

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION 2013

LEE DANIELS'  
THE BUTLER  
WRITTEN BY DANNY STRONG  
DIRECTED BY LEE DANIELS

**BEST WRITING (ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY)**

**Danny Strong**



# **THE BUTLER**

by

Danny Strong

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INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY - 2009

CECIL GAINES, 90, kind, elegant and much wiser than he lets on, sits in the Entrance Hall of the White House. It's been many years since he's been here, but it's as he remembers.

QUICK CUT TO - an image of two black men HANGING from a pole, they've just been lynched. The American flag waves in the wind behind their limp bodies.

CUT BACK TO - CECIL IN THE WHITE HOUSE. He is emotionless as he contemplates his dark past. We hear his voice...

CECIL V.O.

The only thing I ever knew was  
cotton.

FADE CUT TO:

EXT. COTTON FARM - DAY - 1926

The sun pounds down on a beautiful cotton field. Brilliant reds and alabaster whites intermix with green foliage along a blue river bed. Twenty or so black FIELD WORKERS lace the cotton field baking in the heat.

CHYRON: MACON, GEORGIA, 1926

CECIL V.O.

It was hard work. But I didn't mind  
because I got to spend all day with  
my daddy.

Cecil Gaines, now 8, sits in the field with his dad, EARL GAINES, 30, tough, who teaches him how to pick cotton.

EARL

...and you know the cotton is ready  
when the bulb splits, and the bulb  
is star shaped, like a big old star  
in the sky. Like your big ol' head.

Earl rubs cotton all over young Cecil's head as Cecil laughs.

EXT. WESTFALL HOUSE - PORCH - DAY - 1926

THOMAS WESTFALL, 25, an attractive white man with bad skin sits with his grandmother ANNABETH, 70's, sharp and stern, reading on the kitchen porch as he heads to the field. Thomas looks over his property and his workers. It's a good day.

EXT. COTTON FARM - DAY - 1926

Cecil's friend, ABRAHAM, 9, holds a worn old camera as Earl positions his wife, HATTIE PEARL, 25, beautiful, together with Cecil.

EARL

Hurry up and take this picture.

ABRAHAM

Why don't everybody smile?

The family barely smiles as Abraham snaps the camera.

Then - Thomas walks into the field, towards Hattie Pearl.

THOMAS

Hattie, come on. Come on!

Little Cecil and Abraham both look up with concern to Earl. Hattie Pearl reluctantly follows Thomas to the shed.

CECIL

Pa, where is he taking ma?

THOMAS

Get back to work!

Earl looks frustrated. He goes back to the cotton. His pace quickens as he picks the cotton. Sweat drops from his lip. Cecil heads for the shed. Earl snatches him mid-stride.

CECIL

(Yelling)

Mamma!

EARL

Look at me boy. Don't lose your temper with that man. This is his world. We just be living in it. You hear me? Now get on back to work!

Cecil watches his mother enter the shed. Stares a beat, then sadly goes back to work with Abraham.

We hear some commotion, then Hattie Pearl's piercing SCREAM. The workers don't look up. Everyone continues picking cotton.

Annabeth stands from the porch. She looks towards the shed.

Thomas stumbles back to the field. None of the workers dare look up except for Earl.

CECIL  
Pa...What you goin' do?

Earl turns to Thomas defiantly.

EARL  
Hey! Don't you ever do that to my wife.

Thomas pulls his revolver out. Cecil looks terrified, as everyone watches in silence. Then -

Thomas SHOOTS Earl square in the eye!

CECIL  
Dad!

The WORKERS on the field freeze. Little Cecil stares in shock at his father's body twitching against the cotton, a chunk of his head in the dirt. A fly lands on Cecil's brow.

Annabeth runs towards the field as Thomas heads back to the house waving his gun around.

THOMAS  
What are you looking at?! Huh? Who wants to go next? You get back to work!

Cecil trembles in utter shock as Annabeth approaches him.

ANNABETH  
Hey you! Men! Get some of the hands to help dig a hole for his pa.

She points to an area taken over by weeds near the shed. Then leans down toward Cecil, feels sorry for him.

ANNABETH (CONT'D)  
Stop crying.  
(Then)  
I'ma have you working at the house now.

She bends down to face him.

ANNABETH (CONT'D)  
I'm gonna teach you how to be a house nigger.

Little Cecil stares at her in pure sadness.

TITLES

INT. WESTFALL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - 1926

PATTY CAKE, 50's, heavy, arranges baked chicken on a tray.  
Cecil pays close attention. Annabeth enters to oversee.

ANNABETH

Quiet when you're serving. I don't  
even want to hear you breathe.

A fearful Cecil nods.

INT. WESTFALL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - 1926

Cecil stands behind Patty Cake holding a bowl of potatoes  
that she scoops onto Annabeth's, Thomas', and her TEENAGE  
GRANDSON'S plates. These men appear to be an ungrateful  
bunch. Cecil holds his breath, struggling not to make a peep.

CECIL V.O.

It was much nicer working in the  
house than in the field.

Thomas grabs Cecil's arm.

THOMAS

Give me more.

INT. STUDY - DAY - 1926

Cecil pours iced tea for Annabeth who reads *The Adventure of  
Sherlock Holmes*. Annabeth examines the tea. Satisfied, she  
goes back to her book, flicks her hand at him to leave.

INT. WESTFALL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - 1926

SEQUENCE - TIME LAPSE: Cecil serving throughout the household  
as we dissolve from 8 year old Cecil to 15 year old Cecil.

15 year old Cecil bows his head at his father's grave.

CECIL V.O.

When I got older, I knew I had to  
go before he killed me too.

He then heads up the road walking through the poverty  
stricken sharecropper's houses.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

Part of me was scared to leave, it  
was the only world I ever knew.

EXT. SHARECROPPER HOUSE - DAWN - 1933

Hattie Pearl sits in the corner, a shell of a woman. The years have broken her mind. Cecil goes to his mother, he holds out an old watch.

CECIL

Ma, I took pa's watch.

Hattie doesn't respond.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Ma, I'm leavin'.

She's too far gone to even notice him. He hugs her goodbye.

CECIL V.O.

My ma never spoke much after that.  
I knew she'd miss me. But I also  
knew she wanted me to leave that  
place.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT- LATER - 1933

Annabeth sits in the rocker on her porch as she tucks a book into Cecil's shirt.

CECIL V.O.

And even though Miss Annabeth never  
said it, I knew she'd miss me too.

EXT. SHARECROPPER HOUSE - DIRT ROAD - 1933

Cecil walks down a lonely dirt road by himself.

CECIL V.O.

I don't think God meant for people  
to not have a family. I yearned for  
one.

INT./EXT. CULVERT - NIGHT - 1933

A rainstorm hammers down upon the roof of a small culvert. Cecil cradles his shivering body. Water drips from the roof down onto Cecil's head. DRIP...DRIP...DRIP. With each DRIP of water, he looks like he's slowly going mad.

CECIL V.O.

Outside the cotton fields was much  
worse than I thought it'd be.

SEQUENCE: Cecil traveling through the Southern countryside. He walks through the rain, alone, hungry and desperate.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)  
No one would give me a job, or  
food, or a place to sleep. I was  
hungry all the time.

EXT. STREET INTO TOWN - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT - 1933

Cecil walks into a town and passes by two lynched men hanging from a pole (the opening of the film). Cecil stares at them, terrified.

CECIL V.O.  
Any white man could kill any of us  
at any time and not be punished for  
it. The law wasn't on our side. The  
law was against us.

EXT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT - 1933

Cecil creeps down the street through the pouring rain. Paranoid, he looks over his shoulder. He peers in a window of the restaurant, sees an elaborate array of succulent pies and cakes resting on the counter.

CECIL V.O.  
And even though I knew the law was  
against me...

He gazes in, then suddenly SMASHES the window with his fist!

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT - 1933

His wrist gashed and spilling blood, Cecil heads toward the pastry laced counter. He devours a frosted coconut creme cake. He sees his blood drip into the frosting.

Cecil catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror behind the counter. The hunger in his eyes, blood mixed with white frosting against his black skin are a site of the macabre.

CECIL V.O.  
...I never knew I could be this  
hungry.

Then a VOICE calls out from across the room.



VOICE

You know what could happen to you  
son?

Clutching the cake like a rabid dog, Cecil turns to MAYNARD, late 50's, a freckled-faced, gentle-looking light-skinned black man.

MAYNARD

Get up. I said get up.

EXT. ALLEY WAY - DAWN - 1933

Cecil and Maynard sit on the kitchen stoop outside the restaurant. Cigarette dangling, Maynard bandages Cecil's wrist.

MAYNARD

I'm going to have to lie to the  
boss man about that window. Good  
lord says you aint supposed to lie.

CECIL

Sorry sir.

MAYNARD

Where's your ma and your pa?

CECIL

My Ma crazy in the head and my Pa  
got killed.

MAYNARD

I'ma make you some ham sandwiches  
and send you on your way. The boss  
will be here any minute. Sunday's  
our busiest morning.

CECIL

You looking for some help? I know  
how to serve.

MAYNARD

(laughing)

You done broke our window. You done  
stole our food. And now you asking  
for a job?

CECIL

(proudly)

Back in Macon, I'ma house nigger.  
A good one.

Maynard SLAPS Cecil across the face.

MAYNARD

Don't ever use that word son.  
That's the white man's word.  
Filled with hate. Didn't your  
father teach you any better?

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY - SERVING MONTAGE - 1933

Cecil runs through the hall with a tray dressed in a suit.  
He's training to be a proper butler.

MAYNARD

Slow Down!

INT. HOTEL BAR - DAY - 1933

Maynard teaches Cecil how to make a martini, shaking with  
style. He twists off the top and effortlessly pours.

MAYNARD

You gotta look 'em in their eyes.  
See what it is they want.

Cecil watches attentively.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

Maynard teaches Cecil how to clean a candelabra, cleaning  
each piece by hand.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATE NIGHT - 1933

Cecil spit shines eight pairs of men's shoes, making sure his  
reflection is on every pair.

INT. HOTEL BAR - DAY - 1933

Cecil continues to watch Maynard make martinis.

MAYNARD

See what it is they need...

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

Cecil shows a couple to a hotel room, carrying their luggage.

CECIL  
Right this way.

INT. HOTEL BAR - DAY - 1933

Cecil pours martinis alongside Maynard.

MAYNARD  
Anticipate.

INT. HOTEL DINING ROOM - DAY - 1933

Cecil serves martinis to older white ladies. With one hand, he holds the tray, with the other, he goes to move a purse to make room. The lady abruptly snatches her purse away.

CECIL  
I'm - I'm sorry ma'am.

INT. HOTEL BAR - DAY - 1933

Maynard and Cecil put the finishing touches on martinis.

MAYNARD  
Smile with your eyes.

EXT. POOL - DAY - 1933

At the head of the pool, Cecil is drenched in sweat. He holds a tray with grilled cheese sandwiches and chilled Coca Colas. Three WHITE TEENAGERS, Cecil's age, frolic and lounge in the pool.

INT. HOTEL BAR - DAY - 1933

Maynard watches Cecil finish the martinis.

MAYNARD  
Perfect.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATE NIGHT - 1933

Cecil looks up from spit shining shoes and smiles. He really likes his new job.

EXT. ALLEY WAY - LATE AFTERNOON - 1933

On a break, Cecil and Maynard sit on the kitchen stoop. Both smoking. It's raining.

MAYNARD

(to workers)

Don't forget to save me chitlins.

CECIL

Why do you like chitlins so much?

MAYNARD

It's good eating.

(To Cecil)

The manager of the Excelsior in DC,  
he came by yesterday. He offered me  
a job as a butler.

Both are quiet. Cecil looks up sadly.

CECIL

They must be paying you top dollar,  
huh boss?

MAYNARD

Yeah... I was thinking about taking  
it... But I dunno, I'm too old to  
be leaving North Carolina. I'm just  
fine right here. I told them to  
hire you.

Surprised, Cecil looks up at Maynard.

CECIL

I'm just now finding my way 'round  
this hotel. I'm not ready for those  
high falootin' white people with  
all their fancy words.

Maynard laughs.

MAYNARD

Cecil, we got two faces. Ours, and  
the one we got to show the white  
folks. Now to get up in the world,  
we have to make them feel  
nonthreatened. Go on and use all  
them fancy words that I taught you.  
White folks up north love them some  
uppity coloreds.

Cecil ponders all of this. Smiles. He's grown fond of this  
old man.

EXT. WASHINGTON, DC SKYLINE - NIGHT

SEQUENCE: ESTABLISHING SHOTS of 1950's Washington DC ending on the gorgeous Excelsior Hotel.

CECIL V.O.

When I took that job up in  
Washington, DC it was the most  
beautiful hotel I had ever seen.

INT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT - 1954

A WEALTHY COUPLE, 50's, white, he in top hat, she in mink,  
walk into the stunning lobby. Waiting to greet them is:

Cecil Gaines, now 36. Wearing a black vest and bow tie, he  
looks like a different person - filled out, handsome, exudes  
class and refinement.

Holding a silver tray with a tumbler of scotch and a glass of  
champagne, he gives the wealthy couple an elegant head bow.

CECIL

I hope I wasn't too presumptuous to  
have prepared a few spirits after  
your long journey in from Buffalo.

INT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - STUDY - NIGHT - 1954

Older men in three piece suits are crammed in the hotel's  
study smoking cigars, drinking bourbon. An elegant 36 year-  
old Cecil walks in with a tray of martinis.

A LOUD PATRON talking politics sits across from a man with a  
CREW CUT, Cecil's age, he holds a cigar. The Crew Cut Man  
searches his pockets for matches.

LOUD PATRON

Best decision that court ever made  
was to slow this whole mess down.  
Nigger boys in school with white  
girls?! Who ever heard of such a  
thing? Next thing you know they'd  
be fornicatin'. Gentlemen, this  
could start another Civil War.

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

LOUD PATRON (CONT'D)  
Cecil, what do you think about  
niggers going to school with white  
children?

All eyes on the table turn to Cecil, the Crew Cut Man paying particular attention as he searches for matches.

CECIL  
To be honest with you, Mr. Jenkins,  
I tend to not to be too concerned  
with American or European politics.

The Crew Cut Man smiles, likes the answer.

