

THE NEW WORLD OF ISLAM

*In the 1960's and 1970's a quasi-militant Muslim sect, **The New World of Islam (NWOI)**, emerged as a force to be reckoned with. They was suspected of having staged more than 100 area armed robberies to raise money to further the cause of the New World and to finance a black separatist community. During the course of there robbery spree-six murders-including that of the head of the NOI Temple, James Shabazz, along with those of two police officers who intervened in robberies allegedly staged by members. Eventually an indictment was returned by a federal grand jury in New Jersey which consisted of 19 counts and charged the group with a string of 17 robberies committed in violation of the RICO statute to finance the aims and purposes of the New world.*

*To get the real story we got with the reputed founder and leader of the New World of Islam, **Albert Dickens**, along with several other brothers and sisters who were down with him and did time for the cause. We also got with the Queen of Thug Love Lit, Essence Bestselling author **Wahida Clark**, who was also down with the New World from the jump and did time for being a part of the group as well as money laundering, mail and wire fraud. All of these brothers and sisters joined us to relate their experiences.*





Feds: Please introduce yourselves?

Albert Dickens: In the name of Allah, in Muhammad. Peace, Peace. First off, I'm not the founder of the New World of Islam. Elijah Muhammad, my God and Savior is the founder and creator. My authority comes from him. I am General Ali Mahdi Muhammad, spiritual leader and teacher of the New World Nation of Islam.

Wahida Clark: I am the Field Supreme Captain of the M.G.T. and G.C.C., in charge of all New World Muslim sisters, wherever I go. I am also the mother of the nation.

Dewey Upshaw: I am Brother Hakim Ali. More than 30 years I have tried to uphold all that the Honorable Mr. Elijah Muhammad said in deeds more so than words.

Alvin Conerly- I am brother Hijr. I was called LB in my younger days. When I became a Muslim in 1975 the name Hijr was the name I chose which is chapter 15 of the Holy Qur'an, it means the rock. Later Najee was given to me.

Gina Conerly: I am Sister Hijrah Ali. This name was given to me by my husband Hijr Najee. My full name is Mahasin Hijrah Ali and I am a believer in the New World Nation of Islam.

Raymond Skinner: I am Brother Rafi Ali. Looking back on all that we have gone through I see the great wisdom taught by my teachers in the New World. Every exercise program, lesson, essay that was written helped to make me the person I am today. It saved me. I have no regrets and I blame no one.

Kenneth Gilbert: I am Brother Samud Ali. I've dedicated my life for the freedom of our people.

Don't get it twisted with all the righteousness. Because righteous brothers can get down too. So this is definitely a gangster tale because for real, these Muslim brothers and sisters were as gangster as they come. Death before dishonor and

all that. But they were also righteous soldiers, soldiers in their faith. Willing to get down for a cause. They always say if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything and these brothers and sisters stood for the New World, more properly referred to as the New World Nation of Islam. In the 1970's, the brothers and sisters gathered here were the core members of the NWOI, which federal authorities at the time described as a Black Muslim splinter group which was one of the most violent criminal organizations in New Jersey.

The quasi-military group advocated black superiority, a separatist movement and armed robbery to raise money. They were getting theirs and didn't have any qualms about what they had to do to get it. While pursuing their militant brand of Islam, members of the group were tied to a number of bank robberies and several murders including two beheadings and the slayings of two police officers. The New World was not playing. Authorities even said that they plotted to have the judges on their cases kidnapped. These brothers were thorough, straight-up Muslim gangsters.

Feds: How did the New World come about?

Albert Dickens: I didn't start the NWOI. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad officiated the New World to succeed the old word Nation of Islam. Elijah established the Field Supreme Staff to be in charge





of all the Muslims and put the NW headquarters in Muhammad's Mosque #25, Newark, New Jersey. That was February 26, 1960. The government came in and arrested the whole Field Staff that same year.

