

**THE BUTLER**

by

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Sony Pictures  
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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 HOBOES, 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 fiancé,  
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 smoke 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 tieing 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