

THE BUTLER

by

Danny Strong

First Draft
03/17/10

Sony Pictures
Laura Ziskin Productions

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

Home video footage of an African-American HAND holding up a TUXEDO. We hear the elderly voice of its owner:

CECIL V.O.

This was the tux I wore on my first day workin' at the White House on September 8, 1957.

The video camera pans over to CECIL GAINS, 90, African-American. He is a kind, gentle soul wearing comfy sweatpants and a sweatshirt. We hear the male voice of the CAMERA MAN:

CAMERA MAN

Who was your favorite president?

Cecil smiles. He would never say who his favorite was.

CECIL

I liked them all very much.

CAMERA MAN

Even Nixon?

CECIL

I especially liked Mr. Nixon, and Mrs. Nixon was just lovely.

CAMERA MAN

What about LBJ?

Cecil starts to laugh.

CECIL

Well, he was...different, that's fo' sure, but a very special man.

CAMERA MAN

Did you ever meet a person you didn't like?

Cecil thinks about it, then his smile slowly drops.

CECIL

If the Devil wore a green bow in his hair, the good Lord woulda' named him Annabeth Lewis.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

ANNABETH LEWIS, 45, white, plump, wears a lacy dress and a green bow in her hair. She screams at a young Cecil, 8.

CHYRON: 1926

ANNABETH LEWIS

Every single field nigger on this farm wants to work inside the house! Why in the name of the lord and sweet baby Jesus should I take a puny little nigger like you?!

Terrified, little Cecil stares out at thirty black FIELD WORKERS picking cotton in the hot sun.

CECIL

My ma just passed and my pa been gone a long tim--

ANNABETH LEWIS

Boo hoo! Little nigger don't have no kin! Give me a real reason, boy!

Little Cecil shivers, terrified:

CECIL

Cuz...cuz...I think yo' green bow is awful nice, Mrs. Lewis.

Her face turns bright red in anger.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Annabeth is in the kitchen arranging chicken with lemon slices on an ornate gold tray. Cecil pays close attention.

ANNABETH WILLIAMS

When you're servin' you need to be as quiet as you can. I don't even want to hear you breathe.

A little scared, Cecil nods.

ANNABETH WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

The room should feel emptier when you're in it cuz no one likes a nigger. You understand me, boy?

Cecil nods with simplicity, he understands.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil stands behind Annabeth holding a bowl of potatoes that she scoops on to her HUSBAND and three pre-teen SON'S plates. Cecil holds his breathe, struggling to not make a peep.

Annabeth serves with a distinct elegance, very delicate. Cecil closely eyes her every move as he quickly sips a tiny breathe, then looks around to see if anyone noticed.

INT. TIN SHACK - NIGHT

Little Cecil lies awake in a tin shack filled with five other sleeping African-Americans of all ages. Everyone is crammed on the dirty floor, barely able to stretch their legs out.

Lying on his back, Cecil mimes pouring water. Practicing.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Cecil pours iced tea for Annabeth who reads Marie Curie's autobiography. He puts in two spoon fulls of sugar and stirs.

ANNABETH LEWIS

This is the one day I don't want
sugar. Make me another.

Disappointed, Cecil takes the glass and walks away.

CUT TO - LATER

Cecil walks back in with another iced tea.

ANNABETH LEWIS

Is there honey in it?

The look on his face clearly says no.

CUT TO - LATER

He walks back in and places another iced tea next to her.

ANNABETH LEWIS (CONT'D)

I've decided I don't want honey, I
want sugar after all.

CECIL

I brought it plain along with some
options, Mrs. Lewis.

He gestures in Annabeth's stylish manner toward the tray where there is a filled sugar bowl, a tiny jar of honey, lemon and lime slices, marble tea cakes and oatmeal cookies.

Annabeth forces herself not to smile as she gives Cecil a slight head bow. He is stunned at the first positive gesture.

ANNABETH LEWIS

There are no stirring spoo--

But Cecil is already stirring it with a silver stirring spoon. He sets it on a tray, then gives a slight head bow.

ANNABETH LEWIS (CONT'D)

Do you read, Cecil?

CECIL

No, Mrs. Lewis.

She goes back to her book, flicks her hand at him to leave.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Cecil walks into the family library filled with leather bound books. He opens a book and stares at the maze of words. We hear 90 year old Cecil in V.O.:

CECIL V.O.

I'd never seen anything so confusing in all my life.

INT. TIN SHACK - NIGHT

Cecil sits in the corner as everyone sleeps. Using a candle, he places his finger under each word, silently mouthing it.

CECIL V.O.

But after awhile I started to get it.

INT. BACK PORCH - LEWIS HOME - NIGHT

Cecil is now 15 years old. He sits on the back porch eating grungy meat and potatoes next to the family dog, reading a copy of 'Huckleberry Finn'. He looks up from the book, sad.

CECIL V.O.

Those books ended up being the worst thing to ever happen to me.

EXT. COTTON FIELDS - SUNSET

Cecil walks around the cotton field, he looks deeply unhappy.

CECIL V.O.
 Until I started readin', I always
 thought the world ended at the edge
 of the cotton farm.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Annabeth and Cecil serve the family. Annabeth sets fish on a plate and Cecil debones it like a pro. A well oiled duo.

CECIL V.O.
 I decided I wasn't gone read no mo'
 books.

Annabeth has a huge fake smile, a servant in her own family.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)
 But it was too late...

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Seated at her chair, Annabeth stares up at Cecil, can't believe what she's just heard. She looks almost sad.

ANNABETH LEWIS
 But...why?

CECIL
 I wanna see some of the things I
 been readin' about. I been savin'
 up for almost three year now.

Her face becomes very stoic. She goes back to her book.

ANNABETH LEWIS
 That's fine. Leave when you like.

She flicks him away. He stares at her, surprised and hurt that this is it after all these years. He walks to the door.

ANNABETH LEWIS (CONT'D)
 Cecil.

Cecil stops, looks back at her. There are tears in her eyes.

ANNABETH LEWIS (CONT'D)
 I wanted to be a paleontologist.

INT. FREIGHT TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

Cecil rides the rails in a freight train car with a knapsack. He stares at the barren landscape that flies by, enthralled.

Seated across from him are two grimy HOBOS, white. Excited by the ride, Cecil smiles at them...they don't smile back.

INT. FREIGHT TRAIN CAR - MORNING

Sunlight beams in on a sleeping Cecil, blood CAKES his head. He struggles to wake up as he feels the pain. He darts awake as he looks around - everything he has is gone.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Walking down a dirt road with a blood soaked rag to his head, he passes a charred abandoned factory with broken windows.

CECIL V.O.

I started to understand why they
were callin' it a Depression.

A PRISON TRUCK drives by full of BLACK PRISONERS, all chained together. Cecil stares at the truck, scared this will be him.

EXT. BREAD LINE - CHURCH - DAY

A line of ragged looking white men, women and kids, are lined up in a grimy bread line. They SCREAM and hiss at Cecil.

WHITE CROWD

Go away!/Leave here!/Die, nigger!

Little kids throw stones and rocks at him. Cecil runs away.

INT. TIN SHACK - DAY

A rainstorm hammers down upon Cecil who cradles himself in a small tin shack. Water drips on his head. Drip Drip Drip.

CECIL V.O.

I would dream I was cleaning gold
flatware...

He looks like he's slowly going mad. Drip Drip Drip.

EXT. COUNTRY TOWN - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Cecil stumbles in to a country town through pouring rain. He peers in a window of a closed country store, sees groceries.

CECIL V.O.
 ...and serving chicken au poivre
 from a silver tray.

Transformed into a depraved soul, he finds a large rock, picks it up to throw it through the window...

...but he suddenly STOPS as he sees a glow in the distance. He slowly walks through the rain toward the glowing light. The closer he gets, the more his eyes fill with fascination.

He walks right up to an ornate glass window at a beautiful Southern HOTEL. Through the window he sees...

Three BLACK MEN in elegant black tuxedos. They are placing gold forks next to china dishes in an opulent dining room.

INT. KITCHEN - HOTEL - DAY

Having cleaned up a touch, he is in the kitchen of the hotel. The HEAD BUTLER, black, 40's, glares at him with a meanness.

HEAD BUTLER
 So tell me, boy, why in the hell
 should I hire you!?

Cecil turns to him with a warm smile, completely at ease.

CECIL
 I have found that it is better to
 serve, than be served.

The Head Butler tries not to smile.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil is seated on a chair, still being filmed.

CAMERA MAN
 When did you end up in DC?

CECIL
 Ah, come on now. I got to start
 gettin' ready for tonight.

CAMERA MAN
 Just a few more questions.

Cecil sighs, resigned.

CECIL

I got to Washington DC about ten years later. I went there to enlist so I could fight in the war...

INT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - LOBBY - WASHINGTON DC - NIGHT

A WEALTHY COUPLE walks in to the grand lobby of the Hotel. Waiting for them with scotch on a silver tray is Cecil, now 25. He wears a black vest and tie, exudes class and grace.

CECIL V.O.

...but the army wasn't so interested in takin' negroes.

INT. WINE CELLAR - DAY

Cecil delicately pours red wine into a glass decanter, a lit candle under it to see the sediments more clearly.

CECIL V.O.

And the negroes they did take, they only used for cleanin' and servin'.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Cecil shakes a martini shaker with grace and style. He twists off the top and effortlessly pours the martini into a glass.

CECIL V.O.

But I wouldn't have minded.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Cecil hangs a guest's suit and shirt into the closet, then checks the buttons on the shirt, one at a time.

CECIL V.O.

I would've been happy servin' a Colonel escargot in France...

Discovering one of the buttons is loose, he pulls out a needle and thread from his pocket and begins to re-sew it.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

...or pouring a General jasmine tea in Tokyo.

Then, he hears CRYING in the next room. He peaks in and sees the shy maid, GLORIA, 22, black, crying on the floor.

CECIL

What's the matter, Gloria?

She holds up a white dress shirt covered in a red wine stain.

GLORIA

The glass slipped.

(Starts crying again)

I can't lose this job, Cecil.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil holds the shirt under the sink as he vigorously rubs a bar of soap over the stain. She watches him, impressed.

CECIL

There's magic in a simple bar of soap, but it only works if the water is real hot.

He holds it up, the stain is coming out. She smiles.

GLORIA

Everyone say you real kind.

CECIL

Ah, it ain't nothin'.

But she keeps smiling at him...

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Gloria stands in front of a PASTOR, wears a wedding dress.

GLORIA

I do.

CUT TO - CECIL. He is next to her, looks slightly terrified.

CECIL

I do.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - NIGHT

A wedding reception is being held in the basement. A jazz band plays as dozens of people dance, drink and celebrate.

CECIL V.O.
 I didn't have no kin folk there,
 but Gloria sho' made up for it.

Cecil walks around serving cocktails. Gloria hurries over and takes the tray. He shrugs, embarrassed, just can't help it.

She escorts him to the dance floor as the band plays a slow tune. They slow dance, foreheads touching, madly in love.

CECIL
 Should I bring out hors devours?

She shakes her head, no. Kisses him on the mouth.

INT. COLORED HOTEL - HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Cecil carries Gloria into their honeymoon suite, a dank room with dirty carpets. They look like they are in Heaven.

INT. COLORED HOTEL - HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

They lie in bed next to each other, cuddling. Gloria looks blissful, but Cecil seems pensive.

GLORIA
 What's wrong, baby doll?

CECIL
 I was just thinkin' about Annabeth Lewis.

GLORIA
 That mean ole cracker woman?

CECIL
 I feel so sad for her.
 (Turns to Gloria)
 She neve' had no one love her the way I'm gonna love you.

Gloria starts to beam.

CECIL (CONT'D)
 I'm gonna give you a house and a family and I'm gonna take care of us for the rest of our lives. Nothin' ever gonna tear my family apart. You hear me, honey bear?

GLORIA
 I hear you, baby doll.

INT. STAFF CHANGING ROOM - HOTEL - DAY

Cecil changes his clothes in the run down locker room. The HOTEL MANAGER, 50's, white, walks in. He looks concerned.

HOTEL MANAGER
Cecil, there's a problem.

CECIL
What is it?

HOTEL MANAGER
Gloria is in the hospital.

EXT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - DAY

Cecil stands outside the hotel trying to hail a taxi, but none will stop. Panicked, he sees the Wealthy Couple getting into a Bentley. An awkward look as they know he needs a ride.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Cecil runs down a street waving at cabs that won't stop. He sprints past a store with a 'WHITES ONLY' sign on it.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Cecil runs past the US Capitol Building.

EXT. SUPREME COURT - DAY

He runs past the Supreme Court of the United States.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

He hurries down the hallway of a dilapidated hospital, finds the door he's looking for. A young NURSE, black, stops him.

NURSE
You can't go in there. She needs rest.

CECIL
Please, I need to see her--

NURSE
I said ya can't go--

But he moves past her and hurries in to the room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Lying on a hospital bed in a room with four other PATIENTS is Gloria, she looks terrible, exhausted. Cecil hurries to her.

CECIL
You okay, honey bear?

GLORIA
Your son came early, baby doll.

Tears fill his eyes at the news.

CECIL
It's a boy?

She nods.

GLORIA
And he don't wait for no one.

INT. MATERNITY WARD - NIGHT

Cecil is in the hospital nursery holding his newborn baby BOY who cries with all the other newborns. Cecil is in love.

CECIL
I promise I'll never leave you,
Louis.

His son continues to cry.

CECIL (CONT'D)
Nothin' ever gonna tear us apart.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Gains house is packed with many NEIGHBORS, all African American, as Cecil walks around serving all of his friends fried chicken, biscuits and corn on the cob on a silver tray.

CECIL V.O.
Everything was real nice for a long
time.

Seated by himself in the corner is LOUIS, now 12 years old, a little chubby, he reads a comic book.

CECIL
You wanna join the group, Louis?

Cecil nods to the BOYS seated in the living room. Louis shrugs, 'not really'. Cecil gives him an understanding wink.

A fun neighbor, HOWARD, 40's, charismatic, grills the boys.

HOWARD

What do you want to be when you
grow up, Elroy?

A small boy in army fatigues, ELROY, 8, points at Cecil.

ELROY

I wanna work at a fancy hotel just
like Mr. Gains.

The room 'ahhhs' as Elroy's mom, GINA, heavy, smiles.

GINA

That's my boy.

HOWARD

What about you, Louis? You want to
work at a hotel like your dad?

The room turns to Louis who looks unsure, a touch lost.

LOUIS

I...I don't know.

There is a moment of silence, Cecil looks almost embarrassed.

HOWARD

That's alright, Louis, you take
your time.

Cecil smiles at Louis, but it's clear there's the slightest ounce of concern for his son who's a touch different.

INT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - DINING ROOM - DAY

Holding a tray of martinis, Cecil approaches a table of WEALTHY MEN. A man with CREW CUT, 40's, stern, searches his pocket for matches as he listens to a LOUD PATRON.

LOUD PATRON

The best decision that court ever
made was to slow the whole mess
down. Nigger boys in school with
white girls?! Hell, we'd have
another civil war!

He sets his scotch down close to the table's edge. Cecil glances at it, then notes how full the other glasses are.

LOUD PATRON (CONT'D)
Cecil, what do you think of nigger
kids in school with white folks?

All eyes turn to Cecil, the Crew Cut Man paying particular
attention as he keeps searching for matches.

CECIL
(Refined voice)
To be honest, Mr. Jenkins, I tend
not to be too concerned with
American or European politics.

The Crew Cut Man smiles, liked the answer.

LOUD PATRON
Nor should you, Cecil, they're all
criminals. Earl Warren should be
hanged. He's the dumb son-of-a-
bitch judge that said it was okay
to integrate the schools.

CECIL
I think Judge Warren is going to
find that quite a challenge.

LOUD PATRON
Damn, straight, Cecil!

He pats Cecil on the back, knocking the scotch off the table.
In one motion, Cecil CATCHES it, places it in on the table
and LIGHTS the Crew Cut Man's cigar with his other hand.

CECIL
More spirits, gentleman?

Puffing out smoke, the Crew Cut Man grins at Cecil.

CECIL V.O.
I didn't know it then...

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil stares forward, lost in thought.

CECIL
...but things were about to change.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Seated by himself reading a comic book, Louis notices a group
of kids huddled around something. He walks over to them.

LOUIS
What are ya all lookin' at?

A TEEN holds up a copy of Jet Magazine opened to a gruesome picture of a black teen boy's CORPSE with a mutilated face.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
Who's that?

TEEN
Emmet Till. Some crackers did this to 'em in Mississippi for talkin' to a white girl.

LOUIS
How old was he?

TEEN
Fourteen.

Louis can't help it, he starts to cry.

INT. CECIL'S CAR - DAY

Cecil drives Louis home from school in his Ford 2 door. Louis stares in silence at his lower class neighborhood of small, but lively storefronts - grocers, liquor stores, restaurants.

LOUIS
I'm sorry I got so upset at school.

CECIL
That magazine neve' shoulda published that picture. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Louis looks at his father.

LOUIS
Why did they kill him?

CECIL
Who?

LOUIS
Emmet Till. He didn't do nuthin'.

Cecil doesn't answer at first. Then -

CECIL
The law is different fo' colored folk than it is fo' white folk.
(MORE)

CECIL (CONT'D)

There's certain things that colored
folk can't do or say.

(Then)

Never get in trouble with the law,
Louis, and you'll be just fine.

Louis stares at him, uneasy with what his dad just told him.

INT. CHANGING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil is changing into his street clothes when the Hotel
Manager sticks his head into the room, he looks concerned.

HOTEL MANAGER

Are you in trouble with the law?

CECIL

No, sir.

HOTEL MANAGER

The Secret Service just called me
asking about you.

Cecil stares at him, baffled.

