

# **RASCAL ON THE RUN**

**NOVEL BY  
HOWARD TATE SCOTT**

**SCREENPLAY BY  
JONI RODGERS**

# LOGLINE

A Georgia defense attorney is stuck with a reheated cold case when his alcoholic father goes AWOL. With the clock ticking on his enigmatic client, he rummages old evidence and his boyhood memories to close the case and make peace with the difficult legacy of his dying father.

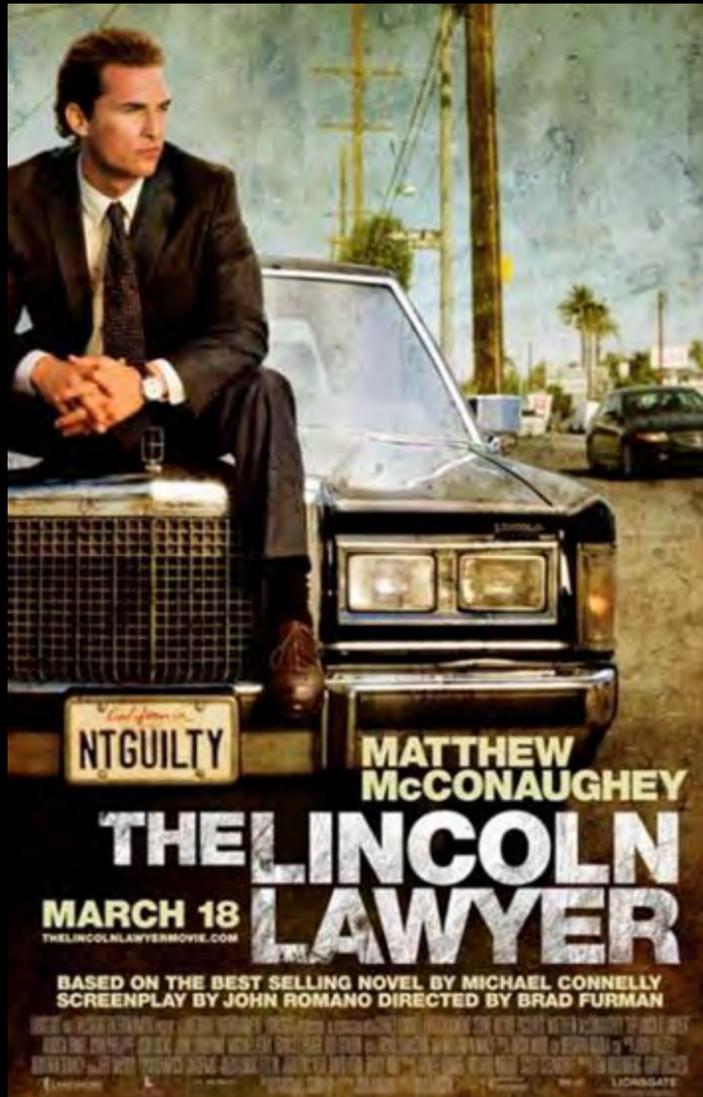


# FORMAT

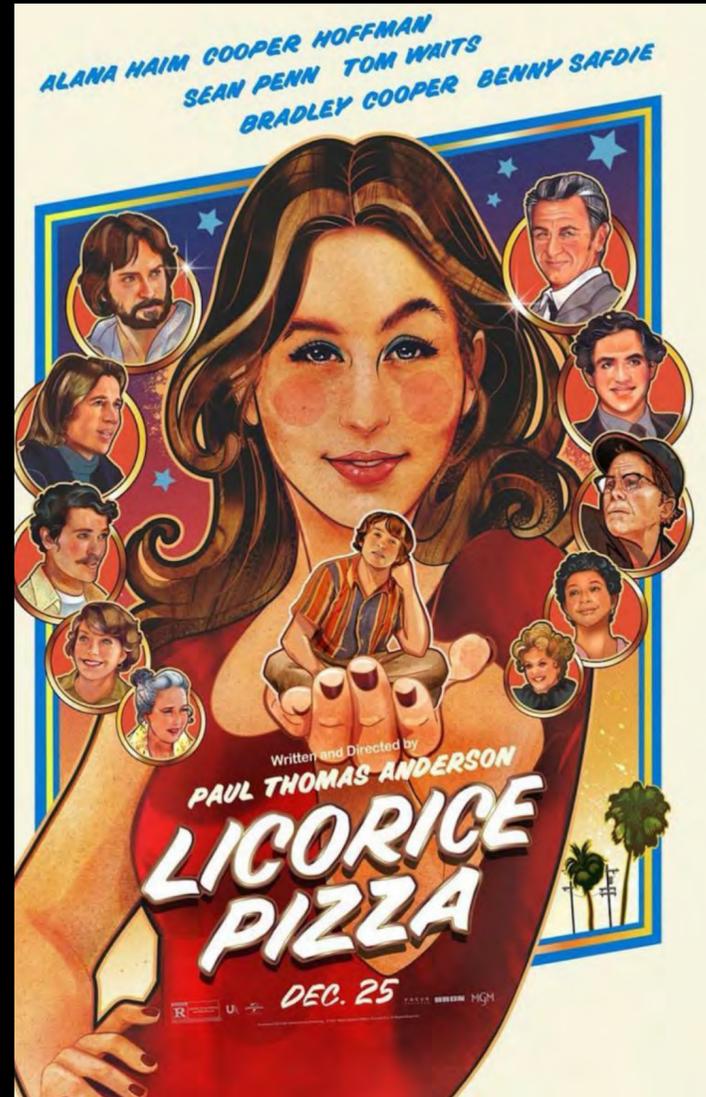
- Feature Film
- Legal Suspense
- Run Time: 110 minutes
- Setting: Athens, GA
- Period: 1963 / 1988
- Novel and screenplay are available for option
- All rights owned solely by author Howard Tate Scott



