

**“Ahmed Alamine, The Imam,” Arab Indianapolis, February 6, 2021,
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Ahmed Alamine is director of religious affairs at the Indianapolis Muslim Community Association (IMCA), and imam, or leader, of its mosque, Masjid Al-Fajr, the Mosque of the Morning Prayer, the oldest continuously operating Sunni Muslim mosque in the city dating from the 1970s. In 2020, he was sworn in as the first Muslim Police Chaplain in the history of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department. He also serves as chaplain with the Marion County Sheriff’s Office. Born in Saudi Arabia, Imam Alamine grew up in Medina, the city where in 622 CE the Prophet Muhammad sought refuge from Mecca and established the first Islamic government. In this interview with Edward Curtis, Ahmed Alamine discusses his upbringing, his work in Indianapolis, and his experiences as an Arab American of African descent.

Q. Where did you grow up? What was it like? What was your experience there?

A. I was born in Saudi Arabia and lived there until I was about ten years-old when my father decided to work for the government of Saudi Arabia in Niger. My experience of living in Saudi Arabia was an amazing experience. We lived next to the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, with our extended families who migrated from Africa. We had great relationships with our neighbors. Although I have experienced some level of racism, the people of Medina are known to be kind, generous, and welcoming. When we moved to Niger, the experience was totally different! it was a mix of cultural shock, language barrier, and low socioeconomic conditions compared to Saudi Arabia. But Niger and its people are very peaceful and welcoming. This made my adaptation to the Nigérien society was seamless.

Q. When did you come to Indianapolis?

A. I came to Indianapolis in 2010 from Columbus, Ohio, at the recommendation of a close friend.

Q. What is your education?

A. I have a BA in Islamic studies, a master’s in Islamic economics and banking and an MBA. I am currently pursuing a third master’s in philanthropic studies at Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and I hope to pursue a Ph.D. in international philanthropy and sustainable development.

Q. What jobs have you had in Indiana? What are your duties? Why did you choose this as your career?

A. In the business world, I have worked in logistics, quality control, and managerial positions. In the nonprofit sector, I started out by volunteering to teach and give lectures and Friday sermons in Indianapolis-area mosques. Two years before I become the Imam of Masjid Al-Fajr, I

volunteered as chair of the religious affairs committee at IMCA. After two years, I was asked by the board to be the imam. I have held that position since 2017.

Q. What does your Arab heritage mean to you?

A. It really means a lot to me. In addition to many other things, my Arab heritage has shaped my identity and personality.

Q. What are the challenges and joys of being an Arab American in Indianapolis?

A. I really cannot recall any major challenges as I have no issues getting along with people from different backgrounds; however, many times I find myself that I do not fully belong either to African culture as a Black man or to Arabic culture, which is my primary cultural identity. This has made full assimilation a challenge to a certain degree. However, the big joy is that I have always felt welcome by people of Indianapolis who come from different cultural and ethical backgrounds. It has been very easy for me to navigate through professional, personal, and social life.

Q. Many Americans—and for that matter, many Arabs—may not think that a person can be both Black and Arab. How do you think of your own identity when it comes to race?

A. When people ask me where am I from, I almost always tell them, sarcastically, that I have an identity crisis. My parents are Africans who migrated to Saudi Arabia at a very early age with my grandparents. When I tell people that I was born in Saudi Arabia, the response often is: I did not know that they have Black people there! So being Black with Arabic and African heritage makes it challenging to fit in anywhere. At the same time, the diversity of my cultural background—which allows me to speak five different languages fluently—is my greatest asset.