

THE SHOWRUNNER

Screenplay by

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Based on the article

"BAD BOYS"

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TITLE CARD: BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA, 1986

FADE IN...

EXT. POINSETTIA HEIGHTS, FLORIDA - DUSK

All is calm on a palm tree lined street. Everything against the golden sky is silhouetted. Seagull caws can be heard beyond the sea breeze. It's serene and peaceful until...

A beat up and rusty van speeds toward the horizon.

BOB (V.O.)

You wanna slow it down, Carmine?

The van makes a sharp turn onto a residential street full of beautiful Spanish Colonial Revival style homes.

BOB (V.O.)

Carmine, you deaf? Slow it down!

INT. BEAT UP VAN - CONTINUOUS

The van is full of policemen with mullets and mustaches.

Captain RON CACCIATORE (40s) a handsome cowboy type, sits shotgun. Behind him are Sergeants BOB DEAK (30s), wound very tight and VICKI CUTCLIFFE (late 20s), a 'you talkin' to me' attitude with big blond hair. SCOTT and HENRY (cops) are behind them. They hold shotguns. CARMINE drives.

CARMINE

We shoulda been there half an hour ago. I'm going 70.

RON

Not in this neighborhood. We're passing big donors.

BOB

You can't speed in a white neighborhood, Carmine.

HENRY

I don't want anything fucking with the barbecue funds.

SCOTT

(not looking well)

Captain, I gotta sit up front. Can we stop?

RON

Get a bag.

They hit a bump. The jolt causes Henry to cock his shotgun. A shell casing flies out.

BOB

Careful with that thing!

The casing rolls to the back of the van. A foot stops it. Looking out of place in civilian clothes is JOHN LANGLEY, mid 40's. He has an intelligent face, a trim beard and fierce eyes. He picks up the casing.

Next to him is a pimply CAMERAMAN. He's assembling a camera.

CAMERAMAN

Souvenir?

JOHN

For my kid.

CAMERAMAN

How old?

JOHN

Just turned twelve.

John takes out his wallet and shows him a photo of his son.

CAMERAMAN

Cute. He's really into guns?

JOHN

No, not really. Just want to give him something when I get back.

CAMERAMAN

But you're not letting him watch this show are you?

JOHN

He has to see what's been keeping me away all this time.

CAMERAMAN

I'm not letting my kids watch this.

JOHN

Morgan's very mature for his age.

CAMERAMAN

My kids are mature too. Look, a child's mind is like a sponge.

(MORE)

CAMERAMAN (CONT'D)
It's very precious thing. Children
imitate what they see.

JOHN
This show isn't gonna make him
smoke crack. If anything, he'll see
this, and never touch it.

CAMERAMAN
But once the idea is planted you
can't ever get it back out. It's
enough for an adult to process this
dark material let alone a child.

JOHN
At a certain point, the world
reveals itself. Better they learn
through us.

CAMERAMAN
I wouldn't risk it. That's the
parent I am.

JOHN
(moving closer)
Look at me. If you ever tell me how
to raise my son again, I'll rip
your head from your fucking body.

John turns to the only person who's heard the interchange,
STEPHEN KIGER, mid 30's, the fastidious boom operator.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You ready?
(Kiger nods)
Hey guys we have to move. We're
live in ten.

RON
Blow through this light.

HENRY
Into the ghetto we go...

EXT. SOUTH MIDDLE RIVER, FLORIDA - NIGHT

The van speeds down a dark street with no lamps. The houses
are dilapidated, some rotting and coated with graffiti.

INT. BEAT UP VAN - CONTINUOUS

John is on his walkie-talkie. The voice coming in is English.

WALKIE-TALKIE VOICE
Geraldo, just did his intro. Over.

JOHN
We'll be there. Over.
(to the Cameraman)
Get that ready to go.

CAMERAMAN
It's ready.

JOHN
You got the lens cap on genius.

RON
It's 611 Douglas Street.

VICKI
Douglas is back there. We have to
turn around.

HENRY
God, I can't see shit. Scott, you
helping us or what?

SCOTT
(still in the bag)
I can't talk man.

RON
These houses have no mailboxes. How
the fuck do they get their mail?

VICKI
615. We passed it.

BOB
How many fuckin' cops does it take
to find a fuckin' house?

JOHN
It's right there. Two houses down.

Carmine slams the breaks.

RON
Turn your brights off, damn it.

Everyone looks to see a red brick box of a house, no lights
on. It's eerily quiet.

CAMERAMAN
No one's home...

BOB
Oh, they're in there.

SCOTT
Yo camera guy, make sure you get a shot of Vicki's ass when we go in.

VICKI
And film him from the back, it's a better hairline.

RON
I liked you better nauseous.

JOHN
We're live in two.

RON
Let's move out.

Officers cock their guns and adjust themselves to look good for the camera.

BOB
No one fuckin' curse okay?

HENRY
So no calling 'em niggers.

CARMINE
Assuming they are.

HENRY
It's a crack house, Carmine. It's only niggers in there.

RON
Henry, do me a favor and shut the fuck up for the night. I don't need the NAACP up my ass again.

BOB
What are you a moron? You can't say that shit on TV.

HENRY
You can't say anything anymore.

VICKI
Hold on.

A tall and husky BLACK MALE turns towards the red brick house. Tucked in on his back side is a... REVOLVER.

ENGLISH WALKIE-TALKIE VOICE
What is going on John? Over.

JOHN
(whispering to Cameraman)
Point the god damn camera...

The Cameraman, trembling, points the camera to the black male knocking on the door... it swings open. He walks into the darkness and the door slams shut.

BOB
That's a Smith & Wesson Model 29
Classic.

SCOTT
He doesn't look like Dirty Harry to
me.

JOHN
We have to move.

The cops get out of the van.

CAMERAMAN
I'm not going in there!

JOHN
You're protected. You have a vest.

CAMERAMAN
They could shoot me in the face!

ENGLISH WALKIE-TALKIE VOICE
YOU'RE ON IN TWENTY SECONDS.

John snatches the camera and gets out of the van. He switches the walkie talkie so that it will go into his ear piece.

KIGER
You should get his vest.

JOHN
(into the walkie-talkie)
You can see me? Good.

John with Kiger runs to the cops huddled at the door. Carmine hoists the pick end of a Halligan bar up. Everyone whispers.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Wait. Commercial break.

RON
How long?

JOHN
Forty.

CARMINE
Minutes?!

JOHN
Seconds.

BOB
There's no 40 minute commercial
break Carmine. Jesus.

RON
Wait. Warrant. Who has the warrant?

SCOTT
Shit... I left it in the car.

BOB
Fucking Christ!

JOHN
Language.

SCOTT
I'll go get it.

RON
Don't. It's fine. We have it
though, right?

SCOTT
(unsure)
Yeah.

HENRY
Guys...

Everyone turns to see two boys, stopped on their bicycles in
front of the house. The boys stare blankly at them.

RON
Requesting back up on 611 Douglas
immediately—

A loud THUD can be heard from inside the house.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
GIVE ME MY FUCKING MONEY!

JOHN
Twenty seconds.

CRASH! A woman wails. Ron motions to Carmine.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(into the walkie-talkie)
We're moving. Come back to us.

John turns on his camera light illuminating the whole area.

BOB
POLICE! OPEN UP!

Carmine heaves... again... again... **CRACK!**

INT. BRICK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

An ADDICT, wearing only boxers, is pummeled to the floor.
Henry pins the addict down with his foot.

HENRY
DON'T MOVE. YOU HEAR ME!

John swoops in behind them getting this all in shot. The
black male, dumbfounded, stands in the kitchen.

SCOTT
DOWN! LIE DOWN RIGHT NOW!

He drops to his knees. Vicki cuffs him. A MOTHER holding her
BABY walks into John's frame.

RON
Miss, just get on the ground.

The mother gets down on the floor, her baby is oddly calm.
Bob moves to the stair landing. John and Kiger follow him.

BOB
Anyone upstairs?

John swerves his camera to Scott and Henry on top of the men.

HENRY
WHO'S IN THE HOUSE?

ADDICT
I don't know! I don't live here,
man. Ow, that hurts!

FOOTSTEPS can be heard from upstairs.

BOB
The light...

John turns off the light making Bob a silhouette... Bob lets out a breath... calm and collected. He starts walking up.

Kiger is pale and shaking. John points to some slack boom chord on the floor. Kiger coils it up. John gives a reassuring nod. Both men follow Bob up.

The floors creak. Bob comes to the first door in a hallway. He opens the door... it's a sparse bedroom with a torn up mattress, no frame. John pans the camera across a desk with CRACK COCAINE on top, propped up next to it lies a SHOTGUN.

The three move to the next room. Bob struggles to open the door... he kicks it open... FLIES swarm... a horrible smell hits them. The room is filthy and cluttered. Lying in a corner is a ROTTING PUPPY. Bob shuts the door.

At the end of the hall is the last door. Light illuminates out the bottom. As they creep forward, voices grow louder. Bob holds up his gun, waits a moment, then bursts in.

BOB (CONT'D)

Hands up!

A dark skinned CARIBBEAN GUY watches TV with his back to Bob.

CARIBBEAN GUY

I saw you enter on the TV.

BOB

Stand and turn towards me. Now get on the ground. Slowly.

CARIBBEAN GUY

There's a gun. On the right.

BOB

This looks rusty as hell.

CARIBBEAN GUY

I'm police from the Bahama's.

BOB

Smuggling huh? Well, you ain't going home anytime soon.

Bob takes him out. On the TV: GERALDO RIVERA talks to a live studio audience, "We'll be back soon after this commercial break." John lowers his camera.

JOHN

That's us... he was watching us.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Police cars with red and blue lights flare the area. A crowd lines the street. John films Ron holding pistols and Bob holding a duffel bag of coke.

RON

We've got two and a half kilos of cocaine. We've got firearms with silencers on them and the jack pot of all jack pots, we've apprehended a Nassau, Bahamas police officer.

(presses into an earpiece)

It means there's a bit of corruption over there and it causes us problems here, not our department, but most importantly how does the neighborhood feel?

The crowd cheers. John and Kiger lower their film equipment. JERRY WURMS (30), the production assistant, approaches John.

JERRY

Over here! It was fucking awesome when you busted in and took down those coons! I was on the edge of my seat.

JOHN

Thanks Jerry...

They move to a satellite truck. The door opens, it's MALCOLM BARBOUR (50's), John's English business partner. If John is the mind, Malcolm is the heart and soul. Jerry drives.

MALCOLM

You could have been bloody shot!

JOHN

The guy you hired chickened out.

MALCOLM

You're not Rambo with a camera John. You put us in major jeopardy by going in there. The liability insurance doesn't cover you.

JOHN

Were you not watching? That Caribbean guy was watching Rivera when we came in.

JERRY

What Caribbean guy?

JOHN

The guy! The Caribbean guy!

MALCOLM

We're making a TV show. We're not curing cancer. You can put your life at risk after I retire, not before.

JOHN

Yes, captain.

MALCOLM

I accept your apology. Sincere as always. Now where's that cameraman?

JOHN

Back at the scene.

MALCOLM

Our insurance only covers the camera if he's using it.

JOHN

I am holding it very firmly.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Officers hold semiautomatic rifles in front of an opened van filled with mounds of cocaine. John positions one officer.

JOHN

Just like that. Stay right there.
Can we have the coke over here to get it in shot?

Sheriff NICK NAVARRO, late 50's, approaches John. The Florida sun has baked deep wrinkles in his Cuban face. He exudes an easy, warm charisma.

NICK

So we won't be able to throw the cocaine in the incinerator tonight. We couldn't test all of it in time for the shoot.

JOHN

So this is all just for show?

NICK

I'm sure you've realized by now that is a lot of what law enforcement work is.

MALCOLM

We're on in five gentlemen.

JOHN

It's going to make your department
look good. Just one bag Nick.
Please. I need this shot.

CUT TO John filming Nick, with an ear piece, in front of the
van with the armed officers standing statuesque.

NICK

Right now we're going to be burning
300 kilos of cocaine which is
around 50 million dollars.

(beat)

So far we have not been able to say
that we're really making a dent.
What we are finding is that they
are bringing in as much as they
want to and we continue to seize as
much as we can.

Rivera speaks into the earpiece: *"Let's see you toss that in
the fire, Nick!"* He reluctantly throws it in the incinerator.

JOHN

And we're off. That's a wrap!

NICK

How'd I look?

COP #1

Old!

JOHN

You did great sir. It was real.
This is what TV should be.

The cops cheer and whistle. The cheers grow louder...

INT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The Broward County police force, including every cop from
earlier clap for John and Malcolm at the front of the room.

JOHN

I know that's because of the free
beer. Before we play the video, I
just want to thank you guys for
allowing us to film you. America
has seen its next superstars. To
Broward County!

CUT TO Jerry putting a VHS into a player. ON THE TV: Geraldo Rivera, in a suit talks into the camera.

GERALDO RIVERA

*Two thousand times a day every day
cops in America prepare to bust
another suspected pusher. Just one
strategy in the escalating war on
drugs. During the course of this
live program you'll be a witness as
a pusher goes down for the count. I
am Geraldo Rivera and this is
American Vice.*

JOHN

(to Malcolm)

He didn't say the one I wrote.

*Heart-thumping music plays as a title sequence swoops in...
"American Vice: The Doping of a Nation". MONTAGE of segments
from the show.*

John gets visibly more frustrated with Rivera's hokey presentation. The program shows Rivera all over the country as it CUTS back to him in New York with the studio audience.

GERALDO RIVERA (V.O.)

It's the kids who suffer the most.

CLOSE UP of a small black child. Rivera is talking to an ADDICT MOTHER holding the BABY.

ADDICT MOTHER

Who are you?

GERALDO RIVERA

I'm someone who's ashamed for you.

ADDICT MOTHER

But who are you?

GERALDO RIVERA

I'm Geraldo Rivera.

John palms his face. A cop blurts out: "Yeah bitch!"

JERRY

Fucking awesome man.

The drug bust starts to play: the cops wait at the door.

GERALDO RIVERA

*This is reality. This is happening.
This isn't a television program.*

(MORE)

GERALDO RIVERA (CONT'D)
*This isn't a made-for-TV movie.
This is real life.*

Carmin busts the door open. The cops pile on the ADDICT. A cop blurts out, "They're always in their underwear." CUT back to Rivera, in front of the studio audience.

GERALDO RIVERA (CONT'D)
*That's live television. We have no
control. There's nothing we can do.*

The cops cheer. John's face burns.

INT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION OFFICE AREA - NIGHT

John snatches a phone off a desk. Malcolm enters behind him.
It's just them in the room.