“This vivid, sure-voiced page-turner is a compelling murder mystery and so much more.”  
- Ann Vanderhoof, author of *The Spice Necklace*



Legal Suspense



Coming of Age



Racial Tension



Dysfunctional Family



# THE STORY

# ACT I

Athens, GA 1988 :: Attorney August “Critter” Stillwell dreams of leaving the law practice he shares with his alcoholic father, legal legend Guy Stillwell. A cold case reheats when Guy’s old pal, Newt Ballerini, is apprehended after 25 years on the lam. Guy takes *Rascal*, Newt’s dilapidated motor yacht, as collateral for the retainer and promptly skips town. Now it’s Critter’s problem.

Newt fled in 1963, charged with hiring a local Klansman, Lucky Winfield, to kill businessman Brink Pollard. In 1963, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is in theaters, and Guy is a wily, hard-drinking spin on the Atticus Finch ideal. At the time, a defense attorney is awarded the murder weapon if he gets a client off, and Guy’s trophy case is jam packed. Critter, 15, works as a de facto law clerk/chauffeur for Guy and his partner King Hodges. Egged on by Critter’s mom Teddi Stillwell, an outspoken crusader for integration, Stillwell & Hodges stir controversy by taking on a Black female law clerk, Poppy Sterling.

Arrested for Pollard’s murder, Lucky calls Guy, claiming he’s innocent, but a Dixie Mafia fixer shows up and takes over the case. A few days later, Lucky turns up dead under the juke joint owned by Poppy’s mother, Othella Sterling, who tells Guy she killed Lucky with a cast-iron skillet and wants to plead self-defense. Guy walks the crime scene with a frustratingly evasive Poppy, forming a strategy but fearing the worst outcome for Othella.



## ACT II

In 1988, Judge Olympia (Poppy) Sterling presides at Newt's arraignment, warning Critter and DA Red Redstone about frivolous motions and Billy Bob BS. Newt insists he was framed, but Red's evidence is rock solid. Critter's little sister Tatum, a scary smart PI, digs deeper into the KKK/Dixie Mafia connection. Aspiring jury consultant Rory tends bar at Tony's, a legal community watering hole. Critter is unconvinced by her theories but smitten with Rory herself.

In 1963, Tony's was segregated, so Poppy was not allowed to go there like all the other law clerks. During Othella's trial, Guy is masterful on cross, but the judge's Klan-friendly rulings tip things in the DA's favor. King woozily sits second chair until the day he finds his wife in bed with a young Black man. Before Critter can stop him, King whips out a gun, grazing the guy's ass. Guy works a backroom deal to keep the ugly situation out of court, but young Critter gets a vivid lesson in not-so-color-blind justice and Guy is left alone at the defense table.

In 1988, King is 25 years sober, a 12-Step evangelist who worries about Critter following in Guy's self-destructive footsteps. Critter is miserable, wrestling with the impossible case and longing for Rory who friend-zones him because of his escalating drinking.



## CLIMAX

Newt's trial looms. New evidence leads Critter to elderly Othella, who tells him she framed Lucky to stop his predatory Klan activity; that's why he came after her that night. So if Lucky didn't kill Pollard, Newt didn't hire him. And Poppy knows it. Critter begs Poppy to recuse herself, and the ensuing throw-down is interrupted by a call from Teddi; Guy is back, and he's dying.

During his father's final hours, Critter relives Guy's dramatic closing argument at Othella's trial in 1963. Guy is brilliant, the anti-Atticus. Othella is found not guilty. When young Critter drives her and Poppy home, they find the juke joint in flames.

At Guy's wake in 1988, Critter reconnects with Rory, but then he gets drunk and ends up spending the night in jail with Newt. Newt confesses to Critter that he framed *himself* to escape his dangerously unhappy marriage to Fernanda, the daughter of a Dixie Mafia kingpin. Knowing that Pollard's murder was a Dixie Mafia hit hung on Lucky, Newt made a deal with the crooked DA, provided fake evidence of his own guilt, and with Guy's help, slipped away aboard *Rascal*.

The night before jury selection, Critter agonizes, drinking alone on his houseboat; proving Newt's innocence means implicating Guy, Teddi, and Poppy, who all knew Lucky's confession was bogus. Dixie Mafia goons break in, beat the crap out of Critter, and take him to Fernanda, who tells Critter he should take a dive in court and come to work for her father. When he declines, she has him thrown down a dry well on a horse farm. Terrified, Critter endures a foul-smelling dark night of the soul, promising himself and God that if he lives, he'll never drink again.



