

SELMA

Written by

Paul Webb and Ava DuVernay

February 2, 2014

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

White gloves on small brown hands.

Black patent leather shoes on spirited feet.

The morning sun streams in through a nearby stained glass window, reflecting rays of gold and topaz and magenta as SEVEN KIDS make their way down a church staircase.

Five girls. Two boys. All with small learning bibles in hand.

BOY #1

I hear it's just like a swimming pool. They dip you in, and say the prayer, and then you done.

GIRL #1

I don't know. I practice holding my breath, but I'm scared to have my head under water. What if I need to breathe?

GIRL #2

I promise you it ain't nothing to be scared of. It's quick. And Pastor right there next to you.

GIRL #3

The biggest thing is getting your hair wet up. I got it pressed that same morning and it was wasted soon as I hit that water. I should've worn a swim cap, like Mama said.

BOY #2

A swim cap? So you can look like you got ringworms!

All the girls burst into sweet laughter.

GIRL #3

A swim cap, not a ringworm cap!

BOY #1

(shrugs)  
Same difference.

GIRL #4

Nuh-uh. You ain't never seen Esther Williams?

The boys give up and head in another direction at the landing. The girls giggle and continue down the stairs.

GIRL #5

I asked my Mama, can she make my hair like Coretta Scott King had hers fixed at the Washington March. But she said it's too grown.

GIRL #4

Oh! I love her hair!

In unison, they all agree as they reach the lower landing.

GIRL #3

(stopping on the last stair for emphasis)

I heard she don't even put rollers in it. It's just *like* that. But I studied it. I know how to do it...

At this, the other girls turn around to hear the valuable tutorial.

GIRL #3 (CONT'D)

See, she just parts it in the middle and then she...

Interrupted without warning, they all hear something strange and turn in the direction of a LOUD CRACKING. Their expressions questioning the origin of the unfamiliar sound.

The answer DETONATES in the next room.

The camera SLOWS to follow the girls. Lifted off their feet as BRICKS fly through the air. Striking them.

Windows shatter, raining LARGE, SHARP SHARDS. One slicing clean through a petite limb.

Gloves now gray with soot, raised in defense of a SPLINTERED WOOD BEAM that crashes down from above.

The back of a head adorned with curls smashes against a CONCRETE WALL.

The CRIPPLED CEILING buckles, then collapses amidst the DARK SMOKE.

Then -- all is silent, except for a HIGH-PITCHED HISS which increases in intensity.

We pull back on the room to find FOUR LITTLE GIRLS, laying motionless. Among blood and debris and bibles.

Covered in TINY BITS OF GLASS that gleam in that morning sun against their broken bodies.

INT. GRAND HOTEL, PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - OSLO, NORWAY

We look directly into the eyes of DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
And he is looking directly at us.

He is deeply disturbed. He shakes his head. Disappointed.

KING

No.

A long sigh as we pull back to reveal his gaze resting upon  
his own image. He wrestles with his tie in a long mirror.

KING (CONT'D)

This isn't right.

We now see that he's dressed in formal striped pants and a  
gray tuxedo with tails.

KING (CONT'D)

Corrie! This ain't right!

CORETTA (O.S.)

What's that?

KING

This necktie! It's not right!

CORETTA SCOTT KING enters from the dressing room, in all her  
elegance and efficiency.

CORETTA

It's not a necktie, dear. It's an  
ascot.

KING

(still struggling)  
Yes, but generally the same  
principles should apply, shouldn't  
they? This isn't right.

CORETTA

Isn't right? Or, you don't like it?

She crosses to him and waits for him to give up. Then gently  
pulls the tie from the irregular knot and begins again.

KING

I don't like how this looks.

CORETTA

Looks distinguished and debonair to  
me.

KING

You know what I mean. Like, we're here living high on the hog. Dressed like this. While folks at home are... it's not right.

(a brooding beat)

Wait 'til the brothers back home see me like this. They'll have a good laugh.

