

CONTACT

Tanya Leverault, ITVS
Adrianna Paidas

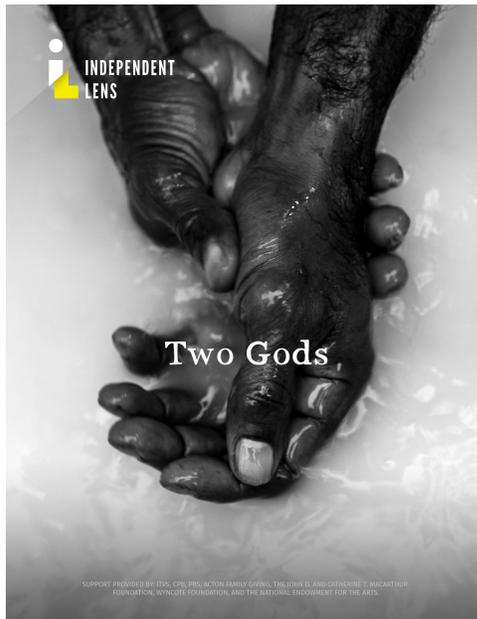
415-356-8383
646-762-8704

tanya.leverault@itvs.org
adrianna.paidas@beckmedia.com

For downloadable images, visit pbs.org/pressroom

AWARD-WINNING, BLACK-AND-WHITE DOCUMENTARY *TWO GODS* PREMIERES ON PBS' *INDEPENDENT LENS* AND THE PBS VIDEO APP ON JUNE 21, 2021

Documentary Paints Moving Portrait of Community, Faith, and Healing Through the Eyes of a Muslim Casket Maker and His Mentees



(San Francisco, CA), May 12, 2021 – An intimate documentary about faith, renewal, and healing, *Two Gods* follows a Muslim casket maker and ritual body washer in Newark, New Jersey, as he takes two young men under his wing to teach them how to live better lives. Directed by Zeshawn Ali, *Two Gods* will make its broadcast premiere on PBS' *Independent Lens* on June 21, 2021 at 10:00 p.m. ET ([check local listings](#)) and will also be available to stream on the PBS Video app.

In the city of East Orange, New Jersey, just outside of Newark, a casket shop stands on the corner. Inside, laboring amid the sawdust and the long pine boxes, casket makers work in the Islamic burial tradition. Hanif, a Black Muslim casket maker who finds spiritual grounding in his work, brings two boys from the local community under his tutelage; 12-year-old Furquan and 17-year-old Naz.

Hanif teaches Furquan and Naz the practices of Islamic burial rituals as they assist him with his work. The film follows his efforts to show the young boys that they can seek out more from their lives. Having formerly served time in prison, Hanif continues to grapple with past mistakes and present challenges, finding purpose in his faith and religious community while guiding his young charges on their own paths toward healing and embracing life.

Shot in black-and-white, *Two Gods* explores the juxtaposition of grief and the rituals of death with the vibrancy and potential of coming-of-age. The film also turns an empathetic lens on Muslim American stories, ultimately crafting a moving portrait of both the intimate moments and the complexities of the everyday Muslim American experience.

"I was first drawn to Hanif in the way so many around him are – he has a natural sense of connection to the people around him. As a healer in both his professional and personal life, he really demonstrated for me the power of faith and community to help us overcome setbacks in our lives and help others find peace and redemption as well," said Ali. "I'm honored that *Two Gods* will make its broadcast premiere on PBS and hope that audiences across the country can find inspiration and healing in Hanif's story and the stories of his community."

Two Gods premiered at Hot Docs 2020 and also played at Full Frame Documentary Film Festival and the 2020 New Orleans Film Festival, where it won the Documentary Feature Jury Award. The film is a co-production with Black Public Media, received production funding through ITVS Open Call and is also part of the ITVS and PBS "Stories for Justice" initiative. This recently announced public media partnership highlights films that boost the work of people on the front lines of criminal justice reform, and heightens their impact through online and real-world engagement.

Visit the [Two Gods](#) page on *Independent Lens* for more information about the film.

About the Filmmakers

Zeshawn Ali, Director

Zeshawn Ali was born and raised in Ohio. He moved to New York to study film at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts where he concentrated on directing and cinematography. He directed short documentaries for the 30 Mosques in 30 Days series before working on *Two Gods*, his feature length debut. He's a member of Meerkat Media and Brooklyn Filmmakers Collective. He's currently based in New York.

Aman Ali, Producer

Aman Ali is an award-winning storyteller in New York City. He's made appearances on dozens of media outlets including the New York Times, CNN, BuzzFeed, NBC News, and HBO to tell stories about the Muslim American community. He is also one of the brains behind the social media phenomenon 30 Mosques in 30 Days, a 25,000 mile road trip he took to all 50 States in the U.S. with the mission of telling profound stories about Muslims in America.

CREDITS

Director	Zeshawn Ali
Producer	Aman Ali
Editor	Colin Nusbaum
Executive Producers	Sally Jo Fifer Lois Vossen
Executive Producer, Black Public Media	Leslie Fields-Cruz
Cinematographer	Zeshawn Ali
Additional Cinematography	Emir Fils-Aime

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, Acton Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).