades and mercenaries. The American scholars who assisted the Chinese "democratization" almost to a person do not support real Third World liberation movements, especially those of the Palestinians and Africans. I think the actions you take toward your own country's treatment of other peoples is the litmus test for the sincerity of your support of liberty and democracy.)

Muhammad Speaks staffers began to play an active role in all of the major black press conventions. I even went to the Alternative Press Convention in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that was attended mainly by the white radical and/or hippie press. The highlight of the meeting was looking out the window of the farmhouse in which we met and seeing Abbie Hoffman prancing nude in a glen with two naked young women.

Lots of toilers in the alternative media hoped that there might be a way to coordinate the journalism of the antiwar movement and campus with that of the Third World, anti-racist, and black liberation struggles in this country. Some link-ups took place, but in general the many divisions within the progressive movement-the American penchant for hyper-pluralism-made long-term coordination impossible.

Nevertheless, all of us in the alternative press seemed independently to have reached certain common

Sidebar 2: "Those Who Wink at Murder Swim in Blood"

by John Woodford

The wanton slaying of four Kent State college students in Ohio is simply the latest and therefore most dramatic sign that the world serpent of U.S. racist exploitation cannot replace its tentacles as fast as they are being hacked off.

The youths of this country are refusing to carry on the devilish work of desperate and dying U.S. leaders. Young people are rising up in the factories, on the campuses, within the cities, and out of the military force itself.

They are uniting across many ranks and they are shouting, "No, we will not accept the inheritance you leave us; we will not accept your blood money."

And as in all struggles both in the United States and around the world, it has been progressive Black people who have set the pace in the battle against the forces of genocide, hatred, and plunder.

The Kent State incident is the latest wave in a tide that also included the Fort Hood (Texas) mutiny and the armed assaults at Texas Southern University, South Carolina's Voorhees College and Pendleton (Ind.) Reformatory to name only a few of countless incidents where Black youths and men took principled stands against inhuman officials of the ruling racist elite.

Remember that at Fort Hood Black soldiers refused to accept guard duty that they saw could possibly find them ordered to shoot down their brothers and sisters in Chicago during the infamous Democratic Convention of August 1968.

It was unfortunate for the dead and wounded Kent State students that the virtually lily-white Ohio National Guard did not have among it young men of equal human compassion.

But the National Guard, as all know, is made up of privileged, well-to-do, glorified draft dodgers who are permitted to serve their military duty without exposure to the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai liberation fighters.

Cannon fodder from the wage-earning and underemployed classes are ordered to fight in a war in which the National Guard types have all the economic interest but none of the military risks.

For those who have been tricked into calling for an end to the draft and the beginning of a volunteer army, consider this: the frenzied and mercenary reaction of the

National Guard of Ohio is what you will see more of if the government builds a volunteer army.

The drafted army expresses more clearly the will of the people. And the will of the people is to lay down the arms that Wall Street financiers and military-industrial monopolists forced them, through hireling politicians, to pick up.

Black people have usually been killed by vigilante forces-Klansmen and other scum who murder while the "lawmen" look the other way.

But at Texas Southern, Voorhees College, and Pendleton Reformatory, Blacks, too, were confronted by deputized forces of repression. And the National Guard has frequently gunned down Black people in many cities where mass protests against poverty, war, and racism gave way to uncontrollable frustration and rage.

The remarks by the president and the vice president following the Kent State killings indicate that those who now rule welcome uncontrollable protests and the police state atmosphere that follows them.

Both men assumed, as their statements show, that the Kent State protest against the illegal, inhuman use of violence in Cambodia was itself an example of "violent dissent" that necessitates "justifiable homicide."

But eyewitnesses say that the protests were nonviolent, that National Guardsmen were themselves the so-called "sniper." Like countless Black people before them, the four college students, two boys and two girls, were exercising their right to free assembly to protest unconstitutional genocidal actions of their government against Asians.