LOUD PATRON  
Nor should you, Cecil, they're all  
criminals. Earl Warren should be  
shot and hanged. That dumb son-of-  
bitch is trying to integrate our  
schools.

Cecil smiles with kindness and grace, his signature.

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

The Loud Patron busts out laughing.

LOUD PATRON  
Damn right, Cecil! Damn right.

Puffing out smoke, the Crew Cut Man grins at Cecil, taking note of him, as Cecil walks out of the room with grace.

CECIL V.O.  
Never in my life did I dream that I  
would work in a place as fancy as  
this.

EXT. OTIS PLACE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - MORNING - 1957

Driving in his 1951 Ford, Cecil heads down a quaint street in a lower-middle class black neighborhood passing two story row homes that share a common wall. Porches have swings, fences are painted white. It's not a wealthy neighborhood, but there is a collective pride.

CECIL V.O.  
I never dreamed my life could be so  
good.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - MORNING - 1957

Cecil walks into his modest three bedroom home. A small living room connects to the kitchen. China in glass cases, immaculate carpets, a portrait of Jesus stares at us.

Smoking her Pall Mall, big curlers in her hair, is GLORIA, 38, tough, brash but full of love. She sits at the kitchen table peeling potatoes, tapping her feet to "Teardrops From My Eyes." Warm biscuits, fat back and eggs on the stove.

CECIL V.O.

Gloria and I met working at the Excelsior. She was a maid at the hotel. But now her only job was raising our two boys. I made sure that they never laid eyes on a cotton field.

Their youngest son, CHARLIE, 9, fidgets next to her doing his homework. He wants out.

CHARLIE

I gotta pee.

Gloria gives him a blank look. She's so on to him.

GLORIA

Not today. Don't try that. Finish that homework.

Cecil stands in the doorway, smiling at his family.

CECIL

Where's Louis at?

GLORIA

He's taking the trash out.

Charlie looks at his father, smiles. He's happy to see him.

CHARLIE

Working late again, huh?

CECIL

Yup.

CHARLIE

How was your shift?

Cecil drops his refined dialect at home.

CECIL

Beats working for a livin'.

He reaches for the plate of fat back. Gloria pouts sweetly.

GLORIA  
I miss you at night, honey.

CECIL  
(To Charlie)  
Didn't you say you gotta pee? Go ahead then. And wash your hands when you come out of that bathroom boy.

Coffee in hand, Cecil kisses her passionately.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Good morning!

GLORIA  
Good morning sir.

Charlie runs to the bathroom. Happy to be rid of his parents. LOUIS, 15, smart and very perceptive, enters the room.

LOUIS  
Hey dad.

He heads for the kitchen table.

CECIL  
Hey Louis. You alright?

LOUIS  
Yeah I'm fine.

Gloria goes to get Louis food. She starts pontificating.

GLORIA  
That woman whose son got killed, she's around doing speeches now.  
(to Cecil)  
What's her name, honey?

Cecil starts to answer, Louis chimes in. He knows very well.

LOUIS  
Mamie Till.

GLORIA  
Mamie Till... I remember that story just like it was yesterday even though it was two years ago. It was dis-damn-graceful what they did to that boy just for looking at a white woman...  
(MORE)



GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Beat him up, threw his body in the  
river... killed him. He was just 14  
at the time.

CECIL  
Crazy white folks down south.

She starts serving breakfast to her men. Louis takes all of  
this in. He is clearly disturbed.

GLORIA  
At least we have it a little better  
here in DC, huh?

CECIL  
Still treating us bad too.

GLORIA  
(Yelling to Charlie)  
Get on down here Charlie!

Charlie enters from the bathroom.

CHARLIE  
Louis said we should stop taking  
the white man's shit.

CECIL  
Watch your mouth.

GLORIA  
Watch your mouth.

The telephone RINGS. Charlie charges towards the telephone.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)  
(picking up the phone)  
Hello, Gaines' residence.

Charlie listens attentively.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)  
Uh, yeah... Hold on Mr. Kidgan.  
(To Cecil)  
It's the boss man dad.

GLORIA  
What's he calling for?

Cecil snatches the phone.

CECIL V.O.  
When the white man called, I always  
assumed the worst.

CECIL

Yes sir?

CECIL V.O.

I would have put money on it that I was getting laid off or something that day.

Cecil looks over at Gloria, confused by what he's hearing.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - MORNING - 1957

Cecil drives through his black neighborhood of storefront businesses - grocers, hardware stores, newsstands. He makes a right hand turn and sees off in the distance -

The White House. Cecil looks a touch nervous. He's seen it thousands of times, but he's never driven to it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST WING - DAY - 1957

Cecil sits in a chair for what seems like an eternity. A WHITE USHER comes up.

WHITE USHER

Would you follow me, please?

CECIL

Yes sir.

INT. FREDDIE FALLOW'S OFFICE - BLAIR HOUSE - DAY - 1957

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

CECIL

I'm Cecil Gaines. It's a pleasure to meet you.

FREDDIE

You as well. Have a seat.

Long beat as Freddie eyes him over. Then -

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

Are you political, Mr. Gaines?

CECIL

No, sir.

FREDDIE

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

Slight beat.

CECIL

How did you find me?

FREDDIE

(Icy)

I didn't. You served RD Warner at  
the Excelsior Hotel. He oversees  
operations for the entire White  
House. You made quite an  
impression.

CECIL

I don't recall.

FREDDIE

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

CECIL

(Laughing)

I know I was quite surprised when I  
got the call.

FREDDIE

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

Cecil knows Freddie doesn't want him.

CECIL

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

Freddie eyes him suspiciously.

FREDDIE

Oh, really.

CECIL

You need butlers that you've hand  
picked, men to your liking that  
will fulfill your vision of a  
proper White House staff.

Freddie just stares at him. Cecil glances at a Louis Trace  
decanter on a nearby table.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Is that... Louis Trace? These  
decanters are replicas of metal  
flasks that were found on the  
battlefield in Jarnac. Correct?

Freddie studies him. Oh, he's REALLY good.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
The Italians, they know their wine,  
and the Irish certainly know how to  
make a great whiskey, but I believe  
the French have a distinct  
advantage when it comes to cognac.

Freddie stares at Cecil for a beat. Then:

FREDDIE  
Oh yeah, you'll make a good house  
nigga.  
(in his best English  
dialect)  
Would you care for a demitasse?

INT. GAINES' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1957

A home packed with LAUGHING NEIGHBORS, all African American,  
all in a festive mood. Couples dance to the scratchy VOICE of  
Faye Adams. Gloria SINGS along.

GLORIA  
(Singing along)  
"I wish I knew some other way..."  
Sometimes it be just me and Faye up  
in here. Me, Faye, and a little  
scotch.

A rather loud but fun neighbor, HOWARD, 40's, gregarious,  
drunkenly dances with one of his neighbors' wives, to the  
irritation of his wife, GINA, 30, accepting and resigned.

GINA  
What did you do to this potato  
salad?

GLORIA

I'll tell you what I did. I put some dill in it because I read in Women's Day, where pickles drown out the flavor and dill bring up the flavor. That's what you tasting right there.

GINA

Oh okay... yeah... I like it.

Louis reads a comic book in the dining room, looks a little annoyed at all the noise.

GINA (CONT'D)

You must be so proud of Cecil.

GLORIA

You know he got that job by himself. The White House called him, he didn't call the White House.

GINA

He's a good man. You got a good man.

Howard finishes dancing and sits down.

HOWARD

(Laughing)

She fun man!

Howard grabs his bitter wife.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Not like this one right here.  
Little sourpuss still mad at me.

GINA

I got reason.

HOWARD

No you don't. I told you I done went down to the number spot. Played me some numbers. Got me some barbecue and went down... I didn't even get nothing to drink!

GINA

I'm so sick of these number spot stories Howard. How you expect me to believe you was down at the number spot...

Howard and Gina start to argue.

GLORIA

Come on y'all, come on, come on.  
Stop this mess. Stop this mess in  
this house right now. We are here  
to celebrate so y'all could be nice  
just one time.

HOWARD

(to Gina)

Get over here and lets celebrate!  
Celebrate the right way.

Howard takes Gina in his arms, romancing her, she starts to  
laugh. Cecil appears at the top of the staircase.

CECIL

Y'all need to get a room!

GLORIA

Ain't that the truth! Or  
something...

GINA

He just drive me crazy! He just...  
Ugh!

Cecil walks down the stairs. He surveys the group. He notices  
Louis' uneasiness over at the table.

CECIL

(to Louis)

You, uh... you wanna come to the  
room with us?

LOUIS

No.

Gloria looks slightly concerned, but Cecil gives him an  
understanding wink.

HOWARD

Hey where are the boys at?

CECIL

They upstairs playing.

GLORIA

Boys! Get down here! I need to see  
your face now! What y'all doing up  
there?

She beams with pride looking up at her husband.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Honey when you gonna take me to the  
White House?

CECIL  
You wanna go to the White House,  
baby?

GLORIA  
You know I wanna go.

Cecil CHUCKLES. Moves over to Howard.

CECIL  
When you want to go?

GLORIA  
Don't play with me now you know I  
want to go.

HOWARD  
The White House, that's a big step  
up.

CECIL  
Yeah. It is exciting.

GINA  
(To Gloria)  
Girl, you are up in that house now.  
I want to hear ALL of the stories.

GLORIA  
I don't know how many stories you  
gonna hear 'cus they done swore him  
to some kind of secret code and he  
can't tell me nothin'.

Gina shakes her butt looking over her shoulders.

GINA  
Girl, you give it to him right.  
He'll tell you everything.

Gloria LAUGHS.

CECIL  
That's the key right there!  
(to Gloria)  
You listening? Did you hear her?

The boys run downstairs, heading straight to the kitchen.

GLORIA  
Boys stop running through this  
house, you know better than that.

HOWARD  
Elroy! Get over here! Come here.

Slight beat.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
Give me some money.  
(Laughs)  
Nah... Tell them... Tell them what  
you gonna be when you grow up.

His son in army fatigues, ELROY, 8, points at Cecil.

ELROY  
I wanna work at the White House  
just like Mr. Gaines.

A few in the room "AHHHH"...

GINA  
That's my boy.

CECIL  
Mighty fine.

HOWARD  
(shouts across the room)  
Louis! What you gonna be when you  
grow up? You gonna work at a White  
House just like your daddy?

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

LOUIS  
I don't know.

There is an awkward moment here, Cecil and Gloria exchange  
concerned looks, they know he's different and it scares them.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST WING PATHWAY - DAY - 1957

Wearing a perfectly tailored tuxedo, Cecil walks down a tree-  
lined pathway toward the side entrance where flags stick out  
of lamp posts. He stops at the Security Gate.

CECIL  
I'm Cecil Gaines. I'm the new  
butler.



INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY - 1957

Cecil and Freddie walk through the White House hallway.

FREDDIE

There are 16 full time maid, 6 butlers, 4 carpenters, 2 painters, 7 electricians, 3 dishwashers, 3 doorman, a full kitchen staff including pastry chef and 3 full time calligraphers. 2 painters, 7 electricians and 9 engineers.

They walk the Cross Hall passing Presidential portraits.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

Here comes Warner.

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

CECIL

Mr. Warner, I wanted to thank you for this opportunity to work in the Whi--

But RD Warner keeps walking, doesn't even acknowledge him. Cecil is surprised by the snub, but Freddie just smiles, that's how it is here.

FREDDIE

(Laughing)

Come on. Here we go.

Cecil spots a maid scrubbing the floor of a bathroom.

CECIL

Ma'am, I'm Cecil Gaines, I'll be working with you here.

FREDDIE

Mr. Gaines, please don't do that.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - DAY - 1957

Cecil and Freddie stand in the State Dining Room, an elegant room with ornate gold curtains, gold chandelier and a massive portrait of Abraham Lincoln. They hover over a dining table covered in the finest china, crystal and flatware.

FREDDIE

When lifting a plate, never scrape the bottom.

(MORE)

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

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

CECIL

--empty when I'm in it.

Freddie nods.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BUTLER'S LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON - 1957

A Brooklyn Dodgers game BLASTS from a rickety transistor radio somewhere in this cramped room. Cecil enters unnoticed as JAMES HOLLOWAY, 32, intellectual, brushes his teeth as he listens to CARTER WILSON, 40, brash and crass, tell a story.

CARTER

...So then she says, "stick a finger in." So I stick a finger in. Then she says, "Stick two fingers in!". "Okay!" Then she starts moanin' and screamin' and yells, "Stick your whole hand in!" So I put my whole hand in. Then she yells out, "Put both hands in!". "Okay!" Then she screams, "Now clap!" I say, "I can't." She looks up, smiles and says, "See I told you my stuff was tight."

Cecil ROARS. Carter notices Cecil.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Hey! There he is! I heard you were coming. What's your name brother?

Cecil holds out his hand.

CECIL

Cecil. Cecil Gaines.

Carter shakes his hand first.

CARTER

Cecil Gaines. I'm Carter Wilson, head butler. Don't worry about Big Mo behind you. That brother will steal your wallet before you even knew it. This brother in the mirror over here, his name's James Holloway, he's my second in command.

Cecil holds out his hand to Holloway.

CECIL

Hey James.

HOLLOWAY

Jackie Robinson or Willie Mays?

CARTER

Why don't you shake the man's hand  
first 'fore you start asking  
difficult questions like that?

HOLLOWAY

I just want to know where the man's  
coming from.

CECIL

Look like the jury is still out on  
that one, right?

They shake hands.

HOLLOWAY

That's right. Welcome. Fancy  
Freddie give you the tour yet?

Cecil nods.

CECIL

He did. Are the Dodgers losing?

HOLLOWAY

I might be able to answer that  
question if Carter over here stop  
running his nasty mouth?

The three men listen through the static. Fast friends.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER - 1957

Wearing his tuxedo jacket. Cecil places a colonial silver  
teapot on a silver tray. A few members of the kitchen staff  
shoot him glances as he preps the tray. They know it's his  
first serving. LORRAINE, black, mid 20s, shakes her head.

CARTER

Lord, help us.

LORRAINE

Don't be nervous man, just go on  
and get to it.

As he lifts the tray, a PHOTOGRAPHER takes a picture to  
record the moment. He looks fantastic in his fitted tuxedo.

Freddie whispers to him.

