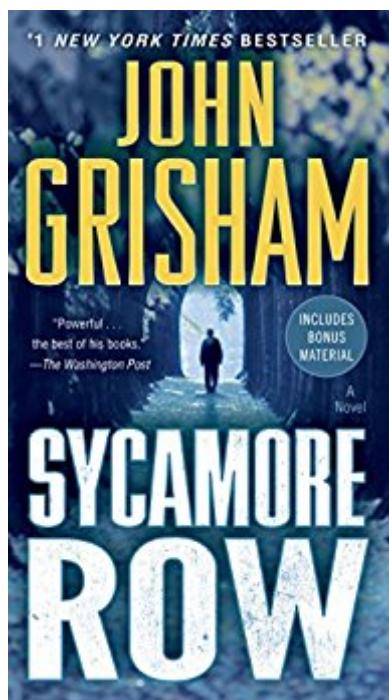


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# Sycamore Row: A Novel (Jake Brigance Book 2)



## Synopsis

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Don't miss an original essay by John Grisham in the back of the book. John Grisham takes you back to where it all began. One of the most popular novels of our time, *A Time to Kill* established John Grisham as the master of the legal thriller. Now we return to Ford County as Jake Brigance finds himself embroiled in a fiercely controversial trial that exposes a tortured history of racial tension. Seth Hubbard is a wealthy man dying of lung cancer. He trusts no one. Before he hangs himself from a sycamore tree, Hubbard leaves a new, handwritten will. It is an act that drags his adult children, his black maid, and Jake into a conflict as riveting and dramatic as the murder trial that made Brigance one of Ford County's most notorious citizens, just three years earlier. The second will raises many more questions than it answers. Why would Hubbard leave nearly all of his fortune to his maid? Had chemotherapy and painkillers affected his ability to think clearly? And what does it all have to do with a piece of land once known as Sycamore Row? Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader's Circle for author chats and more. Praise for *Sycamore Row* • The Washington Post • "Powerful . . . immensely readable . . . the best of his books." • USA Today • "One of [Grisham's] finest . . . Sycamore Row is a true literary event." • The New York Times Book Review From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

I have always loved John Grisham's books. I can remember when I was introduced to his writing when I read A Time To Kill. I read ALL of the time - I inhale books. I have been disappointed in the last few Grisham books. In fact, I was quite irritated to read his baseball ones. I felt he had abandoned his best writing : lawyer, courtrooms, small Southern towns. Well, I just finished Sycamore Row. Oh, my! It's a wonderful book. I loved how I could not guess how the ending would be. I will have to say Grisham is back 100%. This book will shoot to the number one spot on the best sellers list!

The beginning of 'A Time to Kill' opens with one of the cruelest act that could ever be committed on a fellow human being. That scene will forever be seared in the minds of anyone who has read it. The ending of 'Sycamore Row' will evoke that exact same emotion. I digress but let me quickly throw this in since I'll get this question five thousand times a day until Christmas. "Is this book really a sequel to 'A Time to Kill'? It depends on what your definition of "sequel" is. If to you a sequel is a book that includes the same characters as the previous book, then yes. If to you a sequel is a book that continues on the same storyline as the previous book, then no. There are references to Carl Lee and "that verdict" but not enough (in my opinion) to call it a continuation of the storyline in 'A Time to Kill'. I know that's splitting hairs and to be honest... it really doesn't matter. 'Sycamore Row' is a GRAND SLAM in the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, last game of the Series, off a pitcher that, up to that point, has thrown a perfect game. If you think I'm exaggerating I would love to chat with you after you've read this book. Seriously. I'm an unapologetic fan of Grisham and while I think he is a magnificent writer, I'm under no illusion that everything he writes is gold. (\*Ahem\*, 'The Last Juror', 'The Racketeer'). But there are the gold ones like 'The Broker', 'The Confession', 'A Time To Kill'...And now 'Sycamore Row'. This story centers around a colorful old man named of Seth Hubbard. Seth is old. Seth is dying. Seth is rich. Unfortunately the rich part is the one that draws the attention of everyone. Even if said rich is only speculative, and not yet proven. Seth is a shrewd yet successful business man with a plan that, on the surface, looks like he's lost his damn mind. He kills

