

Hallie Q. Brown Community Archives Oral History Collection:

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September 30th, 2025

Residence of Nathaniel Khaliq, St. Paul, MN

Nathaniel Khaliq Oral History

MW: Mackinnon Williams (interviewer, transcriber)

NK: Nathaniel Khaliq (interviewee)

01:00:54 runtime

Subjects discussed: Being born in 1943 at 304 Rondo Ave and raised in the Cornmeal Valley section of the Rondo Neighborhood; Cornmeal Valley and Oatmeal Hill; Black businesses in Rondo; moral standards in the community; being raised by his grandparents Reverend George Davis and Bertha Davis; the self-sufficiency of the Rondo neighborhood in his childhood; Black men in the community working on the railroad and in the packinghouse; being told certain areas of the city were off-limits to Black people; his grandfather being the last homeowner removed for the construction of I-94; racial housing covenants and eminent domain; riot in Rondo in 1968; the Saint Paul police going buck wild in dealing with Black folks; police officer Allan Lee being killed in 1949 and the city cutting power in lower Rondo; the “true face of life in St. Paul for Black folk”; people in the neighborhood shooting at police and fire trucks; urban renewal; pressures on Black men working as railroad porters; Black women in the community working at the Twin City Arsenal and in domestic roles; educated Black people being barred from work; benign neglect by the St. Paul police towards Rondo; organizing to close an establishment on Dale and Selby which was a center point for crime and violence; the El Rukns gang from Chicago moving into St. Paul; working with Bobby Hickman, Kwame McDonald, Katie McWatt; St. Paul police disregarding gangs; arson fire which killed babies; ad hoc Black radical organizations forming during the Black Power Era; stories of police ignoring crime; police harassing his family at home; major drug sweeps in St. Paul during the Republican Convention; investigating an arson fire that killed five children; getting affordable housing built in Rondo; trying to slow gentrification with the Summit-University Planning Council; the creation of Unidale Mall; the economic engines of other ethnic groups in Saint Paul; his involvement with the Nation of Islam and the Muslim communities in the Twin Cities; friend Abdul Kareem surviving a shooting in North Minneapolis; Islam being one of the greatest experiences of his life along with having children and being married to his wife Victoria Davis for 52 years.

People/organizations discussed: George Davis (grandfather) and Bertha Davis (grandmother); Russel Balenger; Allan Lee; Darrell Cruz; Kwame McDonald; Bobby Hickman; Katie McWatt; El Rukns; MOVE Organization; Inner City Youth League; Summit-University Crime Prevention Council; Black Underground Army; Black Liberation Army; NAACP; CORE; SNCC; SCLC; Minneapolis Star Tribune; Bill Clinton; Janet Reno; Lonnie Atkins; Roy Wilkins; Summit University Planning Council; Unidale Mall; Help Development Corporation; Kraus Anderson;

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General Mills; Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, W.D. Muhammad; Abdul Kareem; Masjid An-Nur; Victoria Davis (wife).

00:00:04

MW: Great, okay. My name is Mackinnon Williams. I'm here with Mr. Nathaniel Khaliq at his home in St. Paul, Minnesota. Today is September 30th, 2025, and we're here for a discussion about some of Mr. Khaliq's life work. So, to start off, Mr. Khaliq, could you briefly introduce yourself, give your birthplace and birth date, and describe your connection to the Rondo neighborhood?

NK: Born September 11th, 1943, at 304 Rondo, part of the Rondo neighborhood that was referred to as Cornmeal Valley. It was Cornmeal Valley and it was east of Dale Street and then west of Dale Street was Oatmeal Hill. And so, we lived in the lower economic part of the community, even though there were folks that were doing, y'know, better than others.

MW: Thank you. And then what were some of the— you spoke to some of the class dynamics— what were the race and class demographics and dynamics of Rondo at the time?

