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COVER STORY

MINISTER LOUIS His Relationship With

FARRAKHAN Sets The Record Straight About MALCOLM X

By CLARENCE WALDRON
PHOTOS BY JAMES MITCHELL

Minister Louis Farrakhan loves to talk about his great friend and mentor, the late leader Malcolm X.

They shared a very close friendship that became complicated as the years went by.

The subject of their relationship remains one of the most talked-about and misunderstood relationships in modern Black history.

And Farrakhan believes a recent joint interview he did with Malcolm X's eldest daughter, Attallah Shabazz, on "60 Minutes" has renewed that misunderstanding and added fuel to that fire.

Farrakhan and many of his supporters believe the interview was edited in such a way to give viewers the impression that Farrakhan had a role in Malcolm's death by words he wrote in the Nation of Islam's newspaper, Muhammad Speaks, years ago. In fact, some newspapers ran stories about the "60 Minutes" interview with headlines like "Farrakhan Admits Role In Malcolm's Death."

Malcolm X was gunned down by three members of the Nation of Islam as he gave a speech at Harlem's Audubon Ballroom on Feb. 21, 1965. The three men were convicted in the slaying.



▲ The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam, recalls his close friendship with the late leader Malcolm X during an interview at his Chicago home. "He was my mentor, my teacher, a marvelous example to me of what a man should be," Farrakhan says.

On a recent morning, Farrakhan opened up his Chicago home—and his heart—as he talked passionately to JET about Malcolm X and set the record straight about their relationship.

Farrakhan was frank and candid throughout the interview. What was supposed to have been the standard 30-minute interview easily lasted more than an hour. It was a no-holds-barred interview. Farrakhan did not

hold back and was forthright in all of his answers. He answered all questions—no matter how painful, no matter how personal.

"He was my mentor, my teacher, a marvelous example to me of what a man should be," Farrakhan says of Malcolm X.

"He was straightforward," he continues. "Honest, disciplined, courageous, all those wonderful things that I thought I would like to see in myself



▲ During a recent interview on CBS-TV's "60 Minutes," Farrakhan and Malcolm X's eldest daughter, Attallah Shabazz, talk with the news show's co-host Mike Wallace outside Farrakhan's home in Phoenix, AZ.

and in others."

Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam, says his love for Malcolm X stemmed from Malcolm's love and care for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, former leader of the Nation of Islam.

"I loved Elijah Muhammad with a love that I can't adequately describe. Because as a youngster I longed to see the Black man free and I longed to see anyone stand up for us. When I saw and heard Elijah Muhammad, I saw the man that my soul had longed for. So I fell in love with Malcolm because to me, he was the greatest helper of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. He was the most articulate, he was the best organizer. He was the most disciplined advocate. So

I loved him for that. And I was willing to give my life at any time to protect the life of a man who I felt and believed was so important to the message and the mission of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad."

Farrakhan's friendship with Malcolm X changed when Malcolm X revealed to the national press that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, then the leader of the Nation of Islam, had extramarital affairs. Farrakhan says what angered him was that Malcolm did not stand by Muhammad and "refused to defend his teacher, but opened him up to slander and ridicule."

Farrakhan was angry with Malcolm for revealing such allegations about Muhammad's personal life and

a bitter feud ensued.

The "60 Minutes" interview was four hours long, but less than 10 minutes was shown, Farrakhan says. Farrakhan believes if the public is ever given a chance to see the entire four hours, they would understand his position.

He said the joint interview with Ms. Shabazz was an effort to form a public reconciliation with Malcolm's family. Shabazz is a friend of "60 Minutes" co-host Mike Wallace and asked Farrakhan to join her on the news show.

Shabazz's mother, Dr. Betty Shabazz, who died in 1997, had publicly accused Farrakhan of a role in Malcolm X's murder. She reconciled with him after her daughter Qubilah was charged in 1994 with plotting to hire a hitman to kill him. The charges were later dropped.

