

“ANTI-DRUG PATROLS 1: THE CALL”

FOR LESSON

*Belonging
in Brooklyn*NARRATOR **Siraj Wahhaj**

ALI So I want to talk about the patrols. And tell me about the year before the patrol started in 1987, where members of the masjid, including yourself, helped a landlord with his property on Tompkins Avenue. Tell me about that story.

RUN TIME **5:24**

WAHHAJ Wednesday night, we're having a special occasion in this masjid. It's called an **aqiqah**. One of our family members had a baby. Who was that family member? Salim Abdus-Saboor. The first Masjid At-Taqwa — I'll never forget that night. I'm in my office. And I'm preparing my **khutbah** for Friday. This is Wednesday, right. I know what I'm going to talk about. So I started writing notes. I know the verses from the Quran I'm going to use. Help one another in righteousness in the fear of Allah. Do not help one another in enmity, fear Allah. That's my talk. Help one another.

AQIQAH
a celebration of
a new baby.

KHUTBAH
a sermon or
religious talk
delivered by a
Muslim leader.

So the brothers say — I was in my office. Say, “Imam, there's — there's a brother here to see you.” I said, “Send him in.” He's — Maher [phonetic] is his name. I saw a different name that you had? Maher from Palestine. He is not from our congregation. Never met him before. He ain't Black like us. But he's a Muslim. He said, “Imam, I got a problem. We have a building. And we were gone sick or whatever. Came back. Some drug dealers took it over. Our apar— one of our apartments, took it over. Like a three-family house. And I went to the cops. The cops did nothing.” He was crying. And I made a decision that night. I'm going to do one of two things. If I'm not going to help him, I'm not teaching help you one another. And if we help him, I'm going to teach the khutbah Friday, help you one another. And that here's an opportunity to do it.

I got together with the brothers, took **shura**. What do you think? “Yes, Imam, we should help him.” We went home and changed. It was about, at that time, maybe 40 of us. We went in a number of cars. And I went with him. About seven of us was in front of the door. [knocks] I knocked on the door. They said, “Who is it?” I said, “It’s the Muslims. And we’re here to take back the apartment of — from — of our brother.” One of them said — the leader to the people there, “Hey, man, it’s the Muslims. Don’t do nothing stupid.” He opened the door. And I said, “You’ve got to go.” He said okay. They said, “Listen, we got, like, TVs. Can we —” “Yeah, take them and go.” About nine or ten of them came out. Ask me today, would I do the same thing? I’m not sure. But we were just full of faith. That’s just how we were, how we rolled, man, in those days. And the irony of ironies, the drug dealers, when they got out, they called the police on us. Ha! Can you imagine? They called the police on us! And so I guess our reputation preceded us. And so the police came. I told all the brothers, “Go back to the masjid.” And the police came. We were on our way back to the masjid. There was five of us in a car. Abdul-Rauf [Shakir], myself, Askia [Umrani], Salim Abdus-Saboor, and Mustaf Abdullah. And some of the brothers in the car had stuff.

ALI When you say stuff —

WAHHAJ Weapons. So Salim was licensed, right. And two of the brothers were not licensed. So the police followed us and put their siren on. And arrested us, you know. I had a — I had, I think, a knife. One brother had a baton. One brother had a pistol. Salim had a pistol, but he’s licensed. Another brother had, maybe, a shotgun, maybe. So that’s another thing. We went — we went to that. And we were — we were given a conditional release. So you don’t get in trouble for — because really, the DA was saying, “Great job.” The police was saying, “You did a great job.” You know what I’m saying? But yo, we can’t — you know, we got to

SHURA

the Arabic word for consultation. In Muslim traditions, leaders are encouraged to gather members of the community to help make decisions.

obey the law. That’s why I say today, I wouldn’t do the same thing. Because I think we’re a bit – we’re – we’re – we’re better now. You know, we were like – we don’t care. So we – we – we’re better now. We don’t – we don’t break the law. [laughter]

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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