NK: Well, from what I remember, it was majority Black. We had over two or three hundred Black businesses. Many of them weren't storefronts. Many of them were housed in people's homes and stuff. We had connectivity and cohesiveness that we could depend on each other. It was a strong, strong safety net. There was high moral standards that the elderly set for us. I was raised by my grandparents, and my grandpa was a evangelist preacher [Reverend George Davis] and my grandmother [Bertha Davis] was blind. But she was a— she could do just about any and everything any other stay home mom could do. During that time, everything that we needed was

pretty much self-contained in that community for many of us. Many of us didn't travel outside the community. We've— that was it. Everything was right there. We felt safe, loved, and nurtured. It was really a— even though we were very poor, we didn't know we were poor because we felt that there wasn't anything missing in our lives. Everything that we needed or wanted was right there for us. Like I said, everybody pretty much knew each other. Everybody looked out for each other. Any kind of problem, you didn't call 911, you'd talk to your neighbor or your relative about it and try to work it out. During my growing up, up until 1956 and somewhat even after that, we didn't hardly know anyone that was in— well, we didn't know anyone that was in any institution. No one was in jail; no one was in prison. Most of the Black men we knew were working on the railroad, maybe the packing house. Even though those with degrees that we knew of— that may have had degrees in higher education— didn't get the same opportunities as white folks. I don't remember knowing anyone that lived outside of our community. We were told don't go to— “Don't go on Rice Street because we're not welcome over there.” They didn't have signs or anything up— and were told to stay off Selby. We didn't realize the impact of racism— and I'm talking about the younger folk— that was going on around us, around the country. Every now and then, we would hear a little bit about what was going on in Mississippi or a place like that.

00:05:07

NK: And so, we had after hour joints in Cornmeal Valley, where folks would go on the weekend or after hours and do their thing, even though they were illegal. But even then, there wasn't any drama. We didn't hear about any drama or— folks went there and pretty much did their thing. As

the freeway started, we were at the first phase of the freeway from the Capitol up to Western Avenue. My grandpa was the last house on Rondo between Western and Rice Street. He was about the same age as I am now, about 81, 82 years old. They wanted him to move. He kept telling him, “No, I’m not moving. I want you to pick up my house and set it back. And that way you can still, do your freeway.” Of course, they weren’t— they weren’t having that. They would try to send different people from the housing authority to reason with them. He said, “you know what, I got a shotgun.” In the newspaper article, when they finally evict’ him, it said, “Pastor threatens authorities with a shotgun.” So first they sent someone in to cut the power off to the house. He came out with his stuff and said, “Come on down from there, young man.” He came down. Then shortly after that, in September of 1956, they sent a brother to catch him off guard. Then the police came in and they physically removed him— and I got pictures of him being handcuffed, led to a squad car, and they moved him on by Regents Hospital. That was very impactful for me. I came home that day— I’d started spending time with my mother then— but still stopped by the house, and they were gone. There were moving vans there, squad cars, and then some of the workers from- I don’t know if it’s the highway department or public housing or whatever— were, making the house uninhabitable inside. So that’s when it dawned on me about— slowly but surely— about racism and how they would never treat an elderly white man that way. Then unlike other parts of the city where the freeway came through and may have displaced white folk, they had the choice to move wherever they wanted to. We didn’t have that choice. They had covenants that had, “Do not sell to Negroes” and so forth. We moved when I started living with my mom at least five or six times and ended up in a public housing project. And, not only was the community, far as all the benefits that we had from being together and

everything, but we lost— unlike white folks who may have been displaced— we lost generational wealth. We got zero equity. Once they came through, a lot of folks had contracts for deeds and whatever equity they had built up in those contracts for deeds was gone. A lot of people were not able to relocate, and then the big hit, of course, was for the businesses, those that were storefront businesses and those that had businesses in their home. We were scattered throughout the city. As a result of that, I think we lost our moral authority, and little by little, we started taking it out on each other. I mean, the tension and the anger was at a boiling point, because from Western going west, they hadn't started tearing down as much. It was, it was a slow process.

00:10:04

NK: We had a major riot in Rondo.

MW: In '68, right?

NK: Yep. I believe it was 1968 on Kent and Rondo, because of an altercation between a white cop and a brother who was with his wife— wife or girlfriend at the time- and the officer came up and said, "Who is this b—?" [Enunciation left as original] or whatever, and all hell broke loose. Did you ever see the clipping?

MW: I haven't seen the clipping. Mr. Balenger told me a little bit about it this morning.

