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Oral History Interview with Rodney Adib Rashid
Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.27
Interview conducted by Zaheer Ali on August 16, 2018,
at Masjid Abdul Muhsi Khalifah in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn

ALI: Okay. My name is Zaheer Ali. I'm the Oral Historian at Brooklyn Historical Society, and this oral history interview with Imam Rodney Adib Rashid is for the Muslims in Brooklyn project. And we are here at Masjid Abdul Muhsi Khalifah in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. So Imam Adib, if you can reintroduce yourself to the recording by stating your full name and your birth date.

RASHID: As-salaam alaikum to yourself and all those would eventually hear my oral history. My name is Imam Rodney Adib Rashid. I was born on [date redacted for privacy], 1955, in the town of Christiansted, Virgin Islands.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: Saint Croix, Virgin Islands. And as you was talking, the name of the masjid is M-U -- it's Muhsi -- Muhsi.

ALI: Muhsi.

RASHID: Muhsi Khalifah, right? And what came to my mind -- I know my -- I -- I'm supposed to talk about myself.

ALI: That's okay. This is natural conversation.

RASHID: But what came to my mind is the name of the masjid, because we was talking about my name, and -- and when you pronounced the name of the masjid, it -- it was named after a person -- his name was [Rudolph, Rudolph] Khalifah. And the reason why we named this masjid after him, because he died going to the aid of a -- a young lady. Back then, when that took place, you know, the Nation of Islam, we had a very strong code of looking out for our family and our women. So a Muslim sister called the -- the mosque for some help, and [Rudolph] went to the location. And he subsequently died as a result of going to the aid of a sister, and so we named the masjid after him. And his -- his family's still around. I just saw -- actually, I just spoke to his brother a few

days ago -- no, a few -- a few weeks ago. But, yeah, that's -- that's part of -- that's why we named the masjid after Brother [Rudolph], [Rudolph] Khalifah.

ALI: So what does that mean for -- for you, to be the imam of a masjid named after someone who gave his life in that way. What does that -- what do you hope that communicates to people about this community?

RASHID: Well, that's just part of it, because -- and not saying that that part of the history is not important. It's very significant. It's emotional. It's -- it, kind of, rises up a -- a level of respect in -- in us, about the fact that we chose to do that. He was one of our brothers that -- that gave his life. Not -- it just happened. He just went to the aid of a sister, and he gave his life. But in terms of history, we think of, also, Malcolm Little [Malcolm X], because his name is on the original documents. So those are two -- I will put them together. Malcolm opened up the doors, and he came here to this location, and opened up this place. It was called [Temple] 7C at the time, right? So he named -- you know, it was a satellite, and he opened up the doors. So we think of -- when we think of -- when I think of the history of Masjid Khalifah, I think of 7C, initially, with Malcolm Little and company, and then the name after 7C, we changed it to Masjid Khalifah for [Rudolph]. So those are two, I don't know, milestones. So I think of both. And it means a lot.

ALI: And -- and for people who might not know who Malcolm Little is --

RASHID: [laughter] Oh, Malcolm Little? Okay. That's true. There might be some.

ALI: Just because you --

RASHID: Especially young folks.

ALI: Yes.

RASHID: Some of the young folks.

ALI: Yeah.

RASHID: Malcolm Little is actually -- name -- he's Malcolm X. He was one of the best and brightest ministers that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad had. So his name was Malcolm Little, and that's what it was -- that's what it is on our documents, but he went to -- he became a Muslim after living his life of -- in the streets, and he was converted to

Islam by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. And everybody should know Malcolm X, even the young folks.

ALI: Right, right.

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: So it's interesting, because I think he opened up this mosque in either 1962 or '63.

RASHID: Somewhere around that, yeah.

ALI: And -- but on -- on -- you said on the legal documents, he signed "Malcolm Little."

RASHID: Malcolm Little.

ALI: Wow. Okay.

RASHID: Yeah, Malcolm Little and Imam Bakradin and a fellow named Calloway, Ronald Calloway. They was the signatures on --

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: -- on -- on the -- on the -- on the documents. Yeah.

ALI: Okay. Fascinating.

RASHID: And --

ALI: And then are ei-- any -- are -- are either Imam Baqarah Deen or Calloway around, or are they --

RASHID: Ronald Calloway, I think he's in -- he's in Virginia.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: Imam Baqarah Deen passed several years ago.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: About maybe 10 years now or so.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: Yeah, he passed, and he --

ALI: Was -- was he at one time the imam of the Corona --

RASHID: Yeah, that was him.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: You remember Baqarah Deen? He -- he died on his post.

ALI: Yes, sir.

RASHID: He was -- he was a friend of Ali Rashid, Imam Ali Rashid --

ALI: Yes. Yes.

RASHID: -- from -- from Harlem.

ALI: From Harlem, yes, yes.

RASHID: Right. And so they was --

ALI: Former west coast captain --

RASHID: Exactly.

ALI: -- of the Fruit of Islam and Nation of -- [inaudible].

RASHID: That's -- that's right.

ALI: Yes, yes.

RASHID: That's him. They was -- they was good friends, and both of them died on their posts. But Baqarah Deen, he was -- he was -- he was a good soldier. He was a dedicated imam. And he was here from the -- I don't know. I'm not going to say day one, but he was here for a long time, serving his community.

ALI: Yes, sir.

RASHID: So when I think of the name -- getting back to the name of the masjid, all those things, when I think of it, come to mind. The two milestones, Malcolm Little, and then when we changed it from Mosque -- what was -- what was it called? It was called Muhammad's Mosque.

ALI: Yes.

RASHID: From when we changed that name from Muhammad's Mosque, we chose the name Masjid Khalifah.

ALI: Yes, sir.

RASHID: So it's a community of service. And Brooklyn, when we -- everyone -- anyone would tell you that Brooklyn is and was always a family-orientated mosque, and it is and was always a mosque of productivity and workers. When -- when -- when showtime came, you know, Louis Farrakhan and others, you know, from Malcolm Shabazz [phonetic] that's showtime. But getting the job done was Brooklyn, the workers.

ALI: Okay, okay.

RASHID: Yeah. And we still maintain that tradition to -- to this day.

ALI: So let's -- let's talk about your journey to this -- to this place.

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: So tell me a little bit about -- so you were born in the Virgin Islands.

RASHID: Yes. Saint Croix, Virgin Islands.

ALI: Tell me a little bit about your family, and how you -- when did you come to the United States?

RASHID: Well, I came to the United States -- I believe I was about two years old. That's what I was told. I have very little memories of when I was young, but there's two that stuck out in my mind. One was, I had a little chicken. I remember that, clear as day. A little white chicken, and it grew up to be a rooster, white rooster with red -- the red -- whatever you call those things on the top of his head. And I would chase it around the yard, and -- and one day, someone -- and I don't remember the person -- caught the chicken. Because I used to chase the chicken, he chased it, he caught it, and he spun it, and I saw all the red at the time. I remember the color. And it was blood, you know. He wrang the chicken's neck, and then I'm looking at the chicken, and -- and my grandmother -- I remember my grandmother plucking the chicken, and looking at the chicken, and put it in the oven. And I'm waiting for the chicken to come out. I'm saying, "What's going on with the chicken?" [laughter] And it came out, and they started eating the chicken, and they wanted me to eat the chicken. And I refused to eat the chicken. "Eat. Rodney, eat your food. Eat your" -- I'm like -- I'm looking at them like they might eat me, you know. I remember that. I was two -- I had to be two years old. That -- that's one moment I remember.

And another one, I got stung by bees. The whole sky turned black, and the bees came down on me. That's what I remember of Saint Croix, and then the next memories I has as a young man was in Brooklyn, New York, in Bushwick. I was a little boy, about maybe five or six.

ALI: Okay. So tell me about your family's background. Where were your -- were your parents also from the Caribbean?

RASHID: Yes. My mother was from -- is from Saint Croix. My father's from Saint Croix. Her mother and his -- that -- my whole family, from the island, Saint Croix, Virgin Islands. Yes.

ALI: And what was your religious upbringing like?

RASHID: I remember going to church with my grandmother and my mother, hosting my grandmother and my aunt. I don't remember the dom-- denomination, but -- but I remember going to church. A little bit more than Easter. It wasn't just the special occasions. It was some Sundays, "Let's go to church," you know, so I went. But I also remember listening to the stories in the Bible and listening the preacher, and it just -- I -- I remember it was -- it just was a little off. It just didn't smooth -- it wasn't smooth sailing. How do you relate to that? And -- but as a kid, you know -- I'm -- I'm reflecting back. But as a kid, I -- I didn't really give it too much thought, but I knew there was something. It was, like, huh? How did that -- how does that work, you know?

ALI: Right.

RASHID: It was one of those kind of moments, when they would say certain things about the scriptures. And -- and then it wasn't until later on that those questions started to come clear into focus. I became more conscious of them. Listening to Louis Farrakhan, and, you know, they talked about -- and he talked about the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and the Bible, and -- and how we have to interpret it properly. And so they -- they, kind of, helped me focus in on some of the questions.

But getting back to my family, yes, my father, his name was Charles. Charles -- no, that's my grandfather on my mother's side, Charles. Charles Brannigan. Then my mother, she had several sisters and brothers, and that was a big family. Her -- my grandmother, Edna. And then on my father's side -- what was his name? I can't -- actually -- who was my father's name. Oh. [laughter] Yeah. Excuse me. Albert. That was his name. His name was Albert. He was a jockey. He used to ride horses.

ALI: Oh.

RASHID: And he was -- he was known, because, you know, I'm a little fellow, so he was, too.

ALI: Right.

RASHID: And -- and that -- Saint Croix was, sort of, like the -- just the beginning area for certain horses. They would start in places like those little islands. Then the bigger stage was Puerto Rico. Once they make it in Puerto Rico, then they come to the States for studding or -- or, you know, advanced races, or whatever. So I find out my father was a jockey. And, you know, you know, I went there. And when I visited Saint Croix, I was 15 years old. Him and my mother separated, so I didn't really know him. She -- she -- she brought me up here when I was two. And I went back to visit Saint Croix when I was 15, and that's when I met him and found out a little bit more about him, and things like that.

ALI: What was your family -- what was your birth name?

RASHID: Oh, Rodney. Rodney Adams.

ALI: Adams. So growing up in New York, did you -- was the -- how did you -- was that your first trip to Saint Croix when you were 15, or had you been going back and forth?

RASHID: No, that was the first -- the first trip.

ALI: What was that like, having spent the majority, at the time, of your life in Brooklyn or in New York --

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: -- and then going back to -- to the island?

ALI: Well, it -- it was -- it was interesting and it was fun, and I almost didn't come back. I almost didn't come back. I was more like a pers-- a kid that was in the streets. I was -- my mother used to work all the time. She got divorced from my stepfather. I had -- there was seven of us. I was number two in the chain. And so I had a lot of responsibilities in the home, taking care of my little brothers and sisters, cooking, going to the laundry, paying bills, you know, while my mother, she was resting. So I -- I -- I just knew how to handle myself in the streets. And so when I went to Saint Croix with my younger brother, the one under me, Vincent, we -- you know, we was having

fun. I was there for the summer, two months. We was doing martial arts. We was hanging out. We was meeting people. Everybody knew who I was, because, you know, my father. And they -- "Oh, Rodney." My -- my -- I had a big family.

