

Promoting Diversity in the Courts: Hon. Carolyn Walker-Diallo

John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insights from a New York Courts. I'm John Caher.

For today's Diversity Dialogue segment, I'd like to welcome to the program the Honorable Carolyn Walker-Diallo, the first Muslim person to serve as a judge in New York State. Justice Walker-Diallo was elected to New York City Civil Court in 2015 and served in Brooklyn Criminal Court and Manhattan Civil Court before she was appointed Supervising Judge of the King's County Civil Court in 2018.

She has held a number of other administrative posts, was appointed and acting Supreme Court Justice, and is currently the Administrative Judge for the New York City Civil Court. She was elected to the New York State Supreme Court from Kings County in November 2021. The judge has degrees from Lincoln University, Baruch College, and New York Law School, where she's now a Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and a Senior Fellow in the school's Law and Leadership Institute.

Judge, thank you for coming on the program. I'll work my way back to your roots, which is where I usually start, in a moment. But I want to start off with something that I find troubling, and deflating, and disturbing.

When you were sworn in back in 2015, you chose to take the oath of office with your hand on the Qur'an. As you know in taking an oath, public officials often raise their right hand and place their left on a Bible or another religious text that's meaningful to them. For a Christian, it might be the King James Bible. For a Jew, it might be a Torah scroll. Whatever. It's rarely an issue.

When you took the oath with your hand on the Qur'an, you received threats. You were accused of being un-American, even a terrorist. How did that make you feel?

Judge Walker-Diallo: Wow, you're taking me back a couple of years. I was actually shocked by the backlash. Of course, I was disappointed. I was hurt and I was concerned for my safety and my family's safety. We had to have NYPD presence outside of my house for a certain amount of time, but it was definitely eye-opening to know that certain people, not all, because there's some amazing people in this state, this city and this country, but that we have a lot of work to do in terms of understanding each other and recognizing that we are so diverse in this country and that "American" doesn't look one particular way.

So, although it was disheartening, and I still at times have safety concerns, I feel like it is so important to continually put myself out there to open the dialogue and to have conversation about our differences because I also know that although we do have a lot of differences, we have a lot of things in common. If we focus on that and also celebrate the differences, because that's what makes us so vibrant and diverse, we can move the needle forward.

John Caher: That's what makes us American. That's who we are. We are a diverse country by nature, by design.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Exactly. Exactly.

John Caher: Is Islamophobia something that you encounter frequently in your life?

Judge Walker-Diallo: Frequently in the sense that, no. I don't have people yelling at me on the street or trying to rip off my hijab or anything like that. But I have experienced it in the sense that people have this irrational fear, this prejudice, this hatred, this discrimination against Muslims, and it comes out in different ways. I'm blessed that I haven't had any physical altercations or anything like that, but I've had situations where people have said things that I deem to be disrespectful and prejudicial, and I can either get upset about it or use it as an opportunity to educate, to tell them that's inappropriate.

John Caher: Let's take a couple of steps back, just a couple steps. Where are you from originally?

Judge Walker-Diallo: I am originally from the kingdom of Brooklyn, I'd like to say. My family is from the South. My father's from Mississippi and my mother's from North Carolina. They both passed away. They came to New York during The Great Migration of African Americans in the mid-1900s who left the South, coming to the North for economic opportunity and fleeing the segregation and discrimination in the South. I like to say that I'm a city girl with Southern tendencies.

John Caher: When did your parents migrate North?

Judge Walker-Diallo: My father was born in 1924 in Mississippi, and he came in 1942, the same year that my mother was born. She came to New York in 1963. She had done a year or so in college, and because of economic situations and things that were happening with the family in the South, a lot of racial incidents, she and her siblings came to the North for a better life.

John Caher: So your father came of age during the Jim Crow era, for sure.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Yes.

John Caher: Your mom, a little bit after that.

