

“SALAT”

FOR LESSON

*Growing Up
and Fitting In***NARRATOR** Idris Braithwaite

ALI So tell me what it was like growing up in the '70s. Well, let me just do it this way. When you were born, growing up in the early part of your memories, what was — was Islam in your family's life at that time?

RUN TIME **4:27**

BRAITHWAITE You know what, I would say it wasn't such a prominent impact, you know, besides my name, you know, as far as what's distinct — the distinctions. But around me, most of my friends and my mother's friends weren't Muslim. What I recall, the most influential sort of movement or thing that sticks out in my mind was sort of, like, a Black nationalist kind of thing. We were — my parents were involved with the East Movement, which is called Uhuru Sasa, and I went to those kind of very Black nationalist — if anything. Other than that, you know, very typical, you know, African American, grew up in Bushwick, and I don't know when it occurred to me that I was Muslim or that I was different. I grew up very much like everyone else, you know. It was like we're the same but different, so there were situations — it's funny, because I was talking to my kids the other day about salat, you know. Salat was the thing that kind of distinguished the Muslim or me — it distinguished me from everyone else, and it wasn't a nice thing. Unfortunately, it wasn't — it wasn't something that I recall with fond memories, because you'll be playing ball or you'll be playing skully or you'll be doing something that all the other kids — and then, out the window, it's like, "Idris, come in." And I'm like, "Oh my God." So it was like being pulled out of the now that every — you know, that young kids live in every — it seemed like every two minutes, but it might have been, like, every three, four hours. [laughter] And I was telling my kids, like, one thing that sticks out in my mind distinctly, one situation, I was in the movies. You know, I went with some older brothers,

you know, teenage types, and we went to the movies. And we were watching a karate movie, and it was, like, you know — back in the day, everybody loved karate movies. And then, it was like, “Time for salat.” And it was like, “Bro,” you know, and we left. We left the movie theater, and I remember being so upset about that. I mean, so —

ALI How old were you? Do you remember?

BRAITHWAITE I might have been, like, 15, you know, and —

ALI Did you — when they were like, “It’s time,” or whoever was like, “It’s time for salat,” did you —

BRAITHWAITE Right. Right.

ALI — say something, or were you — did you try to like —

BRAITHWAITE Yeah, I —

ALI — “Can we stay and watch the movie?” or —

BRAITHWAITE Yeah. I think, you know, it’s funny, because, yes, I remember being very outspoken and things. You know, I’m — Islam to me was present unlike, you know, for my parents, who made a conscious decision to become Muslim. And I think when you make a conscious decision you’re much more willing to stick to the — hit the marks, so to speak. And so me growing up Muslim, where I say, like, the majority of my parents’ friends or my friends weren’t Muslim, you know, I grew up just doing everything else like everybody else did. So when the, like, emphasis of Islam was placed on me, it became, like, an interference. You know what I’m saying? So I wasn’t used to that kind of stuff. I might have said, you know, my earlier years, I wasn’t used to, you know, this Islam sort of impinging on my sort of reality. So when my family got, you know, more into Islam — because

their Islam developed, you know, younger teenage and 20s, 30s, whatever, so their Islam developed, and as a child that sort of, like, forces you to make this transition. And for them, it's conscious. For me, it's an imposed, you know, kind of thing.

BIO Idris Braithwaite was born in 1971 in Brooklyn. He had a strong interest in dance and music from a young age, including attending his father's music rehearsals and working as a DJ. He has served on the board of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Gateway Business Improvement District and founded the nonprofit Aunt & Uncle Youth Employment Services. In 2011, he took over management of Abu's Homestyle Bakery (originally known as Abu Baker's Bakery) from his father, Idris Conry (interviewed for this collection on June 21, 2018).

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