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Anthony Anderson Biography

August 15, 1970 • Augusta, Maine

Actor, writer, producer



Anderson, Anthony.

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With his boyish face and gap-toothed smile, and weighing over 270 pounds, Anthony Anderson is not a typical Hollywood leading man. In fact, for most of his career he has played second banana in such films as *Big Momma's House* (2000), *Barbershop* (2002), and *Kangaroo Jack* (2003). In March of 2003, however, Anderson signed a deal with the Warner Brothers Network to write, produce, and star in his own TV sitcom, *All About the Andersons*. And in 2004 he finally came into his own, appearing in at least four major movies. In fact, most moviegoers couldn't turn around without seeing Anderson grinning down from the screen. In an interview with Anderson on the *Filmcritic* Web site, Sean O'Connell remarked, "Few could argue with the fact that Anderson is the hardest working young talent in show business."

(Born into the business

Anthony Anderson was born on August 15, 1970, in Augusta, Maine, but was raised in Compton, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. His mother, Dora, was a movie extra, so young Anthony literally grew up on film sets. By the age of five, Anderson followed in his mother's footsteps and began appearing in television commercials. He showed such promise as an actor that he attended a Los Angeles performing arts high school, where he won an award given by the Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO), a program sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The annual award recognizes students in grades nine through twelve "who exemplify scholastic and cultural excellence."

Anderson won the ACT-SO award for a monologue, or short speech, which he performed from the play *The Great White Hope* (1968), written by American playwright Howard Sackler (1929–1982). The play is based on the life of Jack Johnson (1878–1946), the first African American heavyweight-boxing

champion. Jackson was portrayed by James Earl Jones (1931–) both on the stage and in the film version of the play. Anderson considers Jones to be his favorite actor, and credits him as his inspiration. "I really respect and admire his work," Anderson commented to O'Connell. "It's why I do what I do."

"This is what my energy was created to do—entertain, to have an effect on people's lives with my work."

As a result of his talent, Anderson earned a drama scholarship to attend Howard University, a prestigious African American college in Washington, D.C. It was also a result of Anderson's determination and drive, since life could have been quite different for a child raised in Compton. The suburb is known for its gang violence, and frequently makes the news for incidents of drive-by shootings and drug arrests. In a 2002 interview appearing on the *Femail* magazine Web site, Anderson commented, "You were either made a ward of the court, on parole, or dead at 21 if you grew up in Compton, Los Angeles."

(Stepping stones

After graduating from Howard, Anderson paid the usual dues of an actor, taking such bit parts as that of Alley Hood #2 in the 1996 television movie *Alien Avengers*. His work on *Avengers* helped land him his first major job, as a regular on the NBC morning teen sitcom *Hang Time*. From 1996 to 1998 Anderson played the role of Teddy Brodis, a bumbling high school basketball player. He was in his mid-twenties at the time, but with his baby face and knack for comedy, no one would have guessed it. During his *Hang Time* days, Anderson also popped up on other television shows, including *In the House*, which starred rapper LL Cool J (1968–), and on *NYPD Blue*.

In 1999 Anderson made the leap to the big screen in the 1930s prison comedy *Life*, playing opposite established stars Eddie Murphy (1961–) and Martin Lawrence (1965–). That same year he also appeared in director Barry Levinson's 1950s coming-of-age movie *Liberty Heights*. In 2000 Anderson had what many consider to be his breakthrough year, when he played opposite Martin Lawrence in the hit comedy *Big Momma's House*. He also appeared in *Me, Myself, and Irene*, which starred Jim Carrey (1962–), one of Hollywood's biggest box office draws. Critics claimed it was a forgettable Carrey film, but Anderson, as Carrey's son, Jamaal, drew rave reviews.

Not all of Anderson's movies were comedies. Some were dramas, like *Kingdom Come* (2001). Some were action films such as *Romeo Must Die* (2000) and *Cradle 2 the Grave* (2003), both starring Jet Li (1963–), and *Exit Wounds* (2001), a Steven Seagal (1951–) thriller. In these films Anderson usually provided the comic relief, and he was consistently singled out over the stars with bigger billing. For example, in *Cradle*, many reviewers felt that as Tommy, the wisecracking henchman, Anderson's acting stole the show.

(Anthony Anderson at the Movies

Life (1999).

Liberty Heights (1999).

Urban Legends: Final Cut (2000).

Romeo Must Die (2000).