NK: Yeah. I was in high school at the time, and it was— it was a big time. I think they arrested 200 people. We didn't tear anything up, but we tried to deal with the police. They had, they put dogs on us— not on us, I wasn't out there, but on the folks. And the other thing— these people

that were involved in the riot, they were regular folk working nine to five, raising their families and everything. But they set an environment where folks said, “They running us out of here. They coming through the freeway.” The police was on— I mean, they had gone buck wild in how they dealt with Black folk. They’re asking for ID, almost like apartheid South Africa. And like I said, these weren’t radical people. These were regular, everyday folk that said, “Enough is enough.” They raised up and made a statement. Then, the other thing I can— that I think about, and for years I didn’t realize that it was something that actually happened or whether I was having some kind of hallucination. But in 1949, an officer named Allan Lee got shot. I was six years old.

MW: In Rondo.

NK: Yeah, in Rondo. There was a liquor store robbery. There was a shootout between this guy named Crutcher and the police department and Allan Lee got killed, and they cut out all the lights in lower Rondo in our area. I don’t know how far the radius was, but I know at 304 Rondo between Farrington and Lewis and Carroll and St. Anthony, the lights were out in our homes and on the street. And they were going with flashlights and dogs and stuff looking for this brother. They would have never done that— that wasn’t the first or the last officer to ever be shot, but they shut it down and ended up shooting a brother in the face who was drunk and didn’t get the memo about not coming out. And so little by little, we started seeing the true face of life in St. Paul for Black folk. After they came through with the freeway, little by little, and folks were still rebelling against them, they used to have incidents where some brothers, unbeknown to whom, would call 911 and when the police or the fire trucks would respond, they would shoot at them. It

got to a boiling point and people downtown never did anything to try to rectify, pacify, or somehow have a meeting of the minds and see how we could work through this. And then the double whammy came with urban renewal, when the government came and said, “We’re gonna try to get you all in a situation where you can reclaim some of your generational wealth, some of your businesses, some of your homes, and on and on and on.” They start, tearing down houses and so forth. Little by little, they tried to make— they made a concerted effort to try to replace that. So I’ll stop there and see if you want to—

MW: This is great. I want to circle back. I think I have a few follow up questions to each part of the story.

NK: Yeah, go ahead.

MW: I’m curious—

NK: You’re gonna edit this, right?

MW: Mmhmm. Yeah. In Cornmeal Valley for these adult men who were working for the railroads— or the packing houses for that matter—

00:15:12

NK: Yeah, different places, yeah.

MW: Did you hear about people’s, the dynamics of these men’s work growing up? Was there agitation around service roles if they were working for white people or about the work in general?

NK: Well, you know, especially those on the railroad— they called them a certain name. I forgot the name, how they referred to all of them.

MW: The porters?

NK: Yeah, the porters. Most of the jobs that, especially Black men were working in, they had to stay in their place. You didn't challenge yourself or say anything. You went along to get along because you knew you had a family to support. A lot of the jobs were not living wages. Back then, it wasn't unusual for the head of the household to be working two jobs. So they were, there were different, different and difficult times for a lot of brothers. I hear— I never knew my father, but I hear stories about Black men that, they didn't hardly say anything. They kept whatever they was dealing with inside. Some of them ended up— the weekend would be the time for a little bit of freedom to hit the juice. Some of them would come home after a long road trip on the railroad and just let their hair down and stuff. But, they didn't hurt anybody. They was just dealing internally with some of the trauma that they were going through. And so, it was difficult times for many of them, I'm sure.

MW: And what were the main jobs for Black women that you were around at the time?

NK: The what now?

MW: What were the main jobs for the Black women that you were around at the time?

NK: Well, a lot of them worked at the Twin City Arsenal, which was a place I believe in New Brighton that made bombs and bullets and stuff for the war. From what I understand, it was a pretty decent paying job. Many of them, like my mom, she worked as a maid in a St. Paul hotel.

And my aunts worked in Highland Park, cleaning white folks' homes and maybe watching their kids and stuff. Yeah. And some of them had different businesses in the neighborhood. But they were contributing as much as they could at that particular time. And many of them, even though they were single or stay-at-home moms,

MW: And was that World War II at that point, or the Korean War?

NK: That was between as far back as I can remember. Maybe '50s yep, the Korean War period, all the way up to— until the freeway was completed—

MW: Okay.

NK: — and highway state connected.