FREDDIE

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

INT. WEST WING - HALLWAY - DAY - 1957

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

INT. WEST WING - OVAL OFFICE CORRIDOR - DAY - 1957

He walks into the corridor, a SECRET SERVICE AGENT looks up at him.

INT. WEST WING - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1957

Cecil walks in to the Oval Office and sees DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER standing at his desk. He exudes a grandfatherly warmth. Cecil tries not to stare at him. He sets the tray down and begins to pour a cup of tea.

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

SHERMAN ADAMS

Send federal troops to Little Rock?

HERBERT BROWNELL

If it comes to it, yes.

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

IKE

I can't see any situation where I'd  
send troops to the South. Ever. It  
would cause another Civil War.

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

HERBERT BROWNELL

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

IKE  
It's just going to take some time  
to adjust, that's all.

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

HERBERT BROWNELL  
I understand, Mr. President, but if  
Faubus continues to block the negro  
children then what do we do? We  
must enforce the Constitution.

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

SHERMAN ADAMS  
Give Faubus more time. With a  
little persuading, he'll back down.  
We just want to move slowly.

Ike sips his tea struggling through his feelings as Cecil grabs his tray and hurries out of the room.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - 1957

Cecil walks into the busy kitchen carrying the silver tray.

CARTER  
How'd it go?

CECIL  
I almost shit myself.

CARTER  
I dated a girl once. Every time I  
hit it, she shit herself.

Some laugh. Lorraine throws a wet rag at Carter.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
I put a towel down.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - NIGHT - 1957

Charlie and Elroy watch *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. We hear a GUNSHOT. A woman SCREAMS. At the same time Louis creeps up on them from behind the couch. Charlie and Elroy jump as Louis laughs at them.

Cecil enters from a long day's work.

CHARLIE

Hey dad.

CECIL

Hey.

ELROY

Hi, Mr. Gaines.

CECIL

Hey Elroy.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Louis, I told you about letting the kids watch that show. It's too scary. They're too young for it. Turn it off.

Cecil walks into the kitchen.

CECIL (CONT'D)

(from the kitchen)

Where's your mamma at?

ELROY

Miss Gloria tried staying up but she went to sleep.

The kids continue watching the show. Cecil comes out of the kitchen with a glass of milk.

CECIL

Elroy nobody asked you nothin'. Take your butt home before your mamma come in here and whoop the both of us.

LOUIS

Come on dad.

CECIL

Go on.

Elroy gets up to leave.

ELROY

Bye.

CHARLIE

Dad.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Turn it off. Don't go stomping up the stairs and wake your mom up.

Elroy leaves as Charlie storms upstairs. Louis turns off the television. Cecil spots a flyer on the table. He picks it up.  
**MAMIE TILL, MOTHER OF EMMET TILL, SPEAKS OUT!**

CECIL (CONT'D)

What is this? Is that that Mamie Till stuff?

LOUIS

I want to go to this.

CECIL

Absolutely not.

LOUIS

How come?

CECIL

Ain't no good gonna come of that.

LOUIS

Dad, you hear what mom said?

CECIL

That mess right there happen down south.

LOUIS

This could have been me.

CECIL

It happened down south. I got out of there so we could have us a better life. Right now I'm working for the white man, make things better for us. And not just any White man, either. Put the lights off. Go to bed.

Louis watches his father walk up the stairs, frustrated.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1957

MOZART plays from the stereo. In the middle of the Oval Office Ike sits alone painting on a canvas. His short sleeve shirt is splattered in paint. His sunflower painting leaves much to be desired. Cecil enters with a bowl of soup.

CECIL

I have your chicken soup, Mr. President.

He pulls off the lid as steam rises from the perfect bowl.

IKE  
Just set it on the table, Cecil.

Ike goes back to his painting. His eyes narrowly focused. Cecil can feel the weight of the world on this man's shoulders. Cecil sets the soup down.

IKE (CONT'D)  
Did you go to an all colored school, Cecil?

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

IKE  
I grew up on a farm... Do you have any children?

CECIL  
Yes. I have two sons.

IKE  
Do they go to an all colored school?

CECIL  
Yes, sir. They do.

Never looking up, Ike nods. As Cecil turns to leave, a furious Sherman Adams is in the doorway.

IKE  
What is it?

SHERMAN ADAMS  
The State Guard just blocked all the colored kids again.

IKE  
Faubus promised me the guards would escort the kids in.

SHERMAN ADAMS  
The Governor of Arkansas lied, Mr. President.

IKE  
What is wrong with him?! Why is he forcing me to do this?

Sherman Adams catches Cecil standing there.



SHERMAN ADAMS

Our next move needs to be bold and swift.

Cecil nods and exits.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - 1957

Cecil, Holloway and Carter watch Ike on TV make his historic announcement.

IKE (FROM THE TV)

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

Cecil watches Ike, proud and impressed.

CECIL V.O.

When the President sent those troops down to Little Rock, it was the first time I'd ever seen a White man stick his neck out for us.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - 1958-60

SEQUENCE: White House staff at work around the White House, showing us the passage of time.

CECIL V.O.

I told Louis that the President was going to make things better.

INT. GAINES HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON - 1958

The Gaines Family enter the house from Louis' graduation. Louis is wearing a cap and gown.

CECIL V.O.

Now he could see I knew what I was talking about.

GLORIA

(To Louis)

That was wonderful. I'm so proud of you.

LOUIS  
Thanks mom.

CHARLIE  
That hat looks stupid.

LOUIS  
Your face looks stupid.

CHARLIE  
Shut up.

Charlie walks upstairs to his bedroom, leaving Cecil and Louis alone downstairs.

CECIL  
I'm proud of you too.

LOUIS  
Dad, did you see one white kid in  
my school?

Cecil stares at him, confused at why Louis is asking this. A disappointed Louis just walks up the stairs.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL

Cecil serves cookies to school children. He looks a touch melancholy thinking about his son.

CECIL V.O.  
Why couldn't Louis see that the  
President made things better for  
us?

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT - 1958

The family rushes through a bus depot toward a Greyhound bus. They are sending Louis off to college.

GLORIA  
I told you don't be late! You can't  
miss this bus!

CECIL  
Wait wait wait! We gotta say  
goodbye. This can wait!

Everyone stops running for a moment. Cecil turns to Louis, he looks really worried.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Tennessee is a long ways away Pops.

LOUIS  
Fisk is a really good school, dad.

CECIL  
You can change your mind and go to  
Howard.

GLORIA  
I cannot believe you are *still*  
talking about Howard University.  
He's going to Fisk.

Cecil smiles through the pain of losing his son.

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

Louis looks at his dad.

LOUIS  
That's the point.

CECIL  
What's the point?

Louis walks away over to his mom. Cecil is taken aback,  
confused. Gloria is in tears, hugging her arms, she waits  
with Charlie by the bus.

GLORIA  
Gimme a cigarette. And don't tell  
me you don't smoke.

LOUIS  
I don't have one.

Charlie tries not to cry. Louis bends down to him.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
(in his ear)  
Come here. You know you wanna cry  
punk.

CHARLIE  
Fuck you.

LOUIS  
Look under your mattress. I left  
something.

Back to Cecil and Gloria, he's very worried.

CECIL  
I can't protect him in the south.

GLORIA  
The south has changed Cecil. The south ain't what it was when you was there.

CHARLIE  
(through tears)  
I'm too young for Playboys.  
(to Gloria)  
Mom, Louis is leaving me his filthy magazines.

Gloria smacks Charlie upside the head.

GLORIA  
Stop lying on your brother.

She hugs Louis.

LOUIS  
I love you momma.

GLORIA  
I love you, son. I love you Louis.  
I made you a ham sandwich.

LOUIS  
Come on, dad.

Louis and Cecil walk over to the bus, they stare at each other. It's awkward between them, neither knows what to say.

CECIL  
You're the first.

LOUIS  
I know.

CECIL  
I'm really proud of you.

LOUIS  
I gotta go dad. I gotta go.

Cecil can't bring himself to hug him, so he finally puts out his hand. They shake and Louis enters the bus.

CECIL  
If you need anything, you call me.

LOUIS  
 Alright.

CECIL  
 Alright?

LOUIS  
 Bye mamma.

GLORIA  
 Bye Louis.

The white BUS DRIVER nods to him to go to the back of the bus. Louis nods back-- no problem.

Louis waves to his family from the back of the bus. Crying, Gloria waves back. Cecil smiles stoically. Charlie stares at the nearby fire hydrant, refusing to look up.

As the bus pulls away, we see Louis staring at his family, he knows this may be the last time he ever sees them.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - 1960

Cecil, Holloway and Carter are in aprons making pastries.

CARTER  
 Remind me again why we're doing  
 this please... somebody? Tell me?  
 That look like a mugging to me,  
 this that what that look like.

HOLLOWAY  
 This is the art of french baking.

CARTER  
 Nigga please. French baking.  
 (Messes with the dough)  
 You want me to play with it? I'll  
 play with it. Play with it like  
 this. It'd be good if it had a  
 little... little nipple on it.

Everyone laughs. Then Vice-President RICHARD NIXON, 47, walks in. Nixon laughs along with the guys even though he has no idea what the joke was. Nixon feels like the kid in school that desperately wanted to be liked.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
 Good evening, Mr. Vice President.

NIXON  
 That looks like a tasty treat.

CARTER

Yes, sir.

NIXON

I brought you all something.

Nixon reaches into his pocket and pulls out three campaign buttons. '**NIXON FOR PRESIDENT. 1960**'. The butlers put on their best Uncle Ben smiles while putting on the buttons.

NIXON (CONT'D)

Now I don't want to say anything negative about that Kennedy boy. I'm sure he's a fine fellow, but do you really want that spoiled rich son of a bitch fuck to be your next president!? Think about it.

CECIL

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

NIXON

Thank you, Cecil.

Carter nods and Holloway smiles a little too wide. Nixon dabs a handkerchief on his sweating forehead.

NIXON (CONT'D)

Let me ask you something, in all candor, as members of the Negro community, what are your biggest concerns?

Carter goes back to massaging the dough. Cecil begins sweeping the floor. Holloway looks at Nixon dumbfounded.

NIXON (CONT'D)

Now come on now boys. Don't be shy. Holloway, come on.

HOLLOWAY

Well, since you asked sir...

NIXON

I did.

Cecil and Carter cringe.

HOLLOWAY

...the colored help gets paid almost 40% less than the white help.

NIXON  
Is that right?

HOLLOWAY  
Yes, sir, and it's very difficult  
for the colored staff to be  
promoted.

NIXON  
I'll tell ya what, when I'm  
President I'm gonna look into  
getting you boys the raises and  
promotions you deserve.

Holloway smiles his biggest smile.

HOLLOWAY  
That would be swell, sir.

NIXON  
You got my word on that.

HOLLOWAY  
Thank you, sir.

NIXON  
You tell your people to vote for me  
and that's exactly what's gonna  
happen.

Nixon takes a cherry tart and leaves. All the smiles fade on  
the Butlers.

EXT. FISK UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY - 1960

Carrying his textbooks, Louis strolls through campus. He  
holds a flyer up, searching for the right address. Lost. He  
spots an attractive girl staring at him.

CAROL  
You lookin' for love boy?

CAROL HAMMIE, 19, black, wears a school girl's skirt. Her  
hair in a pony-tail, Carol is sexy yet tough. She looks at  
his flyer.

CAROL (CONT'D)  
That's what we call the Lawson  
workshop, the love school. Is that  
what you're lookin' for?

LOUIS  
(bashfully)  
That's why I came to Fisk.

CAROL  
Me too!  
(Holds out her hand)  
I'm Carol Hammie.

LOUIS  
Louis Gaines.

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

CAROL  
Come on. Follow me.

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

CAROL (CONT'D)  
You a country boy ain't you?

INT. FISK UNIVERSITY MEETING ROOM - DAY - 1960

Carol and Louis walk into the room. The room is full of COLLEGE STUDENTS, black and white, getting ready to listen to JAMES LAWSON, 29, a very Zen black priest with glasses.

Lawson begins to speak to the group.

JAMES LAWSON  
...You can't sustain a movement like this in one week. Nor could you sustain it in over a month. This requires time, commitment, dedication, and discipline and focus. And we are measuring our accomplishments in waves. Right? This is not a fly-by-night affair, this doesn't happen over a week, this requires a fierce discipline, which is what we've been discussing. How do we measure these things? We go back and look at someone like Ghandi.

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

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)  
Together we are going to study and examine Ghandi's techniques.  
(MORE)



JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)

What has been so effective in South Africa, what has been so effective in India, for his own people and others, and we're gonna employ it right here, in Nashville. So we're gonna form an army, you and I. This army has one weapon, and this weapon is love. Now I am of the-- yes?

CAROL

(raising her hand)

If our only weapon is love and their weapons are... weapons, isn't that dangerous?

JAMES LAWSON

You can be killed. If anyone is uncomfortable with that, you know where the door is. I understand that sounds provocative, but it's true.

No one does.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)

Alright kids. It's show time.

Masking his excitement to this new world, Louis tries to be cool, giving Carol an assured nod.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - DAY - 1960

Twenty butlers enter the State Dining room ready to serve.

EXT. DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE - DAY - 1960

Louis and Carol walk down the street with several other students. All nervous but determined. Carol grabs Louis' hand as they walk toward A WOOLWORTHS DEPARTMENT STORE.

JAMES LAWSON V.O.

Ghandi has demonstrated for us that a brown man, in his native land, or anywhere that he is being oppressed, can pull himself out of segregation with patience, with persistence, with intelligence and thought.

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - 2ND FLOOR - DAY - 1960

The five students walk up to the LUNCH COUNTER. It is half filled with WHITE PATRONS.

JAMES LAWSON V.O.  
With discipline, and a bit of a  
sense of humor.

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

WAITRESS  
You know y'all can't sit here.

LOUIS  
We would like to be served, please.

JAMES LAWSON V.O.  
This is unprecedented what we're  
talking about. But it needs a  
patience that none of us have ever  
seen.

WAITRESS  
You can order food in the colored  
section, but I'm not going to be  
serving you here.

The students stare forward. They aren't going to move.

INT. WHITE HOUSE STATE DINING ROOM - DAY - 1960

All the Butlers prepare for an elaborate state dinner.

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - DAY - 1960

Patrons stare at the students. Every one is giving them confused and dirty looks. BLACK PATRONS sitting in the 'colored only section' look nervous. The students all look calm as they stare forward, waiting to be served.