Me, Myself, and Irene (2000).

Big Momma's House (2000).

3 Strikes (2000).

Two Can Play at That Game (2001).

See Spot Run (2001).

Kingdom Come (2001).

Exit Wounds (2001).

Barbershop (2002).

Scary Movie 3 (2003).

Malibu's Most Wanted (2003).

Kangaroo Jack (2003).

Cradle 2 the Grave (2003).

My Baby's Daddy (2004).

Agent Cody Banks 2: Destination London (2004).

Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle (2004).

All American Game (2004).

King's Ransom (2005).

(All about Anthony

Anderson was on a career roll, starring in at least four movies each year, beginning in 2000. The exception was 2002, when his only on-screen performance was in *Barbershop*. He also continued to do guest spots on television programs, including *Ally McBeal* and *My Wife and Kids*. It seemed that Anderson was everywhere and could do anything, but he was not yet a household name. In 2003 all that changed. Anderson had a blockbuster hit with the film *Kangaroo Jack*, and then bounced back to the small screen in a big way to write, produce, and star in his own television sitcom.

For several years Anderson had been toying with the idea of writing a television script. In March of 2003 he finally pitched his idea to Warner Brothers (WB) executives, and they loved it. Mike Clements, a WB senior vice president of development, told Leslie Ryan of *Television Week* that Anderson "is such an enthusiastic and energetic guy that when he was telling us these stories, well, we literally hadn't laughed like that in a really long time."

Clements also commented that the stories were so outrageous they had to be true. And, in fact, they are. *All About the Andersons* is about a struggling actor (played by Anderson) who, along with his young son, moves back home to live with his parents. Anderson based the idea on a period in his own life when he moved back home after graduating from college. Still jobless, he just sat around the house eating. Eventually he drove his parents crazy. His stepfather was so determined to get Anderson out of the

house that he put a padlock on the refrigerator, took out all the phone jacks and installed a pay phone, and bought a coin-operated washer and dryer so that Anderson was forced to pay in order to wash his clothes.

Anderson knew these things were a bit abnormal, but he also knew they were funny. "I realized my family was funny, because nobody ever wanted to leave our house," he explained in *People*. After his show debuted in the fall of 2003, TV viewers were given a glimpse into Anderson's early life, and they agreed with him: his family was hilarious. Critics, however, wrote mixed reviews. In particular, some felt that the relationship between Anderson's character and his on-screen father, played by veteran actor John Amos (1941–), was sometimes a bit harsh for a family comedy. In general, though, Anderson received applause for his acting and most agreed that *All About the Andersons* showed great potential. However, the show was cancelled in April of 2004.

(A long way from Compton

In 2004 Anderson continued juggling his time between TV and film. He costarred in several movies, including *Agent Cody Banks 2* with teen actor Frankie Muniz (1985–). In *Agent Cody* he played Derek, the wisecracking handler of the young secret agent. He also finished work on *King's Ransom*, the first movie in which Anderson took top billing. It seemed that the big man with the big potential was finally coming into his own.

What are his future plans? Although he admitted in *People* that "comedy is second nature for me," Anderson has also noted that he is eager to take on more dramatic roles. He also plans to balance out his movie choices by appearing in some movies that are family friendly and some that are more edgy. He explained to Julia Roman on the *Latino Review Web* site, "It's good making films that my family can sit back and enjoy." Anderson and his wife, Alvina, who was his college sweetheart, have two children, Kyra and Nathan.

Anderson also has plans to act on the stage, and hopes one day to do some stand-up comedy. The multitalented actor has come a long way from Compton, and there seems to be no stopping him. As busy as he is, Anderson frequently takes time out to visit his old school and talk to kids about what they can accomplish. As reported on the *Femail Web* site, he has urged young people to "set your seights on more than what you see around you, see beyond." Better than the message is Anderson himself, who is living proof that big dreams can become a reality.



Anthony Anderson in movie still from Agent Cody Banks 2 (2004).

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(For More Information

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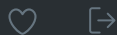
Tweets

 by @LechMazur**Lech Mazur**

@LechMazur

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And for the record, I'm against unjustified zoning restrictions that increase housing costs in cities. Then you get people asking for rent control, which makes matters worse.



4m

**Lech Mazur**

@LechMazur

Doesn't Coronavirus put into question the widely held assumption that dense, walkable cities are better than the suburbs? I think it's fine to acknowledge that

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