So I started looking late August -- it was time for us to come home. Middle of August, late August, and I started looking for some work. And this guy, you know, he was a -- a landscaper or something. I said, "Hey, you -- you know, you got a job? I want to work." And he said, "You want to work?" He said -- I said, "Yeah." Then he said, "Are you going to go back to school?" And I thought to say yes was a good thing, so I said, "Yeah, I'm going to go to school." He said, "Well, if you're going to go to school, I don't need you. I need somebody who's going to work all the time." I said, "Well, I don't have to go to school." He said, "No, no, no. You already said you was going to school."

But if that man would have -- if I would have -- if he would have hired me, and I'd have started working, I probably would have contin-- my -- my thoughts was, I was going to send my younger brother back on the plane, and I'm -- I'm -- I was going to stay there and work, and just stay in Saint Croix. Yeah. Because the waters, the beaches, the people. You know, I met a lot of folks, that they liked me. I was from New York, and I think maybe -- now in hindsight, that's what it was. I was from New York, but I'm from the Virgin Islands, but I'm, kind of, like a Yankee. Some of them didn't like me, and they called me Yankee. You know, I didn't know what -- you know, Yankee, you know, real islander. But made a lot of friends, and it was -- it was -- it was good.

But being that I didn't get hired, I thought about it, and I said, well, I need a job, but I didn't have a job. So I came back home. Otherwise, I'd have been over there. I think about that every now and then.

ALI: So -- so now, growing into young adulthood, did you -- you mentioned earlier that you -- you, I guess, semi-regularly went to church.

RASHID: Yeah, once in a while.

ALI: Was there a point where you stopped going to church, or were you continuously -- continually going to church, even as a teenager or as a young adult?

RASHID: No, it was more younger. At teenager, I -- no, I didn't go to church. That -- that was early, like, I was eight, nine, maybe ten. But once I got to 12 and 13, again, I was -- I was -- I was basically doing my own thing. You know, checking in the house because I had younger brothers and sisters, and then I -- but I would go hang out in after school, in the school yard and the park, and things like that. So I wasn't going to church. No.

ALI: Right, right. Okay. [laughter] So you mentioned you were very knowledgeable and aware of the streets.

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: What -- what does that mean? What does the streets mean?

RASHID: Well, the streets meant, like, what -- whatever -- who -- who was in the neighborhood, the different areas in the neighborhood, the different activities in the neighborhood, the different -- I know who the -- who the -- the girls were, the guys, the gangs, the -- you know, what was happening, the -- the -- the fads. And -- and then you have to -- in the neighborhood that you're -- that you're in, you have to establish yourself. And it wasn't -- again, this -- these wasn't conscious thoughts. It was just understood --

ALI: Right.

RASHID: -- that you go in the neighborhood, and, you know, you have to be respected, you know. You have to know how to fit in. And the -- the street -- on the street level, being -- knowing how to -- or knowing how -- one knowing how to articulate themselves, and do geometry and academics, didn't get you much credit in the street. So -- so the emphasis was more on who -- who was slick, and who had the girls, and who had the certain kind of style and clothes, and who -- who, if you mess with them, you know, you would pay a price. You know, that kind of stuff.

ALI: So where and how did you find yourself in this, let's say, ecosystem? Where did you -- how did you emerge and where did you emerge?

RASHID: Well, I think I learned early on, because I was always, kind of, like, a quiet person, but I didn't take any mess. And -- and I learned early on that people underestimated my abilities based upon my size. And -- and I have to keep repeating, these thoughts were not conscious. It's just -- I'm reflecting. Now I can put them in words, but back then, it wasn't a conscious thought. It was, I knew that individuals thought, because I was smaller, I couldn't take them, so that always surprised them. And once that happened one or two times, then people just know. [laughter] "Oh, he -- you know, he took -- yeah, he took down so-and-so." You know, and -- and --

ALI: So when you say took down, you mean, like, fights.

RASHID: Yeah, yeah, hurt 'em, yeah.

ALI: Yeah, yeah.

RASHID: Yeah, yeah. They -- they approached me. They was violating or disrespecting or whatever. And -- and I -- and I handled it. And once you do that a couple times, I guess they know. "Well, don't -- don't mess with him."

ALI: Did you have a -- a -- a -- a consistent circle of friends, or a group of people that you were -- you know, your closest associates during this time?

RASHID: Yeah. There was individuals that went to both schools. There was the -- the public school, and then when I went to the junior high school, but I -- from -- from the public school, and then when -- when I went to the junior high school, I think folks knew who I was. But in Queens, what happened in Queens, I didn't -- I didn't stay over there, because my mother -- let me -- let me think back. My mother -- I had some friends, then we moved. We moved a lot.

Because my house burnt down, that's what happened. Had a fire in the house. Yes, we had a fire in the house, because my mother was struggling to pay the bills. She had -- she was trying to pay the mortgage, and -- and they turned off a utility. And so we got electric heater when it got cold. And my mother used to work a lot, and I -- my job was to look out for the -- the -- my younger brothers and sisters. I was in the streets, and my brother, he had the heater on, and there was some alcohol spilt over. And -- and that --

that's flammable. Boom. The whole house went up. Everybody got out, but the house burnt down.

So now, my -- some of my siblings went to live with their father, and I was with my mother. My older brother, I don't -- I don't remember where he was. And so I was in hotels and various things. And that's where I learned a little bit more about the streets. I was, at that time, about 16. About 16, because -- and I was living in a hotel on 72nd [Street] and Broadway. Seventy-second and Broadway back when I was 15, that was, like, a dump.

ALI: Right.

RASHID: It was a straight dump. [laughter] And I remember these --

ALI: So this is -- this is, like, the early '70s.

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

RASHID: Yeah. I remember -- I remember seeing women with brightly painted faces. And they would get inside of a car and drive away. So I'm in the hotel looking out the window. Then 15 minutes later, I would see the same lady. And -- and I just -- I -- I said, "Wait a minute," to myself, "I just saw that lady get in the car. Then I see the same lady. What, she got a sister?" I'm thinking, like, "What is it, a twin?" Then I said, "Let me focus on these women, because I know I see these women getting in the car." And then when I figured it out, "Oh, these same women are getting in the car," then I started talking to some of them. "What -- what y'all doing?" And they start telling me, you know, you know, about what's going on. And I start hanging -- [laughter]

ALI: Because then -- you know, I was -- and I -- I'm interested, because I -- and you said -- you -- you asked people, because I was wondering, you know, how did you -- who were you talking to, or who -- how did you put the pieces together? As you're observing -- or whether it's this phenomenon or anything else in the street, was there -- you know, it's not like a book that you can look up and be, like, what's happening here? So what is the chain of knowledge?

RASHID: It was for -- I saw it myself. And I knew that that -- once I knew it was the same person, I said, "Okay." So then it was three or four women, and I'm looking at them. And I say -- now I'm zeroed in. These women are going and coming and going and coming.

ALI: Right, right.

RASHID: So now, there's a black guy. He's the pimp. And he got his little buddies, whatever. So, you know, I just start talking. "Yo, what's going on? What y'all doing?" "What do you mean, what you doing?" You know, they start talking to me, and they just -- they didn't bother me. They -- you know, they just told me what was happening. And -- and -- but I didn't stay there too long. And -- you know, but I met a couple of them, and, you know, that kind of stuff. So -- so from that hotel, we went to another one in -- in Queens.

That was a raggedy hotel. My mother went and brought the money. The guy kicked the door in, and -- the manager, he kicked the door in, because my mother was, like, 30 minutes late bringing the check to pay him. You had to pay weekly or however she -- they had to pay, but she was, like, a couple hours late. This guy kicked the door in. She came back, and said, "What happened? Why you out here with the bags?" I said, "Well, he kicked the door in, and he said you were -- you know." So we left. There was a big argument.

And came to Queens. It was a little bit more settled, but that was in Jamaica, Queens, and I started going to a high school out there. And that didn't work out. Then I went to live in -- where did I go from Queens? Oh, the Bronx. Then I went to the Bronx. [laughter] Then we went to the Bronx, and then my mother, she got a house in -- up there [inaudible] in Astoria. That's where she lived. And -- but by that time, I was -- I was 17, and I was already doing all kind of things, and got myself in trouble. And then I had to go to court, and I -- they didn't let me go. I just stayed in jail.

But in between that, I did have a friend named Clyde, and he was -- he was with us. That was in Brooklyn. That was on Hinsdale Street in Brooklyn. It was a -- I used to go hang out there on Hinsdale and Williams Street. And this guy named Clyde, he -- he was one of our friends. And he came to -- to the gathering where we'd hang out, with a bow tie and a white shirt. Said he's a Muslim. And we started teasing him. "Get out. You ain't no Muslim. What you talking about?"

ALI: Now, what did you -- what had you known or thought about Muslims prior to that?

Because there was a prominent presence of -- of -- of Muslims, of black Muslims, certainly, in New York in the -- in the early '70s, yeah.

RASHID: Yes. Well, I didn't really pay them too much attention. You know, I would basically hear a prayer call on the radio a little bit, because we did listen to them on the radio every now and then. And it came on after Gary Byrd. Then -- then -- then the Nation of Islam would come on. But I didn't pay it too much mind. It -- all of this was background noise.

And -- and then Clyde came, and said he's a Muslim. And, you know, I was being silly, not taking him serious, but he stood his ground. That's what caught my attention, because Clyde would never stand his ground against any of us. He was one of those guys you -- you know, you know how kids be bothering other kids, and he would back down. But he stood his ground. He said, "No. No, no, I'm serious. I'm a Muslim. And this is what we do, and you got to" -- he started trying to give us the Muslim spiel, talking out. And I said, "Okay." So that -- that caught -- that's what caught my attention. Clyde himself stood up with a straight back and not backing down as to what the message he wanted us to hear. And I don't even remember what the message was, but I just know that Clyde looking me in the eye and telling me, "No, you need to do this. That's what you need to do." I said, "What? [laughter] Clyde got a little backbone." And so that -- that caught my attention.

So I -- I -- I came here, you know, with Clyde. He told me, "You got to come." And I came, and I don't remember what was happening. They had a lecture. I don't remember who was giving the lecture. And it caught my attention.

ALI: Do you -- so this was your first time you came to this mosque.

RASHID: Yeah, yeah.

ALI: Do you remember what -- what it was like coming in? Like, what did -- what did you experience?

RASHID: Yeah. What I didn't like was you had to stand in the line, and you had to be searched. And -- and they was, like -- it -- it was -- they was polite, but they was firm, and it was, like, no-nonsense. And I'm used to, you know, if I don't want to walk in between the lines, I'm not going to walk in between the lines. [laughter] But with them, in a polite but firm way, "No, you got to walk in between these lines. This is what you're going to do." And I -- and I, kind of, didn't like that. But it -- but it -- I -- I went for it. I said, "Okay." I just didn't like the searching. "All right, brother." You know, and all that kind of stuff. But it was cool.

