

Disturbing the Sound of Silence about Louis Farrakhan

by Michael Curtis



Silence may be the perfect herald of joy but sometimes has unfortunate consequences. Sir Thomas More, 16th century lawyer and Lord High Chancellor of England in 1532 refused to approve the decision of King Henry VIII to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon, but as a result was tried for high treason and executed. In the play *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt, based on this issue, the question of the interpretation of silence is disputed. The prosecution asserted that More's silence on the King's action meant denial. More replied that the maxim of the law is "Silence gives consent." Therefore, "You must construe that I consented."

This principle is pertinent to the silence, the selective lack of global outrage, by the media and particularly by so called humanitarian groups and individuals, such as the American Friends Service Committee, very active in the boycott against

the State of Israel, concerning the atrocities committed around the world in recent years. A few examples illustrate the astonishing silence about events in Nigeria, Indonesia, Syria, and Myanmar, among so many others.

In the United States the silence is deafening on the part of the media and Twitter concerning members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and others tolerant of or not critical of the raucous bigoted rhetoric of Louis Farrakhan (once Louis Walcott and Louis X), the African-American activist who has been leader of the religious group, Nation of Islam (NOI) since 1975 after considerable infighting within the organization. Its current membership is said to be 50,000.

As a young man Farrakhan had played the violin, recorded calypso music as "The Charmer," before being influenced by Elijah Muhammad and his Nation of Islam in 1955. At that time he informed the world that the original humans were black and God, who was black, created them.

Farrakhan's unreserved stormy rhetoric and his activism for forty years have drawn large audiences and support including a \$5 million loan and gift from Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. He organized the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. on October 16, 1995, the largest gathering to that point of African-Americans. His speech on that day can politely be described as "remarkable" when he commented on the statue of Abraham Lincoln in Washington which is 555 feet high. When you add the number "1" in front of it you get 1555 and that is the year "our first fathers landed on the shores of Jamestown, VA, as slaves."

Irrespective of this inaccurate historical commentary, Farrakhan is best known for his non stop attacks from the beginning of his career until today on the worst enemy of blacks and African-American advancement. In speech after speech he has denounced the Jews, people of "a dirty religion," who appear to be in his eyes the dominant group in

life. Only a small sampling of his rants is necessary to make the point. In Chicago on February 25, 1990 he denounced the Jews, a small handful, who have control over the "movement of this nation," and have a stranglehold on Congress. They are responsible, he wrote in a message on June 24, 2010 to the Southern Poverty Law Center, for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, plantation slavery, Jim Crow, sharecropping, and the condition of "our people."

His most recent announcements were at the NOI's annual Saviour's Day convention in a large arena in Chicago on February 25, 2018, where he delivered a three hour speech, and on Twitter on March 7, 2018 when he asserted that the FBI was the worst enemy of black advancement and the Jews have control over these agencies of government. In Chicago, he talked of Jews as the "Synagogue of Satan." Jews, we are informed, have chemically injected homosexuality in black men through marijuana.

His speech in Chicago will interest or amuse some international leaders, in the U.S., Russia, France, and the EU. According to Farrakhan, the people, part of that Synagogue of Satan, who are running Mexico are Mexican Jews, and the Jews also control Ukraine, France, Poland, and Germany. Of course, Jews who were the "mother and father of apartheid," also control, among other things, the U.S. government, Hollywood, as well as the FBI.

Farrakhan's tirades and prejudices have long been familiar, and been discounted by every rational person as over the line of acceptable political and social dialogue. What is disconcerting are two things: the refusal of members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the very people concerned with discrimination and bigotry, to condemn wholeheartedly or to dissociate themselves from Farrakhan's bigotry; and the almost universal absence of critical, explicit, candid commentary by most of the mainstream media on these failings.

