Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on February 20, 2015
“In Memory of Malcom X – 50th Anniversary”

February is designated as Black History Month and February 21, 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination and martyrdom of Malcolm X. His life and struggle for justice is an inspiration to many people of conscience. He is among the great American icons and heroes who will always be remembered.

In his early days with the Nation of Islam he was taught to hate the white man and described him as the devil. He spoke of separation not integration. He delivered fiery speeches arousing the feelings and emotions of his fellow black brothers and sisters. He was bold and straight to the point. He addressed domestic issues and like his contemporary, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he spoke out against the US engagement with Vietnam.

After he split from the nation in 1964, he departed for the hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca and his experience there changed him forever. It not only changed him as a person, but it changed his worldview. He became a true Muslim who appreciated the diversity of God’s creation of different people, nations, colors, tongues, etc. Soon after, he became known as el-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.

El-Shabazz realized after seeing Muslims, “…of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans,” being treated as equals, that true Islam could help overcome racial ills. Islam teaches, “O mankind! We created you from a single male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another, for verily, the most honored of you, in the sight of Allah, is the most righteous. Surely, Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)” (al-Hujurat, 49:13).

Upon returning to the U.S., Malcolm began promoting equality, fairness and tolerance. He believed that true Islam could solve the slew of racial and social issues plaguing society at the time while remaining critical of the policies of the US government.

Events like those of Ferguson, New York, Chapel Hill and elsewhere make us believe that the issues Malcom stood for and spoke out against have not been resolved. The mainstream media among other agencies make it seem as though times have changed, but unfortunately, they haven’t.

The issues Malcolm fought for including discrimination, the prison industrial complex, unfair prison sentencing and white privilege still exist today at an even larger scale. Additionally, not only do African Americans continue to be discriminated against, but Latinos and other minorities like Muslims who have become victims of Islamophobia are targets of hate and discrimination.

When will the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” ring true? Among these truths is that we are endowed by our creator, (the one who created us all, blacks and whites, men and women, people of every nation on earth,) with certain unalienable rights. And among such rights are life, liberty
and the pursuit of happiness.

What life? One may ask. Can they bring Michael Brown back? Can they bring Eric Garner back, who was choked to death by a white cop while crying out, I can't breathe! I can't breathe! Can they bring Deah, Yusor and Razan back? Precious souls gone in vain.

What Liberty do they speak of? Freedom is not free. Be it freedom of speech, or freedom of the press, freedom comes with responsibility. Unfortunately the press and mainstream media outlets have abused their privileges. They are responsible for enticing people to hate their fellow citizens be them blacks, Muslims or other minorities.

And what pursuit of happiness? One out of five children go to bed hungry every day here in our own backyard. Our government needs to re-assess the values it claims to uphold. Malcom X was right, America can learn from Islam.

It is interesting to note that Article 1 of the United Nations charter called for what Islam had been promoting centuries before the creation of the United Nations. Article 1 declares, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Freedom, Equality and Fraternity may be considered Islam’s slogan 1,400 years ago. Human liberty under the law is a fundamental teaching of Islam. Equality of all people is a major tenet of Islam and brotherhood is Islam’s most cherished value in sustaining a healthy society.

It is clear that our existence is based on our willingness to submit to our Creator and His Will. Indeed humans are created with certain inalienable rights and freedom of religion is the most inalienable of all human rights. Every human being has the right to choose what he or she believes in. Confirming this right the Qur’an asserts, “Say (O Prophet), ‘this truth (the Qur’an) has come to you from your Lord, so whoever wishes to believe in it may do so and whoever wishes to reject it may do so’” (al-Kahf, 18:29). “Let there be no compulsion in religion”(al-Baqarah, 2:256), the Qur’an instructs. People have the absolute freedom to choose between good and evil.

It was Islam who championed the notion of equality and fraternity centuries before the Magna Carta of England, the Bill of Rights of the US and the UN charter were adopted. Islam did not only preach but established those ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity.

