

Black and White

Feature screenplay

Legal drama / ensemble relationship drama

Written by Ben Burgess Jr.

Key art and visual approach are proposals. No cast or production attachments are implied.



A story in one sentence

Competing for partnership, a Black attorney defending a rapper accused of four murders and a white attorney representing an accused rapist must confront the racial assumptions and moral compromises threatening their careers and interracial relationships.

Listing synopsis

Ben Turner and Bill O'Neil compete for advancement at Wayne, Rothstein, and Lincoln, a prestigious New York law firm. When two high-profile criminal cases arrive, the partners assign Ben to rapper Reginald 'Co-Kayne' Brown, accused of killing two civilians and two police officers. Bill must defend NBA player Johnny Alfieri against Sophia Winters's rape allegation. Strong results could bring partnership.

Both assignments expose fault lines outside the courtroom. Reggie questions Ben's identity and loyalty, while Ben's relationship with writer Becky Preston faces hostility from her wealthy parents and his friend Gabby. Bill, raised in Queensbridge, struggles to reconcile his professional ambition with his love for police sergeant Ebony Williams. Alfieri's behavior makes the moral cost of defending him impossible to ignore.

As family pressure, grief, and professional demands intensify, the attorneys discover how little they know about each other. Ben searches for evidence that can distinguish appearance from guilt. Bill faces a client whose entitlement threatens everything he values. Their rivalry becomes an examination of belonging, integrity, and whether the success they have pursued is worth the lives it asks them to compromise.

The story

Four people are killed near a New York nightclub: two civilians and police officers Ricardo Gomez and Kenneth Roberts. Sergeant Ebony Williams and her partner Rashida attempt to save the officers, but both die. Rapper Reginald 'Co-Kayne' Brown is arrested after being found with a gun and blood on his clothes. Meanwhile, NBA player Johnny Alfieri is accused of raping dancer Sophia Winters.

At Wayne, Rothstein, and Lincoln, attorneys Ben Turner and Bill O'Neil receive the cases as a possible route to partnership. Ben, the firm's Black associate, is assigned to Reggie in part because the client requested a Black lawyer. Bill receives Alfieri's case. The partners' casual racism and willingness to protect a profitable client are already evident. Ben suspects Bill's warmth toward the firm's minority employees is a performance. Bill, in turn, dismisses Ben as privileged and pretentious.

Reggie initially rejects Ben as insufficiently connected to his experience. He insists that he collided with the real killer outside the club, picked up the dropped gun, and then panicked when police arrived. Forensics link Reggie to the weapon, but also identify Kuwuan Mitchell, a gun dealer with a similar physical description. Ben struggles to make the account persuasive while Reggie challenges his beliefs about class, choice, and the way institutions use Black success.

Ben's home life adds another struggle for acceptance. His girlfriend Becky writes about interracial relationships and refuses to remove that element merely to secure a publishing deal. Her parents demean Ben, while Gabby, his longtime friend and former romantic interest, undermines Becky. Ben's cousin Simone helps Becky confront Gabby and his mother. His mother's resistance begins to soften. Becky eventually earns a three-book deal, but a visit to Ben's office reveals that he has kept their relationship out of his professional world.

The resolution

Bill's history complicates Ben's assumptions. He grew up poor in Queensbridge, cared for a mother with multiple sclerosis, and became close to Ebony and her twin brother Akeem. Akeem's death after police gunfire helped shape Bill's legal ambitions and Ebony's determination to change policing from within. In the present, Ebony is traumatized by her colleagues' deaths and preparing for promotion. Her attempt to help a teenage offender has painful consequences when he is arrested again for a serious assault. Morgan St. Clair's attention tests her relationship, but she rejects his sexual advance.

Alfieri admits to Bill that he raped Sophia. Bill nevertheless attacks her credibility in court, pursuing the career opportunity and financial security he believes will help his family. Ebony refuses to support that choice and leaves their home. Bill's mother dies, deepening his loss. When Alfieri threatens to subject Ebony to the same treatment, Bill punches him and is fired. Ben reaches out, and an honest conversation replaces their mutual contempt. Bill reconciles with Ebony and proposes. Alfieri later undermines his replacement attorney's defense through his own testimony and is convicted.