MW: Did people ever talk about those domestic roles of working in homes or doing the childcare work for white folks?

NK: Well, you know, they were just there. They were going through the motions to provide for their family. And for the most part, people treated them okay. Yeah. They treated them, I never heard of any horrific experience that Black women had working at homes. I'm sure there was some, but I never heard of any.

MW: Sure. And then you mentioned some people who were educated and had degrees, but then couldn't find work, couldn't find academic work, was what you meant?

NK: Well, I think a lot of them, their earning power was suppressed, even though you would hear about the “First and only this and the first and only that.” And that really doesn’t mean anything if you’re not lifting any

body, or you don’t have the authority or the ability to lift the second, third and fourth up. Every now and then somebody would get in a position, but it wasn’t universal. I mean, just like the fire department over the years, they had a few token Blacks on there. But then, in the ‘60s, folks had to go to court to get on the fire department, to get on the police— St. Paul Police Department. And nepotism was running buck wild. They hired everybody but their mamas on there, damn qualifications or anything. But when it came to us, you know, the standards would always be different.

00:20:31

MW: Would you say that the role of the police and the presence of the police shifted over the course of the ‘50s? Or do you think that it was consistent with Rondo?

NK: I don’t think it ever shifted until we started raising hell about it. I don’t mean just screaming and hollering but holding the elected officials accountable to hold them accountable. The whole issue with the police department wasn’t just how they treated us in our encounters, whether it was a traffic stop or a neighbor calling because there’s too much traffic in your house. But we didn’t even get equal protection under the law. It was a benign neglect, you know, kind of policy. Like Dale and Selby, when after Rondo, when our community started, for all practical terms, disintegrating to a low level where we had— and I don’t mean all of us, of course— but a small segment had no love or respect for one another. Any kind of differences that a brother had with

another brother, they— at some point it up costing people their lives, over senseless things, not anything really major, but that was a mindset. It was a difficult time we didn't have safety nets and those moral curtains there to keep us in check, “Hold up, man, don’t do that.” We just lost it. And next thing you know, here come the gangs and the crack. And so that was unfortunate.

MW: How would you say you were introduced to political organizing or movements in your lifetime?

NK: I think it started with Dale and Selby. That used to be referred to as Little Korea, the Wild, Wild West, where they had establishments there that really didn’t have a license to sell liquor and so forth. Brothers would drift in there. At one point, and I’ll show you a couple of newspaper clippings, but at one point, I think there was four murders in a two or three month period at the same establishment. The city was hands off. So we would start complaining to them and fall on death ears. I wasn’t involved in anything then. But I had a nephew, Darrell Crews, who was 16 or 17 years old. He was probably about six feet tall, brother. Our neighbor next door and another childhood friend had an altercation up there and had his stomach slit open on a Saturday afternoon, outside and in broad daylight. I had another friend that lost her brother up there. So we said, “You got to hold this establishment accountable.” And since they wouldn’t do it. So we circulated a petition and got over a thousand names on it. I asked Kwame McDonald and Bobby Hickman and Katie McWatt. They were all pillars of the community. I talked to them, and we got the pe tition, and we went down there with my cousin whose son got killed and demanded that the city, take some kind of appropriate action. And so, they eventually closed it down.

00:25:08

NK: There was some in the community that said, “Wait a minute, you’re shutting down a Black business, and we don’t hardly have any.” We said, “If we got to rely on Black businesses like this, we don’t need Black businesses.” It was an ugly situation. People wouldn’t even wait for the bus up there. Like I said, the city was out of sight and out of mind. You know, they said, “They’re gon’ just deal with that there.” We told them, “You wouldn’t allow this in any other neighborhood.” Then there was another establishment on the corner that was open at the same time, but they hadn’t reached that level, but they started getting close to it. That was our first introduction to gangs in St. Paul, a gang called El Rukns from Chicago.

MW: Say that again.

