

In Proximity
Episode 8: Charles D. King and Ryan Coogler
Final Transcript

[Music/Old Radio Sounds by Ken Nana]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're listening to P-R-O-X.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Ryan Coogler: You played a big role in Proximity launching in terms of you sitting down with me and Zinzi, kind of making us do this.

Charles D. King: I had a vision and an idea. I saw—I could clearly see from the first time, that very first meeting that we had in our office. I remember telling other people this, and I still do, that I believed that you were going to be one of the most important storytellers and filmmakers of our generation. And this was before you made Fruitvale Station, and this is definitely before you made Creed. And I remember thinking I should have bought stock in Disney with that day you called me, and you said, "I'm going to"—

[LAUGHTER]

—"I'm thinking about making Black Panther."

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're listening to In Proximity.

Charles D. King is the founder and CEO of MACRO, a multi-platform media company representing the voice and perspectives of Black people, indigenous people, and people of color. The company includes a film and TV studio, talent and content creator representation divisions, a branding and creative agency, and an affiliated venture firm. Some of the projects they've co-financed include Mudbound, Fences, Just Mercy, Sorry to Bother You, Raising Dion, Gentefied, and Judas and the Black Messiah, produced with Proximity Media and Warner Bros.

But before all this, Charles was a partner and senior agent at William Morris Endeavor. He was the first Black partner in the company's 100-plus-year history and the first ever Black partner at any major talent agency.

In 2021, when Judas and the Black Messiah was nominated for Best Picture, Charles became part of the first ever all-Black team of producers nominated for an Academy Award alongside director Shaka King and Proximity founder Ryan Coogler.

The team worked closely with an esteemed group of Black creatives, activists, and executives including Chairman Fred Hampton Jr. and Nijja Kuykendall, a film executive currently at Netflix but at the time served as senior vice president of production at Warner Bros.

Charles and Ryan talk about the making of Judas and the Black Messiah, and how they first met just as they were laying down the foundations for MACRO and Proximity.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Charles D. King: Hello, this is Charles D. King. I'm the founder and CEO of MACRO.

Ryan Coogler: Hey, what's going on? This is Ryan Coogler. I'm a writer, director, producer, and one of the founders of Proximity Media. And just jumping right in, Charles, we've known each other for a little over 10 years, I want to say. And when I first met you, I was in your office—very nice office in Beverly Hills at WME, and you were a talent and lit agent. And we talked, and I was trying to figure out whether or not to sign with WME as a representative agency. I'd already met with Craig Kestel at Sundance, and he sent me to go meet with you so I could make my decision. You was kind of a closer that way, you know? Do you remember that day?

Charles D. King: I remember it like it was yesterday, Ryan, and I remember literally you sitting on the couch, that white leather couch in my office. I remember when Craig told me about you in our staff meeting, and he told me about Fruitvale Station. And I remember we met—it must have been at least a two-hour meeting, and it was one of the most powerful conversations I've had since I've been in the industry.

Ryan Coogler: Oh, man.

Charles D. King: Yeah. It was like a kind of brotherhood connection that happened in that room that was very refreshing and unique, and I absolutely remember that day. That meeting was one of the more seminal moments. It was the first time I shared certain aspects of my life and interest outside of just entertainment with anyone in our industry, including my interest around activism and community and some of the experiences that I had had as a young Black man growing up. And that's where I've so identified with your film Fruitvale Station, with the script and your vision for what you were looking to do by telling Oscar Grant's story. And then I could tell from that meeting too, what you were looking to do to use your voice as a storyteller to lift community and bring people together and entertain.

And I remember when you first pitched the story, this father-son story that would be used and set within the Rocky universe. And I remember you literally pitched Creed to me there because I asked you, "What else do you have?" And then I said, "Well, by the way, funny enough, the guy down the hall represents Sylvester Stallone, and we could introduce you." And it was just one of those magical conversations and moments. And so I knew then that you were destined for greatness with your storytelling and how you were going to use your voice.

Ryan Coogler: I remember having a feeling that you weren't going to be an agent for that much longer.

[LAUGHTER]

And I didn't know that much about the industry, but I was like, man, this dude seems like—you felt bigger than the job you had, you know? So I kind of figured it was a matter of time before you transitioned to doing something else. And that something else ended up becoming launching MACRO.

