

= Clarence 13X =

Clarence Edward Smith (February 22 , 1928 ? June 13 , 1969) , better known by his assumed names Clarence 13X and Allah , was an American leader and founder of the Five @-@ Percent Nation . He was born in Virginia , and moved to New York City as a young man before serving in the United States Army during the Korean War . After returning to New York , he learned that his wife had joined the NOI and followed her , taking the name Clarence 13X . He served in the group as a security officer , martial arts instructor , and student minister before leaving for an unclear reason in 1963 . He enjoyed gambling , which was condemned by the NOI , and disagreed with the NOI 's teachings that Wallace Fard Muhammad was a divine messenger .

After leaving the NOI , Clarence 13X formed a new group with other former members . He concluded that all black men were divine and took the name Allah to symbolize this status . He rejected the belief in an invisible God , teaching that God could be found within each black man . In his view , women were " earths " that complemented and nurtured men ; he believed that they should be submissive to men . He and a few assistants retained some NOI teachings and pioneered novel interpretations of them . They devised teachings about the meaning of letters and numerals : understanding the meaning of each letter and number was said to provide deep truths about God and the universe . Clarence 13X referred to his new movement as the Five Percenters , referencing a NOI teaching that only five percent of the population knew and promoted the truth about God . One way that he distinguished his group from his previous faith was by rejecting dress codes or strict behavioral guidelines ? he allowed the consumption of alcohol , and at times , the use of illegal drugs .

Clarence 13X was shot by an unknown assailant in 1964 but survived the attack . After an incident several months later in which he and several of his followers vandalized stores and fought with police , he was arrested and placed in psychiatric care . He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia . He referred to himself as " Allah " , which had become his preferred name . He was released from custody after a 1966 ruling by the Supreme Court placed limits on confinement without trial . Although he initially taught his followers to hate white people , he eventually began to cooperate with white city leaders . They gave him funding for a night school , and in return , he tried to prevent violence in Harlem . Clarence 13X was fatally shot in June 1969 ; the identity of his killer is unknown . The mayor of New York City and several other prominent leaders expressed condolences to his followers . Although the Five Percenters faltered in the immediate aftermath of his death , the movement rebounded after new leadership emerged . The group took a non @-@ hierarchical approach to leadership , and no single leader replaced Clarence 13X . He has been held in high regard by Five Percenters , who celebrate his birthday as a holiday .

= = Early life and Nation of Islam = =

Clarence Edward Smith was born on February 22 , 1928 , and raised in Danville , Virginia , with his five brothers and one sister . During his childhood , Virginia was racially segregated , and he witnessed incidents of racism , including a fight between his father and a white man that was sparked by racial tensions . In 1946 , he moved with his mother to New York City , where they settled in Harlem . He attended only two years of high school .

In 1949 , Smith fathered a child , Clarence Jowers , with Willieen Jowers . Although he married a woman named Dora Smith in 1950 , he fathered another child , Otis Jowers , with Willieen in 1951 ; he also had several sons and daughters with Dora . Smith joined the U.S. Army in the early 1950s and was stationed in Korea from 1952 to 1954 , where he served as an infantryman in the Korean War . After returning to the U.S. , he lived in Harlem and served in the United States Army Reserve until 1960 . During his military service , he became skilled in karate .

Dora Smith embraced the Nation of Islam (NOI) while her husband was away and he converted after returning to New York . By 1961 , he had registered at Mosque No. 7 and changed his name to Clarence 13X in accordance with NOI practice . Before his conversion , he often smoked marijuana and gambled , activities forbidden by the NOI . After joining the group , he studied the NOI 's

doctrines and quickly progressed within their organizational structure , possibly thanks to skills learned in the military . His responsibilities included teaching martial arts and serving on the Fruit of Islam security team . He was also recognized as a skilled speaker and reached the rank of " student minister " at Mosque No. 7 . By 1963 , he had come to the attention of the FBI ? informants recorded his presence at rallies led by Malcolm X.