JAMES LAWSON V.O.  
We are organized. We have a leader  
with every group. We have lookouts,  
with pocket change, and the local  
phone numbers for ambulances ready.  
And when one wave comes off that  
lunch counter, what follows?  
(MORE)

JAMES LAWSON V.O. (CONT'D)  
A whole 'nother wave of negro  
students sitting right there at  
that lunch counter blowing their  
minds.

Louis turns to the Waitress.

LOUIS  
We would like to be served, please.

She just stares back at him like he's crazy.

JAMES LAWSON V.O.  
Now who wants to role play?

INT. FISK UNIVERSITY MEETING ROOM - DAY - 1960

We are back during the 'training session'. Louis is  
surrounded by students yelling at him. They are preparing for  
the sit-in as James Lawson hovers nearby.

JAMES LAWSON  
Attack them. This is an experiment.  
So you need to do whatever it takes  
to break their spirit.

Lawson turns to a WHITE STUDENT, 19, nerdy.

JAMES LAWSON (CONT'D)  
I need to hear nigger coming out of  
your mouth. I need to hear coon.

STUDENT  
I don't feel comfortable saying  
that.

JAMES LAWSON  
You came here to get yourself  
prepared, and get her prepared. So  
let me hear it, now!

The White Student turns to a GIRL, 19, sitting in a chair.

STUDENT  
Nigger.

JAMES LAWSON  
Louder! Say the words like you mean  
it!

STUDENT  
Nigger!

JAMES LAWSON  
(yelling)  
Louder!

STUDENT  
(screaming)  
Nigger! You are a nigger!

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER DAY - 1960

An ELDERLY WOMAN PATRON, 70's, jumps to her feet, loosing her patience and temper with the students.

ELDERLY WOMAN PATRON  
You need to be sitting in the  
colored seating! This is not for  
you! You cannot be served here!

INT. FISK UNIVERSITY MEETING ROOM - DAY - 1960

Back in the training session, the nerdy White Student keeps yelling at the Girl.

STUDENT  
You are a nigger!

JAMES LAWSON  
Make her believe it!

STUDENT  
You are a nigger!!!

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - DAY - 1960

The Elderly Woman Patron is getting even angrier, she starts yelling at the restaurant STAFF.

ELDERLY WOMAN PATRON  
If you want us to shop in this  
establishment, make them go!

She throws up her arms, has had enough.

ELDERLY WOMAN PATRON (CONT'D)  
Come on, Robert. Let's go.

They exit. Louis watches her go and looks around to see if anyone else is going to start yelling. No one does. For now.

TIME LAPSE: Hours go by. Day turns into night as the Students sit patiently at the lunch counter. At the end of the lapse, several of the students are reading books, studying. Then -

A group of angry white TEENAGERS walk towards the sit-in.

They enter the lunch counter area and begin to brutally YELL at the students. They SPIT on them, THROW food on them, until it turns into an all out beating!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT - 1960

The doors to the State Dining Room open revealing dinner guests and the BUTLERS upright at their stations dressed in tailed tuxedos.

The candle lit tables are covered in the finest china, flatware and crystal. A vision of pure opulence. The butlers seat the President and first lady.

INT. WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER - NIGHT - 1960

A White Student DUMPS ketchup on a black girl's head. The black students stare forward calmly.

A white girl SPITS on Carol.

A white teenager THROWS coffee at Louis' face. He SCREAMS!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINNING ROOM - NIGHT - 1960

We continue to hear Louis' screams as Cecil stares forward standing at attention behind the President. He becomes invisible as the opulent dinner takes place around him. But Louis' screams won't go away.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - 1960

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

FREDDIE  
To serving our country.

ALL  
To serving our country!

Cecil, genuinely proud, clinks his glass with Freddie.

A TV plays in the background. News footage of arrests begins to play. As we push in on the TV we see that Louis is being arrested on the television.

INT. DAVIDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY - 1960

Thirty black students sit in a packed courtroom. Louis sits next to Carol. He sees Cecil. The look on his father's face scares him.

JUDGE O.S.

You are all sentenced to 30 days in  
the county jail to commence at noon  
today.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY - 1960

Cecil drinks from a 'colored only' water fountain. He's so furious he barely hears his son who stands in front of him.

LOUIS

Something special's going on down  
here dad.

CECIL

What's so special about another  
colored man in jail? What are you  
doing with my hard earned money  
Pops? Are you even in school?

LOUIS

I'm trying to change the way  
negroes are perceived--

CECIL

(interrupting)

You're breaking the law. That  
judge just sentenced you to 30 days  
in the County Work House. You're  
fixin' to get killed.

LOUIS

If I can't sit at any lunch counter  
I want then I might as well be  
dead.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

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

CECIL  
 Rights? Boy, what are you talking  
 about? And them postcards you been  
 sendin me? You're a damn liar.

Cecil grabs Louis by the throat. He slams him against the  
 concrete wall.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 (seething)  
 Who do you think you're talking to?  
 I brought you into this world and  
 I'll take you out of it.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1960

Gloria waters plants and smokes a cigarette in silence. There  
 is a sadness in her soul as she tries to do her daily chores.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - 1960

Cecil polishes silverware in silence, filled with sadness.

EXT. GAINES HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT - 1960

Gloria sits with Gina on the porch swing, Howard drinks on  
 the porch. They all smoke Pall Malls.

GINA  
 Y'all been able to talk to him?

GLORIA  
 Talk to who?

GINA  
 Louis.

GLORIA  
 Yeah, we talk to him. He said he  
 joined something called the  
 "Freedom Riders", whatever the hell  
 that's supposed to mean.

GINA  
 You gonna see him?

GLORIA  
 I've been fixing to trying to see  
 him in jail. Every time I do, Cecil  
 get all riled up so I don't know  
 when that's gonna happen.

HOWARD

Fixing to trying... see that's the problem. You gotta stop trying and you just got to do it. He take you to the White House yet?

GLORIA

No. Cecil say we goin' soon.

HOWARD

(laughing)

Cecil say, Cecil say... four years... That's what makes you a little bit gullible darling.

This irritates Gloria. Awkward silence. The mood is tense.

GINA

You know I don't understand, I don't understand why he can't get the President to do something.

HOWARD

Come on Gina. That's your problem. You just say stupid stuff. The President's got more to do than be thinking about Louis' foolishness.

GINA

You know, why don't you just shut up? It's just a mess! Be nice!

He takes another hit of his Miller.

HOWARD

Who told you you could tell me to shut up?

GINA

Well... you--

HOWARD

Go get me a drink. I want some scotch. Well I personally think Louis gonna get every one of us killed. They comin' to get us, they comin' to get us... He crazy like his mamma.

Gloria stumps her cigarette into her Miller can. She stands looking at him for a moment. She goes into the house without saying a word. Leaving Howard on the porch.



INT. WHITE HOUSE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - 1961

SEQUENCE: A series of shots of the White House staff packing up President Eisenhower's belongings and preparing for the arrival of the new President.

CECIL V.O.

The President lives at the White House until the moment the next one is sworn in. So the staff has exactly two hours during the inauguration ceremony to move the old President out and move the new one in.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM- DAY - 1961

The White House Staff are all lined up. Maids, Cooks, Butlers, Housemen, Engineers. Everyone stands at attention, very nervous, butterflies are in the air.

Carter whispers to Cecil.

CARTER

They say this new white boy is smooth.

CECIL

I just need to get my butt home to Gloria. These hours are killing us.

CARTER

How's your boy doing, Cecil?

Before he can answer, the front doors open. JOHN KENNEDY, 43, handsome, and his wife JACKIE, 32, beautiful and astute, enter. Movie stars. Jackie holds a three month old JACK, JR. as CAROLINE, 3, tags behind. They are surrounded by many AIDES. Jack flashes the staff an enormous grin.

JACKIE

Where should we start?

JACK

I'm not sure. This end? Maybe over here? Thank you.

FREDDIE O.S.

Right this way Mr. President.

JACK

Hello everyone.

ALL STAFF  
Hello Mr. President.

JACK  
I'm thrilled to be working with all  
of you over the next four years.

Jackie is slightly aloof. She speaks in almost a whisper.

JACKIE  
Eight years, Jack.

JACK  
(laughing)  
Well, you see who wears the pants  
around here.

Everyone laughs. Freddie introduces the staff to John one by one with Jackie in tow. They get to Cecil.

FREDDIE  
This is Cecil.

CECIL  
Pleasure to meet you, Mr.  
President.

Cecil nods to Jackie walking behind Jack.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Miss Kennedy.

Caroline Kennedy drops her doll in front of Cecil. Cecil bends down to pick it up and hands it to Caroline.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
She's all right. Pleasure to meet  
you Miss Caroline.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1961

Cecil is in bed reading a book on Addison's disease. Gloria tries not to stumble into the bedroom, clearly drunk. The slip that once fit her beautifully now hugs her hips the wrong way. She crawls up next to Cecil.

CECIL  
Why you drinking so much?

GLORIA  
I'm not drinking.

CECIL

What's that on your breath Gloria?  
Stop, okay? Stop!

Gloria notices the book.

GLORIA

What's that?

CECIL

Baby, that's gin on your breath.

GLORIA

(ignoring him)

That says Addison's Disease.

CECIL

Did you take Charlie to the dentist  
today?

GLORIA

Does someone at the White House got  
Addison's disease?

Cecil nudges away from her a bit. Disturbed.

Gloria goes to the vanity table and smacks lipstick on. She  
sticks her butt out and starts to shake it. Cecil and  
Gloria's eyes lock in the mirror. Then, Cecil turns away.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

No I did not take Charlie to the  
dentist today. And what you asking  
me about it for? You never home.  
Now, you gonna act like you gonna  
take Charlie to the dentist? You  
ain't never here, I don't know how  
you gonna take him. His teeth fall  
out waiting on you to take him.

CECIL

Go to bed Gloria. I'll take him  
tomorrow.

GLORIA

Hoe many pairs of shoes does she  
have?

Cecil ignores her.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I said how many pairs of shoes does  
Miss Jackie Kennedy have?

CECIL  
How the hell do I know?!

Cecil turns over and tries to sleep.

GLORIA  
You in that White House all day and night... I thought you knew everything. Coming in and telling me what to do... worry about me drinking. You ought to be worried about your house! Our boy's in jail Cecil! Our boy's in jail, and you can't come home! You don't see I'm here trying to talk to you?! I bet you wish I spoke French just like Jackie?... Jackie Kennedy... Que sera, sera... You like that? You like the way she talk? Cecil! You hear me talking to you?

Giving up on Cecil, she throws down her lipstick in an angry drunken haze.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
(Mumbles to herself)  
You ain't sleeping.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil stares forward, trying to hide his emotional pain as the famous cellist PABLO CASALS plays a brilliant Mendelssohn's Trio in D Minor for the White House CROWD.

INT. WHITE HOUSE- BUTLER'S LOCKER ROOM- NIGHT - 1961

Cecil, Carter and Holloway change into their tuxedos.

HOLLOWAY  
Bobby told the President that they shouldn't be worried about the Negro sit-ins. Polls showed the US does not support civil rights.

Cecil is surprised and disappointed.

CARTER  
Told you that white boy was smooth... a little too smooth for my money.

Holloway shakes his head.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
(changing the mood)  
Cecil, how's your boy doing?

CECIL  
Out of jail. He says he's back in school. But I think he's doing that freedom riding thing.

HOLLOWAY  
Hey man, how's Gloria doing with that drinking?

CECIL  
(strained)  
She's hangin'.

CARTER  
You see that Kat that's playing? He's a big deal.

HOLLOWAY  
Pablo Casals. World famous.

CECIL  
Course he's world famous! You think Ms. Kennedy's gonna have some back woods country fiddle band playing out there for her?

HOLLOWAY  
Man...

CECIL  
Why don't you start a band. Maybe you could go out there too? You know, in fact, let's all start a band! I'll play the bongos... what about you?

CARTER  
I'll play a mean skin flute.

HOLLOWAY  
Casals is a righteous soul. He refuses to play in any country that recognizes Franco's regime.

CARTER  
Who's Franco?

Cecil chuckles. Carter shakes his head in disgust.

HOLLOWAY  
Forget it, man.

CARTER  
Huh?

HOLLOWAY  
Forget it. You're ignorant.

EXT. ALABAMA - COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT - 1961

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

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA - NIGHT - 1961

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

LOUIS  
Carol, you tired?

CAROL  
What you want me to put my head on  
your shoulder?

LOUIS  
What's wrong with that?

CAROL  
(smiling)  
I'm not putting my head on your  
shoulder...

The mood is fairly relaxed. Kids goofing off, having fun, despite the potential danger. A JOURNALIST, 30, white, charming, talks with one of the riders.

JOURNALIST  
You ever been on a Freedom Bus  
before?

FREEDOM RIDER #1  
No, it's my first time.

JOURNALIST  
No? How's your boyfriend feel about  
that?

FREEDOM RIDER #1  
(laughing)  
My boyfriend?!

JOURNALIST

(smiling)

Yeah... He must be upset at you,  
being on this bus?

FREEDOM RIDER #1

I don't have a boyfriend.

JOURNALIST

You don't have a boyfriend? How do  
you not have a boyfriend?

Louis and Carol sit together, relaxed, until someone notices:

FREEDOM RIDER #3

Louis, what is that?

A beam of light floods through the bus. Everyone looks out  
front and sees a car with a KLAN CROSS formed by bright  
lights. The car is coming straight for them!

LOUIS

DRIVER, TURN! TURN THE BUS!

The bus turns onto a bridge to avoid the collision. All of a  
sudden, lights are turned on by cars blocking the other side  
of the bridge.

Men with torches in Klan dress and a burning cross approach  
the bus. They start SMASHING the bus windows with bats and  
chains!

The Freedom Riders drop to the center aisle of the bus. Glass  
shards fall on top of them. A WHITE MAN's smiling face  
appears as he takes off his Klan hood. Then - he throws A  
MOLOTOV COCKTAIL into the bus, setting the back on FIRE!

LOUIS (CONT'D)

(Yelling)

EVERYBODY OUT!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER - 1961

With most of the White House staff gone, Cecil sits at the  
kitchen table reading a book to Caroline.

