



October 20, 2021

26th Anniversary of the Million Man March

October 16th marked the 26th anniversary of the historic Million Man March in Washington, D.C. One of the primary motivating factors for the March was to place Black issues back on the nation's political agenda in this time of the Contract with America, according to Wikipedia. March organizers believed that politicians were failing the Black community by "papering over the most vital dimensions of the crisis in international capitalism" and blaming urban Blacks for "domestic economic woes that threatened to produce record deficits, massive unemployment, and uncontrolled inflation".

Event organizers were of the view that urban Blacks were born with "three strikes against them": insufficient prenatal care, inferior educational opportunities, and jobless parents. Instead of providing young children with the means to succeed, they believed the government instead intervened in the lives of its Black citizens through law enforcement and programs that did little to improve the community's circumstances.

The organizers of the event took steps to lift the march from a purely political level to a spiritual one, hoping to inspire attendees and guests to move beyond "articulation of Black grievances" to a state of spiritual healing. Speakers at the event structured their talks around three themes: atonement, reconciliation, and responsibility. The Day of Atonement became a second name for the event and for some came to represent the motivation of the Million Man movement. In the words of one man who was in attendance, Marchers aimed at "being at one with ourselves, the Most High, and our people".

Though organizer Louis Farrakhan has been rightly criticized for his anti-Jewish rhetoric and patriarchal views, we can still be inspired by the power of Black men standing together and powerfully reciting the Million Man March Pledge to hold themselves and their communities accountable. Even though some of the language may seem a bit dated today, its ideas and motivations still have meaning for all of us. Here is the powerful pledge recited that day:

I PLEDGE that from this day forward I will strive to love my brother as I love myself. I, from this day forward, will strive to improve myself spiritually, morally, mentally, socially, politically and economically for the benefit of myself, my family and my people. I pledge that I will strive to build businesses, build houses, build hospitals, build factories and enter into international trade for the good of myself, my family and my people.

I PLEDGE that from this day forward I will never raise my hand with a knife or a gun to beat, cut, or shoot any member of my family or any human being except in self-defense. I pledge from this day forward I will never abuse my wife by striking her, disrespecting her, for she is the mother of my children and the producer of my future. I pledge that from this day forward I will never engage in the abuse of children, little boys, or little girls for sexual gratification. For I will let them grow in peace to be strong men and women for the future of our people.

I WILL never again use the 'B word' to describe any female. But particularly my own Black sister. I pledge from this day forward that I will not poison my body with drugs or that which is destructive to my health and my well-being. I pledge from this day forward I will support Black newspapers, Black radio, Black television. I will support Black artists who clean

up their acts to show respect for themselves and respect for their people and respect for the ears of the human family. I will do all of this so help me God.

Please join me and co-hosts Meleika Gardner and Revin Fellows every Saturday from 2-3 p.m. for our radio talk show on WVON 1690 entitled 'Chicago Heal'. Our hour-long show is a campaign to push mental health healing for communities and families in Chicago. We will also appear on WCPT 820 AM on Sundays from 6-7 p.m. These shows will bring mental health experts together to help communities and families in Chicago heal from past and ongoing trauma of violence in Chicago. Here is a Facebook link introducing the show:

<https://www.facebook.com/100005177499590/posts/1864912763691289/?d=n>

Let's be inspired by the positive aspects of the Million Man March, please join us by listening to the show, and let's help Chicago heal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District