himself, leaves behind a new will that cuts out his children and bequeaths 90% of his estate to the Black maid. A white man in the Deep South leaving the bulk of his rumored riches to his Black hired help... yeah, can't see why that would be a problem. Although the will is explicit in its direction and clear in its execution, you know it'll be challenged. Why? Because there hasn't yet been a law written that is above the scrutiny of the mighty and great wisdom of the all-knowing attorney. And so begins the circus. We do have the pleasure of witnessing the antics of Harry Rex and beloved Lucien once again. These guys. I swear, there isn't enough alcohol in Ireland to sate those two. Despite their quest to become the reincarnation of 'Bartles & James', Ford County would be one hell of a boring place without them. And Jake would be lost. Ah yes Jake. Life hasn't gone exactly as our brave lawyer hoped. Of course he did try a double murder case for only \$900, so I'm not sure what he expected from good ole' Ford County. He's brought into this battle courtesy a mailed letter from Mr. Hubbard himself. Now contesting a will does seem dull and boring, and I'm sure in real life it is. But in the hands of John Grisham, following all this mess is pure joy. Lettie Lang is the Black housekeeper who is the heir to this (potential) windfall. And because of such the leeches and distant family have all shown up to "help her through this rough and difficult time". Not only that, but she doesn't heed the advice of Jake and surrounds herself with one of the most jerk-off character I've had the pleasure of reading in a Grisham novel. I'll only say he's a lawyer from Memphis, TN and I was literally laughing out loud at this clown. Think of it like this... what if Al Sharpton had an entourage? A good writer tells you about the interaction between characters. A great writer makes you feel the interaction between the characters. I wasn't sure if I liked Judge Atlee or not. At times I was cheering, other times I was found myself using words that I specifically invented for that lawyer clown from Memphis. I wanted to hug Dell and ask her if she's make me some shrimp-n-grits while bumping that ample derriere against me. My respect for Sheriff Ozzie grew and my distain for Seth's "family" only grew. And by "grew" I mean "like cancer". The last time I felt such hatred and bile for a person(s) was Travis Boyette in 'The Confession'. And unless your father's name is Lucifer, you will too. Remember how I said a great writer will make you feel the interaction between the characters? With the loathing I had for this family, I felt that interaction between those characters and ME! His offspring are probably the only people who could make a suicide (by hanging no less) feel like a bloody escape. Now... I'm going to warn you that there are two parts in this book that will make you pause. (Don't worry no spoilers here.). The first is an incident that involves Lettie Lang's husband. The father of the family he affects comes to speak to Jake and that conversation... if your eyes don't get a little bit wet then you have a heart of pure concrete. The second part I alluded to earlier is the ending. 'A Time to Kill' has one of the most disturbing openings you'll read. 'Sycamore Row' has

one of the most disturbing endings. The more you read the faster your heart beats. And the faster your heart beats the more you read. As you read this book you wonder "what does this have to do with that?", "what is the significance of that?" And then it hits you... right in the gut. Hard. 'Sycamore Row' is history. 'Sycamore Row' is symbolic. 'Sycamore Row' is a place of pain. 'Sycamore Row' is a place of beauty. 'Sycamore Row' is one of the best books I've read this year.\*Personal note: John Grisham has had a few give-a-ways and contests with this new book of his. I entered but I didn't win. (No surprise there if you're familiar with my luck) You know what I wish John would do? I wish he would have a contest and then the winner(s) of the contest get to come to his house, sit on the porch, drink sweet (very sweet) iced tea, snack on boiled peanuts, and just listen to John tell stories. I've said this before but John has that old school, old soul, old traditional Southern way of telling stories. And it translates perfectly to paper. Google Hangouts and FB question and answer sessions are great ways to connect us with our favorite writers. But imagine... just imagine a weekend in Mississippi immersed in the Southern culture, shooting the breeze on a slow Saturday afternoon with one of the most engaging storytellers writing today. THAT would be something. OK enough mindless meanderings from a book lover, back to your regularly scheduled life. And reading.

John Grisham's original work was outstanding. He then fell off with less than impressive work - almost like he was rushing to meet a deadline. Case in point, *The Associate* which ended horribly leaving loose ends all over the place (and I've successfully forgotten the other failures). But with *Sycamore Row*, it seems Grisham's got his mojo back. It holds your attention by not revealing what 8 year old Ancil saw until the very end and the question that's the elephant in the room all through the book is why Hubbard left all that money to Lettie. About half to 3/4 into the book you start to figure out the why he left it. But not until the end do you realize the significant of why he hung himself. All these things become significant in the end and the book wraps up well. Basically couldn't put it down and am looking forward to JG's next novel. Hope it's not a bust!

Seth Hubbard writes a holographic will cutting out his ungrateful, unsupportive children and grandchildren from any inheritance and leaves 90% of his estate to his black housekeeper Lettie, after which he plans his suicide by hanging; but not before nominating one of the town's young lawyers, Jake Brigance, to handle his will and estate. Seth has studied the legality of such a will and knows that it is defensible, but he expects his adult children to put up a fuss, and believes that Jake can ensure that his last wishes are respected. It seems a rather simple plot, until the full value of Seth's 20+million estate is determined, and the various parties line up with their own lawyers, trying

to prove that Seth lacked testamentary capacity, that we was overwhelmed by the pain drugs he was taking for cancer, that his housekeeper unfairly influenced him. Jake gets plenty of support from his former disbarred partner and from other shady characters, many of whom seem to have a drinking problem. Racism is alive and well in the small town of Clanton, Mississippi, and one of Jake's primary concerns is seating an impartial jury with a reasonable balance of blacks and whites, to listen to the case of the largest inheritance ever known in those parts. As usual in a Grisham novel, there is plenty of legal wrangling, side deals, greedy lawyers, corruptible witnesses, etc. There are numerous sub-plots revolving around Jake's prior cases, Lettie's no-good husband and family hangers-on, the strong-minded judge assigned to the case, and the search for Jake's long-lost brother. Just when the plot seemed to be predictable, a big twist is interjected, with a surprising conclusion. Though not quite as engrossing as some of the early Grisham novels, "Sycamore Row" is an entertaining page-turner right up until the end.

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