

# Farrakhan strikes some moderate notes in farewell speech: May be Nation of Islam leader's last major address

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Louis Farrakhan, the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, used what was billed as possibly his last major address to urge followers to unite and cooperate with other faiths. But he also used it to reshape the organization's theology.

"My time is up," Farrakhan told tens of thousands of people February 25 at Ford Field in Detroit, where the Nation of Islam was holding its annual Saviours' Day convention. Farrakhan, who turns 74 on May 11, checked out of a Washington, D.C., hospital January 28 after recovering from complications following prostate surgery.

Farrakhan told the crowd that he had been at "death's door" but had been saved by God and the prayers of people of all faiths, striking an inclusive tone that he maintained throughout his two-hour speech. Still, black pride and unity were a main focus of his message.

The speech was occasionally interrupted by chants of "Long Live Muhammad"—a reference to Elijah Muhammad, who led the Nation of Islam from 1934 to 1975 and is regarded by Nation followers as a prophet of God. His son W. D. Muhammad was chosen to succeed him, even though he rejected the group's theology and brought the movement into mainstream Islam.

Farrakhan, who joined the movement in the 1950s, remained a fervent black nationalist. Disagreeing with Muhammad's more moderate direction, he restarted the Nation of Islam in 1978.

Despite its name, the organization relied on the Bible as its primary reference and worshiped on Sundays. In recent years, however, the Nation has incorporated the

Qur'an into its teachings and has participated in Islamic congregational prayers, traditionally held on Fridays.

Farrakhan peppered his speech with references to Islam's Prophet Muhammad. He also declared that Nation founder Wallace Fard Muhammad was not God, contradicting a long-held Nation view. *-Religion News Service*