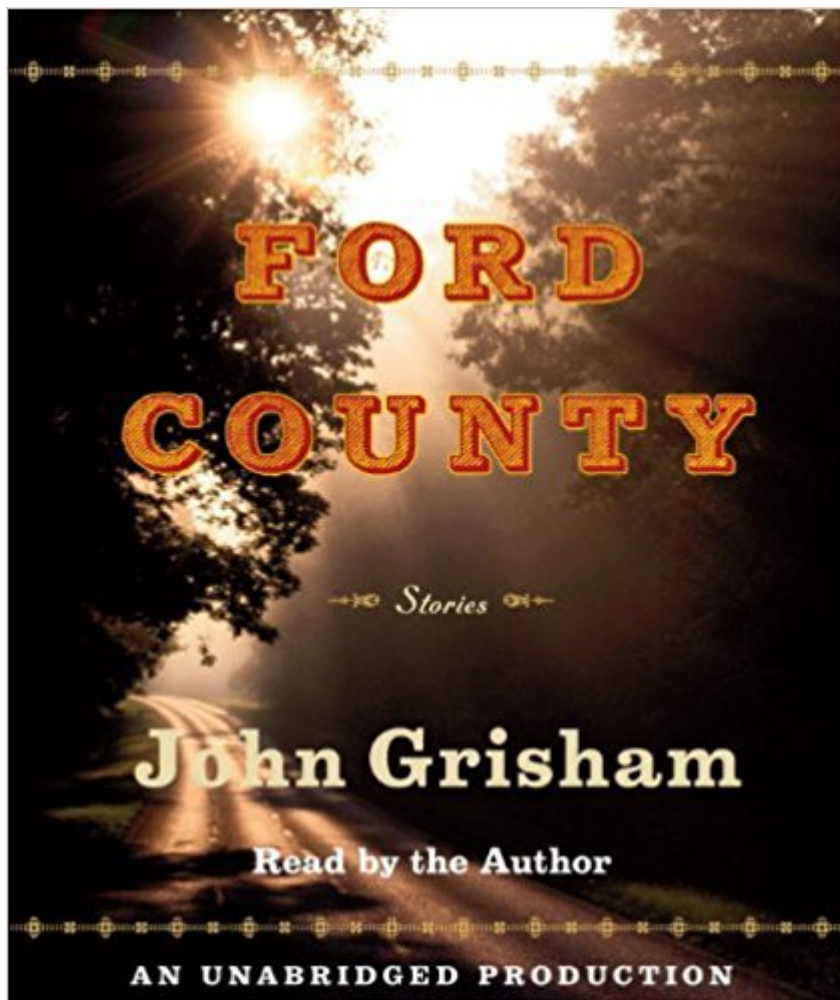


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Ford County: Stories



Synopsis

In his first collection of short stories John Grisham takes us back to Ford County, Mississippi, the setting of his first novel, *A Time to Kill*. Wheelchair-bound Inez Graney and her two older sons, Leon and Butch, take a bizarre road trip through the Mississippi Delta to visit the youngest Graney brother, Raymond, who's been locked away on death row for eleven years. It could well be their last visit. Mack Stafford, a hard-drinking and low-grossing run-of-the-mill divorce lawyer gets a miracle phone call with a completely unexpected offer to settle some old, forgotten cases for more money than he has ever seen. Mack is suddenly bored with the law, fed up with his wife and his life, and makes drastic plans to finally escape. Quiet, dull Sidney, a data collector for an insurance company, perfects his blackjack skills in hopes of bringing down the casino empire of Clanton's most ambitious hustler, Bobby Carl Leach, who, among other crimes, has stolen Sidney's wife. Three good ol' boys from rural Ford County begin a journey to the big city of Memphis to give blood to a grievously injured friend. However, they are unable to drive past a beer store as the trip takes longer and longer. The journey comes to an abrupt end when they make a fateful stop at a Memphis strip club. The Quiet Haven Retirement Home is the final stop for the elderly of Clanton. It's a sad, languid place with little controversy, until Gilbert arrives. Posing as a lowly paid bedpan boy, he is in reality a brilliant stalker with an uncanny ability to sniff out the assets of those "seniors" he professes to love. One of the hazards of litigating against people in a small town is that one day, long after the trial, you will probably come face-to-face with someone you've beaten in a lawsuit. Lawyer Stanley Wade bumps into an old adversary, a man with a long memory, and the encounter becomes a violent ordeal. Clanton is rocked with the rumor that the gay son of a prominent family has finally come home, to die. Of AIDS. Fear permeates the town as gossip runs unabated. But in Lowtown, the colored section of Clanton, the young man finds a soul mate in his final days. Featuring a cast of characters you'll never forget, these stories bring Ford County to vivid and colorful life. Often hilarious, frequently moving, and always entertaining, this collection makes it abundantly clear why John Grisham is our most popular storyteller. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Exclusive: Pat Conroy Reviews Ford County Pat Conroy is most recently the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *South of Broad*, as well as eight previous books: *The Boo*, *The Water Is Wide*, *The Great Santini*, *The Lords of Discipline*, *The Prince of Tides*, *Beach Music*, *My Losing Season*, and *The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes of My Life*. He lives on Fripp Island, South Carolina. Read his exclusive guest review of *Ford County*: In the mail last week, I received a copy of John Grisham's latest fiction. It surprised me that the book was comprised of seven short stories. From the time I first began publishing at Doubleday, they have always made sure that I received a copy of a Grisham book long before it went on sale in the bookstores. He has written 22 books, and I've read them all as soon as they were available in crisp review copies. I have loved the Grisham books for the same reason that I love the works of John Irving, Richard Russo, or Anne Rivers Siddons: I get hooked by an early page, and pure habit forces me to read until I am issued my walking papers and can return to my normal life. These writers are all wish-bringers who cast spells with the bright enchantment of their stories, and the power of story has retained its glamour and necessity for me. I've