

Organisation of Black Unity

There shall be no solution to this race problem until you, yourselves, strike the blow for liberty

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Background

The idea of Black people coming together to attack the racist foundation of society by creating and supporting our own institutions and organisations has gradually fallen out of favour. Many people are still keeping the fight alive doing invaluable work and no doubt the spirit of Black activism continues in the conversations and debates you can hear across the community. However, the battles won fighting direct discrimination have meant that enough of us have been able to achieve in society that those who are 'successful' are marked out as role models for those failures left behind. The state is certainly moving away from targeted funding, which is making it very difficult for some of the organisations involved in Black activism. On top of this we are told that in this globalised, postmodern world, group identity is a thing of the past and we are in the era of the individual. Organising around race is seen by some as out of touch and backwards.

The more society has changed, however, the more it has stayed the same. In Britain [Black children still get significantly less qualifications](#), [the police continue to harass the community in the form of stop and search](#), the prisons are being [filled with Black people](#), [unemployment is at least 4 times as high for Black people than the average](#), [even Black university graduates are less likely to find jobs](#), and perhaps most disturbing is the rising number and falling ages of murders in the community. Across the Diaspora things are no better, in fact worse. Jamaica retains [one of the highest proportions of national debt](#) and [one of the highest murder rates in the world](#), in America there will soon be [1,000,000 Black men in jail](#), [poverty is endemic throughout South America](#), and on the continent of Africa we have not only poverty and the continuation of colonialism, where the resources are being stolen by the rest of the world; but also the AIDS crisis with over [22 million people living with the virus](#). As the euphoria ending apartheid South Africa has declined, what is left is a society where [over half the population live below the poverty line](#) and [over 250,000 people have been murdered](#) since achieving 'freedom'.

We continue to face problems created by a racial system of oppression. To have any chance to overcome this we need to come together as Black people and create organisations that can improve the conditions we find ourselves in. We need to build on the Black activism which has gone before us and modify it for our present situation. We are facing global systems and problems, but we feel the effects firstly on the local level. There are a number of groups across the world who are doing outstanding work in Black communities, providing invaluable services and support.

There is a need to strengthen these groups, extend the activities taking place and create new avenues of resistance.

In order to do this locally we need to work to build the Organisation of Black Unity that can be a focal point for Black empowerment in the city of Birmingham.

The Organisation of Black Unity

We need to develop an umbrella organisation to deal with the issues facing the community, based around different departments (updating Malcolm X's creation of the Organisation of African American Unity). The organisation would be focused practically on issues facing the local community, but always tying these into national and global concerns. There could be any number of departments and the focus of each can be decided later but could include, for example:

Education & Training

Health

Black Business Alliance (see below)

Arts & Culture

Fundraising & Events

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Many people are involved in these areas already and there are services that exist. The idea would be to draw on the resources and expertise already out there and support and extend it. So, for example, if we decided Saturday schools were a good way to tackle educational inequality then we would use the experience of those Saturday schools already running, provide them with resources and also create new Saturday school programmes.

Once the departments are formed they would have relative autonomy from each other, calling their own meetings and arranging events. We would need a number of people to head up the departments, who could be elected at larger organisational meetings. The leaders of the various departments could then form the basis of the Central Committee

When people sign up to be involved in the organisation they would pick a department or departments that they wanted to be a part of. This way we get people who are interested and with expertise doing what they know and are passionate about. People could be involved in as many different departments as they wish but would be expected to contribute fully to the activities within them.

Black Business Alliance

An organisation bringing together all of the Black-owned businesses in the city would also be beneficial. Economics are an essential part of any serious movement to improve our conditions. The idea here would be to cooperate to help the growth of businesses, retain more of the money that we spend in the community and attract more funds to the community. This could be done in a variety of ways. One important way such an alliance could be used is by businesses in the same trade bulk buying produce in order to get products cheaper. Cheaper products would encourage more people to support the businesses. There could also be some kind of commitment to training and employment opportunities.

Also, membership of the alliance would mean businesses providing a certain amount of money to the Organisation of Black Unity. This would hopefully also be an incentive to bring money into local businesses; knowing that some of your money spent will be filtering back into the community.

Expert support for businesses would be an added benefit of membership. We would retain the services of professional consultants and business advisors to offer support on various issues such as developing sound business plans, creating realistic strategies and responding to market changes.

Long Term Funding

In order for OBU to function long term, we will require a significant amount of money. We cannot rely on one source of funding. We must look to securing funds from a variety of sources to ensure the stability and sustainability of the organisation.

We cannot rely on the government or other public funding bodies for long term funding, as it is not available. Funding can be cut or reduced and funders can make unreasonable demands such as a change of our activities to suit their politics. Therefore we must also look to other sources.

In order to survive long term we need to engage the Black community. There are almost 80,000 Black people in Birmingham, if we can convince a significant number to people to donate (on average) £5 a month we will have significant funds to carry out a range of activities. Not only would we be asking people for contributions of money, but also for their services as volunteers on various projects. With donations and largely volunteer work, we should be able to run a number of projects.

We need to build up to the idea of donations. Building trust would be a priority to show that we are serious about and can achieve our aims. We could start by organizing the departments and coming up with various projects to support that depend entirely on volunteers with possible donation of space (e.g. legal clinics). The departments could draw up a number of ideas for projects. We could then present this list to the wider community with the simple argument that if we want to see the projects realised and improvements made in our community then we would have to pay for them. If we could do this after we have successfully run events and

popularised the idea of the organisation, bombarding the radios, papers, dances etc. then maybe we will be able to get enough people on board.

OBU must be committed to raising the economic profile of the Black community. This means that we must do more than simply move money around the Black community. We must bring money into the Black community through supporting the Black trade industry, providing support and training that enables Black people to secure better jobs and go into business for themselves; and securing government and other social funding to maximise the reach and effectiveness of Black community projects. We must remember that the Black community pays considerable millions to the government in taxes and fines every year. We must ensure that the maximum amount of funds is invested back into the Black community for the benefit of Black people.