EXT. BLAIR HOUSE - DAY

Cecil walks up to the Blair House, a federal-style townhouse
that faces the WHITE HOUSE. He glances at the White House,
takes a breath, then walks into the Blair House.

INT. FREDDIE FALLOW'S OFFICE - BLAIR HOUSE - DAY

Cecil sits in a small office, finely furnished with turn of
the century antiques. He sits across from FREDDIE FALLOWS,
black, mid-50's, has the formality of English royalty.

FREDDIE

Are you political, Mr. Gains?

CECIL

No, sir.

FREDDIE

Good, we have no tolerance for
politics at the White House.

Slight beat.

CECIL

Forgive me for asking, but how did you find me?

FREDDIE

(Icy)

I didn't. You served RD Warner at the Excelsior Hotel a few years ago. He is the Chief Usher here which means he oversees operations for the entire House. Needless to say, you made quite an impression.

CECIL

A few years ago?

FREDDIE

Mr. Warner and myself make note of potential staff around town, but butler positions rarely open as most stay on for 30 years or more.

CECIL

I see. It was quite a surprise getting the call.

FREDDIE

It was a surprise for me as well. As the White House Maitre D', I normally hire the butlers.

Cecil immediately knows that Freddie doesn't want him.

CECIL

Forgive me for saying this, Mr. Fallows, but I certainly wouldn't want to be hired under circumstances that would make you uncomfortable.

FREDDIE

You wouldn't?

CECIL

Absolutely not. Your job must be immensely challenging, serving the President of the United States. You need butlers that you've hand picked, men to your liking that will fulfill your vision of a proper White House staff.

Cecil glances at a collection of crystal doves on his desk.

CECIL (CONT'D)
Are these baccarat?

Freddie looks surprised.

FREDDIE
Indeed.

CECIL
Waterford is pleasant, and the Irish certainly make a great whiskey, but I think the French have a distinct advantage when it comes to crystal.

Freddie stares at Cecil for a beat. Then:

FREDDIE
Would you care for a demitasse?

INT. GAINS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gloria, Louis, Gina and Elroy and several neighbors are all in the living room, waiting. Elroy is very excited, but Louis looks indifferent, reading a book. From upstairs they hear -

CECIL
Y'all ready?

They all shout 'yes' in unison. Cecil slowly walks down the stairs. They first see his shiny shoes, then his sleek pants and finally the full view - a perfectly tailored tuxedo.

The entire room applauds as Gloria tears up, so proud.

GLORIA
My baby is the President's butler.

Elroy is in total awe, but Louis looks a little uneasy.

INT. EMPLOYEES PARKING LOT - WHITE HOUSE - MORNING

Cecil is in his car in the employees parking lot that overlooks the South Lawn, directly behind the White House. He gets out and looks around, eyes peeled open in awe.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST WING PATHWAY - DAY

Cecil walks down a treeline pathway toward the side entrance where flags stick out of lamp posts. He stops at the Security Gate, a shed with a glass window.

CECIL

My name is Cecil Gains. I'm the new butler.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FIRST FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY

Cecil and Freddie walk through the elegant first floor of the entrance hall. Marble walls with red carpet and pink tiled floors, a French palace and a museum rolled into one.

Four HOUSEMEN, all black, late 20's, are setting up ropes, barriers and tables for the White House tour.

FREDDIE

We have six houseman who are primarily responsible for furniture and chair arrangements.

CECIL

Six men just to move the tables?

Freddie gives him a 'you have no idea' look.

FREDDIE

There are over 70 full time employees at the House.

They walk the Cross Hall passing the Presidential portraits.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

16 maids, 6 butlers, 4 carpenters, 2 painters, 7 electricians, 9 engineers, 2 plumbers, 2 grounds keepers, 3 florists, 2 pantry men, 3 dishwashers, 3 doorman, 4 florists, a full kitchen staff including pastry chef and 3 full time calligraphers.

Freddie nods at a small MAN who sets a clock in the hall.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

And Joe sets all the clocks.

CECIL

That's his only job?

FREDDIE

Every hour of every day, he makes sure that every clock is set to the exact time.

The Crew Cut Man from the hotel, RD WARNER, walks by. Cecil's eyes light up, he steps forward.

CECIL

Mr. Warner, I just want to thank
you for this opportuni--

But RD Warner keeps walking, doesn't even acknowledge him. Cecil is surprised by the snub. Freddie whispers in his ear:

FREDDIE

The Chief Usher is not overly
friendly with the colored help.

Cecil nods, he gets it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BUTLER'S LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

Cecil enters the plain locker room with chipped benches. Two butlers are changing into tuxes, BOOKER PARKER, 32, short and fiery, and CARTER WILSON, 40, stocky with a solemn demeanor.

CARTER

Ten to one those kids never see the
inside of that classroo--.

They immediately clam up as they see Cecil. Eyeing the new guy. Cecil holds out his hand.

CECIL

I'm Cecil Gains, the new butler.

Carter shakes his hand first.

CARTER

Carter Wilson, head butler and this
is Booker Parker, second butler.

BOOKER

Where ya stand on civil rights,
blood?

Cecil is taken back. Carter shoots Booker a frustrated look.

CARTER

Why don't you shake the man's hand
first?

Booker holds out his hand.

BOOKER

Sorry about that.

They shake hands.

BOOKER (CONT'D)

So where do you stand on civil rights, blood?

CARTER

Don't mind Booker, he's just angry his name is Booker.

BOOKER

Of all the goddamn names!

CECIL

I thought we weren't supposed to discuss politics.

BOOKER

Out there in the White House, but you in the black house now, boy, and I'm just a blood that's curious where the other blood stand.

CARTER

You don't have to answer, Cecil, no one else does.

Cecil turns to Booker, smiles with warmth.

CECIL

I don't think those negroes down South want any more trouble than they've already got.

CARTER

Amen to that!

Carter high fives Cecil. Fast friends. Booker smiles.

BOOKER

That's alright, that's alright.
(Upper crust voice)
Now if you gentleman will excuse me, the First Family needs their filet mignon and Grand Mariner. A pleasure meeting you, Mr. Gains.

He bows his head, then walks out. Carter smiles at Cecil.

CARTER

Welcome to the House.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - DAY

Cecil and Fallows stand in the State Dining Room, an elegant room with ornate gold curtains, gold chandelier and a massive portrait of Abraham Lincoln over the marble fire place.

They hover over a dinning table covered in the finest china, crystal and flatware. Freddie points to the crystal glasses.

FREDDIE

The glasses are always placed in the following order: Water, white, red and flute. Always serve from the left and when lifting a plate--

He leans in from the left and effortlessly lifts the plate.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

--you must never scrape the bottom. The tinkle of silverware will get an immediate report to me which I report to the Chief Usher.

Cecil nods, but it's clear that this is serious business.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

You must never listen or react to a conversation. The room should feel--

CECIL

--emptier when I'm in it.

Freddie nods.

FREDDIE

And never ever rush service, because Mrs. Eisenhower is watching you like a hawk.

As if on cue, the door opens and in walks MAMIE EISENHOWER, 59, with her SOCIAL SECRETARY. In a sundress, Mamie dresses youthful with curly bangs, but she acts like a general.

MAMIE

Freddie, I just finished tonight's menus. I've decided to change asparagus to green beans.

The Social Secretary hands Freddie the menus.

FREDDIE

Very good, Mrs. Eisenhower. Allow me to introduce our new butler, Cecil Gains.

Cecil gives a slight head bow.

CECIL

A true honor, Mrs. Eisenhower.

MAMIE

Never rush service, Cecil, and you'll be alright with me.

(Turns to Freddie)

Speaking of which, at the Navy dinner, I noticed that on three separate occasions, Roger picked up courses too soon. This is the third time I've mentioned his service.

FREDDIE

It is unacceptable, Mrs. Eisenhower and I assure you that his presence will no longer be required.

Cecil looks surprised, it's cutthroat here. Mamie feels bad.

MAMIE

Oh, now, that's not necessary, Freddie, give him one more shot.

FREDDIE

I prefer not, Mrs. Eisenhower, he has tried both our patience.

MAMIE

Well...if you insist.

Mamie smiles at Cecil, flipping from General to hostess.

MAMIE (CONT'D)

Welcome to the House, Cecil, I hope your time here is pleasurable.

And with that, she moves on as quickly as she came.

FREDDIE

Let's begin, shall we.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Cecil is in the small kitchen with steel appliances and cabinets. He places a teapot on a silver tray as the STAFF, black, shoot him glances, they know it's his first serving.

As he lifts the tray, a photographer takes a picture of him to record the moment. He looks fantastic in his fitted tuxedo holding a beautiful tea set. Freddie whispers in his ear:

FREDDIE

You hear nothing, you see nothing,
you only serve.

EXT. WEST WING - HALLWAY - DAY

Cecil walks down the hall to the corridor entrance of the Oval Office. A tiny bead of sweat forms on his forehead.

INT. WEST WING - OVAL OFFICE CORRIDOR - DAY

He walks into the corridor, a SECRET SERVICE AGENT stops him.

CECIL

Tea for the president.

INT. WEST WING - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Cecil walks in to the Oval Office and sees DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER standing upright at attention by his desk. His presence is enormous, but he exudes a grandfatherly warmth.

Cecil tries not to stare at him, but it's hard not to. He sets the tray down and begins to pour a cup of tea.

Two other men are seated on the sofas - the Chief of Staff, SHERMAN ADAMS, 56, tough and harsh, is in an argument with Attorney General, HERBERT BROWNELL, 51, calm and low keyed.

SHERMAN ADAMS

So what are you suggesting? Sending
federal troops to Little Rock?

HERBERT BROWNELL

If it comes to that, then yes.

Cecil picks up the cup and saucer, but it rattles as his hand SHAKES from nerves. He grips the cup with the other hand to stop the rattling and carefully sets it down on Ike's desk.

Ike steps forward, his presence overtakes the room.

IKE

No, no, no. I can't see any
situation where I'd send troops to
the South. Ever. It would cause
another Civil War.

Cecil begins to pour another cup, his hand shakes even more. He's not listening, totally focused on not spilling.

HERBERT BROWNELL

If the Federal government doesn't enforce Brown, then who will? The South must comply with the law.

IKE

The South has been in compliance with the law for the last 60 years. They've built their entire society around the law. Then, in one day, that damn fool Earl Warren tells them their entire way of life is now illegal. It's going to take some time for them to adjust.

Cecil pours another cup, but a tiny bit of tea pours over the edge. He quickly takes out a napkin and dries the saucer.

HERBERT BROWNELL

I understand, Mr. President, but if Faubus continues to block the negro children, then we must enforce the Constitution.

Cecil places a cup of tea in front of Sherman Adams, trying to be as obsequious as possible.

SHERMAN ADAMS

Let's give Faubus more time. With a little persuading, he'll back down. We just want to move slowly.

Ike sips his tea as he struggles through his feelings.

IKE

I am for moderation...but I am also for progress.

(Then)

That is exactly what I am for.

Cecil grabs his tray and hurries out of the room.

EXT. CORRIDOR TO OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Walking out of the Oval Office, sweat freely pours down Cecil's face. He dabbles a handkerchief on his forehead.

CECIL V.O.

I was so scared I didn't hear one word those men said.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Cecil serves Gloria, Louis and Elroy dinner as everyone listens with rapture.

CECIL

Then my hands started shakin'.

ELROY

Did you spill, Mr. Gains?

CECIL

A little, but I cleaned it before anyone saw.

GLORIA

What did the President talk about?

CECIL

You know I can't tell anyone that.

Gloria nods, a little disappointed, but understands.

ELROY

Butlers know secrets?

CECIL

They know everything, but they tell nothing. That's the butler's code.

Elroy grins, very exciting. Louis clears his throat, loudly.

CECIL (CONT'D)

You got a bone in your throat or you got something to say?

Louis takes out a flyer and hands it to his dad, it reads - 'MAMIE TILL, MOTHER OF EMMET TILL, SPEAKS OUT!'

LOUIS

I really want to go to this.

CECIL

Absolutely not. No way.

LOUIS

How come?

CECIL

Nuthin' good can come goin' to this sort of thing. Nuthin'. I'm sorry, Louis, the answer is no.

Gloria glances at Louis who can't hide his disappointment.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Gloria and Louis are in a packed African-American church.

GLORIA

You promise you won't tell your
father I brought you here?

Louis nods, so thrilled to be there. Up on the stage walks MAMIE TILL, 34, black, pretty. The audience gives her a warm round of applause.

She walks to a podium next to a large black & white picture on a pedestal of the smiling Emmet Till. On another pedestal is the photo of his mutilated corpse. She speaks softly:

MAMIE TILL

If I should cry for the rest of my
life there wouldn't be enough tears
for my son Emmett Till.

The audience yells 'That's right!' and 'Tell it like it is!'

MAMIE TILL (CONT'D)

I'm just a quiet house wife from
Chicago, I never once saw myself as
having the courage to stand up in
front of people and speak my mind,
but we can't allow what happened to
my boy to ever happen again!

The audience jumps to its feet, screaming with fire. Louis yells, transformed by Mamie Till who looks right at him:

MAMIE TILL (CONT'D)

We all gonna be tested...

Louis is taken aback, he never thought he would be tested.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - IKE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ike stands in front of his VALET, a Filipino man in a Navy uniform. The Valet buttons Ike's shirt up for him.

MAMIE TILL V.O.

...and only then will we see who is
truly on the side of the righteous.

Ike stares forward in deep thought, very conflicted.

Cecil walks into the room with a coffee as the Valet takes the President's dirty pajamas and exits. Ike sips the coffee.

IKE

Cecil, did you mind going to an all colored school?

CECIL

I didn't go to school, Mr. President, I grew up on a cotton farm.

Ike stares at him for a beat, then nods. As Cecil turns to leave, he sees a furious Sherman Adams in the doorway.

IKE

What is it?

SHERMAN ADAMS

The State Guard just blocked all the colored kids from entering the school again.

IKE

Faubus promised me he'd let them in.

SHERMAN ADAMS

The Governor lied, Mr. President.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Ike sits behind his desk as he speaks directly into a TV camera. Sherman Adams and Herbert Brownell are in the room.

IKE

I have today issued an Executive Order directing the use of troops under Federal authority to aid in the execution of Federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas.

Brownell shoots Sherman Adams a subtle look, Adams shrugs.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Cecil, Booker and Carter watch the announcement with the dishwashers in the kitchen. Everyone has a look of pride.

IKE (FROM THE TV)

'Thus will restore the image of America and of all its parts as one nation...'

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - MORNING

Louis and Elroy walk to school as we hear Ike finish up:

IKE V.O.

"...indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

ELROY

Does this mean we're all gonna go to white schools now?

LOUIS

Probably not right away, but I bet by the time I graduate high school, every school will be integrated.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

A huge auditorium is packed with friends and family for a high school graduation ceremony. The PRINCIPAL, black, announces the names of the graduates.

PRINCIPAL

Sarah Feener.

In cap & gown, she walks across the stage to get her diploma.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Louis Gains.

Cecil, Gloria, Elroy, Gina and all the neighbors cheer like crazy as Louis walks across the stage. Three years older, Louis is a fit, handsome, but still shy young man.

We PAN ACROSS the rows of the GRADUATES in cap and gowns - every single one is black. There has been no integration.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Cecil and Louis drag a trunk full of clothes to the cargo load of a Greyhound bus as Gloria waits by the door.

CECIL

You sure you wanna go all the way down to Tennessee?

LOUIS

Fisk is a really good school, dad.

Cecil tries to smile through the pain of losing his son.

CECIL

I know, I know, it's just so far
away. That's all.

Louis looks right at his dad.

LOUIS

That's the point.

He walks back to his mom. Cecil is taken aback, confused.
Gloria awaits by the bus door in tears, she hugs Louis.

GLORIA

I can't believe my boy is going off
to college.

Then Cecil hugs Louis, holds on to him a little bit longer
than he should, just doesn't want to let go.

CECIL

You're the first person in this
family to ever go to college.

LOUIS

I know, Dad.

CECIL

You make me proud, Louis, you make
the whole neighborhood proud. I
love you so much.

LOUIS

I love you too, Dad.

Cecil finally lets go. Louis takes a deep breathe, then gets
on the bus. The white BUS DRIVER nods to him to go to the
back, Louis nods back, no problem, sits at the back.

As the bus pulls away from the station, Louis waves to his
parents who wave back. They hold each other as they watch
their son go off to college, a sadness filling their souls.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil stares forward with the same look from the
bus station, sadness. The Camera Man changes the subject.

CAMERA MAN

So what was a typical day like?

CECIL

What?

CAMERA MAN

At the White House. What was a typical day like?

Cecil smiles.

CECIL

There was no typical day.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINNING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE UP - an escargot dish filled with delicious snails.
Cecil sets the tray down in front of the President of France.

CECIL V.O.

One day I'd be servin' escargot to
President Charles De Gaulle...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - SOUTH LAWN - DAY

Cecil hands Ike a putter on the South Lawn putting hole.

CECIL V.O.

...the next day I'd be a caddy.

Ike misses the shot, slams the putter on the grass.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil smiles into the camera with pride.

CECIL

I never did make it to Japan...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BLUE ROOM - DAY

Cecil pours tea for Japanese EMPEROR HIROHITO.

CECIL V.O.

...but I did get to pour tea for
Emperor Hirohito.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CHINA STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

A weary Cecil and Booker place the Truman China back into boxes. The room is filled with all of the White House China.

CECIL V.O.

We always worked long hours...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CHOCOLATE SHOP - NIGHT

Cecil, Booker and Carter help the pastry chef, LUKE JA'DEAN, 50's, passionate, make an elaborate french dessert.

CECIL V.O.

...but I loved every minute of it.

The Vice-President, RICHARD NIXON, 47, walks in. He feels like the kid in school that desperately wanted to be liked.