Alvin Conerly- The New World split from the NOI in the 60's because the brothers thought they were getting too soft. We took a military stance like the Black Panthers, BLA etc. The NWOI has always been a movement ever since Fard Savior was commissioned by our spiritual father The Honorable Elijah Muhammad back on Saviors'Day. He also gave Newark his number: 25.

Raymond Skinner: It was an era where there was much controversy and close scrutiny surrounding the Muslim community. The Muslims were branded trouble makers and frequently were charged with stirring up black folk against the white man and his world.

Kenneth Gilbert: Muslims under the teachings of Elijah was very progressive in doing for self.

Newspaper articles from the era reported that the New World was founded in the 1960's by Albert Dickens, a Muslim who was rebelling against James Shabazz, the leader of the NOI's mosque No. 25 in Newark. The New World accused Shabazz of being corrupt and felt the entire NOI was deviating from the teachings of its founder, Elijah Muhammad, who the splinter group decided was not just a prophet but Allah himself. In 1973, the struggle to gain control of Newark, which had come to be thought of as a Holy City, a New Mecca, led to an outbreak of violence. In the ensuing struggle, NW members were blamed for the murder of Shabazz in 1973 as well as the subsequent slayings of four of its own members, including two men found beheaded in Newark. And an alleged follower of Albert Dickens, Warren Marcelo was thought to be the triggermen but before the year was out his body and his and a few other men were found beheaded in Newark's Weequahic Park. Police believed that Dickens recruited many members

for the NWOI while he was doing time in Rahway State Prison for a 1966 bank robbery in Newark, where he also shot at a police officer. Dickens was originally sentenced to serve 38 to 51 years in Rahway for the December 15, 1966 holdup of the Robert Trent Savings and Loan in Newark in which Newark police Lieutenant William Meyer was shot and paralyzed. The holdup men also fired at then Mayor Hugh Addonizio and his chauffeur who were responding to the robbery alarm. Addonizio was being chauffeured down Clinton Avenue on his way to the dedication of Cooper Memorial Park when an alert crackled over the police radio about a robbery in progress. Addonizio could see the bank and a group of men wielding guns scurrying for a car. They were directly in the mayor's path.

Addonizio ordered his chauffeur to give chase. The car struck a utility pole and the robbers sprang from their car and fired at the Mayor's limo. Police arrived and apprehended two of the robbers- 29-year-old Albert Dickens and 22-year-old James Washington. Both were black Muslims. Within hours of the robbery the angry mayor ordered police to raid Temple 25. Traffic along South Orange Avenue was blocked off for a mile as thirty policemen smashed the glass doors of the temple and rushed inside. The police confiscated everything and dissected the place piece by piece. The Addonizio incident began the decades long harassment and look into the affairs of Newark's Muslim population causing the Muslims to develop a mission and a plan. They were going to awaken the black man to his true identity. During his time in prison, Dickens allegedly built an army of adherents to his cause and was subsequently viewed by law enforcement officials as orchestrating the murder of his rival James Shabazz but authorities couldn't prove it. On November 13, 1974 Dickens was acquitted of charges of planning the 1973 assassination of Black Muslim leader Rev. James McGregor Shabazz in Newark. Dickens ended up serving 13 years for the armed robbery before being released. Investigators in the Essex County prosecutor's office described Dickens as a "silver-tongued con man," a religious fanatic who controlled the NW from his prison cell in Rahway. But an administrator at the prison said, "As long as I have known Al Dickens he's never created a problem in this institution. I can say one thing about him, he's never broken his word."

Feds: What is the New World all about?

Albert Dickens: We're about trying to save our own black people. It's a matter of first making our black people realize that they are an independent people. And that they have a right, just like everybody else to have a place in the sun and some of this earth to call their own.



impressionable blacks into the sect, in order to use them to commit crimes, primarily bank robberies.

Feds: When did you first get involved with the New World Nation Of Islam?