JOHN
(in the phone)
Get me Rivera. Well, get him out of
there. I don't care what you say
just get him!

MALCOLM
Hang up the phone.

JOHN
What the fuck was that?

MALCOLM
It's just TV-

JOHN
That was the worst shit I've ever
seen. That was my baby, Geraldo
Rivera raped my baby.

MALCOLM
It was our baby.

Rivera through the phone: "Hello? Hello?" John hangs up.

JOHN
You thought Rivera was a good idea!

MALCOLM
Don't twist this. We knew this
could happen when we sold it.
Before this we had nothing. We have
something we can show now.

JOHN

No one in their right mind will
watch this and think we're serious.

MALCOLM

If it gets good numbers it won't
matter.

JOHN

It's fucking junk food.

MALCOLM

Then perhaps we need to take a
visit to McDonald's. I don't know
what the nuggets are made out of,
but this country can't get enough
of them.

JOHN

I didn't get into this to make shit
nuggets.
(barges out)

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

John is on the phone with his wife MAGGIE (40's), she wears
nurse scrubs in their LA home. She maintains herself like a
Stepford wife and has tired eyes from overworking.

MAGGIE

You know you have to apologize.

JOHN

I've said worse.

MAGGIE

It's Malcolm...

JOHN

I'll talk to him.

MAGGIE

I think he's right. I have a
feeling this will lead to more work
for you two.

JOHN

There's no way. Rivera bastardized
the issues. Cops good, suspects
bad. No nuance, no complexity and
nobody learned anything.

MAGGIE

But do people really care about that? I know you do but Geraldo knows what people want, he knows how to put on a show.

JOHN

I'm not talking about making an after school special Maggie. You can make something entertaining and have depth. It's not a trade off.

MAGGIE

You got your first show produced. Be happy for yourself.

JOHN

I'm on the wrong side of 45. I should be in a different place.

MAGGIE

But we can afford the rent now. You ought to be grateful Geraldo believed in your concept. I'd hate for anything to get in the way of you working with him again.

JOHN

Is Morgan there? I want to talk to him.

MAGGIE

I put him to bed already.

JOHN

What did he think?

MAGGIE

I didn't let him watch it. It's not for his eyes yet. John? You there?

John sighs, too exhausted to fight back.

JOHN

Yes.

MAGGIE

I liked it. A lot actually. I always knew you were going places. Why do you think I married you? I think this is the start of something great for you.

FADE TO BLACK... FADE UP on an aspirin tablet dissolving in a glass of water.

TITLE CARD: Los Angeles, California, 2013

INT. COPS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

DOUG WATERMAN (60's), a supervising producer on COPS, walks in holding the bubbling aspirin water and an iPad. The Santa Monica office is full of hustle bustle energy. Coverage of the Trial of George Zimmerman plays on the TV.

DOUG
Is he up?

JOHN'S ASSISTANT
He hasn't come out yet.

Doug enters...

INT. JOHN LANGLEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

John Langley, now in his 70s, is passed out on the couch. He's wrinkled, sun spotted and has a good sized gut. There's a empty whiskey bottle on the floor. Doug opens the blinds.

DOUG
Good morning sunshine! The color team needs your approval on this immediately to send out.

Doug hands John an iPad with a clip from the TV show COPS. John's assistant brings in breakfast.

JOHN
This looks awful. Terrible. Tell them to take out the stabilizer and dim it down. It's a night scene for god sakes.

DOUG
What do you want to do about the Walk of Fame?

JOHN
I'm not going next to Kirstie Alley. Fuck that.

DOUG
You don't have control over where you go. The other open spot is next to the silent film star ZaSu Pitts.

JOHN

So do I chose cancer or a heart attack? Flip a coin and decide for me. They're just going to step on my name where ever I go.

Doug picks up empty bags of Cheetos and Doritos on the floor.

DOUG

If this is going to be a regular thing, then you should get a hotel room with room service. Your diet should include something beyond the office vending machine.

JOHN

I pay to keep the damn lights on, I should be able to sleep here.

DOUG

Finish that up quick. You got a meeting with FOX in fifteen.

JOHN

What meeting with FOX?

DOUG

It's probably something to do with the 25th anniversary.

JOHN

You handle it and just you. Don't bring Morgan with you.

DOUG

You don't have to hog-tie him down.

JOHN

There's a ladder Doug, and he has to climb it. Rung by rung.

DOUG

He's a good producer. I'm trusting him to close on Omaha.

JOHN

On Omaha? No, no. He can't do that.

DOUG

Too late. He's on the phone with them right now.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John's son MORGAN LANGLEY (40's), relaxed LA vibe, talks with jovial ease with OFFICER SCHMADERER on the other line.

MORGAN

I can assure you that our crews are very professional and will not get in the way of your officers performing their duties.

John and Doug barge in.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

I get that but we're having a bit of a PR crisis right now. The media is all over my officers destroying video footage of an arrest. This is alleged of course, but I don't think having a camera crew filming everything helps.

MORGAN

JOHN

Officer-

Officer...

JOHN (CONT'D)

Officer Schmaderer, it's John. I understand your concerns completely. Let me ask have you ever watched an episode of COPS?

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

Of course.

JOHN

So you know what we do. We are not the news. We don't expose departments or look for dirt. We just want to show what a difficult job a police officer has on a daily basis. That's our agenda. And any department I film in I'm a guest. If you object to anything I'll take it out.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

Oh, I didn't know that.

JOHN

Departments discover that it's a positive thing to have been on the show.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

The public becomes aware of the job and can appreciate it more because these days you don't ever hear anything about a police department unless it's negative.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

You're right on that.

JOHN

If I can be frank you encounter a lot of bad shit and a lot of bad shit happens to you guys, but the police officers themselves aren't the perpetrators. No, after watching COPS people see they're the solution to the negativity.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

Let me ask you, why Omaha?

John looks at a paper: "Omaha crime rate on the rise".

JOHN

I'll be honest with you. Middle America loves COPS and I want the 25th season our most highly watched season yet. If we can't work this out we have Iowa City as a backup.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

Iowa City...

JOHN

Yes sir. Not my first choice.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

No, no. You guys can film here.

JOHN

That's good to hear. I'm excited already. I'll have, Doug Waterman, my Supervising Producer reach out with the details.

OFFICER SCHMADERER (O.S.)

Awesome! Looking forward—
(John hangs up)

MORGAN

Iowa City?

JOHN

To close you got to make them think
they're losing something.

MORGAN

I would have had him just fine.

JOHN

I'm not so sure about that.

JOHN'S ASSISTANT

I'm sorry to bother. FOX is here.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - AFTERNOON

*An episode of COPS is playing: A WHITE POLICE OFFICER pulls
up to a HEAVY BLACK MALE on a curb off an intersection.*

POLICE OFFICER

*Here we go. Let's check out and see
what's going on with this guy.*

HEAVY BLACK MAN

I ain't got non to say to you.

POLICE OFFICER

*Sit down on the curb. I'm not going
to tell you again.*

The officer grabs the man by his shirt. They tussle a bit.

HEAVY BLACK MAN

*What are you doing? Don't be
crapping on me. I just gonna get
J's.*

*The officer points a taser and hits him in the chest. The man
is pummeled down and pinned on the street as he's cuffed.*

*The black man is hoisted up, his face is all bloody and his
shirt is half ripped off. He is dragged away.*

*A BLACK WOMAN, watched by another cop, sits on the curb
crying. The camera pushes in on her face. The video pauses.*

*The woman holding the remote is CLAIRE (30's). She is dolled
up like a Fox News Barbie and has a smooth way about her.*

CLAIRE

You see what I mean?

JOHN

No...

CLAIRE

It may be a little tone deaf with the Trayvon Martin trial playing 24/7. We're in a racially heated climate right now.

JOHN

This is America, we're always in a racially heated climate.

MORGAN

What if we pushed this back a bit?

JOHN

You don't get it. Trayvon Martin is exactly why we need to show this. People need to see police escalation for what it is, otherwise, we're just sanitizing reality.

CLAIRE

At FOX we think the white males who watch COPS won't change their minds after watching this segment. This segment will probably bolster their biases.

JOHN

I don't cater my show to any race or gender.

CLAIRE

But our audience is white men. With all due respect, Mr. Langley, those who watch COPS watch it passively. They watch it for the great entertainment piece it is.

JOHN

That's so naive, passively watching. When you watch something you watch. Everything that's in the frame, every action, every line of dialogue is scrutinized. People are actually thinking when they watch something. Maybe you don't. This is no different than Rodney King. We thrived during the LA riots because we aired challenging segments.

INT. COPS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

John exits the meeting with Morgan. Doug walks Claire out.

MORGAN

Dad... dad! What was that about?

JOHN

You sided with her.

MORGAN

They still haven't renewed us yet.
I'm trying to play nice.

JOHN

If you don't think we should be
airing segments like that then you
don't get this show.

MORGAN

I agree with you. I just don't want
anything happening to us.

JOHN

We have ratings. We'll be fine.

PRODUCER

(approaching)

John, we're ready for you...

MORGAN

Hold on. I spoke with mom.

JOHN

(to the producer)

Give us a minute.

MORGAN

She's going to file. It's going to
be public soon. I thought you
should know so you can prepare.

JOHN

(deeply hurt)

Is that it?

MORGAN

We can handle sound mixes. You and
mom, that's bigger than this stuff.
Take the day. Really. You need to
take care of yourself.

Morgan walks into the mixing room. John's gaze moves to the
Zimmerman Trial still playing on the office TV.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Back to the 80's: John opens the door to his modest home, holding tons of luggage. There are moving boxes everywhere.

YOUNG MORGAN, still cute for 11, is passed out on the couch. John kisses him on the head waking him up. He takes out the shotgun shell. It's been made into a key chain.

JOHN

Hey kiddo. I got you a something.
This could have been used to kill
someone. Be very careful with it.

MORGAN

Mom's at the hospital, can we watch
your show now?

JOHN

You're not going to tell mom right?

CUT TO: *On the TV: Rivera interviews a trashy woman on the street.*

RIVERA

*So you whore yourself out for crack
cocaine?*

TRASHY WOMAN

Yeah.

RIVERA

How much do you charge?

JOHN

We can skip through this part.

MORGAN

What does whore mean?

JOHN

It's a derogatory word for a woman.

MORGAN

What does derogatory mean?

JOHN

Whore is a bad word used to
describe a bad woman. Don't ever
say it... Here.

*The cops are just about to break in... Morgan's eyes are
glued to the TV. John watches how engaged Morgan is.*

MORGAN

Whoa...

INT. FANCY BEVERLY HILLS RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

This is a fine dining experience: mahogany paneled walls, waiters in tuxes and the air is filled with cigarette smoke. Only the rich, famous or attractive can eat here.

John strolls in, way under-dressed. He spots Malcolm, clean and pressed, and sits next to him.

MALCOLM

I'm glad you dressed up for the occasion.

JOHN

You see Brando over there?

MALCOLM

Don't point and button that second button I don't want to see your chest hair.

JOHN

You have to do all the talking. I can barely look at his face.

MALCOLM

Geraldo's face is gold.

JOHN

Those ratings were because of the work we did, he had nothing to do with it.

MALCOLM

Don't fuck this up. He brought in those ratings. We need him.

JOHN

He's the Lorax minus the cuteness, but at least he lived in self-imposed exile. Besides I've been thinking we should pitch-

VOICE

Gentlemen.

They look up... Geraldo Rivera! They stand, towering over him, not knowing if he heard anything.

MALCOLM

Geraldo! So good to see you.

RIVERA

You see Marlon Brando?

MALCOLM

He's had three martinis since we came in.

RIVERA

Hey waiter! Three martinis. Just for me.

Malcolm gives a sympathy laugh. John can't make eye contact.

WAITER

Right away, Mr. Rivera.

RIVERA

Were you waiting long? Some fans stopped me. They're stopping me all the time now. They're finally off Capone's Vault, thank god. I guess the saying is true, "you're only as good as your last performance," but don't tell John's wife that! You tried to call me the night we aired. They said you were huffing and puffing.

JOHN

No, no. I wanted to compliment you. You could be nominated for that performance.

RIVERA

Awards. Hmm. So you liked the show?

JOHN

Yeah.

RIVERA

So you loved it?

The waiter presents the martinis.

MALCOLM

To 15 million viewers?

(clink!)

Good stuff! So we were thinking given the success of American Vice we should do a follow up.

RIVERA

No! American Vice has updated my image, my persona, my brand, to something edgier, something darker like Satanism.

MALCOLM

Excuse me?

RIVERA

I want to do Satanism: the documentary. It will explore human sacrifice, ritualistic killings, all that bizarro Christian shit. I mean have you listened to heavy metal? The kids are into that and self mutilation. I want Satanism to be in the consciousness of this country and I want to make this special before anyone else does. You need to put together a list of satanists and cult leaders I could interview.

MALCOLM

Of course! This is a brilliant idea.

RIVERA

What about you John? Why don't I see your eyes lighting up?

JOHN

Well, I don't think there should be a host anymore.

RIVERA

What do you mean no host?

JOHN

It's pretty self explanatory.

MALCOLM

I think what John is saying is—

JOHN

Leave you out completely.

RIVERA

It's called the Geraldo Rivera show for a reason.

JOHN

If we want to be serious we should and give the subject matter the spotlight and ask questions from behind the camera. People want to see something real. Not a personality, not a filtered, chopped up version. They want something pure.

RIVERA

That's fucking boring! The people want me. I'm the reason we were the highest rated special ever.

JOHN

Fifth highest.

EXT. VALET AREA - AFTERNOON

John watches Malcolm placating an incensed Rivera. Rivera drives off in a red Ferrari. Malcolm scoffs over to John.

JOHN

So I've been thinking—

MALCOLM

Shut up. Just don't. You know how close we were to losing his business? If it weren't for the fact that your family would go homeless if I divorced you, I'd divorce you.

JOHN

I think we should pitch Law Enforcement again.

MALCOLM

That's been dead for a while.

JOHN

That pitch is how we got Rivera.

MALCOLM

This is insane! Anything Rivera makes will get picked up. Law Enforcement was a pipe dream, it's not going to happen.

JOHN

You want to produce this demon doc?
It's time we make our own show now
the way it should be made.

MALCOLM

For the first time in this bloody
business we've found stability. We
can't turn away from that.

JOHN

But we'll be making shit. Is that
what you want to leave behind?
Don't you see we have an
opportunity now? Those drug busts
were something they've never seen
before: unscripted real-life, life
threatening situations. We can get
to the issues and actually be
responsible about it. Have cops be
the way in and show them as they
are, warts and all. No host, no
reenactments, no spin, just pure
raw reality.