## ACT III

Critter is set free with a warning about what needs to happen in court. In a panic, he goes to Rory, who advises him to buy time with voir dire and ask the question “How did you know?” Connecting the final dots, Critter instigates chaos that forces Poppy to declare a mistrial. When the courtroom is clear, he asks Newt: “How did you know it was a Dixie Mafia hit?” Newt admits the true price of his freedom: he killed Pollard.

Critter advises Newt to roll over on Fernanda’s father and spend his final years in witness protection in prison, which leaves Critter with *Rascal*—Guy’s plan to give Critter his freedom. Critter persuades Rory to sail with him, promising “there’ll be no booze on the boat.”

Closing the law office, Critter realizes it was Poppy who killed Lucky. The only evidence is the murder weapon: the cast iron skillet locked in Guy’s trophy case since 1963. Torn, Critter reflects on his experience of justice in contrast to Poppy’s.

In 1963, it’s tradition for a law clerk passing the bar to take the partners to lunch at Tony’s. Poppy, Guy, and Critter meet with resistance at the segregated café, but they make a stand together.

Out at sea 25 years later, Critter knows there’s still a long way to go. With the voices of Othella, Atticus Finch, and Guy echoing in his memory, Critter hurls the cast iron skillet into the deep.



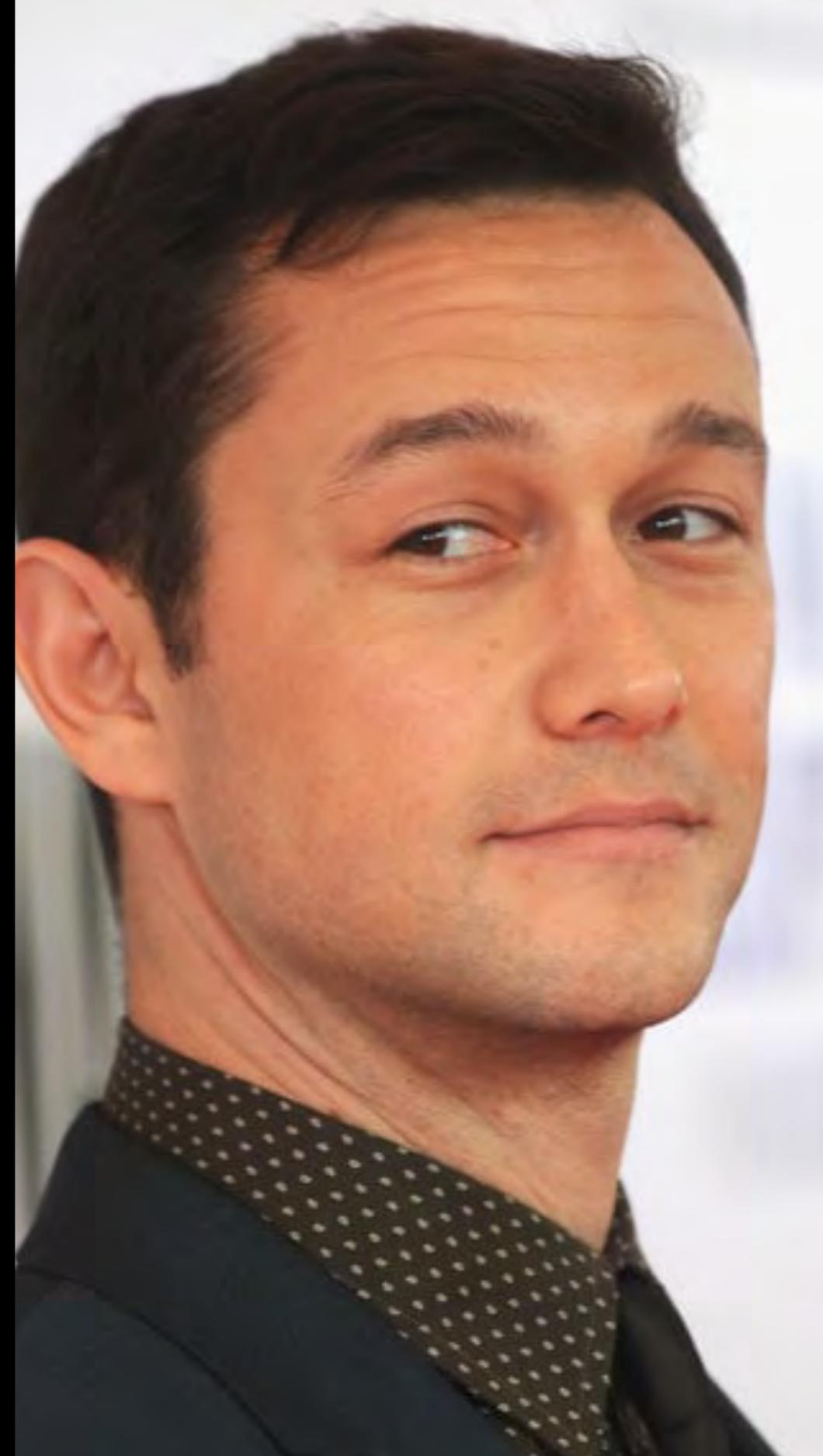


# CRITTER

If the *Licorice Pizza* kid grew up and went to law school

1963 :: At 15, August “Critter” Stillwell is ambitious and canny beyond his years, working as a de facto law clerk, chauffeur, and drunk-sitter at Stillwell & Hodges. He is fiercely protective of his family and worships his dad. The mental gymnastics it takes to justify Guy’s drinking and philandering prepare Critter for a career defending the indefensible.