After Farrakhan saw the "60 Minutes" piece he came to believe that "60 Minutes" co-host Mike Wallace's "aim was not to foster the process of atonement and reconciliation started by Dr. Betty Shabazz and myself." He feels the show's intent was "to show Farrakhan as the instigator behind

the tragic assassination of Brother Malcolm and that was what disturbed me about the whole piece. The way they edited our words, not Ms. Shabazz's words, so much, but mine."

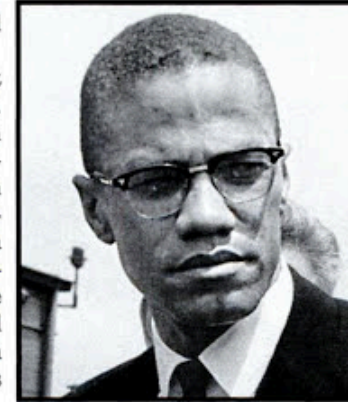
He adds, "It seemed to me that he

(Wallace) wanted the American public and the world public to see me in my remorse over words that I had written or spoken that might have contributed to the atmosphere or did contribute to the atmosphere that may have caused his (Malcolm's) untimely demise. Not that I regret saying what I believed to be the truth, but I regret anything that I might have written or spoken that could

have been used in a way to help to foster that atmosphere out of which came the loss of life of Brother Malcolm."

He maintains, "So I believed Mr. Wallace wanted to use that posture of mine to indicate to his audience that I felt guilt for the murder of Brother Malcolm and I thought this was pretty vicious."

The comment that Farrakhan made that has received the most attention was written by Farrakhan in the Nation of Islam newspaper a



▲ Malcolm X was one of the most influential Black leaders of the '50s and '60s. He was assassinated February 21, 1965, during a speech in Harlem, NY. He would have celebrated his 75th birthday on May 19.

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year before Malcolm's assassination.

He told JET: "I wrote something like: 'The die is set and Malcolm will not escape for the foolish talk he spoke against his benefactor, such a man, is worthy of death, and it would have been so, were it not for Muhammad's confidence that God would give him the victory over the enemies.'"

Farrakhan points out, "That's the whole sentence. Everyone stops where there is a comma, they put a period—'Malcolm's 'worthy of death.' But I said it would have been so were it not for Muhammad's confidence. So there was no threat against Minister Malcolm in those words. However, those who have used those words use half the sentence to fit their purpose, which, of course, I believe is to discredit me and the new Nation of Islam that has come up around me."

Farrakhan said, "I regret anything that I may have written or said that could have triggered or helped to create an atmosphere that caused



▲ During the revealing interview, Farrakhan opens up and shares his most personal thoughts about Malcolm X and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, his battle with prostate cancer and how his health concerns have changed him.

the life—the loss of life—of any human being, Malcolm in particular."

He believes it was a government conspiracy that ultimately led to Malcolm's assassination. "I, as a defender of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and other ministers as

defenders of his, spoke to and then criticized Brother Malcolm for what he did. He became disillusioned; he was hurt; he was angry, and what he knew of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's personal life, unfortunately, he felt a need to bring it out in the public. And in bringing it out in the public, the forces were

already at work inside the Nation of Islam, the forces that already were at work in the government of the United States, the FBI and the CIA. There's the atmosphere, the FBI sitting back, the police department sitting back. They had agents on both sides, fostering the division—Malcolm X is assassinated. So, Malcolm initiated the process that created the

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atmosphere into which I spoke, feeding the atmosphere that ultimately led to Brother Malcolm's death and that's the absolute truth."

He maintains that the White press in general likes to pit one Black against the other to stir controversy and division. The media often builds a Black person up to tear him down, he believes. "I was never named in the early years as having anything to do with the assassination of Malcolm. I was a non-player. I was just Louis X back then."