Wahida Clark: I first heard the teachings of the Honorable Mr. Elijah Muhammad in 1978. Since that day I have never looked back. I was a youngin' at the time and down for whatever, even though the only dealings I had

was with the **Muslim Girls Training** and **the General Civilization Class**. I only had contact with the FOI at Temple meetings. Dewey Upshaw: 1974, I had been in the U.S. Air Force and in Vietnam so I knew what type of government I was living in. Hearing Islam

from what Al Dickens taught me made me realize that the Honorable Mr. Elijah Muhammad was more than just a messenger and that I needed to be apart of and live by all Mr. Muhammad taught.

As part of this conspiracy, court records relate, the older members recruited new, young members for the New World. Once recruited the older members would give instructions in the proper methods to be used in armed robberies of banks and other businesses. The instructions included specific roles to each participant in the robbery, the use of stolen cars, guns, masks and physical violence to avoid detection and apprehension. "We went out and we recruited," Najee says. "The Nation graduates brothers in groups of 10. It was so hard to get 10. You graduate from a soldier to First Lt., 2nd Lt., etc. It consists of praying, fasting, working out. All the brothers were in shape. The old world Muslims and the New World Muslims

Muslims, they were the gangsters. They had the clothes, the cars." Najee says of the era. "The flash was what attracted the youth of Newark, but that wasn't all. One of the things that attracted me was the discipline. In exercising, eating, everything." Alvin Connery aka Najee relates. "We were raised in the street but I was attracted to the righteous thing. We took a military stance." And brother Dewey Upshaw aka Hakim Ali echoed these sentiments, "When I first got into Islam I was lost." He says. "I'd probably be dead if I hadn't got into Islam. If something hadn't stopped the downward trend of my life." The youngsters banded together to form a youthful militancy that was carefully guided by their spiritual leader, the imprisoned Albert Dickens. He had sent out his comrades from inside the prison system to the world when their time was served to spread his message and to recruit youngsters for the cause. "Fred Pittman was teaching the doctrine," Najee says. "We went and met him. The belief system was another way of life." They believed that Malcolm X was a heretic who was justly punished by Allah and their extreme brand of Islam demanded extreme actions. And the book, Uncle Yah Yah, written by the incarcerated Albert Dickens was their spiritual guide. The book is a collection of parables written in the manner of Aesop's Fables. Uncle Yah Yah describes life in a black community, a resort retreat where black people can go to escape the scrambling constrictions of the white man's society. But law enforcement branded the group a "Fagan" operation, where older leaders indoctrinated young,



The elite core reportedly engaged in robberies, murder and more since the beginnings of the 1970's, court records indicate. The small but dedicated cadre took their orders directly from the General, Albert Dickens but the many thousands of members and sympathizers followed Master Fard aka Belton Williams, a former minister from Temple 25 who Dickens met in the New Jersey prison system. Essex authorities described Williams as the New World's spiritual leader while Dickens was its field commander. Members climbed the ladders of rank after proving themselves through loyalty. The Muslims had a mission and their mission worried the police. Rumors were rampant that Muslims robbed banks to finance their cause, that each took a vow to take the head of four white devils and that the group was planning for the final showdown, the Biblical Armageddon.

The government's investigation revealed that they were involved in the sale of religious tracts, baked goods and clothing. They also operated at least three nation houses. They were investing in legitimate businesses to build the foundation of their nation. It was an all out effort to improve the lives of black people and keep their money in their community.

Feds: What was it like for Muslims in that era?

DU: Back then there were many who claimed belief in all the Honorable Mr. Elijah said. Newark was a Muslim city and it looked good too. Businesses like Steak and Takes, Temples and stores were all over and Muslim brothers and sisters were all over looking and sounding good.

KG: It was the truth.

The underground didn't expose itself until later. We knew in the end that we would be successful. says najee In '77, we started getting money. It took two years for all the underground stuff to be exposed. We were being trained mental

The organization had strongholds in East Orange and New Brunswick. The government's investigation disclosed that in the middle of 1979, Albert Dickens, still in Rahway, actively engaged in plans to institute a wide-spread program of armed bank robberies. Dickens controlled an extensive network of NW adherents. He told an eventual government witness of his plans to establish a cadre of soldiers who would be trained by more experienced men in the art of bank robberies or missions. Guns and stolen cars were provided. The militant group of ex-convicts and youngsters was honor and duty bound to unity and they were going hard for their beliefs and interests. "We always had a link up with the prisons," Najee says. "I was going to visit the brothers in liaisons. I became James 'Superman' Scott's liaison."

