Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor—all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked—who is good? Not that men are ignorant—what is truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men.

—W. E. B. Du Bois,

_The Souls of Black Folk_ (1903)

**Looking for Farrakhan**

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to happen in the press gallery that would require guards? Or perhaps these were simply young men curious about the press, like so many young people are. After all, this was their mosque.

In another thirty minutes or so, all the people outside were seated in the rest of the balconies and on the first floor of the mosque, and guards were stationed in the aisles every dozen or so rows apart. I learned later that while the people in the mosque were being seated, the overflow crowd was being seated in the school's gymnasium.

It had been quite an orderly process. People lined up, women on one side, men on the other, the media off to one side. The FOI guards stationed to search the crowd and guide it into the hall had been very efficient; in about an hour and a half they had thorough searched with metal detectors every person who was admitted, about 2,500. All cameras or tape recorders except those owned by the media had to be checked outside the hall. The media's equipment had to be checked before it was admitted.

Down in the heart of the mosque, in the very first row below the stage, were a group of recognizable Farrakhan supporters—Father Pfleger, a number of well-known Black Nationalists, a couple of Baptist ministers, and others, all standing around and greeting one another as they would at a festive or political gathering. On the stage of the mosque stood twenty-five or thirty people, including the ninety-six-year-old wheelchair-bound matriarch of the Nation, Queen Mother Moore, who had been flown into Chicago from New York with her aide for the event. When the program got under way, about six of Farrakhan's lieutenants and other dignitaries, including the aide who spoke for Queen Mother Moore, and a flock of guards prepared for Farrakhan's entrance.

At last, at about 9 p.m., amid wild cheering, Farrakhan, in a peach-colored suit and a handsome bow tie, with his well-oiled curly hair and wire-rimmed glasses, surrounded by his bodyguards and wearing a rapt expression of what seemed to be love and goodwill, took the podium. Alongside were his beautiful wife Khadijah and their five daughters, all arrayed in elegant, obviously handmade street-length long-sleeved dresses and headwear, the female uniform of the black Muslims. While his women stood severely at attention, with the other dignitaries and guards surrounding him, Farrakhan emoted for about an hour, describing the U.S. government's plot to frame Qubilah with the final intent of destroying him and the Nation and, by implication, the entire black people. He went on to explain all the plots that over the years the government had hatched against the Nation and other black organizations.

After this long introduction, he spoke personally and emotionally about the specifics of the case of the thirty-four-year-old Qubilah Shabazz. "Think of Qubilah," he intoned. "Qubilah is a child I knew and held in my arms as a baby. [Malcolm helped recruit Farrakhan into the Nation and remained close to him for years.] I do not believe that Qubilah is an evil woman—and in the numerous reports I have read, most people who know her do not believe it either. Qubilah is a child who loves her father, a child who grieves over the loss of her father's life; a life cut short not by Louis Farrakhan but by the same evil forces who throw stones and hide their hands, and who, like Pontius Pilate, wash their hands and allow just men to go to an undeserved destruction.

"I want my wife, Sister Khadijah Farrakhan, and my five daughters to come forward... My wife is a righteous woman, my daughters are righteous young women. They do not engage in unlawful acts. However, I assure you that if anyone were to do harm to me, they would not hesitate to avenge me. And they would not hire someone to do it for them, they would do it themselves! I believe in my heart that no power but Allah (God) could stop them."

So, said Farrakhan, even if Qubilah conspired to kill him, she had to be understood and forgiven. More important, we had to understand that even if she had these terrible thoughts in her head, she was really innocent. She had been tricked and seduced by the government, which did this sort of thing regularly.

"The same government of the United States that did all of these things," he said, "created division within the Nation of Islam and exploited it, made the Nation of Islam and its leadership the number one organization targeted for destruction."

