

A Brief Introduction to the Nation of Islam

What is the Nation of Islam?



The Nation of Islam (NOI) began in Detroit's black ghetto during the 1930s depression. The movement was originally known as the **Temple of the Lost-Found People of Islam**, additionally referred to as Temple No.1, but they soon changed to the **Nation of Islam** and went on to establish Temple No.2 in 1934. The NOI was influenced heavily by the racial ideology of Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) who was a proponent of black nationalism and pan-Africanism. Garvey had a particularistic approach to Islam and self-help philosophy.

The NOI and associated groups (along with some other groups with similar black-nationalist teachings) are often referred to as **Black Muslims**. In spite of this, many Sunni and Shia Muslims do not consider the NOI, or any of the movement's offshoots or associated organisations, to be Muslims. However, offshoots led by Wallace Deen Mohammed are an exception to this.

The movement has seen some disagreements and splits, resulting in offshoots. Wallace Deen Mohammed renamed the NOI the **Bilalian Muslims**, the **World Community of Al-Islam in the West (WCIW)** in 1976, and then the **American Muslim Mission**, all the while bringing the movement closer to Sunni Islam. Louis Farrakhan broke away from this and brought his followers back to the pre-Wallace Deen Muhammad NOI. Other schisms include the **Five Percenters** under Clarence 13X; the **Muslim Mosque Inc.** and the **Organisation of Afro-American Unity** under Malcolm X. (More details about these offshoots can be found at the end of this document.)

Who were the founders and leaders?

The NOI's founder was a man named Wallace Fard Muhammed (1891- c.1934). Fard's identity, birth and death locations, and dates are all still disputed today. When Fard founded the NOI he was known as Abdul Awli Farrad Muhammad. The NOI was strongly influenced by Noble Drew Ali's **Moorish Science Temple** and the **Marcus Garvey Movement**. Whilst Fard was the founder, he was followed by a man named Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975). Elijah went on to lead the movement from 1934-1975 and proclaimed that Fard was the physical

Patrons

incarnation of Allah, and that he, Elijah Muhammad, was his messenger.

Elijah built on Fard's racial teachings and, through three major works, developed the vision of the NOI. Under Elijah's tutelage, Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little, 1925-65) became the group's spokesman, and was National Representative from 1959-1964. Malcolm X left the NOI in 1964 when he converted to Sunni Islam, and changed his name to El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (after the Tribe of Shabazz from early NOI texts). Soon after, he repudiated some of NOI's teachings but continued to be committed to the civil rights struggle for black Americans until he was assassinated in 1965. (There were allegations that the NOI was responsible for his assassination, including in Professor Manning Marable's biography of Malcolm X, but those charged maintained their innocence and no consensus has been reached on who was responsible.)

Elijah died in 1975, after which his son, Wallace Deen Muhammad (1933-2008), took over leadership of the NOI and steered the group more towards Sunni Islam. Furthermore, Wallace Deen reinstated the reputation of Malcolm X within the NOI. He changed the name of the movement a few times, as well as his own name (to Warith Deen Mohammed), in his quest for closer ties with Sunni Islam. Under his leadership ministers became Imams, temples became mosques and later masjids, and a new emphasis on the study of the Qur'an and the five pillars of Islam was introduced. This caused a schism as members loyal to Fard and Elijah left in order to re-establish the 'old' teachings. Consequently, a few independent NOI organisations were created (although Warith's movement remained the largest branch).

One such organisation was headed by Louis Farrakhan (born Louis Eugene Walcott), who was related to Elijah Muhammad by marriage, and who considered himself his spiritual heir. Farrakhan became the National Representative after Malcolm X's assassination, re-established the pre-Wallace Muhammad legacy of the NOI in 1978, and reinstated the vision through *The Final Call*, a weekly newspaper founded in 1979. (Some NOIs existed in parallel to one another, including **smaller independent NOIs** such as those headed by John Muhammad, Silas Muhammad, and Caliph Emanuel Muhammad.) In the 1980s, Farrakhan began moderating his NOI's stance towards Sunni Islam again. Not all ministers have followed, which has led to further dissension within the NOI. (See below.)

What do they believe?

For the NOI, religion, identity, and their relation to ethnicity and race are extremely important. Fard taught that the black people of North America were not 'Negroes' (terminology used at the time) but Muslim 'Asiatics' from the Arabic-speaking Original Tribe of Shabazz in East Asia. He also taught that the black race was the original race, and that the red, yellow, and white people of the world were a result of a eugenics experiment by a black scientist named Yakub. Fard tied these teachings in with biblical history and a messianic prophecy of the black race once again becoming a superior race after their period of servitude. Fard also taught about the Mother Plane, a wheel-shaped spaceship built by Allah that would eliminate the white race by dropping a bomb on the USA.