For folks listening—because we got folks listening from all walks of life, you know? What does a agent do if you were to, like, put it in a couple sentences,? I know it's difficult, but just to paint—you know, to paint a picture for folks, you know what I'm saying, of what you were doing before MACRO.

Charles D. King: First off, for those that are not in the entertainment industry or those that aspire to be, the talent agency world has been at—for over 120 years, they're at the epicenter of our industry in terms of the center of the spoke of a wheel where they're interfacing with all the studios, managers, production companies, publicists, the financiers. They're so connected to the artists and are really,—they're the artist advocates that find the opportunities, the scripts, the material. They help to introduce the artists to the marketplace, negotiate their deals, work in conjunction with their attorneys and their managers to forge their careers and to build their businesses.

And so I was very blessed to be the first Black partner in the history of Hollywood at any one of the major talent agencies and spent over 17 years at the William Morris and William Morris Endeavor in the agency world. And so that was my career path, and I did that for many years and loved doing it before launching MACRO.

Ryan Coogler: I'm just realizing, before getting into MACRO, like, just give us a snapshot of what your career was like as an agent. You know, who were some of the folks that you represented during your tenure at both William Morris and at WME?

Charles D. King: Yeah, I was very fortunate and blessed to represent and work with some of the most talented and inspiring artists, multi-hyphenates, filmmakers, musicians, and moguls in our industry. I was blessed to work with filmmakers like Tim Story, you know, put him in Barbershop, you know, made that deal for him my first year as an agent—to filmmakers like Lee Daniels or M. Knight Shyamalan and musician multi-hyphenates like Andre Benjamin, Prince, and Janet Jackson, Tyrese, and many others, and actors like Michael Eley or Terrence Howard and many others.

Ryan Coogler: You leaving a big one off. You worked with Oprah for a little bit, too, right?

Charles D. King: Blessed to also work with Oprah and her company as she was really building out, further building out Harper and using her voice as a producer. And so I was really the point person for her film business while I was there, too, during my last couple years at the agency.

Ryan Coogler: And what's like your basic 9:00 to 5:00 as an agent? I know it can vary, but to paint a picture for folks, what's a day as an agent in Hollywood?

Charles D. King: First off, there's no such thing as a 9:00 to 5:00 in the world of a talent agent, okay?

[LAUGHTER]

It's more like a 6:00 in the morning to midnight or 1:00 in the morning and sometimes around the clock. Your world between work and personal life almost blurs together because so much of our industry is also not only reading material and being on phone calls, in meetings, visiting sets, being on sets, but it's also the cultivation of building of relationships and socializing and being at functions and screenings and watching and reading material. And then there's a 6:00, 7:00 dinner with two colleagues, or there's a premiere, and you go to the premiere, and there's the

afterparty. And then, after that, you go home, and you read a script at night. Yeah. So that's a—that's an average day.

[LAUGHTER]

Ryan Coogler: That sounds—that sounds—

Charles D. King: Every day is different.

Ryan Coogler: That sounds both exhilarating and exhausting. But—and it was 17 years of that.

Charles D. King: Absolutely, and every day is different. When we met, I already had my business plan written, and I was in a phase of my career where I was really looking to support other colleagues like our friend, your agent Craig Kestel, and mentor and be supportive of their growth as well as helping them and working with other amazing filmmakers and artists from within the walls of the talent agency world, but ultimately knew that there was an opportunity for me to do something far greater for the community in launching and building a media company like the one that we launched eight years ago at MACRO.

[KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

Ryan Coogler: You know, you're a partner now, at this point, it sounds like, with massive clients at a massive agency. And you got to let folks know, "I'm transitioning to start something new." Take me to that. Take me to that point. When did you know it was time?

Charles D. King: Wow. I'll tell you, while at Howard Law, when I graduated, in my commemoration book where they asked every graduate: What is your plan? What will you be doing in 10 years?—in that commemoration book, I said, "In 10 years, I'm going to be at the helm of a diversified entertainment and media company."

Ryan Coogler: Wow.

Charles D. King: And—so that was—I graduated from Howard Law in '96. I moved to L.A. a year later, landed in the William Morris mailroom. So say 10 years after that, it was 2006. I was a very successful agent with a multi-million dollar business practice. I was doing well. I had gone from mailroom to being a multi-millionaire. And I was still antsy because I knew there was something bigger for me.