CORETTA

(clearly her sore spot)

Let 'em laugh. It's not a crime to be away for a few days, Martin.

Their faces are close. She's focused on the tie. He's focused on her now. Lightening up.

KING

It's nice being away, huh?

CORETTA

Yeah. It really is.

A beat as she works.

KING

Look, I'm gonna go be a pastor somewhere small. A college town. Led a little church, teach a class. The occasional speaking engagement.

CORETTA

I'll make out all the bills for us, especially the mortgage for our very own house. Savings since we don't have a phone anymore and all.

KING

Our own phone-less house. Perfect.

They smile at that little game as she finishes the fancy tie. They remain close.

KING (CONT'D)

Ever wish we could go back? Before.

CORETTA

I don't think we would if we could.

(a sad beat)

You look handsome.

She turns around to the mirror and pats her hair in place, as they each look upon the other's reflection.

INT. OSLO UNIVERSITY - LATER

APPLAUSE from dignitaries as King makes his way to an ornate, polished podium. He joins GUNNAR JAHN, the elderly Nobel Committee Chairman, who holds an encased medal with pride.

JAHN

I have the great honor to stand with the youngest recipient in our history, a man of 35 years old. We honor this man from the Deep South of the United States of America, who has been imprisoned on many occasions, whose home has been subject to bomb attacks, whose life and the lives of his family are constantly under fatal threat, and who nevertheless does not falter in his quest for justice and for freedom. Martin Luther King has spoken of his dream. One which we, and many people across the world, share. To this undaunted champion of peace, the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Parliament awards the Peace Prize for 1964. For you, sir.

Visibly moved, King accepts and steps to the microphone.

KING

Your Royal Highness, Mr. President, Excellencies. I refuse to accept that mankind is so bound to the starless midnight of racism that the bright daybreak of brotherhood can never be a reality.

We watch a great orator in full command of the room.

KING (CONT'D)

I accept this honor for our lost ones. I accept this honor for 22 million American Negroes who move with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger. I believe that what the self-centered have torn down, the other-centered can build up. I believe that We Shall Overcome.

APPLAUSE. Then, letter by letter as it is typed ON SCREEN...

SUPERIMPOSE: Oslo University: 5:15pm - M. King. C. King.  
LOGGED

INT. SMALL-TOWN COURTHOUSE LOBBY - DAY

The APPLAUSE CONTINUES as we watch ANNIE LEE COOPER, a plump dignified woman in her fifties, completes a form with meticulous handwriting. She smiles with satisfaction as if this document was a mountain conquered.

She carefully gathers her coat and purse, pats her hair and straightens her hat, takes a deep breath and walks across the polished lobby of the small, quiet courthouse.

She heads to the REGISTRAR, a 30ish white male reading the comics at a window marked "SELMA ADMINISTRATION OFFICE."

Annie Lee stands there for several seconds, but the man ignores her. He continues to read, never looking up. Then...

ANNIE LEE COOPER

'Scuse me, sir. I come to register.

REGISTRAR

Ain't nobody called you up here.  
Sit on down 'til you're called.

ANNIE LEE COOPER

But, there's no one here...

REGISTRAR

You stirrin' trouble? Sit your  
black behind down 'til ya called.  
Or I'll ring up the Sheriff.

Annie Lee swallows her pride and turns around. She walks back across the lobby, gripping her purse tight to calm herself. As soon as she reaches the seat and sits down...

REGISTRAR (CONT'D)

Annie Lee Cooper!

She looks at him. He smirks at her.

REGISTRAR (CONT'D)

Get on up now. I ain't got all day.

She grits her teeth and rises. She holds her head high as she walks back across the lobby, placing the form on the counter.

REGISTRAR (CONT'D)

You work for Mr. Dunn at the rest  
home, ain't that right?

ANNIE LEE COOPER

(hesitantly)

Yessir.

REGISTRAR

Wonder what ol' Dunn'll say when I  
tell him one of his gals over here  
stirrin' trouble.