MALCOLM

What would Maggie say if she found
out you quit? There's no money in
it without Rivera's name. This is a
good gig. Give it time, John. It
will lead to better things.

JOHN

Cover for me. Just until I get the
show bought. You can do that for me

INT. FANCY BEVERLY HILLS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Flash forward to 2013: It's a Hollywood party: the area is
filled with people all dressed up. Their attention is on
STEPHEN CHAO (50's), sloshed, talking into a microphone.

STEPHEN

... He truly is the godfather of
reality television. Since COPS
premiered 2,250 reality shows have
been launched. He's the richest man
in the room, has a star on the
Hollywood Walk of Fame, gets to
work with his son Morgan and he
owes it all to me. Please give it
up for the man who has 25 years on
the air, my friend John Langley.

The crowd cheers. John takes the microphone.

JOHN

After that I'm almost speechless,
but not entirely.

CUT TO: John and Stephen at the bar getting drunker. The band is playing an instrumental version of 'Bad Boys'.

JOHN (CONT'D)

She's not wearing her ring anymore.

STEPHEN

Make her jealous. Find a woman here
who'd fuck you, once Maggie hears
about it she'll be back.

JOHN

Speaking from experience?

STEPHEN

Insecurity is the glue that keeps a
marriage together. What about
Morgan? You made him an EP.

JOHN

He works hard, that much I can say.
Spends a lot of time away from his
family.

STEPHEN

I guess the apple doesn't fall far
from the tree.

(Morgan approaches them)

Speak of the devil!

MORGAN

Hello Chao.

(to John)

Can I talk with you?

STEPHEN

I'll leave you two be. I have my
eyes on a little birdie and now
I've just made eye contact.

(walks off)

MORGAN

Have you heard of Color of Change?

JOHN

I didn't know it had a color.

MORGAN

They're a civil rights group. They just released a petition urging FOX to cancel COPS. They say the images, "linger in the subconscious of viewers, creating unconscious attitudes and implicit biases about race."

JOHN

I've never heard of these people.

MORGAN

They got Glenn Beck off Fox News, even when he was the highest rated cable news show in his time slot.

JOHN

I know who Glenn Beck is.

MORGAN

Here. I've drafted a press release we could use.

JOHN

If we do that we give it air. All those outlets that wanted to interview me about the 25th anniversary, set them up. We can drown them out with that coverage.

MORGAN

I could do them with you. The family business look would be good.

JOHN

Nepotism isn't a good look.

MORGAN

Why are you pushing me to the side? I work very hard for you.

JOHN

Since it's birth I've been the face of this show and until I die that won't change.

An instrumental rock intro pulses.

INT. ABC CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Back to the 80's: John, nicely dressed, hands a packet titled "LAW ENFORCEMENT" to ABC executives. The music continues.

INT. NBC CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Same scenario, John is pitching to executives. We don't hear what he's saying, but he looks prepared and focused.

INT. CBS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The executives nod along as John continues pitching. John picks up on their disinterest and leans in to grab attention.

INT. PBS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

An executive checks her watch as John pitches.

INT. ABC CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

John's passion grows as he's speaking. An executive interrupts him. John deflates.

INT. NBC CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

An assistant opens the door interrupting John's pitch. They turn to John, say a few words, and walk out.

INT. CBS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

John shakes hands with the executives. They leave the "LAW ENFORCEMENT" packets on the table. John takes them.

INT. PBS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The executive pats him on the back and walks away. John stands there like a statue. *Defeated.*

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Maggie, in nurse scrubs, perfects her makeup. All the sudden voices are heard. She walks over to see John watching TV.

MAGGIE

Oh, honey. You're home early.

JOHN

Got out early.

MAGGIE

Everything okay?

JOHN
Just watching Superman.

MAGGIE
You see my extensions?

JOHN
(not looking)
Nice.

MAGGIE
Everything is okay, right?

JOHN
I wasn't fired. Satanism...

MAGGIE
It's just this one for now and
you're contributing. I don't have
to work as many nights.

JOHN
I should have my own show Maggie.
I've paid my dues.

MAGGIE
We can't risk that again.

JOHN
I'd like to watch this.
(Maggie scoffs up)
Maggie, I didn't mean to say that.

MAGGIE
I have to pick up Morgan, he got
detention.

JOHN
What'd he do?

MAGGIE
He called a girl in his class a
whore.

INT. STUDIO ROOM - MORNING

CUT to 2013: A makeup artist powders John's nose.

MAKEUP ARTIST
It must be nice to run the show
with your son....

John just glares at her. KAREN (30's), dignified, approaches.

KAREN

Mr. Langley, it's a pleasure. My father and I used to watch COPS when I was a girl.

JOHN

Are you not putting a diffuser on?

KAREN

I beg your pardon?

JOHN

The key light. If you don't put a soft box or a diffuser on it, it will be too harsh and there's no bounce over here. I don't want to look shadowy.

KAREN

I'll make sure they handle that.

JOHN

Could I get a frame line?

CUT TO: The interview. Cameras roll on John and Karen seated. John's charming now.

JOHN (CONT'D)

... So we had these two PA's pick up the dog droppings in front of the house in Venice Beach and after a while one of them comes up to me and asks, "John do you have any advice for me?" I said if you want to be a writer write, if you want to be a producer produce and he said, "That's it? That's your advice?" And I said, "That's my advice!" So he walked off, picked up some more dog droppings and at the end of the day he came back to me and said, "John, I quit!" And I said, "Congratulations! So what are you going to do now?" He said I'm a writer and I'm a director and that's what I'm doing. That kid was Quentin Tarantino and the other one was Roger Avery. Together they wrote Pulp Fiction.

KAREN

Wow.

JOHN

The moral of the story is if you want to have success in this business don't get stuck picking up dog droppings in Venice Beach.

KAREN

Speaking of partnerships, you haven't mentioned Malcolm Barbour.

JOHN

Malcolm my ex partner, the cad! He retired a while ago so he hasn't been around much and he wasn't around much in the beginning to be honest with you.

KAREN

What do you think he brought to the party when you were starting out?

JOHN

Business stuff mainly. That's why we hooked up; he was the business side, I was the creative, but he was a skeptic about COPS. He didn't think it would ever work but he was a very amusing guy. In his day.

KAREN

So COPS just entered its 25th season, a television milestone. Your contract with FOX ends after this season, do you think they will renew the show beyond that?

JOHN

I have had a great relationship with FOX, they stay out of the way. We'll continue working together.

KAREN

I have to ask you about the steady decline in ratings over the years.

(careful)

Do you think it's correlated with the criticism of how demographics have been represented on COPS?

JOHN

The study you're referencing only evaluated 16 episodes.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

If Old Dominion University wanted an accurate reading they should have taken a larger pool.

KAREN

There was also another study—

JOHN

Look, we can debate every study done on COPS, but I don't want to bore people.

KAREN

But they overwhelmingly show that your show has sharply skewed the numbers of black and Hispanic men, depicting them as a violent criminal class out of proportion to their actual percentage of crime while at the same time, Caucasian males were shown as a far less culpable group than they actually are, statistically.

Morgan's phone goes off. Bad timing. He walks away.

JOHN

It's no secret that they're arrested more than whites, but I don't believe that has anything to do with race. I believe that's institutional racism from the top.

KAREN

I don't want to stray from the point—

JOHN

Please, let's get there.

KAREN

Do you think COPS, inadvertently, contributes in perpetuating the stereotype that brown people are criminals?

JOHN

Yes, my reality TV show is causing the racial divide in this country.

KAREN

If you could please answer my question. There is a petition out—

JOHN

COPS is apolitical. We are documentarians capturing real events. What you see is what actually happened. Possession of drugs is the number one crime we show. Why? Because drug offenses are half of the total incarcerations in this country. Blacks and whites use drugs at the same rate and yet the imprisonment rate of blacks is 6 times more. I expose that and I don't sway audiences one way or another. I just maintain sunlight is the best disinfectant.

KAREN

But you will concede that COPS is a pro-cop show?

JOHN

Yes...

KAREN

So by nature it is not apolitical.

JOHN

Fine, sure. It's pro-cop, if that's what makes something political.

KAREN

We're introduced to the cops first, we come from their perspective so aren't we conditioned to sympathize with them?

JOHN

Karen, the show is called COPS.

KAREN

Yet we're never shown misconduct. Wouldn't it be more balanced if COPS showed cops who made mistakes?

JOHN

Made mistakes, sure, we've shown that but if you're implying misconduct, never. I've never seen that.

KAREN

The first season you filmed in Broward County.

(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

Shortly after you filmed there,
Sheriff Nick Navarro was exposed
for some pretty egregious
practices—

JOHN

I'm going to stop you right there.
You have to understand Broward, at
that time, was in a drug war. Crack
was smuggled in there every day.
With that came prostitution, rape,
murder. He had to clean up those
streets. If you watch the pilot and
go there now, it's another world.
He made Broward safer and he made
mistakes but if you're looking for
me to hang my head in shame for
'portraying' cops like Nick as
heroes I won't. I will never. Nick
was a hero and so are the thousands
of cops I've worked with. It's easy
to say otherwise, I was on the
other side once but I was ignorant,
I was ignorant until I got to spend
time with them. There are men and
women out there protecting and
serving, doing it the right way,
they're not talked about. And yes
there are some bad apples. Some do
it the wrong way and it's going to
get out there. It's going to go
viral now but you would be wrong to
paint all cops with the same brush.
The overwhelming majority of police
officers are hardworking people who
want to do the right thing. So
instead of generalizing your
frustrations on misconduct, maybe
start recognizing the ones that are
doing it the right way.

John sits back and gives Karen a "I won" grin.

CUT TO: Interview is over. John and Doug walk over to Morgan.

DOUG

You did great. You destroyed her.

JOHN

It doesn't matter. She'll just show
what she wants with the footage.

(interrupting Morgan)

What's going? Morgan...

MORGAN
We have a problem.

INT. LA HOME - MORNING

Back to the 80's: LAUREN STRATFORD, huge glasses and curly hair sits across from Geraldo Rivera. Cameras roll on them.

LAUREN
I was locked in a metal drum with four dead babies who had been sacrificed to Satan. I became a baby breeder. I had three children, all of them were sacrificed.

RIVERA
What did he do with the bodies?

LAUREN
He ate them.

John and Malcolm watch on the monitor. John storms out.

INT. GARAGE - MORNING

John pours himself coffee from crafty. Rivera approaches him.

RIVERA
Malcolm really stuck his neck out to bring you back. Fought me tooth and nail. Now that's a friend, maybe more? Go out and get me a grande misto with soy milk.

EXT. LA STREET - EVENING

John, in his car, slows down as he sees a group of people huddled together holding signs, "WRITERS GUILD ON STRIKE".

JOHN
Yeah, keep fighting.

INT. JOHN'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

The family is at the table eating.

MAGGIE
How was work today?
(John mumbles)
What was that?

JOHN
We're not attracting advertisers.
Apparently businesses don't want
promote their products along side
the devil.

BBRRIINNGG! The phone wails. John drifts to the kitchen.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(picking up)
Hello?

VOICE
Is this John Langley?

JOHN
Who's calling?

INT. STEPHEN CHAO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

It's Stephen Chao! He looks exactly the same decades younger
but with long hair.

STEPHEN
My name is Stephen Chao, I'm an
executive at FOX. Maybe you heard
of us, we're a new studio looking
to get into the TV market. I heard
about your pitch for "Law
Enforcement" and it sounds in line
with what we're looking to make.
Would you mind coming in to talk
about it with us?

John's frozen. He can't believe it.

JOHN
I can come in.

STEPHEN
Excellent! It would be me and Bruce
Geller.

JOHN
Bruce Geller. As in the CEO Bruce
Geller?

STEPHEN
That's him. It's good you're up to
date on industry news. Mr. Geller
will like that.

INT. JOHN'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

John comes back in.

JOHN
Hey kiddo, you want to throw the
ball around?

MAGGIE
He's grounded...

JOHN
Oh you're sorry right?

MORGAN
Yeah...

MAGGIE
John, who called?

JOHN
Wrong number.

John and Morgan leave. Maggie can tell John is lying.

INT. FOX WAITING AREA - MORNING

John walks to a RECEPTIONIST (early 20s). Her eyes are red and watery from crying several times today.

JOHN
John Langley to see Stephen Chao
and Bruce Geller.

RECEPTIONIST
I will let them know.

The receptionist doesn't know how to use the intercom. She is visibly overwhelmed. She deeply sighs and walks off screen.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Mr. Langley is here for you.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)
Don't you knock?!

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
I'm sorry, I have Mr. Langley
waiting for you.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)
Use the phone! For fucks sake
honestly. Wait. Girl! GIRL!
(MORE)

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Come back here! What happened to
that note from Eisner? Now is when
you answer.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
I was going to send it to you.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)
You were going to send it and then
you thought better of it?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
I got distracted, my bad.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)
MY BAD, WHAT IS THIS HIGH SCHOOL?!
Get the fuck out. Out of this
office. Out of this industry. GO!

The receptionist, mascara bleeding, leaves the building. A
beat later Stephen Chao, sunny face, pops out.

STEPHEN
John, Stephen Chao. So glad you
could come in on short notice.

JOHN
(unsettled)
Yeah, yes. Thank you.

CUT TO John and Stephen walking down a hall, an earth shaking
laugh comes out of an office. All John can see are a pair of
legs propped up on a desk with a phone chord going up.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)
You couldn't pay me to see Dustin
Hoffman play a retard! HA HA HA!

INT. FOX CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

STEPHEN
Some coffee?

JOHN
Oh, no thank you.

STEPHEN
That thread. He'll find that thread
off your lapel distracting. Cut it.

Stephen hands him baby scissor. He just has them in his
pocket.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Whatever you've heard about Bruce Geller, anything at all, you should know it's all true.

JOHN

Um, is there anything you think I should know?

STEPHEN

Just make sure you take out the ums and ahs. He likes people to be articulate. Poised. Sit up a little. Take these.

Stephen hands him tic tacs.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Don't suck on them. He'll notice an orange tongue. You have a firm handshake but your palms are sweaty. Wipe them off and make sure to close your mouth when you're not talking. If you have to cross your legs don't let it be away from him. And whatever you do, don't stare. I mean look him in the eye, but every seven seconds or so look away.

The door swings opens... BRUCE GELLER makes his entrance. In appearance he's a Mr. Burns doppelgänger, at heart he's the bully boy's bully boy. However, now he's the charm master.

BRUCE

Don't tell me the party started.

STEPHEN

Not at all!

BRUCE

Mr. John Langley. Very good to meet you. Bruce Geller.

JOHN

It's a pleasure, sir.

The handshake went well. Stephen is happy.

BRUCE

Sit down, please. I know you've done the rounds. You don't have to tell me about it; NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS. They're all shit holes.