And it wasn't until 2009 when William Morris merged with Endeavor, and there was so much chaos that went on through the year of the merger, and I had cultivated and had such a great hockey stick trajectory. It was the first time in my career that I lost a couple of clients. There was just a lot of upheaval and things that happened. And I spent a year playing defense, trying just make sure I didn't get picked apart and adjusting to this new—the new company that had now merged.

And I think it was on Christmas Day of that year when I was still putting out a fire of some issues as a result of this merger, I knew for then that I was not going to continue being in that type of position again.

Ryan Coogler: Understood.

Charles D. King: And that was—and so then it became: How am I going to transition? And then it was—the following year is when I started writing the business plan for what has now become MACRO. And it wasn't until a few years after that that I had the conversations internally with the parties that ran WME to let them know, "Hey, look, I'm going to one day go launch and build a company," like one we're building now. And I told them about it and shared the information and said, "I'm going to do it."

And so once, you know, I said, "Look, I'd like you guys' blessing, and I'm going to go and do this," and the rest was history. I remember that day like it was yesterday, as well. But the light bulb of, like, "I'm absolutely going to leave. There's a bigger play for me. I'm going to leave, and I'm going to launch a company like MACRO," was Christmas Day of 2009.

Ryan Coogler: Christmas Day of 2009?

Charles D. King: That's right.

Ryan Coogler: And it was that vulnerability juxtaposed with your family.

Charles D. King: Yeah. Well, there were several things. There was recognizing that there was a more empowered position for me to use my experience and my skills to uplift culture and to make a difference and to build a company that I knew would inspire and transcend and make an impact on our industry. And it was also making sure that I, personally, and my family would never be in a position to be subjected to some of the experiences that I was having through that year of the merger where there were things that were outside of my personal control. And I recognized that I would never want to put myself or my family in a position again and that there was a more impactful and empowered way for me to live my life and also for me to live and build in a way that would also help others, and it could change the paradigm.

And it's really been a blessing to see a lot of that shift take place once I took that leap of faith because I knew that there was a need to show other people that what I am doing in building with MACRO, that it's possible because what I experienced through that year was there were not enough of us. Whether you were a young filmmaker, whether you were someone sitting in Decatur, Georgia, or whether you were a very successful artist or mogul, there weren't enough of them that recognized the power that we have. And I recognized that I needed to be able to do it for myself and my family, but also a larger community to show what was possible.

Ryan Coogler: And that's amazing, man. And did you feel like your time—you know, 17 years in the center of the spoke that is the wheel of the entertainment industry—did you feel like that was—that was valuable, like that was a great time spent? Do you feel like you still use the skills that you built over that time today?

Charles D. King: It's not possible to duplicate those 17 years of—one, the experience putting out 100 fires a day, all of the relationships, the thousands of relationships, my natural connectivity with so many people, with so many artists, with so many executives and producers and people that I came up with in the industry, the amount of scripts that I read, the number of movies, the events, just the thousands of phone calls and negotiation of deals, the trends and patterns of business. The experience was invaluable, so uniquely positioned me to do what I'm doing now.

And having an African American who, up to that point, there had never been someone from our community to be at the highest levels of this world, which is a world that is now opened up

slightly since that time that I was in there. But I was in uncharted territory during my time in the agency world. So, yes, that 17 years of experience was incredibly valuable.

Ryan Coogler: And I hear you talking about business plan. And just out of curiosity—like, this is going to sound ridiculous, maybe, but I'm just thinking about folks who are listening—like, what is a business plan? What kind of things should a business plan have in it? Like, what were you—what were you working on? Because I remember you were talking about working on it for a long time.

Charles D. King: Yeah. Well, first and foremost, for anyone listening, whether you're a young person or an older person, there's real power in taking your ideas and your thoughts and your visions and writing them down on paper—and your goals. There's been so many books and studies that have shown how successful people in almost every industry are people that write their goals down, that write their thoughts down and jot and tinker with things. And so part of the business plan writing process for me was really taking this vision and these ideas that were in my head and formalizing them, dumping them into one place and then working with really smart people. I had some really smart people that I worked with who I had NDA-ed up, you know, who had gone to Harvard Business School, to help put the ideas and the vision that I had on paper and then add some structure to it, put statistics alongside of it, put numbers in it. And it really began to shape and shape the plan and idea. And many of them were—some of those plans were things that I didn't even understand exactly, some of them. They were just ideas and a vision that I had. And so—and ultimately, yeah, it turned into like a 100 page deck of—

Ryan Coogler: A hundred pages?