NIXON

I brought you gentleman something very special.

Nixon pulls out four buttons that say 'NIXON FOR PRESIDENT. 1960'. The butlers all 'coo', immediately put them on.

CECIL

We're all cheering for you, Mr. Vice-President.

Carter nods but Booker smiles a little too wide.

NIXON

Now I don't want to say anything negative about that Kennedy boy, I'm sure he's a fine fellow, but do you really want a spoiled rich brat who never lifted a finger in his spoiled rich brat life to be your next president!?

Everyone shakes their heads as Nixon dabs a handkerchief on his forehead. Nothing gets him angrier than Kennedy's wealth.

NIXON (CONT'D)

Now let me ask all of you, as members of the negro community, what are your biggest concerns?

The Butlers all stare back at him, no one wants to answer.

NIXON (CONT'D)

Come on, don't be shy. I want to have a focus group here.

BOOKER

Well, Mr. Vice President, the colored help gets paid almost 40% less than the white help.

NIXON

You don't say?

BOOKER

Yes, sir, and it's very difficult for us to be promoted. There isn't a single colored houseman that's been made an engineer and many of them have been here for years.

NIXON

I tell ya what, Booker, when I'm President, the first thing I'm going to do is look into getting you gentleman the raises and promotions you deserve. Of course I'll have to check with certain oversight committees and the National Trust foundation, if we have one, but I'll definitely look into it.

Booker grins, doesn't buy it.

BOOKER

That would be swell, Mr. Vice President.

NIXON

What about you, Cecil? What are your concerns? Civil Rights?

CECIL

Oh, no, sir, that's none of my business. I just want my boy to have a good education.

NIXON

Damn straight.

LUKE JA'DEAN

Zeziel's zun just went off to college.

NIXON

What?

LUKE JA'DEAN

His zun just went off to college?

NIXON

What?

BOOKER AND CARTER

His son just went off to college.

NIXON

Ohhhhh. 'Son'. Got it. The accent.
Well congratulations, Cecil, what a
fine accomplishment, just fine.
Where's he going?

CECIL

Fisk University.

Richard Nixon's face drops. All of his 'campaign' enthusiasm
vanishes as the shrewd Tricky Dick pops out.

NIXON

In Nashville?

Cecil nods. Nixon leans into him.

NIXON (CONT'D)

What the hell does he want to go to
the deep South for?

All eyes on Cecil who shrugs, he doesn't really know.

INT. NASHVILLE STREET - NIGHT

Louis is in a rundown area, wooden shacks with dirt lawns. He
holds a flyer with a picture of a Hindu Goddess on it,
written across the top is 'FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION'.

CAROL

You lookin' for love?

From out of the shadows steps CAROL BLUE, 19, black, wears a
school girl skirt and has her hair in a modern coiled flair.
Carol exudes a natural charisma, outgoing and brash.

CAROL (CONT'D)

That's what some of us are calling
the Lawson workshop, the love
school. Is that what you're lookin'
for?

LOUIS

Yeah, that's why I came to Fisk.

CAROL

Me too!

(Holds out her hand)

I'm Carol Blue.

LOUIS

Louis Gains.

They shake hands, but she doesn't let go.

CAROL
Well come on then, Mr. Gains, Mr.
Lawson is awaitin' us!

She drags him toward a small red brick chapel on the corner.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Damn, boy, I'm amazed I saw you,
you the darkest nigger I eve' seen.

Louis blushes, he's in love.

INT. CLARK MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The room is full of COLLEGE STUDENTS, all black, they listen to JAMES LAWSON, 29, black, bespectacled. Very zen, mystical.

JAMES LAWSON
Satya is truth which equals love.
Agraha means force.

He points to a picture on the wall of MAHATMA GHANDI.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)
Mahatma Gandhi combined them into
one word, Satyagraha, to mean love
force. This is the foundation of
his philosophy of non-violent
resistance and it's what Martin
King used in his bus boycott a few
years back. We will study Gandhi's
techniques to train you to become
an army, but in this army, your
only weapon will be love.

CUT TO - LATER

James Lawson has his jacket off, sleeves rolled up. Everyone is paired up into teams of two seated across from each other.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)
When they scream at you, visualize
them as a baby...a time before they
were taught to hate.

CUT TO - LATER

Carol curls into a fetal position as a student 'kicks' her.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)
Always protect your vital organs.

CUT TO - LATER

Louis is surrounded by students yelling and spitting on him.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)

It's not enough to resist the urge to strike back. You must have no desire to strike back. You must love the person that's hitting you, you must love the hell out of them, because that is the only way you can change their heart.

James Lawson steps forward to make the most important point.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)

For it is only when they learn to love you back that we will truly become a Beloved Community.

EXT. DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE - DAY

Louis and Carol walk down the street with three students. The men in suits, women in blouses, all nervous, but determined. Carol grabs Louis' hand as they walk hand in hand toward -

WOOLWORTHS DEPARTMENT STORE.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - DAY

Twenty butlers and housemen are setting up for a State Dinner. Cecil sets down a plate followed by Carter with the gold flatware, followed by Booker with the wine glasses.

RD Warner stands under the painting of Abraham Lincoln as the black staff scrambles to set up the ornate room.

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - 2ND FLOOR - DAY

The five students get off the escalator and walk right up to the LUNCH COUNTER. It is half filled with WHITE PATRONS.

The black students sit down at the counter. The white patrons immediately look at them. A WAITRESS drops her tray.

WAITRESS

Y'all can't sit here.

But the students stare forward, they aren't going to move.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

MILITARY AIDES escort LADIES in dresses into the East Room as their MALE dates tag along. As they all line up on the red carpet, the doors to the State Dining Room open revealing -

The BUTLERS upright at their stations dressed in tailed tuxedos. The candle lit tables are covered in the finest china, flatware and crystal. A vision of pure opulence.

MILITARY AIDE

Ladies and Gentlemen, the President
and First Lady of the United
States.

The Military Band strikes up 'Hail to the Chief' as Ike and Mamie walks down the corridor lined with Military Aides.

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - NIGHT

Having sat for hours, the students still sit at the counters reading books as many white ONLOOKERS stare from a distance. Concern fills Carol as she points toward the escalator -

A group of angry white TEENAGERS are walking toward them.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

All of the guests are seated at their tables as Cecil and the butlers stand at attention. Freddie nods at the butlers who start serving filet of sole. Cecil elegantly sets one down.

GUEST

Do you think I could have some
ketchup?

INT. WOOLWORTHS LOUNCH COUNTER - NIGHT

A White Student DUMPS ketchup on Carol's head. Others laugh as they squirt mustard on them. The black students stare forward in zen calm as Louis looks at the counter Manager...

LOUIS

We would like to be served, please.

INT. STATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil sets down the next course of French lamb chops with minted pears in front of a FEMALE GUEST who is so delighted she kisses her HUSBAND on the cheek.

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - NIGHT

An aggressive student with a CREW CUT punches Louis in the face. Louis FLIES off his stool onto the ground.

Carol jumps on Louis followed by the black students to form a coordinated protective ball. The Crew Cut student pulls Louis out and punches him. Louis looks him in the eye as he hears:

JAMES LAWSON V.O.
You must love your attacker.

He punches Louis again.

JAMES LAWSON V.O. (CONT'D)
Love him with all your heart.

As Louis looks up, a massive GLOW OF LIGHT shines behind his attacker, a light that is pure and bright and beautiful.

JAMES LAWSON V.O. (CONT'D)
For it is only when they learn to
love you back that we will truly
become a Beloved Community.

Louis's eyes light up into a trance-like state, he's having a mystical experience. A smile forms on his bloodied face because Louis now loves this man.

Five POLICE OFFICERS hurry into the lunch counter area and immediately handcuff Louis and the other black students.

POLICE OFFICER
You are all under arrest for
disorderly conduct.

The White Students CHEER as the bleeding black students are lead away. The Crew Cut student grins, until he sees -

Four new BLACK STUDENTS are now SEATED at the lunch counter.

NEW LEAD STUDENT
We would like to be served, please.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

All of the butlers are lounging in the kitchen. They are all exhausted as they hold up wine glasses for a toast.

FREDDIE
To serving our country.

Cecil beams, proud of his work as he clinks his glass.

EXT. WOOLWORTHS - NIGHT

The five students are escorted to a police paddy wagon as they peacefully sing their anthem, 'We Shall Overcome':

BLACK STUDENTS
*'We shall overcome. We shall
 overcome. We shall overcome some
 day.'*

Up and down the street, 100 black STUDENTS are being hauled into police paddy wagons as mobs of whites scream at them. This was a coordinated sit-in all over downtown Nashville.

INT. DAVIDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Eighty-two proud students, mostly black but a couple whites, are seated in a packed courtroom. Louis and Carol sit next to each other, smiling, proud. Then - Louis's smile drops.

He sees Cecil standing in the back of the courtroom, his father looks horrified. Louis walks over to him.

LOUIS
 Hi, Dad.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

A furious Cecil scolds Louis in a corner of the hall.

CECIL
 I worked every day of my life,
 every single day, to give you the
 opportunities I never had. And this
 is what you do with it?!

LOUIS
 You don't understand. Something is
 happening here, something special.

CECIL
 Ain't nuthin' special about a
 nigger in jail!

LOUIS
 We're standing up for our rights.
 We're going to change the nation's
 consciousness toward the American
 negro.

CECIL
 You're what?!

LOUIS

We're changing the national consci--

CECIL

All ya' doing is breakin' the law!
And it's gonna get you and a lot of
other folks killed. I didn't send
my boy off to college to go to his
funeral!

LOUIS

If I can't sit at any lunch counter
I want, then I'm not really alive.

CECIL

Nuthin' good can come of this. All
you're gonna do is make white folks
angrier and get a lot of negroes
hurt. That's what always happens.

LOUIS

That's what we're going to change.

Cecil stares at him, angry and scared.

CECIL

You don't understand, Louis, the
law doesn't work for us, it's
always against us. Always.

INT. DAVIDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

JUDGE JACK HARRIS, balding and heavy, sits up on the bench
staring out at the courtroom. The attorney Z. ALEXANDER
LOOBY, 61, black, sharp, stands up in front of the judge.

Z. ALEXANDER LOOBY

Your honor, the charges of
disorderly conduct have absolu--

Judge Harris turns his chair AROUND so his back faces the
court, he's not going to listen. The students gasp in shock.

Z. ALEXANDER LOOBY (CONT'D)

--absolutely no merit. These
students were calm, quiet and in
compliance with all conduct laws.

The Judge's back is still to the court. Looby speaks louder:

Z. ALEXANDER LOOBY (CONT'D)

The mob that beat them are the ones
that should be tried for disorder--

He throws up his arms and yells at the Judge.

Z. ALEXANDER LOOBY (CONT'D)
What's the use!

Judge Harris turns back around and faces the students.

JUDGE HARRIS
I find the defendants guilty of
disorderly conduct and sentence
them to thirty days in the county
workhouse or a fine of \$50 each.

Carol leaps to her feet. She calmly announces to the Judge:

CAROL
We feel if we pay these fines we
would be supporting the injustice
and immoral practice that have been
performed in our arrest and
conviction.

JUDGE HARRIS
Ya'all feel that way?

All of the students rise to their feet in solidarity.

JUDGE HARRIS (CONT'D)
Enjoy the big house, kids.

He SLAMS his gavel as we CUT TO -

FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE:

A MONTAGE of news clips of sit-in's all over the country.

NEWSCAST V.O.
"Sparked by the Greensboro and
Nashville sit-in's a phenomenon has
erupted across America."

EXT. GAINS HOUSE - NIGHT

All of the neighbors are outside the Gain's house, everyone
is talking, gossiping, concerned looks are shared.

HOWARD
That boy is gonna get us all
killed.

Several people nod in agreement.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A scared Gloria watches the news coverage of the sit-in movement with more neighbors. Gina has her arm around her.

NEWSCAST (FROM THE TV)
 "Thousands of negro students joined by some white students have been 'sitting-in' at department store lunch counters..."

Cecil is in the staircase staring at an old family photo during happy times, he is filled with a deep concern.

NEWSCAST V.O.
 "...in protest of their policies of only serving white patrons."

Elroy tugs on his leg, he's scared.

ELROY
 Can the President help Louis?

Cecil stares back at him, not sure of the answer.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - DAY

Ike and Mamie stand in front of the entire staff.

IKE
 From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for everything you did for us. These last eight years...

Ike tears up, Mamie finishes for her husband who can't speak.

MAMIE
 ...they've been the most special years of our lives, and much of that we owe to all of you.

The staff is in tears too as they applaud. Even Booker cries.

CECIL V.O.
 There's nothin' sadder than sayin' goodbye to the First Family.

Ike and Mamie say tearful good-byes to each one individually.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)
 We've spent every day with them for the past eight years, and in less than an hour, they gonna be gone.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

90 year old Cecil shines a pair of black dress shoes, he looks up into the video camera.

CECIL
Transition is hard.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CENTER HALL - DAY

Every member of the White House staff carry moving boxes and haul furniture down the Center Hall.

CECIL V.O.
The rule is that the President lives at the White House until the moment the next one is sworn in.

The Chief Usher, RD Warner, keeps glancing at his watch as the staff carries out the Eisenhower's personal belongings.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - IKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Maids quickly place Mamie's dresses and clothes into boxes.

CECIL V.O.
So we have exactly two hours during the inauguration ceremony...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TREATY ROOM - DAY

Cecil and Carter quickly wrap Ike's trophies in newspapers.

CECIL V.O.
...to move the old President out...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NORTH PORTICO - DAY

A 1950's moving van is parked underneath the North Portico. The Housemen place the boxes and furniture into the van.

CECIL V.O.
...and move the new President in.

The moving pulls away as an identical MOVING VAN pulls up in its spot. We hear the distinct Bostonian accent of -

JACK V.O.
I, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, do solemnly swear.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CENTER HALL - DAY

The entire White House staff carries boxes and new furniture.

JACK V.O.

That I will faithfully execute the
office of President of the United
States.

RD Warner glances at his watch, starting to sweat.

RD WARNER

Forty-eight minutes left!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

The master bedroom is being set up with a new blue draped
four poster bed, Cecil gracefully helps guide it into place.

JACK V.O.

And will to the best of my ability.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - JOHN JOHN'S NURSERY - DAY

Cecil opens a box filled with stuffed animals and
meticulously places them in the play pen for a baby boy.

JACK V.O.

Preserve, protect, and defend the
Constitution of the United States.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CAROLINE'S ROOM - DAY

Cecil delicately sets down a rocking horse next to a canopied
bed as a maid places pink rosebuds out for a young girl.

JACK V.O.

So help me God.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

90 year old Cecil looks nervous at the memory.

CECIL

It's always scary meetin' the new
President cuz you never know what
kinda man he's gonna be until he
moves into that house.

(Then)

I don't think he knows either.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL- DAY

All of the staff is lined up in the Entrance Hall everyone stands at attention, tense. RD Warner wipes his sweaty brow as Cecil whispers to Carter.

CECIL
You nervous?

Carter nods, then whispers back.

CARTER
I voted for Nixon.

CECIL
Me too.

Booker leans in and whispers:

BOOKER
You negroes are a disgrace.

The front doors open and in walks JOHN 'JACK' KENNEDY, 43, handsome, lean, and his beautiful wife JACKIE, 31, tall, wears a fawn coat and pillow box hat, she's a touch shy.

Jackie holds their 3 month old, JACK, JR, with daughter, CAROLINE, 3, behind them. They are surrounded by many AIDES. Jack flashes an enormous grin, he exudes charm and class.

JACK
I want to start by saying that I'm thrilled we're going to be working together over the next four years.

Jackie is slightly aloof as she speaks in almost a whisper:

JACKIE
Eight years, Jack.

Everyone laughs. The baby, John Jr., starts to cry.

JACK
I bet you all haven't heard that around the house in a while.

The room laughs, Carter turns to Cecil, nods with approval.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BLUE ROOM - DAY

The Kennedy's tour the house, looking at all the art work with RD Warner, Cecil and Carter in tow. As Jackie looks around, she seems unhappy. She speaks in a light whisper:

JACKIE

Mr. Warner, there seem to be very few historic artifacts. There's barely an item here before 1948.

RD WARNER

Mrs. Eisenhower was concerned about this as well, but as I explained to her, when it comes to redecorating, the budget is very limited.

The shy Jackie washes away as her voice gets much louder.

JACKIE

I'm not talking about redecoration, Mr. Warner, I'm talking about restoration.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TREATY ROOM - DAY

The light blue walls are being painted over in a dark green.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - ROSE GARDEN - DAY

The Rose Garden is packed with landscapers digging it all up.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CENTER HALL - DAY

Jackie walks with an exhausted RD Warner and Cecil in tow down the Center Hall pointing at the empty walls.

FADE CUT - LATER

The walls are now covered in a beautiful series of portraits of proud American Indians by George Catlin.

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Cecil walks out of a new florist shop. Up and down the street, businesses are repainting and upgrading.

CECIL V.O.

Everywhere I looked, folks were sprucin' things up.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil walks in and sees Gloria repainting the living room. Her hair looks like Jackie's and she wears an A-line dress.

CECIL
What in the Lords name are you
doing?

Gloria waves her hand with a refined touch.

GLORIA
Restoration.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cecil is in bed reading a book on Addison's disease. Gloria
reads a Life article about Jackie. She turns to Cecil:

GLORIA
Do you wish I spoke French?

CECIL
My goodness, what?

GLORIA
Jackie speaks French.

CECIL
You are without a doubt the most
perfect woman I know.

Gloria turns away, looks slightly unhappy.

GLORIA
I'm not perfect, I'm just...here.

CECIL
What's wrong, honey bear?