(MORE)

BRUCE (CONT'D)

We're the new kid on the block with a handful of shows, but that's going to change soon. We do what no one else does in this tinsel town, Mr. Langley. We take risks, damn it! Tracey Ulman, Married with Children. Good shows, nobody wanted them but we did them. They got us started and we're going big now. Tell him about The Simpsons.

STEPHEN

It's a animated sitcom--

BRUCE

It's the Flintstones with yellow people. Not Asian like Stephen here, just yellow. You'll get it when you see it. Everyone passed except for us. We also got a variety sketch show in the works, the black SNL I'm calling it and I'm making Joan Rivers the first woman on late night. That'll happen when the strikes over.

STEPHEN

We have a growing slate we're very proud of.

BRUCE

I was a big fan of your work on American Vice. I can't stand that dingus with the mustache but those live drug busts were a hellova lotta fun. I respect a producer who knows how to shoot.

JOHN

You knew that was me?

BRUCE

Oh Mr. Langley, I may be a college dropout, but I do my homework. I like what you're about, the whole real raw thing, I get it. I like reality TV, some people think it's cheap, but I think it's the future. No writers to deal with! You tell him we like the concept?

STEPHEN

We like the concept.

BRUCE

We love the concept. We're all about it. I don't want you to waste a breath trying to convince me because I'm convinced. We want FOX to be its home.

JOHN

Wow... I'm, I'm thrilled.

BRUCE

We're about quality here. When I first took over Paramount we had a film called Bug, the one about mutant cockroaches, you ever see Bug?

STEPHEN

I did!

BRUCE

Shut up you! No one saw it. I had them make the tag line: "the picture you see with your eyes closed", cause that's the only way you could watch it! There's a reason the guy before me was fired. I blew up their slate and we made Airplane!, Grease, Indiana Jones! That's what I want to do with FOX, your show is going to be a big part of this network. Now tell me about Mr. Barbour. Why isn't he here?

JOHN

We're in production on the next Rivera special. He's covering for me.

BRUCE

Easy to work with?

JOHN

Very, he's my partner on everything.

BRUCE

Then let's set a meeting with you two to get this deal done! We're very excited about this. We definitely want your input as we move forward.

John winces, that last bit was off to him.

STEPHEN

Our office will be in touch with your people soon about a contract.

JOHN

I'm a little confused. You said you want my input?

BRUCE

Very much so. We want you involved.

JOHN

But not as the showrunner?

BRUCE

We have to go with someone more experienced. We know plenty of showrunners who are experts in this kind of pedigree. We definitely want you involved in that decision.

JOHN

But I'm the only one to oversee this show. It's my vision.

STEPHEN

We want to make you an EP, but overseeing a broadcast series is a horse of a different color.

BRUCE

Look Mr. Langley, I can make you a rich man. Every time an episode airs you will get a check. Every time it's rerun you will get a check. And if the show is syndicated, well, you and your family won't have to worry about the rent or house hopping anymore.

JOHN

I think we're getting a little ahead of ourselves—

BRUCE

Let's get serious here. Everyone you pitched to, they all passed. They fucking hated it. You got no other options and you're old enough to know this town doesn't hand out green lights for free.

JOHN

We're the same age, Mr. Geller—

BRUCE

And yet before yesterday, I never heard your name and if you pass this up, you'll be sure no one else ever will.

JOHN

When you were at Paramount, I was writing scripts that never went anywhere. My entire career I trusted men in suits who I thought believed in my ideas. Our jobs are our lives and yet you've made a name for yourself. No one knows who I am and there's only one way that changes.

BRUCE

What's that?

JOHN

I do it my way.

INT. FOX WAITING AREA - MORNING

John walks out. Another RECEPTIONIST is sitting at the desk.

RECEPTIONIST #2

Have a good day!

INT. SCHOOL FRONT OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Morgan enters, the shotgun shell dangles off his back pack. He sees John.

MORGAN

What's going on?

JOHN

You're sick son. You're not feeling well. Fever? Oh yes very high. I think we ought to take you out.

INT. SPORTS BAR - DAY

John and Morgan watch a Dodgers game. John's had a few beers.

JOHN

You really want to be a baseball player when you grow up?

MORGAN

Yeah...

JOHN

Do you know the odds of becoming a professional in major league baseball? I mean it's got to be next to no chance at all. You think you have what it takes?

MORGAN

I think so. I practice a whole lot.

JOHN

But do you think you have what it takes to be the next Kirk Gibson?

MORGAN

Uh maybe...

JOHN

You don't sound confident.

MORGAN

Not everyone can be Kirk Gibson.

JOHN

Not everyone can be Morgan Langley. Whatever you decide to be you make sure you're the best at it. I didn't have a father who gave me guidance. I had to figure it out myself and I didn't find my passion until late in life. Too late. You're young, you should start thinking about these things now. I want you to make a name for yourself.

MORGAN

Like being famous?

JOHN

Not that and it's not about money either. Don't think like mom. Think of it as making an impact. Every person has the opportunity to leave their handprints on this world, but the truth is most lives are irrelevant. People fade into total obscurity. I don't have much to leave behind other than you. If it's baseball you want devote yourself son.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)
I will help you get there. Your
life should mean something.

INT. JOHN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

John plays the messages from the phone.

MALCOLM (O.S.)
You're late. You should be here—
(John skips)
Where are you?! Geraldo is
screaming. He wants you gone.
(John skips)
You better be sick as a dog I
swear. I put my—

BBBRRRIINNNG. John picks up.

JOHN
Malcolm, my kid got sick. I had to
take him to the doctor.

STEPHEN
I'm sorry. Um, it's Stephen Chao
from FOX.

JOHN
Oh, yes! Hello!

STEPHEN
Your son's okay? I don't have to
ask you about all of that do I?

JOHN
No. He's fine. What's going on?

STEPHEN
I had a chance to talk it over with
Geller. We want to make your
show... with you as the showrunner.

John takes his ear off the phone. A smile grows wide.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Geller has one condition. He hates
the name. It has to be called COPS.

JOHN
I can live with that.

STEPHEN
There is one more thing. The strike
opened the door for this.
(MORE)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
We can't buy anything scripted now
which is what Geller really wants.
I'm afraid if the strike is
resolved we're in jeopardy.

JOHN
How long do we have?

STEPHEN
Negotiations just began with the
WGA. I wouldn't say very long.

INT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

DING DONG. Malcolm, with a robe on, opens the door...

JOHN
I can explain.

INT. MALCOLM'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

John watches a smile grow on Malcolm. It's silent for a beat.

MALCOLM
This is big. It's not little big.
It's big big.

JOHN
It's huge.

MALCOLM
Wow. Bruce Geller. I have to say I
picked a good one with you.

JOHN
Yeah you did. They want us to be
executive producers and for me to
be the showrunner.

MALCOLM
They didn't want us as co-
showrunners huh?
(John shakes his head)
Too bad.

JOHN
I'm calling Sheriff Navarro in the
morning to get Broward. I need you
to help me put the crew together
and get location permits.

MALCOLM

Let me finish up with Rivera first.

JOHN

You're joking.

MALCOLM

They just ordered a pilot. We don't have any security beyond that. I can't rock the boat with Rivera.

JOHN

This is our dream. It's here. I don't want to wait around for the green light to turn red.

MALCOLM

I'll give Rivera my two weeks, I just have to talk it over with Mary. Maggie's on board with this?

JOHN

Of course.

Malcolm hands John a drink. They cheers...

MALCOLM

To COPS...

JOHN

To changing the world...

INT. OMAHA POLICE STATION - DAY

CUT to 2013: FLASH. FLASH. Camera's flash on the grim faces of John and Morgan at a press conference. *Something's off.*

VOICE

It's as if we lost one of our own.
That is the grieving process we're going through right now.

This is the incident...

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

A COPS CAMERAMAN and BRYCE DION (38), the audio operator film in the back seat as the car speeds to a WENDY'S. The Omaha officers draw their guns and run out. The crew follows them. A pedestrian car bolts out of the parking lot.

INT. WENDY'S RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Right as the crew enters... POW! POW! POW! The Cameraman sprints behind a table. He points the camera towards the counter: A black man in a hoodie and the cops exchange fire.

POW! POW! POW! One bullet goes right through the table, inches away from the Cameraman's chest. He ducks down and films through the reflection of the window.

POW! The robber's hit but keeps moving. POW! The window glass shatters. POW! The cameraman lifts his camera up and around to see the man fall facedown in the parking lot.

OMAHA OFFICER #1

He's down!

The cameraman moves up and see's the boom lying on the floor.

COPS CAMERAMAN

God...

Bryce is writhing on the floor. His blood soaked hand is pressing on his side, the Achilles heel of the vest.

INT. OMAHA POLICE STATION BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Officer Schmaderer, the guy on the phone with John before, is in the middle of a press conference.

REPORTER #1

Can you confirm he was killed from friendly fire by an officer?

OFFICER SCHMADERER

Based on our viewing of the footage the officers had no choice other than to respond the way they did.

REPORTER #2

Is it possible they could have been showing off for the COPS cameras?

CUT TO: After the conference John, distraught, is with Doug.

JOHN

Send Lilies and a sympathy basket to the mother. Let her know we're taking care of the funeral and medical expenses.

DOUG

You know they're going to sue us.

JOHN
Wouldn't you?

MORGAN
(approaching)
I just got off the phone with
Claire, Fox is shortening us to 16.

DOUG
Episodes? Just because of Bryce?

MORGAN
It's the Color of Change petition.
They have a 100,000 signatures. The
director, Rashad Robinson, is
making it his mission to get us
canceled. There must be some dirt
we can find on him.

DOUG
I hear he's gay...

JOHN
We're not in Iran or the 1950s.
Jesus! And we're not going after
anyone. Bryce just died.

MORGAN
I think it's time to explore other
networks.

JOHN
No. Absolutely not.

MORGAN
The petition was getting more
attention than all the press you
did. FOX took that seriously. We
have to look into other options.

JOHN
You think anyone will take us now
with Bryce on the news?

MORGAN
We have ratings...

JOHN
If FOX finds out we're taking
meetings with other networks that
could compromise our relationship.
COPS will survive, it always has.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

John laying down with his stomach hanging out flips through the Kardashians, Pawn Stars, The Bachelor, all reality TV.

He gets to FOX News where none other than Geraldo Rivera is on. He's salt and peppered now, but still has the mustache. These were his actual words...

RIVERA

I think the hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin's death as George Zimmerman was. When you see a kid walking down the street particularly a dark skinned kid with the pants around the ankles people look at you, what do you think? Those crime scenes, surveillance tapes, every time you see someone sticking up a 7/11 the kid's wearing a hoodie. You have to recognize that this whole stylizing as a "gangsta", people are going to perceive you as a menace. When you see a black or Latino youngster, particularly on the street, you walk to the other side of the street! Trayvon Martin, a wonderful innocent kid with a box of skittles in his hand, he didn't deserve to die but I'll bet you money if he didn't have that hoodie on he wouldn't have been killed.

The room phone rings.

JOHN

I wanted the alarm at 1 PM.

MAGGIE (O.S.)

It's me. I saw the news. Are you okay?

JOHN

Yeah, I'm fine. It's good to hear your voice.

MAGGIE (O.S.)

When are you coming back to LA? We should talk.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Back to the 80s: At the end of the hall there's a door ajar with light spilling out. Screams come from there.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
You lied to us!

JOHN (O.S.)
This is more money Maggie!

MAGGIE (O.S.)
What happens if it doesn't get
picked up?! Where will we be then?!
You had a stable job with Rivera!

We creep into... Morgan's bedroom. Under the covers is Morgan crying. Something shatters. A glass or a plate. Morgan grabs a Walkman from a drawer. As the music plays his eyes close.

INT. FOX CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Geller and Chao flip through a packet John and Malcolm created. It has the faces of the characters in the opening.

JOHN
That's Ron Cacciatore who heads the
organized crime division, his
number two is right below him,
Sergeant Bob Deak. And on the next
page is Vicki Cutcliffe in charge
of the Airport Interdiction Unit.

MALCOLM
We have the permits to film in the
Fort Lauderdale Airport.

BRUCE
This Vicki girl, she's not very
attractive is she?

JOHN
She looks better on camera.

BRUCE
She's a 6. I need at least an 8 and
all these pigs look like average
joe's. Where are the characters?

MALCOLM
What exactly are you looking for?

BRUCE

Do you not watch TV? Every show has one wild supporting character. We can't make one up, but you can find one. It's Florida for godsakes.

STEPHEN

This cameraman, Bertram Van Munster. He's good?

QUICK CUT TO: John and Malcolm sit with BERTRAM VAN MUNSTER (30s), a lankly Dutch man at their production office.

JOHN

Under no circumstance do camera operators interfere. You may have the instinct to help the officers but they are our actors. We let them be.

BERTRAM

When I filmed for National Geographic I captured lions rip apart dozens of antelopes. I have taken a time lapse of a python swallow a Vervet Monkey alive. I filmed a crocodile tear off the trunk of a baby elephant in front of it's mother. I have never obstructed mother nature before and I don't intend to start now.

QUICK CUT BACK TO: The FOX office...

JOHN

He'll be fine.

BRUCE

There's nothing in the budget for reenactments or music.

JOHN

That's not what this show is. It needs to reflect reality.

BRUCE

No, it's the appearance of reality. Everything has an agenda. Ours is to entertain. Plain raw footage will bore the audience.

JOHN

The value of this show is in the real life drama of the situation the cops will be in. Nothing should cheapen the moment.

BRUCE

If you want to go out and make something the world's never seen before I'll support you, but if you come back with something I don't love it will never see the light of day. Don't disappoint me.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - MORNING

John drives Morgan to school.

JOHN

It'll only be two weeks...

MORGAN

You're going to miss me pitching in the finals.

JOHN

I can't wait to hear about it. You're going to do great.

MORGAN

There will be more episodes after this. You'll be gone for those too.

JOHN

Even if that happens I won't be gone for long. I promise. Now are you going to hug me or what?

Morgan hugs his dad and exits. John watches Morgan walk away.

MONTAGE OF BROWARD COUNTY

Deep dark blue fills the screen. We're flying right above the Atlantic Ocean as we crane up to the sandy coast and further up to the skyline view of Fort Lauderdale. We move across a waterway to see the harbor mansions of Fort Lauderdale with yachts floating off the dock.

Driving on the road we pass the big buildings of Fort Lauderdale, palm tree lined streets, marsh land and then to the ghetto parts of Broward.

Parked at the end of the road of run down houses is the Broward County Sheriff's SUV. Nick Navarro eyes some black kids playing basketball. He gets a call in and he drives off.