Islam not only recognizes but declares that all people belong to one race, the human race. “O people We created you from a male and a female” (49:13), signifies that all human beings regardless of who they are, their skin color, language, race or ethnicity belong to one parent, Adam and Eve. Thus, all human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims, Jews and Christians and people of every faith and religion; blacks, whites, Arabs, non-Arabs or any other race; men and women are unequivocally equal before their Creator and the law. The Qur’an further teaches, “And We made you into nations and tribes so you may know one another (not despise each other). Verily. The most honored before God is the most righteous.”

Brotherhood, friendship and Fraternity is what it is all about.

Islam honors all people, blacks and whites such as Bilal al-Habashi (the Ethiopian) and Suhaiib al-Rumi (the Roman). Similarly, Islam honors the Arabs and the non-Arabs, such as Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq and Salman al-Farisi (from Persia). Islam obliterated the notion of tribalism and fanaticism. The two famous tribes in al-Madinah who for centuries were bitter enemies waging wars against each other, the Aws and Khazraj, became, by the grace of God, brothers. Islam brought their hearts together.

Even a man on the caliber of Abu Zarr, whom the Prophet (SAW) described as having the piety of Jesus (AS),
was stripped of his piety by the Prophet when he called Bilal, “O son of a black woman.” He (SAW) rebuked him saying “By the one who revealed the Book to Muhammad none is more virtuous over another except by righteous deeds. You have none but an insignificant amount.” The memory of Bilal, a Black Muslim from Ethiopia, is still alive with us today whenever we hear the adhan.

Islam does not tolerate racism and discrimination. Islam didn’t just introduce a theory that was preached or a slogan that was shouted, it was established. People realized the benefit of brotherhood, and it was practiced. Islam created necessary communal ties never known before to man of the pre-Islamic era. Malcom was right, our country and the West for that matter can learn from Islam.

Unfortunately, recent events such as the Ferguson, NY and Chapel Hill shootings among many other events reveal a very scary reality that requires our utmost attention. Racism and discrimination is rampant and innocent people, be them blacks, Muslims, Latinos or other minorities continue to be victims to the structured and institutionalized racism our country continues to harbor and cultivate. Islamophobia is a great example. What is Islamophobia?

Islamophobia is a term that combines two words, Islam and phobia. Islam is the religion to more than 1.5 billion Muslims and phobia means fear or horror. As an expression it means, prejudice against, hatred towards, or fear of Muslims or groups perceived to be Muslim. It is about intolerance, bigotry and unfairness.

“Islamophobia” connotes a social anxiety about Islam and Muslims. It is a social stigma towards Islam and Muslims, namely fear. Some scholars define Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism and a continuation of anti-Asian and anti-Arab racism. It is the same racism that existed against Roman Catholics and Jews of the 1930’s.

Islamophobia not only targets Muslims but the faith they adhere to, Islam. It is common to hear statements on mainstream media such as Islamic terrorism, meaning Islam is terrorism. These subliminal messages are creating rage and anger in the hearts of ignorant people that lead to hating Muslims and the faith they follow and in some cases lead to murder and loss of lives.

Consider the Chapel Hill case when, out of hatred to Islam and Muslims, Craig Hicks, murdered three young Muslim students Deah Shady Barakat, 23 (second year dental student); his new wife, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, 21 (admitted to of dental school); and her 19-year-old sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha (a sophomore studying architecture). The slain Muslims had so much to offer America, what did Craig Hicks have to offer?

Islamophobia is simply a violation of human rights. Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural and normal. Among the things hatemongers teach is that, Islam is inferior to the West. Islam is barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist. Islam is violent, aggressive and threatening. Muslims are portrayed as “the other.”

In spite of all the contributions Muslims have made to this country, from cultivating the farms, to building industries, the manufacturing of automobiles, serving in the medical field, engineering and every other field in between, we are nevertheless not considered part and parcel of the overall society.

Stereotyping and statements against Islam and Muslims by politicians, celebrities and comedians are common in mainstream media. In response to the Foley beheading video, Bryan Fischer on his online radio show sponsored by the American Family Association said, “[We need to ban all Muslim immigration because] Islam is like the Ebola virus. It’s deadly. It’s lethal. And all you can do with a virus like that, there’s no cure for it, it can only be contained, it has to be stopped. And the way you do it is through quarantine...”

What is being suggested here is to keep Muslims in concentrations camps like our government did to the United States citizens of Japanese descent. Over 127,000 were imprisoned because of their Japanese ancestry.