GLORIA
Ever since Louis has been gone I've
been feelin' sort of...restless.

CECIL
Cuz he's in jail?

She stares at him for a beat, then changes the subject,
pointing at his book.

GLORIA
What's Addison's Disease?

CECIL
It's a condition that causes
fatigue and dizziness. Someone new
at the House has it.

GLORIA
Jackie?!

CECIL
No, it's not Jackie.

GLORIA
Is it true she's going to sell a
White House guide to finance the
restoration?

CECIL
I don't know nuthing about that.

She curls into his chest, talks in sweet-talky voice.

GLORIA
Baby doll?

CECIL
Yeah?

GLORIA
How many pairs of shoes does Jackie
have?

CECIL
You know I can't talk about that
stuff.

GLORIA
You never tell me anything! You're
there all day and you can't even
share your whole life with me!

CECIL
I'm sorry, honey bear...I just
can't talk about it.

She rolls over, shuts off the light.

GLORIA
Night.

He feels guilty, never knew this upset her so much. Then - he
goes back to his book on Addison's Disease.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Cecil walks into the bedroom as a DOCTOR is administering a
shot into Jack's arm. There are several prescription bottles.

Jack's VALET, another Filipino, brushes a jacket with a linen brush. Jack grins at Cecil as he takes a series of pills.

JACK

I was sick so much as a kid that my brothers used to joke if I got bit by a mosquito, the mosquito would surely die.

As the Valet puts Jack's suit jacket on him, Jack clutches his back in pain. Cecil grimaces, feeling Jack's pain.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Cecil walks into the Oval Office with a tea set and water. Jack is lying on the floor on a heating pad, still in pain. Cecil brings him cortisone pills and another glass of water.

Jack is mid-conversation with his brother, BOBBY KENNEDY, 36, tough and mean. He sits with his aide, JOHN SEIGENTHALER, 32, slim, idealistic. Seigenthaler holds up a pen.

JOHN SEIGENTHALER

This was sent from the 'National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing' as a reminder to follow through with your campaign pledge to wipe out federal housing discrimination with one swipe of a pen.

Jack takes the pills, then hands the glass back to Cecil.

JACK

They only sent one?

JOHN SEIGENTHALER

No, sir, ten thousand.

JACK

I take it the 'National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing' is being sarcastic.

Cecil begins to pour a cup of tea, but unlike the last time we saw him do this, he looks smooth and graceful.

JOHN SEIGENTHALER

They're calling it the 'Ink for Jack' campaign.

JACK

Bobby?

Cecil sets the tea in front of Bobby who doesn't look up.

BOBBY

We lose the support we'll need from
Southern Senators on Cuba if we
touch civil rights right now.

John Seigenthaler eyes Cecil as he pours another cup of tea.

JACK

What do you think, John?

JOHN SEIGENTHALER

I think there is a moral imperative
to fight against discrimination.

BOBBY

We barely won the election! We
don't have the mandate or the
political need to touch contentious
social issues right now.

JACK

What if there are more negro
protests, like those sit-in's?

Cecil slightly flinches at the mention of the sit-ins.

BOBBY

The sit-ins didn't budge popular
opinion. The country doesn't
support civil rights, Jack, I don't
think you should either.

Jack ponders it as Cecil walks toward the door with his tray.

JACK

I don't have time for this right
now. I need to use my capital on
Kruschev and Castro.

Jack looks over at Bobby.

JACK (CONT'D)

Detente abroad trumps detente at
home.

Bobby slightly grins, he likes to win.

BOBBY

I doubt we'll even see anymore
civil unrest.

Cecil glances at Bobby...he hopes that he's right.

INT. CORE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Louis and Carol are in the tiny headquarters of the 'Congress of Racial Equality'. It has a pre-hippy, new age vibe. They sit with JAMES FARMER, 41, black, theatrical voice.

JAMES FARMER

Are you familiar with Boynton V. Virginia?

They shake their heads, no.

JAMES FARMER (CONT'D)

It outlawed segregation in bus terminals, but the law has never been enforced.

LOUIS

So you're going to ride busses into the deep south to confront the law?

JAMES FARMER

Exactly. We expect to be beaten, maybe even murdered, but we will exercise our legal rights.

Louis and Carol exchange glances, nervous, but Carol nods.

LOUIS

We want to be a part of it.

James Farmer smiles at his fellow warriors.

JAMES FARMER

Are you two together?

Before Louis can answer, Carol quickly responds:

CAROL

No, we're just friends.

Louis looks disappointed, but he mutters.

LOUIS

Yeah, we're just friends.

James Farmer knows that Louis was hoping otherwise.

JAMES FARMER

Welcome aboard the Freedom Ride.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

Wearing a tuxedo, Jack stands in front of several hundred elegant guests seated in chairs.

JACK

When Jackie told me she wanted to use the White House as a platform for the arts, I knew it was a good idea because I do what Jackie says.

Everyone laughs.

JACK (CONT'D)

The last time our esteemed guest Pablo Caslas played in the White House was fifty-seven years ago.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

The great musician, PABLO CASALS, 85, wise, finishes a glass of water, whispers to Cecil in his Spanish accent.

PABLO CASLAS

After 81 years of playing, you know what always surprises me?

CECIL

What, Sr. Caslas?

PABLO CASLAS

That I still get nervous.

He hands him the glass of water. Then -

PABLO CASLAS (CONT'D)

Do you find it difficult being oppressed in your own home land?

Cecil doesn't know what to say, stunned. Just then, the crowd in the East Room applauds. Freddie opens the door for Caslas who enters the room. Cecil sits next to Booker and Carter.

CARTER

What did he say to you?

Cecil looks at him for a beat. Then -

CECIL

Nuthin'.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

Holding his violoncello, Casals gives the President a slight head bow, Jack nods back. Then, he begins Mendelssohn's Trio in D Minor. We hear the most beautiful music play into...

EXT. ALABAMA - COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

A Greyhound bus drives down a dark country road in Alabama.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - ALABAMA - NIGHT

A dozen Freedom Riders are on the bus with a few JOURNALISTS, white. Every black Freedom Rider sits next to a white one.

The mood is fairly relaxed. Louis sits toward the back, speaking to a JOURNALIST. Carol is asleep a few seats over.

JOURNALIST

Are you riding this bus to show
that the negro is equal to the
white man?

LOUIS

No, sir. We do not seek equality
with the white man. We want us both
to be raised up.

The bus slows down, pulling into a bus station. Everyone sits up alert as they see the bus station is completely EMPTY.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Why isn't anybody here?

A MOB of white people with chains and bats STORM out from behind the bus station. Louis screams at the driver -

LOUIS (CONT'D)

DRIVE!

The Freedom Bus takes off down the highway, but a row of cars and trucks pull out from behind the bus station. An ambush.

GUNSHOTS blare out that hit the tires. The bus SKIDS back and forth, then skids onto a dirt embankment and comes to a stop.

The cars catch up and a mob of 100 WHITE MEN jump out and start SMASHING the bus windows with bricks and chains.

All of the Freedom Riders drop to the center aisle of the bus as glass shards fly on top of them. Then - A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL flies into the back window setting the back on FIRE!

The Freedom Riders push to the front of the bus and try to open the front door, but the MOB is outside PUSHING it shut.

A white Freedom Rider at the bus door, ELI COWLING, pulls out a gun. The other Freedom Riders look stunned as he points the gun toward the mob through the glass door. The mob backs off.

The door flies open as Eli Cowling holds up a badge.

ELI COWLING

Let these people off or some of you
are going to die!

The crowd backs away even more. All the Freedom Riders stumble out of the bus, coughing and gasping for air. Then -

THE BUS EXPLODES! The Freedom Riders fall to the ground as the mob begins to circle in them. One of them CLUBS Louis in the head as the cello music comes to a passionate conclusion.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

The concert over, Caslas shakes hands with the President. As Cecil hurries over with cocktails, Caslas whispers to Jack:

PABLO CASLAS

Remember all those people out there
who need freedom.

Jack and Cecil are both taken by his words.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cecil is in the upstairs kitchen taking notes. He writes - '20 guests, 10 servers, Truman service.' Then, he hears:

BANGING at the end of the hall. He sticks his head out to see Bobby Kennedy pounding on Jack's bedroom door, he's furious.

BOBBY

Jack! Get up!

The door opens, a sleepy Jack sticks his head out

JACK

What is it?

BOBBY

The Freedom Bus was blown up in
Alabama.

Jack's face drops in shock, Cecil's in horror.

JACK
Are they dead?

BOBBY
We don't know, it hasn't been confirmed. Governor Patterson won't return my calls.

JACK
I'll cut Patterson's balls off!

Bobby enters the room as Jack slams the door. Cecil stares forward in horror.

CECIL V.O.
I didn't know if my son was dead or alive.

Then - he feels a tug at his pants, a just woken up 4 year old Caroline Kennedy holds a children's book.

CAROLINE KENNEDY
Cecil, will you read me a book?

Cecil instantly regains his composure.

CECIL
Of course, Miss Caroline.

She walks him to a table in the kitchen. Caroline sits on his lap and opens 'Madeline's Rescue'. There's a picture of a spooky looking mansion that looks like the White House.

CECIL (CONT'D)
'In an old house in Paris that was covered in vines, lived 12 little girls in two straight lines.'

CAROLINE KENNEDY
Like me and John John.

CECIL
Exactly.
(Back to the book)
"The smallest one was Madeline. She was not afraid of mice."

Caroline beams as Cecil tries to not cry, so scared for his son. He puts his arm around Caroline as he continues...

CECIL (CONT'D)
'She loved winter, snow and ice.'

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

Cecil and Gloria are on the couch watching Jackie's White House tour on the TV. They're tense, nervous.

JACKIE (FROM THE TV)
*"May none but wise men ever rule
 under this roof." It was Franklin
 Roosevelt who loved that prayer and
 had it put on the mantelpiece.'*

The phone rings! They jump up as Cecil quickly answers it.

CECIL
 Hello?

His entire body slumps in relief as he hears:

LOUIS V.O.
 I'm in Mississippi.

Gloria starts to tear up, knowing her son is alive.

CECIL
 I thought you were in Alabama?

LOUIS V.O.
 We spent two weeks in jail there,
 now we're in Mississippi.

CECIL
 Please come home. Please. Just for
 a little while. A few days. Please.

LOUIS V.O.
 That's going to be difficult under
 the present circumstances.

INT. MISSISSIPPI PRISON - DAY

Bandaged and bruised, Louis is in a blue prison uniform calling from the pay phone. The prison looks like hell.

LOUIS
 I've been detained by the local
 authorities.

INTERCUT - CECIL AND LOUIS

CECIL
 For how long?

LOUIS

Three months. When I get out, I'm going to take another Freedom Ride.

CECIL

Why, Louis?

LOUIS

Because it is my right to ride that bus. That is my legal right and I will exercise my rights as an American citizen!

CECIL

They're going to kill you. At some point you gonna get killed.

LOUIS

They're gonna have to kill me, Dad, because I'll never stop.

Cecil's eyes fill with tears, so scared for Louis.

CECIL

All we do is worry about you. Come home, son, please, just for a little while. We miss you so much.

LOUIS

I'm sorry, Dad, but I can't.

CECIL

Why not?

LOUIS

I'm a Freedom Rider.

He hangs up the phone on his father.

GLORIA

Is he comin' home?

Cecil shakes his head, no, a look of painful defeat on both.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - NIGHT

Cecil lies awake in bed, starrng up at the ceiling.

CECIL V.O.

I was scared all the time...

Gloria lies awake on her side, she's not sleeping either.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)
...but it was a scary time.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINNING ROOM - DAY

RD Warner is speaking to all the BUTLERS and several MAIDS.

RD WARNER
If Cuba launches a missile attack
on the capital, your number one
priority is to get the First Family
out of the house first.

Several people nod. Terrified looks are exchanged.

CECIL V.O.
Everyday we thought might be our
last...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE SECURITY GATE - DAY

Several staff walk through the security gate, all are tense.

CECIL V.O.
...but everyday we still came to
work.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Cecil is preparing a sandwich.

CECIL V.O.
If the President was gonna prevent
our nuclear destruction, some one
was gonna have to feed him.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RED ROOM - DAY

Cecil passes the Red Room and sees one of the maids crying.
He immediately gives her a warm hug.

CECIL
Everything is gonna be fine, Tanya,
no one's gonna get hurt.

She nods as she continues to cry, so scared.

CECIL V.O.
I wasn't sure we'd make it, but
those Kennedy boys were real smart.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Booker reads a copy of the Washington Post with the headline: 'REDS AGREE TO SCRAP BASES IN CUBA'. Carter has a huge smile.

CARTER

That was without a doubt the worst
two weeks of my entire life.

Booker nods, but Cecil still looks scared.

CARTER (CONT'D)

What's wrong, Cecil? We made it.

Cecil tries to smile.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - NIGHT

Cecil lies awake in bed again, Gloria awake on her side.

CECIL V.O.

But for us, the fear was never
gonna go away.

CUT TO:

FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE:

Black & White archival footage of black children and teens being hosed down in the streets by police and firemen as barking dogs snap at them.

NEWSCAST V.O.

Protests in Birmingham, Alabama
turned violent this morning as
police turned fire hoses on the
protestors, most of them children.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jack, Bobby and Jackie watch the news footage, they look horrified. Cecil and Booker stand against the back wall, struggling to not appear upset. Jack looks deeply troubled.

JACK

I don't know what country I'm
looking at.

Cecil peeks out over Jack's shoulder, looking for Louis.

EXT. BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA - DAY

Louis is sprayed with a fire hose, jammed against a brick wall. Carol clutches a tree as water drills into her.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cecil stares at the TV screen, barely able to hide his fear. He sees Jack staring at him, he quickly looks forward.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LINCOLN BEDROOM - DAY

Cecil is in the Lincoln Bedroom dusting off the dark wood desk. He is about to walk out when something catches his eye. He walks back to Lincoln's desk and cleans off a small speck.

JACK

Do you ever see the ghost?

Surprised, Cecil turns around to see Jack in the doorway.

CECIL

No, Mr. President, I've never seen Lincoln's ghost.

JACK

They say he still haunts this room.

CECIL

I've heard that as well, but I don't know anyone who's seen him.

Jack Kennedy takes a step forward, lowers his voice.

JACK

I know your son is a Freedom Rider.

Cecil's face drops.

JACK (CONT'D)

He's in prison in Birmingham right now with Martin Luther King.

CECIL

Is he okay?

JACK

I'm guessing he's beat up, but from his record, he must be used to it. He's been arrested 16 times in the last two years.

CECIL

I know Dr. King is supposed to be a great man, but I don't understand what he's done to my son.

JACK

Don't worry about your job, Cecil, I'll keep this quiet.

CECIL

Thank you, Mr. President, I don't want to lose my job...but I just don't know what to do.

JACK

Neither do I.
(Then)
But those kids...

His voice trails off, this is hard for him to say.

JACK (CONT'D)

...those kids have changed my heart, Cecil...

Tears form in Jack's eyes.

JACK (CONT'D)

...they've changed my heart.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Jack sits in front of a TV news camera in the Oval Office. Bobby stands nearby, watching his brother address the nation.

JACK

One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free from the bonds of injustice.

INT. PRISON CELL - BIRMINGHAM - NIGHT

Louis is in a prison cell reading the speech in a newspaper. A small look of pride, his work is starting to pay off.

JACK V.O.

Next week I shall ask the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities open to the public.

INT. COLORED HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Carol is in a hotel room for 'blacks only' with five bruised Freedom Riders watching the speech.

JACK (FROM THE TV)
This seems to me to be an
elementary right.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

A small smile forms on Bobby's face as his brother finishes his historic address. Bobby has been transformed as well.

JACK
A great change is at hand, and our
task, our obligation, is to make
that revolution, that change...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The Butlers all watch the speech on a TV.

JACK (FROM THE TV)
...peaceful and constructive for
all.

Everyone applauds, except for Cecil who looks upset.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil still looks upset.

CECIL
I knew this would embolden those
kids. Their rebellion was workin'
and there was no way they were
gonna stop now.

INT. DISHWASHING ROOM - DAY

Cecil and Carter help out the dishwashers wash the china. Everyone is energized except for Cecil who looks distracted.

CECIL V.O.
I worried all the time that someone
was gonna get killed. Every day I
expected the call and I couldn't
think about nuthin' else.

A Polk plate slips through Cecil's fingers and SHATTERS on to the floor. Cecil stares at the destroyed plate in mild shock.

CECIL
It...it just slipped.

DISHWASHER
Don't worry about it, Cecil.

CARTER
It ain't nuthin'.

But Cecil looks really upset at himself. Then Booker walks into the room, his face is ashen.

CARTER (CONT'D)
What's the matter with you? It's just a plate.

Booker can't speak, clearly shaken about something else.

CECIL
What's wrong, Booker?

Booker looks at the room.

BOOKER
The President's been shot.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

The flag outside of the White House is lowered to half mast.

CECIL V.O.
We laid him in state in the exact same manner as Abraham Lincoln.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil and Booker place black webbing over the windows, the room has been completely transformed into a mausoleum.

MILITARY GUARDS bring in the flag draped coffin and place it on the alter covered in black. Jackie and Bobby follow, she still wears her pink skirt covered in Jack's blood.

RD WARNER
Mrs. Kennedy, would you like me to have a change of clothes brought down?

Jackie shakes her head, no. Defiant.

JACKIE

I want them to see, I want them all
to see what they did to my husband.

Cecil stares at the coffin, devastated with grief.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CENTER HALL - NIGHT

Still in her bloodied skirt, Jackie wanders the hall looking at the paintings as she clutches one of her husband's ties. Cecil gingerly walks over to her as she mutters:

JACKIE

So now he is a legend, when he
would have preferred to be a man.