It remains to be seen whether those who wink at murder and swim in blood will be able to "justify" the slaughter of unarmed white youths as they have so many times in the past when the victims were civil rights workers, little girls in Sunday school, Vietnamese mothers and their babies, Arab schoolchildren, unarmed South African demonstrators, or a Black girl running playfully down a street in Omaha, Nebraska.

NOTE

1. From *Muhammad Speaks* 9, no. 35 (15 May 1970): 17.

opinions and to have formed common values. We all saw class oppression and racism as interlinked; we saw dog-eat-dog individualism and racism as interlinked. We saw the joblessness, hunger, military aggressiveness, criminal activity, high infant mortality, and poor education that plagued so many Americans as systemic problems. And we saw how the U.S. mass media goes to any lengths to avoid describing America's problems as systemic. Only the pressing problems of the socialist countries-stifling cultural systems, low productivity, bureaucratic parasites, inability to put scientific and technological innovations into practice-were (or are) described as systemic in our mass-marketing media.

Too MANY WHITES?

A few high-ranking Muslims began to hint to me that some Muslims felt I had too many pictures of whites in the paper. In fact, only two or three such photos were likely to appear, I said, and besides, I wasn't the one who'd put Nixon on the cover as they had required after his first inauguration! They also complained that I published too many stories that seemed to support socialism and communism. Some objected when I editorialized that, rather than wait for a separate state before they developed political savvy, Muslims ought to register and vote so they'd gain

experience in how to fight for freedom, justice, and equality through political action.

College organizations invited **me** to speak periodically and, when I did, the question of Muslim and black nationalist views on marriage often arose. The **separatists** didn't like my position on this question, which was: Anyone who wants to tell you whom you should or shouldn't marry can't be sincerely interested in your freedom. I argued that black and white separatists shared the same mental impairment, the belief that white women have the sexual power to "undo" the black man. Staking out some women as "our" women is the refuge of men who fear both their own impotence and the rejection of women.

Another issue over which I bumped against the Nation of Islam's dogma was Bangladesh. My support of the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan irritated them. They told me **W.D. Farad** (a.k.a. **Fard Muhammad**), the traveling salesman who, as an incarnation of Allah, designated **Elijah Poole** as his Messenger, renamed him, and inspired him to found the Nation of Islam in the early **1930s**, had been a Pakistani. They implied that a Pakistani group regularly donated money to the Nation. As for Bangladesh, it was backed by Indian Hindus, and so on in the usual litany of religious bigotry. I told them that being an Islamic theocratic state did not give a government the right to oppress a minority or to commit genocide. Let the champions of Pakistan send letters to the editor pointing out anything untruthful in our coverage, I added. I always came out of such encounters O.K. because none of the Muslim leaders was in a position to risk the Messenger's wrath and suspicion by attacking me to him. His vigor was my shield.

And then there was Israel. I consider Zionism to be an ideology highly infected with racism, as have many **anti-zionist** Jews. I oppose the existence of a racist-exclusivist state like Israel, just as I oppose a racist-exclusivist South **Africa**, or an exclusivist Islamic state, as so many Muslim-majority states are. I knew, however, that many Muslims were vulnerable to a lot of Jew-baiting propaganda, from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to neo-Nazi propaganda. I made sure that any hatemongering anti-Jewish statements, bigoted stereotypes, and references to Jewish "conspiracies" or presumably inherited Jewish traits were stricken from any copy I received.

I did and do not include as impermissible or biased those inquiries that objectively examine certain actions of the Jewish-American elite or of Israeli Zionists. My journalistic code has always boiled down to "What's good for the goose is good for the gander," so my policy was, "We will treat the Jews for what they are—people like all other people, innately no better and no worse." The main issue, however, is that such analysis and discourse should never be carried out as **a means** to foster hate, divisiveness, vengefulness, or arrogance. No one should whip up animosity in one

nationality against another, for such passions represent the foulest depths of the human personality. The current vogue in some quarters of inviting obscure, **headline-**seeking black hustlers to college campuses to incite hatred among African-Americans against Jews is a symptom of a sick and repulsive mindset. This **mindset**, however, is an effect—not the cause—of the racism in society at large, and, although I don't share it, I advise Jews and whites to make a more open, vigorous, sincere, and **SUCCESSFUL** fight against American racism before they publicly demand that **African-**American leaders "prove themselves" by taking on bigots in the black community.

