

**THE NATION OF ISLAM:
NOT A FORCE FOR—
A FORCE *AGAINST*—
EMANCIPATION**

*We Need a
Real Revolution*

by Bob Avakian



**Bob Avakian:
A Radically Different Leader—
A Whole New Framework
for Human Emancipation**

Bob Avakian is completely different than the endless stream of bourgeois politicians who are put forward as “leaders,” whose goal is to maintain one variation or another of this system of capitalism-imperialism that is founded on and perpetuates itself through cruel and literally life-stealing exploitation, murderous oppression, and massive destruction, in all parts of the world. BA is a revolutionary who bases himself on the scientific understanding that this system must finally be overthrown through an organized struggle involving millions of people, and replaced with a system that is oriented to and capable of meeting the most fundamental needs of humanity and enabling humanity to become fit caretakers of the earth.

Bob Avakian is the architect of a whole new framework of human emancipation, the new synthesis of communism, which is popularly referred to as the “new communism.”

systems and relations of oppression and exploitation, and the distortions of reality that serve to reinforce them. Once again, this is why the new communism, which has been brought forward through decades of work that I have carried out, represents and insists upon the most consistently and thoroughly scientific method and approach—precisely in order to understand reality as it actually is, and to radically transform reality to bring about the emancipation of all oppressed people, everywhere, and ultimately all of humanity.

THE NATION OF ISLAM: NOT A FORCE FOR— A FORCE AGAINST— EMANCIPATION

*We Need a
Real Revolution*

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Louis Farrakhan, and the Nation of Islam (NOI) of which he is the head, pose as angry and powerful opponents of white supremacy. But the truth is that neither the doctrine of the Nation of Islam, nor its actions, represent the road to ending white supremacy and liberating Black people (or anyone else). Their doctrine and program actually contribute to *maintaining* white supremacy and other horrific oppression, including male supremacy and the patriarchal oppression of women, all of which is *built into* the system of capitalism-imperialism that we are now forced to live under.

In a previous article, I cited this statement by Malcolm X, speaking to his experience in the NOI, before he broke with it: “We believed ... in some of the most fantastic

things that you could ever imagine.” As indicated in that article:

Malcolm was not using the word “fantastic” in this statement to mean something like “really great”—no, he was saying that the doctrine of the Nation of Islam is pure “fantasy” and leads those who follow it to believe the most ridiculous and outrageous things.¹

Given that the NOI is based in and promotes anti-scientific fantasy and wild conspiracy theories, it is not surprising that Farrakhan is among those who have discouraged Black people from getting COVID vaccines, when Black people, and other people of color, are dying of COVID at a higher rate than others, and these vaccines are a very effective measure against serious illness and death from COVID. This is another example of mouthing demagogic denunciation of white supremacy *while actually doing things that contribute to the oppression and devastation of the victims of white supremacy*.

As I have also pointed out:

¹ Bob Avakian, *Why Do People Believe the Most Ridiculous and Outrageous Nonsense? Wild Distortions of Reality, Deadly Illusions of “Painless Progress,” and the Urgent Need for a Real, Scientifically-Grounded Revolution*. This article by Bob Avakian is available at revcom.us. The statement by Malcolm X is cited in Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man, The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1997, Part 1: “Genesis,” Chapter 3, “The Knowledge of Self and Others,” p. 41.

The way the full emancipation of Black people will finally be achieved is through the assertion of the fundamental *humanity* of Black people—which, in its highest expression, means becoming part of the revolution to *do away with all exploitation, all oppression, all inequality, all degradation of any part of humanity: a communist revolution.*

As I have previously given voice to this:

There is the potential for something of unprecedented beauty to arise out of unspeakable ugliness: Black people playing a crucial role in putting an end, at long last, to this system which has, for so long, not just exploited but dehumanized, terrorized and tormented them in a thousand ways—putting an end to this in the only way it can be done—by fighting to emancipate humanity, to put an end to the long night in which human society has been divided into masters and slaves, and the masses of humanity have been lashed, beaten, raped, slaughtered, shackled and shrouded in ignorance and misery.¹⁰

It is not fantastical distortions of reality—and certainly not racist or male supremacist “theories” and doctrines—but a consistently scientific method and approach, that is necessary and essential to guide the struggle to finally and fully put an end to any and all

¹⁰ This statement by Bob Avakian is included in the article *Bob Avakian For The Liberation Of Black People And The Emancipation Of All Humanity*, which is available at revcom.us.

it is simply a fact that any group of Black people (or even Black people as a whole) lack the power to enforce Black supremacy in this society. It is *white* supremacy, not Black supremacy, that has been built into, and remains in force, in the system in this country, from the beginning and right down to today, with all the terrible injustice and horrendous oppression this involves. However, any form of racism—any “theory” or doctrine which insists that any “race” of people is genetically programmed to be evil, or in any case is inferior to, and deserves to be dominated by, another race—is contrary to reality, is in fact a vicious lie, and will serve to reinforce, rather than abolish, oppression and exploitation. And the same is true of any doctrine that makes the same claim about the inferiority of a particular gender.