NK: El Rukns. And they ended up having a public execution. A brother, I believe his name was [Redacted per interviewee wishes]. Anyway, we had a public execution on the corner in front of 30 or 40 people on Dale and Selby. It was a Pac-Man game that people used to play and they bet on the game. And this young man won. But the member of the El Rukns didn’t want to pay him. So they had an altercation, they beat him up, dragged him outside, and held his arms. And the so-called leader gave the demand, “Shoot him,” shot him and dropped him in the street. And even though there were over 30 or 40 people that told us who were eyewitnesses, they wouldn’t talk to the police or anyone else to hold these people accountable. We called on, Bobby Hickman and Kwame McDonald and Rasheed Bilal at the local mosque, we went to seek them out to meet with them. Black men to Black men, we had a conversation, “Y’all just can’t come in our community and do this.” We weren’t used to this kind of madness, even though we had the club next door, but we dealt with that. Now here comes the gang situation. Once again, we asked the

authorities to deal with it. We demanded funding for our local youth organization so we could have some intervention and prevention programs in place. Of course, they dismissed it. The police chief in St. Paul, and I believe in Minneapolis, dismissed the whole idea that we had a gang problem. I mean, this was early on.

MW: And when would that have been?

NK: I want to say early '90s and late '80s.

MW: Okay.

NK: I'm not an expert on any of this. And I'm just a brother out here trying to survive, and make it. But I believe they sort of planted the seed, "This is how you take care of business," because they were very well, in a wrong way, respected, but more importantly, they were feared because they didn't play. . But, anyway, that in my estimation was the beginning. And then, the system had a lot to do with how this whole crime and drug and gang— crack epidemic and how all that got out of hand, because they could have responded in a more meaningful and productive way in working in cooperation with the community, not just on the criminal justice side, but also on the prevention and intervention side.

00:30:20

MW: Was there an organization behind you when you and— you were with Kwame McDonald and Bobby Hickman for that petition effort?

NK: Bobby Hickman was the executive director of the Inner City Youth League, which was known and established in the community. And Kwame McDonald was the head of the Summit-

University Crime Prevention Council. And Katie McWatt was a respected community leader. I was unknown to most at the time, but they had credibility and was always working on behalf of the community on what we were trying to do and understood the importance of it.

MW: What organizations were around during the Civil Rights and Black Power Era or specifically for that the uprising in '68?

NK: Well, there were a lot of ad hoc groups. "Black Underground Army," the Inner City Youth League, NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], Urban League, CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] and others. The Black Liberation Army, they started establishing themselves in different cities around the country. People— at least from what I remember in the Twin Cities, we'd say we were part of it, but we were not a chapter. But it gave us some credibility. And so those are the ones that I could think of. Then there were some brothers that were very strategic.

[Conversation redacted per interviewee wishes]

MW: Did you see a similar back and forth of— I guess— police and city control and then Black uprisings here as in other cities in the U.S. like Watts or other cities in California?

NK: Well, it never got to that point where we were able to organize and do the kind of damage— I'm talking about economic damage— that was done in other cities. You know, later on, we realized that— some of us realized— and I'm not saying one way was better than the other in getting a result.

00:35:00

NK: If I was of the same mindset I was as a young man, I would have handled it myself. But, I had a family. When I was a basketball coach and we whipped this one white team pretty bad and I left to get the car and then I had to make a run to come back, my youngest son and one of our other players was assaulted by a big ol' white boy and had bruises on their neck, visible bruises. I got back and we called the police, waited, and it was a squad car maybe a block away, and gave them a description of the car to the dispatcher. So— make a long story short, nothing happened. Nothing happened. No prosecution or anything. When our community started turning white— because at one time it was all white, and then white flight, and this block was almost predominantly Black, and then it started turning white again. My middle son had a high school graduation party, broad daylight, between two and five or six o'clock, and they were playing music. Some of it was rap music. I was on the fire department then, I had a rough night. One of my kids, "Hey, dad, the police are here." I said, "What?" I look out the window, two cops are in the yard. They said, "Turn that damn music off." And I said, "What's going on?" They said, "Your music is too loud. Turn it off." I said, "Do you have a warrant or anything?" And they said, "No." I said, "Get the— off my property." And the rest of the day— and I got a video of it— they rolled around the block, kept driving in front of our house. I was the president of the NAACP then, and so I had to get real harsh with them. "Why are you doing this to me, man? Why are you harassing my family?" After everything was over, one of my white neighbors came and said, "Hey Nick, I'm sorry about the cops. I didn't know it was gonna get like that." I said, "Are you the one that called 'em?" He said, "Yeah, because I had company over and we didn't