CECIL

'In an old house in Paris that was  
covered in vines, lived 12 little  
girls in two straight lines. The  
smallest one was Madeline.'

CAROLINE KENNEDY  
Like Caroline.

Caroline, sleepy, beams at Cecil. Lorraine smiles fondly from the stove.

CECIL  
"She was not afraid of mice."

CAROLINE KENNEDY  
Why do people ride in the freedom  
bus?

Cecil looks at Lorraine. Then at Caroline. Before he can answer:

CAROLINE KENNEDY (CONT'D)  
Uncle Bobby told my daddy that the  
Freedom Bus exploded.

Lorraine drops her hot comb on the floor. She looks at Cecil. They share stares of horror. Cecil continues reading. His hands trembling on the page

INT. GAINES HOUSE - DAY - FEBRUARY, 1962

Gloria is on the couch watching on TV a report about the explosion on the Freedom Bus. Cecil watches as well.

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

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

CECIL  
Hello?

His entire body slumps in relief as he hears:

LOUIS O.S.  
Hi, dad. I'm in Mississippi.

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

CECIL  
I thought you was in Alabama?

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



CECIL

Now I want you to listen to me,  
Louis. I want you to come home. I  
know we ain't seen eye to eye, but  
your mamma, she wants you home.

He looks over to Gloria, smoking a cigarette, tears flowing.

LOUIS V.O.

They keeping me.

CECIL

How long?

GLORIA O.S.

Where is he?

LOUIS V.O.

I don't know. They said 3 months.  
When I get out, I'm gonna take  
another ride.

CECIL

What are you talking about?!

GLORIA O.S.

What is he saying? Let me talk to  
him. Give me that phone.

INT. MISSISSIPPI PRISON - DAY - 1962

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

LOUIS

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

GLORIA V.O.

American citizen? What you talking  
about? You know what they gonna do  
to you? They gonna lynch ya. Then  
they gonna throw your little ass in  
the river. They gon' kill you.

LOUIS

Ma, then they just gonna have to  
kill me.

He hangs up the phone.

FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE - 1963

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

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1963

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

JACK

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

Cecil peeks out over Jack's shoulder, staring at the screen, a sinking feeling.

EXT. BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA - DAY - 1963

Louis is sprayed with a fire hose. Its force throws him violently against a brick wall. The water pummels him. Carol clutches a tree as the fire hoses drill into her.

INT. GAINES HOUSE- LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1965

Gloria and Howard sit in the living room on the couch. They watch the TV footage of the protestors. She's in her bra and slip. Howard is in his postal uniform. Shoes off.

HOWARD

Louis man... that little nigga  
might be on to something.

GLORIA

Stop calling him a nigga cause he  
ain't no nigga.

HOWARD

What's wrong, baby?

Gloria suddenly realizes the situation she is in.

GLORIA

What's wrong with me is... this.

HOWARD

What are you talking about?

GLORIA

This is what's wrong with me. You know what? This is wrong.

HOWARD

You used to like wrong.

GLORIA

This is wrong.

HOWARD

We aint been wrong yet.

GLORIA

I can't do this to Cecil.

HOWARD

We aint doing this to Cecil. I'm doing it to you.

GLORIA

I want you out of my house.

HOWARD

Why do you think God brought us next to each other each day?

GLORIA

God aint got nothing to do with this.

HOWARD

He put you right next door to me. You always talk about how lonely you are with Cecil being at the White House, so you need a man who can appreciate the love and the woman you are like I do.

GLORIA

I want your number running ass up out of my house, off my sofa right now. I'm through! I told you!

HOWARD

Let me make a demonstration for you.

He lifts up two wire clothes hangers and starts TWIRLING them in a pattern.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

This is you, and this is me. And we seem like I don't fit at all.

(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)

We just crash into each other. But when you align things properly, like God putting you next door to me, everything kinda works out. And even if you slow down, I got you.

GLORIA

You need to get your yellow ass up out of my house.

HOWARD

We need each other.

GLORIA

What I need is my husband. And not to be laying up here in the gutter with you.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY - 1963

Jack Kennedy lies on the ground after taking his pills.

JACK

On an average, how many pills do you think I take a day, Cecil?

CECIL

About 103, sir.

Jack laughs.

JACK

Help me up.

Cecil helps Jack up. Jack clutches his back in pain. Cecil grimaces, feeling Jack's pain. Jack doesn't let go of his hand as he stares him in the eye.

JACK (CONT'D)

I know your son is a Freedom Rider.

Cecil looks stunned (and embarrassed).

JACK (CONT'D)

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

CECIL

Do you know how he is, sir?

JACK

I'm guessing he's beat up, but based on his record, he must be used to it. Cecil, he's been arrested 16 times over the past two years.

Stunned, Cecil is at a loss for words.

JACK (CONT'D)

You know, I never understood what you all really went through until I saw that...

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

JACK (CONT'D)

My brother says these kids have changed his heart... they've changed mine too.

This is the most emotional Cecil's ever seen the President.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Jack gives a speech directly into a TV camera.

JACK

The fires of discord are burning in every city north and south, where legal remedies are not at hand.

INT. PRISON CELL - BIRMINGHAM - NIGHT - 1963

Louis is in a prison cell reading the speech in a newspaper. His work is starting to pay off.

JACK V.O.

Regress is sought in the streets, with demonstrations, parades, and protests.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The staff watches the speech on a TV.

JACK V.O.

I am therefor asking the Congress  
to enact legislation giving all  
Americans the right to be served in  
facilities which are open to the  
public.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - DAY

Gloria and Cecil watches the speech on a TV.

JACK V.O.

Hotels, restaurants, theaters,  
retail stores and similar  
establishments. This seems to me to  
be an elementary right.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Jack continues the speech into camera.

JACK

This denial is an arbitrary  
indignity that no American in 1963  
should have to endure, but many do.  
A great change is at hand.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - DAY

Cecil and Gloria continue to watch the speech.

CECIL

And our task, our obligation, is to  
make that revolution, that change,  
peaceful and unobstructed for all.

Then the TV CUTS TO - WALTER CRONKITE.

He takes off his glasses to make his famous announcement, but  
we don't hear what he says.

INT. WHITE HOUSE- BUTLER'S LOCKER ROOM- DAY - 1963

Cecil sits on the ground in despair, he's clearly been  
crying. Carter walks into the room, looks confused.

CARTER

Hey... Hey Cecil. Cecil, what's  
wrong? Cecil. Cecil?

CECIL  
They blew his head off.

CARTER  
Who are you talking about?

Cecil looks up at him, eyes filled with tears.

CECIL  
Kennedy.

Carter drops his tray as he runs out of the room.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RED ROOM - NIGHT

Still in her blood stained skirt, Jackie wanders the room and sits on a couch as she clutches one of her husband's ties. She is pale, still in shock.

CECIL V.O.  
Mrs. Kennedy refused to change her clothes so that everyone could see what they did to her husband. The last time I saw that much blood was the day my daddy was killed.

Cecil gingerly walks over to her as she stares at a painting.

CECIL  
Please tell me how I could help you.

Jackie gets up and leaves the room.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LOUIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1963

Gloria is turning Louis' bedroom into her sewing room. Gloria's eyes are clear and for the first time in a long time she looks focused. Charlie (now 15) enters and helps.

CHARLIE  
Mom? Are you breaking your liquor bottles in the house again? What you doing?

GLORIA  
Here. I want you to take this box and put it down in the basement. Make sure you label it "trophies".

CHARLIE

This is Louis' stuff mom. You know  
he's gonna be pissed.

GLORIA

I aint caring about Louis being  
pissed. I'm the one who's pissed.  
He aint been here in three years.

CHARLIE

Why you pissed mom?

Charlie leaves for the basement.

GLORIA

And don't put that next to my  
jarred okra either.

CHARLIE

Aint no body trying to smell that  
stankin' okra!

She stares at the fish in her aquarium by the bookshelf.

GLORIA

And when you come back, I want you  
to get me some fish food.

In his work tux, a very tired Cecil stands at the door. He's  
not been home in days. He holds up a green and white tie.

CECIL

Look what the President-- Mrs.  
Kennedy gave me. It belonged to the  
President. Gloria, the President  
was killed.

Gloria grabs a packed box and heads for the basement. Cecil  
grabs her hand. The box falls to the floor.

GLORIA

I'm really sorry about the  
President. I really am. But you and  
that White House can kiss my ass. I  
care what goes on in this house.

Gloria walks away. Cecil sits on the bed looking at the tie.

Feeling guilty, Gloria returns and reaches out to him gently.  
They begin to kiss.



INT. GAINES HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER - 1963

Cecil and Gloria are in bed holding each other.

CECIL V.O.

I knew that Gloria had been unhappy for some time now. I knew that's probably why she drank. She wanted me to get along better with Louis. I didn't know how. But I could cut back them long hours at the house. And I did just that.

GLORIA

How many pairs of shoes does she got...

CECIL

She got about... 125.

GLORIA

125 pairs of shoes...

CECIL

Yeah. I put them in a line from the blacks, all the way to the whites.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRESIDENTIAL BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS - 1964

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON, tough as nails and a bit nutty, notices the lights on in the room. He screams at Cecil.

LBJ

And I'll tell you what. The next time there is a light on in an empty room, I will fire every sorry son of a bitch in this house. I mean it, Cecil, I'll go back to Texas and run the country from a dirt shack if I have to! Is that what you want?! Who do you think pays the God-damned bills around here. I don't, but you know what I mean.

CECIL

Yes, sir.

Cecil flicks off the light switch. LBJ instantly flips to a gregarious, jovial southerner as he slaps Cecil on the back. He holds out an LBJ tie clip to Cecil.

LBJ  
 Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Ladybird  
 and I want you to have this. It  
 matches your eyes.

CECIL  
 Thank you, sir.

LBJ hands Cecil the tie clip.

INT. HOLLOWAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING - 1964

James Brown's "Out of Sight" plays on the record player.  
 Cecil, Holloway and Carter play pinochle with their wives.  
 Everyone but Gloria drinks with abandon. Gloria smokes next  
 to Holloway's wife, HELEN, 40, a rotund and lively woman.

HOLLOWAY  
 I see you baby! You know how daddy  
 likes it!

Helen smiles at Holloway. Holloway yells at the bathroom.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)  
 Negro! Get out here! Back there  
 stinkin up my bathroom! Oh Lord,  
 what you doing?

Carter runs out of the bathroom in a James Brown wig and  
 DANCES around the room like Brown. He's really good. Helen  
 runs over and pulls the wig off his head.

HELEN  
 Give me my wig! What's wrong with  
 you?! This my good wig!

CUT TO - LATER. Seated on the couch, Helen and Gloria are  
 chatting:

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 James said Dr. King told the  
 President that we would be going to  
 the streets down south for our  
 right to vote. Didn't you baby?

The guys are still playing cards.

HOLLOWAY  
 What?

HELEN

Didn't you tell me that Dr. King told the President that we was going down south for our right to vote? I ain't make that up.

She looks at her husband. Holloway looks away a little embarrassed about his breach of confidentiality. Oblivious to Cecil and Carter's disappointment in him, she continues on...

CECIL

Is that what you heard?

HELEN

That Dr. King ain't no joke with his little militant ass.

Holloway's embarrassment. Cecil deals the cards. He's trying to pay attention to the game.

HOLLOWAY

Who she talking to?

CECIL

Well it look like someone is talking...

A parrot SQUAWKS. Holloway throws popcorn at it.

HELEN

Leave my bird alone.

GLORIA

You know three kids got killed down there. Trying to get colored folks registered to vote.

CECIL

That's why I didn't want Louis to go down there. That's what I was trying to tell you.

HOLLOWAY

Well you shouldn't have sent him down there.

CECIL

I know.

GLORIA

Well he is down there now, and there ain't nothing we can do about it.

Cecil shifts uncomfortably. He wishes they'd change the subject.

HELEN

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

HOLLOWAY

Now how do you know that?

CECIL

Who told her that?

HOLLOWAY

Where did you hear that? I didn't tell you that!

HELEN

It was in one of them colored newspapers from Baltimore. That alright with you?

HOLLOWAY

See she getting smart now. Damn.

GLORIA

Honey, you think the President ought to do something about the voting rights bill?

CECIL

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

CARTER

That's it.

CECIL

You see how my wife quizzes me?!

HOLLOWAY

I get it every day.

CECIL

Only you gotta know how much to say, and when you cross the line.

HOLLOWAY

You deal with your woman, I'll deal  
with mine.

GLORIA

At least you tell your wife what's  
going on over there.

Carter throws two cards in the center of the table.

CARTER

Aces!

Holloway turns to Gloria.

HOLLOWAY

(Changes the subject)

Hey, uh, Glo. Did you all hear  
about your neighbor Howard? Guy  
down on 57th caught him in bed with  
his wife. Shot him dead. Shot him  
in the back.

Gloria looks stunned that Howard is dead, but Cecil looks  
indifferent.

CECIL

I don't know. Maybe he got what he  
deserved.

Gloria looks away from him, ashamed.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY - 1964

LBJ sits on the toilet with his pants at his ankles  
surrounded by four queasy staff members. Cecil is jammed in  
the corner.

LBJ

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

LBJ looks at his aides standing around.

LBJ (CONT'D)

I want all of you to get on the phone, call the NAACP, Core, and who ever else will listen to your sorry asses and help me keep them niggers off the street. Buck I smell your ass from here! What the hell are you waiting for?!

His aides scurry away.

LBJ (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ. Cecil, get me some of that God-damned prune juice.

Cecil hands him the prune juice.

INT. ALLEY WAY - SELMA, ALABAMA - NIGHT - 1965

Louis and Carol walk down a dark alley. They've just come from hearing Malcolm X. Both carry flyers that read: "MALCOLM X SPEAKS TONIGHT." Louis looks at the flyer disturbed.

LOUIS

I'm not sure what to make of Malcolm X.

CAROL

He's got a better plan in place than Dr. King.

LOUIS

If someone puts their hands on you, put them in the cemetery. That's a better plan?

CAROL

You just mad because he talking about your daddy.

LOUIS

What?

CAROL

He was saying all that stuff about house negroes. I saw you get mad.

LOUIS

My dad is not a house negro.

CAROL

He's a butler, aint he.

LOUIS  
Don't talk about my dad. I don't  
talk about your dad.

CAROL  
That's because my daddy's proud of  
what I'm doin'.