Islamophobia is a widespread European and American phenomenon. Islamophobia prompted government
leaders in Europe to ban Hijab in public. The construction of Minarets in mosques are banned in the Netherlands. Various translations of the Qur’an have been banned by the Russian government for fear of promoting extremism and Muslim supremacy.

Racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are fruits of the same tree of hate. Wolfram Richter, professor of economics at Dortmund University of Technology, once said, “I am afraid we have not learned from our history. My main fear is that what we did to Jews we may now do to Muslims. The next holocaust would be against Muslims.”

Things have not gotten better since the tragedy of 9-11. According to a 2012 study by the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamophobia rating is at 5.9 on a scale of one to ten, with one representing an America free of Islamophobia and 10 being the worst possible situation for Muslims.

It is alarming to learn that, based on the same study, the US-based Islamophobia network’s inner core is currently comprised of at least 37 groups whose primary purpose is to promote prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims. They enjoyed access to at least $119,662,719 in total revenue between 2008 and 2011. Islamophobia has become big business.

Islamophobes like Daniel Pipes, Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, among others are well connected with high government officials. According to the study, in 2011 and 2012, seventy-eight bills or amendments designed to vilify Islamic religious practices were introduced in the legislatures of twenty-nine states and the U.S. Congress. Sixty-two of these bills contained language that was extracted from David Yerushalmi’s American Laws for American Courts (ALAC) model legislation. David Yerushalmi is another Islamophobe. He is a lawyer and a political activist who is the driving force behind the anti-sharia movement in the United States.

According to a Gallup survey in 2010, “the 48% of Muslim Americans who say they experienced racial or religious discrimination is on par with Hispanic Americans (48%) and African Americans (45%), as calculated from a combination of these same groups. Arab Americans (52%) are most likely to say they experienced this type of discrimination.” Unfortunately, we have not learned lessons from our past experiences as a nation.

Perhaps, many people in the United States forget our Bill of Rights that declares all men are created equal. Muslims must never forget and ought to spread the words of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). In his farewell sermon he stressed that our Lord is one, and that, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action.”

Muslims living these difficult times must work together with the utmost sense of brotherhood and harmony and display the true face of Islam. We shall overcome these difficulties, God willing, but it will take dedication and commitment to combat the war imposed on us, Islamophobia.

We need to positively integrate in our communities. We must give time by volunteering; join interfaith discussions and circles; become civically engaged, register to vote and exercise your right to vote, as they say, there is power in numbers; attend city council meetings, decisions made by city council may affect you, make your voice heard; build alliances with other organizations that stand up for justice and fight racism and discrimination. Be grateful and thank those who speak out or act against Islamophobia.

Don’t hesitate to call 911 immediately if you feel that your life is threatened. Report any incident of Islamophobia to the FBI, your local CAIR chapter or local imam. And of course, pray for those who discriminate against you for the Prophet used to supplicate, “O Allah guide my people. They simply don’t know (the truth).”

As Muslims, we must remain resilient and faithful to our faith and our country. We must never be intimidated by the hatemongers. Always be vigilant and alert. The Prophet and the companions stood the test of their time. They
never wavered in spite of the harsh persecution they faced. Be proud of who you are, your faith and where you came from.

The Prophet himself was subject to hate crimes and his own personal life was threatened. The Prophet and the believers were isolated from the society, similar to a detention camp. Social and economic boycotts, today, we call it sanctions, were imposed on them. The Prophet and the companions never gave up their identity nor their mission to spread the beliefs and values of Islam. They tolerated their adversaries’ evil actions and were patient. Good and evil can never be equal, the Qur’an teaches, “Repel evil with good lest he who is your enemy becomes your dearest friend. But none will attain this except those who endure with fortitude and are greatly favored by Allah” (Fussilat, 41:34).

If hatemongers throw at you stones, you throw flowers back at them. If ignorant people spew hateful remarks and racial slurs, respond by saying, peace. Because of our predecessors strong faith and fortitude they prevailed and God willing, we will also prevail.

The legacy of Malcom is as alive today as it was fifty years ago. The walls of structured and institutionalized discrimination, racism, hate and bigotry must come down for once and for all.