For my part, I tried to ensure that **Muhammad Speaks** did not imply that Jews had a worse record in relationships with the African peoples than did Latinos, Asians, West/Central/East/Southern Europeans, or Arabs. I pointed out to the Black Muslims that it would be especially hypocritical for them to smear Jews, for I had seen Jewish-American businessmen in Mr. Muhammad's home. They were in an investment firm, the Wolverine Acceptance Corporation, that lent money to the Nation for many of its purchases of properties.

I also reminded Muslim Jew-baiters that it was the printing house of Lerner Newspapers in Chicago—Jewish-owned—that first printed **Muhammad Speaks** when it was launched in the early sixties under Malcolm X. Other printers had refused to print the "un-American" Muslim newspaper, but the Lerner's were a progressive family and felt that freedom of the press should mean the freedom to get in print what you had the money to put into print. They defied racist comments and threats of sabotage and took on the job. It probably cost the Lerner's many jobs over the years, and the Muslims didn't think the higher price the Lerner's charged was unfair, in view of the risk.

Still, a few Black Muslims and **non-Muslims** would occasionally toss out a "joke" about how I was soft on the Jews. They'd say it must be some **whammy** from Karl Marx or other Jewish communists. What a brotherhood there is beneath the skins of racists of diverse shades! who share the belief that hatred, discord, and rivalry are the "natural" conditions under which different peoples interact.

I held to what I considered as my principled stand on our treatment of Jews and other nationalities until mid-1971, when I went to Mongolia for 17 days with my wife to see how the economic results of Mongolia's "non-capitalist path of development" compared with the living standards of Third World countries that remained tied with the capitalist bloc.

Authoritarian single-party rule has caused many problems for the Mongolians, as it has for people in other left-wing or right-wing totalitarian states, but I found then and still believe that the Mongolians, and the Cubans, and the Vietnamese stand a better chance of overcoming **those problems** and **expanding democra-**cy with full stomachs, good educational systems, and

relatively full employment than they do in the debt- and crisis-ridden Third World countries dominated by the transnational monopolies and native profiteers.

My trip to Mongolia was as close to a vacation as I had during my four years at *Muhammad Speaks*—and it was definitely a working one, for I compiled three feature stories cum photos while there. Until this trip I had edited and rewritten every piece of copy, overseen the layout of every page, and stayed through the paste-up of every issue. In my absence two or three bigoted anti-Jewish statements had appeared in the newspaper, and at least one was immediately played up by the New York *Times*, via an Anti-Defamation League report, in an article about “Black Anti-Semitism.” I regretted that the *Times* had been given this ammo, and didn’t blame them or other Jewish-Americans for investigating these and similar statements by other African-Americans. But their approach to the subject was, and is, fundamentally unethical because they do not give similar attention to “Jewish Anti-Black Racism,” which, given the relative wealth of the two communities, has a far greater impact on society.

I did not see much of the Messenger over my last three years at the paper, though we did have some brief talks by telephone. Certain Muslim factions that vied to influence him and enrich themselves off him as he grew feeble didn’t want any outsiders around him. Still, I was able to follow his physical decline.

MALE PROBLEMS

The divisions were sharpening so much that one day the head of the Fruit of Islam was wounded slightly outside our plant in gunfire from an angry breakaway unit. During this period someone fired a rifle bullet through the office of his window; the shot came from a highway overpass about a half-mile away. The window was directly above mine, so it should have been obvious to the various rivals why I had no intention of getting into this internecine struggle by becoming a confidant of Allah’s Last Messenger.