1988 :: At 40, Critter is the classic adult child of an alcoholic, taking the world and the wellbeing of people he loves on his shoulders. He dreams of a life beyond his law practice but can’t set down the caseload or the emotional burden Guy has saddled him with. Guy’s death leaves a void that Critter can fill only by choosing his own path and facing the truth about his iconic father.



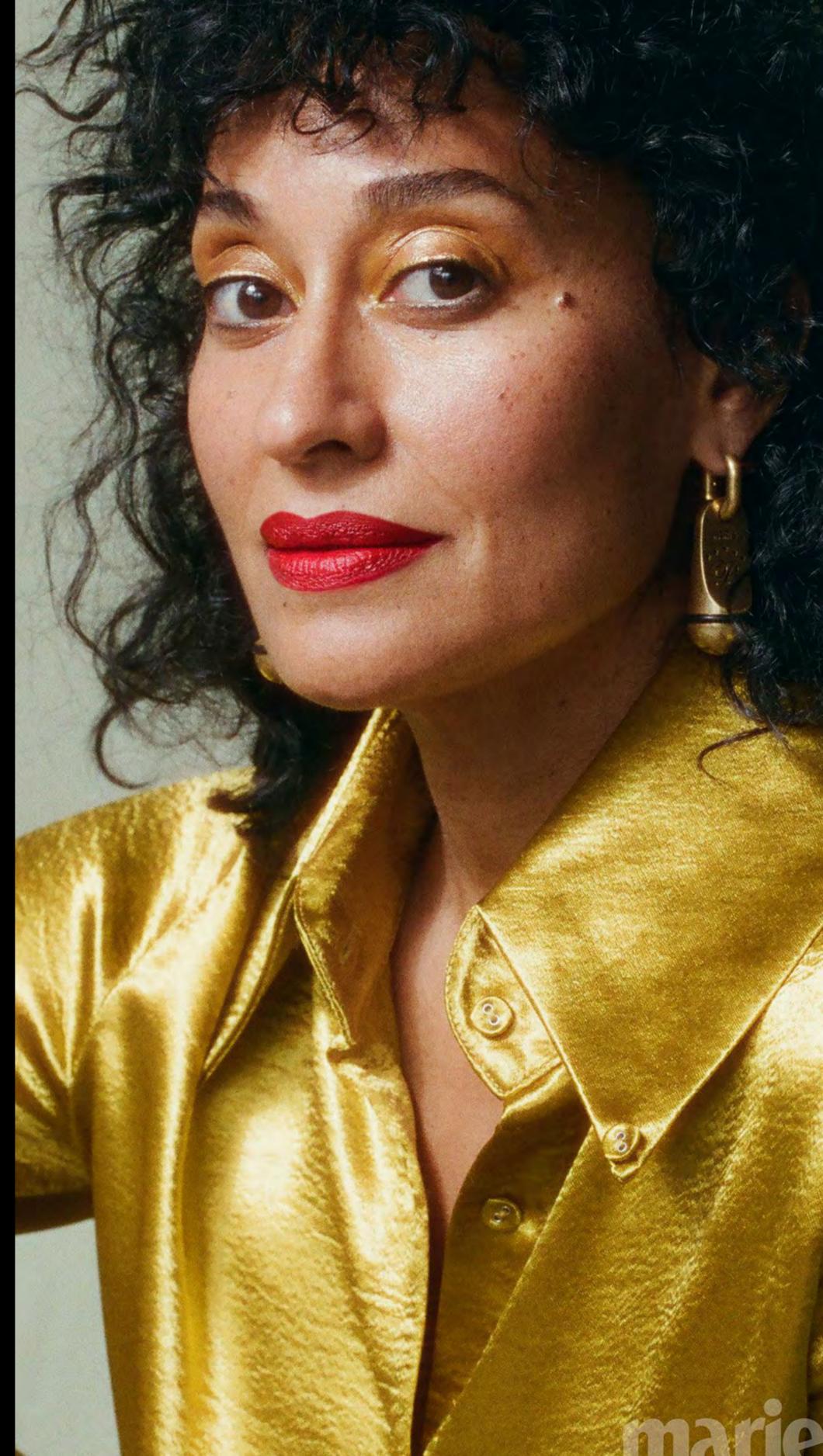


# POPPY

**will change the world by changing the law.**

1963 :: At 21, Olympia “Poppy” Sterling is the first woman of color to serve as a law clerk in Athens. She’s biracial, alienated from her Black neighbors by the disturbing rumor that Lucky Winfield, a predatory Klansman, is her father. Through the tumultuous summer, she’s devoted to Othella’s defense and laser-focused on slaying the bar.

1988 :: At 46, Poppy’s a circuit court judge known for progressive ideals and tightly run trials. There’s law and there’s justice; Poppy knows the difference and doesn’t play games like the good ol’ boys. Her long friendship with Critter has a sibling rivalry vibe, which makes him wonder until Poppy reveals Othella’s well-kept secret: Poppy’s father is King Hodges, and she’s not impressed by his effort to “do the right thing.” The *Poppy killed Lucky* plot bomb reveals her spine of steel, then and now.



