

# Unanswered questions in FBI killing of Detroit Mosque leader

Tom Eley  
5 November 2009

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) killing of a Detroit-area African-American Muslim religious leader, Luqman Ameen Abdullah, on October 27, raises a number of troubling questions.

Abdullah, 53, was shot 18 times by an FBI "counterterrorism" squad in a warehouse in the suburb of Dearborn, after allegedly firing his gun. Abdullah and ten followers were not accused of terrorism, but mail fraud, conspiracy to sell stolen goods, and illegal possession of firearms. These are comparatively minor charges for which the government has thus far provided little evidence, and would carry a prison sentence, not the death penalty effectively applied by the federal agents.

Abdullah was a member of the predominantly African-American Muslim religious movement called Ummah, or "the Brotherhood." Only Abdullah was involved in what the FBI claims was a "shootout." The other ten have been arrested.

FBI agents claim that Abdullah first opened fire on them before they fired dozens of rounds at him. No agents were injured, but authorities say Abdullah shot a police dog. The dog was given a life flight to a suburban Detroit veterinary clinic, where it perished. After being shot, Abdullah was reportedly handcuffed to a stretcher. It has not been reported whether or not he died instantly, or if he was offered medical assistance.

"I'm comfortable with what our agents did," said Andrew G. Arena, of the Detroit division of the FBI. "They did what they had to do to protect themselves." Two other raids were carried out in Detroit simultaneously, and on Thursday Canadian agents arrested Abdullah's son, Mujahid Carswell, 30, across the border in Windsor, Ontario. Carswell was turned over to US authorities, and a judge ordered him released with an electronic tether to monitor his movements. Windsor police later arrested two more suspects.

Carswell's arrest in Windsor was described by his pregnant girlfriend. "The phone rings, we look out the window and there's snipers pointed all around the house," she said. "This is absolutely surreal. My husband is a good brother. He was scared, man. They just killed his dad."

The US Attorney for the Eastern District Michigan, Terrence Berg, dismissed the fact that Abdullah was killed by a counterterrorism unit even though he was not charged with terrorism, telling reporters "the charges speak for themselves." In fact they do not.

The basis of the FBI's complaint against Abdullah and his mosque was gleaned through information handed over by informants and provocateurs who had infiltrated the mosque, Masjid Al-Haqq. These agents allegedly convinced some mosque members to sell stolen furs and laptops, and quoted Abdullah as making vaguely menacing statements against the police and the FBI.

Early media coverage—as well as much of the police complaint—focused on these sensational allegations. But they were not part of the indictment, which focused on the petty property crimes arranged by the informants.

Yet even if the informants' statements regarding Abdullah's comments are accepted at face value, they hardly prove violent intent. According to one informant's claim, Abdullah said he would not support terrorist activities when the Super Bowl was held in Detroit in 2006. "Abdullah said he would not be involved in injuring innocent people for no reason: 'If there's something to be done ... it's going to be legitimate,'" the complaint says.

Scandalously, the *Detroit Free Press* reported Abdullah's rejection of attacking the Super Bowl with the following sub-headline: "Abdullah spoke of attacking Super Bowl XL."

Informants also claim Abdullah said, in various instances, that he would give the Atlanta Police Department “trouble” if they attempted to arrest him when he visited the city, “America must fall,” and “we have to know how to fight.”

FBI statements and its criminal complaint make clear that the most prominent part of the case against him was in fact political, with government court filings portraying him as a radical Islamist, a black separatist, and a proponent of overthrowing the US government.

The government has made no argument that Abdullah ever acted on these alleged positions in a violent manner—acquaintances and his organization dispute the characterizations—though it had monitored him and his mosque for two years.

By most accounts, Abdullah and his followers were hardly dangerous. In January the group was kicked out of its mosque for failure to pay taxes, and relocated to a two story home “with exposed walls and electrical boxes with no switches,” according to the *Detroit News*. The FBI claims it found firearms as a result of the forced relocation.

As the *New York Times* reports, the FBI complaint “shows how much trouble Mr. Abdullah and his associates had in executing even basic criminal schemes, like switching the vehicle identification numbers on a stolen truck, or selling stolen laptops.” The members of Ummah were “far from masterminds,” the article points out.

The FBI “knew a long time ago that this was a penny ante operation, and they could have stopped it,” Abdullah El-Amin, an imam at a largely African-American mosque told the *Times*. “It didn’t have to get to this point, people getting killed.”

El-Amin and others who knew Abdullah downplayed the notion that even his rhetoric was violent. His alleged desire to form a separate nation based on Sharia law was “sort of like the Pennsylvania Dutch have their own communities and stuff,” El-Amin said.

The Muslim Alliance in North America, on whose governing board Abdullah sat, condemned the killing in a statement. “Reference to the Ummah as a ‘nationwide radical fundamentalist Sunni group consisting primarily of African-Americans’ is an offensive mischaracterization,” it said. “To those who have worked with Imam Luqman A. Abdullah, allegations of illegal activity, resisting arrest, and ‘offensive jihad against the American government’ are

shocking and inconsistent. In his ministry he consistently advocated for the downtrodden and always spoke about the importance of connecting with the needs of the poor.”

“The very incendiary rhetoric that the F.B.I. alleges, I never heard that from him,” Dawud Walid of the Michigan chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations said to the *Times*. “There was nothing extraordinary about him.”

Others pointed to the poverty of Abdullah’s neighborhood and those who attended his mosque. A number of those who knew Abdullah said he fed the hungry once a week and opened up his mosque to the homeless.

“They’re living in the hood, the ghetto of Detroit, one of the worst parts of Detroit,” Omar Regan, Abdullah’s son, said. “They don’t have anything! If my dad was involved in what they said, my dad would have some money—he didn’t ever have any money.”

Some groups have called for an investigation of the FBI raid, including the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections and the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

The FBI complaint notes that each of the eleven suspects, including Abdullah, converted to the Ummah movement while in prison. This is hardly unusual. Black Muslims have long focused their efforts on prison inmates, with the most famous such convert being Malcolm X, who converted to the variety of Islam promoted by the Nation of Islam while jailed in 1948.

Ummah was founded by Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, formerly H. Rap Brown. Brown was a member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s, joining the radical black power movement the Black Panthers in 1968. Targeted by the FBI, then arrested and imprisoned, he converted to Islam in the 1970s. Al-Amin was convicted of killing two police officers in 2001 and sentenced to life in prison.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**