And then I came in, and -- and -- and -- and I said -- and I started listening to Farrakhan a little bit more on the radio, and listening to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's lectures. I was taking it a little bit more serious. And I mean, I'm getting older, and I'm, like, about 17 at this point. So 17 -- 17 and a half -- I don't know, but I was somewhere around that age. So I don't see my -- you know, now I'm looking at life a little serious, plus I had got myself in trouble with the law, and I'm going to court in the Bronx. Had a case in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan. And so I'm saying, "Wow, they -- you know, I messed myself up." So I -- I was -- I was always -- the background noises was becoming more serious, because I'm getting older. I'm not a kid anymore. You know, you're a kid, you run in the streets. But now, I was 17, 18, somewhere around there. And I'm listening to Farrakhan.

And then, you know, you know, it was black awareness, and, you know, take care of your people, you know, do for yourself. What are you doing with yourself, you know? All of these thoughts starting to come to my mind. Then I had a girl. Her name was Vivian Carter. She was my girlfriend. And Vivian Carter told me, she said one day, she said, "Listen. Why you -- why don't you -- you could get money being an accountant. I have a cousin. He's an accountant." And she named a couple other professions. She said, "You're smart. You could -- you could do that. You don't have to get money in -- with the things you doing. You know, that's not good." And so I'm looking at her, and she said, "And just -- you could" -- you know, so all those thoughts just started coming to my mind, and I started to change myself.

I -- I -- but while that was happening, my past was catching up to me with going back and forth to court. And I went one day, and didn't get out. And there's some other little details I probably could think about later, but that's what happened. So now, while -- when I went -- when I went to jail, I started thinking about the Five Percenter movement, because that -- they -- jail was populated with them. So I became a Five Percenter. And I --

ALI: Did you -- did you complete all of the studies to get a name?

RASHID: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: What was your Five Percenter name?

RASHID: Asiatic. Asiatic. [laughter] And I would -- became very popular, again, [laughter] you know, because I was very studious. I learned the lessons. I -- I -- I knew what I had to do, and -- and -- and -- and we had to debate with each other, you know. And whoever was the best debater, basically, was the one that folks looked up to. So I became one of the top debaters, and folks looked up to me. But I still would think about and look at the Nation of Islam.

And then one day, there was a young man. I can't remember his name. He was of Hispanic descent. He told me he wanted to be like me. He wanted to be a god. This was

-- because we used to call ourselves gods, at that time. I said, "You want to be a god?" He said, "Yeah, because my parents are Muslims, and I don't want to be a Muslim." So I looked at him, and when he said Muslim -- now, I always was still interested in Muslims. I said, "You're a Muslim?" He said, "Yeah, but I don't want to be a Muslim." I said, "Okay." "I want to be a god like you. I want -- teach me the lessons." I said, "Okay. I'll teach you the supreme alphabets and all that."

"And they make me," he said, "you know, read the Qur'an, and --" I said, "You got a Qur'an?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "You read it?" He said, "Yeah." And he said, "They -- I got to say my prayers in Arabic." And I said -- I said, "You know Arabic?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Let me hear you say Arabic." And he said the al-Fatiha. Then he started tell me about alif, ba, ta, fa -- and I said, "Write it down." He wrote it down. I said, "Okay. I'll teach you this if you teach me that." And he started tea-- that's the first teacher I had in al-Islam, a young guy who, for whatever reason, didn't want to be a Muslim.

And he taught me the alphabets, and he taught me the al-Fatiha. And I started studying that. And then -- and then I went -- started going -- getting the Muhammad speech, and I started going to Muslim service in jail. I said, "Where's Muslim service?" Started going to Muslim service. And I -- I kept studying the religion and -- as it was being taught then. And eventually, I had my brother bring me a Qur'an in. And -- and I stood up, as they -- we used to call it back then. And --

ALI: What does that mean, you stood up?

RASHID: Well, stood up means you accepted Islam. There was a question after they give lectures. "Who here believes that what they heard is the truth?" And you raise your hand. "Who here believes" -- some series of questions. "Who here want to join?" and, "Would you stand up?" And then -- then I stood up. [laughter] That's what they used to call it, standing up. So I stood up, and -- and -- and I guess, kind of, the rest is history, in a sense. I met other people, and -- in -- in -- in -- in -- while I was in jail. And one of the

individuals was Clarence 13x -- no, not Clar-- no, that's somebody else. Thomas.

Thomas -- we used to call him Khalil, but his name was Thomas something.

ALI: Thomas Johnson.

RASHID: Johnson.

ALI: Yes.

RASHID: Thomas Johnson. Khalil. Khalil Islam.

ALI: Right. And who was he? He was -- he was a somewhat significant figure. Who was he?

RASHID: Yeah. Thomas Johnson. He was one of the three individuals actually caught, arrested, and convicted for killing Malcolm X. And he always said he didn't do it, but he -- he was a soldier. And he never cried about it. He was -- and he was well-known. And I didn't know -- you know, again, I'm just new coming in. I didn't --

ALI: Right.

RASHID: I didn't -- I didn't know the history like that. But -- but I knew he was one of those involved with that. And me and him became friends, and I became his assistant imam. And it was a little rocky start with me and him, but -- but eventually, you know, he got to know who I was, and he started counting on me, and relying on me, and I helped him, while we was incarcerated, with everything. And yeah. Then I met a couple -- a couple more people, but --

ALI: So at the time, you said, you really didn't know his history.

RASHID: Not that well.

ALI: When -- when did you know about, like, why he was there, in terms of the accusation against him on -- on -- on assassinating Malcolm X?

RASHID: Well, because when he came to the -- Wallkill. That's the jail I was in. When he came to Wallkill, people in Wallkill said, "Oh, so-and-so is coming. So-and-so is coming. And he's the one who did this, that, and the other." And I said, "Oh, okay." You know, and then I met him. But it was --

ALI: Did that -- did you have any kind of feelings about that? You know, even though he maintained his innocence --

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: -- and most researchers have tended to agree with him, because he was, you know, not at the scene, and the person who was at the scene later recanted. It was a whole thing about his -- about the assassination of Malcolm X. But at the time, did that give you pause, like, you know, maybe Malcolm was not that -- you know, for people, they would be like, "I'm not going to deal with this guy. He was involved in this."

RASHID: Well, that's -- that -- that's a very interesting point, because individuals that were in the Nation of Islam didn't, even then, see Malcolm the way black nationalists and others saw Malcolm. We didn't see Malcolm as -- and I say we at that point, because I was with -- listening to Farrakhan and all of the -- Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and I became a member of the -- the Nation of Islam. And it was still, kind of, the Nation of Islam when I stood up. We were still talking then. So we -- Malcolm wasn't a hero to the Nation of Islam. That's just the -- the truth of it. So whether he did or he didn't, it was, like, he's an innocent man being accused, but if he did it, it would have been, like, okay, he's a soldier. Malcolm was at war with the Nation of Islam, and he's one of the soldiers, and you follow orders. So we don't see him as a -- we didn't see those as a -- a murderer or anything like that.

And -- and I didn't -- even that distinction, I didn't really -- I didn't really think about that distinction until I started looking at some documentaries and doing a little research, and I noticed that the -- the members of the Nation of Islam didn't disrespect Malcolm, but they didn't like the way he was talking about [laughter] the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and some of the things he did. And, you know, he, kind of, like, stepped out of his role, and tried to have -- he had interviews with Mike Wallace, and he said some things that we felt he should have kept it in-house. Actually, Imam Mohammed, when he came, and he said, "We have to stop that," and he had a talk about that. He said Malcolm wasn't -- you know, he didn't deserve that. And he named the Masjid Malcolm Shabazz, to tell us, get over that stuff.

ALI: Right, the Harlem mosque.

RASHID: Right. The Harlem mosque. So -- so to answer your question, before he did that, I -- I -- I don't think it would have been -- because I think I was sensitized, like, because I used to listen to tapes with Farrakhan. He would say -- you know, Farrakhan was talking -- you know how he used to talk. He was talking about Malcolm, "He's a liar, he's this, he's that." And that's -- that's what we was being fed. So -- but looking at it through clearer eyes, he didn't deserve that, and we shouldn't have been fighting with each other. And that's another loss for all of us, you know? And, you know, you've got the infiltrators in there instigating, and -- and they're the ones that were successful. That's -- that's my take on it. But at the time, we was just really not looking at things properly.

ALI: So you -- what kind of duties did you take on, working with -- was he -- was he Khalil Islam by then, or --

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: Yeah, he was Khalil Islam.

ALI: Working with Khalil Islam.

RASHID: That's how I met him, as Khalil Islam. Doing the jummah services, and doing the classes, and administrative duties, everything that he did, I did. And -- and I -- I remember having a student, one student stuck -- stuck out. His name is Imam Wahid. He's an imam now. This -- this young man, he -- he -- I did a jummah about the blackout, and he remembered that, and he liked it. And I talked about the blackout in 1977. There was a blackout, and -- and I gave an analogy of how the people was acting chaotic, and looting, and just going crazy, and I said, "That's what happens when we have a blackout of the soul. It's the same thing." And so he liked that analogy, and he -- he became a Muslim. And he was one of my -- I had -- I was charged with teaching the new people, and he was a very diligent student. To this day, he's -- he's -- he's -- he's -- he's -- he's a good -- he's a excellent person.

And I remember him from years earlier in a different jail, a very -- Comstock. It was a very rough penitentiary, rough. And these guys were -- they was rough. And he used to play basketball. I never -- you know, I was a Muslim at that point, so I didn't -- I didn't bother with that. But I used to see him on the basketball court, and I would think that these guys was going to kill each other. It was, like, really rough. And he would just handle them, joke with them, calm them down. He was like a lion tamer. And -- because he was very good with people. And so this individual, he became a Muslim, and as -- as -- as I said, he's a -- he's in -- he's in North Carolina. And me and him both, when we got out, we just kept working, and we both worked with Imam Mohammed -- close, so that was a good thing.

ALI: So you -- in describing this just now, you said, you know, "I was a Muslim," and you did this gesture to say, like, you, kind of, stood back. So tell me in -- in the communities and in the incarcerated communities --

RASHID: Right.

ALI: -- how -- how did the -- how did being a Muslim impact your interaction with -- with people within the prison system?

RASHID: Well, we definitely had to interact, and we spoke with them, but when they was engaged with unruly language and unruly play, and, you know, we don't -- we didn't get involved with that. And so, to get involved with a basketball game or a football game, or sports, and when emotions is high, and they're cursing and yelling, and, you know, hard fouls and stuff, we had to -- we had to just stay clear of that. But in terms of talking to folks, and interacting with folks, and, you know, and -- and -- and always interacting with the people. That was mandatory. We had to do that.

ALI: Did people respond to you in a certain way because you were Muslim, within the prison? Because you -- you -- you basically underwent this transition while -- while in prison.

RASHID: Yes, [inaudible].