Feds: What was the New World trying to do?

DU: Wanting to uphold the truth and be black. To do something for self as a Blackman with a God, religion and a purpose in life to save our people.

AC: We didn't set out to hurt anyone but we needed money. Brothers were committed to a movement and we needed funds. The most perfect robbery was one where a shot wasn't fired.

AD: Our people are pulled in from the streets of the big cities. We don't find black middle class people. We find the prostitutes, the murders, the thieves. Now because they believe in God it doesn't necessarily give them the money to pay the rent. And if the only way he knows how to get the money is to kick a door down... well? Until an individual is able to change his condition he comes into our world from the world he existed on.

But shots were fired and people were killed. There were high speed chases and shootouts with police. These brothers were not joking. They were serious about theirs and they had little

tolerance for those who didn't follow the rules. "The brothers were totally against drugs," Najee says. "We had numerous opportunities to get into drugs. Big dealers wanted us to invest. But the brothers didn't want to be associated with that. Weed was legal in the nation but drinking, heroin, cocaine, cigarettes, they didn't want us to mess with that." The New World got theirs like Bonnie and Clyde. The Ski Mask Way. They weren't no drug pushers or dope dealers. They knew what was killing their community. They were trying to rectify that situation and get out from under the white man's rule by establishing their own rule and way of life. And loyal soldiers like Najee worked their way up in rank, proving their resolve and heart by their deeds, not by their words. "You had to work your way up in rank," Najee says. "I started elevating in rank when other brothers had to leave. I was Minister of the city. At one time they were keeping me away from the underground stuff."

Throughout its existence the group robbed banks to sustain its members, according to testimony in the federal racketeering trial. Men wearing ski masks, storming into banks, waging highspeed chases and having shootouts with police while fleeing with the paper was their M.O. Members would select and case the banks and other businesses and thereafter plan in detail the execution of the robbery of those targeted institutions. Police identified Dickens as the head of the group and criminal mastermind behind the armed robberies. "All the money went to finance the New World." Najee says. "We were trying to build communities in Calhoun Falls, South Carolina and Salem, New Jersey. We wanted to get the property, we wanted to build the houses. A separate community. That's what we intended but it got crazy. We started robbing the same banks twice." And despite the noble intentions the robbing hustle didn't last. With law enforcement closing

in on the sect due to the murders the New World was attracting way too much attention. Attention that had the feds lurking around the corner.

The end finally came and several New World members were convicted of the September 1973 slaying of James Shabazz, the local NOI leader, even though Al Dickens was found not guilty of planning the homicide. Another murder of Montclair Police Sgt. Alfred Sellick on January 17, 1976 also attracted a lot of unwanted attention as a close connection was found between the accused gunmen and Albert Dickens. One of the defendants was Archie Murphy who police identified as a New World member. "They said we were a crime family with different crews of brothers in Newark, Florida, and New - Brunswick." Najee says. "They were studying us. They said we were causing too much havoc in the street. We had a nice following. A lot of young guys were looking up to us." Police Director Hubert Williams told a press conference that the religious sect, "has been using religion as a disguise to carry out criminal activities. Such as Holdups, robbing banks and killing cops all which has no place in religion, and is clearly contrary to the tenets of Islam. Police Detective Captain George

Courtney compared their techniques to those of famous bank robber John Dillinger, "He'd stick up a bank after he staked it out and built a mock up of the bank.

to put federal indictments on the group.

