

Obama, Farrakhan and Islamophobia

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Two highly influential African Americans have made news recently in regard to Islam. Republican presidential contender Donald Trump infamously called for barring all Muslims from entering the United States (and vowed to carry out surveillance on mosques.) Similarly, GOP presidential contenders Senator Ted Cruz and former Florida governor Jeb Bush said only Christian asylum seekers should be accepted into to the United States. Sadly, they are in “good” company. Two-thirds of Republicans and one-half of all Americans favor a ban on Muslims. About one-half of all Republican voters in Iowa believe Islam should be illegal in the U.S.

Enter Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam (NOI.) Speaking on a radio program hosted by Alex Jones, Farrakhan said that U.S. foreign policy has united Muslims against the Western world in a way that no Muslim leader could have ever done. He praised Trump. The minister said:

...Mr. Trump I think is wise to vet anyone coming from [the Muslim world] into America because the hatred for America is in the streets now....Now, if you let [Muslim refugees] in and you don't vet them carefully, you might be letting in your own destruction.

With friends like Farrakhan, Muslims don't need enemies. Of course, such mind-blowing non-sense from the NOI is nothing new and should not be surprising. After all, the organization is all about a reactionary, authoritarian mindset, religious fanaticism and outrageous, over-the-top statements. This is the same organization that has stated that dinosaurs never existed, that their deceased leader Elijah Muhammad is alive and well and living in “a wheel that you call a UFO,” that Scientology can be used to save Black people, supported Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, and so on.

Happily, Muslims can rely on the sane and humane message of President Obama to help combat Islamophobia. On Wednesday, February 3, 2016, Obama visited the Islamic Society of Baltimore. Trump's talk and the talk of so many other Republicans obviously rubbed the President the wrong way. Obama told the

audience that they are an important part of the nation. “You’re not Muslim or American, you’re Muslim *and* American,” he told them.

On the same day that Obama visited the Islamic Society, the Pew Research Center released findings from a poll that showed that 68 percent of Americans believe that religious violence is a result of “violent people using religion to justify their actions.” Twenty-two percent of those polled said some religions are inherently violent. Of those, 14 percent said Islam condones violence, a higher percentage than those citing other religions. Furthermore, the poll found that half of all Americans believe that Muslims are “anti-American.”

This is where problems can arise. The fact is that the main “sacred” texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam all clearly condone violence, including mass murder. Acknowledging this fact is not anti-religious. On the contrary, if more religious people acknowledged this fact they would be in a much better position to at least reform their religions.

One important point came out after Obama’s visit to the society. Hasiynah Mohammed of Philadelphia drove to Baltimore with her husband and four children. They were not able to get tickets to the event, but Mohammed was excited nonetheless. She pointed out that Obama decided to appear at a mosque established by Muslim immigrants. However, there are large numbers of African Americans that are Muslims, and many non-Blacks are unaware of this fact. This is a fact that could have been highlighted by a trip to a Black mosque, especially considering that February is Black History Month.

Obama’s visit to the Baltimore mosque was not without controversy. The Islamic Society of Baltimore practices “gender Jim Crow,” or what many call gender apartheid. That is to say, males and females have to pray in separate and unequal areas and males receive better treatment than women. Two-thirds of the mosques in the U.S. are set up in this way. Some people were upset that Obama would speak in such a place.

Obama made it clear that good Muslims have to play a major role in assuring that their faith is better represented. However, someone is going to have to also point out that their faith is patriarchal, as are Christianity and Judaism, and therefore

necessarily homophobic. There are other problems with Islam as well, and Muslims need to be their own worst critics.

Finally, one-third of Americans believe that the Christian Obama is a Muslim. This kind of implacable ignorance continues to plague the United States, and is rooted in bigoted, conspiratorial "thinking." However, Obama is leading the fight against Islamophobia, even as the Muslim Farrakhan defends the bigoted ravings of one who would cause Muslims widespread misery if he had the power to do so. Go figure!