Nick enters the police station to see John and Malcolm talking with Ron Cacciatore, Bob Deak and Vicki Cutcliffe.

INT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION - DAY

John and Malcolm walk with Nick Navarro around the station.

NICK

All of this is yours. Full transparency. I'm trusting you boys to do my department right. The papers are only interested in stories of malfeasance. This should be good advertising for us.

JOHN

It will be. We want our audience sympathizing with our characters.

NICK

Characters, that's good.

JOHN

I'd love to have Scott and Henry in this. They were all stars on the American Vice raid.

NICK

Can't. Scott is on suspension and Henry's no longer with the force.

MALCOLM

How about officers of color? We want the cast reflecting America's diversity.

JOHN

What are you running for office?

NICK

You have me - I'm Cuban. I'll have some blacks go with you on bust, but if you want Eddie Murphy go back to Beverly Hills.

JOHN

You're sure there will be drug busts?

NICK

Oh yes. That I can guarantee.

JOHN

What are we looking at on a day to day basis?

NICK

You're in Broward County, anything can happen. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a campaign event.

JOHN

Just one more thing. You wouldn't happen to have an attractive female cop would you? We need some eye candy for the men watching.

Nick points to LINDA CANADA (25), a stunning blond with Farrah Fawcett hair.

NICK

Good to have you boys back. I promise I'll be make up ready for my close up.

INT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION - DAY

John and Malcolm sitting by Linda's desk.

LINDA

Me? Are you sure you want me?

(John and Malcolm nod)

Really?

(They nod again)

Oh wow. This is such an honor. I was such a fan of the last one.

VOICE

That was my work.

It's Jerry Wurms, the PA from the opening! He has less hair.

MALCOLM

You're a cop?

JERRY

Yessiree! American Vice inspired me to put the bad boys away. Pow! Pow! Haven't fired my gun yet, but it should be soon, hopefully.

LINDA
It'll happen, honey.

JOHN
You two are...

JERRY
Dating, she's mine boys.

John and Malcolm look at each other. *They hit the jackpot.*

MALCOLM
Jerry, how do you feel about being
in front of the camera?

CUT TO BLACK then FADE UP on a TIMELAPSE of the warm sun
rising over the Broward County beaches.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAWN

The COPS crew loads the film equipment in a van.

KIGER
Hey John, when will we get our
vests?

JOHN
No vests Kiger.

KIGER
What do you mean?

JOHN
We weren't able to swing it in the
budget. You scared or do you want
to make some art?

Malcolm, listening to a walkie talkie, calls out to the crew.

MALCOLM
We have a call in!

JOHN
Everyone move out! Let's go!

EXT. MARSHY AREA - MORNING

A van parks off the side of the road. The COPS crew jumps
out. John is greeted by Sergeant RICHARD SCHEFF (30s).

RICHARD
Sergeant Richard Scheff. Homicide.
You're right on time. Forensics
just showed up.

They come to a small bridge overlooking the water. A motor
boat with a FORENSICS TEAM steers to a DEAD BODY floating.

JOHN
Beautiful... Bertram!

BERTRAM
Right here boss.

JOHN
I need you to get a wide. Make sure
you get everything: Richard, the
boat, the body...
(to Richard)
You don't mind being on camera?

RICHARD
I can be on camera.

JOHN
Perfect. Malcolm will get a release
for you. Could you direct them down
there a little? Just so you're not
looking static?

RICHARD
I can do that.

JOHN
You smoke?

RICHARD
Just quit last month.

JOHN
A cigarette would give you a good
look on camera, but don't worry
about it.

John moves to Bertram. Richard turns to cop who's smoking.

RICHARD
Give me one of those.

CUT TO John and Malcolm standing behind Bertram and Kiger
filming. A forensic specialist throws a milk gallon connected
to a rope near the body.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Let's go cowboy. We gotta lasso
that body before the gators come.

FORENSIC SPECIALIST
We got it.

CUT TO Richard talks into Bertram's camera near the water.
The forensic team is pulling the body out.

RICHARD
When we get a body in the canal,
any environment where there's
marine life, you find the lips, the
eyelids, or ears eaten away.

FORENSIC SPECIALIST
They won't touch it until it's
rotten.

RICHARD
I guess they know what good is.

A FLASH goes off... it's the forensic photographer.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Damn it, Joey, not while I'm on
camera. Let's do another one.

CUT TO Bertram films Richard talking with the specialist.

FORENSIC SPECIALIST
No bullet wounds. Doesn't look like
there's any trauma. Doesn't look
like suicide to me.

RICHARD
Overdose?

FORENSIC SPECIALIST
Won't know until the autopsy.

EXT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION PARKING LOT - DAY

Linda holds a pocket mirror as she touches up her make up.
She got her hair and nails done before. Jerry's with her.

JERRY
It'll look weird if you're all
dolloed up.

LINDA
Shut the fuck up.

The production van pulls up. The crew comes out.

MALCOLM

So sorry we're late. We got carried away with a dead body.

LINDA

I played hard to get with Jerry, but for you boys, I'd wait all day.

INT. LINDA'S POLICE CAR - DAY

Linda pulls up in front of an OVERWEIGHT WOMEN (50s) talking to a guy in a truck. The truck speeds off revealing the woman's whole front. John, Kiger and Bertram are in the car.

LINDA

Here we go!

KIGER

This is a highway.

JOHN

I'll be right behind you.

EXT. HIGHWAY 95 - DAY

Everyone gets out. Cars zoom by. The camera is rolling.

LINDA

You just going to see your friends with your high heels in the middle of 95?

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

I don't have my driver's license.

LINDA

Why don't you put some clothes on?

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

I don't have ID.

LINDA

Let me see what you have baby.

Linda snatches her bag and goes through her items. John has hands on both Kiger's and Bertram's backs.

INT. PRODUCTION VAN - CONTINUOUS

Malcolm pulls off the highway with the filming team in sight.

MALCOLM

They're going to get run over.

EXT. HIGHWAY 95 - CONTINUOUS

Linda takes John aside. Kiger is inches away from traffic.

LINDA

So I can arrest her for disorderly conduct but I'd have to call it in cause we don't have enough room in the car, so, I'm thinking I could just yell at her a bit and let her go to save time. Is that okay?

JOHN

I love that.

LINDA

Awesome! Thank you.

(getting into character)

Hey. Hey! If I ever see you stopping traffic again you're going to jail. Button up your shirt!

INT. PRODUCTION VAN - CONTINUOUS

Malcolm can hear John talking into a walkie talkie.

JOHN (O.S.)

We're moving on. You can get her release now. Over.

MALCOLM

It's in the middle of the highway!

JOHN (O.S.)

Get the release! We need her.

MALCOLM

(to the production crew)

God damn it. Get me a release.

Malcolm runs across the highway dodging speeding cars. Linda and the crew move off to the next one.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Excuse me Miss! Would you mind signing—

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

Get the fuck away from me! Don't touch me! I'm no whore. That bitch don't know my life!

MALCOLM

Hey! Hey. I'm not going to hurt you. My name is Malcolm. Malcolm Barbour. Here's my card.

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

You're not a fuckin' cop are you?

MALCOLM

No, mum, I'm a producer. I'm with a production crew, we're filming a show and would love it if we had your permission—

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

I ain't doin' no porno! I've got a son.

MALCOLM

Oh no, no. This is a show that will be broadcast on television.

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

You mean like real TV?

MALCOLM

Real TV! We want you to star in it.

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

How you pick me out?

MALCOLM

Well, you're in the middle of a highway. We couldn't miss you!

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

How much you pay?

MALCOLM

It's pro bono, but trust me this will lead to more work. I've been in the business over thirty years, you're going to be highly sought after this. You have something special about you.

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN
(signing the release)
So what kind of character do I
play? I can play a mean bitch or a
nice girl, whatever you want baby.

MALCOLM
We filmed you already...

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN
Nuh uh. You still have to film me.

Malcolm's confused: *She didn't see the camera?*

CUT TO: The crew films Linda talking to WOMAN WITH FOUR
TEETH.

LINDA
Let me tell you something, don't
hitch hike here no more.

WOMAN WITH FOUR TEETH
Well, I was thumbing to get a ride.

LINDA
Don't. Go thumb somewhere else.

WOMAN WITH FOUR TEETH
I'm no whore cause I hate the
bitches cause my brother's wife and
all them are doing that. I need a
ride cause I gotta go get my
clothes.

LINDA
Get off my streets!

CUT TO: Moments later, Malcolm is talking to the same woman.

WOMAN WITH FOUR TEETH
I can't read this.

MALCOLM
All you need to do is sign. Do you
know how to sign?

CUT TO: Linda is talking to a TRAILER TRASH WOMAN.

LINDA
I need some ID baby. I can tell
you've done this before.

CUT TO: Malcolm talking to the TRAILER TRASH WOMAN

MALCOLM

You have such a positive charisma.
People will see a woman, a real
salt of the earth woman.

CUT TO MONTAGE (short) of Linda yelling at more prostitutes
off the highway then, CUT TO Malcolm getting their releases.

INT. LINDA'S POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Linda drives as the neon lights of the strip malls illuminate
her face. Pink. Blue. Red. Purple. John directs her from the
back. She changes her facial expressions as the ride goes on.

INT. PRODUCTION VAN - NIGHT

The neon lights illuminate Malcolm's exhausted face as he
sifts through the signed releases.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The crew unloads the van as Malcolm and John talk nearby.

JOHN

We got everyone?
(Malcolm nods)
That's my Malky!

MALCOLM

Some had no idea they were just
filmed.

JOHN

Huh, I guess when you're in that
situation all your focused on is
the cop in front of you.

MALCOLM

I'm kind of worried we're
exploiting them.

JOHN

They're prostitutes, they exploit
themselves. We're not making them
do anything they wouldn't normally
do. It's fine.

MALCOLM

You think they'll come across okay?

JOHN

How someone comes across on camera is an individual's opinion. They were giving us their truth. That's all we can ask for.

MALCOLM

Before, with Rivera, I just did the job, no questions asked, but now, now that it's just us I worry more.

JOHN

We're making a show that's going to air on television Malcolm. Our names will be front and center as creators! Just think about that.

INT. CORONERS OFFICE - MORNING

The body from the day before lays on a gurney. He's rail thin and his face is full of sores. The CORONER (60s) talks to Richard Scheff as the crew films. Sheriff Navarro watches.

CORONER

Fresh puncture marks in both antecubital fossa. Hyperplasia of porta hepatic lymph nodes. Cocaine identified in the body fluids.

RICHARD

Overdose.

CORONER

Well it would be if the lungs didn't show an abundant amount of water in them. He probably shot up near the marsh, overdosed then fell in the water.

JOHN

Can we get a shot of the big bag of coke he had on him?

CORONER

The coke's been destroyed already.

MALCOLM

Doesn't a judge have to issue an order for that?

CORONER

Not in a case like this.

MALCOLM

What makes this case different?

(beat)

Forgive me I'm just trying to understand but what happens to the coke after you test it?

RICHARD

That chemist would have had it for processing right?

The Coroner glares at Richard. *Are you kidding me?*

MALCOLM

Wait, what chemist?

CORONER

We should get back to the autopsy.

MALCOLM

What is this chemist processing with that cocaine?

The Coroner looks to Navarro. The silence very awkward.

NAVARRO

John, Malcolm, you have a minute?

JOHN

(to the crew)

Go get B-roll of the station.

Navarro waves off Richard and the Coroner. The crew leaves. It's just Navarro, John, Malcolm and the body now.

NICK

Gentlemen, I may have made a mistake letting this boy be filmed. It's still an open investigation.

MALCOLM

But it was an overdose...

NICK

I heard you got some great footage with Linda yesterday. I can set up a time for you to film with her again to replace this.

JOHN

We have more than a days worth of shooting with this body. You're saying we can't use any of it?

NICK

I'll allow his body in the water,
but not the autopsy.

MALCOLM

Why do you have a chemist
"processing" cocaine? I've never
heard of this in my life.

NICK

Careful Malcolm.

MALCOLM

You're not making rocks are you?

Nick's eyes flare. *Bingo.*

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

What are you doing? What is going
on here?

NICK

Nothing scares a junkie. We've
tried everything: increasing
sentences, enforcement, but they'll
steal, rape and murder just to
shoot up so we need to catch them
before they cause havoc and we can
catch them buying. There's nothing
illegal about that. It is already
cocaine, we just convert it into
crack. You ask the father or mother
of any kid who's on crack if they
have any reservations and see what
they tell you. They have none. This
is an undercover operation, if any
of this in here is released or
looked into, you'll have bigger
problems than this series.

INT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Malcolm looking sick, falls to a chair. John comes out. They
whisper as cops walk by them.

MALCOLM

We can't let him get away with
this.

JOHN

I don't like it either, but you
heard him. He threatened us.

MALCOLM

This is bigger than us. We have to follow this.

JOHN

I think we need to take a breath here. Navarro did agree to let us use the body in the water. That's great stuff—

MALCOLM

This is about more than bloody entertainment! This is an actual story.

JOHN

We're not here to be the Woodward and Bernstein of the drug war. We're here to make a goddamn TV show.

MALCOLM

The sheriff of the second largest county in Florida is facilitating the production of crack cocaine so he can lure in addicts. That's a fucking TV show if you ask me. And you know they're making crack to target blacks.

JOHN

If we uncover this, then no other police department will let us film with them. It will kill the show before we've even released it.

MALCOLM

If we ignore this, we're aiding and abetting.
(walks off)

RON

(approaching)
John. We've got something for you.

INT. VAN - DUSK

In the back of the van Bertram films officers.

BOB

Slow it down Carmine. Slow it down! All right this is the place. We're here. Slow it down! Go!

The back door swings open and all the officers pile out of the van with their guns drawn. Bertram and Kiger follow them.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Cops run to the front door of a small house. Their flash lights wave all over. An officer with a sledge hammer slams the knob and another officer kicks the door open.

INT. SMALL HOME - CONTINUOUS

Bertram and Kiger are close behind Bob as he runs through the kitchen and living room. Officers scream "Clear!" Bertram films a guy sprawled out on the floor, putting his hands out.

Bertram swerves to see a massive black man coming at him. He swipes the camera. Kiger grabs Bertram back. An AGGRESSIVE COP swings his arm around the man's neck in a choke hold just like Eric Garner. "Get Down!"

Ron swings a door open... **WHAM!** Bertram's leg bends the wrong way. *Hurts like hell.* Ron jumps the man. The man gasps for air; he's swung down. His face is kneed as they cuff him.

John, from another viewpoint, whispers into a walkie talkie "Push in." He looks away as the cops over power him.