He notes, however, "But when I re-introduced the Nation of Islam, and began to host meetings in cities and thousands and thousands of people come out. And now I call for a million Black men and nearly 2 million show up, then this is a dangerous fellow here. But we don't have any Black man living that we can put up against him who will garner the support of the public. So what do you do? You raise my brother (Malcolm) from the grave. My brother can't talk now

for himself. Then you say, 'Farrakhan did it.' So the young Blacks in the 'hood will say, 'Ah, man I was digging Farrakhan. Now I come to find out that he's the man who took away our hero.'

"What is the intention of this?"

That perhaps one of these with a gun in their hand might want to avenge the death of Malcolm X, so they will use Brother Malcolm to kill Brother Farrakhan and then the Nation will be gone, and the spokesperson for the hurt of Black people will be gone."

Farrakhan says he is optimistic that the tension

between his family and Malcolm X's family will be eased and understood.

"Yes, I am optimistic, and Miss Shabazz and I are optimistic. We must be optimistic about healing wounds and rectifying differences in our families. We are embarking on a Million Family March October 16 this year—five years after the Million Man March. And we have tied it to a national agenda."



▲ Farrakhan, who organized and led the historic Million Man March, has announced that he is organizing a Million Family March on Oct. 16, 2000, in Washington, D.C.

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He has drafted a family bill of rights which in part calls for families to have the right to a decent income, to live in safe, crime-free communities, and have access to quality health care.

"I am hoping that in this year of the family we will go into our families and reconcile differences. If someone has a difference with their mom, dad, their uncle, their cousin, their wife, their husband, children, with one another, go to that party and tell them why, give them a chance to acknowledge their wrong; give them a chance to confess it openly."

He says there was some good that came out of the "60 Minutes" interview. "People saw Brother Farrakhan in a way they have never really seen me before. Some said this was a more powerful Farrakhan. Here he is doing what he preaches—atonement, reconciliation. I was not thinking about image in a piece like that. I was thinking about healing a wound. So I don't come across as the firebrand who is standing for the Black struggle. I come across as a

brother who loves his sister (Shabazz), a brother who was torn between two great men in his life."

Reflecting on Malcolm, Farrakhan says, "I believed that he died so I may live. That's why I will always honor and respect his life and his legacy. Because wherever I am today, I still



▲ Minister Farrakhan says he would like to be remembered "as a brother who loved his people."

owe it to God and I owe it to two men—the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X and of course, two very special women, my mother and my wife."

The JET interview was coincidentally conducted a day before what would have been Malcolm's 75th birthday (May 19).

Asked what would he say to Malcolm on his birthday, Farrakhan, 67, who does not formally celebrate birthdays, replied: "I would be so glad he was here. Maybe I would sit with him on his birthday and talk about the struggles of our people and map out some strategies," he smiles at the thought, "for the total liberation of our people."

Farrakhan has been battling prostate cancer in recent years and says his near-death experience with

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the illness has changed how he sees the world. "I am slowly and gradually recovering. I'm not completely recovered. There is no sign of cancer, but I am suffering from the after-effect of a very high dose of radiation. I am expecting by the grace of God that sometime this year or next that I will be completely healed by the effect of the radiation. I am getting stronger every day by the grace of God."

He admits, "I don't think any person who goes through a life-threatening situation or a trial of a great magnitude comes out the same. I am not the same man I was 35 years ago. And I hope that five years and 10 years from now, I'll be

a better man, a more mature man, a wiser man, a more humble man and a more spirited man to serve the good of my people and the good of humanity."

Asked how he would like to be remembered, he reveals, "I don't think about my legacy, if indeed, I have one. That is in the hands of God. But if I thought on it, I would like to be remembered as a brother who loved his people and did everything that I knew to fight for them, the liberation of our people. A brother who recognizes that we have shortcomings, we, in the struggle, have faults, and that he wanted to reconcile differences."

▼ The Honorable Louis Farrakhan relaxes at his Chicago home with his wife, Mother Khadijah Farrakhan. They will celebrate their 47th wedding anniversary on Sept. 12 and have 9 children, 31 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

