

Islamic leader preached self-help, self-esteem and liberation

JULIAN WILLOCK
Spectrum Staff Writer

UB students were among the many college and university students from Western New York and across the country who attended the Nation of Islam's Saviours Day convention in Atlanta, Georgia, this past weekend. The UB delegation was comprised of about 15 students, headed by Black Student Union President James Minter.

The weekend in Atlanta had its controversy after the Mayor Maynard Jackson sent a letter to the Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan to welcome him to the city of Atlanta. The Jewish community has long considered Farrakhan anti-Jewish, but Farrakhan has denied that charge.

Stuart Lewengrub, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, said one of the demands the League has before it can sit down and talk with the Nation of Islam is for "The Nation and Louis Farrakhan to repudiate and recant their numerous expressions of hostility towards Jews."

Leonard Farrakhan Muhammad, chief of staff of the Nation of Islam, denied that Louis Farrakhan is anti-Jewish and said the Nation of Islam has suffered insults from Jewish leaders who have compared the group to the Ku Klux Klan. While the media and many critics continue to charge that the religious leader is anti-Jewish and racist, his followers say much of the good they do under his leadership goes unnoticed.

Involved in diverse projects

National officials said Farrakhan and his congregation are involved in a variety of endeavors primarily aimed at making blacks

economically, socially, politically and spiritually self-sufficient. Examples of several diverse projects include: security patrols in drug-ravaged neighborhoods in major cities, including Buffalo, a publishing network that includes books and *The Final Call* newspaper, an international office and representative based in Ghana, West Africa, and small business

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Louis Farrakhan
Nation of Islam

ventures, day care centers, a line of personal and health-care products, videos on every thing from Malcolm X to Farrakhan speeches and Muhammad University of Islam in Chicago.

Last month, the Los Angeles Police Commission awarded the Nation of Islam a contract to patrol 15 federally subsidized apartment buildings in Oakwood, California. Two years ago, the Washington City Council cited the Nation of Islam for inspiring a successful anti-drug effort there.

A torchlight for America

In his nearly two hour long speech on Sunday at the Georgia Dome, Farrakhan asserted that "America is on her death bed and is crying for desperate help." Before an estimated crowd of

70,000, he claimed that America "continues to practice white superiority, racism, sexism and has lost her morals...and if we don't change, we will fall like all other great nations have."

He insisted "that Bush, Clinton and Perot do not care about poor people in this country, and blacks are always the ones to suffer first." He urged African Americans to heed his message of self-help, self-esteem and liberation.

Tricia Kerney, a student on the trip, said that he was "very educational and informative, and I dismiss anyone who thinks he is anti-semitic."

Student Lasondra Statham said that "his speech was strong and positive...and even though I don't agree with him in all his beliefs, I found his speech to be a great learning experience."

Nation of Islam beliefs

The nation of Islam should not be confused with the orthodox Muslim community headed by national Islamic leader Warith Deen Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad. Both groups were part of the original Nation of Islam, founded in 1930 as a black separatist organization, but a schism occurred after Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975.

The Nation of Islam believes in God, who followers refer to as Allah. It holds that the essential truth of the Bible has been tampered with and must be re-interpreted. It holds that the so-called 'Negroes' are most in need of mental resurrection; therefore, they will be resurrected first, and they are the chosen people of God. It holds that black women should be respected and protected. It holds that those who declare themselves to be righteous Muslims should not participate in war.