ALI: Did you see or experience a different way, whether it was the authorities or other inmates who responded to you? I guess I'm -- I'm -- I'm wondering, you know, I -- it's

similar to what you described in the streets, of, like, knowing who is who and where they are, and their situation, and who you can deal with in this way or that way. Was that also, you know, happening within the inmate population?

RASHID: Yeah, the same thing happened, and -- but again, it was a different mission then. It was a -- the mission was more focused to have these individuals start to reflect on their behavior, reflect on the fact that some of them would get out, reflect on the fact that, you know, we -- we, as a people, need to improve ourselves. And so it was a whole different mission. And -- and the respect level was always there. We'd respect them, and they respected us. And so we had, basically, zero problems. We had zero problems.

ALI: So the other thing that's significant is, during this period, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad passes, in 1975.

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: Can you tell me a little bit about how you learned of that, what your reaction was to that moment?

RASHID: Well, I learned of it through the -- I think it was through the group, the Muslims at that time. And we had a -- was getting papers. It was head news on -- on the *Final Call*, or *Muhammad Speaks* at that time. And it was a little -- it was concerning. It was a little sad. But it was, sort of, a "What's going to happen now?" type thing. But on the very next paper, Imam Mohammed, he was -- he was in charge, so folks just fell in line. He -- he -- he's -- he's the new leader. And I was more in tune with Imam Mohammed than the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, so I, kind of, came in more under his leadership, and I was more sensitized to him than to his father. So for me, it wasn't -- it wasn't a big deal.

ALI: What kind of changes did you see, or notice, or experience yourself in the transition from the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad to Imam Warithuddeen [Mohammed]?

RASHID: Well --

ALI: In that -- in that moment. I know the changes continued, but just --

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: -- in that moment. And we'll talk about --

RASHID: Well, I think individuals felt -- some individuals, I would say, felt a little bit more comfortable in expressing their -- their thoughts, and expressing their ideas, whereas in the Nation of Islam, you just did what you was told. [laughter] It was less -- it was less of a -- of conversations, you know? So I noticed that. It was more of a conversation. And in -- in a lot of ways, that was good. Actually, it was great. But it -- it had the tendency sometimes, now, to -- folks just wanted to question everything. They -- they didn't -- you know, that -- that level of -- of -- of respecting a person in a position that was over you, that -- that -- you know, they didn't -- it, kind of, fell apart. And I think that we lost a lot of ground because of that. But at the same time, there was a lot of abuse going on, you know, with folks just like, you know, it was, like, somebody just abusing their authority, like police officers. Just they -- some -- some individuals had that problem. But in the long run, I think on the individual level, it -- it allowed those to flourish, to learn the religion, to become independent in terms of their own growth and development, and not subject to somebody else. Because there was a lot of subjugation going on back then.

ALI: So you -- you mentioned that one of your first teachers of Islam was this young man who brought you the Qur'an and began teaching you Arabic. And this is before, right?

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: This is before these changes start happening.

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: So you, kind of, were -- like you said, you were, kind of, already on that road.

RASHID: Right.

ALI: Can you tell me, were there -- were there things that you upheld or believed, personally?

I know the community had a set theology, but things that you upheld or believed personally as -- as a member of the Nation of Islam under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, that you had to think through, or relinquish, or transform under the leadership of Imam Warithuddeen?

RASHID: Right. Well, not really, because it didn't sink in. The -- the teachings of the Nation of Islam did not really sink in. A black man being god didn't sink in. It just didn't add up. Because I'm looking at -- I'm looking at this man saying, god. [laughter] You know, it just -- it doesn't make sense. But we had to say it. It was there. We gave some kind of an explanation to it, that -- it just didn't hold up.

Whereas Imam Mohammed, when he -- when he came in, he started explaining some of the teachings. And I remember how he -- he -- he told us the Qur'an. He just came in and he said, "The Qur'an is the book. That's the book." And he started explaining the Qur'an. There was a lesson that he explained about the earth rotating on its axis at 1,037 miles per hour, blah, blah, blah. I don't remember all of it. But -- and he said, you know, "You have gravity. And gravity, you know, is a force of nature that causes you to cling to the earth." And he went into explaining how our appetites cause us to cling to lower things, opposed to, we got to break the gravity and gravitation pull of this, that, and -- and I said, "Hmm, he's -- he's making sense." And he told us about the Qur'an and Allah. And I remember him also saying that we all need a leader, even him. And I'm thinking, "What is he talking about?" He said, "Our leader is Prophet Muhammad." So he introduced Prophet Muhammad to us. He told us we got to pray in the masjids, and he just started telling us things that just made sense.

And then -- so I -- you know, that's when I -- around the time when I told my brother, "I got to get this Qur'an." So I -- I mean, that -- I mean, I got the Qur'an, and I thought I was going to open it up and just get all this blast of wisdom or something. It didn't happen that way. I just had to keep reading it and praying, and reading it, and eventually, I started to see it.

ALI: Okay. So you -- in 1979, or thereabouts, you were released --

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: -- from -- from prison. So tell me what -- what was the first thing you wanted to do on your first day out?

RASHID: Hmm. I don't think I had a special thing planned. I -- my brother came to meet me at the -- I think in some -- in Manhattan someplace, at the bus depot. I gave him my bags and said, "Yeah, take this home." And then I went -- I don't remember where I went. I think I went to check on -- I had to go the parole office or something. You know, just technical things. Then eventually, I went home. But I didn't have any special thoughts on where to go or, when I get out --

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: -- what I'm going to do, that kind of stuff.

ALI: So -- so tell me, what was life like for you in the first few years after you came out of prison?

RASHID: Well, I -- I reconnected with my -- my girlfriend at the time. She stayed with me, you know, communicating throughout the whole time. Eventually, I connected with her, and spoke -- we talked about getting married, because we're Muslims, and she -- you know, she said, "Okay, we'll get married." And I said, "I got to get a place to live." And so I started focusing on getting a job and finding a place to have my -- take my family, which I did. And then I started -- I went back to school. So I was in school and working and got married, and -- and working on those type of things for the first few years.

ALI: Had -- had she also made the same kind of spiritual journey that you had at the same time, or was this going to be something new for her when you came out?

RASHID: Well, I was telling her about things. And she understood. And she didn't resist it, but she wasn't thinking about that. But I guess as I kept saying it and kept living it, then she said, "Okay, then it's real. You know, you know, people say things, but let me see if it's going to happen." She didn't say that to me, but I'm quite sure that that was the waiting-to-see attitude that she had. And then she just, you know, started reading the Qur'an and reading the material, and listening to the -- looking at the tapes of Imam Mohammed. And she just -- she didn't have a problem with it. She just -- she just accepted Islam. And her mother's a Jehovah's Witness, and, you know, I used to talk to them, and she would tell me, oh, I would be a good Jehovah's Witness, and I'd tell her,

no, you'd be a good Muslim. So we had those talks. [laughter] But -- but no, she -- she just -- she accepted it.

ALI: And where were you living at the time? Was it in Brooklyn, or were you still --

RASHID: I was in -- I was -- I lived in the Bronx. I had to live with my mother in the Bronx.

And then my wife, before, she lived in Brooklyn. And it took me about -- to get the apartment and to marry her, it took me about -- about a month. I had a job. I got the apartment in the Bronx, married her, and then she lived in the Bronx with me about -- from that point on.

ALI: Okay. So tell me, what brought you back to Brooklyn? How did you get back to Brooklyn?

RASHID: And I'm going to tell you something about her, my late wife. The fact that she trusted me meant a lot to me, because I was gone for several years. I didn't really have anything. She was in her mother's home. I did manage to get a place for us to stay -- it didn't take me long, a few weeks, maybe a month. But we didn't have anything in the -- in the house. So as a result, we had to sleep on -- I had cardboard, and, you know, blankets and stuff like that. So it took about another three weeks or so for me to get furniture. But she married me with nothing, and slept on the floor with me, you know. So when time come to get the bed, I -- I actually built her a bed, you know. I went to a carpenter, and I said, "You know, build my wife this nice" -- because we had a little place, it was a nice Murphy bed. And it was, you know, fancy and jazzed up. And then I just really looked out for her, because she -- you know, she just -- you know, she -- she trusted me, you know? So I took that as -- that meant a lot. So, yeah. So I just couldn't go buy her -- just after having her sleep on the floor --

ALI: Right, right.

RASHID: I had to get a -- and it cost me a pretty penny, too, but it was -- it was nice.

ALI: So what -- I'm interested in what -- what was your -- what -- what was your guidebook?

What was the -- not necessarily book, but what was the source of guidance that you were using? Because this is -- this is new -- new territory for you --

RASHID: Right.

ALI: -- becoming an adult, becoming -- you know, starting a family.

RASHID: Right.

ALI: And having been out of the main stream society, having been incarcerated for a period of time, what -- what were the ways, or how -- how were you figuring out how to navigate this -- this new terrain for yourself?

RASHID: Well, to be totally honest with you, I -- the guide was the Qur'an, and the -- the wisdom that I received from Imam W. D. Mohammed. He made me believe that -- that Allah can intervene in any situation at any time, and create and recreate, and change and help, and I just believed it. And -- and he used terminology like, "man means mind." And where -- where to be responsible. I mean, he just made -- he just empowered us to believe that God is always with us, and he pointed to examples in history. And then when you look at examples in history, you can see that, yeah, we just have to just trust in him and do what we need to do, and just be truthful and upright, and -- and trust. And -- and -- and again, that scale of -- of -- of -- of justice and balance, it's real, and it's universal. And so these was my thoughts.

And so the -- and the short -- the short answer is, the wisdom and the logic that I got from Imam W. D. Mohammed and the Qur'an itself, the words of the Qur'an, but sometimes, you know, if you don't apply the words properly, if you don't have the right wisdom, you can still go off a little bit. And that's one of the worst strayings a person can -- can encounter, straying with religious material. And so I think I have to credit him for giving me the logic and the wisdom to -- to move forward. And -- and I -- and that was my criteria. Am I -- am -- am I doing something that's pleasing to God, and -- and -- and just trusting that it would work out? And the -- the -- the -- the speed bumps, and the hills, and the -- the obstacles, and the setbacks, you know, is -- as Allah says in the Qur'an, is -- is, do you think you will be left alone on saying you believe, and not be tested? So I just saw it as a test. And -- and you -- you got to get a passing grade. And so everything was just a -- a -- I didn't -- I didn't see it as a burden. I seen it as vitamins, energy.

ALI: What -- what do you think was the -- the biggest test for you that you had to -- that really, you know, made you have to really practice that, that belief?

RASHID: Well, to me, the biggest test -- if I have to term it "biggest," I would say it's -- it's having the faith to -- to -- to -- to know. Not -- not -- having the faith to know, not believe. Having the faith to know that our people, African Americans and African descendants, are going to redevelop themselves and be a -- a major contributor on the -- on -- on the -- on the -- on -- on the universal -- the world stage, as -- as Muslims. I think that's the biggest challenge I have, because when I think back, as I said earlier, the fact that I didn't -- Farrakhan, who's a eloquent speaker, and he was doing the bidding of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, he sensitized us to be desensitized to the murder of Malcolm. And that's not good. And -- and so that -- that's what always gets us, this -- somehow, even if we have differences, we -- we still -- we walk away from each other. And I don't care if we're Christians or Muslims or whatever. We have to really find a way as a people to -- to -- to -- to reclaim our -- our -- our place on the world -- on the world stage, the stage of humanity. And I -- and we're doing it, but in a, kind of, fragmented way. I just want to see us do it. And that's -- having faith in that is a great challenge. I know that's big, but that's the biggest.