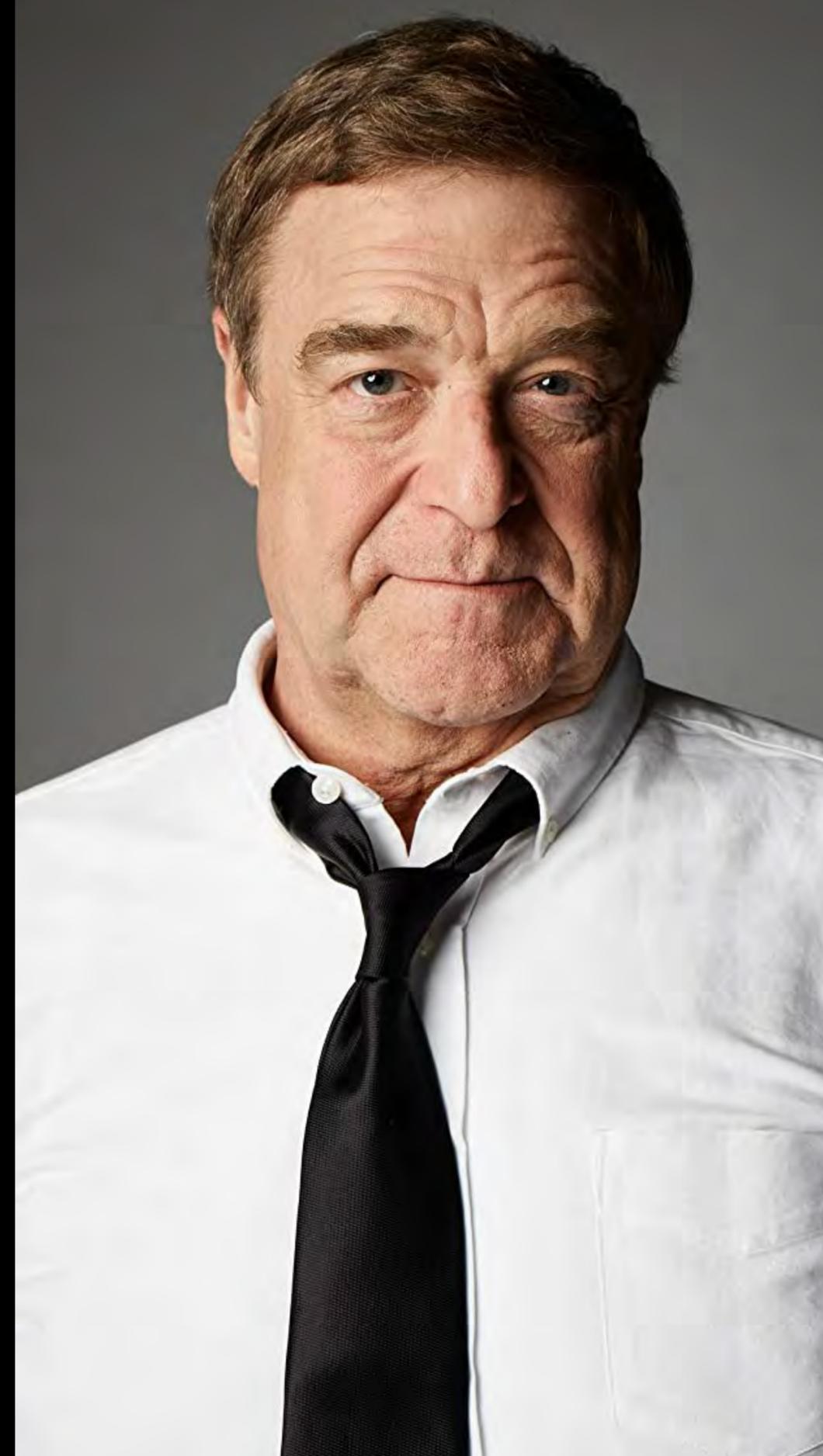


# GUY

## If Atticus Finch was a raging alcoholic

1963 :: In his prime, Guy Stillwell is a local legend, a masterful litigator with a flair for courtroom theatrics. He came from nothing and built his kingdom representing clients other lawyers won't touch: people of low means, people of color, people who've fallen through cracks in the system. His anti-heroic sense of right and wrong is secondary to his knack for wheeling and dealing. He loves Teddi and shares her progressive ideals but is deeply entrenched in the old school.

1988 :: As an old man, even as he succumbs to the ravages of alcoholism, Guy looms large in Critter's life as both hero and villain. A rascal to the very end.





## < OTHELLA

1963 :: Poppy's mother Othella Sterling owns a juke joint on the edge of Athens, a successful business built on sheer ferocity, sharp wit, and a spark of devious genius. Standing trial for murder, Othella doesn't blink. She's determined to take the fall for Poppy, whether or not Poppy wants it that way.

1988 :: Slipping into dementia, elderly Othella is taking her secrets to the grave and messing with Critter's head on her way out.

## TEDDI >

1963 :: Critter's classy, progressive mom Theodora Stillwell is a mover/shaker using her old money and social standing to gently but firmly push Athens toward integration. Defying debutante stereotypes, Teddi went to law school but got pregnant and dropped out—a lingering regret that drives her political ambition. Teddi and Othella's long friendship is an unshakable alliance. They're willing to risk everything to make sure Poppy has the opportunities they never had.





