

# Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 7:30pm

**American Fiction US**  
15 1h 57 mins

**Director;** Cord Jefferson

**Stars;** Jeffrey White, Tracee Ellis Ross, John Ortiz

Monk is a frustrated novelist who is fed up with the establishment that profits from Black entertainment that relies on tired and offensive tropes. To prove his point, he uses a pen name to write an outlandish Black book of his own, a book that propels him to the heart of hypocrisy and the madness he claims to disdain.



## Interview with Cord Jefferson. (Screenrant)

*In translating Erasure to the screen as American Fiction, what were some of the key thematic elements from the novel you felt most passionate about preserving, and how did you adapt them to resonate with today's audience?*

“Cord Jefferson: Yeah, I think that one of the things that I think is the key to a great adaptation is to not necessarily maintain the text of what already exists, but to main the emotion and spirit of what already exists. And so the novel that Percival Everett wrote was very funny. It was sort of filled with a bunch of different emotions. It felt very nuanced and complex. It also wasn't didactic. It didn't seek to teach lessons and tell people how to think.

It was more about just amassing this cast of characters in these situations and then letting you decide for yourself how you wanted to feel. And so there was a great roadmap there. I think the book is, I would say much darker than the film. I sort of wanted to make the movie sort of have a little bit more levity and it'll feel a little bit more inviting to a bunch of different kinds of people. That's not to say that I think that the movie's better than the book, but the movie is different from the book in that way. I wanted to change it and make it something that I wanted to do and allow a bigger tent of an audience in there while still maintaining that kind of metatextual nature, like that some of that seriality and also some of that anti-didactic thinking that's just kind of like, "I'm going to try to make you laugh. I want you to enjoy yourself. I want you to think a little bit, but I don't want to spoonfeed you any morality." Those are the things that I tried to keep alive from the book.”

*How did your experience as a writer for television influence your approach to directing a feature film, especially one with such complex themes?*

The thing that I really wanted to take to make sure that I took from TV and the thing that I like about making and watching TV is that it's got a real commitment to character. And the reason is, is because you have so much time with these people. You really start to learn who they are on an intimate level. And so I think that sometimes when you get into films, they're less nuanced and they're less complex because it's more driven by plot and it's like, "We need to get to the finish line and we don't have time to spend with these characters.”

And I wanted to make sure that I wasn't doing that. I wanted to make sure that I was giving these characters full beginnings and middle and ends, and sort of make them feel like real lived in human beings and not just focus on getting finished with the movie as quickly as possible. To me, those kinds of character moments are just as important as the plot moments for me and sort of the stuff that I like.”

*What aspect of his journey did you find most compelling to explore through direction?*

‘I think that I wanted to focus on a guy who had isolated himself, who was feeling a lot of pain. And because of that pain, that pain had manifested itself as rage. And because he had all of this rage and this anger and resentment about what was going on in his life, that he had allowed that kind of resentment to isolate him from the rest of the world. He was a jerk because he had had all this pain underneath the surface, right? And so he was dealing with all these emotional things that he wasn't allowing himself to speak about. And these emotional things that he was feeling were sort of manifesting itself as rage and resentment. And so I wanted to make sure that he didn't just come off as just a jerk and people are like, "Well, he's a jerk and so I don't like him.”

*I wanted to show what was beneath that, was beneath that resentment, what was beneath that anger that humanized him. And then the second thing was to make sure that he had this emotional journey where we showed him sort of changing and we showed why he was changing, and we show him arriving in a place where maybe he knocks down this facade that he's built in front of himself, and maybe he finds a way to connect with the rest of the world and the people around him and sort of accept this love that he hasn't been willing to accept for so long, for various reasons.’*