Now, in terms of myself, I had little challenges, but they wasn't nothing. It was just patience with people, and -- [laughter] you know, and knowing -- I never had the thought, like, "Well, I can't" -- I never had that thought, like, "I can't make it." Even here, when I became the imam. I never had the thought that we wouldn't make it. We have some challenges, major challenges. When we talk about some of the stuff --

ALI: Yeah.

RASHID: -- that we have here. But I -- I -- I would just -- I'd just look at Abraham. And again, I have to take it back to Imam W. D. Mohammed, having us to understand these figures are there for examples. And Abraham, and Hagar, and Ishmael, and -- and Isaac, all of them, they -- they -- that -- that -- at Zamzam and all of that. That's just a -- a -- a picture,

a -- a very clear picture of faith. That's all it is, faith. And so we have to operate with that. And basically, that's all we have, because we don't really know.

ALI: So let's -- let's talk about how you -- how you ended up being -- being the imam at this masjid.

RASHID: Okay.

ALI: How did you get back involved in -- in this -- this mosque -- masjid?

RASHID: Well, what -- what happened was, as I married my late wife, she -- we had children. I had two children by her, and I was raising up the children. And started my business, cab business, merchandising business, after I worked for this individual called Ralph Mansback. He was a -- a bookkeeper. And he -- I was at Herbert H. Lehman College, and I saw a poster, oh, looking for an assistant. So I called him up, and I said, "Hey." And he said, "Yeah, I want -- want -- need an assistant." So I was working with him, helping him to develop his bookkeeping business. I said, "Okay. We'll develop this bookkeeping business, but I need to be your partner." He said, "Okay." So we was partners to some extent.

And there's this -- there was a person named Cohen. He was a -- a CPA. And -- and Ralph had accounts, various accounts. I used to go in a lawyer's office. I used to go in a manufacturing, LV Adhesives. I used to go in book-- various businesses in Manhattan. And I would go there, and get the books ready for the accountant. And I was going to school for accountancy. So this guy, Coen, he said, "Hey, Rod." He said, "You're going -- you're going to school for accountancy, right?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Why don't you work for me?" I said, "Well, well, I have a -- a agreement with Ralph." He said, "Ralph? What are you talking about?" He said, "You have to work for a CPA to get your license. I'm a CPA. I'll pay you twice what this guy's paying you. Later for Ralph." This -- this is how they -- so I'm, like -- I'm -- I'm older. I should know this. But my mind, at that point -- this is the first time I'm actually dealing with folks in the workforce, like office politics and stuff. I never dealt with that. [laughter] So now I'm saying -- yeah, it's --

ALI: It's another kind of street.

RASHID: [laughter] Yeah. Yeah, this -- this guy's cutting his throat. And I'm saying --

ALI: Yeah. Same dynamic, just different location.

RASHID: Exactly. So this other guy, a white guy, who was my coworker, "Ralph is the man," and, "Ralph is the man," and, "We're going to -- I'm going to stick with Ralph. I don't care." That's what he's saying. So I'm saying, "Yeah, we're going build this company." We're getting clients and we're building it up and getting a little bit more money, but the accountant is trying to siphon me off from Ralph. So I -- I stood firm. I said, "No, no, I can't do that." The white guy, who -- I forgot his name -- bottom line, when the smoke cleared, the white guy went to work for somebody else, Ralph laid me off, [laughter] and I'm standing there, like, okay. 'Cause things -- we ran into some kind of a speed bump, economics. It's okay.

So that was a good thing, because I said, "You know what? Do for self. Let me stick to what I know." But my point is -- this is my point. I'm doing all of these things, and I was -- I was, kind of, into the workforce, school, children, that kind of stuff, and I didn't visit the mosque as much, as often. You know, I was giving a little money here and there, visiting here and there, but I was basically, like you say, in -- in -- in -- in the -- in the corporate world, trying to work and -- and do those things. So when that happened, it hit me. Okay, that's good. Shouldn't -- that offered me, and then I started doing my -- my own thing, getting cabs, merchandising, and I opened up a store in East New York with a -- a old colleague. And then I had more time to come to the mosque. Then I started -- then I moved to Brooklyn at that point.

ALI: So you used the phrase "do for self."

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: What does that mean, and what is the relationship of that phrase to this community and this religious tradition for you?

RASHID: Very good. "Do for self" was a theme that we -- we, those in the Nation of Islam under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, was taught. We was taught to, don't depend on any other person outside of your own self, your own race, your own

people. Not just your race, but also those who are in your -- your same mindset. You all got to get together and circulate that dollar as many times between each other as possible, and provide your own goods and services, and try to develop a -- a ecosystem, that you can sustain yourself financially. And so we termed that, "do for self."

And so once I got kicked to the curb by Ralph Mansback, when he ran into a little economic terms, again, that's a challenge, but I didn't -- I didn't -- I just said, "Okay. It's do for self. That's what -- that's what I have to do. I have to get back to what I should have been doing from the beginning."

And -- and -- and I started -- I got a -- I started merchandising. They -- we used to street vend, and I started with hosiery. So I went to buy the hosiery downtown, and started selling to people on the streets in different places, and I set different individuals up, gave them X amount of dollars. Back then, I had -- my brother was a veteran, and I had other people that got the veteran's license, and had the vet-- veterans out there selling my stuff. And then went to the factories, and found the mills, and buying bulk, and, you know, getting better deals. And then that spun off money into cabs, and I bought a few cars, and just had drivers out there, and just things like that. Then I bought a store, and just doing for self.

[laughter] And so that gave me more freedom. So I started coming to the masjid here a little bit more, because we moved from the Bronx back to Brooklyn. And I started frequenting here in -- in -- after Imam Siraj [Wahhaj] left. Imam Siraj, he left because he had a difference of theology, in terms of the way he saw certain things, from Imam Mohammed, and he left. And when he left, he took a lot of people with him. And this -- this masjid was really doing bad, you know. It was here, but it was not doing that great.

And so I started coming here, and -- and I remember talking to an old colleague. He asked me, he said, he said -- I said, "I -- I live in Brooklyn now. I'm going to start going

to the mosque in Brooklyn.” He said, “What -- what mosque you going to go to?” He said -- I said, “Masjid Khalifah. You know, that’s the masjid that associates with the Nation of Islam and Imam Mohammed.” He said, “Yeah, but it’s dead down there.” I remember these words clear as day. He said, “But it’s dead. It’s -- it’s dead. It’s -- there’s nothing there.” I said, “Well, if I go there, it’s not going to be dead. I mean, if you got one live soul, then it’s not dead. That’s it. So I -- I don’t -- I don’t -- I don’t worry about those things.”

And again, that’s going back to your original question, the biggest challenge. I think if I would have thought about it, I might have saw that as a challenge, but I don’t think too much about things. If I put too much time into it, it’ll -- it’ll -- I hesitate. It’ll -- I -- I just know myself. And I don’t know if it’s a good or a bad thing, but I noticed that -- that sometimes, I just -- I just like doing it. As a matter of fact, that used to be one of my favorite sayings back in the day. “Let’s just do it.” Then I saw Nike, “Just do it.” I think they heard me say that. [laughter] I tell people that. That used to be my -- just do it, because you can’t worry about it. And you’ll figure it out, and you got to have a plan, and you got to -- you should think things out a little bit, and think three or four steps. That, I get, but you have to pull the trigger.

And so that’s what I told him. And I came here, and I saw what he was talking about. It was -- it was -- it was -- it -- we was in bad shape here. But I -- I was very patient, and I introduced myself to the imam at the time. His name was Imam Zaki Hamid. He’s upstate now. He’s a chaplain upstate. He moved upstate. And I introduced myself to him, and I said, “Imam, Brother Imam, I know you don’t know me. I was in the Bronx. I’m in Brooklyn now. I’m free. I’ve been coming to the masjid. If you need any help, just -- just call me. Here’s my number.” He said, “All right, Brother Adib, thank you very much.” And I said, “And this is how you can tell. Just give me an assignment and see how I do. That’s how you judge me.” Because I’m a results orientated person. But he

never called me. And I -- I -- I mentioned that to him a couple more times. He never called me.

So he got a job -- after about a year or so, he got a job, and he moved upstate. Then we had another interim imam. His store's right here. He's -- where are we at? The clothing store. His name is Tariq Dawan. He was the interim imam. And so he was working with a brother by the name of Abdus Saboor, himself, and somebody else. Then we had a board, and they had a search committee. They was looking for an imam. This was, I think, '89 or '88, something like that. And -- and while they was looking for an imam, Imam Tariq, he was the interim imam.

And he -- [Abdus] Saboor Dawan was supposed to give the jummah service, but Saboor Dawan knew about me, because I went to his Arabic class about a year before. So I came, I sat in the Arabic class, and he was teaching Arabic. And when my turn came to speak on the lesson or whatever, I read the lesson, and I spoke on the lesson. Then he realized, "You -- I -- I -- I can't be -- I can't teach you, you know. You know, why are you in the class? You -- you're obviously better than me, so --" But I'm just -- "It is what it is. I mean, this is the Arabic class. I'm not going to try to start another Arabic class. If you need me to do something, let me know." But I stayed in the class, and as we started talking, and getting to know each other, he -- he, kind of, knew my history.

And so when he had to do the jummah service one day, he came to the store. It was about 11:30 or something. He said, "Hey, Adib, did anybody talk to you about something?" I said -- no. He said, "Did anybody talk to you?" I said, "People talk to me every day. What are you talking about [inaudible]?" He said, "No, today. Did anybody come to you and -- and say anything?" I said, "What are you talking about, Saboor? Just, what is it?" Because I don't understand the question. He said, "Well, I'm supposed to do the jummah today, but -- but I'm a little sick. My throat hurt, and I don't really

want to do it. And -- and I was wondering, can you handle it?" I said, "Okay. I -- I need -- what time is it? Let me go home and get some notes."

So I went home, got the notes, and that -- and then when I did that jumamah, the search committee was looking for an imam, and the people in the community heard me do the jumamah, and they said, "Why are we looking for somebody? He can -- him. He's the one." And so that's what they kept saying. So Bilal Muhammad, who passed away -- he was an excellent brother, good friend of mine -- he passed away. But he came to me, and he said, "Hey, the community -- after you did the jumamah, they've been asking me over and over again to submit your name, that they want you to be the imam. Submit your name in the -- in the -- in the -- in the -- on the -- for the list."