like that music.” I won’t tell you what I said. I was active then. The next day in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, they had a big article about me not cooperating with authorities. And then a guy named Joe Soucheray, who is still on the radio— well, I don’t know if he’s on there now— but a redneck from— you know, never said anything positive about Black folks in our community— was putting me on blast on the radio. You know, “That Nick Davis or Khaliq or Kalau, whatever the hell his name is, he thinks he’s above the law!” [Nathaniel Khaliq was born Nick Davis] Anyway, the guys, some brothers from the fire department heard them because the white boys used to like listening to him. They said, “Man, they really doggin’ you on the radio. Call—” And I said, “No, I’m not calling him up.” They said, “Come on, man, you got to call him up.” So I called him up. He said, “Hello, Nick Davis? Or Khaliq? What do you want me to call you? I said, “I just have a few words,” and I went off on a tangent about our history, about our oppression, and hung up on them. And so, just something like that. They had— and our neighbors across the street— they thought it was a drug raid going on because they had other squad cars parked on Selby. When they pulled up, they thought a drug raid was going on at our house.

[Conversation redacted per interviewee wishes]

NK: Look up what happened when the Republican Convention was here in St. Paul. They went buck-wild and— setting brothers up and locking them up.

00:40:25

NK: Remember I was telling you about one of the worst massacres of five Black children— got burnt up in an arson fire. You can read it later, but I just want to show you the headline. We knew within a month because— you know, when I was with the NAACP, we would go to the prisons.

We would help some brothers with post-conviction cases. We would help make sure living conditions were right. So we had a connection to the street and the streets talk. And we found out within two weeks who was responsible for that horrific act. And they sort of played crazy on it. It should have been major, major news. It should have been major demands by the authorities and others. You know how much the reward was when this first happened? Three grand. And we went downtown and raised hell and finally got it up to maybe about \$30,000. But I'm just saying all this to show you what our experience has been here in St. Paul with the police department and how they, in some ways, contribute to what, what's been going on. And little by little, we, chipped away. We established a police community review board. We filed a complaint with the Justice Department and got the Justice Department to come in and had a mediation in it and establish one of the first mediated agreements between the community, the Justice Department, and the police department that had some standards and stipulations and changes, in policy there. And it took almost four years— even though the same people that were convicted four years later, the police had their names two months, three months after the incident happened. They had over 7,000 hours— and that's the whole long story, but the feds got involved because we wrote Clinton [Bill Clinton], Janet Reno, and all these folks. They had 7,000 hours of wiretaps. Instead of indicting four, maybe five or six at the most, they indicted 57, 56 or 57 brothers and sisters. Not for the murder, but for other crimes that they overheard during the wiretap. And that doesn't happen with— but anyway. So that was part of our whole history with the police department. Racism and housing, Selby Avenue, back in the day, remember I told you that they didn't want Blacks, we were told not to come up on Selby, and we broke that barrier and used to go into restaurants and they would— after Blacks would eat, they would break the dishes like it was

hurting us. We said, “Oh, we really need to go in there and break all their dishes.” Then we wanted to build affordable housing on the other side of Selby. And they didn’t want us up there. We had to have an act of protest to go out to the president of the city council’s home and demand that they give it up. And so eventually, the affordable housing was built. It’s still there. And they said it was going to destroy the neighborhood, homes over there for three, four, five, six hundred thousand dollars and affordable housing is still there.

MW: Wow.

NK: It was called Lonnie Atkins Town Home— not Lonnie Atkins, Roy Wilkins. Yeah, after Roy Wilkins. We’ve been nipping away at it. And so, my involvement started out with Dale and Selby and then the president of a community organization called the Summit University Planning Council, which— there’s 17 of them in the city of St. Paul. And they act in an advisory role. We were trying to slow down the gentrification in our community, and where the city would have a policy if you were white and you lived outside of Summit-U— now, when I say Summit-U I’m talking about Rondo included in that. They would give you down payment money or other financial assistance. And a lot of people that were already living here that wanted rehab money, they had to go through hell and high water to get that.

00:45:30

NK: And like I said, there was efforts made. We’ve had at least five subsidized housing complexes that was started or established by Black organizations, including churches and stuff. We control none of them now. Are you familiar with the Unidale Mall?

MW: I'm not sure.

