

## History of The Millions More Movement

Written by David Muhammad ID1749  
Wednesday, 03 August 2005 11:24 -

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It has been nine years since Minister Louis Farrakhan hosted the largest demonstration ever in Washington, D.C., asking one million Black men to take charge of their own fate. Now, Minister Farrakhan has called for the Million Man March, part II, on the 10-year anniversary of the historic event.

The timing couldn't be better. The condition of many Black men in America is still dire, and the re-election of President George Bush has left many Blacks realizing that we must depend on ourselves, not the government, to better our condition.

Since that first march on Oct. 16, 1995, there have been Million Woman, Youth and Family marches, in addition to many other offshoots tapping into the popular name, like the Million Mom March and the recent Million Worker March.

We came to Washington on that fateful day, not to petition government for a civil rights bill or a handout, but to take responsibility for ourselves. The spirit of that day was like nothing I had ever experienced, or have experienced since. I marched down to the National Mall from my college campus with 5,000 other students. When I reached the stage area on the steps of the Capitol and looked out into a sea of Black men, many who stood for at least 10 hours, I held back tears. I knew this day would forever cause a change, if not in the world, certainly in me.

At the conclusion of the march, the throngs of men repeated a pledge given by Minister Farrakhan, to be responsible and active in improving ourselves and our community. After the march, I wrote an article explaining my commitment to take the pledge seriously. Since the march, I got married and have remained so. I have two daughters, and I direct a nonprofit that serves youth coming out of the juvenile justice system, nearly all of them young Black men.

Many of my friends were similarly moved by the Million Man March to come back home and make a change. One, a former pilot for United Airlines, came home and decided to start his own internet company—he currently runs one of the largest Black-owned internet service providers in the country. Another friend, a former classmate at Howard University, also decided to start his own firm, so he could spend more time with his family. He was an engineer for a Washington, D.C., energy company. Now, his own computer consulting business is thriving, along with his family.

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Many others across the country took the pledge given that day seriously. The men were asked to register to vote, join an organization, adopt a Black child. After the march, a reported 1.7 million Black males were added to the voter registration rolls. Organizational memberships skyrocketed—the NAACP, churches and mosques reported huge increases after the march. The adoption of Black children increased significantly.

Others criticized the march: There wasn't a specific demand on government; there wasn't enough follow-up; Minister Farrakhan shouldn't have traveled abroad afterward. But the purpose wasn't political. The purpose was for Black men to take responsibility for their own actions and to help develop their own communities, and to atone for our lack of responsibility.

Forty-two percent of all Black boys have failed at least one grade, according to the Twenty-First Century Foundation, a Black philanthropic organization in New York that has launched an initiative to serve Black boys. The foundation also found that “in 2002, one in four African American males were idle (unemployed) all year long.”

In California, it is seven times more likely for a Black man to be in a state penitentiary than in a state university. The 2000 census revealed that one in 17 Black men in California was incarcerated, compared with one out of 114 White men.

Add that to a myriad of social issues, including alarmingly disproportionate AIDS rates and prostate cancer in Blacks.

In an op-ed on the quality of life for Black people, New York Times columnist Bob Herbert recently concluded that “it’s just wrong to allow many (Black) Americans to remain in a state of social and economic degradation without attempting to alter the conditions responsible for their suffering.”

This is why I will be back in Washington on October 15, 2005. The time is right, the need is great and the opportunity is ripe for change.

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\*Pacific News Service contributor David Muhammad directs the Oakland, Calif.-based Mentoring Center, a nonprofit organization that serves youth coming out of juvenile halls.

\*Photo Credit Photo: 1995 Million Man March by Jabril Muhammad