There is a way that the masses of Black people can finally overcome the profound economic exploitation, the degrading and literally murderous political and social oppression, and the very real psychic damage, which this system has inflicted on them for so long, right down to today and in an ongoing way. But this cannot happen by inventing and clinging to a repulsive reversal of white supremacy—a Black supremacist ideology that identifies and denounces white people as inherently (genetically-programmed) “devils”—an ideology which is itself degrading, not simply of the white people who are its targets, but also of the Black people who are its advocates.

The doctrine of the Nation of Islam also is in conflict in significant ways with traditional Islam, founded about 1,500 years ago by Muhammad bin Abdullah in Arabia. In the book *Away With All Gods! Unchaining The Mind And Radically Changing The World*, I speak to the origins of traditional Islam and ways in which, along with Christianity and other religions, it is out of keeping with reality itself, and promotes social relations, including between men and women, that are outmoded and highly oppressive.²

At the same time, the doctrine of the NOI does have in common with traditional Islam and the Qur’an the fact that women are placed in a separate and unequal category, subordinated to and oppressed by men—something which is also true of Christianity and Judaism, and their scriptures.

Not Fighting Oppression, but Promoting Fantastical False Hopes of Judgment

Quiet as it may be kept, Elijah Muhammad (who was the leader of the NOI before Farrakhan), actually developed some relations of mutual cooperation with blatant white supremacists on the basis that, coming from definitely different places, they shared a common objective: each wanted to see Black people removed, separated from American society. And, although he spent several years

² *Why Do People Believe the Most Ridiculous and Outrageous Nonsense?*

in jail during the 1940s for refusing to be drafted during World War 2 and opposing the U.S. role in that war—for which he gained “martyr status” among his followers—Elijah Muhammad was careful not to undertake any effort to mobilize masses of Black people in a way that would seriously threaten the rulers of this country. Instead, he preached about waiting for an apocalypse that would destroy the evil civilization of white people and return “the original man” (Black people) to their rightful position. Farrakhan, too, while sometimes “woofing” against the powers-that-be in this country, has been careful not to mount any serious challenge to them.

This is a major reason why, for example, rallies called by Farrakhan in the last several decades have not contributed to the mass struggle against the continuing murders of Black people by police and in general the terrible oppression to which Black people are subjected under this system. A clear example of this is the rally that Farrakhan called for in 2015, after there had been widespread protests sparked by the police murder of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. This rally was organized under the slogan: “Justice—Or Else.” But it actually amounted to Justice... Or *Nothing*. Nothing came of this—and nothing was proposed—except a weak call for boycotting Christmas, which came to nothing, in terms of doing anything about justice.

As Claude Andrew Clegg III has pointed out about Elijah Muhammad, and before him Fard Muhammad, founder of the NOI:

Islam, which represent grotesque distortions of reality and point in very bad and dangerous directions.

Simply put, the doctrine of the NOI is not just fantastical anti-scientific nonsense in some general sense—which would be bad enough. It is also overtly racist, as well as male supremacist.

Of course, it is often claimed, by outright, blatant white supremacists especially but also some others, that opposition to white supremacy is itself racist—against white people! That is complete garbage. It is part of, and serves the attempt to preserve and enforce, what is by far the dominant racism in this country—racism against Black people, and other people of color, and the white supremacy that is built into this system. But it has to be said, without pulling any punches—and it can be seen in both what has been discussed here, and in the proclamations and actions of the NOI and its leadership—that the doctrine and program of the NOI is racist, and that this is also a patriarchal male supremacist organization, which promotes racial and gender supremacy, as well as other forms of hateful prejudice (such as the repeated anti-Jewish rantings of Farrakhan).