NK: On Dale and University? If you get a chance, check it out. And one of these times, I'm gon' take you on a little tour and point out—

MW: That'd be great, yeah.

NK: And show you some of these places that we had control of, but we didn't have the safety net of the system to assist us. But the Unidale Mall was started by Help Development Corporation. It's still over there, but our footprints are nowhere. It's Asian owned and operated. And it started out as a partnership between Help Development Corporation, which was a— I think they were a little ahead of their time trying to rebuild, reestablish the economic engine that was destroyed with the freeway. And they— in partnership with Kraus Anderson, who's a large construction conglomerate that still operates today, and I think they may have built some stadiums, but they're still big time. But that was a partnership. But once they ran into some bumps in the road, everybody said, "Well, y'all can't do this." We had a Black hardware store. There was a Black liquor store in there. There was an alternative school in there. And little by little, they were, pulling in other businesses. But that fell by the wayside. And so, I can show you several apartment buildings right around the corner that a brother built and— ran into some difficulty and didn't get the safety net. On University, University and Western, the Asians have a— forgot the name of the restaurant— but the original restaurant and owners of the building ran into some rough times and had to give it up, but the Asian community said, "Oh, time out, don't put it on the market. Let's work something out." And they ended up turning it over to a nonprofit and forgiving like a 300 something thousand dollar loan. And so, we've been mired in racist policies

and practices that have led to the great disparities that we have in Minnesota. We got the greatest health, criminal justice, employment, education— all those indicators, we're pretty much at the bottom. And some of them, I think we compete with Mississippi. And how could that be when at one time, Jet Magazine and Ebony Magazine held the Twin Cities up as a model for Black folks to come to? General Mills and all the Fortune 500 companies that are here used to send delegations to the HBCU schools [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] in recruiting brothers and sisters to relocate here. Nobody has been able to figure out— and there's a lot of folks a lot smarter than me— on the hell, what happened? And we still don't know what happened, but we know we're catching the hell and we catch it. It's unfortunate. So I know I got off script, but—

MW: That was great. One other thing that I wanted to ask you about, I know that you're Muslim, and I read that you were involved in the Nation of Islam at one point. What was the Nation of Islam presence in St. Paul like back in the day?

NK: Well, back in the day, the Pioneers, as we referred to them, had visits from the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] — and this is their story, not mine— that found out that they were affiliated with the Nation of Islam early on under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad and would try to discourage them, “You know, you really don't want to be any part of that.” So early on, it was just a very small, dedicated group of brothers and sisters here in the Twin Cities. And every now and then, you would see— not so much the sisters— but the brothers out here selling Muhammad Speaks, newspapers and stuff, and having that conversation.

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NK: Back then, the majority of the converts were people coming out of institutions, prisons, and many of the sisters were sisters that were out there a little bit. I got involved and started listening to the Nation of Islam because of Malcolm X, like a lot of brothers. That was one of the first books I read, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. You know, many of the paths that he walked down, was, “Oh, okay, damn, he was able to turn his life around and elevate himself to a level of honor and respectability.” I don’t know who it was, but someone— that I may be getting the quote messed up, “But you don’t judge a man from the depths in which he comes from, but the height in which he reaches.” Many of us saw that as a way of regaining a sense of dignity and respect. He said, “If you only have one suit, you clean it and wear your suit and tie every day.” There was something— we didn’t agree with everything, Of course, we never had a discussion or debate about, “Hey, brother, why is the white man the Devil and the Black man God?” Many of us had white blood running through our veins. So we didn’t go there. We just looked at what we could get out of it. Little by little, we could see ourselves being elevated— some sense to all the madness that was going on in the world. But the most important thing, we felt like— not invincible— but we were very, very proud and we weren’t going to back down or allow anybody to take our dignity away from us or treat us less than the man. Our little community started growing a little bit as younger brothers started getting involved. Many of the young brothers that was getting involved were brothers that were in college. A few brothers and sisters had degrees. So we had a temple over in Minneapolis on 4th and 38th. I think it was Temple number, maybe 87. And we had a brother named Brother Kareem that was the head of that. And in 1970s and we sat in chairs, some of us didn’t know anything about— I shouldn’t say we didn’t know anything— we didn’t practice a lot of the traditional rituals that are part of Islam. Touched a little