Charles D. King: Yeah, the first business plan for the, you know, multi-platform media company was originally 100 pages. And then I wrote a complimentary business plan on a complimentary investment strategy that would sit alongside the media company. And this is something that I worked on weekends and the evenings throughout the course of over a year or two, you know, post the William Morris Endeavor merger.

[In Proximity Theme 2 by Ludwig Göransson]

Charles D. King: And I've noticed, too, with Ryan and many of our interactions and conversations, the beauty, one of the beautiful things about you is—I remember how many meetings and things we've been a part of where there'll be a term that'll be brought up in a meeting, and you'll say, "Can you tell me what that is?"

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Charles D. King: Or, "Can you explain?" And that's what's so—one of the many things that makes you so unique and special because most people in our industry pretend like they know these things and act like they know terms. And you're willing to be like, "Can you tell me what that is?" And so I was maybe not as enlightened as you are. So sometimes, I would hear things on calls or be in meetings, and then I'd write it down. And I'd go back and look it up.

So, when I started writing a business plan for MACRO, I didn't know the difference between mezzanine financing or credit debt, venture capital, private equity. I had no idea about the difference between each of these things.

Ryan Coogler: I'm going to—I'm going to stop you right now because if I hear "mezzanine," I start thinking about seats at a concert. So what is a mezzanine strategy, bro?

Charles D. King: Mezzanine financing is—it's almost like a form of credit. It's not like pure equity, and it's not like a loan or a debt. It's somewhere in-between. That's why they call it mezzanine.

Ryan Coogler: Okay. Like, literally like at a concert where you're in-between floors. Okay.

Charles D. King: Yes, yeah.

Ryan Coogler: Man, learn something new every—every conversation with you..

Charles D. King: But, anyway, I just had to learn. Yeah, I had to learn a lot of these terms, and then I spent time actually just getting to know people in the space while also writing the business plan and well in advance of launching the company. So it was to establish these relationships, to understand from getting to know people in the arena, so that once I actually launched the company, I could draw upon these relationships, and they weren't people that I was just getting to know once I was out on the playing field.

Ryan Coogler: Amazing. When you made that first move, you know, when you left WME, let everybody know what you were doing, announcement comes out, how many employees did MACRO have?

Charles D. King: Four full-time employees and then my wife, Stacey, because the King Family Fund financed MACRO the first six months. And so Stacey was consulting and very involved in the company for the first three years, even though she wasn't full-time until four years ago.

Ryan Coogler: Big love to Stacey. So how many employees do y'all have now? It's been eight years?

Charles D. King: It's been eight years. So we're about at 50 people now and continuing to grow organically. That includes M88. M88 is the joint venture representation firm that we launched just under three years ago that represents a lot of incredible artists and multi-hyphenates and filmmakers and writers, as well as UNCMMN, which is a digital influencer representation group that's a sister company to M88.

Ryan Coogler: Incredible. And what's that like going from four employees and Stacey to 50 people in MACRO and two partner companies?

Charles D. King: It's been a beautiful journey. Yes. It's been beautiful to watch the company unfold, but I'd say even more powerful to see the community that's been cultivated, to see other companies that have launched post-MACRO and have taken an entrepreneurial approach to how they're building their businesses, the artists' careers that have been launched and that have flourished as a result of the company's launch and what we've been building, not only just the artists, but I'd also say the executive talent and the hundreds of—we've had almost 200 interns that have come through MACRO.

Ryan Coogler: Wow.

Charles D. King: And we've had so many talents that are now all throughout the industry. And I—that impact that I knew, that I envisioned that MACRO would have, it's just been beautiful to see that come to fruition, and I still look at it like we're just getting started.