CUT TO Bob is standing two feet away from another LARGE MAN (20s) with his hands cuffed in a bedroom. Bertram is filming.

BOB

Let me make sure I understand this.
We got two guns out of your room.
One shotgun. Sawed off shotgun.
Find a bottle of cocaine rocks.
You've been arrested for cocaine
and you're going to tell me you
don't know nothing about this?

LARGE MAN

Sir, that was in the past.

BOB

No, no we found rocks a few minutes ago. We found guns a few minutes ago. You were here. Maybe it's your mother's, is that a possibility? Cause you know what we're going to do? We're going to arrest everybody in this house.

LARGE MAN

If you're going to put it on me,
put it on me.

BOB

Well, was it yours?

LARGE MAN

No, it's not mine.

BOB

Then why do you want to me to put
it on you? This is a rock house.
When you deal cocaine you should
have thought about that your
parents live here. There's cocaine
everywhere. Gun's everywhere.
People out in your yard running
throwing rocks in every direction.
You know nothing about that do you?
Maybe you was watching the Dick Van
Dyke show. Why you so nervous?

LARGE MAN

I'm not nervous.

BOB

You're sweating a little bit.

LARGE MAN

It's hot.

BOB

Yeah, I'm hot, too. Nothing you
want to do for me?

LARGE MAN

Ain't nothing I can do, sir.

BOB

You're going down big time. You
remember when that judge puts you
in prison, that I tried to give you
this opportunity. You remember that
for me, okay?

LARGE MAN

Can you have them loosen these?

BOB

I'll talk to them about that.
You change your mind, you let me
know before they put you in that
wagon.

Bob moves into the hallway where John is.

BOB (CONT'D)

Good?

JOHN

What do you think about doing the scene with him not wearing cuffs?

BOB

Why?

JOHN

Well the image of a white police officer berating a chained up black man sort of invokes an image.

BOB

What kind of image?

JOHN

You know what, never mind. It's good how it is.

BOB

Take him out boys!

The large man is escorted out. Kiger supports Bertram as they leave. A PRODUCER, hands John blank releases.

PRODUCER

I wasn't able to get anybody. I guess Malcolm has that special touch.

JOHN

I'll get them.

EXT. FRONT LAWN - NIGHT

John comes out, it's a scene: Black men are taken away. Blue and red lights illuminate the street. A mob of people watch.

MOTHER OF LARGE MAN

My baby! My baby!

John, moved, chucks the releases in the trash. He sees on the opposite yard a yard sign: *Reelect Nick Navarro for Sheriff. Keeping Broward safe!*

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

John is on the phone with Maggie.

JOHN

Malcolm may walk. I don't know where he is.

MAGGIE

Give him time. He'll be back. He has a family to support.

JOHN

He's right about Navarro.

MAGGIE

They're addicts. It may be tough, but Navarro is doing what's best for his community.

JOHN

You should have seen the way they strangled this guy tonight. He wasn't doing anything—

MAGGIE

And you got that one on camera for people to see.

JOHN

But I don't know if this is the way to talk about the issues. Some people may get the wrong idea about these cops.

MAGGIE

Two people can watch the same thing and come away with completely different opinions. You can't control how people will respond. All you can do is worry about making it the best pilot possible so you get a season order.

JOHN

Right. You're right.

MAGGIE

You're just over thinking these things with that brain of yours.

INT. LA RESTAURANT - DAY

CUT to 2013: John is sitting across from Maggie, now in her 70s. She's barely recognizable from all the plastic surgery.

MAGGIE

Have they reached out to you?

JOHN

No.

MAGGIE

Can you reach out to them?

JOHN

No, honey, Bryce just passed. Why are we talking about this?

MAGGIE

The petition affects us both. It has to be dealt with. You should make peace with them.

JOHN

There is no peace Maggie. They think I wear the hood and go out at night burning crosses.

MAGGIE

What they're saying about the show, some of it's true.

JOHN

I didn't know this was going to be an ambush. I thought we were going to talk about us.

MAGGIE

Anything written about COPS is as much a reflection on me as it is for you. Whatever happens with us I will always be known as your wife. I don't have much to leave behind other than that. I've made my choices and I have to live with them. So do you. We always knew there were issues. Perhaps now there needs to be some adjustments made. Maybe that group has ideas. Maybe if you heard them out they would calm down. There shouldn't be anymore negative things written. I've had it!

JOHN

Honey—

MAGGIE

Is this how you want us to be remembered? Do something.

JOHN (V.O.)

Mr. Robinson, it's a pleasure.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY

John shakes hands with Rashad Robinson (35), well dressed with warm eyes. The office has been cleaned for the occasion.

RASHAD

Thank you for having me.

JOHN

Any coffee or tea?

RASHAD

I'm good thank you.

JOHN

I promise I haven't poisoned it.

Rashad smiles. He points to a framed insignia on the wall.

RASHAD

Is that Army Intelligence and Security Command?

JOHN

Sure is, served from 61 to 63.

RASHAD

You were in Vietnam.

JOHN

I was.

RASHAD

My father was too. Served in the Marines and came back to North Carolina where he couldn't find a bathroom open to "colored folk." I must say I was surprised when your office called to set this up.

JOHN

Well, it's been some time. We ought to discuss these things.

RASHAD

What do you want to talk about?

JOHN

I have great respect for the work Color of Change does. Back when I was a kid I marched for civil rights. I want to support you in anyway I can.

RASHAD

How would you do that?

JOHN

With more resources you would be better equipped to fight against racial injustice. If you were to let go of that petition Langley Production would be willing to give you a sizeable contribution.

RASHAD

How far are you willing to go?

JOHN

I've been syndicated for over two decades. I think we'll be able to find common ground.

John hands him a check.

RASHAD

This is a lot of money Mr. Langley.

JOHN

It's yours if you want it.

RASHAD

We're going to need more than this.

John writes another check. Rashad shakes his head.

JOHN

What are you asking for?

RASHAD

All of it.

JOHN

I'm sorry?

RASHAD

All of it Mr. Langley. We're not going to stop until your show is off the air.

JOHN

I'm not a betting man, but if I was I'd put my money down on the FOX Corporation over you guys.

RASHAD

I didn't get the sense they see your series valuable enough to attack a civil rights organization when I spoke with them.

JOHN

You spoke with them?

RASHAD

I did.

JOHN

Don't you think you're wasting time on my show when there's 'stand-your-ground' and 'stop-and-frisk'?

RASHAD

We're advocating for their repeal, but oppressive ideas are more harmful than oppressive laws. Ideas spread and COPS has spread poisonous images of African Americans for the past 25 years. Who's to say George Zimmerman didn't watch COPS.

JOHN

COPS didn't kill Trayvon Martin.

RASHAD

COPS didn't pull the trigger, but it loaded the gun. If I were to ask someone who's just watched your show to close their eyes and think of a black male, how do you think they would describe him?

JOHN

I can't help that they don't all look like you in those ghetto's.

RASHAD

A shirtless, neck tattooed, pants around the ass thug. They're all painted the same way. They're the 'bad boys'.

JOHN

Blacks are arrested more. I expose that inequity for what it is.

RASHAD

Mr. Langley, if you really wanted to challenge the macro levels of crime do a show on Wall Street or Capitol Hill where the type of crime really does have an impact. Instead you chose to go into communities that are poor and black and show low level criminals because it's easy and because you can profit from showing it.

JOHN

I didn't do this for the money! I did it to make an impact. I've made them aware of these injustices!

RASHAD

You've entertained them, you haven't informed them.

JOHN

I'M NOT A FUCKING RACIST!

RASHAD

No, you just don't care.

JOHN

You have no idea who I am.

RASHAD

How many black people do you have working out there?!

That shuts John up. He doesn't have any.

RASHAD (CONT'D)

If you had one in a position of power we probably wouldn't be talking. I am going after your sponsors now. These brands trying to sell products to black folks are going to know they can't have it both ways.

(MORE)

RASHAD (CONT'D)

I came here to tell you that. I will do everything I can to get your show scrubbed off television. This is a slow sinking ship. It's only a matter of time until they abandon ship.

Rashad exits. John's just been hit by a freight train.

EXT. GRIMY STREET - DAY

Back in the 80's: Sirens are blaring. Jerry Wurms pulls over a convertible. Another day of filming for the COPS crew. Bertram exits Jerry's car filming, he has a band on his knee.

Two black guys without shirts on sit in the convertible. One's wearing yellow shorts, the other is wearing jeans.

JERRY

This your car?

YELLOW SHORTS

Yeah.

JERRY

You got some papers for it?

Yellow shorts pulls out his papers and hands them to Jerry.

JERRY (CONT'D)

What are you holding brother?

JEANS

Nothing man.

JERRY

I smell marijuana, okay? I'm going to need to check the vehicle. Can you stand over here? That means get out of the car.

JERRY (V.O.)

It's a game out here. Cat and mouse game that's all it is. Some days they win, some days I win.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Jerry is talking into Bertram's camera.

JERRY

What you can do sometimes is sit here and watch the white boys take a right turn to buy their dope. Give them about a minute and there they are dealing drugs.

EXT. GRIMY STREET - DAY

Bertram films Jerry berating a WHITE ADULT MALE.

JERRY

I'm down the street. I see you making a drug deal in front of that house. You tell me I didn't see what I saw?

WHITE ADULT MALE

I was just driving by, sir.

JERRY

So you're telling me I ain't goin' to find any grass in your car? What are you doing looking around? I'll shoot you if you run.

CUT TO Jerry waves down car.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Where you going pal?

ANOTHER WHITE GUY

I'm lost.

JERRY

No you're not.

ANOTHER WHITE GUY

I'm from California.

JERRY

No, you're not. Hey, John, you know this guy? Oh shit, I'm not suppose to look in the camera ha-ha. PUT YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM!

CUT TO Jerry patting down a WHITE BRO.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You want to know what happens over here to white boys like you?

(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)

You get yanked out of the car,
because they think you look easy,
put a gun to your head, pistol whip
you and take your car. Is that
worth ten dollars of grass?

CUT TO Jerry hunched over talking to TWO WHITE GUYS in a car.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You came to buy drugs?

WHITE GUY

Yeah.

JERRY

I appreciate your honesty. Listen,
I'm just going to give you a slap
on the wrist. I never want to see
you boys around here again.

CUT TO Jerry approaches a car with a BLACK MALE in it.

JERRY (CONT'D)

No, no I don't need you. I'm just
trying to get these white boys to
stop from coming in here.

INT. PRODUCTION VAN - DAY

John, Malcolm and Stephen Chao watch Jerry from the monitor.

STEPHEN

He's perfect. Geller will love him.

MALCOLM

How much longer are we filming with
him?

JOHN

We need to get a lot of him. He's
going to be a prominent character.

MALCOLM

I don't know if a guy like that
should be represented on our show.

STEPHEN

What do you mean? He's too much of
a character to give up.

MALCOLM

Think about it, we come into each
scene from the cop's point of view.
(MORE)

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

They are our eyes in. We're inclined to sympathize with them and because of that we're not as discerning to their behavior.

JOHN

People have the capacity to make judgement calls. They're constantly assessing every action these cops do and Jerry's... Jerryness-

	MALCOLM	JOHN (CONT'D)
Racism.		is obvious!

MALCOLM

People like simplicity. When someone comes home after a long day at work they don't want to think, they want to be entertained. People are constantly looking to identify with someone on screen because they so desperately want to see themselves. People watch TV to watch themselves and when people watch this it has the potential to reinforce their worst instincts about race.

JOHN

The general public is not going to see Jerry and think boy, that's me. They'll judge him and, yes, they'll be amused by him but he's not likable enough to identify with.

MALCOLM

I don't have a crystal ball, I don't know how people will react to him, but when there's someone with a gun, someone who has all the power and is using that upon people who seemingly deserve it people are going to be drawn to that.

JOHN

That's one cynical way of looking at things.

MALCOLM

People analyze with their hearts not their heads.

JOHN

They use both.

STEPHEN

Who the fuck cares. I want to watch more of him. He's great TV!

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

A white guy in BLUE PANTS (20s) has his hands on a car. Jerry removes his wallet. Blue Pant's GIRLFRIEND (20s) is close by.

JERRY

You see me - I'm the only white face in this area. You don't belong here, okay? It has nothing to do with white or black. It has everything to do with crimes against persons. Lady, you need to step back.

Blue Pants **SHOVES** Bertram into car and **BOLTS** off. Bertram's knee is slammed. *Ouch!* Jerry and other cops go after him.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Shit. 2-10 1-31!

GIRLFRIEND

HENRY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING! NO!

Bertram tries to jog, but can't. *Too painful.*

BERTRAM

Ah, fuck me.

Coming in out of nowhere John grabs the camera. John and Kiger start full on sprinting. *The chase is on.*

JERRY

Stop or I'll shoot you in the back!
(in a walkie talkie)
I got a 99 on a white male with blue pants heading towards sunset. Sunset is a street!

John and Kiger catch up to the cops. Suddenly a cop car swerves in front of Blue Pants. **WHAM!** Blue Pants slams into the car. An Overweight Cop gets out and draws his pistol.

OVERWEIGHT COP

Stop! Stay down!

Jerry smashes a baton down on Blue Pants. He's hit over and over until Jerry's grabbed by a fellow cop.

OVERWEIGHT COP (CONT'D)
Jerry that's enough!

The girlfriend, driving full speed to the scene, hits the brakes. John swings the camera to her.

GIRLFRIEND
DON'T HURT HIM!

A cop grabs her. As she resists her shirt bunches up showing her bra. *This is a mess.*

GIRLFRIEND (CONT'D)
LET GO OF ME! I DID NOTHING WRONG.
I'M INNOCENT. YOU'LL BE SORRY.

BROWARD OFFICER
Shut up, lady!

THWACK! She's slammed on top of her car, cuffed and thrown in a police car. The screaming continues. John moves to Jerry, his foot is holding down Blue Pants.

OVERWEIGHT COP
You got a hit on a guy you cuff him
and throw him in. You can't leave
him like that. Bad police work.

BLUE PANTS
Officer can you get your foot—

JERRY
Shut up! You got no reason to talk.

INT. CACCIATORE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ron Cacciatore watches TV. His wife, MRS. CACCIATORE (30s) approaches him.

MRS. CACCIATORE
I heard something went on at the
train station last night? Is TV
more important than talking to me?

RON
Honey, I'm watching Superman.

MRS. CACCIATORE
You're always watching Superman.
Why don't you talk to me?

RON
What is this 20 questions?

MRS. CACCIATORE
I want to know what happened.

RON
We made an arrest. Took in about a kilo of cocaine.

MRS. CACCIATORE
Was it just one guy?

RON
Honey, when I come home I just want to relax and watch TV. You're like an interrogator.

