

## Arts & Entertainment

# Michael B. Jordan, Now a Hollywood Heavyweight, Punches Up

As 'Creed II' opens, star takes a moment to reflect



Michael B. Jordan in 'Creed II'

By **JAKE COYLE**  
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NEW YORK — If Michael B. Jordan's path to this moment was condensed and edited, it might look, appropriately, like a training montage.

Images of Jordan cutting his teeth on the Baltimore streets of "The Wire" and the Texas football fields of "Friday Night Lights," followed by hints of a soaring talent ("Red Tails," "Chronicle"), shattering breakthroughs ("Fruitvale

Station") and setbacks ("Fantastic Four") before reaching, with a pair of haymakers ("Creed," "Black Panther"), heavyweight status.

Parallel to Jordan's steady rise has been the 31-year-old's expanding sway behind the scenes in Hollywood. His production company, Outlier Society Productions, was among the first to embrace the inclusion rider, adopting the pledge to seek diverse casts and crews just days after Frances McDormand referenced it at the Oscars. Jordan was also influential on a similar agreement by WarnerMedia, making Warner Bros. the sole major studio thus far to sign up.

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"Creed II," which opens in theaters Wednesday, finds Jordan's character, Adonis Creed — like the actor, himself — adjusting to his newfound prominence: reaching the pinnacle of his profession while still having to fight for what he believes in. As Steven Caple Jr.'s boxing drama prepared to open in theaters, Jordan went door-to-door in Georgia urging people to vote in the midterm elections.

"You've been doing one thing for 20 years. Constantly working at it, trying to grow and become successful, or whatever your version of success is. And then you have a moment in time where everything seems to be coming together at the same time. Everything seems to be happening. But you live in a society, in a world that's kind of going to s—," Jordan said in a recent interview. "So to be able to use one to help the other, is something. To try to find your voice."

It's an answer with shades of Jordan's typical performance: earnest, thoughtful, tinged with pain. Then he exhales.

"I don't know, man," says Jordan. "Honestly, there's a lot going on right now and I'm trying to find my place in all of it, professionally and personally."

A big part of Jordan's quest was "Black Panther," in which he played Erik Killmonger. The part is ostensibly a villain, but in Jordan's hands, Killmonger — a wounded, fatherless warrior bent on reparations through violence — has a depth uncommon if not outright alien to comic-book films. Between Killmonger and the Wakanda leader T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) is a larger dialogue, one fraught with history,

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## Guidebooks cont'd from pg 6

But they were also startled by a 2017 report from the Missouri attorney general's office showing that Black drivers were stopped by police at a rate 85 percent higher than their White counterparts. The report also found that they were more likely to be searched and arrested.

When I first read about this news, I thought of the motoring guidebooks published for African-American travelers from the 1930s to the 1960s — a story I explore in my book "Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobiles in America." One of these guidebooks, "The Negro Motorist's Green Book," is also the subject of a new movie, "Green Book," starring Mahershala Ali.

Although they ceased publication some 50 years ago, the guidebooks are worth reflecting on in light of the fact that for drivers of color, the road remains anything but open.

### The half-open road

In American popular culture, movies (1983's "National Lampoon's Vacation"), literature ("On the Road"), music (the 1946 hit "Route 66") and advertising have long celebrated the open road. It's a symbol of freedom, a rite of passage, an economic conduit — all made possible by the car and the Interstate Highway

System.

'Get your kicks on Route 66,' Bobby Troup crooned in his hit song.

Yet this freedom — like other freedoms — has never been equally distributed.

While White drivers spoke, wrote and sang about the sense of excitement and escape they felt on automobile journeys

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through unfamiliar territories, African-Americans were far more likely to dread such a journey.

Especially in the South, Whites' responses to Black drivers could range from contemptuous to deadly. For example, one African-American writer recalled in 1983 how, decades earlier, a South Carolina policeman had fined and threatened to jail her cousin for no reason other than the fact that she had been driving an expensive car. In 1948, a mob in Lyons, Georgia, attacked an African-American motorist named Robert Mallard and murdered him in front of his wife and child. That same year, a North Carolina gas station owner shot Otis Newsom after he

had asked for service on his car.

Such incidents weren't confined to the South. Most of the thousands of "sundown towns" — municipalities that barred people of color after dark — were north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Of course, not all White people, police and business owners behaved cruelly toward travelers of color. But a Black individual or fam-

Despite the dangers, try they did. And they had help in the form of guidebooks that told them how to evade and thwart Jim Crow.

"The Negro Motorist's Green Book," first published in 1936 by a New York letter carrier and travel agent named Victor Green, and "Travelguide: Vacation and Recreation Without Humiliation," first published in 1947 by jazz bandleader Billy Butler, advised Black travelers where they could eat, sleep, fill the gas tank, fix a flat tire and secure a myriad of other roadside services without fear of discrimination. The guidebooks, which covered every state in the union, drew upon knowledge hard-won by pioneering Black salesmen, athletes, clergy and entertainers, for whom long-distance travel by car was a professional necessity.

"It is," a "Green Book" subscriber wrote to Victor Green in 1938, "a book badly needed among our Race since the advance of the motor age."

Acknowledging the era's racial tensions and dangers of travel, the 1956 edition reminded drivers to "behave in a way to show we've been nicely bred and [were] taught good manners."

It pointed to certain states that would be more amenable to Black travelers: "Visitors to New Mexico will find little if any racial friction there."

ily traveling the country by car would have had no way of knowing which towns and businesses were amenable to Black patrons and visitors, and which posed a grave threat. The only certainties for African-Americans on the road were anxiety and vulnerability.

### 'A book badly needed'

"Would a Negro like to pursue a little happiness at a theatre, a beach, pool, hotel, restaurant, on a train, plane, or ship, a golf course, summer or winter resort?" the NAACP magazine The Crisis asked in 1947. "Would he like to stop overnight in a tourist camp while he motors about his native land 'Seeing America First'? Well, just let him try!"

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