



FILM: **AMERICAN FICTION**

FDG RATING: 4.0 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Cord Jefferson: *director*  
Jeffrey Wright: *actor, Monk*  
Sterling K Brown: *actor, Clifford Ellison*  
Issa Rae: *actress, Sintara Golden*

DATE: March 24, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **AMERICAN FICTION**

Jeffrey Wright was outstanding as Monk, the black literature professor, in the 2023 film, American Fiction, and was nominated for the best actor Oscar. As part of a class lesson on Flannery O'Connor, he wrote the N word from the title of the book on the board, which upset his "winy" students, and caused him to be kicked out of the school. Now, he will have the opportunity to focus on writing another book although to his publisher's disappointment, he's not getting much traction on what he has already published. What his publisher wants from him is a really "black" novel, and Monk's quotable response is, "I'm a writer and I'm black."

Enter Monk's nemesis, Sintara Golden, the highly successful black female writer whose books are the rave as they replicate the black, low life, most obvious in her newest novel, "We's Lives in Da Ghetto". It's exactly what his publisher wants from him.

Monk's life is the ultimate opposite. His brother and sister are both doctors, they are well educated, live in a wealthy community, and have a summer home beach house. His sister has been caring for his ailing mother who needs to be moved to an expensive nursing facility and now that Monk has lost his job, his sister begs him to help take care of her which probably is why he compromises his values and agrees to write his next book in the style his publisher wants. It will bring in some extra money but surely be a huge flop. It isn't. Meant to be an insulting joke on capricious publishing and to mock the stereotypical black life that publishers were pushing, he quickly wrote it while intoxicated. It is adored by the industry. He uses a pen name, Stagg R. Leigh, and jestingly titles it, My Pafology.

While most of us enjoyed the social satire, some discussion participants were frustrated with the family dysfunctional dynamics feeling that there were 2 stories being told: first a social satire and second a family drama involving sibling relationships, personal problems, the mother, and Monk's new girlfriend who he meets while at the beach house. Others disagreed and believed the family drama set the stage but the focus is on the black experience, black representation, expectations, and perceptions in literature. One discussion participant noted that the family was not any more dysfunctional than most families who deal with sibling rivalry, one sibling bearing the burden of caring for elderly parents, and one sibling getting into drugs.

There's quite a twist at the end. Monk is at a New England literary award ceremony and his alter ego, Stagg R. Leigh, supposedly a fugitive from the streets, is about to be honored. It seems like Monk has no choice but to finally reveal the truth about his identity. The scene cuts to the filming of American Fiction where Monk is disagreeing with the filmmaker about the ending and again, after offering two plausible scenarios, suggests an exaggerated, over the top finale which, of course, the filmmaker loves. Authenticity loses to what sells.

Definitely entertaining with terrific acting, an endearing character, and lots to think about, we applaud American Fiction, with an authentic 4.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!  
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