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

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

INT. CHURCH - WASHINGTON DC - NIGHT - 1965

In a packed black church. The choir passionately SINGS as  
everyone in the pews looks nervous. A tension in the air.  
Gloria sneaks into the back of the church.

CECIL V.O.  
Everybody went to church to raise  
money for the kids down in Selma.  
But I didn't go. I wasn't going to  
give money to pay for my son to be  
killed.

CUT TO - FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1965

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

CECIL V.O.  
Once again, them kids got beat.  
This one was so bad that the press  
called it "Bloody Sunday".

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1965

LBJ watches the newscast on three separate televisions at the  
same time. He looks deeply disturbed. He looks over to Cecil  
who is also watching the footage with fear and sadness.

LBJ  
How are your boys, Cecil?

CECIL  
I don't know how my oldest is Mr.  
President, but I think he's Selma.  
(Then)  
(MORE)

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 Sometimes I feel like we're living  
 in two different worlds. I just  
 want to keep them safe.

Cecil seems defeated. LBJ looks at him with understanding.

INT. SENATE FLOOR - NIGHT - 1965

LBJ is making an impassioned speech on the Senate floor.

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

INT. WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - 1965

Holloway, Carter and Lorraine watch the speech in the  
 kitchen, stunned.

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

CARTER  
 Negroes? Since when did he start  
 calling us negroes? That nigger  
 uses the word nigger more than I  
 use it.

INT. SELMA HOUSE - NIGHT - 1965

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

LBJ (FROM THE TV)  
 But really it's all of us that must  
 overcome the crippling legacy of  
 bigotry and injustice.

Everyone in the room is beaming.



INT. GAINES' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1965

Gloria and Cecil cuddle up next to each other on the couch as LBJ wraps up his speech.

LBJ (FROM THE TV)  
And we shall overcome.

Cecil and Gloria both smile, they know Louis helped make this happen.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - GATE - DAY - 1968

HIPPIE PROTESTERS are outside the White House protesting the Vietnam War. We hear their enraged chants:

HIPPIE PROTESTORS  
HEY HEY LBJ, HOW MANY KIDS DID YOU  
KILL TODAY?! HEY HEY LBJ, HOW MANY  
KIDS DID YOU KILL TODAY?!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RED ROOM - DAY - 1968

A maid cleans a mirror as she hears the chanting:

HIPPIE PROTESTORS V.O.  
HEY HEY LBJ, HOW MANY KIDS DID YOU  
KILL TODAY?!

MAID  
I wish they'd shut up.

CUT TO - FULL SCREEN ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - VIETNAM

American bombs drop on the JUNGLES of Vietnam.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - MEMPHIS - DAY - 1968

MARTIN LUTHER KING, 38, wise, but weary, stands in the doorway, various AIDES and STUDENTS fill the hotel room. Louis sits across from him. They are watching footage of the Vietnam War on television.

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

Martin Luther King shakes his head, frustrated.

MARTIN LUTHER KING  
President Johnson is making a  
tragic error in Vietnam.

LOUIS  
Why shouldn't we fight in Vietnam?

MARTIN LUTHER KING  
The Vietcong don't call us niggers,  
for one.

Louis and a few of his aides laugh.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)  
Seriously, how many of your parents  
support this war?

Almost all of them raise their hands.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)  
Well my Lord...  
(to Louis)  
Why do your parents support it?

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

MARTIN LUTHER KING  
What do your daddy do?

Louis looks at him embarrassed.

LOUIS  
He's a butler.

MARTIN LUTHER KING  
The black domestic plays an  
important role in our history.

LOUIS  
I didn't tell you that to make fun  
of me.

MARTIN LUTHER KING  
Young brother, the black domestic  
defies racial stereotypes by being  
hardworking and trustworthy. He  
slowly breaks down racial hatred  
with the example of his strong work  
ethic and dignified character.

(Then)

(MORE)

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONT'D)  
Now while we perceive the butler or  
the maid as being subservient, in  
many ways they are subversive  
without even knowing it.

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

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - RD WARNER'S OFFICE - DAY - 1966

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

RD WARNER  
Come in, Cecil.

CECIL  
Good afternoon, Mr. Warner. Thank  
you for seeing me.

RD WARNER  
What do you want?

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

RD WARNER  
'Black' staff?

CECIL  
I also feel that we should have  
opportunities of advancement. No  
black houseman have ever been  
promoted to the engineer's office.

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

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

CECIL  
With all due respect sir...

RD WARNER  
Don't let that Martin Luther King  
shit fill your britches out. Just  
remember where I found you.

CECIL

Yes sir.

Long beat.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

He walks out of the room, humiliated.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - MEMPHIS

Martin Luther King stands on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel smoking a cigarette. We hear a newscast in VO:

TV NEWSCAST V.O.

Martin Luther King was shot and  
killed in Memphis today...

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - NIGHT - 1968

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

RADIO NEWSCAST V.O.

...riots have broken out across the  
nation in response to the  
assassination of the famed civil  
rights leader.

Cecil sees THREE BLACK MEN dart out in the street in front of him, running to a liquor store and throw Molotov cocktails at it. Cecil continues to drive. Then -

BOOM!!! The store EXPLODES! Cecil is stunned, he's never seen anything like this.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - BLACK SUBURB - NIGHT - 1968

Cecil can no longer drive as too many people block the streets. He gets out and starts walking up the block, dabbing a handkerchief on his forehead. People stare at the fires that consume the city. Cecil looks around, almost confused.

CECIL V.O.

I didn't know if I was gonna get  
home alive. It was the first time  
that I felt like I didn't belong in  
my own neighborhood. The whole  
world was changing and I didn't  
know where I fit in.

INT. ND HOTEL - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

Louis and Carol sit alone in the room, as they watch news footage of the riots and chaos.

TV ANCHOR

'The announcement of King's death  
has sparked riots in cities all  
across the country.'

EXT. GAINES HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT - 1968

Cecil walks up to his porch. Gloria comes out to greet him and they both stare at the fires that engulf Washington DC.

There is a deep sadness in their eyes as they watch their city burn.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LOUIS' BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON - 1970

The room has been painted pink. Mannequin busts and fabrics everywhere. Gloria sits at her new sewing machine. She works diligently on a shirt for Cecil.

We hear a voice from the other side of the room.

VOICE O.S.

Ma? My room's pink.

Gloria looks up to see Louis. He sports an Afro and a thick moustache. Wearing black pants, a black leather jacket and a beret. He's hardened.

Gloria stares at him, filled with emotions words cannot describe.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1970

The entire family is having dinner. Carol sits looking like a female version of Louis clad in a black turtle neck and ANGELA DAVIS AFRO.

Cecil is subdued. He clearly does not like his son's new look. Louis has a different energy, he's edgier. Both he and Carol exude an angry, aggressive quality.

GLORIA

Make sure you get some of my sweet  
potatoes, Carol. I use orange juice  
when I make 'em. That what make 'em  
so tart.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
(to Louis)  
How long ya'all been dating?

5 Years.

CAROL  
We're just friends.

Cecil stares at his son, and then at Carol. An awkward moment. Charlie smirks. This dinner's gonna be good. Gloria changes the subject.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Is, uh, all the rest of the kids  
getting involved in politics too?

LOUIS  
There's been a division, kind of a  
split Ma. A few of them like John  
Lewis are--

GLORIA  
I always liked him.

Cecil looks surprised.

CECIL  
How do you know who John Lewis is?

GLORIA  
Because I read JET Magazine. I'm  
not just sitting up there sewing  
for you all day.

Carol takes a sip of grape soda. She BURPS.

CAROL  
I'm getting sick and tired of  
gettin' thrown in jail.

CECIL  
Yeah? Well that makes two of us,  
don't it?

Carol rolls her eyes. Gloria takes note.

LOUIS  
Dr. King's philosophy ultimately  
got him murdered. It worked when we  
started, but now it's time to take  
the next step, which is politics.

Charlie grins.

CHARLIE

What, so y'all going to the White House now? Dad, Louis going to the White House. You know they ain't gonna let you in with them nipples out. Maybe one, but not both of them out.

Louis chuckles, only Charlie can make him smile these days.

LOUIS

Nah, we're more grass roots, one on one with the community. Although we have started our own political party.

Charlie sees that Louis is serious.

CHARLIE

(to Carol)

What's your party? You like to party? I like to party. What's your party called?

CAROL

The Black Panther Party.

Cecil looks at his son, confused.

CECIL

What kind of name is that? What that stand for?

Carol is instantly edgy with him.

CAROL

We provide free breakfast for children, free medical clinics, free clothing and self defense classes.

GLORIA

And why y'all need self defense?

LOUIS

We ain't gettin' beat no more.

This lands like a hammer. Cecil and Gloria look uncomfortable, not sure what the implications are.

GLORIA

Me and your daddy saw a wonderful movie the other night, reminded me so much of you.

LOUIS

Oh yeah?

GLORIA

What was the name of that movie honey?

CECIL

'In the Heat of the Night'.

GLORIA

'In the Heat of the Night' with Sidney Poitier. Lord, Sydney Poitier. I love Sydney Poitier. Sy--

LOUIS

Sidney Poitier is the white man's fantasy of what he wants us to be.

GLORIA

What you talking about?

CECIL

But his movies have him fighting for equal rights.

LOUIS

Only in a way that is acceptable to the white status quo.

(Then)

And the brother can't act.

He and Carol laugh. Cecil looks upset at his son mocking one of his heroes.

CECIL

What are you talking about? He just won the Academy Award... he's breaking down barriers for all of us.

LOUIS

By being white, by acting white. Sidney Poitier is nothing but a rich Uncle Tom.

CECIL

Look at you. You all puffed up. You got your hat on your head. Coming in here. Saying whatever you want. Your girlfriend is belching at the table. You don't even think you need to go to school even though I gave you the money.



Cecil stares at him for a beat. Then makes a decision

CECIL (CONT'D)  
You need to go. Yeah, Louis, I need  
you to get out of my house.

Louis looks stunned.

LOUIS  
What?

Cecil jumps to his feet, screaming.

CECIL  
GET THE HELL OUT OF MY HOUSE!

Louis and Gloria jumps to their feet.

GLORIA  
Cecil! Cecil no! No no no! Cecil!

CECIL  
I can't take this no more!

GLORIA  
We ain't seen this boy! We ain't  
seen this boy in years! Now  
everybody just sit down!

LOUIS  
I'M SORRY, MISTER BUTLER! I DIDN'T  
MEAN TO MAKE FUN OF YOUR HERO!

Switching gears mid sentence, Gloria turns to Louis and  
SMACKS him across the face! He flies back, stunned. Gloria  
stares at him with a fiery intensity.

GLORIA  
Everything you are, and everything  
you have, is because of that  
butler.

Gloria turns to Carol.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Now you take that triflin', low  
class bitch and get out of this  
house.

Silence. Then Louis and Carol leave the house. They look  
furious.

Cecil, Gloria and Charlie sit back at the table, an awkward  
silence between them all. Then Charlie turns to Cecil:

CHARLIE  
I like Sydney Poitier, daddy.

EXT. JAIL WAITING AREA - WASHINGTON, DC - DAY - 1970

Carter and Charlie have been sitting in this waiting area for what seems like forever. He looks at his watch.

CARTER  
Y'all gonna make me late for work.

Charlie is grateful that Carter is there.

CHARLIE  
Uncle Carter, I'm sorry. Who else  
am I gonna call to bail him out?

CARTER  
What they got him in for this time?

CHARLIE  
He said the cop stopped him "just  
because".

CARTER  
Just because?

CHARLIE  
He said he wasn't gonna get beat no  
more, so... he got out the car and  
hit him back.

CARTER  
What about that little gal of his?

CHARLIE  
They put her in the hospital.

Carter looks at his watch again.

CARTER  
In the hospital? Charlie this  
shit's gotta stop, man. I'm late  
for work.  
(then half joking)  
You tell Louis I'm not his momma. I  
want my money back.

Charlie smiles. Louis enters the room.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
You alright?

LOUIS

Yeah. I'm alright. Thanks Uncle Carter.

CARTER

You can take all this Black Panther shit somewhere else. I'm not them, I want my money back. Hear me?

LOUIS

Yes, sir.

CARTER

Every dime.

LOUIS

Yes, sir.

CHARLIE

Hey Uncle Carter, don't tell Daddy?

Carter nods, then leaves.

Louis sits across from Charlie. Slight tension. Then -

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How you avoid anal sex in prison?

Louis laughs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Do they teach you that at The Panthers? They teach you how to sit?

Louis laughs harder, loves his brother. Louis gets serious.

LOUIS

She been drinking again?

CHARLIE

No. She sober. She ain't doing nothing but sewing and feeding them damn fishes... feed them more than she feed me.

LOUIS

You excited about going back to Howard?

CHARLIE

I'm excited about not going back.

LOUIS

What?

CHARLIE

Yeah. I'm going to Vietnam.

This hits like a load of bricks.

LOUIS

Charlie, don't do this. DON'T DO THIS. This country treats us like dogs!

CHARLIE

Do what?! Don't do this? You fight your country, I wanna fight for my country.

LOUIS

I won't go to your funeral.

Charlie smiles, making light of it all.

CHARLIE

Good, because I don't want you there with all of that... black... leather... latex... shining and taking all of the attention off MY pretty face in my casket...

Louis chuckles.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What they call you now? Lou-eez?

LOUIS

Shut up.

CHARLIE

Lou-eez Gaines...

Louis can't help but laugh at his brother.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY - 1970

Cecil walks down a hall with a tray of tea. Anger and bitterness still shows on his face. As he enters the room, he flips to his pleasant smile.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1970

Cecil brings in tea for Nixon who is deep in conversation with his advisors - BOB HALDEMAN, 44, crew cut, intense, and JOHN EHRLICHMAN, 45, balding, boy scout face.

NIXON

I want to know every God damned domestic policy decision right now and I want it on the table right now.

EHRLICHMAN

Did you get the memos we sent last week?

HALDEMAN

John and I strongly agree that the time calls for a period of benign--

A fly buzzes around Nixon's head.

NIXON

There's a God damned fly. A God damned fly in here. Jesus fucking Christ.

HALDEMAN

...a period of benign neglect.

Cecil pours tea for Nixon.

NIXON

Benign neglect?

EHRLICHMAN

Yes.