So I went to Tariq Dawan, who was the interim imam, and I said, "Imam, this is what they want me to do. Bilal came to me and -- and said he wants me to be the -- you know, put my name in. What do you -- what do you want me to do?" Because I'm, like, hear and obey. Leadership, I don't -- it doesn't matter. Titles don't matter to me. You know, it just -- it just doesn't. So he said, "Okay. No problem." I said, "You sure? Because whatever you tell me to do, we'll do, because we still -- we -- as long as I'm here, it doesn't matter if I'm the imam. Long as you let me help you, you going to get the same results, to me." You know, in theory, you should get the same results. Sometimes the title helps, too, but if you're -- if you're -- if you're there, and you're giving your input, you should get somewhat the same results. So he said, "No, don't worry about it." So I put my name in.

And time came, the people -- it was narrowed down to three individuals, and they chose me by 85 percent. So I said, "Okay, Alhamdulillah [All praise is due to Allah]." And then the other two, I called them up, and I said, "Well, you still want to help? You can." Adesanya, Abd'Allah Adesanya. Dr. Adesanya, we used to call him. He -- he accepted my invitation to work with me, and -- and me, him, and another brother who was the

imam here, we just started working. And that was in 1989, and -- in September '89. And it became official in -- in January 1990.

ALI: Do you remember what that first jummah was? Was that your first -- that was your first jummah?

RASHID: Here.

ALI: Yes.

RASHID: The one that Saboor --

ALI: Yes.

RASHID: -- asked me to do.

ALI: Yes.

RASHID: Yeah, that was the first.

ALI: Do you remember, you know, what -- what -- what it was, or -- or what it felt like to do it?

RASHID: Well, it felt like all the other jummahs I did. I didn't -- [laughter] it -- it -- it was okay. Because I hadn't done it in awhile, though.

ALI: Right.

RASHID: Because I was raising my children. It would have been about since I came out.

That was '80 -- I came out in '79, '80, '81. That was -- that was awhile, because it was -- I hadn't done it in awhile, to be honest with you. So -- so it had been years, but I had -- I was always studying. You know, I was always studying Ar-- I kept -- I got to keep studying. I had children. I used to teach them. So I mean, I used to teach my children Arabic, the Qur'an, the language of the Imam Mohammed. So that's what I did.

So it felt -- I'm not really a public speaker, to be honest with you. That's not my thing. I just find myself being placed in that position, so I do it, but I try -- I -- I shy away. But I don't shy away anymore, because it's just something I have to overcome. I just have to do it. But that really wasn't my thing. So I always feel nervous. I always feel,-- am I saying the right thing? Did they understand me? Did I make it clear? You know, you -- some people just love the mic. They -- they -- they -- they good at it. I'm -- I'm -- I'm not one of those individuals.

ALI: So in your term of -- as -- as imam, what are some of the transformations or changes you've seen in this -- in this community?

RASHID: Okay. One of the first things we was successful in doing was coordinating the efforts of everyone here, because when I became the imam, we had excellent people working with -- following their passions and their skills, and what they wanted to do, their ideas, but it wasn't coordinated. And so they, kind of, undid some of the work of the other individuals. It was just a little, or a lot, chaotic. So we established something called the coordinating council, where all the committees, you know, and their assistants would meet once a month and coordinate efforts. We were successful with that.

We improved the -- and changed some of the language of the bylaws of the -- and the language of the board to make it a little bit more conformed -- conformed to religion and not so much corporate. Because it was more like Robert Rules was really taking over, opposed to Qur'anic logic. And so we, kind of, changed that. We were successful with that.

ALI: Can you give an example of what that distinction is, between --

RASHID: Well, we had a board of directors, and we had a president of the board, and a chairman of the board, and a secretary, and a treasurer, and they would come and convene the meeting -- board meetings. And you have the -- a book, *Robert Rules of Order*, and they would convene and follow the book. And it was good. But I don't think many of them knew what Prophet Muhammad would say to do, or what the -- the -- the -- the Qur'an said, or what the religious guidance was. That wasn't a part of it.

And so what I did -- and -- and I noticed that a -- some of the immigrant communities, when they followed that, they -- they have that. They have a board, and they have the imam. And the board actually controls the imam. And they can fire him and hire him, and he comes in, and he's what they call the spiritual leader. And -- and -- and -- but he's not the leader. So in this al-Islam, if you choose a leader to run -- or emir, you know, he -

- you know, he has take shura. He's not -- he can't be a dictator. You have to poll the people. You -- he has restrictions on him, but at the same time, if you trust him, and if he's getting a consensus and basing it on the Qur'an -- or her, whoever the leader is -- you have to support that individual. And that's -- that's the -- that's the emir. That's the leader. You can't override him.

And Islam, you know, we give -- and especially in Afri-- in our culture, we give the imam a little bit more respect and little bit more authority than some of the other ones, other communities. And they have a board that's separate from the -- the -- the office of the imam, and when the two come in conflict, the actual board members, the businesspeople, can override the imam. So we -- we, kind of, changed that. I didn't like that structure. And that's, kind of, the structure we had.

ALI: I -- I'm glad you got into that, because I -- I was thinking, people may not know what an imam does. So that's even a more basic question. What -- what does it mean to be the imam of this masjid?

RASHID: Right. Very good. Now, imam, in the simplest terms, is one who leads the prayer. And that's where a lot of the immigrant community limits the imam. Lead the prayer and give the khutbah. Teach a class. You're doing spiritual work, and that's the language we had here, spiritual. But I told the -- the believers here that I don't lead spirits, you know what I'm saying? I'm -- I don't know how I'm going to lead your spirit. [laughter] If I'm going to lead, I'm going to lead the men, women, boys, and girls, people. We've got flesh and blood, everything. Now, either I'm qualified to do it, or I'm not.

And -- and then you all have to know what a good imam is. You have to study, so you'll know from -- how to grade me, how to judge me, how to say -- even -- even if I'm doing a great job, and I leave or I get called back by Allah, you still have to know how to judge an imam. So use that to judge me, but use that to -- for future, and teach it to your children, so you'll know what a good imam is.

So in our association, the association of Imam W. D. Mohammed, and mostly African Americans, we -- imam, he has more than just, lead the prayer. He's the face. He's the voice. He's the -- he's the -- he's the -- he's the leader. He's the motivator. Like leadership, like the president. He don't do everything. He has different people to do things, because I can't do everything. I don't want to do everything. But my job is to inspire, motivate, and give clear -- clear -- a clear vision to the people, where they can move towards that vision in a unified -- in a unified form, a unified manner.

And -- and I also told them that my job is like a catalyst, an enzyme in the body. Enzyme don't digest the food. It causes other things to do what it needs to do. So -- and that's what I -- that's what I'm good at; motivating, setting a clear direction, articulating that direction, and -- and -- and double checking, and having us have checks and balances on each other to make sure that we're -- we're reaching our milestones and our objectives in -- in a reasonable way -- manner.

And in addition to -- that's in addition to what the basic tenets are, which is knowing the Qur'an -- so I have to know the Qur'an. All imams need to know the Qur'an in Arabic and in English. Not Arabic where you could speak it, but enough where you can read the Arabic and get information from the actual text, not just the translation, know the life of the Prophet Muhammad and know his logic and wisdom, and know the general undisputed tenets of the religion, then teach this to the people through jumma services, counseling, marriage -- how do you call it -- janazah [funeral] services.

All those various levels of obligation are definitely squarely on the imam. And also be to go out and interact with the people in the community, and -- and -- and give leadership. That motivational -- motivational -- what's that other word -- persuasive guidance to the people. Sometimes people don't want to move in a certain direction.

You have to give them a sound argument to say, this is a good direction, just try it. And that's what I do.

ALI: So some of the -- so during the time that you've been here, and -- and -- and -- and as imam, and you've mentioned that, you know, a colleague of yours said, you know, this place was quote-unquote "dead."

RASHID: Dead, yeah.

ALI: What were some of the -- and you talked about needing to coordinate --

RASHID: Yeah.

ALI: -- people's activities. I'm wondering how -- you know, this masjid being located in Bed-Stuy, Bed-Stuy in the '90s is not like Bed-Stuy in the -- 2018. [laughter] But, you know, how did your community respond to some of the social challenges of the greater community that maybe also was present in this community? And I'm thinking about, you know, issues of -- of -- of drug addiction, issues of -- of violence. We talked about how this masjid was named from -- you know, after someone who gave his life helping a sister. So, you know, I'm thinking of the social challenges that the greater community has -- has had, and how has your mosque community responded? So, you know, anything from, like, drugs, HIV, any of those, kind of, major social issues in -- in the community.

RASHID: Well, when I became the imam, we -- we had -- it was -- for jummah services, it was very -- very light. If we had 10 people, that was -- that was -- that was a lot. Actually, it might have went to 20. When I first started coming here, we had about 10. Then when -- by the time Imam Zaki left, we had -- we had 20 people. It -- it was still light. The stores were light. Everything was light. The back part of the building was basically abandoned. It was junk and debris, and, you know, no roof, and, you know, it was -- it was -- it was in bad shape.

ALI: And -- and for people who don't know, this -- this property is an entire block.

RASHID: Yeah. It goes from Madison Street and Bedford [Avenue] to Putnam [Avenue] and Bedford, and it goes back, I think, 40 feet, so -- from Bedford towards Franklin

[Avenue]. Yes. With the stores and the alleyway. So -- so we -- we was in bad shape in terms of economics, and in terms of participation, and in terms of a lot of things.

What -- let me see. Where do I start? Well, we started to organize individuals, as I said, on paper. Then we started to -- we went and got the 501(c)(3). We did that paperwork. Because the -- the individuals before us, there was a council before us. Bilal Muhammad, his wife Ebon, and some other individuals, they -- they did a good job, and -- because they started the -- they -- actually, they started to -- to shape it up. They -- they started to -- to, you know, get the masjid in -- in -- in good form. I have to give them credit. So I just continued on with that. And even their process of a search -- search for a imam, and -- it -- you know, it -- obviously, it produced me, so -- so they -- they was doing some good work. So we continued on with that.

And there was -- there was no school. There was no -- we had to renovate the back of the building. We had to renovate the hall. We had to organize classes. We had to -- oh. Dr. Adesanya. He worked for the mayor, in the mayor's office. He worked for -- at that time, it was [David] Dinkins. He worked for Mayor Dinkins. And that -- that helped us out a lot, also, because Mayor Dinkins -- see, what happened, Imam Bakradin -- no, Mayor Dinkins wanted a person to reach out to the Islamic community. And so Adesanya, who was my assistant, he -- he had that job. So I had connections to, you know, the mayor's office through him. And we, kind of, helped organize, a little bit, the Muslims, and we was trying to get the -- the alternate side of the street parking for the Eids, and -- and, you know, these type of things. And -- and so we -- we was, kind of, involved in various levels.

I can't remember all of the efforts, because it was a little while, but I remember working with the precinct when one of our members got killed. That was a big thing. That was in the newspapers and on television. And we -- actually, it was a -- a lower-level Mafioso person who killed them by accident. Went to the market with his wife, and -- and there

was -- the mafio-- the lower-ranked Mafioso guy was arguing with somebody else and shot at the person, or shot at the brother, or whatever, and he shot him. And -- and he died, and we had a big campaign about that. That was -- that was -- that was some heavy lifting, but eventually we -- we got him. We got the -- we got the person, Nicky No Socks [Nicholas Facciolo]. That was his name, Nicky No Socks something.

