NACL offers its deepest sympathy to the families and friends of departed brothers and sisters

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Dear letter carriers and the book’s creator.

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Carriers leaving their mark on the movies

Two letter carriers, both African American members of NACL, have had an impact on the silver screen in recent months.

“Green Book,” the story of a black musician and his white driver who refer to the title work often in their travels through the segregated South, is based on the true story of Don Shirley, a Jamaica-American pianist. The Universal Pictures release was chosen as best film of 2018 by the National Board of Review.

But the Green Book itself would not exist without another true story, that of the late Victor Hugo Green, a 39-year letter carrier and the book’s creator. As The Postal Record wrote in its September 2013 story on Green, “As a union member and a civic leader…Green heard many stories of humiliation and violence from members of his community. He looked to other travel guides for inspiration on creating a tool for helping African Americans.” Thus began The Negro Motorist Green Book, referred to simply as the Green Book, a travel guide for the black- and white-owned hotels, inns and even private residences that would accept African American travelers.

“Their will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published,” Green wrote in 1949. “That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please.”

That day came roughly 15 years later with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination by businesses, but Green was not around to see the change. He had died in 1960.

Fast-forward to Detroit in the 2000s and Branch 1 letter carrier Wendell Watkins, the thread that holds together “Detroit 48202: Conversations Along a Postal Route.” The 2018 documentary by Pam Sporn follows the now-retired carrier over a six-plus-year period as he chats with residents along his route, chronicling the “rise, demise and contested resurgence” of Detroit, with an emphasis on the stories of working-class African Americans.

The movie asks the question, will the resurgence of Detroit center on a high-tech and increasingly white downtown, or will it focus on the stretches of neglected neighborhoods that continue to deal with a 40 percent poverty rate, water shutoffs, foreclosures and schools in crisis?

In a positive review on the People’s World website, Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member John Dick calls it “a searing film that weaves the racial history of the city with the economic truths of capitalism.” “Detroit 48202” will have its TV and online premiere on Jan. 29 as part of World Channel’s “America ReFramed” documentary series; for more about the premiere, go to worldchannel.org/show/america-reframed. For more information on the film itself, visit newday.com/film/detroit-48202-conversations-along-postal-route. DVDS are expected to be available from NALC Headquarters’ Supply Department at 202-393-4695. The Postal Record’s 2013 story on the Green Book is at NALC.org/greenbook.