The early 1960s were a turbulent period for the NOI ; unrest was caused by conflicts between leaders Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. Around that time , Clarence 13X became disenchanted with the organization , although the root of his qualms is not known . NOI members have offered contradictory accounts of the events that caused his exit and whether he left voluntarily . His departure has been variously attributed to doubts about the NOI 's theology , violations of their moral code , objections to the luxurious lifestyles of their senior leadership , or Malcolm X 's distrust of him . Dora Smith elected to stay with the group , prompting the couple 's separation . Before leaving the NOI , Clarence 13X had begun to doubt their teaching that Wallace Fard Muhammad was a divine messenger . He believed that the NOI 's teachings were contradictory because they taught that God is black but encouraged reverence of Fard Muhammad , who was not of exclusively African descent . Clarence 13X concluded that divinity was found in all black men , rather than in a single person . Several times before he left the NOI , he was censured by leadership for these assertions . His friend John 37X elected to leave with him . Malcolm X also left the NOI in 1963 and remained on good terms with Clarence 13X . Clarence 13X did not join Malcolm X 's newly created group , Muslim Mosque , Inc .

= = Founding the Five Percenters = =

After leaving the NOI , Clarence 13X and John 37X continued to study the group 's teachings , sometimes while smoking marijuana . They assumed new names : Clarence 13X took Allah , and John 37X , Abu Shahid . After reading an NOI book with 34 riddles , known as the " Lost @-@ Found Lessons " , John 37X concluded that numbers represented specific concepts , such as knowledge or wisdom . He referred to this system as " living mathematics " . During its development , he was imprisoned on firearms charges . While John 37X was in prison , Clarence 13X taught a system of beliefs he referred to as " supreme wisdom " , which he saw as the core of Islam , to groups of young men . He was assisted by his friend James Howard , with whom he developed a modified version of living mathematics , " supreme mathematics " , and an accompanying doctrine about letters , the " supreme alphabet " . The development of these systems , considered a " divine science " by adherents , may have been influenced by the teachings of Sufism ; like some schools of Sufism , they found esoteric meanings in the alphabet . David Smydra of The Boston Globe compares these teachings to Kabbalah ; Felicia Miyakawa of Middle Tennessee State University sees similarities to Gnosticism and Kemetism .

Clarence 13X developed novel teachings , assigning backronyms to familiar words . He stated that the letters of the word " Allah " stood for " arm , leg , leg , arm , head " , signifying the human body . This was said to prove that humanity held a divine nature . He named parts of the New York area after locations in the Middle East that are significant to Islam : Harlem was referred to as Mecca , and Brooklyn , Medina . Other disaffected NOI members , including some who served the Fruit of Islam , were soon drawn to his burgeoning group . Several people from the NOI who were unwilling to choose between loyalty to Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X also joined ; Clarence 13X incorporated aspects of the theology taught by the feuding leaders . In the group 's early years , some Five Percenters attended NOI events , and Clarence 13X 's theology had much in common with the teachings of the NOI , although there were notable differences . He taught his followers that he was an incarnation of God , and they each were gods . His followers were thus encouraged to look within themselves in their search for God . Clarence 13X taught that there was an inherent greatness in those of African descent not found in Europeans and their descendants , echoing statements made by Elijah Muhammad . He did not enforce the NOI 's strict moral rules : one way that the group appealed to potential converts was by allowing many practices condemned by the NOI , including gambling , alcohol , and drug use . Clarence 13X told his followers to avoid

developing addictions but that drug use was not inherently wrong . He strictly forbade the consumption of pork , arguing that pigs were similar to animals that are not eaten in the United States , such as rats and dogs , and hence should not be consumed . Owing to their belief that black men are gods , the group allowed its members to make choices about clothing and most aspects of diet .

Early members of the group often proselytized on street corners for hours , and Clarence 13X 's assistants led classes about the group 's teachings , strictly enforcing study habits . He instructed his followers to memorize his teachings on the significance of numbers and letters . Once they did so , they were said to gain an understanding of profound truths . These lessons were taught in a form that resembled catechisms . Rather than hold services in mosques , they gathered for monthly meetings known as parliaments , which were often held outdoors . Attendees were given wide freedom to speak in a system that Ted Swedenburg of the University of Arkansas has compared to Quaker meetings .