Judge Walker-Diallo: She was coming of age during the Civil Rights Movement when they were marching and the students were doing sit-ins. She had participated in some of that before she came to the North. My father was from Mississippi and we know the history back then of what it was like. The stories that he used to tell me were just bone chilling.

The reason why he actually got to New York was because he used to play the guitar and he would play it all over by Jackson. Apparently, he played it and some people didn't like it because he was playing to an integrated audience. My grandmother was told that if he was not out of there by sunrise, he was going to be hanging from a tree. My father had brothers who lived in Chicago and had a sister who lived in Brooklyn. My grandmother put him on the first thing smoking, and that was headed towards New York. That's how he got to New York.

John Caher: What did your parents do?

Judge Walker-Diallo: My father, he was a retired police officer and he was a community leader. There's a park in East New York named after my father. We'll talk a little bit about that. My mother was a bookkeeper. She also helped my father with a lot of the community activism that they engaged in, but she was the best bookkeeper ever. I say she could balance any budget. If she was given the United States budget, she could balance it! She was amazing at that.

John Caher: You mentioned your father. I know the George Walker Junior Community Coalition, a youth development organization, is named after him. I think at one point you were Executive Director. What's the story behind that, and the park you just mentioned?

Judge Walker-Diallo: The organization actually started as a block association in the late 80s, around 1989. If anyone remembers living in New York City during that time, the late 80s and early 90s, there was a lot going on. It was very hard, especially where I lived with a lot of, unfortunately, crime. Ordinary people needed to step up to really protect our communities and help NYPD and the government do right by the community.

There used to be a school called PS-76. By the time I came of age to go to school, when I was six, so we're talking about 1981 or so, the city had closed this school, and by the mid-80s it became a big problem. There was a lot of activity, prostitution, and drug activity, was happening in this park. We couldn't really go outside to play really because there was always something happening once we get to around '86, '87. My father started the Wyona Street Block Association, and what they would do is they would patrol the street, they would patrol the school yard because a lot of things were happening, and really get people out of there so we had a safe place to stay.

My father was known as—the street that I lived on was Wyona Street, he was known as the “Mayor of Wyona Street.” Every day he would put on a suit, he would have his cowboy hat, he would walk up and down with his cane and he would patrol. They were asking the city to maybe bring the school back because we needed more educational opportunities in that community. For whatever reason, the city decided not to do that. Then they fought to have the school torn down.

During this time—and at this point I'm about 14, 15 years old—I remember thinking, “Why are you guys fighting? Let's just move.” My father was like, “Wherever you go, there's going to be problems. So you need to stay and you need to fight for what you believe in.” During this time, he passed away and my mother and the other community leaders continued. The block association had different names over the years, but they settled on the “George Walker Jr. Community Coalition.”

At this time, I am off to college. I come back, I go to law school. What was interesting is I remember the school was just very large and massive, and my house never had sunlight because the school was so big. It was really just an eye sore. By the time I came back from college, the building is gone and then I go to law school, and when I graduated, maybe a year later, they had built the park and then they named it after my father.

So, now we have this park. I took over the organization because at that point, most of the people that had been involved had moved away to retire. I had a friend whose mother was involved as well and we decided to revamp it and then to bring it back and to use the park as the base to provide youth services and programs for kids in the community, things that we didn't have growing up. That's what we started to do.

I led that organization for a couple of years. It's still in existence. I serve on the Board. We actually have a youth court out of a high school in East New York. We work with young people and we use it as a pipeline to try

to get them into the profession--go to college first, of course, then law school. But it is very important for them to see someone from the neighborhood, from the community.

John Caher: It seems pretty evident that your parents were great role models for you.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Yes, they were. And I miss them. Despite what I may have seen going on in the world or media, or images about who the world thought I was, they would always tell me, "You can do and be anything you want. There will be challenges. You'll have to work five times as hard, but you put in the work, it will pay off." They told me the truth, for sure.

John Caher: What was your childhood like?