A few mosques harbored a criminal network that I don’t think the Messenger ever knew about. Some older members of the Nation in various Southern cities used to write me about physical abuse of women in their temples or mosques, of beatings of men who objected to certain actions of these thugs and petty criminals, who seemed to operate with the approval of certain elements in a few mosques. Four representatives from a mosque in Florida came to my office to tell me they couldn’t make their way through Mr. Muhammad’s rings of aides to tell him their complaints. If the Messenger knew of their difficulties, they said, they were sure he’d straighten matters out as he had in the past, so would I please inform him of them? I

said I’d try if the opportunity arose, but that I doubted it would.

I received similar complaints from a few Muslim women who worked in the plant. The Nation, like most religious organizations, espoused and imposed a strongly patriarchal social order. As elsewhere, this ideology boiled down to condoning violence by husbands against wives.

The Muslim women had hoped that the Nation’s emphasis on family harmony and achievement would mean that they were less likely to be beaten by a Muslim husband than by a “mentally dead Negro” spouse. Maybe they were right, I don’t know. But there was wife-beating, nonetheless, and what galled the women who complained about it to me was that when they reported it to certain high-ranking men they had been laughed at.

“They told me that, because of the way the black man has been abused in the Devil’s society, I should understand how my husband might lose his temper easily,” a clerical worker told me. “They said I should take it ‘for the good of your man.’ And then in the next breath, they said that black women are like children, and the man has to discipline a child with a whipping. The truth is, most of the Muslim women are better educated than the men, and a lot of the men have been in prison, where they get conditioned to dishing out or taking physical abuse.”

One of my relatives joined the Nation of Islam during my years there (some of their recruits I label as “flip-outs,” and I’d say that, for a time, she fit that category), so I’ve learned more about male-female relationships and other aspects of Muslim customs than most outsiders. I remember how her 9-year old son was routinely punished in the Muslim cadre of boys—considering his age, tortured would not be an extreme word—because he had an assertive and independent spirit. Failure to follow some petty instruction or ritual could result in any one of several punishments—that-leave-no-telltale-marks common in the prisons that produced many Muslims, such as twisting limbs, squeezing fingers, and rapping the ribs (These same prisons are filled to bursting now, and what spills out of them in the coming days will make the unpleasant idiosyncracies of the Nation of Islam seem tame because the conditions are more crowded, jobs are scarcer, and the mood of the incarcerated is more coldly violent and vengeful than ever.)

I don’t wish to imply that petty crime, family violence, and hypocrisy were more serious problems within the Nation than outside it. But these violations of the utopian image of Islamic life did occur, and there was no mechanism for dealing with them under an autocratic system in which the autocrat was weakened by old age. One-man-rule and its corollary cult of the personality were two of several aspects of the Nation that seemed to assure its self-destruction once Allah’s Last Messenger had left the scene.

Very few Muslims would complain to an outsider, however, and I was of little help to those who confided in me. All I could do was to suggest that they quit the organization if they didn't like what was happening or unite with other critics to improve it from within. The problem with that advice, some said, was that they could be accused by their tormenters of being "hypocrites," and a hypocrite could be severely punished, even fatally.

With Mr. Muhammad's asthma and other ailments taking their toll on him, I remembered Dick Durham's advice: "When it's time to quit, it's better not to quit. It's better to be let go. If you quit, you may be accused of being an enemy. But if they push you out, then they are in control."

I didn't know where I wanted to work next, but I definitely knew I didn't want to be around when Mr. Muhammad died. I thought his followers might plunge into dangerous hysteria if he died unexpectedly (a fear widespread at the time, though it proved to be groundless). One day in 1972, the assistant editor, Leon Forrest, came into my office and said he had something confidential to report. A few top Muslims had come to him to say that our news content was contradicting the Muslim point of view. They were going to denounce me to the Messenger on the grounds that I had made sexual advances toward Muslim women and had stated that the Messenger was senile and a drug addict. Forrest said that Charles Warts, one of our poorest reporters at the time, would "verify" that I had made these statements about Mr. Muhammad at a luncheon. (Whether Warts was an FBI informer or just dim-witted I never learned; I do know that, only a few months earlier, I'd managed to get his brother some good, free legal assistance in Minneapolis, which prevented his expulsion from college.)