Clarence 13X 's group was initially known as the " Suns of Almighty God Allah " or the " Blood Brothers " . After Malcolm X 's death , the group became known as the " Five Percenters " or the " Five Percent Nation " . The name was drawn from the NOI 's claim to be the five percent of the black community who knew and promoted the truth about God ; Clarence 13X considered his movement to be the five percent of the NOI that still held to truth and integrity . The other 95 percent were said to be unaware of the truth or corrupt . Clarence 13X assembled an inner circle of assistants , nine of whom are referred to by Five Percenters as the " First Born " : they are said to embody his attributes . The assistants were assigned to spread the group 's teachings to younger people , many of whom took African names , including some from non @-@ Islamic societies . Clarence 13X taught Afrocentrism to his disciples and often wore a dashiki ; male Five Percenters members frequently wore tasseled kufis , and female members wore colorful African head wraps . Some Five Percenters supported themselves via drug dealing and petty theft ; others intentionally committed minor legal infractions , hoping to proselytize to others who had been arrested .

Clarence 13X 's followers saw him as a divine messenger and referred to him as " Father Allah " . This elevated him to a higher position than Elijah Muhammad , who had deemed himself the " Messenger of Allah " . Eventually , Clarence 13X stopped identifying himself as a Muslim and spoke out against the reverence of Fard Muhammad , casting him as a " mystery God " . He rejected the idea that God is invisible , which he felt weakened people . He encouraged his followers to learn about and respect other spiritual traditions .

Although female converts were initially referred to as " nurses " , Clarence 13X renamed them " earths " in 1967 . He taught that women were not gods , as he believed that they were created by man and did not possess creative power . In his view , women could nurture , but only men could make children . Women were said to resemble the Earth in their ability to sustain life . Clarence 13X had a patriarchal philosophy , and the Five Percenters were initially overwhelmingly male . He spoke in favor of fathers ' arranging their daughters ' marriages and told women to embody submission by serving their husbands as God . Polygamy or serial monogamy were allowed , and legal marriage was discouraged . Clarence 13X encouraged his followers to have many children and discouraged the use of birth control .

= = Opposition = =

NOI leaders were angry that Clarence 13X freely taught portions of their doctrine that they only revealed to committed members ; although one of their captains repeatedly asked him to stop , he refused . Clarence 13X also experienced conflict within his family : his children did not revere him , and hostility quickly developed between core Five Percenters and some of his sons when Willeen Jowers brought them to visit him .

On December 9 , 1964 , Clarence 13X was shot twice in the torso while at a popular gathering place in the basement of a Harlem tenement . He was brought to Harlem Hospital , where he was treated and released . He later claimed that he died and returned to his body a short time later . In a 2007 study of the Five Percent movement , American journalist Michael Muhammad Knight

speculates that this caused his followers to see him as a Christ figure . The identity and motivation of the shooter are unknown ; Knight notes that law enforcement and rival Muslim groups both had a motive to attack Clarence 13X . Some Five Percenters have speculated that the attack was part of a robbery attempt or retaliation for unpaid gambling debts . Clarence 13X 's companions reported that he instructed them not to seek revenge on the shooter and to forswear violence . While recuperating from his wounds , Clarence 13X sought to distinguish his movement from other Islamic movements , abandoning Arabic greetings for English expressions .

The Five Percenters soon attracted attention from media and law enforcement . Local papers published negative coverage of the group , casting them as a violent hate group or a street gang . The New York Amsterdam News reported that Clarence 13X had threatened to kill white children if his group did not receive a government subsidy . In 1965 , the FBI initiated an investigation of his group and may have provided sensationalized rumors to the press . That year , FBI director J. Edgar Hoover deemed Clarence 13X as a " Harlem rowdy " , and feared that he would form ties with more dangerous groups . The FBI developed a detailed file on Clarence 13X ; in 1967 , Hoover described him as a potential threat to the President of the U.S. , and sent a detailed folder about him to the United States Secret Service .