Elijah Muhammad continued along racialised theological lines, teaching that Islam is the original religion of 'all black mankind'. Furthermore, the NOI teaches that a significant number of slaves taken from West Africa during the trans-Atlantic slave trade were Muslims. For the

NOI, becoming a Muslim and joining the Nation is understood as a process 'to reunite with their own kind'. Islam, therefore, revives the ethnic heritage and generic memories of their past and assists in the rediscovery of their cultural and spiritual ties with Africa. To the NOI, especially under Elijah Muhammad, Islam is seen as an ancestral faith and Christianity is seen as the white man's, or Europeans', religion. Followers are taught that the Bible has been tampered with and must be reinterpreted, that there is no God but Allah, and that they should believe in the Qu'ran.

NOI Muslims are encouraged to shed the names they were given in slavery and adopt an 'X' instead. The 'X' would therefore symbolically signify that they had been uprooted and did not know their origins. Elijah Muhammad argued that the time had come for the separation of the so-called black people and white Americans. He called for economic self-sufficiency through the 'Build Black, Buy Black' agenda, arguing that NOI members should not buy from shops that would not hire them. Furthermore, NOI called for complete separation in a territory of their own in North America to be given to Black Americans as reparation for slavery. Farrakhan later continued many of Elijah's separatist teachings, although he moderated them over time, especially in regard to political participation.

Members are required to pray five times a day, adhering to Salat times (standard prayer times for Muslims), and must always face Mecca during these prayers. Furthermore, ritual washing is required before prayers, members must use prayer rugs, and members must prostrate themselves before Allah. Prayers can be made individually and they can be adapted to certain institutional requirements (daily school or work breaks). Once a week, members are expected to congregate for Jumah (weekly prayer), and study meetings are carried out preferably twice per week.

In 1998 Farrakhan wrote that the NOI would begin to observe the Ramadan fast. That year Farrakhan, along with a 24-member delegation, had visited Mecca to perform 'Umrah' (pilgrimage to Mecca, referred to as the 'minor pilgrimage' in relation to the Hajj, the 'major pilgrimage'), following a previous visit in 1996. He called for other NOI Muslims to make Hajj as well.

What does the Nation of Islam do?

The NOI is considered a social as well as a religious movement. For example, Fard established many educational organisations:

- **Temple of Islam:** for worship
- **Muhammad University of Islam:** for primary and secondary education from a NOI perspective
- **The Muslim Girls' Training Class:** teaching young female members 'home economics', including 'how to keep a house, how to rear children, how to take care of a husband, sew, cook'.
- **The Fruit of Islam (FOI):** also known as the 'Security Order', where young men monitor and enforce discipline within the movement, and of some outside communities, protecting these from outside violence.

Additionally, the NOI has previously set up schools, most of which had a distinctive dress code and curriculum. In Britain there were three schools all located in London; the **New Mind School** in Brixton, the **Star Chamber Academy** in Shepherd's Bush, and a full-time nursery, primary school, and secondary school in Hackney. In 1998, the Department for Education had threatened the closure of the Star Chamber Academy if it did not complete a registration process; but it did so allowing it to become 'provisionally registered'. However, in 2020, it is not listed in the Department for Education school's directory. New Mind School closed in 2013.

The NOI also provides economic and business enterprises, e.g. restaurants, grocery shops, bookstores, and clothing stores (including **Elijah's Garden**; the **People's Trust**; **Respect for Your Life Bookstores**; **Respect for Life Clothing Company** and more).

Both Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan gave priority to schemes for improving the socio-economic status of followers. Past initiatives have included **POWER – People Organised and Working for Economic Rebirth** (an all-black entrepreneurial scheme to build a 'black economy') and **The Three Year Economic Savings Program**. The latter, established by Elijah Muhammad in 1964, called for black people to pool their resources by contributing \$10 a month to help fight against the poverty of the black people in America. Louis Farrakhan re-established this programme in October 1991. In further efforts to help the wider black community, Farrakhan established the NOI **Security Agency Incorporated** in 1988 to clean the streets from drugs, prostitution and other crimes. They worked together with some USA government departments to protect and bring security to residents in urban housing projects.

