

MUDBOUND (2017)

- Released on November 17th, 2017
- 2 Hours 14 minutes
- 10 million USD Budget
- Directed by Dee Rees
- Written by Virgil Williams (screenplay by), Dee Rees (screenplay by)
- Armory Films, ArtImage Entertainment, Black Bear Pictures
- Rated R for some disturbing violence, brief language and nudity
- Premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek

DEVELOPMENT

- Based on the novel by Hillary Jordan (2008 debut novel)
- Netflix picked it up for \$12.5 million in January at the Sundance Film Festival.

WRITING (Virgil Williams, Dee Rees)

- Hillary Jordan's story is told through the alternating voices of six characters - Jamie, Ronsel, Laura, Henry, Florence and Hap.
- "Virgil Williams wrote the first adaptation of the script in 2015. Reading the script prompted me to read the book to see what else was there, and then I rewrote the script before we shot it." -Dee Reese
- "It felt like God herself had reached down and handed me my orders and it was my responsibility to adapt this story into a film."- Williams
- "My agent begged me not to do it, begged me not to do it."- Williams
- "It took about a year to write the screenplay. Before Dee Rees or before Cassian came on board, about four years went by where we were rewriting the script and rewriting the script and getting it to a place where the world could see it." -Williams
- "The heartbeat of the story is about a friendship between two soldiers. One is black. One is white. And both are heroes."- Williams
- "I was driven to adapt "Mudbound" because it felt necessary. Especially now, in this second civil rights movement, this era of unabashed bigotry and misogyny where the "very fine people" of the KKK march unmasked."- Williams
- "Mudbound" tells us that no matter what color, creed, gender or faith, we are all trapped here together in the same mud. The mud of fear, hate and ignorance. And the only way to fight our way out? With love." - Williams
- "I wrote a lot of individual monologues for the characters, like Hap's monologue. I wrote, what good is a deed, and the play on words "deed" and "deed" and the fact that no matter how much he is invested in this land, he'll never be vested. And Florence going to care for Lauren's children, I wrote the meditation because it's important to hear that chord of dissonance of her doing the very things she said she would never do. Then Ronsel leaving for war, I wrote that scene because it was important to establish Ronsel not just as the son of Hap and Florence, but a son of the community." - Dee Rees
- "Hillary Jordan is like one of my buddies. We're homies. We became friends through this process. It was important to me, as a writer, to be very respectful of another writer, and

really, really be in touch with her throughout the process. I called her before I told her I was going to change the ending and she was a little mad, but I think she's okay now." - Williams

- "I hope people take away from this film the fact that we can't begin to tackle our collective history until we tear down our personal histories. More expansively, I think it's about inheritance. It's just not about race. It's about what ideas we have inherited, what attitudes we have inherited, and what we are unconsciously passing on." -Dee Rees

STORY/TOPICS

CAST:

CAREY MULLIGAN (Laura McAllan)

- Director Dee Rees shared photographs from the film's era with Carey Mulligan as part of her preparation, and she was drawn to a particular one of a woman with a really short fringe (bangs) who looked so awkward to her, which she thought reflected her character Laura. Thus, she cut her hair in a similar style for the film
- Carey Hannah Mulligan is a British actress. She was born May 28, 1985, in Westminster, London, England, to Nano (Booth), a university lecturer, and Stephen Mulligan, a hotel manager. Her mother is from Llandeilo, Wales, and Carey also has Irish and English ancestry
- Her first major appearance was playing Kitty Bennet in Pride & Prejudice (2005) alongside Keira Knightley, Judi Dench and Donald Sutherland. Carey also played orphan "Ada Clare" in the B.B.C. television series, Bleak House (2005).
- Carey has said that her passion and love for acting was first kindled at her old school Woldingham School, where she took part in a school production of "Sweet Charity" in her final year, and where she was also a student head of drama.
- Carey is married to musician Marcus Mumford, of Mumford & Sons

GARRETT HEDLUND (Jamie McAllan)