Now, here, it is important once again to recognize, and insist upon, the truth that this racist doctrine of the NOI does far less harm than the white racism that it is directed against, and serves the brutal oppression of, Black people. Besides the fact that the overwhelming majority of Black people are not Black supremacists,

Uprooting and Abolishing White Supremacy and All Oppression: Science and Revolution, Not Fantastic Distortions of Reality and Promotion of Poisonous Ideas

The actual conditions of white supremacy and male supremacy—and the poisonous ideology that reinforces them—can be overcome and uprooted. But this will not, and cannot, happen through the destruction of white civilization by a Mother Plane, or some other fantastical notion of righteous judgment by some imaginary god or other supernatural force. It can happen only through revolution, in this real world, to *overthrow* the system of capitalism-imperialism, and bring into being a radically different system—a *socialist system, aiming for a communist world*—which has, as one of its most essential requirements and objectives, the abolition and uprooting of white supremacy and male supremacy, along with all other relations of oppression and exploitation.

This revolution must be guided by—and can only succeed if it proceeds in accordance with—a genuinely *scientific* method and approach, which rejects and combats all illusions and fantastical notions, all ways of thinking that are out of keeping with actual material reality, no matter how comforting or gratifying they might seem to be. As part of this, it is necessary to sharply critique—and vigorously struggle against—theories, doctrines and programs of forces like the Nation of

Ultimately, his depiction of the Judgment and the afterworld allowed Fard Muhammad, and later Elijah Muhammad, to attract African-Americans into the Nation of Islam without having to actively deliver them from their oppression beyond a partial withdrawal of believers into temple life. Conveniently, the burden of deliverance was left to God, who would act in his own good time.

And:

The ideology of the Nation of Islam, though fiercely enunciated by various spokesmen, was thoroughly conservative. Little of what Elijah Muhammad said, and even less of what he actually did, fundamentally challenged the status quo of the United States.³

The Doctrine of the NOI: A Doctrine Full of Poisonous Falsehoods That Serve This Oppressive System

To understand this more fully, it is necessary to examine the doctrine of the NOI, fashioned first by Fard Muhammad, and how this relates to, and sets the framework for, *not* waging a determined struggle against oppression but in fact accepting, and actually embodying and promoting, key expressions of oppression.

³ *An Original Man, The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, pp. 67 and 282.

In the article which referred to the above-cited statement by Malcolm X, speaking about the doctrine of the NOI (“We believed...in some of the most fantastic things that you could ever imagine.”), I also made this observation:

Even when a particular conspiracy theory may spin an elaborate “explanation” of things, it usually boils down to something simplistic—the notion that the reason some people, or many people, are mistreated is because there is a group of evil people with power who cause this to happen.⁴

The “theory”—the doctrine, or “theology”—developed by Fard Muhammad, and passed down to Elijah Muhammad and now Farrakhan, does indeed “spin an elaborate ‘explanation’ of things” while it also “boils [this] down to something simplistic.” It is not possible, in an article of this length, to go fully into this NOI doctrine. Rather, what I have done here is touch on important aspects of this doctrine, which get to the essence of it—basing this on Claude Andrew Clegg III’s thoroughly footnoted summary of this NOI doctrine, which draws extensively from Elijah Muhammad’s *Message to the Blackman in America* and other writings and speeches by Elijah Muhammad, as well as publications and statements by the NOI under Elijah Muhammad’s leadership. The quoted passages that follow, speaking about the NOI doctrine, are from Clegg’s book *An Original Man*.

⁴ *Why Do People Believe the Most Ridiculous and Outrageous Nonsense?*

As I said in the Dialogue with Cornel West a few years ago, if you are looking to me to justify the attitudes and actions of all too many white people, all too much of the time—well, you are looking in the wrong place!⁹ But, again, this racism among white people is not something that is genetically programmed in them, and which therefore they cannot overcome—any more than male supremacy and misogyny (hatred of women) is genetically programmed in men, despite the horrific actions of far too many men, of all “races” and nations. No, this racism, and sexism, are fundamentally rooted in—and are ideological reflections and expressions of—the white supremacy and male supremacy that have historically developed as part of exploitative systems and today are grounded in and built into the economic and social relations of the capitalist-imperialist system and are propagated and reinforced, in both blatant and more “subtle” ways, through its dominant institutions and culture.

And, on the other side of things, we have seen situations in this country where millions of white people, of all genders, have actively taken part in crucial struggles against racial oppression—in a major way in the 1960s, and once again just last year (2020) with the massive outpouring sparked by the vicious police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

⁹ This Dialogue between Bob Avakian and Cornel West—*REVOLUTION AND RELIGION: The Fight for Emancipation and the Role of Religion*—took place at Riverside Church in New York City in November of 2014. A film of this Dialogue is available at revcom.us in BA’s Collected Works.

is no genetic programming of white people, or anyone else, to be inherently evil (or good).