Some recent schemes that are listed on the NOI current website include:

- Ministry of Agriculture
- Final Call News
- The Muslim Program
- Government War Against Dissent

In Brixton, Shepherd's Bush, Hackney, and Tottenham (areas in London with significant black and ethnic minority populations), residents and sometimes civic authorities have welcomed the NOI initiatives and praised their efforts to create clean, drug and alcohol free and safe environments. The NOI's members are seen by some to present role models whom disaffected black youths should emulate.

On 16th October 1995, Louis Farrakhan oversaw the **Million Man March** on Washington D.C., in which he strongly encouraged black men to take responsibility for their own personal, familial and communal development by renouncing drugs, violence, and unemployment, and by supporting black entrepreneurs. The march was widely covered in the media, but received mixed support, much of it focused on Farrakhan and his reputation. For example, Warith Deen Mohammed dissociated himself from the Million Man March and discouraged his followers from joining; he considered this to be more for Farrakhan's public relations than for black Americans. A Million Family March was held in 2000 and a 20th Anniversary of the Million Man March, 'Justice or Else', was held on 10th October 2015. A special video presentation is planned for the 25th Anniversary march on 18th October 2020; Covid-19 restrictions mean that a physical march cannot take place.

Since at least 2010, the NOI has been using Scientology methods and taking Scientology courses in order to empower black people and their communities. The NOI, from its founding, has had a focus on self-help methods to improve the lives and self-determination of its membership. This is something they have in common with Scientology.

Lifestyle

Alcohol and tobacco are prohibited. With regards to diet and nutrition, pork is prohibited. There are also teachings against some ingredients typical of some American regional diets, such as grits, peas, lima beans, sweet potatoes, corn bread, and 'collard greens'. These are supposedly good for cattle, but not for humans. Elijah Muhammad wrote books on diets where he stated one needs only to eat one meal a day (except small children and those who are ill). Fard and Elijah suggested vegetarianism as the best diet, and Farrakhan strongly reiterated this. The NOI are famous for making and selling bean pies, made with navy beans.

There was gender segregation within the temples and NOI organisations under Elijah Muhammad, who at the time of his leadership held conservative beliefs about the nature, roles, and positions women should occupy in society. He wrote and taught that women were 'given to evil and sin', and hence should be closely monitored by men. Elijah Muhammad invested heavily in educating and training women, with a focus on the home - cooking, sewing, and childcare. Malcolm X was also critical of the moral standing of women (although he later stated he regretted some of his remarks). Wallace Deen relaxed the segregation of men and women in the movement, put them on an equal footing, and gave women administrative positions. Farrakhan returned to Elijah's more traditional teachings of male superiority, but did introduce more positive teachings regarding women. Under Farrakhan, some women were appointed as female Ministers and given positions in the group's executive board, which directs the NOI during Farrakhan's absences.

Cleanliness, inside and outside, is important to the NOI. Men tend to wear clean-cut suits (especially the FOI, the Security Order), and women wear modern, although modest, dress and headscarves. Women generally do not wear make-up or tight clothing. There is an adherence to traditional gender roles; women are generally expected to take the lead role in running the household and raising children, as well as working outside the home – often an economic necessity for black women. There is a ban on interracial dating, and within the NOI members engage in chaperoned courtship to meet their future spouse. Non-marital sex is forbidden.

Where is it based?

The Nation of Islam established its headquarters in Chicago in 1934 and this was followed by related social organisations and more temples across the USA. The American headquarters are at South Side Chicago Mosque Maryam in the USA. The movement also has a significant social presence in other countries and regions, including Canada, the UK, France, Ghana, and the Caribbean. The NOI European Regional Headquarters are based in Brixton, London.

Size of the following

The NOI does not publish membership figures but there are estimates of 100,000 worldwide in the 1960s (Rubel, 2006) and, from 2001, between 50,000-100,000 worldwide, mostly in the USA (Barrett, 2001), with up to 10,000 in Britain (Tinaz, 2001).

Additionally, the NOI's social media accounts can give some idea of interest in the movement and potential membership figures. The NOI twitter account, in 2020, has 55,000 followers and the Facebook page currently has 45,000 followers.

A 2017 Pew Research Centre survey of American Muslims found that 20 per cent of American Muslims are black. Of these American-born black Muslims, only three per cent identified with the NOI.

The Nation of Islam in Britain

After his defection from the NOI, Malcolm X visited Britain in 1964 and 1965 to rouse and organise the 'black nationalist' movement.