Foremost in the CBC is Keith Ellison, the first Muslim to be elected to Congress, deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee, who as a young man was employed by the NOI for 18 months in 1995 in Minnesota, and who had links with NOI for a number of years though he falsely claimed to have never been a member. Later he said, he found the views of Farrakhan upsetting and unacceptable. Ellison has never made antisemitic remarks himself, and publicly disavowed NOI in 2006 and rejected bigoted and antisemitic ideas and statements, after having defended him against charges of racism.

Yet he has had some meetings with Farrakhan, though at first he denied them. One was a meeting after Hurricane Katrina at a church in New Orleans in 2005. Another was at a private dinner in New York for U.S. Muslim leaders hosted by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in 2013. A third was a private meeting, together with Rep. Andre Carson (D-Ind-7), the second Muslim elected to Congress, with Farrakhan in his hotel suite in 2016.

Rep. Carson replied to critics who called for his resignation over his ties to Farrakhan by saying that the "outcry" over Farrakhan's recent antisemitic and racist remarks by Jewish organizations had no "credibility with him." Instead, Carson called on the Republican Jewish Coalition to condemn Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli government for discrimination against Africans who he held are migrating, who are fleeing dictatorships, who are fleeing oppression.

Among other members of the Caucus are Rep. Danny Davis, D-Illinois, and Rep. Maxime Waters, D-Cal. Davis is reported to have said that Farrakhan is "an outstanding human being." However, his position is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, he said he rejected, condemned, and opposed Farrakhan's views on the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. Yet earlier, he remarked that Farrakhan's position on the so-called "Jewish question" did not bother him.

Waters has decided views on some issues but seems to be silent or suffer from lack of memory on other questions. On January 12, 2018 she termed President Donald Trump a racist, a dangerous, disturbed, deceitful man. However, she was silent when at a California convention in 2002, Farrakhan defended Palestinian suicide bombers who made themselves a weapon against Israel. At that meeting Farrakhan applauded her presence, calling her "our great congresswoman from this area." She refused requests to comment on the speech. Waters, together with some other black leaders, met after Hurricane Katrina, in New Orleans in 2005. When asked about this meeting, her secretary said "She was traveling and unable to answer."

One particularly disconcerting aspect of these recent events is the tolerance and apparent support of Farrakhan by women associated with the Women's March, the co-leader Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez, and Linda Sarsour. By their behavior they have disgraced the principles of the women's movement. Mallory, a Christian black community activist, who identifies herself as a "strong black woman," attended the 2018 Chicago rally and calls Farrakhan the greatest of all time. She explains that the black community is very complex. She condemns antisemitism and racism, but has not explicitly condemned Farrakhan. Should we expect her to do so? The answer is that a woman who calls herself a progressive leader and refuses to condemn the antisemitic Farrakhan is hypocritical.

Perez posted a video of herself watching a Farrakhan speech in 2016 when he spoke of "truth to power," thus apparently justifying him. She pointed out a need to understand the significant contributions people, like Farrakhan, have made to black and brown people. There are, she said, no perfect leaders. Linda Sarsour, a Muslim Palestinian-American activist, is proud of her speech at a 2015 rally organized by Farrakhan. She declared that "the same people who justify the massacres of the Palestinian people are the same people who

justify the murder of young black men and women.”

One final note, rather intriguing, resulting from the inquiry into the Congressional Black Caucus. Farrakhan had remarked that Barack Obama was the first Jewish president, the people who selected him were rich, powerful members of the Jewish community. However, a photo taken in 2005 was recently made public for the first time of then Senator Barack Obama meeting with Farrakhan. The photographer said he had suppressed its publication at the request of an unnamed member of the Caucus.

Farrakhan long ago crossed the line of acceptable dialogue. What is very troubling is that the current members of the Congressional Black Caucus do not appear to have publicly condemned, systematically or otherwise, his bigotry against Jews. Remembering Thomas More, is silence consent? The CBC should come face to face with their past actions and confess and renounce any past ties to Farrakhan, or any tolerance of his bigotry. In addition, the mainstream media by its silence should not exemplify “hello darkness, my old friend.”