Ryan Coogler: Incredible. And—and, you know, I'm just bringing us up to day. You left WME, and I think—I think I was, like, twisting your arm to stay as my manager—

[LAUGHTER]

—which, which I was able—I was able to work out. And when y'all formalized the representation side of y'all business, we was able to make it more official. You know, but I feel very secure doing business in the world knowing that Charles King is still on my—on my team, you know, along with Craig and Jonathan and Mark and the other folks. But you—you played a big role in Proximity launching in terms of you sitting down with me and Zinzi, kind of making us do this, you know?

[LAUGHTER]

Charles D. King: I had a vision and an idea. I saw—I could clearly see from the first time, that very first meeting that we had in our office. I remember telling other people this, and I still do, that I believed that you were going to be one of the most important storytellers and filmmakers of our generation. And this was before you made Fruitvale Station, and this is definitely before you made Creed. And I remember thinking I should have bought stock in Disney that day you called me, and you said, "I'm going to"—

[LAUGHTER]

—"I'm thinking about Black Panther." But the only thing I would say is this. That's one—everyone—different people have superpowers. One power of mine is I have the ability to identify talent in others and also to try to do what I can to nurture and advise and just, you know, make sure that it's—what the beauty of what's there comes to fruition. And so, it was all there. It's always been there.

I knew also, too, that what you and Zinzi and Sev were setting out to do and the type of company that you're building, that who you are as people, the opportunity it's going to provide is just far greater than what you yourselves were looking to do. And unfortunately, that is unique in the industry that I came up in. But what's beautiful about where we are now is that there are more like minded people like yourselves that are less beaten by an older system and are more uplifting of others and recognizing that we can all rise together. And I saw that in you when we first met.

[Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

Ryan Coogler: All right. So we start Proximity, and we get the opportunity to work together, like immediately. You know, our friend Shaka King, who we worked with, Blackout for Human Rights, and—and filmmaker who I met at the Sundance Film Festival in 2013, had a film there called Newly Weeds, a comedy set in Brooklyn. Spent some time with him, really dug him when we were doing some work around state-sponsored human rights violations.

Blackout Human Rights is a collective of like minded folks across different industries and walks of life but predominantly folks that work in entertainment and folks that work in human rights

activism. And we were formed to combat and raise awareness of state-sponsored human rights violations that happen, you know, globally, but specifically in the United States. Looped Shaka in. We got the—you know, Shaka got to know Charles. And Zinzi and Shaka and I had a close friendship.

So I remember, you know, working on Panther, I'm in New York because they're doing a screening of Creed with the orchestra in Brooklyn. You know, so whenever we in New York, Zinzi and I try to stop by Shaka's house, see his parents. And he tells us this idea, this idea that would become Judas and the Black Messiah. At that point, he was calling it Jesus Was My Homeboy.

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And I remember thinking, like, we didn't—Zinzi and I didn't have a company. You know, but I remember thinking, "Man, I would love to help Shaka make this." And Zinzi and I would talk about it. Eventually, Black Panther comes out. We're starting to figure out Proximity. Shaka calls and says, "Hey, man, I want you guys to be involved. I'm going to send you the script." He sends me the script. I read it. Zinzi reads it. I immediately send it to Charles, and I'm like, "Hey, man, we should"—you know, "Read this. If you like it, we should figure out a way to do this together."

And what was so great about what you started with MACRO was that you guys had the ability to finance because it was—it was a movie that we all—that we knew would be challenging on the surface for studios and for the marketplace, but I was just—I just remember thinking, like, "Man, how crazy is this that—that Charles, my Charles, you know what I'm saying, has this company we can—if he's interested in doing this, we can walk into any studio and say, 'Hey, this is what we thinking.'" And we have money, you know? Like, we coming in with financing.

And that's what we did. Man, it was—that part of it was just—I got to be honest with you, that part of it—we never really talked about this. But walking into those meetings, man, I felt like I was, like, walking in like 10 feet tall, you know what I'm saying?

Charles D. King: I couldn't agree more. I remember the phone call when you called me. It was about three weeks after the global success of Black Panther. You were on vacation somewhere, I believe. And I was leaving the CAA Oscars party. It was the Friday night before the Oscars, and I'm leaving. It must have been midnight, and you called. I'm like, "What do you—hello? What do you—what's going on, Ryan?"

And you said, "You got a sec?"

And I said, "Yeah."

And you said, "Look, I know what I want to do with the next year."

And I said, "What is that?"