Ben proposes to Becky at her parents' party. Her father threatens to disown her and cut off her trust fund. Ben ends the relationship rather than make her choose, leaving both devastated. He rejects Gabby's attempt to become his rebound partner and continues fighting Reggie's case. At a diner across from the crime scene, he notices surveillance cameras. The footage shows another man committing the murders, then colliding with Reggie. The prosecution moves to dismiss, and all charges are dismissed with prejudice.

Despite Ben's success, the firm awards partnership to Mark Cruz. Ben resigns. Becky chooses to leave her parents and returns to him, accepting the loss of their financial support. Ben forms a new firm with Bill and Terrence. Gabby begins a relationship with Terrence, Ebony prepares for marriage and promotion, and Becky succeeds as a novelist and reveals her pregnancy. Simone reconnects with her sister Samantha and begins working at her studio. The final community food distribution brings the family together as Ben embraces his identity without seeking other people's validation.

People at the center

Ben Turner

A Black attorney whose prestigious education and success do not protect him from racism or judgments about his identity. Reggie's defense tests his assumptions and ambitions.

Becky Preston

Ben's partner, a columnist and aspiring novelist. She fights to preserve her writing, her relationship, and independence from her parents' financial control.

Reggie / Johnny Alfieri

Reggie is the rapper accused of four murders who challenges Ben's assumptions. Alfieri is the NBA client whose admission, entitlement, and threat force Bill's breaking point.

Bill O'Neil

A white attorney raised in Queensbridge. His desire to provide for his mother and Ebony draws him toward a case that violates the purpose he attached to law.

Ebony Williams

A police sergeant whose brother's death shaped her career. She faces trauma, an ethical failure at work, and Bill's defense of a man who admits rape.

Gabby / Terrence / Simone

Ben's circle carries further conflicts about belonging, jealousy, and love. Their concluding relationships and family connections extend the ensemble's resolution.

What the story examines

Race and the judgments attached to success. Class and competing ideas of authenticity. Professional ambition versus conscience. Interracial love under family and community pressure. Trust, self-definition, and the difference between institutional advancement and personal integrity. These are editorial interpretations of the screenplay, not factual claims about law or society.

Two criminal cases test rival attorneys' ambitions and the relationships around them. Their assumptions about each other give way to a shared need to choose what kind of lawyers and partners they want to become.

The world of the story

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New York law offices and courtrooms, precincts and public streets, Queensbridge childhood memories, affluent family homes, publishing offices, cafés, clubs, and community spaces. The story moves between two cases and multiple personal histories. Black and White is credited as an adaptation of Defining Moments.

This lookbook describes the supplied screenplay material. Proposed visual choices are labeled separately.



An approach to the image

Proposed visual approach: grounded ensemble drama with contrasting spaces rather than a simplistic visual division by race. Glass offices and formal courtrooms against lived-in apartments, family tables, and Queensbridge courtyards. Charcoal, ivory, and restrained brass. Surveillance footage functions as decisive evidence within the story. Build tension through faces and reactions, keeping depictions of sexual violence non-graphic in promotional materials.

How the story turns

Two cases and one advancement incentive establish the rivalry. Reggie's account confronts Ben with assumptions about guilt and identity. Alfieri's admission exposes Bill's compromises. Family conflict destabilizes Ben and Becky while Ebony refuses to support Bill's choices. Bill's firing creates the first real conversation between the men. Surveillance clears Reggie, but the firm denies Ben advancement. Their new firm and restored relationships resolve the story on terms they choose.

Ben Burgess Jr.

Ben Burgess Jr. is a novelist and screenwriter with a background as an NYPD detective. His published work includes *Mothers Vol. 1* and *A Father's Sacrifice: Daddy's Girl*. He previously published with Urban Renaissance/Kensington Publishing and has identified Legacy Books LLC as his publishing company.

His screenplay portfolio includes *Ball Is Life*, a basketball drama about a professional athlete grieving her father while reconsidering the family legacy that shaped her. *Black and White*, adapted from his novel *Defining Moments*, follows competing attorneys whose criminal cases expose pressures on their careers, relationships, and sense of identity. *Faces* follows a trusted teacher's concealed predatory behavior, his exposure, and the consequences for the people who believed in him.

These projects place personal relationships alongside professional roles, examining what people protect, what they conceal, and what their choices cost. Burgess brings experience in both prose fiction and screenwriting to stories concerned with Black family life, interracial relationships, responsibility, grief, and trust.