

Introduction

The Organization of Afro-American Unity was the brainchild of black activist Malcolm X. At the forefront of the civil rights struggle, as a spokesman for the Nation of Islam, he often found himself opposed to the leadership and “nonviolent” protest philosophy of the main line movement. Opposed to integration, Malcolm X was a black nationalist who favored a separate nation for the black man. To this end, he preached that it was up to the black man to become morally responsible to his family and his community. By leading a moral life and by becoming educated, the black man was prepared to change society and to serve his own people. Malcolm X developed the plan for the OAAU after a tour of Africa in 1964, which included a trip to Mecca, and visits with various African leaders.

At a public rally held in New York City in June 1964, Malcolm X announced that the OAAU was formed as an all-Negro militant, civil rights organization designed to eliminate differences between Negroes and to convince them to work for their “human rights.” The first objective of this new organization was to internationalize the American racial problem by taking it to the United Nations. The OAAU condemned the nonviolent civil rights movement and urged that Negroes be taught to protect themselves when and if necessary. He claimed that the OAAU was patterned after the Organization of African Unity, formed a year earlier by the heads of state in Africa.

Malcolm X envisioned the OAAU as a vehicle to sponsor programs for the Negro in education, politics, culture, economics, and social reform, as well as to organize a voter registration drive.

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