I remembered the fateful luncheon. It was months earlier, after Savior's Day, the annual February celebration of the birth of W.D. Farad, the twentieth-century incarnation of Allah, according to the Nation's tenets. All of the faithful from Muslim mosques throughout the land gathered in Chicago every Savior's Day. The best orators among the ministers would deliver powerful speeches. Then, as they awaited the appearance of the Messenger of Allah, the throng of twenty thousand or so would shout repeatedly in strict martial cadence, clapping and stomping their feet on the stressed syllables:

All praise

Is due to Allah

For the Honorable Elijah Muhammad!

The chant becomes hypnotic after the first five minutes-then goes on for another five or ten. The fervor of true belief manifested in the unity of sound and in the sight of uniformly gowned women and the lean, stern-looking, neatly dressed men could shake

the most irreligious soul. I wondered to myself if I would have been better off in some way if I had a mind that succumbed to the intoxications of religion. It was, as Mr. Muhammad intended it to be, a spiritual manifestation of Black Power.

A day or so after Savior's Day, we non-Muslim staffers were lunching in a local restaurant. I don't remember if it was Warts or someone else who said: "The Messenger had asthma so bad a few days before Savior's Day that he was wheezing with every sentence. Then he got up there, delivered that fiery speech, and stood up the whole time. How could he do **that**? Is he on drugs?"

I reminded them that as he began his speech Mr. Muhammad had said, "They told me I should deliver my talk to you from my seat, but my doctors have given me something that could make any man stand." I told them that I had had asthma as a boy, and that the Messenger might have received an injection of adrenalin, a common treatment for severe asthma, so if he was "on drugs," it was probably adrenalin.

Someone else commented, "The Messenger is looking so weak, I think he must be getting senile." I said I doubted that because no senile person could have given a speech that was so clearly improvised and yet well-fashioned, dotted with reminiscences from readings and from earlier incidents in his life, as Mr. Muhammad had on Savior's Day.

True, I had uttered the words "drug" and "senile" in statements about Mr. Muhammad, but I certainly had not used the terms in the way my accusers charged. As for the claim **that** I'd flirted with Muslim women, I never learned what that was about. I could guess only that one of the Muslim reporters knew that Sister Cleo, my secretary, had told me about beatings administered by her new husband. Nothing could make me believe that Sister Cleo would lie about our chats, most of which were about pleasant topics. We did laugh a lot, however, and that was probably enough to rile a certain variety of Muslim male, the ones with sexual hang-ups **that** made their jaws tight any time they saw a Muslim woman look happy in public, period, let alone in conversation with an infidel.

"I don't want to stab you in the back," Forrest told me after describing the planned steps in the coup. "So what do you want me to say? They want me to say I heard you make these statements, and I can become editor after you're gone. But if you want to fight it, you know I'll back you all the way."

I told Leon that, as far as the intrigue went, they could throw this Brer Rabbit right into the briar patch, but at the same time I resented being pushed out under false charges. I said I would deny the charges, and he needn't say anything one way or the other, because if the charges stuck my exit would flow as Durham had advised. I would be the rejectee and not the rejector.

Word came to me the next day from one of the top officials that I was hereby suspended on the charges

Leon had cited until my "trial" at the Messenger's house, where I could defend myself. Meanwhile, he advised, I would be wise to look for other work.

"If You WERE A GOOD EDITOR..."

Two weeks later—during which time I'd begun talking with the **Chicago Sun-Zimes-I** went to the Messenger's home for the last time. He looked unwell (though he was to hang on for three more years). "Well, Brother Editor," Mr. Muhammad began, "they've made some serious charges against you." Then he instructed an aide to describe the allegations briefly.

"All I can say, sir," I replied, "is that all three charges are false. I can explain my statements. And as to the accusation that I flirted with the sisters, I don't know which sisters I'm accused of doing what with or when I was supposed to have done it."