Judge Walker-Diallo: I just have to give a shout-out to all the Generation X because we're the forgotten generation, I'll say. My early childhood years, early 80s, were amazing. I remember playing outside all the time. I remember not coming into the house until the streetlights came on, all of that. We were never in the house. We were just always running. Then I spent a lot of summers in the South, so my cousins and I, we would all go back. I had about 30-something cousins. I don't know how my grandparents did it.

We would always go back to the South for the summer and spend time there. I recall my early years, from say five to 10, 11, as being great. Then in the mid-80s to late 80s, you had this crack cocaine epidemic that just ravaged our communities. I distinctly remember that change where, "Oh, you can't go outside. Oh no, you need to stay inside." Then we had a lot of racial incidents happening in the late 80s and early 90s.

I had a lot of acquaintances die because of gun violence and things like that. I do distinctly remember by the time I was in high school that I could not wait to get out of New York City. By the time I graduated, that was '93, I just had to go. I do have this dichotomy where I remember my early childhood as being just amazing. Then when I get to my teenage years, the changes in the society and things that were going on outside of my home, it was a lot to deal with for sure.

John Caher: Do you recall when you first encountered or first became aware of Islamophobia?

Judge Walker-Diallo: I would say after 9/11, because I was not Muslim at the time. I was in law school and I was getting my master's at Baruch. When 9/11 happened, of course we were all horrified not knowing what was going on. I had friends at Baruch who were Muslim, and what I knew of them were, they

were great people. But with what I'm seeing on the news, I'm like, "Oh my God, you're crazy. What's going on?" The more I spoke with them, "What do you *really* believe? What is happening? Because is that *you*?"

They were like, "That's not what we believe." Then they would give me things to read, and the more I read, I'm like, wow. So, I actually participated in some Islamophobia because of what I was watching on TV and the propaganda that I was hearing. I became aware of that even before I was Muslim. Then when I became Muslim... Well, the one thing I'll say about me is that I have a spirit about myself. I really don't care what people think about me at all. I care less.

I mean, I don't live in a bubble in terms of being aware that there may be safety issues or things like that. If people don't like me just because how I show up in the world, there's nothing I could do about that, but just be open to discuss the fear, the irrational fear and things of that nature. There's no place for that, no place for that. I talk a lot to my family. We're predominantly Christian. When I converted to Islam, they could not understand.

Then they're seeing a lot of stuff on TV, "How could you be a part of something like that?" Then I said to them, I said, "Do you think all Christians are bad because you're Christian?" They go, "Of course not." I said, "Okay, well, as African-Americans who were enslaved in this country, under Christian dogma, does not make Christianity bad? It's not Christianity that's bad, but it's the people who make a religion by what they do." Then they started to get it. "Oh, okay, so then what do you believe?"

In answer to your question, I found out very early about it before I even was Muslim. And actually, unfortunately because of my own ignorance, I participated. But I knew enough to ask people, "You seem like a great person. What I'm seeing here [on TV], it does not comport with who you are. Can you just help me understand?" I'm hoping that a lot more people will be like that as well. You are like that, so I appreciate it.

John Caher: Thank you. What led you in that direction, to Muslim?

Judge Carolyn Walker-Diallo: To convert?

John Caher: Yeah.

Judge Walker-Diallo: In college I had a classmate or so who was Muslim, but I never really thought about it. Like I said, after 9/11 I was talking to a lot of people. I

was really searching. I didn't have a lot of peace at that point in my life and I was looking for it through religion. When I read the Qur'an, to be honest with you, I cried for three days straight because for me it resonated with me. It didn't conflict with me with what I had believed before when I was a Christian. It didn't. To me, it was a continuum of the message of God.

Listen, when I first read it, I cried for three days and then I put it down and I was like, "This can't be. I am not Muslim." But it just kept calling to my heart. It was difficult telling my family because, if you remember, at that time, 2001 to 2002, it was a very difficult time. Once I did, I found a peace that I had not had before.

