

## **Oct. 16: A Day of Reflection**

**By Sonsyrea Tate**

Saturday morning, I was delighted to see people pouring into the area around the reflecting pool outside the U.S. Capitol, showing up to support the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Million Man March. Billed also as the kick-off of a Millions More Movement, perhaps it would be more successful than I'd anticipated. I was looking on the bright side.

"At least we can see hundreds of Black people up early in the morning on TV," I said to a friend as I watched the gathering crowd and the early morning speakers on C-Span. "That's something I know we do, but we don't see that on sit-coms or in commercials," I added.

"So what? Who's standards are you measuring us by?" my friend said.

"Uh. Our ancestors. Our grandparents who got up at the crack of dawn," I said.

"I don't think so," he said. "But even if that was the case, just because they needed to get up at the crack of dawn - in the south - that doesn't mean that's what I have to do in New York. You know who you're really comparing us to. They got theirs who sleep late, too... I don't know why we keep measuring ourselves by everybody else's standards."

In the background, on the TV, renown economist Julianne Malveaux, who ten years stood staunchly against Louis Farrakhan and his march, was hosting the new day long program along with Radio One Talk Show host Mark Thompson. Councilman Marion Barry was introduced respectfully by his wife Cora Masters Barry, who did not appear estranged though a reportedly not together. Barry yelled something about telling Pharaoh to let his people go, a reference to District taxpayers beholden to federal taxes without a federal vote. He also spoke about the problems still plaguing our community – teen pregnancy and incarceration, among them. We have much work to do, he said.

"Man, you were in a hotel room with a prostitute, smoking crack. How you gon' tell me about morality?" my friend said.

"She wasn't a prostitute," I corrected. "She was an old friend. Rasheeda Moore. She was a long-time friend of his."

C-Span's coverage proceeded with a commercial break featuring Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" playing as a parade of photographs of great leaders flashed on the screen – Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali, Mark Clark, Elijah Muhammad, Martin Luther King, Jr., Kwame Toure, Huey P. Newton, Maurice Bishop, and Che Guevara.

On the TV screen, speakers returned with fiery insights, compelling facts and information, or simple loud rhetoric.

"It's the same thing. It ain't changed in God knows how long," my friend said.

To be sure, much has changed. Fiery protests and marches have afforded us access to better education, access to better resources, access to better jobs, enjoyment of basic and marvelous human rights and freedoms. Young African Americans vacation in the islands and party on week-long cruises now like never before. But the playing field is far from leveled, and many of us wonder, what do we do now to ensure better opportunities for ourselves and our offspring?

By noon Saturday, I was ready to roll out and head over to the March. As a journalist, a historian, I needed to record the event for myself - for future references. Shortly after my

arrival, I ran into an old classmate from the Nation of Islam's University of Islam. It was a blessed re-union. We chatted about our Nation days. Her conclusion of the fall-out is less intense than mine. "I'm not in the Nation of Islam anymore either," she said. "I look at myself like Malcolm, how he tried to evolve. You gotta keep growing, right?" She was not there to support Minister Farrakhan as much as she was there to support his promoting progress.

I didn't bother to stay for Farrakhan's message, pretty sure that it had not changed from ten and twenty – even 30 and 40 years ago. I could watch the rest on C-Span, I figured.

Sunday morning, I woke up mindful of some lyrics one of my uncles wrote some time ago. The lyrics had been on my mind all week: *They look but they don't see, hear, but they don't listen, speak but they don't say a word. Cry but they shed no tears, laugh, but they feel no joy, think but they don't understand. And me as I sit alone, watching these things go on, scream out my silent scream.*

I called Uncle Sabu, who had graduated from the University of Islam and taught there a while to ask him what had inspired his song. The song was never released to the public, but the lyrics were impressed in my memory. The lyrics became fresh again as momentum for the Millions More Movement built.

*Folks rip their children off; tell them of Santa Claus, mutilating innocent minds. Frustration dominates. Grow old and learn to hate, the future is a thing of the past. And me as I sit alone, watching these things go on, scream out my silent scream.*

"Oh, that was back in the 70s, the Disco era," Uncle Sabu explained Sunday morning. "Civil Rights weren't important anymore. Everything was a fashion statement. People were doing things without understanding them. There was general apathy among the people because we had been through so much." He still feels strongly about mass manipulation at marches.

"I went to the first Million Man March to pass out fliers about Islam, so Farrakhan wouldn't hi-jack the religion and use Islamic phrases to build himself up. I wanted to make sure people knew about Islam for real," he said.

Upon reflection Sunday morning, I realized why I've been turned off by the likes of Louis Farrakhan whooping and hollering from whatever platform a multitude of people helped them build. I am more likely to appreciate the messages of ministers like Imam Yusuf Saleem, who follows Elijah Muhammad's son, Warith Deen Muhammad's humble ministry, and Rev. Roy Settles, of the Ambassador Baptist Church, who keeps alive a quiet food ministry and a ministry of service in his southeast neighborhood. They are practical and humble, and I see the impact they make on individuals' lives daily.

I see them keeping their community clean and serving as best they could in many ways. Perhaps it takes the humble men and women in work clothes at the grassroots and the fiery folks dressed in flashy suits, shouting from mountaintops to make things move. Perhaps. I'll keep my eyes open.

E-mail Sonyrea Tate as [state@washingtoninformer.com](mailto:state@washingtoninformer.com).