CECIL

Is there anything I can do for you,
Mrs. Kennedy? Please tell me how
can I help you.

She smiles at Cecil, holds out the tie for him.

JACKIE

This is for you.

CECIL

Mrs. Kennedy, I can't take that.

JACKIE

Please, Cecil, he'd want you to
have it, Jack was very fond of you.

He takes the tie.

CECIL

I will always treasure it.

She touches his face, then continues strolling down the hall, looks almost like a ghost. Cecil walks the other direction. As he passes the Lincoln Bedroom he hears Bobby sobbing:

BOBBY

Why!? Why, God? Why!?

Cecil stares at the door clutching President Kennedy's tie, he can't help it as the tears fall down his face.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cecil lies in bed in his tux, the tie still in his hand. Gloria is clutched in his arms, face red from crying. They lie there in silence. Then Cecil slowly starts to tell her -

CECIL

She's very witty. Most people don't know that, but she's very witty and sometimes she can be silly. She's very relaxed and playful around the house, but when she's in public she transforms into a different person.

GLORIA

Really?

CECIL

That's when she becomes more aloof, and mysterious, but always elegant. She's very complex...and beautiful...and wonderful.

(Turns to her)

What else do you want to know about Jackie? I'll tell you anything you want to know.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

Cecil, Carter, Booker and Freddie Fallows are out on the golf course watching Booker miss a long put. They yell, 'OHHHHHH!'

CARTER

The white man prevented you from hitting your shot!

BOOKER

You know he did!

They all laugh as they stroll to the next hole.

BOOKER (CONT'D)

We're going to have a fund-raiser at church next month for all those kids in Mississippi trying to register black folk. You bloods should come down.

FREDDIE

'Black' folk?

BOOKER

That's right, ace boon coon, we
ain't no negroes no mo'!

CARTER

I'll go. I want to go.

BOOKER

What about you two Tom's? Those
kids are putting it on the line.

CECIL

Not for me.

BOOKER

Alright, alright. What about you,
Mr. Fallows?

FREDDIE

I will be in the Bahamas,
celebrating my retirement.

(Then)

Congratulations, Carter, you are
going to be the new Maitre d.

The Butlers are stunned, Cecil beams at Carter.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

It's time for me to move on,
gentleman, I'm getting old.

BOOKER

But you gonna miss out on all the
fun with LBJ!

They all laugh with clear sarcasm.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

LYNDON JOHNSON, 55, gray haired with glasses, fiery, manic,
sits on the toilet with his pants at his ankles surrounded by
four queasy staff members. Cecil is jammed in the corner.

LBJ

You sorry sap ass motherfuckers
gotta realize that the nigger ain't
gonna take it no more! This entire
country is a tinderbox, ya see, a
goddamn tinderbox of nigger rage
just waitin' to explode!

INT. QUEENS ROOM - DAY

LBJ screams at Cecil in the Queens Room:

LBJ

Next time there is a light on in an empty room, I will fire every sorry son of a bitch in this house. I mean it, Cecil, I'll go back to Texas and run the country from a dirt shack if I have to! Is that what you want?!

CECIL

No, sir.

Cecil flicks off the light switch. LBJ instantly flips to a gregarious, jovial southerner as he slaps Cecil on the back.

LBJ

Now that's what I'm talkin' about!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Cecil and Booker are playing cards, both drinking coffee. Carter reads a newspaper, looks at his watch, it's 3am.

CARTER

Does the man ever sleep?

In walks LBJ's wife, LADY BIRD, sweet and private, she speaks in an elegant Texan accent. They both immediately stand up.

CECIL

What can we do for you, Mrs. Johnson?

LADY BIRD

I just feel terrible about Lyndon's schedule. He's been staying up all night long trying to get this bill passed, and y'all are stuck here.

BOOKER

We don't mind at all, Mrs. Johnson.

LADY BIRD

I was thinking you could have some food pre-made for Lyndon that he'd heat up himself if he wants to eat in the middle of the night.

CECIL

I can't tell you how much we appreciate the gesture, Mrs. Johnson, but no President will ever serve himself as long as we are the White House butlers.

LADY BIRD

Are you sure?

Booker emphatically nods with pride.

CECIL

We serve the President, so that the President can serve the country.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TREATY ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil walks into the Treaty Room carrying a tray with a silver lid. LBJ is seated at the desk on the phone.

LBJ (ON THE PHONE)

I know it's three in the morning, Senator, but I actually wasn't calling for you, I wanted to speak to your wife.

(The voice responds)

Then you'll just have to wake her up now, won't you.

He motions for Cecil to serve him. Cecil elaborately sets down a place mat, a gold fork, knife and spoon.

LBJ (ON THE PHONE) (CONT'D)

Good morning, Barbara, this is your President speaking, I sure hope I didn't wake you.

Cecil places a large plate of green beans in front of LBJ, he covers the mouth piece, asks Cecil:

LBJ (CONT'D)

These canned?

Cecil nods. LBJ gives him a pleased wink.

LBJ (CONT'D)

The reason why I'm calling so late is your husband is wavering on signing Kennedy's Civil Rights Bill, and the American negra' needs your husband's support.

Cecil sets down a tapioca pudding and plate of pancakes next to the green beans, LBJ grins at his bizarre feast.

LBJ (CONT'D)

Now, until he agrees to vote for this bill, I'm gonna have to call you every night at three in the morning, and if he doesn't vote with me, well, I may just keep on calling for the next year or two to tell you how disappointed I am.

As Cecil walks out, he glances at LBJ who digs in to the green bean. Cecil looks baffled by LBJ.

CECIL V.O.

I never before seen a man who said 'nigger' so much, work so hard to help negroes.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

90 year old Cecil is hand washing his socks in the sink.

CECIL

Sometimes people grow up one way, but then they can become someone else, I guess.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - PANTRY ROOM - DAY

The butlers are in the pantry restocking the shelf with glasses and cups. They all look exhausted.

BOOKER

I don't think I've had a full night's sleep in a year.

Cecil and Carter nod in agreement. Then, Booker's face drops in amazement as he sees something. Carter sees what Booker sees, he too is stunned. Carter taps Cecil who jumps up.

They stare forward in quiet shock at the end of the pantry, Booker's eyes fill with tears. Standing across from them is -

MARTIN LUTHER KING.

Only 35, King is very handsome with a rare ability to exude warmth and dignity at the same time.

MARTIN LUTHER KING
I'm so sorry to disturb you,
gentleman, but I wanted to meet you
all. I'm Martin.

He steps forward and holds out his hand to Booker.

BOOKER
This is the greatest honor of my
life, Dr. King.

Martin Luther King smiles, he's very approachable.

MARTIN LUTHER KING
The honor is all mine.

He shakes hands with Carter who is also beaming. Cecil shakes
his hand last, he is formal, a touch cool.

CECIL
A pleasure to meet you, Dr. King.

King grins at their tuxedos.

MARTIN LUTHER KING
My, oh, my, y'all look just superb.

Cecil can't help it as a tiny smile creeps out.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - ROSE GARDEN - DAY

LBJ sits across from MLK, each flanked by their aides. Cecil
stands nearby underneath a magnolia tree.

MARTIN LUTHER KING
Your success with the Civil Rights
Bill is greatly appreciated within
the negro community, Mr. President.

A tiny drop of water FALLS from the magnolia tree and lands
on the back of Cecil's neck. It sends shivers down his spin,
but he stands perfectly still, doesn't move.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)
No President has done more for the
negro since Abraham Lincoln freed
us from chains.

LBJ is beaming, feels great about what he accomplished.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)
But it's not enough.

LBJ's smile drops. Cecil glances over in surprise.

CECIL V.O.

That was the first time I ever started really listenin'.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BATHROOM DAY

90 year old Cecil is wringing his socks out.

CECIL

Oh, sure, I'd hear things from time to time, but I would never listen.

CAMERA MAN

So why'd you start now?

CECIL

A negro was tellin' the President of the United States that a five course meal ain't good enough, he wants all eight courses. I never heard nuthin' like it in my life.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Martin Luther King lights into LBJ:

MARTIN LUTHER KING

Only 5% of the negroes in Mississippi are registered to vote, 11% in Alabama. We desperately need a Voting Rights Bill if we're going to insure we are no longer blocked from Southern voting booths.

Cecil stares forward in stunned amazement.

LBJ

Goddamit, King! You know how many bridges I had to promise to get the last bill passed! I owe every two bit Congressman three bridges, a park and a fuckin' airport. I spent eight months grabbing all these dumb sons-a-bitches by the balls and I got no more balls to grab, Dr. King, I used up all my negra' capital!

MARTIN LUTHER KING

On the bridges and the balls.

LBJ

That's right, Dr. King. Now y'all
are just gonna have to cool down
for a little while.

Another drop of water falls from the tree on to Cecil's neck,
he shuts his eyes in pain. Chinese water torture.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

I should warn you, Mr. President,
that I've got people in the streets
down South right now trying to
register the negro vote.

Cecil's eyes flicker in concern.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)

My guess is that it's going to go
from cool to hot very fast.

LBJ

Where?

Cecil glances over at King right as a drop forms above him.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

Selma.

The drop falls...

INT. REGISTRAR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A black male APPLICANT, 50's, is in a REGISTRAR OFFICE, being
escorted by Louis. The REGISTRAR, snide, reads a question:

REGISTRAR

If the President does not wish to
sign a bill, how many days is he
allowed in which to return it to
Congress for reconsideration?

The black applicant looks at him, baffled. The Registrar
stamps the word 'REJECTED' on his application. Louis shakes
his head in frustration.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

A lively party is going down in the basement of the Gains
House. Cecil serves all his friends martinis and appetizers.

GINA

My niece went to register to vote in Georgia and they made her wait for hours. Then when she finally got in, she had to take a test with all sort of crazy questions. Stuff only an expert would know.

HOWARD

And the white folks are asked who the first president was.

Cecil continues to serve, he looks like he's not listening.

GLORIA

And then those three kids were killed in Mississippi registering black folk.

Cecil tries to hide his fear at this news.

GINA

The only reason why the President sent the FBI is cuz two of them were white.

Everyone nods, except for Cecil. Gloria turns to him.

GLORIA

Shouldn't the President do more to pass a voting bill?

CECIL

President Johnson just passed the greatest piece of civil rights legislation since Lincoln freed the slaves, it's going to be very difficult to pass another bill anytime soon.

Most of the room nods in agreement, when Cecil speaks they listen. He holds up a tray of cocktails to lighten the mood.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Now how about some more spirits while we wait?

They all smile as they grab another drink. Gloria stares at Cecil, it's clear she disagrees with him.

INT. BROWN'S CHAPEL - SELMA, ALABAMA - NIGHT

Louis and Carol are with a huge crowd in the pews. They listen to a 39 year old black speaker in a black suit, skinny tie and browline glasses. His name is MALCOLM X.

MALCOLM X

Back during slavery, there were two kinds of negroes, there was the house negro and the field negro. The house negro lived better than the field negro. He ate better, he dressed better, and he lived right up next to his master.

Louis stares at Malcolm X, taken by what he's saying.

CUT TO:

INT. GAINS HOUSE - FLASHBACK - 8 YEARS EARLIER

Cecil stands in front of the family in his White House Tuxedo for the first time. 14 year old Louis looks at him, uneasy.

INT. BROWN'S CHAPEL - SELMA, ALABAMA - NIGHT

MALCOLM X

Then you had the field negro who hated the master because they caught hell and felt the sting of the lash.

Louis starts to nod.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALABAMA - COUNTRY ROAD - FLASHBACK - 2 YEARS EARLIER

The Freedom Bus burns as Louis gets clubbed in the head.

INT. BROWN'S CHAPEL - SELMA, ALABAMA - NIGHT

MALCOLM X

And today you still have house negroes and field negroes!

The audience applauds as Louis nods in agreement.

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

The same old slave masters today
have house negroes, who are nothing
more than 20th century Uncle Tom's
keeping us passive in non-violence.
That's Uncle Tom making you non-
violent, so you suffer peacefully.

Louis' face drops, he no longer likes this speech.

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

Dr. King came to Selma with his
message of non-violence and I think
the white people of Selma would do
well to listen to Dr. King, before
the field negro comes along and
does things another way.

The crowd breaks out in applause, but Louis looks pissed. He
glances at Carol who has a grin on her face. Louis does not
like what he sees.

INT. ALLEY WAY - SELMA, ALABAMA - NIGHT

Louis and Carol are walking down a dark alley, he looks
disturbed, unsure of what to make of Malcolm X. Carol also
looks disturbed, but she's now unsure of what to make of MLK.

Just then - a GUNSHOT rings through the night. Louis
instinctually grabs Carol and shoves her up against a wall,
their faces inches apart from each other. Then -

She grabs his face and KISSES him on the mouth. Their mouths
and arms inner-twine as they furiously make out in the alley.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gloria walks down the stairs and finds Cecil standing in the
living room, he holds up a personal check.

CECIL

What is this?

Gloria cringes, knows that she's been caught.

GLORIA

What?

CECIL

Have you been sending Louis money?

GLORIA
He needs it.

CECIL
We're not gonna pay for him to kill
himself.

Cecil rips the check up.

CECIL (CONT'D)
If he wants to get thrown in jail
then he can pay his own way!

Cecil storms up the stairs. Gloria watches him go, upset.

INT. NEGRO HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Louis and Carol lay naked under bed covers in a dank motel room. Louis looks quietly content, but Carol is all business.

CAROL
We're losing the press.

Louis doesn't say anything.

CAROL (CONT'D)
We're losing the momentum. King is
in prison and no one cares,
something's got to happen, we got
to make something happen.

He turns to her:

LOUIS
Marry me.

Silence. She doesn't respond.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
Every time I'm rottin' in jail, all
I think about is you. You keep me
sane in this insane world. I want
you to be my wife.

CAROL
I've hated myself since before I
was born. How am I supposed to know
how to love you?

Louis stares at her for a beat. Then -

LOUIS

If I can wait out Jim Crow, I can
wait out you.

She tries not to smile, but she clearly liked the answer.

EXT. DALLAS COURTHOUSE - SELMA, ALABAMA - DAY

Hundreds of black protestors are marching through downtown Selma toward the courthouse. As always, crowds of whites are lined up on the sidewalks screaming and booing at them.

Police in riot gear stand between the whites and blacks. Louis and Carol march with the crowd. Carol looks worried, she whispers to Louis in hushed fury.

CAROL

There's no press here, we're losing
this thing. We are losin'!

She turns to him, an anger building deep in her soul.

CAROL (CONT'D)

You understand me, you stupid
nigger, we're gonna lose Selma!

SHERIFF JIM CLARK, fat, jabs his nightstick into Louis ribs.

SHERIFF JIM CLARK

Get in the middle of the street.

Carol grabs the nightstick and stares at the Sheriff.

SHERIFF JIM CLARK (CONT'D)

What in the hell do you think ya
doin'?

Carol lifts her fist and PUNCHES Sheriff Clark right in the face. Totally blind sided, he falls over.

Louis looks terrified and grabs Carol, but she shoves him off, jumps on top of the Sheriff and PUNCHES him again. And again. And again. And again. And again.

Three cops finally jump on top of her and start beating her with their nightsticks. A PHOTOGRAPHER frantically shoots pictures of the beating.

INT. CHURCH - WASHINGTON DC - NIGHT

In a packed black church, a PASTOR holds up a copy of the NY Times with a photo of Carol getting beat on the front page.

PASTOR

Tomorrow morning these brave men,
women and children in Selma are
going to begin a march to
Montgomery and we need to give them
all the support we can!

Hats are being passed around where people toss in their
dollar bills and change. Booker and his wife, THELMA, pretty,
sit in the pews next to Carter and his wife, SOPHIE, shy.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

Whatever change you've got, put it
in the till because every dollar is
goin' to Selma!

Gloria sneaks into the back of the church. She takes out a
thick roll of one dollar bills and places it in a hat.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

Now let us pray for them.
(Shuts his eyes)
Oh, dear lord, protect these brave
men and women as they march for
freedom.

No one is praying harder than Gloria.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

Protect them as they seek to
protect us.

CUT TO:

FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE:

Black & white news footage of the black protestors getting
clubbed by a militia on the Edmund Pettus bridge.

NEWSCAST V.O.

'The Alabama State Gaurd brutally
suppressed a march from Selma to
Montgomery today in what has been
dubbed 'Bloody Sunday.'

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

LBJ watches the newscast on three separate televisions at the
same time. Lady Bird watches with him, horrified. Cecil
stands behind him, trying to find his son on TV.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - SELMA - DAY

Louis is on the ground coughing from tear gas as riot police and horses trample everywhere around him. A bandaged Carol lies on top of a young teenage girl, protecting her.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cecil looks terrified, but LBJ is stoic as the news footage reflects off his glasses, it effects him on a deep level.

LBJ
The South is never gonna vote
Democratic again.

Cecil looks at him, not sure what he means.

INT. CONGRESS - DAY

LBJ stands at the lectern in Congress addressing the Senate, the House of Representatives and the country:

LBJ
Every American citizen must have an
equal right to vote. Yet the harsh
fact is that in many places in this
country men and women are kept from
voting because they are Negroes.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cecil, Booker and Carter watch the speech in the kitchen.

LBJ (FROM THE TV)
The negro is given a test. He may
be asked to recite the entire
Constitution, or explain the most
complex provisions of State law.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gloria watches alone, enthralled...she's part of this now.

LBJ (FROM THE TV)
And even a college degree cannot be
used to prove that he can read and
write. For the fact is that the
only way to pass these barriers is
to show a white skin.

INT. SELMA BLACK HOTEL - DAY

Louis, Carol and Martin Luther King are crammed in a room full of beaten up Selma protestors. Everyone is bandaged and bruised as they watch the speech.