It's like, "I'm going to build my company. I'm going to build my company on a—utilize the uniqueness of the position that I am." So here it is, you have this global success. You could have done anything in the world and you said, "I'm now going to launch this company and utilize this power that I have in this moment to launch a company and open up opportunities for

others." And then you said, "There's a project I think I want to be the first one." And then you said, "I'd like to see if you and MACRO would be interested in partnering on it."

And I was like, "Absolutely." And I remember you sent me the script, and the next day, I think I was at the Spirit Awards, and you were already hitting me up like a great producer—

[LAUGHTER]

—less than 12 hours later, saying, "Have you read it yet?" And I remember reading it that night and that weekend and being blown away by it and already being a huge fan of Shaka's from the work we did together with Black Alpha Human Rights and the journey that we went on. It was just so beautiful and powerful. But the power of you also recognizing what it's like for us to come together and for Shaka to recognize that.

And I think the power of the three of us going in together—you said you felt like you were 10 feet tall. So did I because that—that was, like, showed unity and power together. And I believe that was part of the beauty of the experience and why the film, it was as good as it is. I believe that Judas is going to stand the test of time, and it's—I'm so incredibly proud of the work we did together on it. And I feel like I know our company got better from the process, the experience of developing that project with Proximity. And I think we all learned from one another, and it made a great film that I think has really—just the impact that it's had, it's just been beautiful, just a beautiful experience.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, man. It was an amazing experience. I remember just so many crazy stories.

[LAUGHTER]

From like—from like, me, you, Zinz, and Shaka, you know, going to see Chairman Fred Jr. for the first time.

Charles D. King: Oh, my goodness, yes.

Ryan Coogler: In Maywood. And I remember—

[LAUGHTER]

Man. I can't tell you how often I tell this story, man. But I remember—I remember the first day, we were going to see him, and I think Rosa Clemente when she was with Chairman—Rosa Clemente is a Puerto Rican American activist/teacher/academic/politician who is a friend of Shaka's and is a friend of Chairman Fred Hampton Jr., who helped us to make the connection initially when we were looking for a way to sit down with Chairman Fred Hampton Jr.

And we went to the Hampton house, and Chairman and Rosa weren't there yet. And I—and I remember—I remember the sun was going down in Maywood.

Charles D. King: It sure was.

Ryan Coogler: And the Uber—the Uber had let us out. And I remember me and Zinz was looking at each other. I think Shaka was kind of in his phone trying to find where Rosa was. And me and Zinz looked at each other, and we were looking around. People were coming out, you

know what I'm saying? They were looking at—they were looking at us like, "Who are y'all?" You know what I mean?

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And I remember, Charles, you had this big old—this big old backpack on that looked like it had like four or five laptops in it, an iPad, you know what I'm saying?

[LAUGHTER]

You was dressed—

Charles D. King: I still carry it.

Ryan Coogler: You was dressed real nice, you know what I'm saying? Like you always are.

Charles D. King: I look like a mark.

Ryan Coogler: And I remember me and Zinz just thinking, "Yo, we got to get to, like, a coffee shop or somewhere. We got to get somewhere where we could just sit for a sec and not just be outside in front of people's houses," you know what I'm saying?

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And—and I remember, at this time, the craziest part about it was the closest place that made sense was Starbucks. But this was right after the dudes had got arrested at Starbucks just for sitting there. So it was—so we was debating over whether or not the four of us should even, like, be seen walking into a Starbucks at that time.

[LAUGHTER]

Charles D. King: By the way, that was when we—we had to, like, get to a corner. We had to get a corner where we ducked into a—it was a restaurant behind bulletproof—yes.

Ryan Coogler: It was—it was, like, a chicken joint that had—yeah, it had the bulletproof glass, but nobody was in there. You remember?

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: Like, we went in. We went in, and we like, "Hey, yo, excuse me," and nobody came out.

Charles D. King: That's right. And we were, like, trying to get an Uber to come. Then we were going to have an Uber take us to Starbucks. And they were like, "Oh, but can we go there?"

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. Yeah, and then—but then—

Charles D. King: And then Chairman finally—yeah.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, Chairman pulled up. Yeah, Chairman pulled up. We went in the house and met with him for the first time. And I just remember thinking, like, "Yo, this is going to be a crazy movie," It never stopped being that.

