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R.W.: I always say poetry can hold your emotions, it can hold anger and sadness, it can hold your questions, and I think it's a good outlet for young people to have structure to put to what they're feeling and thinking. So I encourage educators to have students write about what happened. I've also known some visual artists lately who have young people take clippings about Ferguson and create a collage. I hope educators are not shying away from these difficult conversations.

For poets, Aracelis Girmay is one I have used in the classroom before. Her poetry is talking a lot about what is happening now, what happened in the past and what will happen in the future. I think young people need to be part of that conversation and art is a powerful way to do that.

S.H.: *Is there anything else you want to share, about the book, your work, or your thoughts on gentrification?*

R.W.: People always ask me, which one are you? And I think I'm both of the twins. I very much identify with Maya and Nikki. I love Portland and there are so many good things about my experience growing up here as a child, but there are some things that were painful and difficult along the lines of race and class that I dealt with, and I never got to really talk about those things until I was older. So I'm hoping that conversations are started from this book, that people don't shy away from letting young people express how they're feeling, especially young people of color, to have a space where they can talk about this stuff.

S.H.: *You said that as a kid you didn't get the opportunity to talk about your experience of race and class. Why do you think kids aren't given the space to talk about these issues?*

R.W.: I think there are a lot of reasons. There are some very practical reasons, especially when you're talking about school where there's not a long time of time to talk about what kids think, what they talk about. There's also a lot of fear: "What if I make the kid upset, what if a kid cries?" And I don't think those concerns shouldn't be had. I don't want to come across that it doesn't matter, because it does. So I do think there should be support, I'm not just saying go out there and do it, but I do think we should figure out how to do it.

I also think that as adults, sometimes we feel we don't want people to have to deal with that yet, that, "Oh, they're so young, they don't realize what's going on, we don't want to put that on them." But I really do think that young people are aware, they know what's going on, they just don't have the language (to express it). They understand concepts of fairness and sharing and cooperation. They understand on a very basic level what it means to be nice and what it means to listen. So I just think if we learn to talk in kid-friendly language, there's a way to do it, to be successful at it.

Mitchell S. Jackson

The author of "The Residue Years" talks about his memories of Portland, where his book is the 2015 Everybody Reads selection from the Multnomah County Library

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

"It's cold!" says Mitchell S. Jackson. "It's really cold in Brooklyn."

Indeed. But in his native town of Portland, it was a balmy, sunny February day, the kind of day where somebody, somewhere in town, might be reading a book on a park bench. And it's not so unlikely that the book would be Jackson's.

"The Residue Years" is Jackson's first novel, but it has garnered high praise from critics in the United States and Europe. It is also the Multnomah County Library's selection for the 2015 community reading program, Everybody Reads. The program encourages everyone to read the same book — and then come together to discuss it and listen to the author lecture about it. Thanks to The Library Foundation, more than 3,200 copies of "The Residue Years" are available to borrow from Multnomah County libraries.

