Khallid Abdul Muhammad; Formed New Black Panthers

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Khallid Abdul Muhammad, a former Nation of Islam lieutenant who was known for his anti-Semitic speeches, his uncompromising hatred of “white devils” and his accounts of the “black Holocaust” of slavery, died Saturday. He was 53.

Muhammad was admitted to Wellstar Kennestone Hospital in Marietta, Ga., on Tuesday after apparently suffering a brain aneurysm. His death was announced Saturday by Malik Zulu Shabazz, the national spokesman for the New Black Panther Party, the organization Muhammad was leading at the time of his death.

Muhammad was best known for speeches so virulent that Louis Farrakhan, the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, demoted him in 1994 from his position as spokesman and minister of the black separatist organization.

Muhammad, who alternately described himself as a “knowledge gangsta” and a “truth terrorist,” then formed the New Black Panther Party and organized a youth rally in New York City which ended in a melee with police; 28 people were injured.

Born Harold Moore Vann in Houston, Muhammad was raised by his aunt in that city. An honor student, an Eagle Scout and the quarterback of his high school football team, Muhammad eventually enrolled at Dillard University, a Methodist institution in New Orleans.

It was there that he met Farrakhan, who had come to the campus to give a speech in 1967. Three years later, Muhammad dropped out of college to work full-time for the
Nation of Islam, then being rebuilt after the death of its founder, Elijah Muhammad. Farrakhan renamed him Khallid, or “warrior.”

Muhammad was the minister of Mosque 27 in Los Angeles in the 1970s and went on to head mosques in New York and Atlanta.

In 1989 he was named supreme captain of the Fruit of Islam, the Nation of Islam’s security force. One year later he became the Nation of Islam’s chief spokesman, a position similar to that of the late Malcolm X before his ouster in the 1960s.

Muhammad’s speeches used the history of black oppression as an ideological hammer against his foes and a foundation for his black separatist agenda. He also used that past to make as much as $10,000 a speech and to finance a pair of Rolls-Royces and homes in Atlanta and New York City.

A stocky divorcee, he was known as much for what he said as how he said it. Militant was too mild a word for the fiery Muhammad, who peppered his speeches with hardcore rap lyrics, Koranic quotations, occasional profanity and the machine-gun cadence of a Texas preacher.

Inflammatory Rhetoric

In turn, rappers like Ice Cube and groups including Public Enemy often used samples of Muhammad’s speeches in their music, which elevated his fame far beyond his following.

In 1992, Muhammad strode across a stage at a historically black South Carolina university and slammed a depiction of Jesus to the floor. Then, before a packed, predominantly Baptist crowd, he stomped on it, screaming: “Jesus wasn’t no cracker!” Muhammad then derided the “chicken-winged angels” of Christian iconography.
Muhammad accused Jews and Arabs of “sucking the blood in the black community,” called black civil rights leaders Uncle Toms and labeled Pope John Paul II a “cracker.” He also condemned homosexuals.

In a widely publicized 1993 speech at Kean College in New Jersey, Muhammad described former South African President Nelson Mandela a “fool” for forming a coalition government with whites. Muhammad said Mandela should have ordered all the whites out of the country and killed those who remained.

Comments like those caused Farrakhan, who has also been criticized for bigoted statements about Jews and others, to demote Muhammad in 1994.

But Muhammad continued to praise Farrakhan even as he led the New Black Panther Party.

Shortly after Farrakhan’s rebuke, a disgruntled former Nation of Islam minister shot Muhammad in both legs after he delivered a speech at UC Riverside. Four other men were also wounded. Muhammad recovered quickly, however, and talked by phone with Farrakhan from the hospital.

In 1998, Muhammad took a page from Farrakhan’s Million Man March and organized a Million Youth March in Harlem. Only several thousand people showed up, including 3,000 police on foot, on horseback and in helicopters thundering over the crowd.

Some members of the Nation of Islam wondered if Muhammad’s continued visibility was intended to undercut Farrakhan’s attempts to broaden his appeal to the African American mainstream. Others said that Farrakhan still approved of Muhammad and was using him to shore up the most radical elements in the Nation of Islam.

In an interview with Emerge magazine in 1994, Farrakhan said Muhammad was a “beautiful black stallion. And it takes God to ride such a gifted horse. He will buck;
that’s his spirit, he’s a warrior.”

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