Warith Deen Mohammed sought to spread a 'true version of Islam' to the black diaspora, and his missionary policies had reached Britain by the late 1970s when he sent two envoys, Imam B. D. Murad and Abdul Aziz, to teach and spread Islam among people of African Caribbean heritage. Aziz re-joined Farrakhan's NOI in the early 1980s, changed his name to Abdul Akbar Muhammad, and became Farrakhan's and the NOI's International Representative. (Murad continued to be active in the wider Sunni Muslim community, with financial support from, among others, The Muslim World League.)

Farrakhan, seeking to further heighten international awareness about the NOI, sent Khalid Abdul Muhammad (his national aide) to London in 1985, along with Abdul Akbar Muhammad. In 1986 Farrakhan was invited to speak in London by the Hackney Black People's Association, but the British-Israeli Parliamentary Group urged the then Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, to ban this visit. The latter issued an exclusion order on the grounds that 'Farrakhan's presence in the UK would not be conducive to the public good'.

The exclusion order remained in force for fifteen years, and within the African-Caribbean community this acted to arouse sympathy for the NOI and its message. The NOI challenged the exclusion order in court and it was lifted in 2001, but the government appealed and the order was re-imposed in 2002. The NOI in the UK are still campaigning, in 2020, for the lifting of the ban, with a special page on their website dedicated to this topic.

In 1988 sympathisers held meetings in their homes to study and discuss NOI teachings, and in February 1989 some British followers went to Chicago to meet with Farrakhan. Upon their return, they started the first Study Group in Brixton, South London, and over time the group spread its Study Groups across London (1991 in West London, 1994 in East London and 1997 in North London, with eventually Mosque No. 1 in Hackney, East London, Mosque No. 1B in Shepherd's Bush, West London, and Mosque No. 1C in Brixton) and other British cities.

There was extensive media coverage of the NOI in Britain after the Steven Lawrence Inquiry in 1998. (Lawrence was a black British teenager who was murdered in a racist attack in south-

east London.) The NOI were in attendance, both in the public gallery and outside the court along with people who were refused attendance (reportedly because the public gallery was full), about which the NOI members protested and reportedly disrupted proceedings. Police used tear gas, and one NOI member was reportedly involved in violence towards a police officer. These events, as well as the 10,000 Man March they held in October that year in London, helped create a public awareness of the NOI in the UK. Previous NOI UK leader Yasser has pointed out that NOI fits well with the UK's black diaspora which is mainly Caribbean, all the black leaders in the USA being Caribbean: e.g. Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Minister Farrakhan. The current NOI UK representative, Minister Abdul Hakeem Muhammad (previously called Minister Hilary Muhammad, and who is actually the European Regional Representative), is a regular guest speaker at Mosque Maryam in Chicago, USA.

The organisation now seems to enjoy a significant position and legitimacy among black civil rights organisations in Britain, and London has the strongest NOI chapters outside the USA. The London chapter of the NOI has at times sold more copies of the *Final Call* newspaper than their counterparts in the USA, which is significant given that the US chapters are much larger.

Areas of Controversy

The movement has been controversial throughout its history. Fard's identity has been questioned, and his disappearance was mysterious, coinciding with the murder of a member and the subsequent arrest of another member. Fard's successor maintained that Fard had gone to Mecca. The murder of Malcolm X has also caused much speculation, within the movement and beyond.

Elijah Muhammad was accused of promiscuity and of fathering illegitimate children with several female NOI followers who had worked as his secretaries. In two cases the women involved were expelled from the NOI after internal trials. They eventually filed paternity suits with the Los Angeles Supreme Court. Within the NOI in the 1960s this news was largely dismissed as a ploy by the media to discredit the group, while current justifications for Muhammad's behaviour are found in Islamic teachings on polygamy – now it is argued by members of the NOI that Elijah Muhammad took these women as 'wives'.

The racial teachings have also caused controversy. Fard and Elijah taught that the scientist Yakub had created white people 'without soul'. Farrakhan is known for his disparaging remarks, especially about the exploitation of black people by Jews, Koreans, the Vietnamese, and white people. He has been criticised for being a vocal critic of American foreign policy, and also for allegedly accepting, in 1985, a \$ 5 million interest-free loan from the late Colonel Gaddafi. Farrakhan has been banned from entering the UK indefinitely, on the grounds that his presence could jeopardise public order (explained above). Farrakhan's rhetoric appeared to have softened until his 2015 'Justice Or Else!' tour, when he expressed racist and anti-Semitic positions. Campaigning groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Centre and the Anti-Defamation League keep a record of these remarks, which include such statements as "I don't care what they put on me. The government is my enemy, the powerful Jews are my enemy." (Saviours' Day speech, 2/25/18).