## < RORY

1988 :: Rory's masters degree in social anthropology makes her the dream bartender for a legal community watering hole. A patient but skeptical listener, she's quick with the zingers when Critter hits on her. This job is a placeholder, not a passion, as Rory rebuilds her life in the wake of an abusive relationship. Rory provides the key to Critter's case without compromising self-determined boundaries that may or may not allow for love.

## TATUM >

1963 :: Critter's baby sister Tatum is a precocious first grader with a Wednesday Adams edge.

1988 :: The tech renaissance is happening, and Tate is there for it. A computer savvy PI, she provides key evidence and sibling pushback, determined to drag Critter out of their mutually chafing past into a future beyond their father's influence.





## < NEWT

1988 :: Newt Ballerini's been on the run for 25 years, sailing around on a dilapidated motor yacht, evading the law and his wife—a Dixie Mafia princess—until *Unsolved Mysteries* plasters his cold case all over primetime. Newt's as amiable and easygoing as he was in the '60s. But now Critter sees an unmistakable edge of ruthless self-preservation, which forces Critter to ask himself how far he's willing to go to break free.

## KING >

1963 :: King is a great trial lawyer, even when he's roaring drunk—which he always is. But his jovial antics are a lot less funny when he exposes the law firm to financial ruin.

1988 :: Sober for 25 years, King is a 12-step evangelist and folksy oracle who gives Critter the old school perspective on Newt's case. King's made peace with his past. Almost. Poppy—King's daughter “on the outside”—calls out his privileged definition of accountability.



## THEMES

With good humor and a well-tuned sense of irony, *Rascal on the Run* sweeps away the sentimental cobwebs of *To Kill a Mockingbird* with a grittier take on the legacy of racism, the reality of privilege, and the limitations of well-intentioned wokeness. Rejecting the “white savior” narrative, it’s a story about intersectional alliance and unstoppable resilience of good people working around a broken social code, then and now. Guy’s dramatic closing argument in 1963 and Critter’s grand final gesture in 1988 are not about rescuing someone else; they do it for themselves and inadvertently offer a template for redemption.



