

Farrakhan Justice or Else rally reaches beyond Black Lives Matter

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Facing throngs of people on the National Mall, Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan called for justice Saturday (October 10) as he rallied African-Americans, Latinos and others during an anniversary protest at the U.S. Capitol.

In a speech that lasted more than two hours, Farrakhan said the United States was hypocritical for insisting other nations were violating human rights, all the while describing its own misconduct as something that causes Americans “dissatisfaction.”

His Justice or Else! event came 20 years after hundreds of thousands of black men came to the same stretch of lawn between the Capitol and the Washington Monument to rededicate themselves to being better fathers, sons and citizens.

Farrakhan’s remarks were preceded by supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement along with Latino, Native American, and Palestinian activists who took turns at the microphone urging better treatment.

The sunny fall day brought out hundreds of thousands, according to organizers, though no official estimates were available. The crowd was predominantly black, ranging from millennials in “Black Lives Matter” T-shirts to Nation of Islam adherents with women in brown headpieces and matching garments.

The rally addressed a range of grievances connected to justice including calls to stop deportation and to reduce mass incarceration.

Farrakhan, 82, called for 10,000 men to help address crime in the African-American community.

“I want 10,000 names that we can train ‘cause we got to stand between the guns,” he said, alluding to both black-on-black crime and the killing of unarmed black people by police.

He also listed a range of other “instructions,” including doing more to educate children in schools that promote “white supremacy,” and focusing on Jesus instead of Santa this Christmas.

“Today is both a call and a demand to come together and focus on not what divides us but on what unites us,” said the Willie Wilson, a Washington minister who was one of the organizers of the gathering. “Let us bind ourselves together, stick together, stand together, demand together.”

Farrakhan praised Pope Francis for visiting the United States, but sided with those Native Americans who criticized his canonization of St. Junipero Serra, a 17th-century Spanish Franciscan who helped establish the mission system in California.

“The pope is not a foolish man, but he made a saint out of somebody that the native people don’t see any sainthood in,” Farrakhan said. “That’s like us taking the grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and beatifying him and making him a saint.”

Several in the crowd said they appreciated the gathering’s emphasis on a diverse range of calls for justice.

“Everybody is of like mind or trying to build their mind to be about the cause,” said Paul Miller, a nondenominational Christian from Auburn, New York, and CEO of a charter school of mostly African-American males. “We need to be allies and band together and fight against injustice.”

Cammy Payne, a nurse from Tulsa, Oklahoma, welcomed the focus on unity across races and religions.

“I’m actually delighted to see it, especially to see the incorporation of the Native American community and the Latino community,” she said. “Because we are all one.”

Donna Auston, a Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers University who is a researcher and an activist with the Black Lives Matter movement, said the event demonstrated a confluence of the Nation of Islam and other activists joining with the newer Black Lives Matter on addressing police brutality, an issue that has long been fought in the

black community.

“There’s a long history of folks across the spectrum of black politics organizing and advocating around issues of fair and safe policing,” she said. “It’s a new spin on an old fight.”