LBJ (FROM THE TV)
On Wednesday, I will send to
Congress a law designed to
eliminate illegal barriers to the
right to vote.

The room is beaming, several hugs and pats on the back.

INT. CONGRESS - DAY

LBJ gets worked up as he speaks deep from his heart:

LBJ
What happened in Selma is part of a
far larger movement which reaches
into every section and State of
America. Their cause must be our
cause too. Because it's not just
Negroes, but really it's all of us
who must overcome the crippling
legacy of bigotry and injustice.

CLOSE UP - LBJ

LBJ (CONT'D)
And we shall overcome.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

The protestors cheer in celebration, Louis and Carol hug in joy. The only person not cheering is Martin Luther King because his face is covered in tears.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Cecil watches LBJ on the TV, taken by what he's saying.

LBJ (FROM THE TV)
The real hero of this struggle is
the American negro. His actions and
protests have awakened the
conscience of this nation.

BOOKER

It's those kids in Selma, they did this. They made this happen.

A tiny smile forms on Cecil's face.

LBJ (FROM THE TV)

His demonstrations have been designed to call attention to injustice, designed to provoke change, designed to stir reform.

For the first time, Cecil looks truly proud of his son.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

90 year old Cecil is in awe at the memory.

CECIL

The greatest politician of our time said he could never pass that bill, and then because of my son and his friends, the Voting Rights Act of 1964 was passed.

(Then)

Ain't that somethin'.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RD WARNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Cecil sits across from the Chief Usher, RD Warner. Cecil is nervous, gripping his sweaty palms.

CECIL

Since the black staff does just as much work as the white staff, I believe our salaries should reflect our service.

RD WARNER

'Black' staff?

CECIL

I also feel that we should have opportunities at advancement. Black houseman are never promoted to the engineer's office.

RD Warner stares at Cecil for a long beat. Then -

RD WARNER

You're very well liked here, Cecil,
but if you're unhappy with your
salary or position, than I suggest
you seek employment elsewhere.

Cecil looks surprised that he got such a hard rebuke, but he quickly covers it up with a warm, but defeated smile.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - MEMPHIS - DAY

Martin Luther King is in his hotel room seated across from his various associates and aides. Louis sits across from him. They are watching footage of the Vietnam War on television.

NEWSCAST

"US Casualties are on the rise in
Vietnam, giving fuel to critics who
say there is no end in sight for
what has become a bloody war."

Martin Luther King shakes his head, frustrated.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

President Johnson may have a big
heart, but he is making a tragic
error in Vietnam.

Everyone nods their heads in agreement.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)

How many of your parents support
the war?

Almost all of them raise their hands.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)

That's why we've got to keep
speaking out against it.

(To Louis)

Why do your parents support it?

LOUIS

We haven't spoken about it
specifically, I just know they do.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

What does your dad do?

Louis looks embarrassed to say.

LOUIS

He's a butler.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

Ah, yes. The black domestic. They serve a great role in our history.

LOUIS

They do?

MARTIN LUTHER KING

The black domestic defies racial stereotypes by being hardworking and trustworthy. He slowly breaks down racial hatreds by the example of his strong work ethic and dignified character.

(Then)

So even though we perceive the butler as being subservient, they are in many ways subversive without even knowing it.

Louis stares at him, never thought about his dad in this way.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - MEMPHIS - TWILIGHT

Louis walks out of the Lorraine Motel, he is deep in thought, effected by what MLK said about his father. Then -

The sounds of GUNSHOTS explode in the air. Louis drops to his knees for cover. He looks up and sees King's aides standing over a man lying on the balcony.

They point to roof tops across the way.

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Thousands of people are in the streets in Cecil's neighborhood. People are crying, screaming in anger.

A furious black man picks up a trash can and throws it into a store window, glass shatters everywhere.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Hundreds of NATIONAL GUARDSMEN line up in front of the White House in full riot gear. Shields and clubs ready for action.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - NIGHT

Still in his Tuxedo, Cecil drives his car down a dark street, it's dark and quiet, almost eerie. On the radio -

RADIO NEWSCAST
 "Riots have broken out in DC,
 fueled by anger over the
 assassination of Martin Luth--"

Cecil hits the brakes as THREE BLACK MAN dart out in the street in front of him, running from a liquor store.

BOOM!!! The store EXPLODES! Cecil's car FLIPS onto it's side.

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The riot has tripled in size. Stores are on fire as windows are smashed and buildings set on fire. All the renovations and upgrades of the last decade destroyed in minutes.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - BLACK SUBURB - NIGHT

Cecil squirms out of the passenger side window of his car, bleeding at his temples. He starts walking down the street.

A MOB of hundreds of black men are coming toward him. Gun shots are fired into the air as the mob breaks windows.

Police sirens whirl as a RIOT SQUAD pulls up at the end of the block. The RIOTERS march toward the riot police with Cecil directly in between. He doesn't know which way to go.

Tear gas is volleyed through the air and lands in the middle of the rioters. Cecil starts coughing from the tear gas.

EXT. STORE FRONT - NIGHT

A man smashes windows with a baseball bat as fires rage around him. It is violent and aggressive as other LOOTERS back away from him. He turns around as we see it's -

Louis. There is a dark anger in his eyes, transformed by rage. Carol hurries over to him, puts her arms around him.

LOUIS
 I'm not taking it no mo',
 baby...I'm not taking it.

EXT. OTIS PLACE - NIGHT

Cecil walks up his block, dabbing a handkerchief on his forehead. People stare at the fires that consume the city.

Gloria waits on the balcony with Gina and Elroy who's 18 now. She runs into the street and gives Cecil a huge bear hug.

CECIL

I'm okay, honey bear, I'm alright.

Elroy stares at the fires with anger and frustration.

ELROY

Why are they setting their own neighborhood on fire?!

CECIL

They're angry, Elroy.

GLORIA

It's happening all over the country.

They all stare out at the fires that engulf Washington DC.

CECIL

America is burning for Martin Luther King.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - A WEEK LATER

Cecil drives his tattered car through the war torn streets. Burnt buildings, rubble everywhere, military police in tanks. There is a sadness in him at the ruins of his neighborhood.

CECIL V.O.

Three months later, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Cecil gets out of his car and walks toward the White House.

CECIL V.O.

Seemed like riots were breaking out everyday. They even had one in Chicago during the Democratic Convention.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - BACK ENTRANCE - DAY

Hundreds of protestors stand outside the back gate of the White House entrance. They are mostly white students and HIPPIES dressed in colorful tie-dye clothes and beads.

CECIL V.O.

And now the white kids were just as
angry as the black kids.

Holding up Anti-Vietnam War signs, they scream at Cecil as he
pushes his way through the crowd.

PROTESTORS

How can you work there?!/You're
just a nigger to them!/LBJ is a
baby killer!

Cecil maintains his warm smile as the Protestors shout.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - DAY

The butlers and housemen prepare the State Dining Room. The
Protestors outside the White House are heard:

PROTESTORS

HEY, HEY, LBJ! HOW MANY KIDS HAVE
YOU KILLED TODAY!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-A Maid makes a bed, glancing toward the window.

PROTESTORS V.O.

HEY, HEY, LBJ! HOW MANY KIDS HAVE
YOU KILLED TODAY!

-A Calligrapher writes out an invitation, distracted.

PROTESTORS V.O. (CONT'D)

HEY, HEY, LBJ! HOW MANY KIDS HAVE
YOU KILLED TODAY!

-The Florist designs a new arrangement, she looks upset.

PROTESTORS V.O. (CONT'D)

HEY, HEY, LBJ! HOW MANY KIDS HAVE
YOU KILLED TODAY!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

LBJ stares out the window at the furious protestors.

PROTESTORS V.O.

HEY, HEY, LBJ! HOW MANY KIDS HAVE
YOU KILLED TODAY!

LBJ looks like a worn out old man, tired, drained, but mostly defeated. Cecil stands behind him, sets down a can of Fresca.

CECIL

I brought you a Fresca, Mr. President.

LBJ looks back at him, smiles through his sadness.

LBJ

Thank you, Cecil.

He takes a huge swig, it makes him feel a little better.

LBJ (CONT'D)

How's your boy doing?

Cecil doesn't answer immediately, tough to talk about Louis.

CECIL

I don't know, Mr. President. Sometimes I feel like we're living in two different worlds. All I want is for him to be safe, but no matter what I say, he always gets so angry at me.

The Protestors get even louder:

PROTESTORS

HEY, HEY, LBJ! HOW MANY KIDS HAVE YOU KILLED TODAY!

CECIL

He keeps telling me that I don't understand him...and maybe he's right. Maybe I just don't understand him anymore.

LBJ looks at Cecil with a deep pain. He feels the same way about the country.

LBJ

Sometimes it's hard to be a father.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil is ironing a pair of black pants.

CAMERA MAN

Were you sad that LBJ didn't run for a second term?

Cecil looks at his watch.

CECIL

How much more time do we have? I don't want to be late.

CAMERA MAN

We've got a few more hours.

(Then)

Were you sad to see him go?

CECIL

I'm always sad when the First Family leaves. Always.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NORTH PORTICO ENTRANCE - DAY

The moving van is parked as Housemen carry LBJ's boxes to it. Right after a Houseman shuts the van door, it takes off.

CECIL V.O.

But I was also secretly excited that an old friend was comin' back.

An identical moving van immediately pulls up in its place. We hear the voice of the new President:

RICHARD V.O.

I, Richard Milhous Nixon, do solemnly swear...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CENTER HALL - DAY

Richard Nixon and his wife, PAT NIXON, 56, walk down the Center Hall flanked by staff and RD Warner. She is poised and lean with a perfect blond coif. Pat is quiet, but not cold.

They are taking a tour of their new living quarters led by RD Warner. He is flanked by a few aides and the Nixon daughters, TRICIA, 22, petite blond and JULIE, 20, brunette.

Nixon smiles as he gives Cecil his signature Victory salute, Cecil gives it back to him.

EXT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

Gloria is in the kitchen, rolling dough for dinner. She looks unhappy, perhaps something is missing from her life. Just then, there is a knock at the door. She opens it to see -

Louis and Carol. They both have afros and wear black pants and black leather jackets, a militant 'black power' look.

LOUIS

Hi, Ma.

Gloria tears up at the site of her son, so excited to see him. She flings open the door and gives him a huge hug.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Ma, I want you to meet my fiance,
Carol Blue.

Gloria's eyes light up. She screams:

GLORIA

The dear lord has finally answered
my prayers!

She throws her arms around Carol, embracing her in a big hug.

INT. GAINS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The entire family is having dinner along with several neighbors, including Gina and Elroy, who is dressed in a Navy uniform. An impromptu welcome home party.

There is a tension in the air as no one knows what to make of Louis and Carol's 'black power' look. Cecil is particularly put off. Louis glances at Elroy, hates his Navy uniform.

LOUIS

You goin' to Vietnam?

ELROY

Yes, sir.

Gina puts her arm around him.

GINA

We all so proud.

Everyone nods. Louis and Carol glance at each other, then go back to their food, biting their tongues. More silence.

GLORIA

So, Carol, I have all sorts of
cooking supplies you can have when
you two move in together.

CAROL

Thank you, Mrs. Gains, but I don't
cook.

GLORIA

What?

LOUIS

The sisters in our political organization refuse to partake in traditional gender roles.

This makes Gloria feel a little self conscious.

GLORIA

Oh, that's very...unique.

ELROY

What's your political organization called?

LOUIS

The Black Panther Party.

Silence.

CECIL

What kind of name is that?

LOUIS

We promote Black Power through pride in our African heritage as expressed in the teachings and self discipline of Brothers Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

CAROL

We provide free breakfast for children, free medical clinics, and free self defense classes.

CECIL

Self defense classes?

LOUIS

We ain't gonna get beat no mo'.

This lands like a hammer. The room looks uncomfortable.

GLORIA

That reminds me of a movie I just saw that you might like. 'In the Heat of the Night'. Sidney Poitier plays a cop that goes Sout--

LOUIS

I won't see anything with Sidney Poitier.

CECIL

Why not?

LOUIS

Sidney Poitier is the white man's fantasy of what he wants the black to be. Well behaved with no sense of his manhood as a sexual being.

CECIL

But his movies have him fighting for equal rights.

LOUIS

Only in a way that is acceptable to the white status quo. He earns the white man's respect with false dignity instead of fighting against the immorality of his degradation.

(Then)

And the brother can't act.

Carol and him laugh. Cecil looks upset.

CECIL

He won the Academy Award...he's broken barriers for our people.

LOUIS

By being white, by acting white. Sidney Poitier is nothing but a rich Uncle Tom.

Cecil jumps to his feet and screams:

CECIL

GET OUT! GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!

GLORIA

Honey!

CECIL

I WILL NOT SIT HERE AND HAVE YOU RIDICULE THE GREATEST NEGRO STAR OF OUR TIME!

LOUIS

HE'S AN UNCLE TOM!

Cecil SMASHES a plate.

CECIL

GET OUT!

LOUIS
I'M SORRY, BUTLER! I DIDN'T MEAN TO
MAKE FUN OF YO HERO!

Gloria SLAPS Louis across the face. Hard. Gina gasps.

GLORIA
Never disrespect your father in
this house. NEVER! Everything you
have is because of him. Everything!
Your father is a saint and you will
treat him with respect!

Silence. Then, Louis laughs, nods to Carol to leave.

LOUIS
Shit, alright. I'm gone. You
negroes be good, while me and my
girl get y'all some mo' rights.

CECIL
Get out.

LOUIS
So long, pops.

CECIL
Just get out.

Louis and Carol turn around and walk out of the devastated room. Cecil stares at them, fuming in anger.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Cecil walks down a hall with a tray of tea, the anger and bitterness still plastered across his face.

Right when he turns into the room, his face instantly flips to his pleasant smile.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LINCOLN SITTING ROOM - DAY

Cecil brings in a tea for Nixon who is deep in conversation with his two closest advisors - BOB HALDEMAN, 44, crew cut, intense, and JOHN EHRLICHMAN, 45, balding, boy scout face.

HALDEMAN
We think the time calls for a
period of benign neglect.

Cecil pours tea for Nixon.

NIXON
Benign neglect?

EHRlichMAN
The polls overwhelmingly show white voters are tired of the race issue and feel enough has been done.

Cecil pours tea for Ehrlichman, glances at him, but Ehrlichman doesn't notice.

HALDEMAN
And the Southern Strategy is clearly working. We gained momentum in '68, but we think we can flip the South for good in '72.

Nixon thinks it over, stares at Cecil who pours tea.

NIXON
There's this whole black power movement going on, right? What if Nixon promotes black power to mean black businesses, and we find ways to support black entrepreneurs. We pass the buck on desegregation to the courts, but push black enterprise to win over the 20% that could vote our way.

Haldeman and Ehrlichman exchange glances, they love it.

HALDEMAN
That's excellent, sir.

Cecil picks up his tray and heads for the door.

EHRlichMAN
We just need to make sure that 'Nixon's black power' doesn't equate Nixon with the Black Panthers.

Cecil pauses for a slight beat.

NIXON
God no! Did you read Hoover's memo?! It's terrifying. I gave him the green light to go after them with all we got.

Cecil's eyes shut in pain as he walks out the door.

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Ten BLACK PANTHERS, all in black jackets and berets, load shotguns in a smoked filled room. The leader of this group ELDRIDGE HUDGINS, 29, black, muscular, loads his shotgun.

ELDRIDGE HUDGINS

Always beware of the nigger with a gun.

A few people in the room laugh, but Louis is uncomfortable. He looks around at the guns, the smoke, just doesn't like what he sees. He whispers to Carol.

LOUIS

I got to talk to you.

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Louis speaks to Carol in the hall outside the room.

LOUIS

We should get out of here.

CAROL

What?

LOUIS

This is a mistake. We should go.

CAROL

What the hell are you talking about?

LOUIS

I was always proud to be in jail...but I don't think I'd be proud to be there for what we're about to do.

Carol looks stunned. Eldridge Huggins sticks his head out.

ELDRIDGE HUGGINS

Is there a problem here?

CAROL

Louis wants to leave.

Eldridge Huggins stares at him.

ELDRIDGE HUGGINS

You scared, brother?

LOUIS

Yeah, I'm scared, and I'm not your brother.

ELDRIDGE HUGGINS

What about you, soul sister? You gonna go with this jive ass peckerwood?

Carol looks at Louis, then at Eldridge Huggins.

CAROL

No, soul brother, I'm with you.

She walks over to Huggins and puts her arm around him.

CAROL (CONT'D)

I'm not getting beat no mo', Louis.

EXT. OAKLAND STREET - NIGHT

Louis walks down a quiet Oakland street, deeply disturbed. A POLICE CAR slowly drives by him, then continues on its way. Louis watches the car for a moment, then runs after it.

EXT. HOUSE - OAKLAND - NIGHT

The Panthers are staked out with their shotguns - one behind a tree, two behind a house, three more behind a fence. Carol grips her shotgun, but now she looks unsure.

EXT. OAKLAND STREET - NIGHT

Louis runs toward the police car that's half a mile down the street. He waves his arms at the police car.

EXT. HOUSE - OAKLAND - NIGHT

The police car slowly drives down the block looking for an address, inching closer toward its assassins.

The Panthers give each other slight nods. Carol nods back, but she's starting to sweat, doesn't want to do this now.

Right when the car gets in their cross hairs, the Panthers start BLASTING away. BANG! BANG! BANG!

Carol watches for a second, then starts BLASTING as she screams in rage.

Louis appears at the head of the block and sees the firing squad. Police sirens can be heard off in the distance as the Panthers immediately take off running.

Carol sees Louis at the head of the block. They stare at each other, Carol with shame in her eyes. Then she runs off.

Louis watches her go as the sirens get louder and louder. Finally, he runs away.