When we got arrested the Newark police had a special squad that was studying us, Detective Jerry Signman, a psychologist who knew everything about us headed the squad. They had a whole bulletin board with everybody who was even associated with us." Najee says. The government defined the instant enterprise as, "a group of individuals who operated within the framework of the New World and were dedicated to the organized practice of armed robbery." The indictment did not claim that New World was the enterprise but that the NW provided a structure or formal organization therefore. And some of their members, when caught, were talking. Said one Newark police sergeant, "when we bring the New World guys in, they talk. It's almost like they're getting something off their chest. And it's always the same story- the New World trained them to rob banks."



"We started robbing the same banks twice." And despite the noble intentions the robbing hustle didn't last.

He'd study it and practice jumping over the counter before hitting a bank. He was well-prepared like the Muslims are today." Courtney said. "We're not talking about religious law abiding Muslims. We're talking basically about a bunch of former convicts During a November 1980 robbery at the Howard Savings Bank on University Avenue in Newark, off duty Newark Police officer John Gottfried was shot to death when he tried to intervene. This latest cop killing brought tremendous heat down and the feds came in

Everybody wanted to be down but only the real brothers and sisters could take the heat. Before the trial the government moved to have the jury sequestered because of the sects history of intimidation of all connected with prosecutions against them. Law Enforcement received information that a high ranking police official in New Jersey was going to be killed

U.S. Attorney William Robertson said, "Evidence will show the defendants were engaged in a long term pattern of violence and intimidation. There is no reason

to now suspect this pattern will not continue." Threats through telephone calls and letters placed in the mailboxes of witnesses were made causing 100 extra police officers to be ordered to guard the courthouse because of the fear of violence. "We were concerned with safety precautions and a possible escape try. The department took some tight security measures as we normally do when handling cop-killers." There were also rumors of a plan to kidnap the judge and threatening calls made to his chambers.

Trial commenced on October 28, 1981. The judge said that the indictment, "charges that under the banner of religion, some defendants persuaded others to commit illegal acts- to rob banks in order to provide money for the religious group." Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Czarnecki said the group had about 300 members but only a small number were involved in the bank robberies. Noting the group operated several stores, Czarnecki said, "They tried to be self sustaining but couldn't so members began to commit a series of armed robberies." In his opening statement, AUSA Terrence Flynn described how youngsters were recruited into the sect from the street of inner-city neighborhoods, trained in basements using BB guns and on several occasions taken to local parks for training wearing baseball or football uniforms so passerby's would not understand their real purpose. "They were all trained in spotting bank alarms, use of weapons, how many people were needed for one robbery. People in the banks will tell they were amazed by the proficiency of these people. They were in banks less than five minutes and everyone had a specific role.. Noting that none of the money was ever recovered from the bank robberies, Police Director Williams said there is "a strong indication it is being used to foster the cause of the New World of Islam. What we have here is a massive conspiracy going far beyond the

**Threats
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the fear of
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pale of individual robberies. The money apparently is being taken not for individual design but for some broader purpose within the organization."

Feds: What happened when the indictment came down?

KG: For the first few days it was difficult for lack of understanding, but when understanding came it became an honor to stand for my belief to the point others began to honor us for such a stance.

Not only did most of the members of the NWOI stay true to the code of the streets but they took it a step further. They refused to participate in their trial. They refused to recognize the laws of the United States and to be pawns in the criminal justice that would eat them up and spit them out with no qualms. Under the First Amendment they had a right to freedom of religion and they used that as their defense. After the court denied several pretrial motions the defendants through counsel stated that thereafter they would not participate in the proceedings. Eighteen members of the NW religious group said they would not offer a defense in their trial on federal conspiracy charges because the government "wants to put our religion on trial." The 18 told Federal District Court Judge Herbert Stern they wished to remain in their prison cells during the trial and instructed their attorneys to take no action during the trial. "We don't want our religion being mentioned. It should not be on trial," Albert Dickens said. Dickens attorney, Theodore Wells said, "The government has crossed an impermissible barrier by saying the religious organization they are members of is part of the conspiracy. This chills their rights to practice religion." Stern invited all the defendants to the courtroom and asked them individually if they still held to their stand of not

presenting a defense. All said they did. "We boycotted the trial. They put pictures of us up. We were in the bullpen listening on speakers." Najee says.