bit on Ramadan, but nothing real serious, and the five prayers, we met on Sunday, not on Friday for Jummah. And when Elijah Muhammad passed, many of us was more caught up, and I don't want to speak for anyone else, but for myself, many of us was more caught up in the Black liberation part of it— Black man, Black businesses. And Elijah Muhammad was the most successful of any Black leader in this country, along with the help of Malcolm X, of course, in bringing about a transformation with so many folks that were downtrodden and had all these businesses all over the country— Black businesses and stuff. So in 1975, when the honorary Elijah Muhammad passed, may peace and blessing be upon him, his son took over, W.D. Muhammad. And W.D. Muhammad was not that that deeply involved with the Nation of Islam. He had went on the Hajj and everything, like Malcolm, but he saw a path for Black folk through orthodox Islam.

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NK: And so little by little, he'd start making the changes, removing the chairs, sitting on the floor, and getting deep into the Quran— many of us hardly read the Quran in the Nation of Islam. I'm speaking for myself and some others. We would look at it, skim through it, certain quotes we'd make reference to and so forth. It was a true lifesaver for many of us. I just think now, in the old— the Pioneers back then, we would get discouraged because we would be in a building and the roof would be leaking. We'd have buckets all over and everything. And they'd say, "Brother, don't get discouraged. Allah's going to bless us, and pretty soon there'll be a mosque on every corner." Now with the influx of the Somalis— and we, a lot of us talk about that, how the brothers and sisters are smiling in paradise, looking down at, "Yeah, I told you." It

has been a beautiful transformation. We've always contributed to the betterment of the communities in which we were located. And, people would say, well, "Why are y'all dealing with the police?" And we'd say, "Man, we're working with whoever we need to work with for the betterment of Black folks, because we hold the police accountable too." Everybody needs to be held accountable. But Black blood, no matter who spills it, we want some justice. A mother and a father and an aunt and a son and a daughter, they don't cry any harder whether the pain or injustice was inflicted by one of us or one of them. You know, it's the same pain. And so that's been a real good experience for me and many of the brothers and sisters I've been knowing over 40, 50, almost 60 years. We still have that love and relationship that we had from back in the day. We can still pick up the phone and say, "Brother, I got a problem." One of my dear brothers, and I'm going to say his name, brother Abdul Kareem, He's 75, 76 years old, a stroke survivor, walked with a cane, coming out of the Masjid An-Nur [mosque] in North Minneapolis. And there were some brothers there selling dope. He went up to them and said, "Brothers, this is sacred ground." It was on our parking lot. "Y'all can't do this here." "You old—!" and went off on him, not knowing who Brother Abdul Kareem was. He used to be a knucklehead back in the day. He said, "Uh uh, don't do that, get away from here," and start fussing with him and raise his cane up. They got in the car and drove, went down to the corner, made a U-turn and came back and shot him. He survived and everything. We said, "Oh hell no." Now, back in the day, we would have handled that situation differently. But we have grown and matured, and our understanding of Islam is much better—the culprit was arrested. We showed up at every hearing at the courthouse to make sure that he was held accountable. This has happened in the last year. So that's been one of the greatest— besides being married to my beautiful wife [Victoria Davis] for

52 years. That's been one of the greatest experiences— and of course, my children and grandchildren that I've had in my lifetime. I can certainly attribute that to a lot of my growth and development. You know, after Rondo, I served eight months in Boys Totem Town for car theft and went up there and half of the neighborhood was up there. That's just getting back to that moral authority and the safety net that we had back in the day. Because back then, we couldn't think of anybody that was in any of those places. Then from 1960, excuse me, 1956, within five or six years, we had lost— some of us have lost our way. And I don't want to blame it all on the freeway, but that certainly had a lot to do with it. It had a lot to do with the home ownership— used to be close to 50%. Now it's probably hovering around 30%. Like I said before, all those social and economic indicators have just plummeted, have gone downhill. So, it's unfortunate. And I don't know how we regain our way, but we just got to keep on fighting and scratching.

01:00:34

MW: Well, that answers my questions really beautifully. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about while we're on the recording?

NK: No, I talked too much.

MW: That's good. Never too much for me. I appreciate you taking the time, Mr. Khaliq.



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