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Cecil drives down the street that still has many burnt down buildings from the '68 riot. A few new storefronts have opened that sell incense, candles and African clothes.

Men and woman have AFROS and wear colorful DASHIKIS. A sense of AFRICAN PRIDE has been infused into the neighborhood. Cecil eyes it all, just doesn't know what to make of it.

INT. ALLEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Cecil walks into the house and sees Gloria on the couch watching news coverage of Watergate.

NEWSCAST V.O.

"The White House continues to deny any involvement in the break in at the Watergate hotel."

CECIL

Can you please turn that off? I have to deal with Watergate everyday at work, I don't want to deal with it at home.

GLORIA

Well, I can't live in ignorance just because your boss is a two bit criminal with a gang of Cuban thugs on his payroll.

CECIL

A gang of what?

GLORIA

The plumbers.

CECIL

The what?

GLORIA

Nixon's henchmen. The same guys that broke into Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist office were behind the Watergate break-in's, it's obvious this is a conspiracy.

CECIL

What do you want me to do about it? Quit?

GLORIA

Of course not.

CECIL

Cuz if the staff quit every time a President did something we didn't like, there'd be no staff!

Gloria feels bad, kisses him on the mouth.

GLORIA

I'm sorry, baby. The whole thing just makes me upset.

CECIL

And when did you start getting so worked up about politics?

GLORIA

When he didn't appoint a black cabinet member. Not one single black man in his entir--

Just then - they see a MILITARY CAR drive slowly down the street. They hurry to the window to see the car pull up to a house. Out walks a MILITARY OFFICER and a PRIEST.

CECIL

Oh my god.

Cecil and Gloria hurry out of the house, they look terrified. Many neighbors are coming out of their homes as the Officer and Priest knock on a front door.

The door opens revealing Gina, she stares at them in mortal fear. Before they can speak she screams:

GINA

No! Not my Elroy! No!

Cecil has hurried over and holds her as she WAILS in pain:

GINA (CONT'D)
 Please God! Not my Elroy! NOT MY
 ELROY!

The neighbors all surround Gina, many are crying. Cecil continues to hold Gina as she wails in his arms.

CECIL V.O.
 I never felt more lost in all my
 life.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil ties a black tie around his shirt collar.

CECIL V.O.
 Everything was changin' around me
 so fast. Vietnam took our Elroy and
 Gloria was startin' to drift away.
 (Then)
 Everywhere I turned, someone new
 was leavin' me behind...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - YELLOW OVAL ROOM - DAY

Nixon stands in front of the entire White House staff with Pat and his two daughters.

NIXON
 I want you all to know that I leave
 with deep regret in my heart. You
 lifted me up during the tough
 moments and for that I will always
 be grateful.

Several of the staff are crying, but not Cecil. He stares at Nixon with a bitter detachment.

NIXON (CONT'D)
 We think that when we suffer a
 defeat, that all is ended.

He looks right at Cecil.

NIXON (CONT'D)
 But the greatness comes when you
 are really tested...

Cecil looks surprised, never thought he'd ever be tested.

NIXON (CONT'D)
 ...because only if you've been in
 the deepest valley...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NORTH PORTICO ENTRANCE - DAY

The Houseman shuts the back of the moving van.

NIXON V.O.
 ...can you ever know how
 magnificent it is to be on the
 highest mountain.

Right as the moving van drives off, an identical moving van
 pulls up in its place. We hear the voice of GERALD FORD:

GERALD FORD
 I, Gerald Rudolph Ford, do solemnly
 swear--

The moving van immediately pulls off and a new moving van
 pulls up right where it was parked. We hear the distinct
 southern twang of our next President:

JIMMY
 I, Jimmy Carter, do solemnly
 swear...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CENTER HALL - DAY

The staff hurries through the Central Hall, bringing in the
 Carter's new furniture that has a distinct country flair.

The new Chief Usher, SCOTT REXFORD, mid-40's, clean cut,
 oversees the melee, he is much warmer than RD Warner.

SCOTT REXFORD
 38 minutes to go. You all are doing
 great!

Willie Nelson's 'On the Road Again', plays over the sequence:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The new President, JIMMY CARTER, 52, cherub-like, exudes
 warmth and charm. He feels like a sweet uncle. He wears an
 apron as he pours green water from a pot into a bowl.

JIMMY

The juice from the collared greens
contains an abundance of the
vegetable's minerals and vitamins.

(Big smile)

We call it pot likker.

The Chef grins, but a little worried that his culinary skills
are going to be under utilized for the next four years.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CROSS HALL - DAY

'On the Road Again' continues as Jimmy's daughter, AMY, 9,
round nerdy glasses, roller skates through the Cross Hall.
Cecil jumps out of the way holding a tray.

EXT. SOUTH LAWN - NIGHT

A huge Southern style BBQ is taking place on the South Lawn
with a crawfish boil, piles of corn bread and BBQ. WILLIE
NELSON is up on a stage singing 'On The Road Again'.

Jimmy dances with his wife, ROSALYN, pretty and charming.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - DAY

Jimmy Carter stands at a podium in front of the press corps.

JIMMY

...and that is why I am proud to
appoint the country's first black
female Cabinet member, Patricia
Harris, as head of Housing and
Urban Development.

PATRICIA HARRIS, 52, black, walks up to the podium. Cecil
applauds, then stops, remembering he's not supposed to clap.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

Gloria beams with pride at a big front page photo on the
Washington Post of Patricia Harris. She looks up,
thinking...this sparks something in her.

INT. COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE - DAY

Gloria walks into the office of the Combahee River
Collective. It's filled with young black woman in their 20's
and 30's. Many of them with bushy Afros.

Posters cover the walls with pictures of black women marching in rallies with the slogan - "A SEPARATE ROAD TO FEMINISM". A female STAFF MEMBER look up at the older Gloria.

STAFF MEMBER

Can I help you?

Gloria doesn't respond, she looks nervous.

INT. COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE - OFFICE - DAY

Gloria sits in a small office across from BARBARA SMITH, 30, wears an army jacket. She has a tough, but cool vibe.

BARBARA SMITH

Our goal is to gain female equality by calling attention to racism, sexism, homophobia and classicism to ensure that the most discriminated individual in American society, the black woman, will no longer be ignored.

Gloria has a stunned look on her face, doesn't know what to say. Barbara Smith can tell she is overwhelmed.

BARBARA SMITH (CONT'D)

So tell me, Gloria, what exactly brought you here?

GLORIA

Well, my son was a civil rights activist in the sixtie--

BARBARA SMITH

The black woman was completely left behind by the Civil Rights movement. It was always 'One Man, One Vote', the word 'woman' was never mentioned even though we were an integral part of the struggle.

Slight beat.

BARBARA SMITH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, go ahead.

GLORIA

I just feel like I've spent the last 20 years watching the world go by on my television.

(Then)

I don't want to watch no more.

Barbara Smith smiles at Gloria, likes her.

BARBARA SMITH
I think you'd fit in nicely here.

GLORIA
You don't think I'm too old?

BARBARA SMITH
You're never too old to fight for
social justice.
(Then)
So what is your son doing these
days?

Gloria goes quiet.

GLORIA
We haven't spoken in a while.

INT. ELKS CLUB - STATE ASSEMBLY DEBATE - NIGHT

Dressed in a suit and tie, Louis stands at a podium in front of a medium sized audience of about 100 people. A banner above him announces 'STATE ASSEMBLY DEBATE'.

The room is sparsely decorated, a low budget operation, but Louis passionately addresses the modest crowd. In his mid-30's now, he's lost a little hair and gained a few pounds.

LOUIS
With the economy spiraling out of control, there is no greater time for Affirmative Action than now. I know these measures are not popular with white voters, as they seem to feel that racism is a thing of the past, but the truth is that black America is still significantly disadvantaged due to past and present discrimination.

The MODERATOR turns to Louis main competitor, KEITH ALANS, a black conservative in a bow tie, he speaks from a podium.

KEITH ALANS
Mr. Gains and I may share the same skin color, but that is all we share. Affirmative Action is racism in reverse and it only creates more hostility by causing whites to resent blacks.

(MORE)

KEITH ALANS (CONT'D)

If the black man wants to succeed
he must do it with his own
achievements.

LOUIS

You can't kick a man in the dirt
for 400 years and then accuse him
of being dirty.

KEITH ALANS

Even our liberal President agrees
that Affirmative Action should be
phased out as he has already begun
slashing these programs.

Louis shoots him an icy look.

LOUIS

To my great disappointment,
President Carter is not a liberal.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - ROOSEVELT ROOM - DAY

Jimmy Carter sits across from the Black Congressional Caucus.
They are stern with him, all look frustrated. Their leader is
REP. JOHN CONYERS, 49, tough, no nonsense.

Cecil refills everyone's glasses with waters. He seems
focused on the water, but it's clear he's listening.

REP. JOHN CONYERS

You received 94% of the black vote
in the second closest election of
the century, Mr. President. We
elected you, and I'm sorry to say
that we feel betrayed by these cuts
to social programs.

JIMMY

My first priority has got to be
getting inflation down or the
economy is going to continue to
spiral out of control.

REP. JOHN CONYERS

Which is exactly why we need more
economic investment in the inner
cities, not less. White businesses
have fled in droves and it has
created rampant black unemployment.

JIMMY

It's not just the black community
that is suffering--

REP. JOHN CONYERS

--but we are disproportionately
affected.

JIMMY

I've got to keep the budgets tight,
everyone is just going to have to
learn to get by with less.

The black leaders exchange frustrated glances. John Conyers
rises to his feet. Cecil looks surprised.

REP. JOHN CONYERS

We're used to getting less, Mr.
President, we were just hoping for
more from you.

He walks out of the room, Cecil looks stunned.

EXT. LOUIS GAINS ELECTION HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

The small campaign headquarters is covered in deflated
balloons that matches everyone's deflated spirit. The only
person not upset is Louis who tries to cheer everyone up.

LOUIS

I know everyone is disappointed,
and no one more so than me. But we
have to remember that even though
we lost tonight, we need to
celebrate that another brother has
won an election. Now I know he may
not be our kind of brother...

Everyone laughs.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

...but a black man is going to the
state assembly and for that we
should all be thrilled.

Polite applause.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Ten years ago we couldn't even vote
in the South and now we've got
brothers and sisters in Congress
and state offices.

(MORE)

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Maynard Jackson is the mayor of Atlanta, Tom Bradley in Los Angeles, Carl Stokes, Shirley Chisolm, Barbara Jordan and the list goes on and on! We are doing it! We are starting to live the American dream!

Everyone is applauding like crazy now. Even though Louis lost, he looks like a leader.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

I've been through so many dark times, but in all those years gettin' beat and thrown in prison, I never thought I'd see the day that I would have to give a concession speech.

The room gives a warm and joyous applause to this.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

I want to thank you all for your hard work, and I want to thank my beautiful wife, Sarah, for all those long hours on the trail.

Everyone applauds Louis' gorgeous wife, SARAH, 30, black. She smiles at the crowd.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

This isn't the end tonight, it's only the beginning.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil is on the phone as Gloria anxiously waits for news. As Cecil's eyes drop, so do Gloria's.

CECIL (INTO THE PHONE)

Thank you, I appreciate it.

He hangs up, turns to his wife. Then sadly shakes his head.

CECIL (CONT'D)

He lost 51 to 49%.

Gloria cringes at how close it was.

GLORIA

Should we call him?

CECIL

It's been so long. Do you think he
wants to hear from us tonight?

Gloria shrugs, isn't sure.

INT. LOUIS GAINS ELECTION HEADQUARTERS - LATER THAT NIGHT

The room has emptied out a bit. Louis lounges on a couch,
arms clutched around Sarah.

LOUIS

I still can't believe I lost to
that honky nigger.

She busts up laughing.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Everyone knows the fool only got
into Harvard because of Affirmative
Action! What's the matter with
these people?!

An AIDE yells from the other end of the room.

AIDE

Louis, you got a phone call.

Louis walks over to the phone, picks it up. He hears:

CAROL V.O.

I'm so sorry you lost.

Louis sits up, obviously hasn't heard from her in years.

LOUIS

Where are you?

INT. FEDERAL STATE PRISON - NIGHT

Carol is in a prison uniform in a federal penitentiary. Her
arms are covered in prison tatoos, she's been here for years.

CAROL

I love you, Louis. I'm sorry I
never could say that before, but I
really do love you.

INTERCUT - LOUIS AND CAROL

LOUIS

What happened? Where did you go?

CAROL

Don't ever forget that, okay, baby,
please don't ever forget it.

She hangs up.

Louis slowly hangs up the phone, then looks over at his wife.
He smiles at his beautiful Sarah...happy with his life.

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Driving to work, Cecil sees several boarded up buildings with
'FOR RENT' and 'FORECLOSED' signs. All of the African-Pride
stores have shut down and no new businesses are moving in.

CECIL V.O.

Every where I looked, it seemed
like another black man was losin'
somethin' new.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Cecil eyes the headline on Booker's newspaper: 'SUPREME COURT
RULES FOR BAKKE, ENDS RACIAL QUOTAS.'

CECIL V.O.

And for the first time, I was
startin' to get mad.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CHIEF USHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Cecil sits across from the Chief Usher, Scott Rexford.

CECIL

I've been here for twenty years
now, and for all that time, the
black help has been getting a
smaller salary than the white help.
I just don't think it's right.

Scott Rexford is much warmer than the previous Chief Usher.

SCOTT REXFORD

I don't think it is either, Cecil.

CECIL

And there are black housemen who
should be engineers by now, they
should've been promoted years ago.

SCOTT REXFORD

I fully agree, and I plan on making several promotions immediately. The raises are going to be tougher because of the recession.

Cecil smiles his warm smile.

CECIL

I know that we're in a recession, but I can't wait out these excuses anymore. I have to be paid the same as the white help or I'll have to move on.

Silence. Scott Rexford is impressed at his forcefulness.

SCOTT REXFORD

I know that no one wants that, including the President. I'll get into it immediately.

CECIL

It's important that it's not just me, all of the black help needs to get equal pay to the white staff.

Scott Rexford smiles.

SCOTT REXFORD

We'll find a way to make this work.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STAIR LANDING - DAY

Cecil walks up the stair landing with a small look of pride on his face, he sees Jimmy Carter sitting on the floor of the Treaty Room tying a fly fishing fly.

Cecil stares at the President, he looks beaten up by the job, depressed. Jimmy sees Cecil through the doorway.

JIMMY

You ever do much fishing, Cecil?

CECIL

No, sir.

JIMMY

My daddy used to take me fly fishing as a boy.

(Then)

(MORE)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I bet when I'm on my death bed,
I'll think of my daddy, and I
probably won't even remember I was
President.

Cecil grins, but the conversation is a touch painful.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Were you close with your father?

Cecil shakes his head, no.

CECIL

I never knew him.

JIMMY

I'm sorry, Cecil, that's a real
shame.

CECIL

I sometimes wonder what he looked
like.

JIMMY

If he could see you now, I bet he'd
be real proud of you.

CECIL

I bet your father would be very
proud of you, Mr. President.

Slight beat.

JIMMY

I think he might be disappointed.

CECIL

I don't think so, Mr. President.
His son made it to the White House.

JIMMY

We both made it, Cecil.

CECIL

Yes we did, Mr. President.

Slight beat, Jimmy's face falls knowing his doomed fate.

JIMMY

Except you'll get to stay.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NORTH PORTICO ENTRANCE - DAY

A moving van is pulling out as a new moving van pulls in. We hear the raspy older voice of our next president:

RONNIE
I, Ronald Wilson Reagan, do
solemnly swear...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

RONALD 'RONNIE' REAGAN, 69, exudes a sweet, likable quality. He feels like a favorite Grandfather. He is in the kitchen with the butlers and the kitchen staff telling them a joke.

RONNIE
So the psychiatrist took the pessimistic brother to a room piled to the ceiling with brand-new toys. But instead of yelping with delight, the little boy burst into tears. "What's the matter? Don't you want to play with any of the toys," asked the psychiatrist. "Yes," the little boy bawled, "but if I did I'd only break them."

The staff is smiling, a few have already started laughing.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Next the psychiatrist treated the optimistic brother. Trying to dampen his out look, he took him to a room piled to the ceiling with horse manure. The optimist yelped with delight, clambered to the top of the pile and began gleefully digging out scoop after scoop with his bare hands.

A few people grimace, but Cecil is laughing. Ronnie starts to chuckle as he nears the punch line.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
"What do you think you're doing?",
the psychiatrist asked.
(Then)
"With all this manure," the optimistic boy replied, "there must be a pony in here somewhere!"

The whole room bust out in laughter, everyone is beaming, they love Ronald Reagan. Just then, his wife, NANCY, 59, walks into the room in a stylish red suit.

As soon as she walks in, Ronnie tenses up a touch, becomes a different person around Nancy.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Good talking to everyone.

He pecks Nancy on the cheek as he hurries out of the room. Booker whispers to Cecil:

BOOKER
Just like at my house.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Ronnie sits with PAT BUCHANAN, 47, jowly, the Communications Director. They are across from three Republican Senators, RICHARD LUGAR, 53, BOB DOLE, 62 and NANCY KASSEBAUM, 53.

Cecil pours tea for Senator Dole who smiles at him.

RONNIE
I want to make myself clear on this issue. If Congress passes sanctions against South Africa, I will be forced to veto those sanctions.

Cecil stops pouring for a split second, then starts up again.

SENATOR LUGAR
Mr. President, we feel that you are missing a major point here.

RONNIE
Which is what, Senator Lugar?

Cecil pours tea for Senator Kassebaum who nods at him.

SENATOR LUGAR
The brutal repression of South Africa's black citizens is no longer just a foreign policy issue. It's a domestic civil rights issue.

Pat Buchanan snaps at him.