- Born in Roseau, Minnesota, Garrett John Hedlund is the son of Kristi Anne (Yanish) and Robert Martin Hedlund. He has two older siblings, Nathaniel and Amanda. His father is of Swedish descent and his mother is of German and Norwegian ancestry.
- Garrett spent his early years growing up on a farm in a small town. When he was in the ninth grade, he moved to Scottsdale, Arizona, with his mother, and took private acting lessons. After graduating from high school, he immediately moved to Los Angeles, California to pursue an acting career. One month later, he would landed the role of Achilles' cousin Patroclus in the major feature Troy (2004) opposite Brad Pitt. His next feature was Friday Night Lights (2004) starring Billy Bob Thornton, in which Garrett played a high school football player. He then landed a starring role opposite Mark Wahlberg in Four Brothers (2005), playing one of four brothers whose mother is murdered. He also starred opposite Jeff Bridges and Olivia Wilde in TRON: Legacy (2010), the long-awaited sequel to the science fiction cult classic TRON (1982).

JASON CLARKE (Henry McAllan)

- Jason Clarke was born on July 17, 1969 in Winton, Queensland, Australia. He is an actor and producer, known for Zero Dark Thirty (2012), Everest (2015) and Dawn of the Planet of the Apes (2014)

JONATHAN BANKS (Pappy McAllan)

- Versatile veteran character actor Jonathan Banks was born in Washington D.C in 1947. While growing up he always had an interest in acting and stage work, so decided to pursue a career in entertainment. To this day he is a very accomplished stage actor. While acting in film, he usually plays sinister types or villains. He can be seen in Better Call Saul (2015) as Mike Ehrmantraut

JASON MITCHELL (Ronsel Jackson)

- Jason Mitchell is an American actor. He had roles in the films Contraband (2012) and Broken City (2013), both of which starred Mark Wahlberg. In 2015, Mitchell played Compton rapper Eazy-E in the biopic Straight Outta Compton (2015), with his performance being met with significant praise by critics. In 2016 he appeared in Keanu(2016), which starred Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele.

MARY J. BLIGE (Florence Jackson)

- Mary J. Blige had an Aunt who was very much like her character Florence, who had worked for (and raised a bunch of kids in) a white family who loved her. Additionally, the experiences of her grandmother helped her in playing the role.
- Mary J. Blige's experience going through her divorce from Kendu Isaacs fueled the hurt and heaviness in her performance in the film
- The singer reveals that her Oscar-nominated role for Best Supporting Actress and Song in "Mudbound" left her with expenses that far outweighed monetary compensation for the film. She says that it's been necessary to seek out new projects to earn income, however, the roles in TV and film have not been lucrative and are instead intended to support her brand and image

DIRECTING (Dee Rees)

- Dee Rees is a director and writer, known for Mudbound (2017), Pariah (2011) and Bessie(2015)
- "As a fierce, openly gay, black woman her mere presence in this business is an inspiration. But it's her rare combination of skill and will that sets her apart. Oh, and by the way, she shot the film in less than a month — and created art." -Williams

PRODUCTION (Rachel Morrison)

- First female DP to be nominated for an Oscar as well as for a guild award from the American Society of Cinematographers.
- "This nomination is so much bigger than me or my work," she says. "I hope it tells women all over the world that there's nothing they can't do, including cinematography."
- Got an undergrad degree in photography at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and a master's in cinematography at the American Film Institute.
- "I thought the messaging in *Mudbound* kind of touched on a lot of issues that we're experiencing all over again," the DP says, "or maybe just never went away."