always liked it when Grisham took a sabbatical from his impressive fiction to romp in the field of sports or non-fiction. John surprised me by entering the ring of danger that the short story represents for all writers. In the world of writing, the poets come first as they finger the language like worry beads and wonder where their next meal is coming from. The art of the short story writer is one of economy, concision, and the genius of trying to craft a whole world inside a mason jar. The modern world punishes the short story writer with inattention. The literary reviews keep the short story alive and finger-popping in America today, while the *New Yorker* tries to strangle the form with its bare hands. But a great short story is a source of joy, and the reading of Chekhov, de Maupassant, Flannery O'Connor and others offer pleasures unmatched by any other form. Since I'm incapable of writing the short story form, I wanted to see how Grisham fared, knowing the critics would sharpen their swords against him no matter how accomplished his stories might be. *Ford County* is the best writing that John

Grisham has ever done. One of the many things I've admired about his books is his intimate chronicle of Mississippi life in the generations following William Faulkner and Eudora Welty. Grisham writes equally well about the plantation south, the black south, and white-cracker south. Over the years he has used the legal system as an instrument to illuminate the world of mansions and sharecroppers and everything in between as he not only defined Mississippi but also staked it out as his home fictional territory. His short stories were a surprise to me. All of them are very good; three of them, I believe, are great. Grisham has always had a rare gift for breaking hearts when he invokes unforgettable images of the broken, hopeless South. Some of the stories are hilarious, and Grisham's gift of humor has never found a showcase like this. One of these stories should find its way into the anthologies of the best short stories of 2009. It might not happen, but I for one think the stories in Ford County are that damned good.--Pat Conroy (Photo © David G. Spielman) --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Returning to the setting of his first novel, *A Time to Kill*, longtime bestseller Grisham presents seven short stories about the residents of Ford County, Miss. Each story explores different themes-mourning, revenge, justice, acceptance, evolution-but all flirt with the legal profession, the staple of (former attorney) Grisham's oeuvre. Fans will be excited to settle back into Grisham's world, and these easily digestible stories don't disappoint, despite their brevity. Full of strong characters, simple but resonant plotlines, and charming Southern accents, this collection is solid throughout; though his literary aspirations may seem quaint, Grisham succeeds admirably in his crowd-pleasing craft while avoiding pat endings or oversimplifying (perhaps best exemplified in "Michael's Room," which finds a lawyer facing the consequences of successfully defending a doctor against a malpractice suit). As always, Grisham balances his lawyerly preoccupations with a deep respect for his undereducated and overlooked characters. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Not only a great collection of stories all set in Ford County, it is also a showcase of human follies, and in as few words as possible, I'll describe each one of them: Blood Drive - a very point-blank demonstration of the saying "boys will be boys". Fetching Raymond - it's true that your character will most likely take after your parents or the people who've raised you, but it's still up to oneself to set one's course in life. Fish Files - this one, along with Casino, are the stories that had the villains got away with it. Nothing much in terms of life lessons there, so to the young people who read this, just