John Caher: That's wonderful. I know this is a question that could probably take up the rest of our afternoon, but in a nutshell, what is the Muslim faith all about? It's not about crashing planes into buildings. What is it all about?

Judge Walker-Diallo: Islam means to achieve peace, peace with God, peace with yourself, peace with the creations of God. We believe that this is done through wholly submitting yourself to God. With us, we have we call Six Articles of Faith, and then we have Five Pillars. We believe that God is the sole creator of the universe. We believe in the angels. We believe in all the prophets from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Joseph, Jesus, and Muhammad. Peace be upon them all.

We believe that they all came with the same message, to worship God, and to have no partners. We believe in the scriptures that came before. We believe in the Torah, which was given to Moses, the scrolls which were given to Abraham, the Psalms which were given to David and the Gospel which was given to Jesus. We believe that in that continuum that the Qur'an was the final revelation given to the Prophet Muhammad. Peace be upon him.

We believe in the afterlife, that we all will be held accountable for our actions on the day of judgment. We also believe in the Divine Decree and will of God. For me, that's a nutshell that says "What is meant for you will reach you, even if it's between two mountains." This is a saying that we read, and "What is it meant for you won't reach you even if it's between your two lips." We tend to live by that with the will of God.

The Five Pillars, these are key practices that every Muslim practices every day. We take what we call the "Shahada," where we remind ourselves every time we pray that we believe in one God and that Muhammad is a messenger. We pray five times a day -- before sunrise, midday prayer,

afternoon prayer, sunset prayer, and evening prayer. For us, it's a time to stop and to remember our purpose in this life, which we believe is to worship God. We fast during Ramadan and we give in charity, which is Sadaqah, which we must do every year. Then if every adult is able to go, we are responsible for going to the pilgrimage, the Hajj to Mecca.

In a nutshell, this encompasses who we are in terms of our belief, the Articles of Faith, but then how we carry that out through the Five Pillars.

John Caher: That was beautiful, and thank you for that. How do your faith and your beliefs impact the way you view the world from the bench?

Judge Walker-Diallo: We all know that there's a separation between church and state. My decisions are always based on applicable law and the facts, but my faith and beliefs do impact how I see the world from the bench. As a Muslim, we believe that there are 99 names of God, and one of his names we say is Al-Hakam, which is the judge, the one who always delivers justice in every situation to everyone, the one who never wrongs anyone and is never oppressive.

I think about that name daily and I work very hard to ensure that I'm living up to the expectations of that name. It does not inform in terms of when I make a decision. My decision is definitely based on the law and facts, but how I treat people to make sure in my courtroom and anything that I'm in charge of, that justice is delivered in every situation to everyone, every day of my life.

John Caher: Also a very beautiful answer. Now, you chose to attend Lincoln University, the first degree granting historically Black college in the country, and the alma mater of such luminaries as Thurgood Marshall and our very own Franklin Williams. Why did you choose to go to an HBCU?

Judge Walker-Diallo: My mother actually started the trend, I'll say. She attended St. Augustine's in Raleigh, North Carolina, which is an HBCU. I remember her talking about her time there and how empowering it was for her to be on campus there. This was the early 60s, so it was a different time. However, as I said, what was going on in the late 80s, early 90s when I was coming of age, I recall feeling very unsafe and never wanting to leave the house.

I remember being in high school and having my guidance counselor tell me not to apply to college. She didn't think that I would do well in a four-year college. It had nothing to do with my grades, but more so with how I

showed up in the world and where I came from. For me, attending an HBCU was a safe space for me.

I didn't have to worry about being the only Black girl in an accelerated class. I didn't have to worry about proving my worth to be there. I just really had to rise to the greatness of those who came before me, those who walked those same grounds, those who you mentioned, which was such a crucial part and critical part of my development.