In 2008, Farrakhan initially supported Barak Obama for the Presidency, but withdrew his support in 2011 when the President offered military support for the invasion of Libya. In 2016,

he initially supported Donald Trump for the Presidency but, again, withdrew his support in 2018 when Trump reinstated the sanctions against Iran. Media accounts suggest that on a visit to Iran in 2018, Farrakhan compared Trump to Satan.

Some of his ministers have continued to be controversial and divisive, including his spokesman Khalid Abdul Muhammad, who gave a racist speech in 1993 at Kean College in New Jersey, USA. Farrakhan suspended Khalid from his post as his national assistant, but since then Khalid has been compared to Malcolm X by some followers. In further controversy, Khalid was shot in the leg a year after his notorious speech, and rumours circulated that this had been an assassination attempt. The following year he was reinstated in his post. Khalid did eventually leave the NOI in the late 1990s, after which he became the national chairman of the **New Black Panther Party (NBPP)**, taking some NOI followers with him.

Many Sunni and Shia individuals and institutions are distant from and suspicious of the NOI for its heterodox teachings and practices, including its concept of God (with Fard being seen as an incarnation of Allah), prophecy, the hereafter, and different dietary and fasting teachings - as well as the racial teachings. Muslim critics tend to deny that the members of the NOI are true Muslims, and often refer to the movement as 'Farrakhanism'.

In October 2020, YouTube removed the Nation of Islam channel as it violated its community guidelines, with Farrakhan repeatedly engaging in hate speech, most prominently anti-Semitic speech. There is, however, still an active YouTube channel for the NOI's European Regional Headquarters.

Future Leadership

By 2012 Minister Farrakhan was nearing 80 years old and battling prostate cancer and related health problems. However, in 2020, Farrakhan is still the leader of the NOI. Throughout the NOI's history, many key positions have been filled by members of the Muhammad and Farrakhan family (Farrakhan himself has nine children), and Farrakhan has established a Council of Leaders for NOI, on which a significant number of positions are filled by Muhammads (including Ishmael Muhammad and Abdul Hafeez Muhammad) and Farrakhans (including Mustapha Farrakhan and Nasir Farrakhan).

Influences and Schisms

Influences

Marcus Garvey Movement

Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a Jamaican-born black nationalist who created a 'Back to Africa' movement in the United States. From 1910 to 1912, Garvey travelled in South and Central America and also visited London (where he studied at Birkbeck College). He returned to Jamaica in 1914 and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). In 1916, Garvey moved to Harlem in New York where UNIA thrived, and later he spoke across America. He urged African-Americans to be proud of their race and return to Africa, their ancestral homeland – a move he attempted to facilitate and realise through several initiatives.

Garvey was arrested in 1922 for mail fraud (it has been claimed by his followers that this was either a politically motivated prosecution, or a fraud perpetrated by colleagues behind his

back), sent to prison, and later deported to Jamaica. In 1935 he moved to London, where he remained for the rest of his life. In 1964 his body was returned to Jamaica where he was declared a national hero.

Garvey has become an inspirational figure for later civil rights activists, ideological and religious movements - for example, Rastafarian groups consider Garvey a prophet. His teachings were also a strong influence on a number of leaders in the NOI.

Moorish Science Temple of America

Founded by Noble Drew Ali in 1913 in New Jersey. Noble Drew Ali was born Timothy Drew (1886-1929) in North Carolina, either as the son of two former slaves who were adopted by Cherokees, or of a Moroccan Muslim father and a Cherokee mother, according to different accounts. Drew claimed to have been trained by a high priest of Egyptian magic who gave him a lost section of the Quran. This text came to be known as the Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America, aka the Circle Seven Koran (after a symbol of an encircled '7' on its cover), and Drew came to be known as a Prophet. Drew presented his movement as a sect of Islam, but there were also Buddhist, Christian, Masonic, Gnostic and Taoist elements. Much of the focus was on personal transformation through mystical knowledge of the divine within, and racial pride. Drew taught that 'Negroid Asiatics' existed in the Western Hemisphere and on American soil long before the transatlantic slave trade, and have since been confused with African people. Followers refer to themselves as 'Asiatics', indigenous Moors, American Moors or Moorish Americans, rather than African Moors or African Americans. He also taught that African Americans were all descended from the ancient Moabites, and that Islam is their true religion. Followers added the suffixes Bey or El to their surnames to signify Moorish heritage.

