

Introduction

The Muslim Mosque Inc. was founded by Malcolm X in March 1964 when he separated from Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. To a great extent, the history of the Muslim Mosque Inc. was coextensive with that of its charismatic leader and effectually ended with his assassination in February 1965.

The story of Malcolm X's conversion to Islam as a young man while serving a prison term has become the stuff of legends, both through Malcolm's autobiography, written with Alex Haley shortly before Malcolm's death, and through Spike Lee's film biography, "X." Born in 1925 to a part-time Baptist minister and his wife in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm Little heard his father, a disciple of Marcus Garvey, preach blacks' dignity and right to self-determination. But the racial violence that attended the family for much of Malcolm's childhood culminated in his father's death on streetcar tracks—murdered by white racists, according to Malcolm's version—when Malcolm was six. Malcolm's mother declined into insanity; the children became wards of the state.

Malcolm dropped out of school at age fifteen and, after a short stint as an attendant on Pullman trains between New York and Boston, began running numbers in Harlem. He looked older than his years and soon was involved in illegal drugs, gambling, and pimping. In February 1946 he was arrested and convicted for burglary in Boston and was sent to Charlestown State Prison, where he began an intensive program of self-education.

Through his brother, Malcolm became acquainted with the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of a black nationalist movement called the Lost-Found Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam had been founded in 1931 in Detroit by Robert Poole, who received a revelation about the true history of the world and the relationships among the races. He changed his name to Elijah Muhammad and began spreading his message about the true nature of blue-eyed white "devils," the inherent genetic superiority of the

black races, and the need for economic and political separation from white America.

Upon his release from prison in 1952, Malcolm traveled to Detroit, where he became a fervid disciple of Elijah Muhammad. His ardent work on behalf of this tiny sect multiplied its membership dramatically, and by 1960 it had become a truly national religion with almost ten thousand followers. Malcolm was soon its most prominent spokesperson, making radio and television appearances and speaking on university campuses across the country. His message of separation, violent revolution, and belief in the universal depravity of white people found a receptive audience. In June 1954 he was appointed the minister of the Nation of Islam's Harlem mosque, the largest in the country.

Malcolm's formal breach with the Nation of Islam happened on March 8, 1964. After being placed under a ban of silence by Muhammad for his inflammatory comments about the Kennedy assassination in December 1963, Malcolm broke his silence by stating that he intended to separate from the Nation of Islam and to establish his own organization, the Muslim Mosque Inc. Some believe that the breach occurred over Malcolm's resentment of the Nation of Islam's hesitancy to directly and actively confront racism. Others suspect that Malcolm's dynamism and popularity had begun to overshadow Muhammad's leadership in Chicago and that Malcolm's comments on the president's death simply provided a convenient excuse to expel him from the community. Still others believe that Malcolm was disillusioned by his discovery of Muhammad's sexual liaisons with a succession of secretaries and began telling others within the Nation of Islam about the infidelities. When word of the betrayal reached Muhammad, Malcolm was warned that the Nation of Islam would not stand for slander of its leader.

In May 1964, shortly after his break with Muhammad, Malcolm made his pilgrimage to Mecca, where for the first time he encountered people of all races peacefully coexisting in the name of Islam. This experience of "true Is-

lam” began a transformation that took him away from militant black nationalism and toward a goal of true white-black brotherhood and mutual transformation of American society.

The FBI file on the Muslim Mosque Inc., reproduced here, opens with Malcolm X’s split with the Nation of Islam. Malcolm himself had attracted FBI attention as early as 1953, when the Bureau was told that he might be a Communist sympathizer. But Malcolm’s role as what one writer calls “an exotic racial incendiary” prompted the surveillance of the Muslim Mosque Inc. that continued even beyond his death. Malcolm’s longtime advocacy of rifle clubs to prepare his black Nationalists to resist their white oppressors and to establish an African state on American soil also aroused suspicion, particularly because Communist countries, such as Cuba and China, were widely thought to be involved in such militancy.

As Malcolm X neared the end of his life, he suspected that members of the Nation of Islam, as well as powerful government constituencies, wanted him dead. His home, where he, his wife, and his four young children were sleeping, was firebombed in the early morning of February 14, 1965. Just a week later, in the Audubon Ballroom at 166th Street and Broadway in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, Malcolm was gunned down while addressing a meeting of his followers. Although two of his three assailants were black Muslims, no conspiracy was ever revealed. Already weakened by controversy and indirection, without Malcolm’s dynamism and without a chosen successor, the Muslim Mosque Inc., withered away.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents, or portions of documents, have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, and every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

The file is in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.