When my daughter, who had gone to the best schools, decided to go to college, when we had that discussion about college, I was open to her going anywhere. She told me she was only going to go to Spelman College, the number one HBCU. And she's doing very well.

John Caher: That's great to hear. Now, there are those, often in the Black community, and in fact Franklin Williams wrestled with this later in life, not when he was at Lincoln, about whether the HBCUs foster segregation. What do you say about that?

Judge Walker-Diallo: I would ask the question, would you say that a woman's college fosters segregation against men? I don't think that it does. In the same way, I don't think HBCUs foster segregation against non-Black people. Students benefit from having different educational choices. I truly believe that college is not only about obtaining that degree, but what you gain while you're there, who you become while you are there.

For me, I needed a place where I could *just be*, where I could exhale, where I didn't have to put on airs. For me, it built my self-esteem and I was continually supported and challenged in meaningful ways. I saw every day that what I dreamed about becoming was possible because someone who looked like me and attended the same institution had already done it, so I wasn't breaking any ground.

For me, HBCUs give students who needed the tools and the skills to *confidently*--and that's so important--and *successfully* navigate life outside of the gates. I think it's unfair for someone to characterize it as "fostering segregation." I think that's an unfair thing to say. We have other institutions like women's-only college and Spelman, for example, is an HBCU, but a women's-only colleges. It doesn't foster segregation. I know for me, if I had not attended Lincoln University, I would not be where I am today.

John Caher: Thank you for that. You used two words that I want to pick up on. You said at Lincoln you were able to "just be." I think what you're saying, and

please correct me where I'm wrong, is at Lincoln you could just be Carolyn. You didn't have to be the Black kid.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Exactly. The “Black smart kid.” I had been in internship programs where I was the only Black girl there, and you often feel as if you are representing the whole race: “If I mess this up, there'll be no other Black girl coming behind me.” It was always this pressure, but that was a point in my life where I felt none in that regard. It was just Carolyn – “Carolyn, what are you going to do?” “Who are you going to be?” “How are you going to go out there and change the world?”

But by doing that, when I left Lincoln... Someone told me the other day, “You walk in any room and you just feel like you own it.” I'm like, “Lincoln gave me that confidence. No matter what room I walk in, it doesn't matter who's in the room, you are meant to be there.” I don't have an Imposter Syndrome thing going on. I'm not better than anyone else at all, but I deserve to be there like everyone else does.

John Caher: That's wonderful. Now, was it always your intention to become a lawyer?

Judge Walker-Diallo: It was. I think growing up and seeing the challenges that my parents went through with the community work, and I had a lot of friends and family members who unfortunately got caught up in the criminal justice system, just a lot of things happening where we felt it was unfair. I always felt like I wanted to be a lawyer to help right the wrongs, to be an advocate.

I remember my father telling me one day, “I wish I could find one good lawyer.” I was like, “That'll be me, daddy. One day, that'll be me!” Yes, from a very early age, I distinctly remember wanting to be a lawyer.

John Caher: I find it interesting that much of the progress in the Civil Rights era resulted from a legal system and from the courts. I mean, it wasn't the Congress, it wasn't the state legislatures that desegregated the schools. It was the Supreme Court.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Exactly. These are the type of things that I learned growing up and watching *Eyes on the Prize* and different documentaries about the movement and the struggle. I always felt some people think the way out, and I'm not saying it's not, is money and power, but there's something about getting that education. There's something about knowing and understanding the laws and the Constitution when you look at the history of what people have done.

Maybe when it was drafted, it wasn't meant to include this person or that person, but because it was drafted so well, to use the actual documents to say, "No, no, no, this works for this person and that person," it's the beauty behind it. The more I learned about the power of the attorney, the power of the judge, to make sure that the system is working the way it's supposed to work, I just knew that I was going to be in law and a lawyer specifically.

John Caher: How did you happen to earn an MBA and a law degree the same year? Did you basically not sleep for three years?