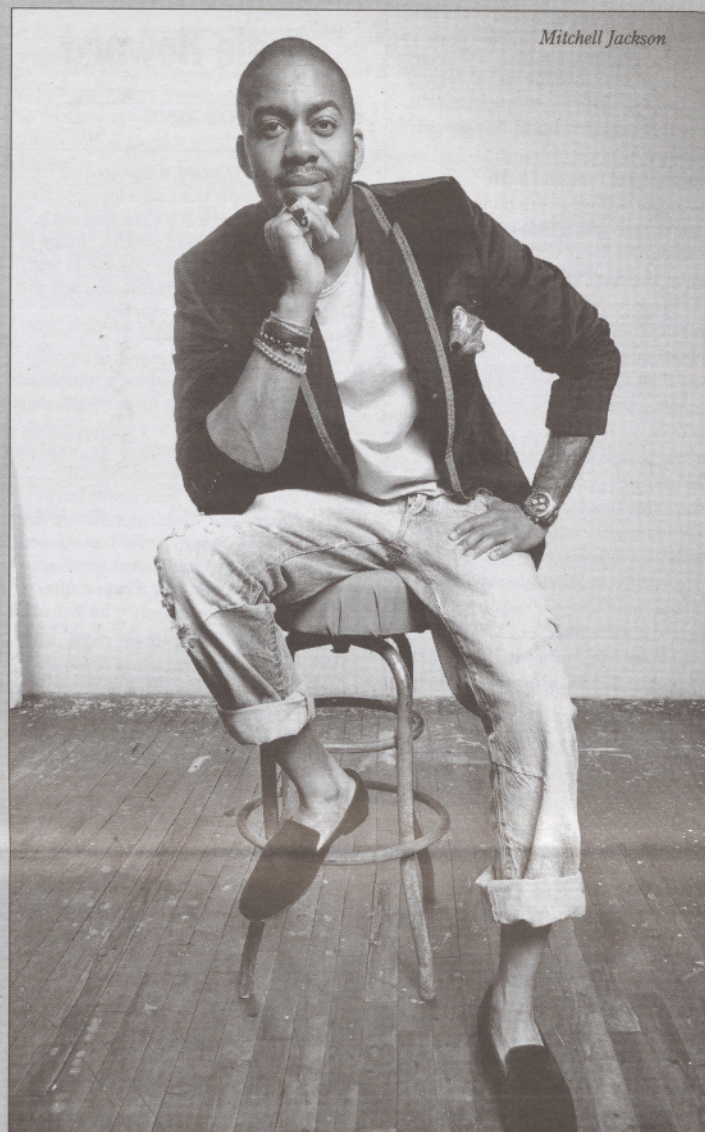
He received a masters in writing from Portland State University and a masters in fine arts in creative writing from New York University. Today he teaches writing at NYU.

Jackson's novel chronicles the relationship between Grace, an African-American woman caught up in the dark side of drugs in Northeast Portland, and her son Champ. Though the novel was born from a series of autobiographical vignettes of Jackson's relationship with his own mother and the experiences they had, the book is — he stresses — a fictional piece of work.

Jackson will speak at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall on Mar. 10 as a part of the Everybody Reads campaign. He is scheduled to host the Oregon Book awards in April. s

S.Z.: *We have something in common: We are both teachers. Tell me your a bit about your classroom experience and the importance of education.*

M.J.: I was telling my students just the other day, my first class at NYU — I was



Mitchell Jackson

PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE M. WALES

like 26 years old. I had very little teaching experience and I was intimidated by the prospect. I thought how am I gonna go in there and fill up two and a half hours and not have them feel like they are wasting their time?

As time has gone on, it feels really natural to be in the classroom. I can't really imagine my life without a classroom in it.

As many teachers say, it works both ways ... I feel like I'm giving them something, but feel that I get a lot more than I give them — to learn their stories and to see people grow and to be inspired by what they say in the classroom, to have them push me and me push them — it's a very rewarding experience.

S.Z.: *Your novel, "The Residue Years," was born from autobiographical vignettes about your life and relationship with your mother in a Northeast Portland neighborhood and evolved into a fictional story. How closely do Grace and Champ's relationship parallel that of your relationship with your own mother?*

M.J.: The specific incidents are fictionalized, but the nature of their relationship is pretty spot-on to me and my mother's relationship.

S.Z.: *For those who might not be familiar with the backstory of your book, can you talk a bit about your neighborhood as you remember it from your childhood?*

M.J.: I didn't really have a "neighborhood" because I moved around a lot, but I grew up in Northeast Portland. It was a really small community. It felt like everyone knew each other.

In elementary school, we would always go to King School. They had this amazing playground and we would all go do flips and play basketball. In middle school, it was King (School) or Alberta Park. In high school, everyone congregated in Irving Park. It just felt like you knew everyone and you felt really comfortable.

And then about the mid '80s is when the gangs started coming. Sometimes you would congregate and it would be a sense

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