

Micah 6:8

DO JUSTICE

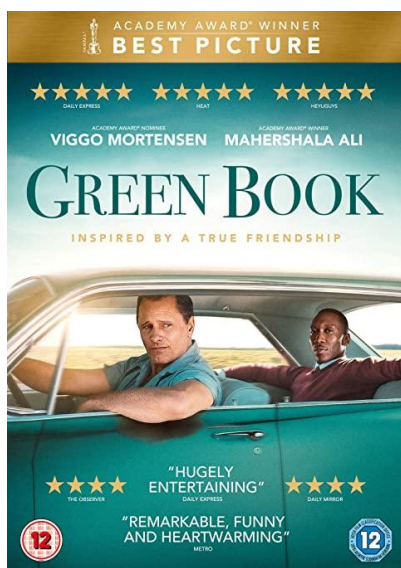
LOVE MERCY

WALK HUMBLY

END RACISM

Green Book (Movie)

Set in 1962, the film is inspired by the true story of a tour of the Deep South by African American classical and jazz pianist Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali) and Italian American bouncer Frank "Tony Lip" Vallelonga (Viggo Mortensen) who served as Shirley's driver and bodyguard. (1) On the tour, Don Shirley is "welcome" to entertain in white establishments, but will not be served food, nor hospitality as a traveler. In reality, Shirley and Vallelonga spent a year and a half together on the road, though in the movie it's condensed to a couple of months. (2)



In the 1980s, Vallelonga's son, Nick, approached his father and Shirley about making a movie about their friendship. For reasons that are now contested, Shirley rebuffed these requests at the time. According to an interview with Nick Vallelonga in TIME, Shirley gave his blessing—but told him to wait until he died. (2)

The film won the Academy Award for Best Picture, in addition to winning Best Original Screenplay and Best Supporting Actor for Ali. The film also won the Producers Guild of America Award for Best Theatrical Motion Picture, the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, the National Board of Review award for the best film of 2018, and was chosen as one of the top 10 films of the year by the American Film Institute. Ali also won the Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild, and BAFTA awards for Best Supporting Actor.

Along with these accolades, it also received criticism on a number of counts.

Many saw the film as supporting the "white savior" narrative. Director Peter Farrelly told Entertainment Weekly that he was aware of the white savior trope before filming and sought to avoid it. He said he had long discussions with the actors and producers on the point, and believes that it was not advanced by the film, saying it is "about two guys who were complete opposites and found a common ground, and it's not one guy saving the other. It's both saving each other and pulling each other into some place where they could bond and form a lifetime friendship." (1)

Brooke Obie, writing for *Shadow and Act*, also accused the film of erasing the very object it was named after: the Negro Motorist Green Book. She pointed out that when Green's book appears in the film, it is a prop mostly handled by Vallelonga: "Black people don't even touch the Green Book, let alone talk about its vital importance to their lives," she wrote. And while the guide leads the pair to run-down motels in the film, the real guide would have offered higher-end options to suit Shirley's refined tastes.

Don Shirley's family expressed frustration that they had not been contacted in the development of the film. Some of them see the film as one-sided; a depiction of Don Shirley as told by white people. They argued that the portrayal of Don Shirley was inaccurate, though the response from one of Shirley's friends, Michael Kappeyne, a student of Shirley's and producer of his last album, was different. After seeing the film, he was quoted as saying, "It was like he was back to life. For two hours, he gave us back Dr. Shirley."

Nonetheless, the family argues that they could have done better.

Nick Vallelonga defends his approach, saying that when working with Don Shirley on the film he had been told by Shirley not to reach out to others. "He told me, 'If you're going to tell the story, you tell it from your father, me. No one else. Don't speak to anyone else. That's how you have to make it.'"

The family also disputed that Shirley and Vallelonga were ever friends, though that remains in conflict with an interview outtake with Donald Shirley from the 2011 documentary 'Lost Bohemia', which appears to support the strength of their bond. "I trusted him implicitly," Shirley said of Vallelonga. "Tony, not only was he my driver. We never had an employer-employee relationship. We got to be friendly with one another." (2)

It's also in conflict with Nick Vallelonga's memories of their relationship. "I met Dr. Shirley when I was a kid. I went to his home. I went to Carnegie Hall. ... I saw his beautiful African robes, and I saw the man that he was. And I saw the change in my father when he came home and over the years how he brought us up. So when he told me the story, because he was so angry when he went on this trip with Dr. Shirley (about) what he saw and witnessed, that's what changed him. ...

"It's about their relationship and how they changed each other in a time when it was crazy, obviously. So I think we brought great honor to Dr. Shirley. His name is out in the world. We brought great honor to the 'Green Book.' People know about the 'Green Book.' And Pete (Farrelly) directed a magnificent film, and here we are." (3)

(1) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Book_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Book_(film))

(2) <https://time.com/5527806/green-book-movie-controversy/>

(3) <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/academy-awards/2019/02/25/don-shirleys-family-green-book/2979734002/>