PAT BUCHANAN
If we impose sanctions on South African it will make us appear weak to Russia!

Cecil stands at the back, staring forward, it's clear he's listening. Senator Kassebaum turns to Ronnie with urgency:

SENATOR KASSEBAUM

Mr. President, the three of us are Senators from your own party, you can't get a friendlier room than this. That is why we feel so comfortable telling you that South Africa is a human rights disaster. Blacks are beaten, tortured and gunned down in the streets. The America people are horrified by Apartheid.

Ronnie looks frustrated with the Senators.

RONNIE

I'm sorry, Senator Kassebaum, but I will not show weakness to Russia by backing down on this issue.

SENATOR LUGAR

But Mr. President, your own personal world leadership is at stake. The United States of America needs to be on the right side of history on the race issue.

Ronnie looks at them all with his iron will, when he is convinced he's right, nothing can change his mind.

RONNIE

Let me be clear so that there's no confusion, if Congress passes this bill, I will veto it. Period.

Pat Buchanan smiles at the three Republican Senators who just stare at Ronnie, they can't believe it.

Cecil also stares at Ronnie, he can't believe it either.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DISHWASHING ROOM - DAY

Cecil pours out the left over tea from his teapot. He looks disturbed on a deep level.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ronnie sits alone behind his desk, he is writing a check out for \$2000. Cecil walks in.

CECIL
Yes, Mr. President.

RONNIE
I have a secret mission for you,
Cecil.

CECIL
Yes, sir.

RONNIE
I like to send people money when
they write me about their financial
problems, but my staff has been
trying to get me to stop. You think
you could help me keep this going?

Ronnie places the check in an envelope and hands it to Cecil.

CECIL
Absolutely, Mr. President.

Ronnie looks up at him, something on his mind.

RONNIE
Cecil, did you ever go to those
civil rights rallies in the
sixties?

CECIL
No, sir, I was too old for that
sort of thing.

RONNIE
I know what you mean.

Ronnie looks troubled, trying to work through his feelings.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
This whole civil rights issue...I
sometimes fear I'm on the wrong
side of it...that I'm just wrong.

He turns to Cecil, a touch lost.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
What do you think?

Cecil stares at him, amazed.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil stares into the video camera, still amazed.

CECIL

Never in my life had a President of the United States asked me what I thought about anything.

CAMERA MAN

So what did you tell him?

CECIL

I told him the truth.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Cecil smiles at the President with understanding.

CECIL

I sometimes think the same thing about myself, Mr. President.

Ronnie nods. Then points at the envelope with the check -

RONNIE

I appreciate your help with our little project. And don't tell Nancy about it.

CECIL

I won't, Mr. President.

INT. HALLWAY - WHITE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Cecil walks into the hallway he hears from behind him.

NANCY

Cecil.

Cecil tenses up, quickly puts the envelope in his pocket.

CECIL

Yes, Mrs. Reagan?

NANCY

You're very well liked around here. Everyone says you're the man that got them raises and promotions. I had no idea you were such a rebel. How'd you get to be like that?

Cecil smiles, trying to play it off like a joke.

CECIL

I'm not a rebel, Mrs. Reagan, it just seemed like it was time.

She smiles at him, clearly likes Cecil.

NANCY

I wanted to talk to you because I'd like to personally invite you to the State Dinner next week.

CECIL

But I'm going to be there, Mrs. Reagan.

NANCY

No, Cecil, not as a butler, I'm inviting you as a guest.

Cecil is stunned, doesn't know what to say.

CECIL

But...the President prefers for me to serve him personally.

NANCY

Don't worry about, Ronnie. I'll take care of that. So we'll see you and your wife next week, yes?

CECIL

(Stunned)
Yes, Ma'm.

EXT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

Wearing a three piece tux, Cecil walks out of his house with Gloria who is in a ball gown. They are greeted with a wild round of applause from the neighbors who are all outside.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Gloria is being escorted by a Military aide toward the East Room. She looks around in total amazement, Cinderella at the ball. Cecil wanders behind her like all the other male dates.

BOOKER

Can I get you champagne, Mr. Gains?

Cecil slaps him on the shoulder.

CECIL
Oh, come on now!

Booker starts to laugh. Then from behind them they hear:

MILITARY AIDE
Ladies and Gentleman, the President
and First Lady of the United
States.

The Military Band begins 'Hail to the Chief' as Ronnie and Nancy walk down the hall to great fanfare.

Gloria stares at Nancy who greets all of her guests with charisma. Gloria is in awe of Nancy as she whispers to Cecil.

GLORIA
She's so strong.

INT. STATE DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

They are seated at separate tables as all of the butlers smile at Cecil, very proud. A BUTLER serves him tomato soup.

BUTLER
This one is made special, Mr.
Gains.

CECIL
Oh, come on now!

Cecil glances over at Gloria who is seated near Nancy, she beams at the First Lady who is controlling the table.

Cecil looks around at all of the butlers serving the room - carefully setting down dishes, refilling water and wine glasses. They are an impressive, well oiled machine.

But Cecil's smile slowly starts to drop. He doesn't know why, but he doesn't like what he sees.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil looks confused at the memory.

CECIL
It was real different sittin' at
the table instead of servin' it.
Real different.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Cecil walks into the kitchen where Chef Luke is preparing a glorious chocolate mouse. All of the staff looks confused.

CHEF LUKE
What are you doing here?

CECIL
I wanted to see if you needed any help.

CHEF LUKE
Get back up there!

CECIL
Alright, alright.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

All the guests are having after dinner drinks. Cecil looks even more unhappy, but Gloria is shinning, outgoing. Booker walks over, whispers to Cecil.

BOOKER
How's it going, blood?

CECIL
Real nice.
(Then)
Be even nicer if I was here for real instead of for show.

Booker smiles at Cecil with empathy, he finally gets it.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - NIGHT

They walk into the house, Gloria is on cloud nine, still on a high from the night. Cecil looks conflicted, almost confused.

GLORIA
I think that was one of the greatest nights of my life.

Cecil smiles, but it's clear he had a different experience.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gloria is asleep, but Cecil lies wide awake.

CECIL V.O.

I couldn't understand why such a lovely night would cause me so much trouble.

He looks over at Gloria who is sound asleep with a big smile.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

It had a whole different effect on Gloria.

EXT. RALLY - DAY

A huge rally is taking place with hundreds of black women facing a stage where a nervous Gloria stands at a microphone.

GLORIA

I'm just a quiet house wife from Washington DC, I never once saw myself as having the courage to stand up in front of people and speak out.

(Then)

But for far too long the black woman has lived in the shadows. I say it is time we step out from the dark and let our voices be heard!

The crowd roars with approval, no one louder than Cecil. But as Gloria continues her speech, Cecil looks a touch lost.

CECIL V.O.

The more Gloria came into her own, the more confused I felt.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Cecil passes out cookies to people in the White House tour, he looks unhappy.

CECIL V.O.

For the first time in 34 years I started to feel restless at work.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DISHWASHING ROOM - DAY

Cecil is washing dishes, looks almost angry.

CECIL V.O.

I felt like I didn't know who I was anymore.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

90 year old Cecil is wearing a tie and pants, he cleans off his suit jacket with a lint brush.

CECIL

Then I remembered that the last time I felt this way was after I read those books when I was a kid.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Cecil is in a library looking at the stacks of books.

CECIL V.O.

So I figured they might explain to me why I was upset again all these years later.

He pulls a copy of 'EYES ON THE PRIZE' off the shelf.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - LATER

He sits at a table reading the book. There is a picture from 1960 of the black students at the sit-ins being taunted.

CECIL V.O.

I remembered when this happened, but I didn't know how bad it got.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Cecil reads 'RACE, REFORM AND REBELLION' about the Freedom Riders, there is a picture of the burning bus.

CECIL V.O.

Readin' about these kids made me embarrassed about how wrong I had been about them at first. They were never criminals...

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil sits on the couch reading 'PILLAR OF FIRE', there are pictures of the various student protestors.

CECIL V.O.

...they were heroes. All of them.
(MORE)

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)
 James Bevel, John Lewis, Ella
 Baker, Stokey Carmichael, Bernard
 Lafayette, Carol Nash.

He turns the page and there is a full page picture of Louis holding a sign that says 'I AM A MAN.' Cecil is stunned.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)
 And then there he was, my boy...

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Cecil smiles into the camera.

CECIL
 ...right along the rest of them.

For the first time we see the CAMERA MAN -

It's Louis, now 66, he's bald with grey temples. Tears roll down his cheek as he listens to his father. Cecil smiles at his son, so proud.

CECIL (CONT'D)
 We had barely spoken for almost ten years, and when I saw your picture I realized that it had been the worst ten years of my life. I never knew I could miss someone as much I missed you.

LOUIS
 I missed you too, Dad, I missed you so much.

CECIL
 When you were born I promised you that nuthin' was gonna ever tear us apart...

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Cecil walks down the street, there is still rubble from the '68 riots, most of the buildings are run down and boarded up, a DRUG DEALER on the corner, a PROSTITUTE on another.

CECIL V.O.
 ...and now it was time to keep my promise.

EXT. SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY - DAY

Hundreds of protestors are outside the South African Embassy with signs 'Freedom in South Africa' and 'End Apartheid'. Louis is at the front of the crowd standing next to Amy Carter, who is now 18. Louis talks to a REPORTER.

LOUIS

Twenty-five years ago we marched in this country for our rights, today we march to free the people of South Africa!

The crowd cheers around him.

REPORTER

Were you surprised by President Reagan's veto?

LOUIS

Ronald Reagan has attacked or dismantled every civil rights program that has ever been put in to place. Aiding the oppression of black South Africans is consistent with his policies on race issu--.

Louis stops talking as he sees Cecil watching him from across the street. Louis is stunned.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Please excuse me for a minute.

The Reporter moves on to Amy Carter.

REPORTER

Amy, does your father, former President Carter approve of what you are doing here?

Louis walks up to Cecil. The two of them stare at each other for a long beat. It's been so many years.

LOUIS

Hi, Dad.

CECIL

Hi, Louis.

LOUIS

What are you doing here?

CECIL

I came here to protest with you.

LOUIS
But we're gonna get arrested,
you'll lose your job.

CECIL
I resigned today.

Louis is shocked, can't believe it.

LOUIS
Why?

Cecil smiles.

CECIL
I want to join the Beloved
Community.

Louis beams as he wraps his arms around his dad in a huge hug. This time, he's the one that doesn't want to let go.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

Cecil and Louis sit side by side in a holding cell crammed with 20 other protestors. Cecil looks nervous.

LOUIS
Don't worry, Dad, we'll be out in a
few hours.

CECIL
How many times have you been
arrested?

LOUIS
Sixty-three.

Cecil is stunned, had no idea. They sit for a moment. Then, Cecil starts to sing:

CECIL
*'We shall overcome. We shall
overcome.'*

Louis joins in with him -

CECIL AND LOUIS
'We shall overcome someday.'

They continue singing into the next scene...

EXT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

Cecil and Gloria are twenty years older with full heads of grey hair. Cecil helps Gloria gingerly walk down their block, 'BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT' signs are on every lawn.

CECIL AND LOUIS V.O.
*'We are not afraid. We are not
 afraid...'*

EXT. CECIL'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

They continue their walk through the neighborhood, it has been revitalized, lots of new buildings and stores, no more rubble. 'BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT' signs in every window.

CECIL AND LOUIS V.O.
'...we are not afraid someday.'

EXT. GRADE SCHOOL - DAY

They walk up a tree lined street to an elementary school with a sign - 'Polling Station #54. Vote here on November 4!' They stare at it for a long moment, then Gloria tears up.

GLORIA
 My grandparents were born slaves,
 and in a week I'm gonna come here
 and vote for a black man to be
 President of the United States.

She turns to Cecil with tears in her eyes.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
 Never in my wildest dreams did I
 ever imagine this could happen in
 my lifetime, and now I'm not only
 gonna see it, but I'm gonna be a
 part of it.

Cecil takes her hand.

CECIL
 Ain't it something, honey bear.

GLORIA
 It sure is, baby doll.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - NIGHT

Cecil helps Gloria gingerly sit down on to their bed.

GLORIA
Reagan did what?!

CECIL
He'd have me send checks to people
that sent him letters about how
poor they were.

GLORIA
So the man cuts welfare benefits
for millions, but sent poor people
money out of his own pocket?!

Cecil shrugs. Gloria thinks for a moment, then confesses:

GLORIA (CONT'D)
I kept sending Louis money after
you told me to stop.

LOUIS
For how long?

GLORIA
Years.

Cecil stares at her, then smiles.

CECIL
I did too.

GLORIA
No!

CECIL
He never knew it was from me.

They both start to laugh as Cecil walks into the bathroom.

CECIL (CONT'D)
I stopped after the fight, but I
didn't want to. How much would you
send him?

She doesn't respond.

CECIL (CONT'D)
How much did you send him?

He walks back into the bedroom.

CECIL (CONT'D)
Honey bea--?

He stops as he sees that Gloria is passed out in an unusual position. Cecil immediately knows that something is wrong.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Cecil is at a podium in front of a packed church next to a casket. The audience is filled with a huge crowd, watching Cecil eulogizes with a joy at his Gloria's beautiful life.

CECIL

As a poor negro girl growing up in the deep south, never in her wildest dreams did my beautiful wife think she would lead marches and rallies in front of hundreds of black women.

The audience applauds.

CECIL (CONT'D)

As a poor negro girl in the deep south, never in her wildest dreams did my beautiful wife dream that she would she see her son become a United States Congressman.

Louis smiles as the audience applauds the Congressman.

CECIL (CONT'D)

And as a poor negro girl in the South, never in her wildest dreams would my beautiful wife think she'd see her husband arrested for protesting the Iraq War. Both of them!

Wild applause.

CECIL (CONT'D)

The story of my Gloria, is the story of this country. She lived most of her life quiet in the shadows, afraid to lift her head. But when the truth became clear, she found the courage to speak her mind. Not just as a black woman, but as a proud American. She lived a wonderful life, and I am so proud to know her. My family's only regret...

EXT. GAINS HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Louis is in the basement of his father's house. He looks at all pictures on the walls of Cecil with all of the presidents, but instead of the actors that played the Presidents, it's Cecil with the actual Presidents.

CECIL V.O.

...is that she never got to vote
for a black man, an African-
American, for President of the
United States.

Louis looks at a black and white photo of Cecil with Ike. A picture of Cecil serving LBJ. A bronze bust of Robert Kennedy sits next to JFK's tie that Jackie gave him.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

But in my heart I'll know that she
will see his victory...

A picture of Cecil, Booker and Carter smiling with Nixon is next to a picture of Cecil and Nancy Reagan.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

...she'll be up in Heaven smiling
down with all of our ancestors...

He looks at the book case that is filled with dozens of book on African-American history. He pulls a book off the shelf and starts to thumb through the pictures.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

...so proud of how far America has
come.

He stops at - a picture of the smiling Emmet Till. All these years later, the image is still very painful for him.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

Louis! Get up here!

Louis hurries up the steps.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is packed with people - Cecil, Louis, Sarah, Booker, Carter, Howard, Gina and her new husband. Lots of kids and grandchildren. All eyes are glued on the TV:

CNN ANCHOR

We can officially announce that
Barack Obama will be the 44th
President of the United State.

The room screams in joy, hugs and tears.

CUT TO:

FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE:

The real footage of President Barack Obama, his wife Michelle, and their daughters, Sasha and Malia, standing on stage in Grant Park waving to the crowd of thousands.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone in the Gains house watches the TV in awe as President Barack Obama and his family wave to the crowd.

There are no tears, no cheers, no noise, just silence, stunned silence as they stare at the new First Family. Louis and Cecil both turn to each other, they can't believe it.

FROM THE TV - BARACK OBAMA BEGINS HIS SPEECH:

BARACK OBAMA

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

Cecil puts his arm around Louis, holds his son.

INT. GAINS HOUSE - DAY

90 year old Cecil wears the suit that he has been preparing the whole film as he ties a tie on Louis.

CECIL

So let me ask you a question,
Congressman.

LOUIS

Yes, sir?

CECIL

Why did you have to make your dad worry about you so much all those years?

Louis thinks about it, then:

LOUIS

So one day he could meet the man we're about to meet.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Cecil and Louis sit in the Entrance Hall of the White House. Cecil looks around - the paintings, the sculptures, the clocks - it truly is American splendor.

Through a door, he sees the HEAD BUTLER, black, teaching a new young butler. All of the china, flatware and stem ware are lined up exactly how they were when Freddie taught Cecil.

Cecil can't help but notice that both butlers are black. A maid walks by, she is Mexican. Two housemen carry an antique wooden bench down the hall. They are both black.

Cecil's eyes drop ever so slightly. Then, the new Chief Usher, ADMIRAL STEPHEN ROCHON, black, walks up to them.

ADMIRAL ROCHON

Mr. Gains, Congressman Gains, I'm Admiral Rochon, the Chief Usher.

Cecil looks surprised that he's African-American.

CECIL

It's nice to meet you, Admiral. Did you sign on with President Obama?

ADMIRAL ROCHON

No, I started with President Bush. The last one.

CECIL

(Smiles)

Well that's just fine.

ADMIRAL ROCHON

I just wanted to tell you what an honor it is to meet you both.

LOUIS

The honor is ours, Admiral.

Admiral Rochon gestures toward the State Dining Room.

ADMIRAL ROCHON
President Obama is ready for you.

They look at each other as they get up and walk down the hall toward the State Dining Room passing all the Presidential portraits - LBJ, NIXON, IKE, CARTER, REAGAN AND JFK.

The Secret Service opens the door as they see the back of PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA. He is looking up at the great painting of Abraham Lincoln that hangs above the mantel.

A smile forms on Cecil's face as the butler and his son walk toward the first black President of the United States.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END