NIXON

I like that. I like that.

INTER CUT WITH:

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - DAY - 1970

Ten BLACK PANTHERS, all in black jackets and berets, load shotguns in a smoked filled room. The leader of this group ELDRIDGE HUDGINS, 29, black, muscular, loads his shotgun.

ELDRIDGE HUDGINS

The pigs in the media describe us as terrorists.

(MORE)

ELDRIDGE HUDGINS (CONT'D)  
 A terrorist is one who terrorizes  
 and frightens others. We're the  
 ones getting terrorized! How can we  
 exist in peace when we scared to  
 walk down the street to the store?!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1970

Cecil pours tea.

NIXON  
 Now there's this whole black power  
 movement going on, right? What if  
 Nixon promotes black power to mean  
 black businesses, and we find ways  
 to support black entrepreneurs. We  
 pass the buck on desegregation to  
 the courts, but push black  
 enterprise to get the 20% that  
 could vote our way...

EHRlichman  
 Excellent.

HalDEMAN  
 Excellent, sir.

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - DAY - 1970

ELDRIDGE HUDGINS  
 You don't know if your ceiling gon'  
 cave in because your slumlord too  
 busy running around collecting rent  
 checks, but he won't fix your roof.  
 It's time that we take a stand  
 against these injustices that  
 plagued our community! They take  
 one of ours? We takin two of  
 theirs!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1970

EHRlichman  
 We just need to make sure that  
 'Nixon's black power' doesn't  
 equate Nixon with the Black  
 Panthers.

Cecil pauses for a slight beat.

NIXON

Have you lost your mind!? Did you read Hoover's last memo on that?!

EHRlichman

That's my point.

NIXON

It's God damned terrifying. No no no... I gave him the green light to gut those sons of bitches...

Cecil tries not to show the terror on his face.

HalDEMAN

Absolutely.

NIXON

Round them all up and throw them down a fuckin' elevator shaft.

Cecil's eyes shut in pain.

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - DAY - 1970

ELDRIDGE HUDGINS

I don't proclaim to know everything. But I promise you, they'll always beware of the nigger with a gun.

A few people in the room laugh, but Louis is uncomfortable. He looks around at the guns. The smoke. He doesn't like it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1970

Cecil turns to Nixon.

CECIL

Will there be anything else, Mr. President?

Nixon is silent. Cecil walks out of the room.

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - HALLWAY - DAY - 1970

Louis gets up and walks out of the room.

INT. BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS - BACK ROOM - DAY - 1970

Louis is seated in another room, he looks deeply concerned, doesn't know what to do. Carol walks into the room and sits next to him. She knows he's torn.

LOUIS

What are we doing here? I thought  
this was gonna be our community  
service?

CAROL

This is community service.

LOUIS

Someone kills one of us, we kill  
two of theirs?

CAROL

Community protection.

LOUIS

Are you willing to kill somebody,  
Carol? Because I aint.

Carol looks at him, a pain and anger deep in her soul.

CAROL

I am.

LOUIS

Did you ever love me baby?

No response. The answer too painful to say.

Louis gets up and walks out of the room. He takes his beret off as he exits, his Black Panther days are over.

EXT. OAKLAND STREET - DAY - 1970

Filled with sadness, but also resolve, Louis walks down the block as we hear a newscast:

NEWSCAST V.O.

A Police raid killed at least 4  
Black Panthers in Oakland,  
California this week. Marking  
another police victory against this  
terrorist organization.

CUT TO - FULL SCREEN ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - SOUL TRAIN

Funky SOUL TRAIN DANCERS groove across the stage.



INT. GAINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1973

We pull back from a TV to see Gloria dancing to Soul Train which plays on the television.

Cecil walks into his home. He sees Gloria dancing, she sports an enormous curly Afro and looks incredible in a velvet bell bottomed leisure suit. Cecil's mood has perked.

GLORIA

Hi baby! Happy birthday to you!

CECIL

Well this is the present I want,  
right here.

GLORIA

Well, you want it right here?

CECIL

Alright! Kids up? Kids down?

GLORIA

Ain't no kids in the house no more!  
Hey, I made you a birthday cake.

Gloria walks over to the counter and picks up the cake.

CECIL

(smiling)

I got all the cake I want right  
here.

GLORIA

No... you don't... Hey I got some  
champagne, cooling in the ice box.  
And some ice cream too! Get some  
ice cream!

CECIL

You gonna be drinking with me?

GLORIA

You know I don't drink. I don't  
drink.

CECIL

I was just playing with you. I was  
just seeing if it worked. Go ahead.

Gloria dances.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Oh my God!

Cecil heads to the kitchen and grabs a glass of champagne.

CECIL (CONT'D)

We get any mail from Charlie today?

GLORIA

No. I haven't heard from Charlie. I know I got an idea. I think we should go to Shantay's tonight.

CECIL

Ohhhhh no... No. I'm too old for disco.

GLORIA

We not old! Come on! Our boys are gone! Just you and me! You and me! We are free- oh! I forgot this. I forgot this. Now look at us.

Gloria picks up a present and gives it to Cecil.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

A little happy birthday present. I want you to go put it on, upstairs.

CECIL

Put it on?!

GLORIA

Put it on, and make it snappy! Bring down my sewing kit because I need to do some alterations. Make it snappy!

Gloria continues dancing, adjusting her hoop earrings in the mirror. The phone RINGS, she answers:

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Hello.

(She whispers)

Hi. Where are you? Where?! You should call me back because this is not a good time. He's here...

Gloria looks nervous. She does a double take upstairs making sure Cecil is out of ear shot. Cecil comes down stairs wearing the same velvet disco outfit as Gloria.

CECIL

They fit! We gonna be going out tonight!

GLORIA  
(whispers)  
He's home and...

CECIL  
Who that?

GLORIA  
Call me back...

CECIL  
Oh it's Louis. He's asking for some money?

Cecil grabs the phone from her.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
Hey Louis. I wasn't expecting to hear from you on my birthday. You should feel ashamed of yourself. You're a grown ass man and your calling your mamma asking for money. Well guess what it's the butler's money. It's Uncle Tom's money. And he ain't giving none out today. Bye.

He hangs up the phone, pissed. Gloria sits down, pained by his cold words to Louis.

Then the doorbell RINGS. Cecil answers the door. Standing in front of him are -

Two MILITARY OFFICERS. Their eyes are filled with pain and grief. Cecil immediately knows Charlie is dead, but won't accept it.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
You got the wrong house... It's the wrong house.

Cecil stares at them, then shuts the door.

CUT TO - LATER. Gloria and Cecil sit in silence, both of their faces are filled with pure devastation. Finally, Gloria starts to cry.

EXT. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - DAY - 1973

A six gun salute goes off as the American flag is folded over Charlie's coffin. A full military funeral is taking place.

All of the butlers as well as the entire White House staff are there; cooks, maids, housemen, everyone.

Cecil and Gloria stare at the coffin with shattered faces, no tears, just devastation. As promised, Louis is a no show, an empty chair rests next to Cecil.

CECIL V.O.  
Vietnam took my boy. And I didn't understand why we were there in the first place.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1974

Cecil stands above Nixon him with a martini on a silver tray, he's been there for a few moments, but Nixon is so lost in pathos that he doesn't notice him. He finally sees Cecil who pours the drink for him.

NIXON  
Your father still alive, Cecil?

CECIL  
No, sir. My father died when I was a child.

Cecil stares at him, there is an anger in his eyes, the first time we've seen him edgy toward a President. Perhaps he blames Nixon for Charlie's death.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Is there anything else that you would like, Mr. President?

NIXON  
Come sit. Sit down.

Cecil sits, his edginess still present.

NIXON (CONT'D)  
There's been a lot of talk of me resigning, things of that nature, but I just want you to know that it's never gonna happen. I'm gonna come out of this thing stronger than ever.

Cecil shows no emotion. Then -

CECIL  
Is there anything else that you would like, Mr. President?

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY - 1974

As Cecil walks out of the room, Holloway passes by him.

HOLLOWAY

Louis is here looking for you.

Cecil looks surprised.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BUTLER'S KITCHENETTE - DAY - 1974

Cecil enters the locker room. Carter is in mid-conversation with Louis. The TV plays a baseball game in the background. We hear the announcer talk about Hank Aaron's home run title.

LOUIS

I finished school. I got my masters  
in political science.

CARTER

Hey! That's what I'm talking about.  
Get that education.

Carter and Louis stop when Cecil enters. Cecil places his tux jacket with the dirty clothes. Cecil shakes his head and waves him away.

CARTER (CONT'D)

There he is! Hey, well I'ma let you  
all to it...

CECIL

(to Carter)

Ain't no need for that, Carter.

Carter stands awkwardly. Cecil continues on with his dirty clothes. He couldn't care less.

LOUIS

(sincere)

Hey Dad.

CECIL

Get out of here Louis.

LOUIS

Dad?

CECIL

I said leave.

Carter can't believe Cecil. Louis heads for the door.

CARTER  
Keep doing what you doing.

LOUIS  
Thank you.

Louis leaves.

CARTER  
(to Cecil)  
Why you do that? Huh? That was wrong. The boy's hurtin' too. You know he's just trying to get his act together.

CECIL  
He should be hurting Carter. Boy didn't even go to his own brother's funeral. He's full of shit is what he is. He aint doing nothing right.

CARTER  
He just got his masters! What more you want him to do?!

CECIL  
Every grey hair I have is because of that boy.

EXT. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - DUSK - 1986

Charlie's grave has been well kept these past 10 years. Cecil, stands looking at it.

CECIL V.O.  
The years started to drift by, but the pain in my heart never went away. Through it all, Louis and I never spoke.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY - TIME LAPSE 1974-1985

Cecil sits in a chair, watching the TV. We have a MONTAGE that takes through the years - Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, different TV shows, musical acts and news stories that bring us to the 1980's.

Cecil is still watching TV, he's much older, and completely bald. On the TV he sees a news report of Louis RUNNING FOR CONGRESS. Cecil's eye widen in amazement:

LOUIS

(On the TV)

In our district alone, we have 9% unemployment. The country at large, 14%, are living below the poverty line. 60% of those are Black or Hispanic. By the time I'm voted into Congress, the decrease in those numbers is gonna be one of my primary objectives...

INT. GAINES HOUSE - CECIL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1985

From their new TV, Cecil continues to watch TV. We pull back to see Gloria and Cecil in bed. On the television is ELECTION NIGHT news footage.

Cecil is on the phone. Gloria mutes the TV with the remote. She anxiously waits for news. As Cecil's eyes drop, so do hers. He shakes his head, 'no', to her.

CECIL (INTO THE PHONE)

Thanks for getting back to me. How much did he lose by? Really? Alright then. I appreciate it.

He hangs up, turns sadly to his wife.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Nah, he didn't win.

GLORIA

I think you should call him.

Conflicted, Cecil shakes his head, no. Too much time has passed.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Right after Charlie passed, Louis came over and paid me a visit. He found me on the kitchen floor. I had passed out. Drunk. I'd gone to the bathroom all over myself.

(Pained)

He was the one who cleaned me up. And then he told me that I was the best mother anybody could ever want.

They stare into each other's eyes.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
I think he'd want to hear from his  
daddy. I think you ought to call  
him.

Cecil stares at her, unsure. Then he shakes his head, no. He  
just can't do it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1986

RONNIE REAGAN, 69, sweet, likable, sits at his desk. He sees  
Cecil out in the hall.

RONNIE  
Cecil! Cecil!

CECIL  
Yes sir, Mr. President.

Reagan jumps up and hurries over with energy.

RONNIE  
You stay there, I'm coming to you.

Reagan puts his arm around Cecil and speaks in a  
conspiratorial tone.

RONNIE (CONT'D)  
I have a secret mission for you.

CECIL  
Yes, sir?

Ronnie takes out a sealed envelope.

RONNIE  
I like to send people money when  
they write me about their financial  
problems, but my staff has been  
trying to get me to stop. You think  
you could help me keep this going?

CECIL  
Absolutely, Mr. President.

Ronnie hands him the envelope.

RONNIE  
I appreciate your help with this.  
And please don't tell Nancy.

CECIL  
Of course not, sir.



INT. WHITE HOUSE - RD WARNER'S OFFICE - DAY - 1986

Cecil stands across from the Chief Usher, RD Warner.

RD WARNER  
Morning, Cecil.

CECIL  
Morning, Mr. Warner. May I sit  
down.

RD Warner's stare says 'no'. Cecil remains standing.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
I've been here for almost thirty  
years now, and for all that time,  
the black help has been paid a  
smaller salary than the white help.  
And I just don't think it's right,  
Mr. Warner. There are black  
housemen who should be engineers by  
now, they should've been promoted  
years ago.

RD WARNER  
You think so?

CECIL  
I'm gonna have to be paid the same  
as the white help or I'ma have to  
move on.

Silence.

RD WARNER  
I guess you'll be moving on then.

CECIL  
I told the President that you'd say  
that. He told me to tell you to  
take this up with him personally.

Cecil smiles his warm smile. RD Warner is livid.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Excuse me.

Cecil walks out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT - 1986

NANCY REAGAN, 61, sharp and savvy, walks down the hall toward  
Cecil with Reagan's Treasury Secretary, JAMES BAKER.

NANCY

I'm not comfortable with all the foreign policy hawks surrounding Ronnie, we need more moderates on his staff. And I want a summit with the Russians. Ronnie needs to meet with them face to face if we really want to thaw this ice.

She passes Cecil, but then stops and turns around.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Cecil.

Cecil turns around with a smile.

CECIL

Yes, Mrs. Reagan?

NANCY

(to James)

We will talk.

CECIL

Yes ma'am?

Nancy glances at him with a sharp stare.

NANCY

You're very popular around here. Everyone says you're the man that got them raises and promotions. I had no idea.

Cecil smiles with humility.

CECIL

I wish I could take credit for that.

NANCY

I'd like to invite you to the State Dinner next week.

CECIL

But I'm going to be there, Mrs. Reagan.

NANCY

No, not as a butler, Cecil, I'm inviting you as a guest.

Cecil is confused.

CECIL

But...the President prefers for me  
to serve him personally.

NANCY

Don't you worry about, Ronnie. I'll  
take care of that. So we'll see you  
next week? You and your wife.

CECIL

My wife?

NANCY

It's... It's Gloria, yes?