= = Arrest = =

After Malcolm X 's death in 1965 , Clarence 13X mourned his loss but did not attend his funeral . In May 1965 , while visiting the site of Mosque No. 7 , then closed , Clarence 13X and several of his companions were told to leave by a police officer . They left , began to vandalize nearby buildings , and blocked the street near the former headquarters of Muslim Mosque , Inc . More police arrived and subdued Clarence 13X after an altercation , bringing him into custody with several of his followers . After being arrested , he refused to identify himself and was charged with assault and drug possession . About 60 of his followers attended his arraignment , but were removed from the court after shouting " Peace " . Clarence 13X proclaimed his innocence and announced his intent to defend himself in court . He told the judge that he was Allah , and that the city would face grave judgment if he were not released . The judge disregarded his prognostication and set his bail at \$ 9 @, @ 500 . At a court date in June , about 50 Five Percenters protested outside the court ; afterwards , several were arrested on charges of making Molotov cocktails . In July , the court sent Clarence 13X to Bellevue Hospital Center for a psychiatric examination . While in the hospital , he made a few disciples and communicated with some followers through a hospital window . Under his instructions , Five Percenters resisted future NOI leader Louis Farrakhan 's attempts to convert them .

Knight states that Clarence 13X 's psychiatric results were not processed for an unusually long time ; he posits that the delay was due to FBI involvement and argues that Clarence 13X was a political prisoner . In November 1965 , Clarence 13X was ruled incompetent to stand trial and committed to the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene , which placed him at the Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane . After he declared himself Allah and a " Master Gambler " , the doctors concluded that he had schizophrenic reaction , paranoid type with delusions of grandeur ; he faced indefinite commitment . Many Five Percenters and their converts traveled to the hospital to meet with him and receive instruction . He also proselytized to fellow inmates , converting one young white man , who later became a committed follower .

While Clarence 13X was in prison , the Five Percenters continued to proselytize and teach their doctrines . He instructed his followers to adopt names different from those used in the NOI to differentiate their group . After attaining a certain degree of knowledge of the group 's doctrines , members were allowed to adopt the surname " Allah " and sometimes " God " as a first name . This was in recognition of Clarence 13X 's teachings that black men were gods , and that each member should worship himself . His followers often took the name Allah , but would refrain from referring to themselves as such in his presence , in deference to his authority . After a decision (Pate v. Robinson) by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1966 , limits were placed on the confinement of mentally ill criminals , causing many to be released . Clarence 13X was

consequently released in March 1967 .

= = Cooperation and conflict = =

In mid @-@ 1967 , New York City mayor John Lindsay sought to develop closer ties with leaders of impoverished neighborhoods . Prompted in part by concerns voiced by the New York Police Department (NYPD) , the mayor dispatched one of his aides , Barry Gottehrer , to meet with Clarence 13X . Belying his fearsome reputation , Clarence 13X had a congenial meeting with Gottehrer , during which he requested more bus routes and school funding . Clarence 13X subsequently attended a meeting of black leaders at Gracie Mansion , the mayor 's official residence . The city provided buses for Five Percenter to travel to a Long Island park , and with help from the National Urban League , obtained an abandoned storefront for use as a school . It became known as the Allah School in Mecca and aimed to prepare young people for college preparatory schools . Tensions soon formed between the Five Percenter and the school 's overseers ; Clarence 13X desired more control over the curriculum and had difficulty finding qualified teachers . Police regularly visited the school to ensure that the students were not being radicalized . In 1975 , Gottehrer chronicled his friendship with Clarence 13X in The Mayor 's Man . The book was well received by some Five Percenter , who republished portions of it after it went out of print . They have not reprinted the entire book , owing to a passage in which Gottehrer relates that Clarence 13X offered to allow him to sleep with his teenage daughter .

In February 1968 , Lindsay estimated that there were about 500 to 700 Five Percenter . Some of Clarence 13X 's followers attempted to create break @-@ away groups , proclaiming themselves prophets and starting their own movements . They generally retained aspects of Five Percenter doctrine with different emphases .