He said, "You have worked very well and faithfully for me." He paused, gave me one of his stony, piercing stares, then delivered a typically succinct, commonsense lesson on How To Manage People: "Brother Editor, if you were being a good editor the way you should, no one would be able to bring charges like this against you. You shouldn't be eating with these people who work for you. You shouldn't be laughing with our women. I'm going to have to suspend you until such time as I look into this further. "

"Yes, sir," I said, silently recognizing my constitutional inability to profit from such advice.

So here was I, facing trumped-up charges just as H. Rap Brown had done in Louisiana when his predicament had altered his career and sent it careening toward the Nation of Islam. I could have quibbled with the Messenger. After all, hadn't he himself been accused by Malcolm X in 1964 of hanky-panky with several Muslim women? Hadn't others more recently claimed that he sired several children with several of the young women working in his house? Did an accusation prove guilt? But this was hardly a time even to think about quibbling. It was, in fact, one of the few times I've kept my mouth shut when that was the wiser course. Besides, I had no hard feelings. Mr. Muhammad had certainly been an honorable employer to me. It was his press, after all, and yet for four years he had let me feel as free as the man who owns one.

POSTSCRIPT

Muhammad Speaks withered away in the months following Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975. Wallace Muhammad, the son who inherited Elijah's religious leadership, changed the paper to **The Bilalian News** (named for **Bilal**, an African who was one of the first prophet Muhammad's top disciples), a newspaper which faded away over the next three or four years.

A schism took place that saw one branch of the Black Muslims leave Wallace (**Warith-Deen**) to follow Minister Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan founded in the mid-eighties **The Final Call**, a weekly newspaper that is published in Chicago and distributed to most major cities. Farrakhan's newspaper is not a clone of **Muhammad Speaks**, but of all the would-be successors it most closely resembles the original. Farrakhan attracts a lot of publicity with his remarks that appear to be designed to whip up hostility against Jews. I met Farrakhan several times in my **Muhammad Speaks** days and, although I don't know him well enough to identify the motives behind his controversial statements, I do feel that his portrayal as some sort of monster is simplistic. I think he is practicing, quite sincerely, an eye-for-an-eye/tooth-for-a-tooth brand of ethnic relations that he was not the first to invent.

Like Meir Kahane of the Jewish Defense League and many extreme nationalists the world over, **Farrakhan** has a lot of raw courage. When he headed the New York temple of the Nation in the late sixties, Farrakhan and three or four of his aides held off the New York police when they attempted an illegal, provocative raid of the religious buildings. And he and the Black Muslims did so without weapons. Eyewitnesses reported to me that the Muslims' obvious willingness to die in unarmed singlehanded combat with the police seemed to stun the police into halting their action. A similar incident occurred in New Orleans in 1971, although Farrakhan wasn't present at that time. Unarmed Muslims confronted armed mad-dog police and even disarmed them despite taking several gunshot wounds.

Farrakhan's approach to me seems to be: "We didn't invent racism or the notion that this is a **dog-eat-dog** world with a hierarchy of nations that operate under the rule the devil take the hindmost. But if that is the world as our foes see it, then Africans, **African-Americans**, and other people holding the short end of the stick had better unite and come up with the intellectual, political, military, and any other kind of where-withal required to protect their people and enhance their chances of holding the big end of the stick."

If my family or I were under any threat of violence, and I was in a position to turn to Farrakhan or Jesse Jackson or any other black leader for help, I would choose Farrakhan. I think a lot of black people who are under many kinds of threats to their existence more concrete than any I face feel the same way.

After working for the **Chicago Sun-Tunes**, I moved to the New **York Times** as a copy editor on the national desk. I have since pursued public relations journalism at Ford Motor Company, worked as an editor and writer for the **Ann Arbor** (Michigan) **Observer**, taught writing and African fiction, and served as executive editor of **Michigan Today**, a 300,000-circulation tabloid published by the University of Michigan.