CECIL

Yes.

Nancy nods, then continues down the hall. Cecil watches her  
go, stunned at the invitation.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY - 1986

Gloria and Cecil enter the entrance hall. Gloria looks around  
in amazement, Cinderella at the ball. Amused, Cecil wanders  
behind her.

CECIL

(to Gloria)

This is the Entrance Hall.

Holloway approaches them with a tray of champagne flutes.

HOLLOWAY

Can I get you a glass of champagne,  
Mr. Gaines?

Cecil rolls his eyes.

CECIL

Shut up!

Holloway smirks. Then they hear:

LOUD SPEAKER

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

We hear 'Hail to the Chief' as Ronnie and Nancy walk down the  
stairs with honor guards to great fanfare.

Gloria stares at Nancy in awe.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT - 1986

Cecil and Gloria are seated at separate tables. He looks around at all of the butlers serving the room - carefully setting dishes, refilling water. He looks uncomfortable.

CECIL V.O.

It was different sitting at the table instead of serving it. Real different. I could see the two faces the butlers wore to survive and I knew I lived my life with those same two faces. Gloria looked so happy, but I didn't feel the same way. I guess I wished we were there for real instead of show.

Everyone gets ready to eat.

RONNIE

I think that's Bon appetite everybody.

Carter walks by to take a used utensil from Cecil.

CARTER

(whispering in Cecil's ear)

You a black motherfucker!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY - 1986

Ronnie sits with PAT BUCHANAN, 47, jowly, the Communications Director. They are across from Republican Senator NANCY KASSEBAUM, 53, and a few other Republican Senators.

Cecil pours tea for Senator Kassebaum who smiles at him.

RONNIE

I want to make myself clear on this issue. If Congress passes sanctions against South Africa, I will be forced to veto those sanctions.

Cecil stops pouring for a split second, then starts up again.

SENATOR KASSEBAUM

Well, Mr. President, we feel that would be a major mistake. The brutal repression of South African black citizens is no longer just a foreign policy issue, but a United States racial issue.

Cecil stands at the back, staring forward, it's clear he's listening. Senator Kassebaum turns to Ronnie with urgency:

SENATOR KASSEBAUM (CONT'D)

We're Senators from your own party.  
That's why we feel so comfortable  
in letting you know that South  
Africa is a human rights disaster.  
Black people are being beaten,  
tortured, gunned down in the middle  
of the street. Americans see this  
on TV, they're horrified by  
Apartheid.

Ronnie looks frustrated with the Senators.

RONNIE

I've made my decision.

Cecil can't believe his ears.

SENATOR KASSEBAUM

Mr. President, your reputation as a  
world leader is at stake. The  
United States of America needs to  
be on the right side of history on  
the race issue.

Ronnie looks at them all with his iron will.

RONNIE

I'll say it again. If Congress  
passes this bill, I will veto it.  
Period.

Pat Buchanan smiles at the Republican Senators who just sit there and stare at Ronnie. Unbelievable.

Cecil stares at Ronnie too, disturbed on a deep level.

CUT TO - COTTON FIELDS - FLASHBACK - CECIL'S DREAM.

He's a boy in the cotton fields with his father, playing in the cotton.

CUT TO - THE HOUSE - FLASHBACK - CECIL'S DREAM

Thomas Westfall walks up to 15 year old Cecil who's reading on the porch.

THOMAS

What? You reading now? Get up and do the dishes 'fore I shoot you in the head.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER - 1986

Cecil awakens. Bothered by the State Dinner and Reagan's words. He can't sleep. Restless, he leaves the bedroom.

CECIL V.O.

Nothing seemed right to me after that State Dinner. I got all confused.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LOUIS' BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING - 1986

Cecil has not slept. But he's not tired. He's going through Louis' boxes. He looks at his baseball trophies and studies his various awards. He sees the faded flier: **MAMIE TILL, MOTHER OF EMMET TILL, SPEAKS OUT!**

Then he sees a copy of the civil rights book: 'RACE, REFORM AND REBELLION'. He thumbs through it, looks at the pictures and finds one of the burning bus.

CECIL V.O.

They started writing books about everything Louis and his friends had done.

Inside the book he finds an old mug shot of Louis.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

Louis was never a criminal, he was a hero. Fighting to save the soul of our country.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY - 1986

Tired, Cecil passes out cookies to bratty CHILDREN on a White House tour. For the first time he looks irritated at work.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRESIDENT REAGAN'S CLOSET - DAY - 1986

Shoes lay everywhere. On his hands and knees Cecil shines them. He looks tired, almost angry.

CECIL V.O.

I had always loved serving. But it just felt different now. I didn't know that an old man could feel so lost. But that's how I felt... That's how I felt.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT - 1986

Cecil sits alone on a pew. He's deep in prayer. He looks beyond the alter for guidance. A sign.

INT./EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY - 1986

Cecil drives his car through the rural countryside. He looks lost still. Gloria sits by his side.

EXT. WESTFALL'S COTTON FARM - DAY - 1986

Cecil takes Gloria to the shack that he was raised in. It looks much worse than in his youth, rotted to the core.

CECIL V.O.

Americans always turned a blind eye to what we had done to our own. We look out to the world and judge. We hear about the concentration camps, but these camps went on for 200 years... right here, in America.

They wander around what was the cotton field. It's completely different. The fields are more like dirt patches. Cecil takes it all in. He points to a run down shed.

CECIL

I buried my daddy right over there.

It's a little windy. Gloria smiles at Cecil.

GLORIA

My mamma would have been right proud of me, being with a man like yous. Taking such good care of me all of these years. I love you Cecil Gaines.

Cecil holds Gloria's hand as they stare at the remains of his childhood.

CECIL

I love you more Gloria.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY - 1986

Ronnie looks surprised as he talks to Cecil.

RONNIE

Are you sure about this?

Cecil nods.

CECIL

Yes sir. I just want to be the one  
who tell you first, that's all.

RONNIE

You're the best butler here. You  
are like family, Cecil.

CECIL

It's been an honor serving you.

RONNIE

Not just for me, I'm sure I speak  
for all the Presidents when I say  
that you've served your country  
well.

Cecil humbly grins.

CECIL

Thank you, Mr. President.

Cecil gives a slight bow, then walks to the door to leave.

RONNIE

Cecil?

Cecil turns around to see Reagan looking troubled, there is  
clearly something on his mind.

CECIL

Yes, Mr. President?

Reagan pauses, this is tough for him to ask. He motions to  
newspapers on his desk with headlines about apartheid.

RONNIE

This whole civil rights issue... I  
sometimes fear I'm on the wrong  
side of it... that I'm just wrong.

Cecil stares at him, this hits him on a deep level.



CECIL  
 Sometimes I think I'm just scared  
 of what it really means. But I'm  
 trying to not be so scared anymore.

EXT. SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY - DAY - 1986

Hundreds of protestors are outside the South African Embassy  
 with signs 'Freedom in South Africa' and 'End Apartheid'.  
 Louis is at the front talking to the crowd.

LOUIS  
 Who do we want to free?

ALL  
 Mandela!

LOUIS  
 When do we want him free?

ALL  
 Now!

LOUIS  
 Twenty years ago we marched in this  
 country for our rights, today we  
 march to free the people of South  
 Africa. Ronald Reagan has attacked  
 or dismantled every civil rights  
 program that has ever been put in  
 to place. Aiding the oppression of  
 black South Africans is absolutely  
 consistent with his policies on  
 race issues. Am I right? Am I  
 right? Am I rig--

Louis stops talking as he sees Cecil watching him from across  
 the street. Louis is stunned. His father smiles nervously. He  
 looks frail.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
 Excuse me. Steven? Where's Steven.  
 Free Mandela Y'all!

Louis hands off the bullhorn to STEVEN and walks up to Cecil.  
 The two of them stare at each other for a long beat. It's  
 been so many years.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
 Hi, dad.

CECIL  
 Hi, Louis.

LOUIS  
What are you doing here?

CECIL  
I'm here to protest with you.

Louis is moved speechless. After what seems like an eternity:

LOUIS  
You'll get arrested dad. You'll  
lose your job.

Cecil looks to the ground. Mustering up the strength to say:

CECIL  
I've lost you.

A tear forms in Louis' eye. Cecil smiles.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry...

Through tears, Louis wraps his arms around his dad in a huge hug. This time he's the one that doesn't want to let go.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry...

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY - 1986

Cecil and Louis sit side by side in a holding cell crammed with 20 other protestors. Louis is concerned for his father.

LOUIS  
Don't worry, dad, we'll be out of  
here in a few hours.

CECIL  
Who said I was worried?

We PULL BACK on father and son in jail together.

CECIL V.O.  
After going to jail, I thought I  
had seen it all.

EXT. GAINES HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY - OCTOBER 2008

Cecil and Gloria are twenty years older with full heads of grey hair. They sit at a table in their yard filled with campaign posters for 'BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT'.

CECIL V.O.

But I'd never imagined I'd see a  
black man be a real contender for  
the President of the United States.

It's a lively party as people wear Obama T-shirts. Music is playing, BBQ-ing, everyone looks happy. No one more so than Cecil and Gloria.

CECIL V.O. (CONT'D)

Gloria and I would walk to our  
polling place every night to see  
where we would be voting for Barack  
Obama. We would just stare at it  
and smile.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - 2008

Waiting for Louis in their Sunday best, Cecil helps Gloria clear the table of her breakfast. She has very little mobility left at 90 years old.

CECIL

You done?

GLORIA

Pretty much. You done pretty good  
there. Thanks, honey.

Gloria looks at a picture of a little 6 year old GIRL, she looks bothered by the picture.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

How come Louis' wife name that  
child Shaquanda?!

CECIL

Now don't start that again.

GLORIA

I aint starting it, I just don't  
know what kind of name that is. I  
mean, really, Shaquanda?!

(beat)

I think she done that just to spite  
me.

CECIL

Honey ain't nobody done nothing to  
spite you.

GLORIA

Sure she did. She an ugly little thing too. That little pug nose... I hope she grow out of it.

CECIL

You need to stop that. You know that aint right.

GLORIA

Don't you think she look a little like Louis around the mouth?

CECIL

I think she look just like you.

GLORIA

Like me?!

CECIL

Yeah, so you need to stop talking about her!

GLORIA

Let me look at her again then real good...

She takes a long look at the picture. Then -

GLORIA (CONT'D)

She do look a little bit like me. She a pretty little thang.

Beat.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I forgot where I put my Bible. You know I need my Bible. I think I left it in the bathroom.

Cecil gets up and walks to the bathroom for the Bible.

CECIL

Why is Louis late? Boy gets elected into Congress and he ain't been on time getting us to church ever since.

GLORIA

I can't believe you still fussing about Louis--

CECIL

He's going to be late to his own funeral. He said he gonna be here for us! Go ahead, call him.

GLORIA

I aint calling Louis. I'm gonna get my purse and--

Cecil walks back into kitchen with the Bible.

CECIL

What did you say... Isiah... I see you got that mark here...

Then Cecil sees that Gloria's head is slumped. Cecil looks at her. He's too afraid to move. He knows that she is gone.

He stares at her for what seems to be an eternity, doesn't want to accept it.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Baby? Honey? You sleeping? Baby? Are you alright?

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Cecil sits in a church all by himself. He looks like he's been there for hours. Just doesn't want to leave because he's got nowhere else to go.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LOUIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT - 2008

Louis lays face up on a day bed. He looks around at all of his mother's stuff. Louis grabs a photo album off the shelf, he starts thumbing through it, then stops on -

A picture of the Gaines family from when Louis was a teenager - Cecil, Gloria, Louis and 8 year old Charlie. He stares at it for a long beat. An American family.

Then he sees a picture he doesn't recognize. A sepia-tone photograph of young Cecil on the cotton farm with his father and mother, Earl and Hattie Gaines. He hears yelling:

CECIL (O.S.)

Louis! Louis come on down! Come down!

Louis hurries down the steps.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 2008

Cecil sits on his couch watching election night results:

ANDERSON COOPER

"And CNN can now project that Barack Obama, 47 years old, will become the President-Elect of the United States."

A picture of BARACK OBAMA appears on the screen. Cecil and Louis stare at it, absolutely stunned. Then Louis walks over to his father and puts his arms around him.

CUT TO - FULL SCREEN - ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE:

President-elect Barack Obama makes a speech to the crowd on election night.

BARACK OBAMA

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

Cecil and Louis watch the speech, still holding each other. Then Cecil begins to cry.

INT. GAINES HOUSE - BEDROOM - CURRENT DAY - 2009

Standing in front of a mirror, Cecil wears Kennedy's tie that Jackie gave him as he puts on the LBJ tie clip. He then grabs his father's pocket watch.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY - 2009

Cecil sits in the Entrance Hall of the White House. He looks around - everything is exactly as he remembers. He whispers to himself.

CECIL

Look them in the eye, see what it is they want, see what it is they need, anticipate, bring a smile to the principal's eyes...

The new Chief Usher, ADMIRAL STEPHEN ROCHON, black, walks up to him.

ADMIRAL ROCHON  
Mr. Gaines, I'm Admiral Rochon the  
Chief Usher.

Cecil looks surprised that he's a black man.

CECIL  
It's nice to meet you, Admiral.

ADMIRAL ROCHON  
The pleasure's all mine. I just  
wanted to tell you what an honor it  
is to meet you, sir.

Cecil looks pleased. The two start to walk down the hall.

CECIL  
The honor is mine.

ADMIRAL ROCHON  
The President so excited to meet  
with you.

CECIL  
Well that's just fine.

Admiral Rochon gestures toward the State Dining Room.

ADMIRAL ROCHON  
Let me show you the way.

Cecil gives him a look, then tells him:

CECIL  
I know the way.

Cecil walks alone down that long hallway toward the State Dining Room. As he passes the official portraits of the Presidents we hear their iconic voices:

JFK V.O.  
The heart of the question is  
whether all Americans are to be  
afforded equal rights and equal  
opportunities.

He walks past the portrait of LBJ.

LBJ V.O.  
It is the effort of American Negroes  
to secure for themselves the full  
blessings of American life.

As Cecil turns the corner to meet the first black President  
we hear his famous speech:

BARACK OBAMA V.O.

We will respond with that timeless  
creed that sums up the spirit of a  
people: Yes we can!

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END