*Greetings from*

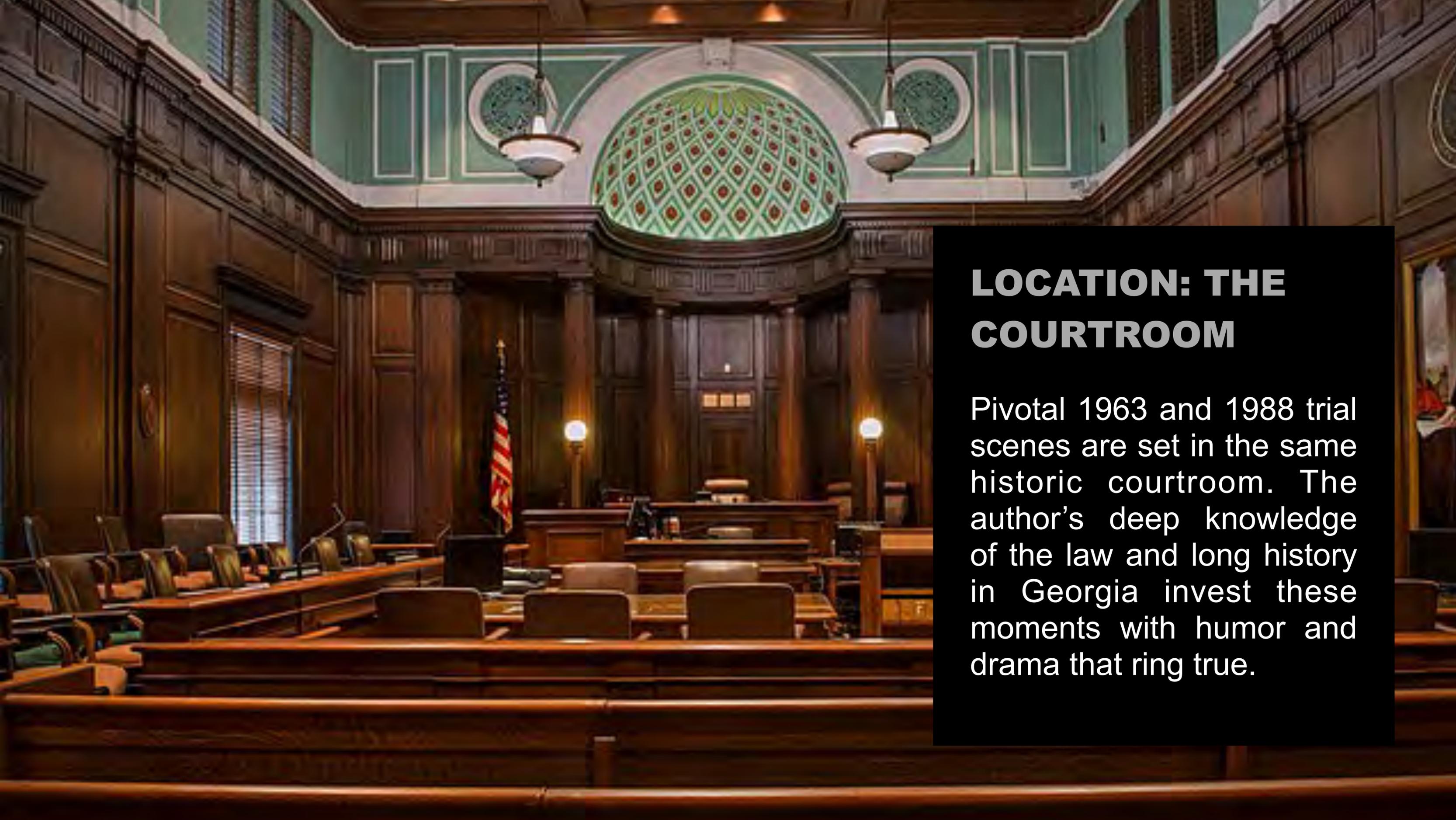
**ATHENS**

**GEORGIA**

## **LOCATION: ATHENS, GA**

Birthplace of R.E.M. and the B52s, Athens is home to historic architecture, quaint streets, and Athena Studios, a 350,000 square foot state-of-the-art production facility on 110 acres. Drawn by generous tax credits, more than 400 productions filmed in Georgia in 2022, including *A Man in Full* (Netflix), *Fear the Walking Dead* (AMC), *The Other Black Girl* (Hulu), and *Manhunt* (AppleTV+).





## **LOCATION: THE COURTROOM**

Pivotal 1963 and 1988 trial scenes are set in the same historic courtroom. The author's deep knowledge of the law and long history in Georgia invest these moments with humor and drama that ring true.

## **LOCATION: TONY'S CAFÉ**

In 1963 and 1988, Tony's is the legal community watering hole, a hub for Socratic dialogue, back room plea deals, and lawyerly shenanigans. In 1963, Tony's is the focus of Poppy's determination to see an end to segregation. In 1988, a bartender at Tony's gives Critter the key to solving his no-win case—and turns out to be his best hope for happiness.



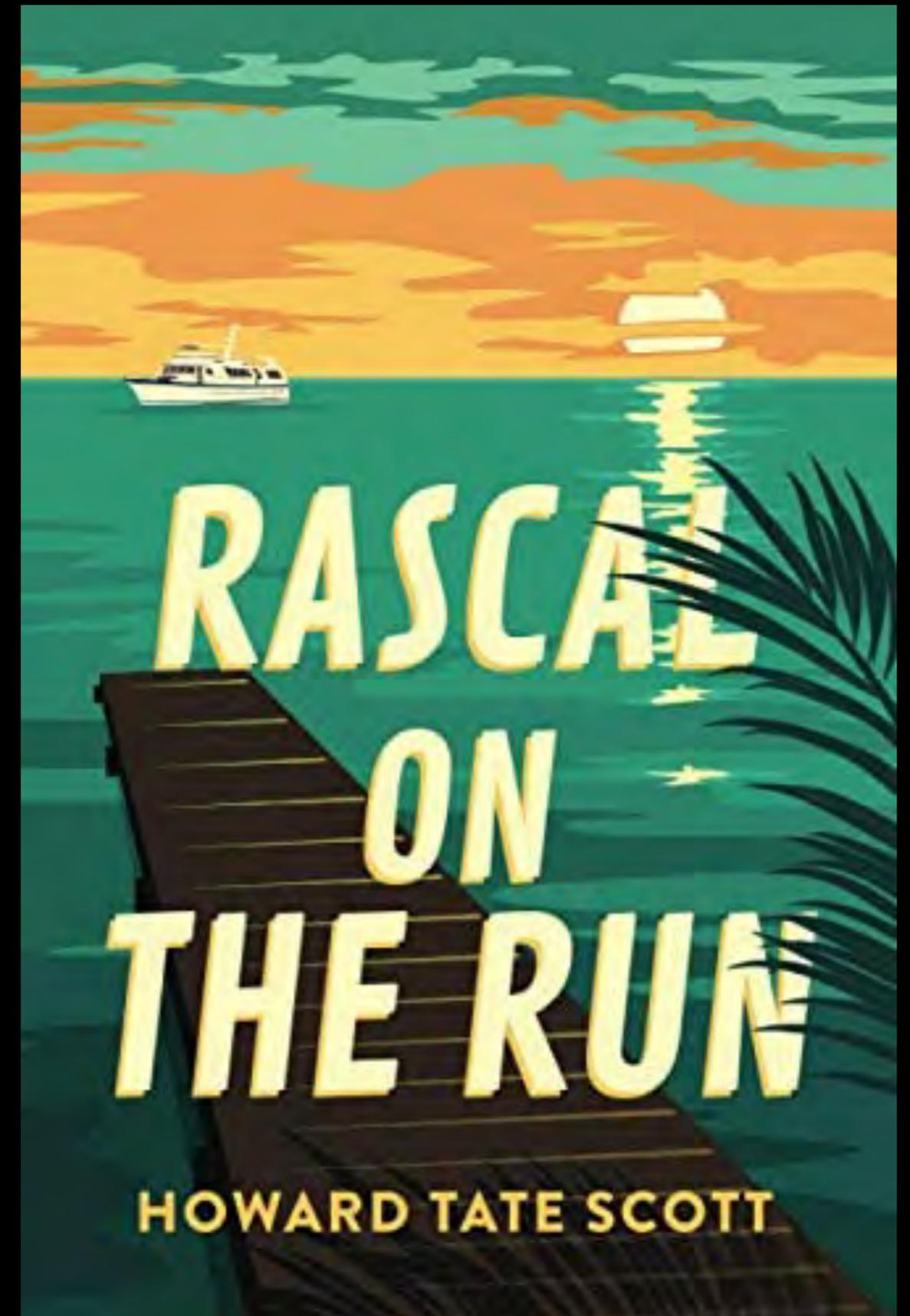
## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“The genial style of Rick Bragg meets the pathos of Pat Conroy in this touching, often laugh-out-loud tale brimming with wry language and knee-slapping metaphors. The novel could have stayed in the shallows of humor and succeeded, but the story becomes noteworthy, even enduring, because it delves deeper.

