

Mahershala Ali

- Mahershala Ali is an **American actor and rapper who [converted to Islam](#) in 1999, at the age of 25, and identifies as an [Ahmadi Muslim](#)**. He is best known for his roles in the Netflix TV series [House of Cards](#), Oscar-winning film [Moonlight](#), and Oscar-nominated film [Hidden Figures](#).
- In an [interview](#) with Radio Times, Ali stated that as a **“black man, anti-Islam prejudice ‘does not feel like a shock.’”** Expanding on how his identity as a Black Muslim finds him facing intersectional struggles, he [stated](#), **“If you convert to Islam after a couple of decades of being a black man in the US, the discrimination you receive as a Muslim doesn’t feel like a shock.** I’ve been pulled over, asked where my gun is, asked if I’m a pimp, had my car pulled apart. Muslims will feel like there’s this new discrimination that they hadn’t received before – but it’s not new for us.”
- Ali’s experiences with heightened surveillance as a Muslim are similar to those he has undergone by virtue of being a black man. He [describes](#) “being followed in Barneys” and being asked by police for identification on the street in Berkeley, CA.
- In the same interview, Ali revealed he found out **he had been placed on the FBI watch list after 9/11**. Speaking on the matter with NPR *Fresh Air’s* Terry Gross, Ali [stated](#), “They would be like, ‘Yeah, your name matches the name of a terrorist,’ ‘I was like, ‘What terrorist is running around with a Hebrew first name and an Arabic last name? Who’s that guy?’”
- Ali has also [discussed](#) the **gendered aspects of Islamophobia as his wife, Amatus Sami-Karim, no longer felt safe wearing the hijab because “she had so many bad experiences.”**
- Shortly after Donald Trump announced the [executive order](#) banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries, which many have referred to as a Muslim Ban, Ali won the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role. In his [acceptance speech](#), **Ali spoke of inclusiveness, stating, “When we get caught up in the minutiae, the details that make us all different, there’s two ways of seeing that. There’s an opportunity to see the texture of that person, the characteristics that make them unique,** and then there’s an opportunity to go to war about it, say, ‘That person is different from me, I don’t like you, so let’s battle.’ My mother is an ordained minister, I’m a Muslim. She didn’t do backflips when I called her to tell her I converted 17 years ago. But I tell you now, we put things to the side, I’m able to see her, she’s able to see me, we love each other, the love has grown.”
- In an [interview](#) with GQ magazine on June 19th, 2017, he said, **“Because of Islam, I am acutely aware that I am a work in progress.”** The **daily practice of the religion, he says, “puts a healthy pressure on you to be your best self, beginning with your own spirit and how that feeds into your actions.”** He went on to say his religion makes him a better actor. “It benefits me from the standpoint of really creating empathy for these characters that I try to embody, other human beings with issues as deep and personal as my own.”

IMPACT: Mahershala Ali is an American Muslim actor and rapper who uses his platform in media to promote pluralism, highlighting the intersecting struggles of a Black, Ahmadi Muslim.