The problem was the defendants felt the government was trying to put their religion on trial but the judge countered that argument. "In light of the testimony I have heard now from some five witnesses it would be impossible to present this case without any reference to the NWOI or to the ranks of the organization or to the roles within that organization of various people on trial here." The judge ruled. "The government has filed a brief saying they do not contend the religious group in itself a part of the conspiracy. However, if there were crimes within the group, a sacristy is not sanctuary from the discovery of truth."

The defendants said they wished to be tried "in absentia and that their court appointed lawyers not participate in any aspect of their defense." Albert Dickens lawyer told the court, "He doesn't want me to open, close, cross examine, object or do anything. He doesn't want to be here." All the defendants refused to participate in the case charging their religious principles were on trial, forcing their frustrated lawyers to watch silently. "Don't follow one of you. Make a decision for yourself. No one will go to jail for you. It's your neck," the Judge told the defendants. "It is my duty to tell you in my judgment you are committing judicial suicide. I don't think I'm required to act like a clown in a circus presiding over a joke."

Feds: Why did you refuse to participate in your trial?

AD: We refused to participate in the trial because the court indicted our religion as organized crime. We couldn't accept that.

AC: We prevented our lawyers from presenting a defense to the judge using the First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

Fred Pittman: My religion would be put on trial, not me and I don't feel that is fair.

Willie Lee Lawson: I feel if a man does not hold onto what he

believes and is not willing to stand up for what he believes, why should he even call himself a man.

The accused cop-killer was Willie Lee Lawson also called Acqeel. He was the floor man in the Howard Savings Bank robbery. The prosecution told tales of a New World higher up berating an underling for not shooting a policeman "when you had a chance" during a prior robbery in Newark. It seems Acqeel took his superiors words to heart but Najee tells a different story. "Willie Lee Lawson got shot. The police was gonna kill him or he was gonna kill the police so he shot them." Najee says. But the Prosecutor spun it in a different light. "It seems that depending on what the youngsters do, they get job points which they use in moving up in the hierarchy of the sect, killing a cop gets them a lot of points." The Prosecutor said. The cop-killing along with the robberies was the focal point of the case. Several attorneys applied to the judge to be allowed to defend their clients even though the clients did not wish to be defended. Judge Stern denied the applications saying, "I cannot force a fair trial down these defendants' throats."

Thereafter the jury heard testimony from 54 government witnesses, who testified to the following scheme: From his cell in Rahway State Prison, defendant Albert Dickens assumed leadership as Lord of NWOI. Assisted by defendant Keith "Ra'd" Monroe he recruited other inmates to commit armed robberies or missions. Participants received a small share or blessing of the stolen money or gold which they pooled to finance the purchase of land in South Carolina where they intended to establish a separatist community. The NW organized its members within a paramilitary hierarchy, which consisted of ranks from general, major, minister and captain to lieutenant and soldier. Connie Pridgen testified he had been recruited into the organization as a 19-year-old inmate at Rahway and had been trained to rob banks to finance

organization activities. Soon before his release, he said Dickens approached him during a walk in the prison yard and told him he should "train people to get the gold, to go on missions. I understood this to mean to rob banks and get the money. He said he needed money for an apartment and big house where all the brothers and sisters on the outside lived."

New World members felt they were "taking from the beast what was rightfully theirs." The beast referred to was white people. Members had to sign a 21 year contract to work for "the cause of Islam" and pledge complete loyalty and obedience. Dickens sent orders through the mail and through visitors from his prison cell. They recruited young people to serve as thieves and to follow their orders outside of prison, court records relate. Before Pridgen went home the lord of the sect told him, "The nation is starving. The nation needs gold." And Pridgen before turning snitch went out and got it.

