

“ANTI-DRUG PATROLS 2: 40-DAY PATROL”

FOR LESSON
*Belonging
in Brooklyn*

NARRATOR Siraj Wahhaj



WAHHAJ We had — we had — we had a meeting in this area. I think it was Restoration Plaza. Community Board 3, I think. And everybody was up in arms about the drugs. The drugs was crazy. And we found out at that meeting — it could have been at Boys and Girls High School. We found out — they had the police, the city administration. And the thing that we learned, we came away from that meeting — they don't have an answer. They don't have an answer. So I'm thinking, What can we do? That's when Allah blessed me with the idea. You know what? Let's have a 40-day anti-drug campaign. Almost like revelation. It wasn't revelation. I don't think I [inaudible].

ALI Well, I was — I was going to say, why 40 days? What was the —

WAHHAJ Talk of the significance. Forty days, 40 nights. Rained 40 days and 40 nights. And, you know, that kind of significance. And the Quran says — Allah says that a man reaches his full strength at the age of 40. So kind of symbolic 40, right? And we thought that's enough time to really do some real stuff. Because if we did it five days, it's a joke. Even a week, they'll be back. So I went and spoke to the commander of the 79th. And borough president — the — Brooklyn North. Rayford, Chief Rayford, I think it was. And I said, “You know, I've gotten an idea. What we can do, something real. And that is I propose that we have on January 21 this big anti-drug rally.” And at that point, we had 15 drug houses. “We want you to raid — you raid those 15 drug houses and get them out.” I said, “In the past, the problem hasn't been raiding these joints and getting them out, but they come back.” I said to them, “If you get them out, we'll keep them out. We'll be your partners.” They liked it. And we met with the highest brass.

So they did it. We had this big rally. I gave them the signal. You could have seen it — you should have seen it all. All at once, they raided all 15 of those drug houses. As soon as they raid them, they arrested them. We put our men in front of them. Told people, “No more drugs being sold here.” So first the drugs dealers say, “Yeah, they’ll do that for a couple of days.” But when they saw we were serious, 40 days and 40 nights in the cold, freezing cold — sometimes the numbers got real low, like three or four brothers. I remember one — one Saturday morning, man. We had a handful of brothers here. The brothers were kind of getting demoralized a little bit. So I went to a masjid called Masjid Makki Jami on Coney Island Avenue at **fajr prayer**. And I told them what we were doing. Pakistani Muslims. I said, “I want some reinforcements.” They came with me. They followed me. About 30 cars, 30 carloads of brothers. And when the brothers saw them — only for a little bit. Part of a day. But can you imagine what it did to them, their spirits? And every once in a while we’d get an influx of people coming. Everybody want — now everybody want to become part of the — you know, the patrols. It’s historic. You know, they — the media’s covering it.

And what happened — again, divine intervention. Those crack houses closed and never opened up again. Sister comes in for **jummah**. Told me a number of occasions, said, “Imam, I used to be mad at you.” I said, “Why?” She says, “You know you had those anti-drug control? I used to cop my drugs from one of these houses.” Now she’s a Muslim. See, the good — when **Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala** blesses you, it adds good, upon good, upon good, upon good. There was a drug dealer there, I’ll never forget. He was one — a very Black guy. Looked African. During the end of the patrols, maybe a day after, two days after, he’s across the street on Fulton Street and Bedford on the north side, sitting down. And I sit down next to him and said, “What’s happening?” Because that’s how — I — I talk

FAJR PRAYER
the name of the first of the five daily prayers performed by observant Muslims. This prayer is performed at dawn.

JUMMAH
the congregational prayer service observed in mosques on Fridays. Jummah consists of a short sermon followed by prayer.

**ALLAH
SUBHANAHU
WA TA’ALA**
Arabic honorific reference to God (Allah) meaning “God, the Most Glorified, the Most High.”

to people. You know what I'm saying? I — I talk to my people. He said, "You know what? You guys put us out of business." I said, "Let me tell you something better than that business is Islam." The man took **shahada**. He said, "**La ilaha illallah, Muhammad-ur rasul Allah**" — he took shahada.

So — and then slowly, you know — and we — we blew it. Because we should have bought up everything in this neighborhood. Smart people saw it. And they saw what happened. What we did was — was so famous, as it was on — major newspaper, every newspaper. Every newspaper in the world, they came. They covered it. And — and every once in a while, one or two police would be on our patrols with us. So they taken our partnership. People used to — we have the bus comes down to Fulton Street. You got the Fulton Street bus. And you got the one who — the one that comes around — I think comes around and — I don't know which bus that is. But anyway, people — when they used to pass us by, everybody on the other side of the bus would come on this side and say, "There they are! There they —" You could see it. The pride, you know.

A Jehovah's Witness — old woman, never forget — one day she came into the masjid. She said, "I'm a Jehovah's Witness. I used to — I used to hate Muslims. But now I love Muslims."

SHAHADA
the Muslim declaration of faith.

**LA ILAHA
ILLALLAH,
MUHAMMAD-
UR RASUL
ALLAH**

the Muslim declaration of faith: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

BIO Siraj Wahhaj was born in 1950 in Fort Greene. He joined the Nation of Islam in 1969 and became the imam of Masjid Muhammad 7C in Bedford-Stuyvesant in 1976. He studied with the Muslim World League in Chicago and at Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He founded Masjid At-Taqwa in 1981; the following year, he purchased a building in Bedford-Stuyvesant to house the mosque. As the imam of Masjid At-Taqwa, Wahhaj coordinated successful efforts to reduce crime in the area, especially through anti-drug patrols in 1988, and by emphasizing significant community outreach. He was the first Muslim to give an opening prayer for the United States House of Representatives, in 1991; in 2004, he founded the Muslim Alliance in North America to advocate for Muslim Americans' needs and civil rights. Wahhaj also served on the city's Majlis Ash-Shura Islamic Leadership Council of New York, campaigned for New York City public schools to formally recognize Eid holidays, and represented Masjid At-Taqwa in the *Raza v. City of New York* lawsuit against the New York City Police Department for religiously motivated surveillance.

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