The movement grew and moved temples several times, eventually settling in Chicago in the mid-1920s, after which more temples were established. In the 1930s membership was estimated at 30,000. In 1929 conflict led to the murder of a member who had split from the movement and taken some followers with him. Police arrested Drew and some other members of the community, but they weren't charged. Drew was released, and died shortly after – reportedly from tuberculosis broncho-pneumonia, although followers speculated that his death had been caused by injuries sustained during his arrest.

After Drew's death there were contested leaders, and the emergence of separate factions, which continued to fight with each other, culminating in 1929 in a gun battle in Chicago that killed a Moor as well as a policeman, and resulted in 60 people being taken into police custody. Over the years the Moors have dwindled in numbers, and by 2007 there were only a few hundred among the remaining temples.

Schisms

Bilalian Muslims, World Community Al-Islam in the West (WCIW), and American Muslim Mission

Led by Warith Deen Muhammad (1933-2008):

Wallace Deen Muhammad, in 1980, changed his name to Warithuddin Mohammed, but he is also referred to as Warith Deen Mohammed. When in charge of the Nation of Islam, he changed its name to the **World Community of al-Islam in the West** in 1976, then to the

American Muslim Mission in the Spring of 1980, and eventually to the **American Society of Muslims** in a general move towards Islamic universalism. Farrakhan disagreed with the changes Warith Deen was making; he broke away and resurrected the 'old' Nation of Islam, resuming its public meetings under new leadership in predominantly black communities in 1978. Warith Deen sought to mainstream the movement by revoking the teaching that Fard was God, reinterpreting the previous racial doctrine in a symbolic manner, allowing white membership, and introducing Islam's Five Pillars. He took on the title of Imam and converted the temples to Mosques and renamed them. But he still reached out to the black community, referring to them as Bilalians. The name Bilal was relevant to the quest for identity among black American Muslims; Bilal Ibn Rabah was an African slave brought to Arabia and the first Muezzin (caller to prayer) in the Prophet Muhammad's earliest Muslim community in Medina. Bilal's past struck a chord with many black Americans.

In a further change, Warith Deen established a Council of Imams for democratic governance. He also came to concentrate on inter-faith work, which put him at odds with Farrakhan's separatist stance and, once they headed separate groups, further negatively affected their relationship. They eventually reconciled in 2000, but their groups remained separate. Warith Deen came to be generally recognised as a leader for interfaith cooperation and for American Muslims.

Offshoots in opposition to Warith Deen Mohammed (along with Farrakhan's NOI)

- **The Lost-Found Nation of Islam** under the leadership of Silas Muhammad.
- **The Nation of Islam** under the leadership of Supreme Minister John Muhammad, (Elijah Muhammad's younger brother).
- Caliph Emanuel broke with Warith Muhammad in 1978 and founded yet another **Nation of Islam**.

The Nation of Gods and Earths, aka The Five Percent Nation or the Five Percenters

Founded by Clarence 13X (1928-1969):

Founded in 1964 In Harlem, New York, by Clarence X (born Clarence Jowers Smith), who was a former student of Malcolm X. Clarence left Malcolm's mosque and the NOI as a result of



doctrinal disagreements. Although clearly influenced by the NOI, the movement and its followers (referred to as Five Percenters) have distinguished themselves through Clarence's teachings and the influence these have had on hip hop music and culture. **The Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE)** teaches that black people (the 'Asiatic Blackman') are the original people of planet earth; they are the fathers (Gods) and mothers (Earths) of civilisation. Allah, God's real name, is considered an acronym for Arm, Leg, Leg, Arm, Head. Clarence (known in the movement as the Father) taught that his followers were Gods, as they themselves are the highest power in the known universe. Women are Earths, as Earth is the planet on which God produces life. The movement has developed Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet, which form the key to understanding humanity's relationship to the universe. As such, followers have also referred to themselves as scientists, as they search for knowledge and proof to build their minds as a

way of elevating themselves. Looking for spiritual messages in numbers and words led many of them to create new terms and meanings, and **Five Percenters** are credited with being the innovators behind much early hip hop slang. This was aided by their skill and effort at reaching out to young black people on the streets in downtrodden areas of New York. The five points of the constellation of their logo are 'Mecca' (Harlem), 'Medina' (Brooklyn), 'the Desert' (Queens), 'Pelan' (Bronx), and 'New Jerusalem' (New Jersey), and their school, established in Harlem in 1967, is the '**Allah School in Mecca**'.