Charles D. King: It sure didn't.

Ryan Coogler: Was this before we partnered with WB and Nijja and stuff?

Charles D. King: Yeah. Oh, yeah, that's—yeah, I believe—this was—this was before we even got—

Ryan Coogler: Because we was just trying to—

Charles D. King: We were just trying to get their—

Ryan Coogler: Get the family's blessing, yeah.

Charles D. King: Get their blessing before we even took the project out into the market.

Ryan Coogler: Holy Toledo, man. Man, what a—what a time.

Charles D. King: It sure was. And then the—the several trips back and forth and spending time with Chairman Fred—

Ryan Coogler: Yes.

Charles D. King:—and Mother Akua and—and their comrades.

Ryan Coogler: Yes, yes.

Charles D. King: In the room, some on phones, the vetting process, it was really—

Ryan Coogler: I mean, it was an incredible experience, man. Like, looking back, I wouldn't change anything for the world. But, man, going through it—going through it was intense.

[LAUGHTER]

Charles D. King: There's a reason why everyone—why everyone that worked so closely on this movie, we're all bonded for life. There were just—the experience of how the film came together and the respect and the bonds that were forged, it was—for me, it was transformative.

[Juno Arp Stinger by Ken Nana]

Ryan Coogler: I remember—I remember walking in there that first day and seeing Chairman Fred Jr. And, like, first and foremost, he's a mountain of a man, you know what I'm saying? Like, and that's the thing that was such a trip, was looking at pictures of Chairman Fred Sr. You know, you don't ever think about, like, how big or small he was. These historical figures, you know what I mean? And that's one of the things that we robbed of when these folks are assassinated, you know what I'm saying? Like, it's just them in the physical sense. Like, they become pictures for everybody who's born after they time. And I just remember the size of him, you know what I'm saying?

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And, like, and thinking about his father, like, like, you know, and you realize his father was a big man, you know what I—you know what I mean? And—

Charles D. King: He walks in. He fills the room.

Ryan Coogler: He fills—fills the room up. Yeah, like—

Charles D. King: Fills the room.

Ryan Coogler: Like, physically and through his persona, you know?

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And he's super sharp. You know, you realize that he's—that's he's studying. Like, like, you know, when he's not talking, he's studying. And this was, like, a—you know, this was a real meeting, man. It was confrontational, you know?

Charles D. King: Yes, absolutely.

Ryan Coogler: He was very much, like, saying, like, you know, "How did y'all—how did y'all get this far without coming to see me?" You know, and I remember—I remember, at one point, he pounded the table, not because he was upset, but he was, like, getting his point across, you know what I'm saying? Like—

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And the whole time—the whole time we there, he feels familiar to me, you know? Like, and I'm thinking it's because—like, you know, he looks like his father, you know what I'm saying? I've seen pictures. But then, at one point, man, he's talking, and he's getting worked up. And it hits me that we met—that we had met before. You know, like, we had—that we had met at the Berkeley Flea Market, and he had handed me an informational pamphlet about the Black Panther Party Cubs, you know? And—

Charles D. King: He remembered you.

Ryan Coogler: Yo, we remember—we remembered it at the same time, you know what I'm saying? Like, you know, and I—and it was one of them things where we had been looking at each other the whole time the same way like, "Man, where do I know you from?" You know what I—you know what I mean? And it was—it was the strangest thing, but, also, I had so much more respect for him because when I met him, he wasn't there saying, "Yo, I'm Chairman Fred Hampton's son. I'm this, I'm that." He was just there working, man, like handing out pamphlets.

Charles D. King: Doing the work.

Ryan Coogler: Doing the work, man.

Charles D. King: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: And I—and I think he was by himself, you know, like, when I met him. He wasn't alone in Maywood, but he—and he might have had a security detail that was, like, around, and I didn't see, you know what I'm saying, at the time. But, man, like, it blew my mind in a way, but also, it gave me, like—it gave me hope, like, internally, that's like, yo, we got to get this done, like, you know what I'm saying? Like the—like, the project felt ordained in a way, you know what I'm—you know what I'm saying?