Judge Walker-Diallo: It was definitely interesting, but I was young, so I don't recall that it being that difficult in terms of not sleeping. Now, I can't stay up past 10:00! The law is my first love, but I also had a passion for operational management. I just love to help organizations and institutions create the highest level of efficiency possible. At times it can be difficult to challenge the status quo and how things are, but I always wanted to get a degree to learn better how to do that.

At New York Law School, they had a program with the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College. By doing it at the same time, you graduate in three years. Or four, sorry. Four years. Three years of law school and one year of the MBA.

John Caher: So you're able to get a joint degree in effect.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Yeah. Of course, some credits transferred to the other. But yeah, I did it four years. It was the best decision I ever made. The best decision. To be able to be a judge because I love the law, but also working to ensure that the wheels of justice turn more efficiently and effectively, and being in this position, it's actually a dream come true, something that I didn't think was even possible.

John Caher: Why didn't you think it was possible?

Judge Walker-Diallo: To be a judge? I never even thought about it. I didn't want it, actually. The first person who mentioned it to me was my mother. A couple of years before I ran, she said, "Have you ever thought about becoming a judge?" I said, "Ma, you watching too much Judge Mathis on TV, or Judge Judy. No, that's not me. I like to be in the fight." But she kept mentioning it to me, so I thought about it and the first opportunity that came to run, I actually decided not to take that opportunity.

I had a child who had passed away a couple of years before that. So my family was really trying to find our center after that. So I said, "No, I'm good. I need to be mentally, emotionally ready to do something like that, so no." Then the next year, it opened up again. The beauty about it was for the Civil Court. I ran from my home district, East New York, Cypress Hills, Bushwick, and the part of Brownsville.

If someone had done it before, it had been a long time before that had been done with somebody who was born and raised and still lived in the community to run for judge in the community. I decided to, "Hey, I'm the homegirl, let's go." I ran in 2015 and we won.

John Caher: You seem to do a lot of running, and looking over your biography, a couple of things immediately pop out. One, before you got to the bench, you had some big time experience as a Litigation Associate with Milbank, a big prominent firm, as an Assistant Corporation Counsel in New York City and Administrative Law Judge.

Two, it seems you're always involved in some extracurricular activities going back at least to law school where you're President of the Black Law Students Association, Co-Founder of the Muslim Law Students Association, you're a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, and I just noticed the press release today that says the Presenting Justice to the Appellate Division Second Department, Judge LaSalle, has appointed you to a task force on artificial intelligence. Why do you get involved in all this stuff?

Judge Walker-Diallo: It was always instilled in me, the importance of working together with like-minded people to achieve a common goal. I believe we are always much stronger and much better as a society and as a people when we work together. I represent a cross-section of a community, being Muslim, being Black, being a woman, that often need to band together into groups to have their kind of voices heard and to also give back to the very communities that have supported them.

It's really my parents, watching them when I was growing up, because they were very active in different organizations as well. Whatever community that I'm a part of, I'm going to do something to make it better. I truly believe that we all in, our own capacities, need to leave the world better than we found it. I'm always asking myself, "What are you doing?"

John Caher: Well, thank you for doing it. How do your experiences at Milbank and with the Corporation Counsel's Office prepare you to be a judge?

Judge Walker-Diallo: I'm fortunate to have really a diverse legal background, as you mentioned: Milbank, Corp Counsel, Hearing Officer. Then I had my own practice and I was General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer of a large nonprofit, the oldest in Brooklyn. I think all of these experiences really prepared me to adjudicate cases that are not only diverse in subject matter, but diverse in the type of litigants who appear in the courts in New York State.

I think my background as well, just being where I am from and the experience that I've had has been very helpful in running the Civil Court, which is the People's Court, because I understand many of the challenges that they face before they even get into the courthouse. I have lived it, experienced it, or have family members who have. I think it's really this wholistic experience of just my life and my background, but also the diverse legal experience that I've had that really uniquely positioned me to be a compassionate, caring, and educated judge.