After the assassination of Martin Luther King , Jr. in April 1968 , Lindsay feared that rioting would occur in Harlem . He traveled to the neighborhood to express condolences ; Clarence 13X and his followers were among those who accompanied him as he walked the streets . Clarence 13X also instructed his followers to try to prevent violence and looting . He was commended by the city 's leadership for his efforts , and they subsequently agreed to help him publish a book of Five Percenter teachings and portions of the Quran . Willieen Jowers recalled that Clarence 13X admitted that his previous teachings about racial hatred were wrong around this time . He later described himself as " neither anti @-@ white nor pro @-@ black " and saw some of his white contacts with the city as allies in the advancement of his teachings . His white convert was released from state custody and joined his teacher in Harlem during the February 1969 nor 'easter . He was accepted as a Five Percenter , as Clarence 13X maintained that " civilization " ? rather than race ? was valued by the group . Clarence 13X made possibly contradictory statements about whether white individuals could be reformed . Contrary to his radical reputation , he endorsed some conservative positions in the late 1960s , including capital punishment , respect for the U.S. flag , and American involvement in Vietnam . He also allowed his supporters to attend Christmas celebrations . Knight notes that these shifts may have been intended to decrease suspicions of law enforcement . Clarence 13X was then allowed to visit a juvenile detention center to speak to young Five Percenter and won some concessions from the institution 's leadership . Some secular black leaders disliked him , owing to his supportive comments about the mayor and neglect of revolutionary rhetoric . On one occasion , he was invited to address an audience of black Marxists , then spoke to them about numerology .

Around 1968 , Clarence 13X fathered a son with a young convert named Gusavia . That year , Gloria Steinem published an article about Clarence 13X in New York magazine . She blamed the NOI for the previous attempt to kill him , arguing that they were angered by his claim to be Allah and thus above Elijah Muhammad . Clarence 13X also received coverage from international media , including a Canadian television program .

= = Death = =

By 1969 , Clarence 13X became very tired and slept little . He feared that he would be killed and instructed his followers to remain strong if he died . On June 12 , he spent time with several of his disciples at their school . He left the school between two and three a.m. on June 13 and then gambled for an hour or two . As was his occasional practice , he traveled to Dora Smith 's house to rest . He was ambushed by three assailants who fatally shot him while he was in the lobby of her apartment building . That morning , several people from the mayor 's office met with his family , and the mayor later visited the Five Percenters ' school to express condolences .

Clarence 13X 's funeral was held four days after his death . It was attended by about 400 people and was followed by a procession through Harlem . His death put the leadership of his movement in question ? there was no clear successor . At that time , his followers were primarily teenagers , and several of his top leaders subsequently struggled with drug addiction .

Most local media sources gave Clarence 13X positive coverage in the wake of his death . The Daily News connected his murder with the recent death of NOI activist Charles Kenyetta , casting them as part of a " Muslim War " . The mayor believed that the NYPD told them this and was angered by their claim . Louis Farrakhan denied culpability , maintaining that he had good relations with Clarence 13X . NYPD investigators suspected that he was killed by members of an extortion ring , possibly connected to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee . In August 1969 , an arrest was made in connection with his murder . The suspect denied involvement , and charges were soon dropped . Five Percenters have posited different culprits , including the CIA , the NOI , or a disgruntled follower .

= = Legacy and reception = =

Five Percenter membership plunged after Clarence 13X 's death , but rebounded in 1970 after new leadership emerged and revitalized the group . After his death , the group was not dominated by a single leader . This may have been a result of their teaching that all black men are gods , which rendered authoritarian leadership untenable .

Knight doubts that Clarence 13X set out to build a movement or a culture , but after his death , the movement expanded and gained converts across the United States . Five Percenters have celebrated Clarence 13X 's birthday as a holiday , and minimized the descriptions of his flaws in their accounts of his life . Numerous apocryphal stories from his life have circulated among the group ; some accounts have claimed that he gambled only as a means to reach others with his teachings . He did not leave behind a record of his teachings , and the group had few formalized tenets at the time of his death . In the following decades , the group 's doctrine became more complicated .

Akbar Muhammad of the NOI described Clarence 13X as " confused " , although relations between the Five Percenters and NOI leaders have improved over time . Clarence 13X 's teachings may have influenced the doctrines of Dwight York , founder of the Nuwaubian Nation . York saw Clarence 13X 's teachings as an insufficient , incomplete path .

Lawyer Sidney Davidoff , one of Lindsay 's assistants , deemed Clarence 13X " a little bit snake @-@ oil salesman and a little bit crazy , but no more unstable than anyone else preaching a gospel on the street corner . " Davidoff saw Clarence 13X 's black supremacist teachings as a way to instill confidence in young people . Knight states that Clarence 13X went from a " ' Harlem rowdy ' to [a] legitimate community leader " , and Lindsay later cast Clarence 13X 's role in the city as similar to that of Al Sharpton . Mattias Gardell of Uppsala University views Clarence 13X as a " gifted philosopher " .