Charles D. King: It sure did, and I remember just how he lit up when he—how he lit up when he realized that you guys had met. And I saw—not that he was guarded, but I know that they were really assessing us and trying to understand who we were. And then I saw, like, the light come into his eyes. And it was like an immediate brotherhood bond that was formed with the two of you. It was just—and it was interesting. We just—we watched this unfold, and our conversation, and it was just clear in there just how much mutual respect and admiration was there.

And I saw Shaka realize it. I realized it. Zinzi did. And just—it was from then on, it was, like, that unique bond that you and Chairman Fred had that would help bridge the gap of when we had issues or when we were looking to get their support. And I feel like that was kismet, and that was meant to be. That was—it was almost like you couldn't even come up with the circumstances around that.

Ryan Coogler: Nah, none of them, man. Even, even down to our executive, Niija, and Shaka, they knew each other in college. You know, they knew each other in college, man. Like, like, and it wasn't like they went to school together. It was through happenstance that they knew each other, I think, like, through their roommates, you know what I'm—you know what I'm saying? But, like, knew each other well, well enough that when we walked into Warner Bros., you know, Shaka and Niija had that connection, you know what I mean?

And so, when you look at it, this was a project that had a lot of connections in the Black community, Black community of entertainers, Black community of activism that, even when that project seemed, like, impossible, you know what I mean? And it was a lot of moments, man, where we hit challenges, you know, like the pandemic and, you know, having to release the film through HBO Max, the uncertainty. It was always, like, this feeling that I had, like, "Yo, I think this is—I think this is going to work out."

[Prox Recs Theme by Ken Nana with Caution to the Wind by Ludwig Göransson]

Ryan Coogler: So um, Prox Recs, this is the segment where we recommend a book or a piece of advice or a movie to listeners at home. And just keeping it on topic, my Prox Rec is going to be the book, *The Mailroom* since we talked a bunch about Charles's time as an agent. This is a very famous book in our industry that talks a little bit about the business from the agency side perspective. It is known to be a little salacious, but I don't know. Charles, how you feel about that book in terms of somebody reading about what the agent life is like?

Charles D. King: I think that's a great recommendation for anyone that wants to work in the entertainment industry. Talent agencies play a big part of it, and you need to understand the history of how the agencies have evolved and what takes place within them. So that's absolutely a great suggestion for young folks that want to know more about that industry. And then do I get to recommend one, as well?

Ryan Coogler: Oh, of course.

Charles D. King: There's a book called *Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?* And it's a story about Reginald Lewis, and it was a book that I read when I was in law school, thinking about what I would ultimately do with my career. And it's about the first African American Wall Street titan who built a multi-billion dollar company. And it tells his journey, and it was really inspiring and quite compelling. So I would recommend that to any young person looking to forge a path in the business industry.

Ryan Coogler: Charles, thank you for making time, and I know you got a lot going on. It's apparent to the audience how much you got going on just by, you know, talking a bit about what you do. But I think that our time together was fruitful. I got new insight in things that are going on with you in your life and obviously a profound gratitude for our relationship in general. But thank you for coming through and being a part of *In Proximity*.

Charles D. King: Thank you for having me. And thanks for letting me join you on this podcast and for everything that you, Zinzi, and Sev are building with *Proximity*, and it was my honor to be here.

Ryan Coogler: Amazing. Amazing. Charles, I love you bro. Thank you for this, man.

Charles D. King: Love you, too, Coog.

[*In Proximity* Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: *In Proximity* is a production of *Proximity Media*. If you like the show, be sure to follow, rate, and review it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app, and tell your friends and loved ones to do the same. Seriously, you can do that right now. Send a link to someone who you think might really like this conversation.

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The show is produced by me, Paola Mardo. Executive Producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, Sev Ohanian, and me. Our theme song and additional music is composed by Ludwig Göransson. Ken Nana is our Sound Designer and Mix Engineer. Polina Cherezova is our Production Assistant. She is also our Audio Editor for this episode.

Special thanks to the whole *Proximity Media* team and to you for listening to *In Proximity*. Meet you back here next week.

[END VOICEOVER]

[MUSIC STOPS]

Ryan Coogler: Oh, is it time?

Charles D. King: I'll make—I'll make the extra time if we need it.

Ryan Coogler: I actually—I actually got a hard out with Charles.

Charles D. King: Great. So it's on you then—

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah.

Charles D. King:—because you building a company. You busy!

Ryan Coogler: Nah.

Charles D. King: Yes!