And so there was a lot of those type of activities going on. And I remember us trying to open up the school for several years. It took us a little while to get it, because we had to do a lot of work, but we renovated the back, got it ready for the classrooms, got the drawings and got the blueprints, and we got -- got it approved with the building department and everything else. And we opened up our school in -- I think it was -- she told me when it was. I don't remember. Just bear with me. I -- I want to -- I want to get this date right. Because I think I told you the wrong dates before. We opened up the school in 1998, September 1998 was the elementary school. We opened it up. And we had 15 students the first year. By the third year, we had 135. So we -- we was really moving. We was -- we was getting it done.

ALI: In terms of governance, what is your relationship to the school?

RASHID: The director.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: I was the director. That's another thing. Imam, director of the school. Yeah. So we -- I got together Darlene Bashir, sister Sameemah, sister Elizabeth, who was a -- sister Elizabeth was a teacher for years. Samima was going to school for education. Darlene was going to school for education, to become teachers and whatever, and get their degrees. And we just opened up the school. We had 15 students, and we started pushing the program. And I met with them every two weeks until we got it going. Then once it got built up to a certain point, we -- you know, we had a waiting list. At that point, I started refocusing my energies -- in 2000 -- four years. After four years, I started refocusing my energies on business, out of state and other places, and -- and the school was just -- was moving.

ALI: How -- how has the neighborhood that the mosque is in, or the masjid is in, how has the neighborhood changed over the course of your tenure here?

RASHID: Yeah. When -- when I became the imam, we had a problem with the drugs down in the neighborhood. We was help -- I was security worked with Imam Siraj to do his 30-day patrol. We was all working together. You know, he was spearheading it, because when he went down there, it was just terrible. It was bad up here, but not as bad as Fulton Street. And so all of us worked together on that project, and he became, actually, well-known for that, but it was really a joint effort. But to his credit, you know, he called the people together, and we all responded. Our security and everybody else responded. And they cleaned that up.

And so we did the same thing over here, on Putnam. It was crazy in Putnam. They had drug dealers over here, and on Madison they had drug dealers, and we did our little work to get them out. There were some tense times, but we prevailed. Nobody got hurt. And we cleaned that up. The neighbors who weren't drug dealers appreciated us. [laughter] The neighbors who were -- because some of them were drug dealers -- they didn't -- you know, they had a problem with it. But, you know, we -- we always -- we had a good rela-- we have a good relationship with the church and the neighbors on the block. And we started the block association for Madison Street. We -- we -- you know, involved getting the neighbors out, letting them know who we are.

We had the Eids, and we started, you know, having the Eids on the -- on the street. We used to have it in the park. But then -- Prospect Park. But we felt -- the Muslims go -- go to the Eid, right? You know, all the Muslims used to go to Prospect Park, which was good. I liked that. But I like the -- the actual non-Muslims to see and hear what -- what our Eids were, I mean, because they don't know that we do these things. So we started staying in the block. I stopped going -- you know, it -- it -- it was a good idea. I still think it's a good idea. Maybe we need to alternate it, have all the Muslims come together. It's just a wonderful feeling to see all those -- but at the same time, we're leaving the blocks.

This is where we are. We're here, and we don't have much opportunities to legitimately call the people together, so we -- we -- we invite them out. They come inside the building, the nei-- the neighbors on the block. They -- they -- and they -- they're out here, and they know, and they know that we're here. And so we use that as an opportunity to do da'wah.

ALI: And so what happens -- what is happening at the Eid celebration here? Tell me what kinds of activities are happening.

RASHID: Well, the -- the -- Eid al-Fitr, we have basically the same thing happen. We have the -- the lecture, at first, and after that, we'll have the food. The -- we -- the breakfast is out there. Then we'll have, eventually, the lunch and the dinners. We'll have speakers. We'll have African drummers. We'll have entertainers. We'll have paint -- you know, activities for the children.

And -- and -- and we make sure that the neighbors, you know, we try to work with them, because it's -- it disturbs their -- some of them, they complain. "Oh, I can't park my car," and whatnot, so we -- we, kind of, accommodate them, and we bring them meals, some of them, in the house. We used to have elderly women, a couple of them, on this block. We would visit them. And so I think it -- it helped -- and the church. You know, the church, you know, we -- we, kind of, worked out with them where, this is our Eid, and, you know, welcome, and so a lot of their members come out, and now they -- they -- at this point, at this stage in the game, we -- we -- we, kind of, like working together. We're like brothers and sisters. They're from Barbados or someplace. And so we -- we -- we're real cool.

So you see all of these different activities. Then, on that day, we have, you know, the borough president, and all -- you know, all the political folks coming through, because there's voters and whatever. [laughter] You know, just doing their thing. But it's good, too, because our folks, I tell them, don't just let them come and show their faces. If you have a concern, you know, get their card, talk to them. And so this is what they do, and

the -- the community. The -- the precinct commander comes out. So we have a -- a -- a long agenda of politicians in the precinct. And we have entertainment, we have food, we have the children, we have families, and -- and the community.

ALI: So it's like a block party.

RASHID: Basically, yeah. It turns out to be just like a block party.

ALI: [laughter] That's very -- that's a different kind of -- is -- is that unique to this community, to do Eid like that, do you think? Do you know of other mosques or masjids that are doing [inaudible]?

RASHID: I think -- they go to the -- the park. They go to the park. But being that we have the building, and we have the kitchen, and we have the facilities, we just get the permit and block the street off, and let everybody come out. And -- and -- and actually, imams and other believers come from other boroughs, because they know what we do. And they -- they -- they been doing that for years.

Now, I know Masjid at-Taqwa started doing that, also. They go to the park here now. So they get the -- the bouncy house, and they do all of that, and they -- but they -- they didn't used to -- yeah. So it's good to, you know, invite the people, you know?

ALI: Yeah. How -- it's -- so it's interesting. You talked about the role of the masjid in helping to clean up the neighborhood.

RASHID: Yes.

ALI: And that has made the neighborhood more attractive to newer residents, who maybe never lived here before. How do you see your role as a masjid in both, kind of, maintaining a -- a history, right, and a historic community, but also being a catalyst for the changes of -- of new --?

RASHID: Yeah. Well, I think -- that's going back to your previous question of, what really is a challenge? Again, it's our people holding onto and maintaining, and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and advancing their -- our efforts and our place at the table. And for whatever the reason, we was here in this community -- we meaning African descendants and African Americans, and, you know, just black folks -- was in this community, in

Bedford-Stuyvesant. And now, it's attracted, for whatever the reason, for -- for -- for other people, you know, that come in, and the prices are going up. Store prices, prop--rentals of apartments. Property values is going up. Taxes is going up. And it's making it a little bit more difficult, and sometimes a lot more difficult, for people of color to stay in these communities. And then when the older folks -- excuse me -- reach their retirement age, their children aren't here, and -- and so they want to sell the properties, and they -- it's hard for other African Americans to purchase brownstones from African Americans. So you have those with the money who are mostly non-African Americans. That's a problem. And we can't tell the older folks that, you worked 40 years, don't sell your house, sell it at only one-third of the value so [laughter] African American -- that's ridiculous.

So there's -- there's economic forces that's really amounted to gentrification, and other forces. And -- and what we -- what we want to do is just accept that we still have a role to play. We still have to interact with these neighbors. Some of them have questioned us calling the adhan at fajr and throughout the day. We have had those challenges. But thank God who has blessed us to have a presence in the community, and they -- it didn't go anywhere. Because I know at 96th Street, they can't call the adhan. That's not their community. If they call the adhan, it's noise pollution. They -- they -- they run into some political problems. Whereas, thus far, we haven't had that problem, because most of us have been at the community board, the precinct council, which there's still enough of us here. We still have a presence.

And I think the challenge that we have is to start to get to know some of our new neighbors, invite them out, and we have been doing that to some extent. They have been somewhat receptive. And I'm going to tell you why, I think. A lot of the new neighbors, though they are not of African descent, they're not -- how do I describe them? They're not the -- the -- the group of -- they don't have the -- a lot of them don't have the same stereotypes like some of the older generation. They're younger. They're

artsy. They have a little -- you know, they pool their resources. But they're more open to -- a lot of them are more open to interacting with different people and accepting different people. They're more liberal. I guess that's the word. I don't know.

ALI: Do you think people know the history? The -- the -- do you think they have a -- a understanding of the history of this --

RASHID: No.

ALI: -- this institution?

RASHID: No. That's our job to share that with them, to find out how -- once we interact with a few of them, we -- we'll do that. But that's our challenge. Again, that's one of the challenges that we have, internal and external. And I -- the reason why I'm saying internal is because we have to develop this property at some point, because it's -- it's been here for awhile. The maintenance alone is very difficult. And the new challenge that I have, as you -- when you asked me about challenge -- is, how do you maintain this big property, the heating bill, the maintenance, the roof, the this, the that, with the -- the population getting older, retiring, and moving. Because a lot of our young folks, they get educated, they go different places. "It's hard to live in the city. The prices is too high. I don't like the crime. You know, I want my children to grow up with -- with -- with dirt up under their feet. It's concrete over here." So they're moving.

So what we're doing, I'm talking to some individuals to help us develop the property, but we have people on the inside that -- our people, that said, "No, then we can't afford the rents, and Caucasians are going to come and take it over, and we -- we're helping with gentrification." I said, "Well, we can't stop it." We can't stop it. We have to develop the property and put it on a footing that is -- is modern. We need to look at the -- the heating system, the cooling system, the -- the -- the green -- it's just -- we just got to -- the structures, the steel, the foundation. It's been here for, like, what, a hundred years. It's -- the piping is old. So we have to just renovate this property. And then we have to do it in such a way whereas we maintain it. It's updated. We can take half the units upstairs and put our people up there. We can figure out a way how to maybe do a

program where we get seniors or veterans up there, or low income. But we have to renovate it. And I'm in the process of talking to the developers right now.

Otherwise, this is a phenomenon that's happening with a lot of the churches, black churches, throughout the city. They -- they're getting older. The members are older. The young people are -- the -- the brick and mortar spiritual edifices, they don't really relate to that. They're on -- online. They look at ju-- a lot of them, they want me to put jummah online. Can you put ju-- They was asking me last -- "Well, let me stream your jummah. I'm going to put it online." They don't even come out. They stay wherever. They have three or four of them look at the jummah, pray right there. They don't -- this is what they do. But that's the new challenge.

ALI: I wanted to ask you at least one more question, because one of the names that you mentioned frequently as a source of inspiration and guidance for you was Imam W. D. Mohammed. Others know him as Imam Warithuddeen Mohammed. And he passed in 2011. Can you talk about what that meant for -- for you personally, and for this community, to experience that transition?