Farrakhan demanded loudly that the government's records of this case and other documents—those related to the trial of Marcus Garvey in the twenties, the assaults on the Black Panther party in the sixties, the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.—be opened so that its role in these events could finally be revealed.
Now Farrakhan reached the high point in his speech, his explanation for the real purpose of the FBI in setting up Qubilah: the U.S. attorney needed to invent "the perfect situation" in which it could indict and convict Farrakhan for the killing of Malcolm. The crowd agreed. There was much shouting and stomping. "The government, even as we speak, is working feverishly to provide a basis to prosecute me, by gathering false witnesses, wicked demons and hypocrites, whose envy of my success and the success of the Nation of Islam is causing them to yield to the temptation to seek my death and destruction."

Farrakhan went on, "In view of all this... since all of the leaders throughout our history in this country have been subjected to government harassment and interference, I propose that we, as a people, file a class action suit, charging the U.S. government with the denial of our civil rights, the denial of our human rights, and open all files, with respect to the Honorable Marcus Garvey..." and a long list of people and organizations that stretched from the spectacular black singer/actor Paul Robeson, who was hounded out of the country by the FBI and the House Un-American Activities Committee, to Lyndon LaRouche, a highly eccentric fascist-tending white political leader who had an alliance with Farrakhan, as Garvey had an alliance with the Ku Klux Klan. LaRouche was convicted and jailed in 1989 for mail fraud and tax evasion. Last on Farrakhan's long FBI victim list was "their number one target, the Nation of Islam."

The opening of the FBI files on those people would indeed reveal what became some famous efforts to deny their civil and human rights by a variety of means. The audience was loud in support of Farrakhan. They were, after all, affirming their leader's life in the face of overwhelming danger.

According to the Final Call, the rally was "beamed live via satellite and carried live by 20 television stations and viewed live at 20 colleges around the country and heard on numerous radio stations." While the newspaper often exaggerates the news of the Nation, Farrakhan does have, as of mid-1996, about 135 hookups with radio and television stations (mostly cable) in major markets around the country and in Canada. The Nation either buys or is donated regular time, often several times a week, for his speeches, to advertise the Final Call, and to make fund-raising appeals. The listing appears weekly in the Call.

Sifting through Farrakhan's rhetoric, I found myself with an awful sense of déjà vu. How many times had I been in situations where considerable evidence had indicated infiltration, provocation, and frame-ups by the FBI? How many times had I read of such FBI actions against black and white dissidents, among them some that Farrakhan had listed, since the 1920s? Under all the paranoia and arrogance, wasn't there some truth in Farrakhan's charges against the FBI and the U.S. attorney? The charges against Qubilah didn't ring true, even if Farrakhan's conclusion that the plot was ultimately directed against him resembled all too many other of his delusions.

The problem was, who was Qubilah Shabazz? The thirty-four-year-old daughter of a long-dead black leader? Had the FBI actually targeted her as a public danger?

It didn't help my comfort level when I discovered that the famous radical civil rights lawyer, William Kunstler, and his New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights was handling Qubilah's defense. Kunstler's appearance on a case automatically raised questions about the government's role, though there had certainly been cases in which Kunstler had had to do a little defensive manufacturing of his own.

The evidence the government presented was, from the start, fishy. It had been supplied by the same FBI paid informer who just happened to be the very hit man Qubilah had allegedly hired. A coincidence? He just happened to be available to do this job for her and then went immediately to the FBI to tell them about it? Or did he make himself "available" for the job at the request of the FBI?

According to the Final Call of February 8, 1995, the Nation immediately responded to the U.S. attorney's notice that Qubilah was to be indicted with a real press conference at which Farrakhan's attorney, an Atlanta-based Nation minister and lawyer, Ava Muhammad, described a meeting she'd had with the FBI several-months earlier at which the agency had warned her of a plot against Farrakhan's life by members of a Muslim extremist group. After that warning, the Nation had heard no more from the FBI, Ava told the press. "We were not aware of any ongoing threat [against Farrakhan] until yesterday, just prior to the indictment," she said. The FBI waited until the day before it indicted this would-be assassin before informing the intended victim?