remember karma. Casino - see Fish Files Michael's Room - taking revenge is better via an attack on the conscience. As well, maybe a little threat on the side, one that is not empty, would surely help. Quiet Haven - a bit in the category of Fish Files and Casino, only this story has the scheming con being able to help in some way while he carries out his mission. Funny Boy - shows how people, even those who preach to love one another, buckle down and pass on judgment like they were not sinners at all. I've always been hooked on Grisham, and I think I will remain to be.

This is a book of seven unrelated short stories; unrelated other than the characters are all residents of the same rural county in Mississippi. Some stories are better than others, but I dare say all will elicit emotions of one kind or another. And some will stay with you long after the story ends. The first story, "Blood Drive", is rather humorous. It's about three local yokels who hop in a pickup truck and head for the big city, ostensibly to help save the life of a buddy. What ensues is a tale that includes beer, strip clubs, jail, and worse. Several of the stories involve unsavory characters. "Fetching Raymond" is about Mrs. McBride and her three sons who all have long rap sheets. (Make that past tense for the son named Raymond) . "Fish Files" is about a small time bankruptcy and divorce attorney who answers the phone when his secretary is away from her desk. Quote: "He had never thought about the possibility that one call could so quickly and dramatically lead to his own divorce and bankruptcy." Sometimes crime pays. Sometimes it doesn't. "Michael's Room" is sure to elicit outrage while at the same time bring the reader to tears. It's about an attorney who makes a living defending incompetent doctors and their insurance companies against lawsuits. One evening, a quick trip to the grocery store to pick up a frozen pizza for dinner, leads to an encounter the attorney will never forget. He is forced to confront the reality of what he does for a living and how a victory for his client can mean devastation for the human beings on the losing side. One would have to have a stone heart to not be affected by this story. My favorite story, "Funny Boy" is the last story in the book. It's about a gay man with AIDS named Adrian Keane who comes home to Ford County to die. His family, prominent citizens of the county, fulfill their obligation to take care of Adrian by moving him in with Miss Emporia, one of their tenants living in a rental property they own on the bad side of town. Quote: The thought of a Keane living across the railroad tracks in the black section was hard to accept, but then it seemed logical that anyone with AIDS should not be allowed on the white side of town." This story deals with racism, homophobia, ignorance and fear, and mortality. The relationship between Adrian and Miss Emporia is very poignant, and the image of them sitting on the front porch will linger long after the story ends. I think the last two stories ("Michael's Room" and "Funny Guy") are worthy of 5 stars, but I give "Ford County" as a whole a strong 4 stars.

This is a great book. After you read the first couple of stories, you might feel like stopping, but don't. They're not as good as the ones nearer the end. Keep going, then you will find it difficult, after getting invested in the characters, as you do when you read a novel, to leave his well-developed characters before you are ready to. That's probably the worst of my criticism for this book. If you stick to it, you'll regret getting to the end of this collection. For it's the characters you will remember long after you finish reading this book, which I enjoyed much more than his last couple of novels. Here are the types of characters we loved in the earlier books. Characters you understand and relate too despite their faults and follies.

Excellent collection of short stories by Mr. Grisham. I noticed one of the short stories, Fetching Raymond, was from the book version. I would like to find the book versions of a few of the other short stories but a google of his books provided nothing. Maybe in the future. Certainly worth the read if you are a Grisham fan.

I enjoyed most of the stories. The way that John Grisham writes, I'm sure he could've came up with a way to write a full novel with some of them. The first story is probably the best and most humorous (these guys were bumbling idiots) I had read this story someplace before (I think it might've been a teaser at the end of one of his other books) I read it again (it was funny tale).

John Grisham continues to be one of the top three story tellers of our time. His character development pushes you right into the story line, right beside the characters. You are IN THE STORY. As always, can't wait for his next book.

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