MRS. CACCIATORE
I want to know what my husband does all day. Why do you think I married you? Because you're a cop! Because I thought our lives would be exciting! Our communication is down to zero.

JOHN (O.S.)
Cut!

Bertram rests the camera. There's lighting equipment all around shining on the Cacciatore's. John enters.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What do you think about going harder on Ron this take?

RON
She can go a lot harder.

MRS. CACCIATORE
Won't people think I'm just a nagging wife?

RON
Come on honey it's for the TV.

JOHN
You're doing great. Just a little harder this time.

Malcolm walks in next to the monitor. John comes next to him.

MALCOLM
We're filming the Cacciatore's?

JOHN

It was a command straight from Geller. I tried to fight it, but he wants domestic scenes. They're nonnegotiable.

MALCOLM

This isn't our show.

JOHN

People like these scenes. They're relatable. We won't have to film them once we're established. Look, what we're doing with this show is worth more than these nothing scenes.

MALCOLM

Scenes? Like plural? Don't tell me we're filming with Jerry and Linda. John. Tell me that's not happening.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - DAY

CUT to 2013: An episode of COPS plays: A white obese officer pats down a black teen (tank top and low denim shorts). The teen bolts. The officer grabs and body slams him.

The COPS producing team watches. John looks away wincing.

MORGAN

Great! We should open the episode with this.

JOHN

We're not airing this.
(storms out)

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY

John pours himself a glass of scotch. Morgan enters.

JOHN

Don't you knock?

MORGAN

People are noticing we're mainly showing white crime now. They're protesting about it on the internet.

(Hands John papers)

JOHN

"The real perpetrators of violence against our people are being airbrushed out of the picture because showing the truth might wake us up to the dangers posed by living in a multiracial society." Boy, this is a real winner here.

MORGAN

Our ratings are sinking. We didn't even get a bump after Bryce died.

JOHN

Stop talking like that! FOX moved us. Our ratings dropped because no one wants to watch a damn thing after four hours of baseball.

MORGAN

We have gripping segments being shelved. Is it just because they're black?

JOHN

There needs to be more of a balance of white and black crime.

MORGAN

We shouldn't be kept from showing the inequities in crime rates.

JOHN

You don't believe that.

MORGAN

Look, FOX hasn't made us an extension offer so I had to reach out to the other networks—

JOHN

You went behind me?

MORGAN

Our show is going to die if we do nothing! I have Paramount interested. They want to talk with us.

JOHN

I'm not changing networks!

MORGAN

It's like you want to sabotage our show!

JOHN

It's not our show Morgan.

MORGAN

This is our fucking show! Ever since it started it was the only thing you cared about. You didn't give a shit about me. The only way to get to you was through this so, I watched every episode, asked you about it and learned the ropes just so I could have a fucking father.

Morgan scoffs out of the office.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

CUT to the 80's: Police cars with lights flaring block off the lot. Crime scene tape everywhere. The same forensic specialist from the river scene approaches John and the crew.

FORENSIC SPECIALIST

We're ready.

They follow him up the stairs passing by officers escorting seedy looking people out. Two cops stand guard around an open door to a dark room. They walk in...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CRUNCH. Malcolm steps on some broken glass. The bedding has been torn apart. On the wall there's a **bloody handprint**. Bertram starts filming the forensic team gathering evidence.

Flashes come from the bathroom. John and Malcolm creep in: a naked woman's body lays in a puddle of her own blood. A photographer snaps some shots.

JOHN

Well... that's one release you don't have to get.

FORENSIC SPECIALIST

Throat slit. Stabbed 24 times.

MALCOLM

This will never make the air.

JOHN

Our show is graphic. Geller will inevitably want to cut some provocative stuff so let's give him this, something obvious so everything else can be saved.

MALCOLM

This was a person, John.

JOHN

I know what I'm doing here. This is how the sausage gets made.

MALCOLM

We don't have to exploit a dead girl to make the show we want.

JOHN

I don't remember you bitching at Rivera this much.

MALCOLM

We weren't creating that show.

JOHN

If it wasn't for me you'd still be making that trash.

MALCOLM

You'd still be a Delta bagman if I didn't make you my partner. Bertram, turn off the camera.

JOHN

Keep filming! If you hate this so much maybe you should leave.

Malcolm moves so Bertram can film the body.

INT. FORT LAUDERDALE- HOLLYWOOD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

The crew films Officer Vicki Cutcliffe digging through a MUSCULAR GUY'S suitcase. Malcolm is close by with a release. She spots a bag of coke. As his arms are swung down he pushes her off him. Within seconds a mob of cops pummel the man.

John and Stephen watch this from a foot court close by.

STEPHEN

We should overnight these dailies.

JOHN

Where is Geller at with the series?

STEPHEN

He won't discuss that with me. I brought this to him so he knows I'm biased.

JOHN

What if I talked with him?

STEPHEN

I've learned his silence is high praise or the calm before the storm.

JOHN

That's comforting.

STEPHEN

I'm going to fight like hell for this. We have the elements of something really special, but there's something missing.

JOHN

What's missing?

STEPHEN

We need something on a large scale. A climax. Something to really wow them in the end.

INT. BROWARD COUNTY POLICE STATION OFFICE AREA - CONTINUOUS

The area is mostly empty except for a few officers somberly huddled around. Not a word is spoken. John moves to look into the Sheriff's office. Nick looks up revealing his teary eyes.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The office is shabby, only decorated with a Cuban flag and a photo of Ronald Reagan. John is sitting across from Navarro.

NAVARRO

Shot him twice through the neck just for a little bit of crack. His wife couldn't say a word. They just had a child. You have kids?

JOHN

A son.

NAVARRO

I have two boys and a girl I hardly see. Missed her recital tonight. Missed my son's game last week. Fuck I wonder if I'm doing the right thing running again.

JOHN

The last thing Broward needs is someone to undo all you've done.

NAVARRO

But what's the point? The press only writes about my men getting shot or the drugs on the streets.

JOHN

That's why I'm here. If people on the outside see the full power of your department they'll be moved.

NAVARRO

If you film his funeral his death could mean something, but I don't know how much more filming we can do beyond that. I think they've had enough.

JOHN

But people ought to be aware of the kind of power you can yield. Look, you arrest one, two at a time the Miami Herald tucks that in deep, but show them something on a massive scale and there will be headlines to match.

NAVARRO

What are you suggesting?

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The crew films a group of serious looking cops conversing. Some are familiar faces. Sleeveless shirts, sunglasses and chewing gum all around. Navarro watches close by.

RON

We have warrants for the houses?

BOB

Affidavits have been written. We're just looking for a judge who didn't take off for the fourth.

RON

Go to Miami, Tallahassee just get a signature. We have floor plans?

BROWARD OFFICER

We're working on it. Only two of them had any records.

JERRY

Can't we just send under covers to take shots of the entry ways?

BROWARD OFFICER #2

If a flash goes off they're done.

RON

How 'bout the SWAT team?

SWAT LEADER

We're fine. Just got the new ninja style assault gear shipped in.

BOB

This will be broad day light. A pack of black ninjas with battering rams and firearms in the sunshine state might stand out.

RON

There's a good chance it will rain.

LINDA

That'll be a visibility issue for the street team.

BROWARD OFFICER

Rain or shine they want their C.

BOB

Timing's tight. The routes are clean, but going in and boarding up takes a minute.

ROB

I have to be straight with you putting away 150 is doable, but nailing every crack spot in town with just a day to plan... I mean we ain't invading Grenada here.

NAVARRO

Then you do the press conference after the next officer is put in a bag. We figure this out now.

John and Malcolm observe from the shadows. Malcolm eyes John.
He knows John did this.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY

CUT to 2013: A magazine slams down. A full page ad shows a picture of a cop cuffing a black teen on the ground. The caption reads, "Let's make the 25th season of COPS its last." Morgan chucks down different publications.

MORGAN

"Black people will no longer tolerate dangerous and dehumanizing stereotypes on so-called "reality" TV shows." God damn.

DOUG

Color of Change is holding a rally tomorrow at FOX. It's organized.

MORGAN

We can counter protest.

JOHN

Good idea. Us versus black America.

DOUG

We can get the LAPD involved. Didn't they just lose one?

JOHN

That was a motorcycle accident.

DOUG

Doesn't matter. Cops are in danger all the time. We just had one of our own get killed on the job.

JOHN

He was killed by a cop!

JOHN'S ASSISTANT

It's Claire. She's on the phone.

JOHN

(picking up)
Hello?

CLAIRE

John, could you come by the studio?

JOHN

When?

CLAIRE

Now. We can meet with you now.
Things are getting out of control.

INT. POLICE GARAGE - DAY

CUT to the 80's: A SWAT team covers themselves in black bullet proof armor. Shot gun shells are loaded.

John films Bob Deak smearing black grease under his eyes.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

A BLACK WOMAN with the shakes leans into the window of a car.

Zooming back Jerry and Linda, the couple, watch her. Jerry hands a piece of gum to Bertram, who's filming in the back.

INT. RON'S CAR - DAY

Ron Cacciatore eyes a group of GANG MEMBERS, tattooed from head to toe, hanging outside a strip club.

Ron nods to the undercover officer next to him. The undercover gets out and crosses the street to the gang.

In the back Kiger taps on a CAMERAMAN'S shoulder to follow.

INT. SWAT VAN - DAY

John, head to toe in armor, films a SWAT member rehearse pulling his gun out.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

The undercover car flashes the brights. *The signal.* Jerry starts the car. Linda has trouble securing the police beacon on the dashboard as the car speeds.

They get out of the car to point their guns at the women.

INT. RON'S CAR - DAY

Kiger and the Cameraman film the undercover exchange of cash for a bag of coke from gang members across the street.

One member spots the camera. Another member goes for his pistol right as a SWARM of cars rush in on all sides.

EXT. STRIP CLUB PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The gang members sit cuffed in a prisoner transport vehicle. Kiger and the camera man film Ron closing the door on them.

EXT. FRONT LAWN - DAY

A WOMAN walks her dog in front of a shabby house on a lonely street. After she passes, the SWAT team races to the house. Windows are smashed. The door is battered.

INT. CRACK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

John films them moving in. ADDICTS in sleeping bags put their hands up. The one addict standing is pummeled to the floor.

The SWAT team starts flipping over the addicts and zip tying their arms full of track marks.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET CORNER - DAY

Jerry sees the undercover car shine the brights. This time it's a SHIRTLESS BLACK MALE. Jerry floors it. Linda has trouble securing the beacon again.

As they get out of the car the man makes a run for it. Jerry tackles him to the ground and punches him repeatedly.

EXT. GHETTO AREA - DAY

Ron sees an undercover remove his hat near a Camaro.

Ron drives forward, but the Camaro floors it. Kiger buckles in. Now it's a car chase. Several cars race after the Camaro.

They swerve and turn. Ron takes out his gun and aims for the tires. **BAM! BAM! BAM!** A tire is blown and the Camaro swerves off the road crashing into a palm tree.

A MAN gets out of the Camaro and is tackled by another cop.

INT. SECOND CRACK HOUSE - DAY

An emaciated man humps a woman on the floor. **WHACK!** The man is hit on the head and ripped off. They're zip tied.

Other addicts cower. John films Bob Deak shake an addict on the floor. Unresponsive. Bob shakes him again. No movement.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Jerry drags a bloodied BLACK WOMAN on the pavement as she screams. Linda giggles in Bertram's frame.

INT. JERRY'S CAR - DAY

Linda fumbles with the beacon. Jerry chucks it out the window.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET CORNER - MOMENTS LATER

Jerry smashes the body of a black male over the hood of a car so hard we can feel the hurt. Jerry cuffs him.

Another black male is smashed on a car in a different area. Another. Another. Bertram flinches as he films each time.

EXT. GHETTO AREA - DAY

Malcolm is shmoozing with local REPORTERS near the SWAT team hauling addicts into buses. They funnel in one by one.

Malcolm notices the prostitute he got a release from earlier entering the bus. They make eye contact. He grimaces.

A helicopter lands close by. Sheriff Nick Navarro gets out making a grand entrance. The reporters run to him.

INT. THIRD CRACK HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

John films Bob Deak and the SWAT team showing Navarro the apprehended assault rifles and cocaine.

John notices the team put the cocaine gently in a container in front of suspects pushed and shoved out the door.

EXT. BROWARD COUNTY - DAY

We fly overhead a ghetto area as SWAT vans and teams fade in and out near different houses as they infiltrate them.

EXT. WAREHOUSE LOT - EVENING

Reporters interview Navarro. Behind them suspects are brought into a warehouse for booking. John watches the cacophony.

KIGER
Do you want to say it?
(John shakes his head)
That's a wrap!

The crew whistles and claps.

BERTRAM
I need a new fucking body.

A reporter and a cameraman walk by. The cameraman recognizes John; he's was the one threatened in the opening. He smirks and walks off. Malcolm approaches with a folder of releases.

JOHN
These are blank...

MALCOLM
Yup.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

John kneels next to a SUSPECT seated on the concrete floor.

JOHN
Hey. I work with the cops. You want
to get out of here?

SUSPECT
They didn't read me my rights man.

JOHN
I can get you out of here. All you
have to do is sign this release
form.

SUSPECT
(signs with hands cuffed)
Okay... When do I get out?

JOHN
Soon.

SUSPECT #2
Get me outta here man.

JOHN
Just sign this release.

SUSPECT #3
Over here!

John works down a long line of suspects getting signatures.

INT. FOX CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Flash forward to 2013: John is sitting across from Claire. There's an HR person in the room.

CLAIRE

Color for Change won't talk with us and with advertisers leaving it puts us in a bad position. Our contract with Langley Productions will expire after the final episode airs. It will be a clean break, you will have complete control to move to another distributor.

JOHN

Do you need me to sign anything?

CLAIRE

Uh, not right now, no.

They shake hands. John gets up and walks out calmly. Claire looks over to the HR person... *that was surprisingly easy.*

INT. BEACHFRONT RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Morgan walks in to see John, intoxicated, drinking at the bar and watching coverage of the George Zimmerman trial.

MORGAN

You know how many bars I've called to find you?

JOHN

Come celebrate the cancellation.

MORGAN

We have Paramount—

JOHN

It won't have the same audience on cable.

MORGAN

I've called every network. It's not a broadcast show anymore.

JOHN

Let it die!

John points to a TV playing Lethal Weapon.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Mel Gibson. Great actor. Got fucked when his girlfriend recorded him saying it'd be her fault if she got "raped by a pack of niggers". Remember that? She recorded him at his worst moment and released it. That's what COPS does. I've made a series out of filming a person's worst moment. That moment shattered him. He hasn't been in a film in years.