John Caher: Why did you want to be an Administrative Judge?

Judge Walker-Diallo: My love for the law and for operational efficiency. I was Supervising Judge first of Kings County Civil Court, and I worked under Associate Judge of the Court of Appeals, Anthony Cannataro, who is a dear friend. He was amazing. He led the court during COVID, which was a significant feat. I worked very closely with him. As we were coming out of COVID, that's when he was elevated and then the opening came up.

I thought about my experiences running Kings, and I think I did very well during COVID especially, and where I knew the court needed to be where we needed to go and experiences that I had. I didn't jump at the opportunity. I was like, "I don't know," but I was advised, "You should really try. I think you'll be good." That's the one thing I will say about my experience within OCA [Office of Court Administration] is that I was really pushed: "Why not you?" Not that I didn't think I could do it, but it was just like, maybe it's not my time. They're like, "No, no, no. It could be. We're not guaranteeing anything, but you at least need to put yourself out there to try," and that, I appreciate.

John Caher: Great. As we wrap up, I want to turn it back a little bit to your faith. I imagine in two months you'll be celebrating Ramadan. Can you share for our listeners what Ramadan is and how you celebrate?

Judge Walker-Diallo: Thank you for the opportunity to share. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is the Holy Month of Fasting, one of the pillars that I mentioned. It begins and ends with the appearance of the crescent

moon, so that's 29 or 30 days. For us, Ramadan is what we call a Month of Mercy. We believe that the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, during this month.

The Qur'an loosely states that fasting was prescribed for us as it was prescribed for the people who came before us so that we may be conscious of God. What does that mean? From dawn to dusk, we fast. All able-bodied adults are required to fast. The elderly, the sick, children and women in certain conditions are not required to do so, but everyone else is. We are excited when Ramadan's come. I have many friends and family who say, "Why are you excited not to be able to eat all day? What's going on?"

For us, the fast is not only about not eating, but it's fasting of the ears, the eyes, the mouth, not to hear or say anything that can be offensive or that can offend. For example, if I get upset and I start screaming or lashing out, that could actually invalidate my fast. When I say from dawn to dusk, it's like the Qur'an says, that we can eat and drink "until the white thread of light becomes distinguishable from the dark thread of dawn."

In the morning, we wake up and we eat something called Suhoor, and it should be something healthy. I mean, it could be anything you want. It's not a special type of food, but you want to eat something that's going to keep you sustained for the day. We go all day. We don't drink anything, not even water. My family asks me all the time, "Not even water?" Not even water.

Then at sunset, we gather to break our fast and when we eat, it's called Iftar, and we pray. This generally happens at home. Many people congregate at the mosque. Ramadan is really a time where the community really comes together. There's also additional prayers that at night. It's called "Taraweeh Prayer," where we pray in congregation. That typically is late at night.

So to accommodate, many of us who participate request time off from work for religious leave. You can't imagine if you are up, especially the last 10 days of Ramadan, which we say like the holiest of days, you're up until dawn. Then to have to go into work at 8:00 or 9:00. That's really difficult. You may have some people requesting, some people don't. They just do it straight.

We do that, and then once we see the crescent moon again, Ramadan is over and we have three days of with what we call "Eid al-Fitr," which is

the celebration. The first day, we go to the mosque and we pray, and then after that it's just fun. It's getting together with families, it's eating.

That's just a very brief summary of what Ramadan is, how we go about it. I just ask people all the time, "Please don't have an early morning meeting, or don't ask me to attend a lunch meeting. I'm just not doing it."

John Caher: What a wonderful tradition. Thank you for educating me and our listeners. Judge, thank you for your service to the bench and the bar, and for coming on the program.

Judge Walker-Diallo: Thank you. This was delightful. I really appreciate you. It's great talking to you.