

## BOOKIT

## 'On American Soil,' big-screen bound

Paris Barclay to direct the tale of black soldiers wrongly convicted of lynching a prisoner.

**The book:**

'On American Soil: How Justice Became a Casualty of World War II' By Jack Hamann ( Algonquin Books)

**The buyer:**

Relevant Entertainment

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By JOSH GETLIN

*Los Angeles Times Staff Writer*

**The deal**

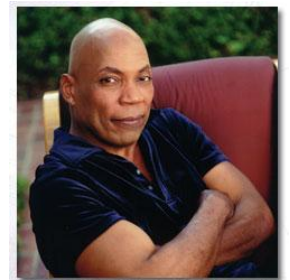
Relevant Entertainment options Jack Hamann's "On American Soil: How Justice Became a Casualty of World War II," the story of a long-forgotten case in which black U.S. soldiers were wrongly convicted of rioting and lynching an Italian prisoner of war.

**The players**

Michael Menchel ("Escape" with Katherine Heigl, forthcoming) producing. Paris Barclay (HBO's "In Treatment") directing and writing the screenplay, is represented by Mark Ross of Paradigm Agency. Hamann is represented by Michelle Tessler on literary rights and Lynn Pleshette on film rights.

**The back story**

For a journalist in the trenches and a producer chasing hot properties, it was the kind of story that comes along once in a lifetime: During World War II, 43 black soldiers were charged with lynching an Italian prisoner of war at a Seattle military base and participating in a riot after the murder. Twenty-eight were convicted and served time; all but one were dishonorably discharged. Yet it was a grotesque miscarriage of justice, as journalist Jack Hamann discovered. The lead prosecutor -- a young Leon Jaworski, years before Watergate -- had withheld key evidence. After "On American Soil" came out, Congress reopened the case, and the Army exonerated all those who were convicted.



**PROJECT:** Paris Barclay will write and direct.

"The question I kept getting was, 'Isn't this a movie?'" said Hamann, recalling a deluge of calls from Hollywood. Events moved quickly this year: He got a call from Menchel, who showed he was serious by persuading Barclay to write and direct. "This story was something you just couldn't imagine your government doing," Menchel said. "And I instantly thought of Paris -- he's a gifted filmmaker and TV writer and director, he's African American and he knew nothing about this, like most people."

For his part, Barclay was drawn to the history and challenge of making a distinctive film. "There's no black and white in this story, there's a little bit of darkness and light in everybody," the Emmy Award-winning director said. "I don't want to do a traditional courtroom drama," he said. "We want something that will truly open people's eyes, and I couldn't have asked for a better story to tell."