MORGAN

Why are we talking about Mel Gibson?

JOHN

Because if COPS continues to be on the air, I will have that moment. Color of Change is right. We do all the shit they say we do so, I'm pulling the plug.

MORGAN

What about us dad?

JOHN

You make your own show. You do have some of me in you. Put your mind to it, make something better.

MORGAN

I've been working on COPS with you since I was a boy. Remember that?

JOHN

This is not the path I wanted for you son. You need to be your own man now.

MORGAN

If you let COPS die this way, Color of Change will forever be an asterisk on your legacy.

JOHN

If I asked our audience to think of a black man, what do you think they'd say? They'd say a thug.

MORGAN

People know enough not to ascribe thugs to every black guy.

JOHN

What about George Zimmerman?

MORGAN

What about him?

JOHN

He saw that boy as a threat.

MORGAN

Everyone has bias but not everyone kills someone over it.

JOHN

COPS advances that. We play a part.

MORGAN

Where did you find out he watches COPS?

JOHN

We're the media! We're everywhere and if it's not us, it's someone else cause god knows you can't make something about this country without some unintended message about race. Every fucking piece of entertainment needs to be scrutinized inside out just so it's not 'problematic'. So I'm doing it, I'm cutting it off before everyone can see that the worst thing about me is the show I devoted my life to.

MORGAN

You're drunk.
(exits)

EXT. BEACHFRONT RESTAURANT ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

John shuffles to his car. *Is he going to drive? Yes he is!*

He backs into a the parked car. **SMASH!** John's back light shatters. It goes unnoticed. John speeds into the street.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

John swerves in and out of the right lane. An approaching car blares its horn. John moves back within the boundaries.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET - CONTINUOUS

John turns on a residential street. Blue and red lights flare. John notices the police car. John whispers, "*Shit.*"

He pulls to the side of the road. The silhouette of a LA OFFICER (30s) approaches. John rolls down his window.

LA OFFICER
Something happen to your tail
light?

JOHN
Some kids must've got to it.

LA OFFICER
You been drinking tonight?

JOHN
No...

A flashlight beams on John, illuminating his glazed eyes.

LA OFFICER
Could you step out of the car for
me, sir?

JOHN
Everything okay officer?

LA OFFICER
Step out of the car.

EXT. LA STREET - CONTINUOUS

John stumbles out, he sees a dog walker eyeing the situation.

LA OFFICER
I am going to check your eyes. Keep
your head still and follow my
finger with your eyes only.

JOHN
I won't do that.

LA OFFICER
You won't or you can't?

JOHN
I'm under no legal obligation.

LA OFFICER
Turn around. Hands on the car. I'm
not playing games.

John complies. The cop pads him down. He places John's wallet
on the car then swings his arms down. Cuffs are tightened.

JOHN
What? What is going on?

LA OFFICER
I'm taking you in for a blood test
since you refused a field test.
You'll lose your license and face
jail time if convicted of a DUI.
You don't have the right to speak
to an attorney prior to taking the
test and your test refusals can be
used against you in court.

INT. LA POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

John is shut in. *Stillness.* He waits and then... *breaks.*
Breathing heavy. Tears rain down.

There's a muffled dialogue with the LA Officer and someone
else that isn't audible. The passenger door opens.

LA OFFICER
Step out of the car for me.

John wipes his eyes on his shoulder and gets out.

EXT. LA STREET - NIGHT

Standing right beside the officer is Morgan, dumbfounded.

LA OFFICER
You're John Langley?

JOHN
Yes.

LA OFFICER
You created COPS?

JOHN
Yes.

The officer takes the cuffs off.

LA OFFICER

I'm letting you off with a warning Mr. Langley. Your show got me into police work. If your son didn't spot your car, the night would have turned out differently for you. You're okay to drive him home?

MORGAN

Yes.

LA OFFICER

Let me help you in.

The LA Officer puts John in Morgan's car and closes the door. He walks back to give Morgan John's wallet and keys.

MORGAN

Thanks Jimmy. You didn't go too hard on him, did you?

LA OFFICER

No, no. Just scared him a little. It's a good thing you called it in. He could have done some damage.

MORGAN

We'll be filming in LA in a couple seasons. You'll hear from me then.

LA OFFICER

I'll rewatch The Shield to prepare.

INT. MORGAN'S CAR - NIGHT

John sees this interaction. The smile. The pat on the back. John knows they know each other. *He knows*. Morgan enters the car and drives off. It's dead quiet.

CUT TO: Morgan drives through the gates of a mansion.

MORGAN

I'll set up the Paramount meeting for next week. You need help getting in?

JOHN

No.

Morgan watches John shuffle in.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

John creeps into bed next to Maggie, still awake. They kiss.

JOHN
I should have called. I'm going to
be better.

MAGGIE
Do whatever you want just as long
as they know I'm Mrs. Langley.

INT. LA EDITING SUITE - DAY

CUT to the 80's: John looms over the shoulder of an editor.
There are a dozen screens at the station, all have frames
from the pilot of COPS. The scene with the Coroner comes on.

JOHN
Take out the autopsy.

The editor turns to look at John, it's a young Doug Waterman!

DOUG
All of it?

John nods then sits next to Malcolm.

JOHN
You good?

MALCOLM
Yeah...

INT. FOX CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

FOX EXECUTIVES watch the show with captivated eyes. John
tries to get a read on Geller's inscrutable expression. The
credits roll and the lights come up. A long tense pause. In
the corner of the room a nameless RUPERT MURDOCH says...

MURDOCH
Order a season.

GELLER
Ah, you hush, I'm talking now. Move
"Beyond Tomorrow" back a half hour.
Let's put this in at 9.

FOX EXECUTIVE #1
I thought we were putting "Beans
Baxter" in that spot?

GELLER

Call Holland tell him it's cancelled.

FOX EXECUTIVE #2

That's going to be right after "The Reporters". Shouldn't we go with something news related?

GELLER

Were you not watching? This is the news. This is going prime time, no discussion. When's the soonest you can get back into Broward?

JOHN

A month maybe?

GELLER

You have relationships with departments in other states?

JOHN

Yes.

GELLER

No you don't. That's okay we'll help. Tom, Andrew, Kyle you're on this now. You report to Chao. I want Vegas, LA, New York, Phoenix, Houston. I want variety. Start making calls. Now.

(executives exit)

That was cute what you did with the dead girl. I'll leave it to you to put something else in.

GELLER'S ASSISTANT

Mr. Geller, I have—

GELLER

Yeah I know. Good job gentlemen, you got yourselves a show.

(exits; to his assistant)

Don't interrupt me ever! Now make yourself useful and get me lunch.

CHAO

We fucking did it!

Chao squeezes John and Malcolm. Malcolm watches them exit; then looks to the TV. The freeze frame is a title card...
Created by John Langley and Malcolm Barbour. His smile fades.

INT. FANCY BEVERLY HILLS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The Langley family is sitting at a table all dressed up.

MORGAN

How long will you be gone for?

JOHN

It's just a few of months.

MAGGIE

This is a good thing, Morgan. Dad is getting to do what he loves and I can be home with you.

JOHN

Everything I do, I do for you son.

HOLLYWOOD AGENT

(approaching)

Excuse me, Mr. Langley I just wanted to introduce myself. Seth Allen, I'm with CAA. I loved the pilot you just wrapped on.

JOHN

You watched it?

HOLLYWOOD AGENT

The whole town has! We'd love to talk about how we can help you. This is a very exciting time and it's best to have someone protecting your interests. Sorry to disturb.

John and Maggie grab each other's hand. Morgan fakes a smile.

EXT. BROWARD COUNTY FIELD - DAY

Police cars are parked with blue and red lights flaring. A crowd of people watch *something* from behind caution tape.

A van stops right nearby. It's the COPS crew! Nick Navarro lifts the tape so they can go through.

EXT. BOW OF BOAT - NIGHT

Bertram films Jerry Wurms getting on one knee in front of Linda Canada. She puts her hands on her chest and nods. They kiss. Malcolm rolls his eyes.

INT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - NIGHT

Linda walks on the set of the Late Show with DAVID LETTERMAN. The audience cheers for her. We CUT into the program a bit.

LETTERMAN

Let me understand this, the guys
ride around with you taping things.
That's a TV show?

EXT. URBAN STREET - DAY

A police car chases after a speeding car. Bertram films in the front. Kiger holds the boom in the back. Title Card: Portland, Multnomah County

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

BLACK MEN, cuffed, lay on the grass. An officer holds back a GERMAN SHEPARD. John gestures for Bertram to get low to get their faces. Title Card: Tucson, Arizona

EXT. BEACH FRONT HOUSE - DAY

John, Maggie and Morgan watch Movers moving boxes into their new home. They look like a happy American family.

In a series of cuts, John is picked up in different cabs at different times. Maggie and Morgan hug him before he leaves.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A PLASTIC SURGEON draws lines under Maggie's eyes. As Maggie turns to look into a mirror, flash forward to the bags removed. She's giddy. The doctor draws more lines on her eyebrows... they're lifted. Her lips... they're fuller.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Two Minnesota cops are in a foot race with a suspect. The suspect is pummeled to the pavement. His face is smashed.

EXT. EDIT SUITE - DAY

Morgan peers in with baseball in hand to see John watching the same footage. John shakes his head but offers Morgan a seat. Morgan takes it.

INT. EMPTY BUILDING - DAY

John and Malcolm are led in by a realtor. In a CUT the place is the headquarters of COPS with office workers all around.

EXT. BEACH FRONT HOUSE - DAY

Maggie and Morgan wave John off as he gets in a cab. The next time John gets in a cab his family isn't there.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

In a series of cuts John wakes up and gets up in different hotel beds. He seems more tired every time.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

John passes by people engrossed in an episode of COPS on TV.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A FATHER (dentist) talks in front of the class. It's "Career Day" and parents sit with their kids.

Morgan leaves Maggie and sits down in another chair. Flash! It's picture day. Morgan leaves frame. In another outfit a teenage Morgan sits down. Not that sweet boy anymore. Flash!

INT. BEACHFRONT HOUSE - DAY

Maggie turns on a lamp in the bed. She looks worried as she retrieves a pill bottle from a drawer. She swallows a couple. The camera slides into the living room: John is going through COPS footage with Morgan. As John speaks Morgan takes notes.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE: the Berlin Wall comes down. The Hubble Space Telescope launches. A clip of Seinfeld.

A clip of the officers beating Rodney King intercuts with Cops from COPS arresting black men. The acquittal of the Los Angeles officers then to the 1992 riots: crowds held back by the National Guard, buildings on fire, people in body bags.

INT. MALCOLM'S OFFICE - DAY

Malcolm watches coverage of the riots. He turns off the TV, contemplates for a moment then looks out to see John flirting with some pretty 20 something employee.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY

John and Malcolm are seated across each other.

MALCOLM

...and with the riots I can't be on anymore.

JOHN

Your signature is still drying on the syndication deal.

MALCOLM

It's time for me to go.

JOHN

You're contracted until '94. FOX will sue you.

MALCOLM

Cover for me.

JOHN

You want to leave now that you made your millions. Fine. I don't need you, but you're wrong about this show.

MALCOLM

You know what this show is John. You always knew.
(beat)

JOHN

If you really believe what we made is... how do you make sense of what you're leaving behind?

MALCOLM

I don't know. There's not a day that goes by where I don't think about Broward. All the things we've seen and chose to ignore. I don't think these feelings go away, but I still have my children and my children are more precious to me than anything I've made. If I do okay there, that will be enough.

John waits there for long beat. Silence. An Office PA enters.

OFFICE PA

Mr. Langley, are you ready to go over these dailies?

JOHN
Yeah, come on in.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Flash forward to 2013: A couple PARAMOUNT EXECUTIVES shake hands with John, Morgan, and Doug. We CUT into the meeting.

PARAMOUNT EXECUTIVE #1
We're so excited to have this apart
of our line up.

MORGAN
It's very exciting for us too.

JOHN
Are you going to address Color of
Change at all?

PARAMOUNT EXECUTIVE #2
Robinson thinks they've won since
it's off broadcast now and the
general public really had no idea
about the petition. Thank god.

PARAMOUNT EXECUTIVE #1
People only need to know COPS is
moving to Paramount and that the
show's integrity will be safe with
you two as the showrunners.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

John, drink in hand, watches Doug chatting with the executives in the parking lot. Morgan enters the office.

MORGAN
Hey. I got us a box for the Dodgers
game tonight. The whole family is
coming. Mom will be there. Thought
we could celebrate before I head to
Amarillo tomorrow.

JOHN
Filming doesn't start for a couple
weeks.

MORGAN
I have to be there for the location
scouts and then the filming.

JOHN

We have crews for that.

MORGAN

It's only a few months. It's not like I'm going away for good.

JOHN

You know it's not going to end with Color of Change. This generation, people are awakening to what they watch. There will be more of them, more of these groups, and they're going to come after us.

MORGAN

We'll survive. COPS always does. I think we're going to be on for a long time.

JOHN

Something will kill this and when it does people will write about us, we'll be condemned, hated...

MORGAN

No one is coming after us now. If people really cared about how the sausage was made, they wouldn't eat it. So what we need to focus on now is making COPS the best, most balanced, show it can be.

JOHN

Think I'm going to pass on that game tonight.

MORGAN

All we do is make TV dad. That's all we do.

Morgan leaves John's ticket on his desk and exits. John waits for Morgan to leave... He makes his way into the open office area... Everyone has gone home, the office TV is still on.

INT. MORGAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Morgan notices the shotgun shell John gave him is still on his key chain. It's all rusted and dinged up. He tries wiping some smudge off but it won't come out. *It's ruined.* He keeps at it as we CUT TO...

INT. OPEN OFFICE AREA - NIGHT

John raises the volume.

ABC ANCHOR

It was a dramatic moment in America when the jury of the George Zimmerman trial finally delivered a verdict: not guilty. Adding fuel to a fire of racial tensions flaring across the country.

JUROR

George Zimmerman got away with it, but you can't get away from God. And at the end of the day, he's going to have a lot of questions and answers he has to deal with, but the law couldn't prove it.

John slouches down in a chair continuing to watch.

TITLE CARD:

The Florida Supreme Court ruled the Broward County Police Department's practise of manufacturing crack cocaine unconstitutional in 1992.

John takes a big swig from his drink.

Malcolm Barbour received 40% of the net revenue of COPS. He died in 2014.

Morgan Langley continues to work on COPS as an Executive Producer and Co-Showrunner.

John adjusts his seat to recline. He's staying for a while.

COPS has produced over 1,000 episodes. It has been on the air for 30 years.

John Langley is the oldest Showrunner in Hollywood.

John continues to watch as we...

CUT TO BLACK