A correction of Harper Lee’s view of the South instead of an homage, *Rascal on the Run* persistently questions how a person, community, and region can recover from a haunted past. It’s in these explorations and the answers offered that it shines. Fans of Southern stories and historical fiction are sure to love this insightful, unforgettable debut.”

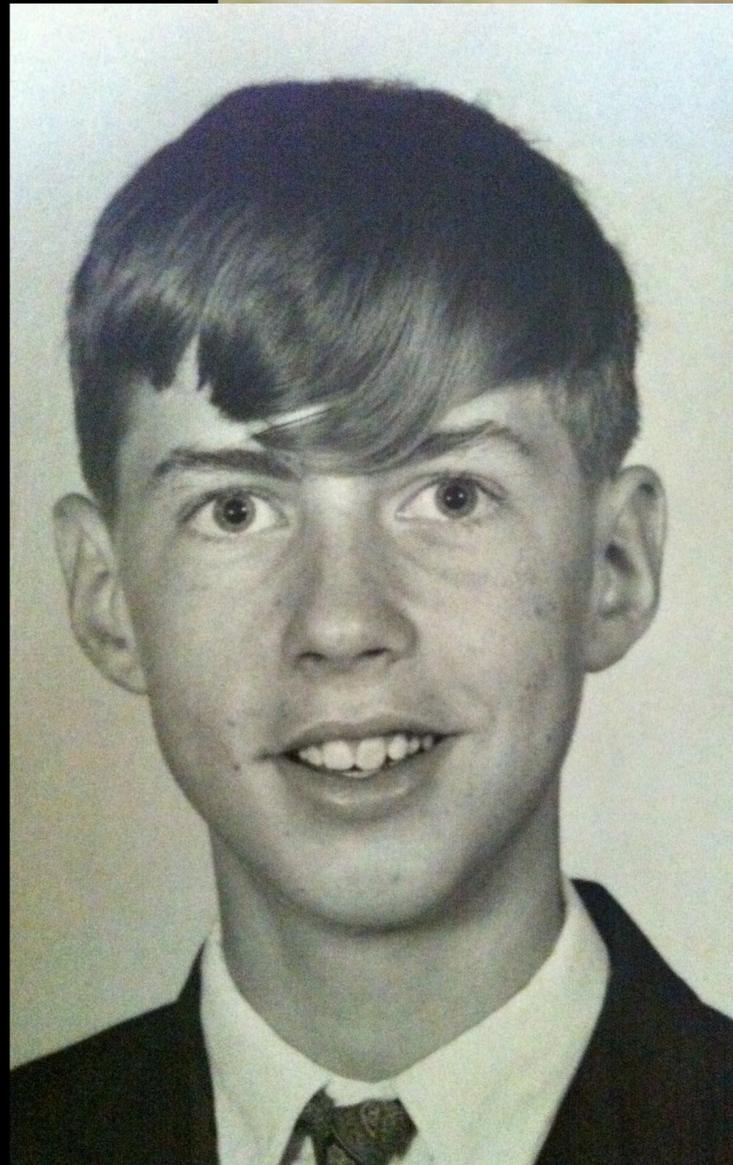
*BLUE INK REVIEWS*

Published in 2021 by HTS Productions, *Rascal on the Run* is available in hardcover, trade paperback, ebook, and audiobook.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author, adventurer, and entrepreneur Howard Tate Scott spends much of his time on the high seas of the Atlantic and Caribbean aboard *Caprico*, the motor yacht that inspired *Rascal*. Like Critter, Howard grew up in the shadow of his father, a hard-drinking legal legend in Athens, GA. After practicing law for 30 years, Howard began writing fiction inspired by the wrenching, hilarious, and buck-wild cases he and his father litigated. A lover of live music, nature, books, and historic preservation, Howard is a founding partner of the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, the world's only chartered blues cruise.



## ABOUT THE WRITER

Joni Rodgers is an EGOT ghostwriter, having collaborated with Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony winners. As a ghost, she specializes in celebrity memoirs and novel-to-screenplay/screenplay-to-novel adaptations. As the author of several novels and a bestselling memoir of her own, Joni tells compelling stories about the joys and foibles of human nature. She lives on the beach in the Pacific Northwest.

“Joni Rodgers is a pure storyteller. She writes with a wit, lyricism, humanity, and joy that make her books impossible to put down.”

AARON SORKIN

“Rodgers lives, loves, and writes without a safety net.”

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

“This talented author brings pen and ink people to flesh and blood fulfillment.”

SOUTHERN LIVING





**THANK YOU**

for your time and interest.

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