Snitch Aubrey Brown, a defendant who pleaded guilty explained how he'd been recruited into NWOI while he was an inmate at Rahway, how he participated in several crimes until leaving the sect in a dispute over money. "I trained 12 people on when to shoot and when not to shoot, what type of money to pick up, to avoid money attached to alarms or with smoke bombs, about how to avoid alarm systems." He testified. Snitch Darryl Benton testified how he signed a 21 year contract with the sect in 1976 and how he had been recruited by Fred Pittman. He described the preliminary training he received, which included calisthenics and a book to study on how to beat alarm systems. He said he began his robbery career with liquor store holdups, which progressed into a series of bank robberies. During the robberies he served as the floor man. He carried a sawed off shotgun and told bank patrons and personnel "to get on the floor and don't move."

The judge accused the sect of running an organized system of terror. "They have sought to

spread their philosophy of violence to others, most often those in younger generation." The judge said. "What is most terrifying is that all these terrible things were done under the name of religion and under the rubric of righting old wrongs, even present wrongs. Each defendant, like a robot, has followed orders from above. This group of individuals has declared war upon this society. Even from the bowels of the prison system they continue to proselytize people in the name of religion to go out and kill and rob and steal."

Feds: What did you try to establish and accomplish?

AD: What we are revealing to you now is the best kept secret of the NOI. We are commissioned to complete the House of our Father's Desire. An independent nation on some land to call our own as Elijah taught us. What the Muslims want and what the Muslims believe hasn't changed, except its more timely now.

WC: My husband taught me how to be a survivor. There are no lazy people in the NWNOI. We are go-getters. You do what needs to be done. Nothing is going to fall out the sky. Elijah said, "Give you nothing."

DU: Islam is a way of life the way we live and want to live is in Peace. We all want it and only in truly serving God can he have it. Mr. Muhammad taught us that is the New World Nation of Islam.

AC: We had a nice close brotherhood. As taught by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad we must be brothers first.

Gang Gets 25 Years For Robbery Spree, The Trentonian reported on December 19, 1981. Seventeen members of the NWOI were each sentenced to 25 years in prison by the judge who condemned them for staging a campaign of crime, terror and murder under the banner of religion. The group members

stood trial for 17 armed robberies- all of which they were convicted for- but law enforcement officials believed the group was responsible for as many as 100 robberies altogether. The all white jury saw the 17 defendants for the first time during the seven day trial when the verdict was delivered. After hearing six days of testimony the jury returned a verdict of guilty against all the defendants after deliberating for just 2 and a half hours. Other than chanting a brief Arabic "All praise is due to Allah," the 17 defendants remained silent during the sentencing. They were sentenced to a total of 2075 years behind bars for armed robbery, conspiracy and racketeering. "We

wounded, helpless and disarmed." Walter Melvin, a bank customer during the lunch hour shooting testified he saw Lawson laughing as he shot Gottfried. Menz called more than 30 witnesses and presented 100 pieces of evidence. Darryl Benton, returned to the witness stand to testify about the robbery he participated in. "When I got inside the bank I saw Willie Lee Lawson standing over somebody, shooting someone. He was shooting down and kicking. I saw him fire three or four shots into this person." Benton testified. Following New World procedure Lawson and Cooper didn't allow their attorneys to present a defense. They were both convicted



got a raw deal. But I understand how the system works for those who stand up for truth," Najee says.

And in a separate case two members of the NWOI were convicted of murdering the Newark police officer after five hours of deliberation over two days. A jury of eight woman and four men convicted Willie Lee Lawson and Robert Cooper on 18 counts in the shooting death of Newark Patrolman John Gottfried. Essex County Assistant Prosecutor Norman Menz told the jury Gottfried was shot and kicked repeatedly by Lawson, who took the officers off duty revolver and fired three more shots as Gottfried was lying on the bank floor "seriously

and sentenced to life.

After all these years most of the members of the NWOI are out of prison and back in the world. They stayed together, stood firm and didn't blink in the face of adversity. Their belief was death before dishonor and even though they spent 25 years or more in prison for their beliefs they are still fighting for their people and are involved in programs for youths and more in Newark today. Plus NWNOI member Wahida Clark started publishing her Thug novels from Prison .