The term Five Percent comes from the doctrine originally taught in the 1930s by Elijah and Fard Muhammad that sees the world's black population divided into three groups: 85% of the people are blind to the knowledge of themselves and God, while 10% of the people know the truth, but teach a lie for their personal gain, including religious leaders who teach that God is an incorporeal being and the governments of the world that deceive and mislead the majority of the world through most of the available media outlets. The remaining 5% are the 'Poor Righteous Teachers'—those who do not subscribe to the teachings of the 10%, but rather teach that God is the Asiatic Blackman.

Clarence 13X was shot and killed in his home in 1969. His teachings are continued and disseminated by a select group among his early students, referred to as the First Nine Born. Many of the teachings have become an oral tradition spread by hip hop music. Musicians who have or have had a Five Percent affiliation include Brand Nubian, Rakim, Poor Righteous Teachers, several musicians associated with the Wu-Tang Clan, Busta Rhymes, Nas, Erykah Badu, and Queen Latifah.

New World Nation of Islam

Founded by Ali Hassan and James Washington:

Minister James 3X Shabazz headed Newark's NOI temple No. 25, where Hassan and Washington were regular participants. In 1960 Hassan and Washington founded the **New World Nation of Islam (NWNIOI)**, which they argued was authorised by Elijah Muhammad, and had authority over all NOI Muslims. This was rejected by James 3X Shabazz, but it caused a struggle for the temple between the followers of Shabazz and the followers of the NWNIOI. Hassan and Washington were arrested and convicted of robbery and sent to prison, from where they continued to run NWNIOI. The NWNIOI spread throughout the New Jersey state prison system and metropolitan Jersey ghettos. This group was allegedly implicated in the murder of 3X Shabazz in 1973, which was followed by attacks in retaliation on NWNIOI within New Jersey state prisons.

<http://www.newworldnationislam.com/home>

The Muslim Mosque Inc. and Organisation of African-American Unity

Founded by Malcolm X:

The **Muslim Mosque Inc. (MMI)** was established in 1964 by Malcolm X, four days after his departure from the NOI. It started with a core of approximately 50 former NOI members who had followed Malcolm X, who had begun to de-emphasize the racial doctrines of the NOI by differentiating between levels of people. He no longer held to the view that white people were intrinsically evil (as had been taught in the early years of the NOI). Malcolm X had visited

Mecca and learned more about Sunni Islam, and at this time changed his name to Malik El Shabazz. However, he did not go as far as Wallace Deen had gone by allowing white people to join – both the Muslim Mosque Inc and the Organisation for African-American Unity were black-only membership organisations. He did, however, see possibilities of working with white people and organisations on selected issues. The MMI developed ties with mainstream Islamic organisations over time, but it remained a relatively small group, and collapsed after Malcolm X was assassinated. The **Organisation for African-American Unity (OAAU)** was created by Malcolm X in 1964 to fight for the human rights of black Americans and promote cooperation among Africans and African Americans. It pushed for black control over every aspect of the black community. But the organisation never really flourished, as Malcolm X travelled a lot and could not invest much time in it. Its eventual collapse followed his death.

The New Black Panther Party

Led by Khalid Abdul Mohammad (1948-2001):

The New Black Panther Party (NBPP, official name New Black Panther Party for Self-Defence) was founded in Dallas, Texas in 1989. It is not an official successor to the original Black Panther Party (BPP); nor is it even connected to the original. In fact, the latter has insisted that the new group is illegitimate and that there is no new Black Panther Party. Yet the NBPP identifies with the BPP and claims to uphold its legacy. The NBPP is defined as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Centre, who considers it 'virulently racist and anti-semitic'. When Khalid Abdul Muhammad became involved and brought the organisation into the spotlight, he attracted many breakaway members of the NOI. The NBPP is currently led by Sister Krystal Muhammad, but it upholds Khalid Abdul Muhammad, chairman from 1998-2001, as the father of the movement.



The movement calls for revolution to overturn capitalism, and promotes Kawaida as the method. The Kawaida theory, a black and African-centred philosophy, was created by Maulana Karenga, an African-American scholar and activist. Popular and respected in mainstream culture, the theory emphasises black unity, collective action and cooperative economics. Individuals and some groupings within the NBPP, however, emphasise racist and separatist teachings, creating controversy.

The NBPP has been involved in armed clashes with the Ku Klux Klan in which some NBPP members also attacked the police; this was the same year, 1998, in which Khalid urged people to attack the police during a Million Youth March he organised in New York City, just before he became chairman of the NBPP. After Khalid's death in 2001, Malik Zulu Shabazz took over leadership. He successfully worked to improve relations with the NOI, becoming the co-convenor of the Million Man March's 10th anniversary and appearing at events together with Louis Farrakhan. Shabazz stepped down from the movement in 2013 in order to pursue a law career; the movement has since been led by Sister Krystal Muhammad.

