

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION 2013

LEE DANIELS'
THE BUTLER
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BEST WRITING (ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY)

Danny Strong



THE BUTLER

by

Danny Strong

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.

Bye. ELROY Dad. CHARLIE

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.

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, starring 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?

LOUIS
 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 you. 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