RASHID: Yes. Well, it meant several things. It's the end of an era for us, in terms of having a charismatic figure, one charismatic figure that can bring people together, and -- and -- and just based upon their own existence and their own efforts, without even trying, force us to find a way to work together. He was the glue that held us together. The Nation of Islam, it was his father and his mother, they held us together. I -- I would say, in a bigger way than he did, because that -- they was -- you know, he -- it shrunk under his leadership the visible manifestation of his followers, but he still had -- he could -- if he pressed the issue, he could get thousands of people out, still, [laughter] you know.

Now, we -- we don't have one person that can do that. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's just the way it is. So what we have to do now, we have to become more serious and vigilant to find a way to advance his wisdom and his logic, because I strongly believe -- strongly believe -- he -- he had a certain type of insight into al-Islam

that was practical, that was non-- he didn't -- he didn't go about -- he didn't want to -- he didn't overwhelm folks with all of the -- the -- the flowers and bells and whistles, but if you listened to what he was saying, he was sincere. He was truthful. And he was right on point.

And how do I know? Because the -- the -- the brand of -- and the -- not the brand. The understanding that he gave us of al-Islam is able to withstand the test of time and the changing circumstances. What -- what he told us about al-Islam, I can say it to you, talk to you about it, without changing anything. Then I can talk to a Chinese person, or Caucasian person, or a Christian, and still have the same message. When 9/11 hit, we didn't have to change anything that we were saying on the rostrum. You know, there was folks had to actually change up their conversation, their jummahs. We didn't have to do that. We -- we -- we -- we kept teaching the same Islam, the same way we always taught about it. Since he was the imam, he -- he -- we never had to change our conversation, ever. And so that tells me --

ALI: What was that conversation?

RASHID: Well, the conversation was basically, Allah -- we see Allah as the creator of the heavens and earth, and one who cares for all of his creatures, every single creature. It doesn't matter if the person say, I'm a Jew or a Christian, or I'm white, or if I'm black. Allah cares for that person, and Allah reaches that person, and Allah wants me to help that person. Period. And -- and -- and so even in the Bible, we believe that Allah sent information to individuals, and some of that information is still in the Bible, and we can look in the Bible and see God's teaching still in the Bible. And -- and we -- we just don't follow it like that, but we -- we -- you know, because we have the Qur'an. But I have no problems with talking like this.

And -- and you know, we don't use a word like kufr, like that. Our understanding of kufr -- there's people who say, kufr, "They're the kufers," you know. And they mean, with that word, that's an Arabic word that means disbeliever. But they mean anyone that does

not accept al-Islam. To them, they're a disbeliever. And that's -- that's not our definition. Like, there's a term in the Qur'an called ma'ruf. And the common understanding of the word ma'ruf, you would see in the footnotes and in brackets, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, they call that ma'ruf. Whereas Imam W. D. Mohammed said ma'ruf is anything that Allah has inspired man to adopt that helps promote humanity and the betterment of man.

Like what? Like, for us, marriage. Let's say marriage. This is -- this is -- these are my words. Marriage -- a man -- this is what I'm -- we're talking about. A man finding a mate that he can give himself to, and she's a female, a female mate, and they get together, they have children, they obligate themselves to each other, they take care of the children and the family. See, all of that means marriage to us. It's not just, you know, the sex or just the bond in itself. It's everything that comes from that. That's all part of domestic life. And -- and people just do that naturally. They just, you know -- now, we have new definitions of marriage, you know, with same-sex and other things, and that's -- you know, that's -- individuals want to do that.

But the -- but getting back to the, like, the nature-based definition, where it produces family and children, if a -- if a woman or a man is not sterile -- produces family and children, and then the obligation and the love that comes from that. All -- even love for your family members. That's ma'ruf. And acting upon that love. See, we -- we have a broader definition, because once we -- once we accept that God created that, and he put it in the midst of human beings to -- to respond to that, we call that ma'ruf, along with the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Qur'an and Sunnah is definitely ma'ruf, too, but we broaden the definition.

And some individuals, they have a narrow definition of ma'ruf, even fitna or jihad or things of that nature. Our definition has always been broad. Jihad is not just fighting. We've been saying that forever. Fitna. What is fitna? Fitna is a trial and a test. It's not

just confusion in the ranks of the Muslims, or confusion in the world. In the -- all of this is based in the Qur'an. So his definition of things helps us to have a universal look on life, and then we can broaden the umbrella of -- of humanity, and just have everybody working together.

And we understand that there's differences, but we don't even want to -- you know, if we have to confront them, we're not going to blink or be shy, because sometimes we'll have to talk about same-sex marriage, and we say, "Well, we don't -- we don't support that." But I have people -- I have family members that are gay, and I -- that's not even a -- I mean, I love them, you know what I'm saying? And see, Islam, our brand, that's my -- I have a nephew. This guy is -- he's cool. I have a cousin. I mean, they -- they -- I mean, I love them. They top -- they good people, you know what I'm saying? But they're gay. I mean, so, that's what they want to do, I'm going to leave them alone. I'm not going to go out of my way to make an issue out of that.

ALI: Do -- are they -- do they identify as Muslim or not?

RASHID: No, they don't identify as Muslim.

ALI: Okay.

RASHID: So -- but --

ALI: Do you know if there are people within your community that may be, and -- and identify as Muslim, or how do you handle that?

RASHID: I knew a couple -- I knew -- I knew a couple. A sister came to me and said, "Oh, I like women," and I said, "Well, what -- what you telling me for? I'm not a priest. I mean, you don't confess no sins to me. That's between you and God. You know what our religion say about that, so if you -- if you -- if you like women, what do you want? Do you -- do you want to continue to like women? Do you want to be with one?" She said, "I want to stop." I said, "Well, then, just stop." And I also told her, I said, "Don't tell people your business. Because you're telling people your business, they don't -- they just talk about you, you know." So I had a couple people come to me and tell me things, "I'm on -- on drugs," or whatever.

See, we -- we -- we don't -- we don't -- all of us are coming up short, and that's, kind of, like, overlapping with the -- the theme of Christianity. And we got to acknowledge what Christians are good at. Christians are good with, "Love your brother." You know, they -- they -- kind of -- that brotherly Christian love thing. And that's real. So, see, in the brand of Islam that Imam Mohammed teaches us, we can accept that, and we can give them credit where it's due. I mean, you know, we have to balance it out, but why would you try to deny a reality? And you can say what you want, but I know that Christians -- a lot of Christians have more of a level of -- from my observation -- of tolerance for other people than Muslims. And Prophet Muhammad had tolerance for basically everybody. You know, he -- he didn't run to hurt people, you know what I'm saying?

But I think we -- we, kind of, lost that. And that's what I'm talking about. Imam Mohammed, he -- he gave us that sensitivity towards all people. And, you know, when it comes to punishment, or exiling, or banishment, or stoning to death, and all, that -- that'll take care of itself. We -- that's -- let that be the very last, last, last, last stop. You know? And if you -- because that's what Prophet Muhammad did. A person said, "Oh, I committed adultery." He said, "I don't want to hear it. Get out of here." He just ignored -- he ignored it until the man pressed him. And then he said, "Okay. Well, this is what we have to do." We don't -- we don't -- we don't -- and that's the sensitivity.

So what I'm saying is, Imam W. D. Mohammed, he sensitized us to look at the religion as -- as the way Allah wants you to look at. Because the bottom line is, the Qur'an, it's only about 1400 or something years old. So was God still here before the Qur'an? Of course. He was here with the Arabs. He was here with the pagans. He was here with -- from Adam. And so -- and he's always the same. Allah is consistent. He didn't change. He didn't improve. He didn't lose anything. He's -- and that's the way we look at Allah. He's the same Allah that -- that created everything.

And I noticed that some Muslims, they're a little hard on non-Muslims. They're a little hard on Christians. They're a little hard on their children. You know, like, some of our children, little girls want to take the khimar off. Little boys sag the pants down. You know, you don't want -- "You shouldn't listen to music. You shouldn't do these things." And certain music is -- is haram. But you got to -- you got to, kind of, prioritize, and -- because we'll play music down here for the Eid, and some of the music -- I got to tell them, "Hey, come on, man. What y'all doing?" [laughter] But -- but I'm not going to tell them no. That's my point. That's -- that's what we get.

I mean, I don't have that -- necessarily, that need, but you got kids here. You got people here. And they -- that's where Imam Mohammed tells us to be flexible and be intelligent. And -- and I think it helps us. It really helps us with human relations. It helps us with knowing how to assimilate where we need to, and be firm and draw the line where we must, in a kind and intelligent way. There's certain things that we just don't do, but if somebody else does it, and they're doing other -- something else that's positive, we can still work with them on those positive points without any problems. We -- we -- you know, I think -- what I think? I think over the course of time, we would change their behavior to conform more to our behavior, opposed to them changing out behavior.

A person is drinking, for example, drinking a beer and watching the game. I can watch a game with him, a basketball game or whatever, without drinking, and eventually, some -- somehow influence him that -- that that alcohol is bad for your liver, is bad for your life, is bad for your blood. It's -- maybe -- maybe he'll stop, maybe he won't, but I know he's not going to cause me to start drinking. That's -- that's what I don't -- that's what I do know. So I think it will -- I would rub off on him before he rubs off on me, and that that's the way -- that's the way the world is. Interacting with people and bringing about change.

And that's what Imam Mohammed does. And very, very sensible, down to earth, practical application of al-Islam and the scriptures overall. And even with the -- the institutions -- because the way we have our institutions set up, we have to have a -- a religious corporation. A religious corporation is what he asked us to do. Don't have it in no individual names. It can't be in my name. Because some people still have storefront mosques, and it's in their name. How are you going to call it a mosque if -- if it's in an individual name? What happens when you die, and your -- your estranged wife comes back, and -- [laughter] I've seen it happen. Your kids, who -- because a lot of our kids, you know, we -- they -- they -- they Muslims, but after they get older, they -- they do what they want to do. And if their name is on a document, and their father dies -- I've seen it. They'll come back and they'll challenge. So we can't have that.

Then, even when we have the religious corporation, the work that we're doing here, this is a CDC. This is a community development corp., that we have to do work under that to protect the masjid. Then the school, we have to start a corporation for that. And so it's business, but it's sensible, and we have no problems with it. And mix up the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an with a little *Robert Rules of Order* and a little corporate business, you got to have all of that. And we have no problems.

I think a lot of other Muslims are advancing to that now, but before, it was -- it was a little -- African American Muslims, it was a little -- they was a little shy. They were scared of that. Even going to the military. He said, "If you want to go to the military, what's wrong with that?" But a lot of African American Muslims said, "No, we're not going into the military." He said, "If you can do -- make a career out of it --" You know, when the time comes for fighting and killing, if -- if you have to -- if you're confronted with a situation where you know you -- it's an unjust war or something, and you -- you put yourself at risk to some extent, but, you know, that's something -- a decision you have to make. But overall, a blanket, "Oh, we don't go to the military." No, we go to the

military. Yeah. We become judges, whatever. So that's his -- that's his influence on his community.

And his passing meant that we have to keep those -- that legacy alive. We have to keep his language alive. We have to keep his logic alive. And hopefully let it influence the conversation of al-Islam in America.

ALI: I think that's a good place to -- to stop. Thank you so much.

RASHID: Oh, okay. You're welcome.