

# American Fiction

Directed by Cord Jefferson  
(R)



A writer triumphs by playing to racial stereotypes.

"It's difficult to be both a cutting satire and a crowd-pleaser at the same time," said Jourdain Searles in *IndieWire*. Cord Jefferson's Golden Globe-nominated debut feature presents principally as an adaptation of a biting 2001 Percival Everett novel about a high-minded Black author who scores his first major success with a faux tale of Black urban woe that he threw together as a joke. But *American Fiction* works even better as a family drama, resulting in a film that's much like its protagonist: "flawed, but oddly lovable." The great Jeffrey Wright stars as Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, who comes across as "a guy so sure he has seen it all that he can't acknowledge his own blind spots," said Alison Willmore in *NYMag.com*. We soon witness his accidental rise to literary acclaim, but we first meet him as he returns



Wright at ease, with Erika Alexander

home to Boston on a forced break from teaching and reveals an aloofness that even his physician siblings, played winningly by Tracee Ellis Ross and Sterling K. Brown, can't fully push past. Though the script's send-up of the book and movie industries is sharp and funny, Jefferson "wisely approaches the material as foremost the story of a closed-off man for whom professional bitterness has become another means of shutting everyone out." To me, *American Fiction* achieves all that it aims for, somehow managing to be "incredibly warm and appealing" even as its satire stings, said Ann Hornaday in *The Washington Post*. My choice for best film of the year, it's "the kind of movie that succeeds gloriously in checking all the boxes, even as it makes fun of checking all the boxes."