- Shot digitally. Shooting schedule of 28 days, the decision to shoot on film would necessitate cutting two days out of the shooting schedule—“and that just seemed impossible.” “We did a test, a comparison between digital and film where the whole point was to make the digital look like film.”
- “[Dee Rees] looked at a lot of fine art. Dee culled together some references that she liked, which included portrait artists like Paul Leveille, a sculptress—Robert Frank’s wife, Mary Frank. Also, Robert Frank’s *The Americans*, as kind of a metaphor for the American dream versus the American reality, which became very much a theme for us.”
- “I brought a stack of books 20 deep. Through all of that, we developed a visual language for composition—and the color, as well. We had the challenge of trying to find a color palette that felt of a time and period, but not completely washed out and lacking contrast. To me, it was really important to have the language of contrast and of blacks.”
- “The first quarter of the film maybe has a much richer, more saturated, more poppy palette, and also much more fluid camera movement—dolly moves and steadicam—and is not at all handheld. Then, after the farm, there’s a move to a grittier, more handheld approach to the camerawork, and the color palette sort of drains a little bit.”
- “Shot on Alexa Mini, which is amazing, and raised it to 15 or 1600 [ISO] to introduce a little bit of digital noise. Then, we did a grain pass in the dailies and the DI, and used older glass.”
- “We shot with a combination of old anamorphic glass—Panavision C Series, D Series, a few B Series—and then old Super Speeds and Ultra Speeds from the ‘60s and ‘70s, which we sort of rehoused.”
- “We were originally set to shoot in January, and then by the time cast and financing came together, we found ourselves in July in the South, which is not a fun place to be—especially when there was no respite from it. The only shelter was our two sharecropper homes, and there were no windows, so you couldn’t air-condition them. It was actually so brutal that we had to shift our schedule. Originally, we were working days into nights, and people were dropping like flies. We ended up doing flips, because we sort of unanimously decided that we could only handle about a half day’s worth of the heat.”

EDITING/VFX (Mako Kamitsuna)

- Known for *Blackhat*, *Pariah*, *She Who Excels in Solitude*

SOUND/MUSIC (Tamar-kali)

- *Mighty River* performed by **Mary J. Blige** and co-written by the singer/songwriter, Raphael Saadiq & Taura Stinson.
- “The score “comes from an emotional place, a scenic place,” Tamar-kali says, adding that she and director Dee Rees “talked about the physicality of the mud, and how I might present that in the compositions, the sound of the farm, which was almost like a character in the film” to be established sonically.” -Tamar-kali
- It was the director’s choice to go with an impressionistic, all-strings score for *Mudbound* that steers clear of references to Southern heritage music.
- Three jazz standards recorded by New Orleans musicians performing source music for the film.
- Had less than five weeks to write and lock the score
- Third collaboration with director Dee Rees.
- Seven-piece string ensemble.

- “I did two days of recording and a week of mixing, but it was such a great opportunity I definitely wanted to meet the challenge.”
- Tamar-kali lends her soulful voice to two blues classics for the soundtrack

BOX OFFICE / PROMOTION

- On January 29, 2017, Netflix acquired distribution rights to the film
- The film premiered on the streaming platform, as well as began a one week theatrical release in New York City and Los Angeles, on November 17, 2017

RECEPTION

- The film was premiered at The Sundance Film Festival 2017 where it received a standing ovation
- Rotten Tomatoes: 96% based on 155 reviews
- The site's critical consensus reads, "*Mudbound* offers a well-acted, finely detailed snapshot of American history whose scenes of rural class struggle resonate far beyond their period setting."
- Richard Roeper of the Chicago Sun-Times gave the film 3.5 out of 4 stars, praising the cast and direction.
- Writing for Rolling Stone, Peter Travers also gave the film 3.5 out of 4 stars, praising Blige's performance and Rees' direction, saying: "The director and her cinematographer Rachel Morrison do wonders with the elements that batter the people of every race and social class in the Delta. But it's the storm raging inside these characters that rivets our attention and makes *Mudbound* a film that grabs you and won't let go."

NOMINATIONS

- At the 75th Golden Globe Awards received nominations for Best Supporting Actress (Blige) and Best Original Song ("Mighty River")
- At the 90th Academy Awards, the film earned four nominations: Best Supporting Actress and Best Original Song for Blige, as well as Best Adapted Screenplay. It also earned a nod for Best Cinematography, making Rachel Morrison the first woman ever nominated in the category and Blige became the first person to ever be nominated for an acting and song award during the same year.

SEQUEL/LEGACY