Finally, according to this astounding, and outrageous, NOI mythology, the day of righteous judgment will come when

the destruction of the white world—variously known as the Judgment, Armageddon, the fall of America, and the second hell—would be carried out by a technological monstrosity called the Mother Plane.⁸

That there is no such Mother Plane—and that the deliverance of Black people, from their long-oppressed condition, will not come about in this way—is not the concern of the Nation of Islam, and has not prevented a significant number of Black people, even beyond those who belong to the NOI, to be drawn to its basic message. It is not hard to understand why. Systemic, systematic and institutionalized white supremacy and grotesque racism directed against Black people, and other people of color, has been a major feature and active force of this system in this country, from the very beginning. And, looking at the history, as well as the present reality, of American society, it certainly can seem like at least many white people are racist “devils” who are incapable of regarding and treating Black people as equals, and who have often been capable of the most horrific savagery.

⁸ *An Original Man, The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, p. 65.

This NOI doctrine borrows certain elements of Jewish, Christian, and traditional Islamic religion—often in distorted form—and incorporates them into a story of creation, existence, and destiny that is even more fantastical. While at times referring to “scientists” and invoking and cobbling together pseudo-scientific claims, this doctrine flies in the face of the scientific method and actual scientific knowledge, including about the origins of the earth, the evolution of life on earth and the emergence of human beings. According to this NOI doctrine, many trillions of years ago (not millions, nor even billions, but *trillions* of years ago) “an atom of life matured and developed flesh and blood, brains and power.” And:

A corporeal entity, later known as the Earth, incubated the dark, growing body until it achieved self-awareness and the power to create. The body, which was once an atom, became a man, a Black Man, “the Original Man,” and lord over all that which was engulfed in universal night. In time, the self-created man took on the name Allah or God and proceeded to create others like him in his own dark, majestic image.⁵

Over a vast span of time since then, according to the NOI, there followed a series of complicated historical events, with many twists and turns, but eventually there emerged a new powerful being, Yacub, who systematically betrayed the “original man.” According

⁵ *An Original Man, The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, p. 42.

to this mythology, Yacub is responsible for bringing into being the inferior species of evil white people—“white devils,” who are “**genetically programmed** to oppose freedom, justice, and equality.”⁶

Again according to the NOI doctrine, as set forth by Elijah Muhammad, “bestiality reigned” among these white people in Europe, and

many evolved or regressed into gorillas, apes, and monkeys ... even these few who remained humanlike could not help but express their innately savage and evil nature in other ways. White women, according to the legend, began commonly copulating with their most cherished pet, the canine, and would over time acknowledge to anyone curious enough to ask that “there is nothing she loves better than a dog.”⁷

This is the doctrine of the Nation of Islam handed down from Fard Muhammad to Elijah Muhammad and actively propagated by him. Research into the positions of the Nation of Islam under Farrakhan—as set forth in publications by the NOI, speeches by Farrakhan and interviews with him—has revealed no rejection or repudiation of this doctrine. When confronted with some of the more outlandish and outrageous aspects of this doctrine, Farrakhan will sometimes attempt to slide around and explain away some of this, while still sticking

⁶ *An Original Man, The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, p. 51 (emphasis—boldface—added here).

⁷ *An Original Man, The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, p. 53.

to the same essential position—for example, insisting “I subscribe to every word that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad taught us,” but then attempting to reinterpret and downplay the teaching of Elijah Muhammad that white people are “devils” who are genetically-programmed to be evil. This can be seen in the interview Farrakhan did with Tim Russert on *Meet the Press* in April of 1997. And the same kind of thing is found more recently in articles in the NOI newspaper, the *Final Call*, where the myth of Yacub’s creation of the evil-doing white race is maintained, but the “evil” part is not always expressed in the most extreme and lurid terms. And it is noteworthy that the *Final Call* continues to regularly publish and promote excerpts from Elijah Muhammad’s *Message to the Blackman in America*.

It also has to be emphasized that, although Farrakhan tries to “cherry pick” certain scientific discoveries and analysis (or certain parts of this), this is distorted in the service of the utterly *anti-scientific* doctrine of the NOI—which is not simply fantastical but is outrageous and poisonous nonsense. To return to one significant example: In reality, modern science is clear that all living human beings on this planet belong to **one** single biological species, the very **same** species (*homo sapiens*), and that minor variations in such things as skin color came about through historic migrations of populations across the globe and evolutionary natural selection, and not through any kind of sinister selective breeding (“grafting”) carried out by a being called Yacub. Again, we are **all** one single human species, and there