In 2010 Malik Zulu Shabazz appointed the French black activist Stelio Capo Chichi as the head of the Francophone branch of NBPP in France. Chichi had been head of the *Mouvement des damnés de l'impérialisme* (MDI, 'Movement of Those Damned by Imperialism'), but resigned

in 2010 and took on the name Kemiour Aarim Shabazz. Previously, Chichi had founded the group **Tribu KA**, inspired by Louis Farrakhan's NOI teachings. Tribu KA was dissolved by the Ministry of the Interior in 2006 after Chichi had sent intimidating email messages to Jewish leaders. Soon after, Chichi was arrested for allegedly anti-semitic posts on his website and was imprisoned for criminal contempt of the law.

<https://nbpp.org/>

Other Independent NOIs

There are more organisations today that are inspired by the NOI, and/or connected to the NOI historically, and that function as independent NOIs. This list includes, but is not limited to:

- **The Value Creators**, Kansas, (originally called **The United Nation of Islam** and founded by Solomon Muhammad who later changed his name to Royall Muhammad or Royall Jenkins).
- **The New Nation of Islam** under the leadership of Marvin Muhammad (who goes by the name Son of Man).
- **The Nation of Islam on Earth and in the Universe**, under Melchisedek Shabazz-Allah.
- **The Messianic Nation of Islam (MNOI)** under the leadership of Prince-Messiah, Omar Al-Tariq.
- *The Mujaddid Community of **The Nation of Islam** under the leadership of Minister Mahdi Khalif Muhammad.
- ***Muhammad Speaks** website under the leadership of Minister Levi Karim.
- ***The Nation of Islam Settlement #1** under the leadership of an individual named Seventhfam.

* These last 3 organisations were based on collaboration among independent NOI adherents who sought to continue the teachings of Elijah Muhammad without alteration. It is not clear whether they are still active in 2020.

Further Information

From the movement

Websites: <http://www.noi.org>; <http://www.noi.org.uk/>

USA Headquarters:

Mosque Mariam, 7351 Stony Island Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60649, USA

<http://www.noi.org/letters/>

UK Headquarters:

Muhammad Mosque, 1-5 Hinton Road, Brixton, London SE24 OHJ, UK

mail@noi.org.uk

Tel: 020 7501 9800

Publications from the Nation of Islam:

The Nation of Islam has a 'store' section on their website that lists all of their publications. Titles range from 'Black History: The Legacy of our Struggle' to 'The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews'.

Elijah, M (1965) *Message to the Blackman in America*. Chicago: Muhammad Mosque of Islam.

Elijah, M (1973) *The Fall of America*. Arizona: Secretarius MEMPS Ministries.

Additionally, the NOI also produce a newspaper:

The Final Call (<https://new.finalcall.com>).

For an academic approach:

Gardell, Mattias (1996) *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and The Nation of Islam*. (The C. Eric Lincoln Series on the Black Experience.) Duke University Press Books.

Gibson, Dawn-Marie (2012) *A History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam and the Quest for Freedom*. Praeger.

Gibson, D.M. and H, Berg (Eds). (2017) *New Perspectives on the Nation of Islam*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Pew Research Centre (2017) 'Demographic Portrait of American Muslims'. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>

Rubel, Nora L. (2006) 'The Nation of Islam', in Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft (eds.), *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America* (Volume 5: African Diaspora Traditions and Other American Innovations; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 3-22.

Tinaz, Nuri (2001), 'Globalization and the Influence of Black Religio-nationalist Movement in Black Diaspora: The case of Nation of Islam in Britain'. <http://www.cesnur.org/2001/london2001/tinaz.htm>

Tinaz, Nuri (1996), 'The Nation of Islam: Historical Evolution and Transformation of the Movement', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 16 (2), 193-209.

HOW INFORM CAN HELP

- By providing reliable, up-to-date information about minority religions
- By putting you in touch with a nation-wide network of experts with specialist knowledge concerning minority religions
- By putting you in touch with people who can give counselling, legal advice - or just lend a sympathetic ear.
- By putting you in touch with former-members or families who have personal experience with a particular group.

New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction (London: HMSO, revised 1995) has been written by Professor Eileen Barker to provide practical suggestions as well as general background information. It can be brought second hand from retailers including amazon.co.uk and abebooks.co.uk

Every care is taken to provide as accurate and balanced an account as possible, but we welcome corrections and comments.

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