ANNIE LEE COOPER

Ain't stirrin' trouble. I'm here to  
vote.

He snatches the form and reviews it with pen in hand. After a  
while, he becomes annoyed that there is nothing to correct.

ANNIE LEE COOPER (CONT'D)

It's all right this time.

Their eyes meet.

REGISTRAR

It's right if I say its right.

She doesn't waver. Her eyes are trained on him.

REGISTRAR (CONT'D)

Recite the Constitution's preamble.  
Know what a preamble is?

She swallows hard and then...

ANNIE LEE COOPER

We the people of the United States,  
in order to form a more perfect  
union, establish justice, ensure  
domestic tranquility, provide for  
the common defense, promote the  
general welfare, and secure the  
blessings of liberty to ourselves  
and our posterity...

REGISTRAR

How many county judges in Alabama?

ANNIE LEE COOPER

Sixty-seven.

Silence.

REGISTRAR

Name them.

Annie stares at him. He inks a rubber stamp. He looks down at  
a form. Bang! DENIED.

Close on Annie. Head still high. Her face doesn't change, but  
her eyes... We see a light go out. She turns and walks away.



EXT. WASHINGTON DC - DAY

KING walks across the Mall at a brisk pace with two advisors on each side. ANDREW YOUNG, balancing an air of both warmth and sophistication. And CT VIVIAN, a taller, slender man with a determined expression.

YOUNG

Johnson's indicated that his main focus will be to get your buy-in on his Poverty program. Be prepared you'll have to work around that to get to what you're there for. He won't see Selma coming.

King nods in understanding.

YOUNG (CONT'D)

Also, I highly recommend you take this face-to-face opportunity to discuss Hoover. The surveillance...

Vivian meets Young's eyes. This is important. Will he do it?

KING

Andy, I don't want to open that can, my friend.

YOUNG

It's open, Marty. It's already open. Just a matter of when and how they want to spill it all out.

King is clearly affected by these words, but masks his worry.

VIVIAN

We're being very careful on the phone and in public rooms now.

YOUNG

Key word being "now."

KING

I'm focusing on the task at hand, brothers. That's all my head will hold right now. My hope is that the new international attention'll move the needle without us having to engage at the ground-level in Selma or anywhere else. Maybe we won't need to go full-scale.

The subject has officially been changed. But not before Young and Vivian share a look of deep concern as the trio walks quickly toward the White House in the distance.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON, all six feet four inches of him, barrels towards the Oval Office with his top aide, LEE WHITE.

JOHNSON

Aren't we done yet? Are we not done with this!? Will it ever end?!

WHITE

Apparently not, Mr. President.

JOHNSON

What's he want? What's he gonna ask for now? Huh? I know. He's gonna ask for more enforcement on the Civil Rights Act. That's it. Yep. Fuck! What can we give him?

WHITE

A very extensive plan is already in place, sir. I'd say just reiterate.

JOHNSON

Man's not coming for reiteration. Man's looking for something so he can say, "Look! I told you I had a dream and now it's all coming fucking true - whether you like it or goddamn not!" *That's* what he wants. But, what he *needs* to do is get on board with what *we're* doing. Not the other way around. For once!

He strides into the Oval Office from the residential entry to find his secretary.

SECRETARY

Mr. President. Dr. King is...

JOHNSON

Yes, yes. Bring him on in.

White takes a seat while Johnson straightens his tie and has a sip of water. Preparing.

King enters. The men shake hands with faux warmth. Then Johnson places a long arm around King's shoulder.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

Martin, I have to tell ya, I may be a tall sonofabitch, but this close to the new Nobel laureate I feel tits-high to a puppy dog!

KING

(laughing)

Well, thank you, Mr. President.

Talking all the while, Johnson guides King to a chair by a small table set with coffee. Johnson pours.

JOHNSON

I have to tell you, Martin, ending segregation with the '64 Act was my proudest moment. Civil rights is a priority of this administration. You know that. If we don't meet the challenge, this nation's storing up a heap of trouble for itself. Seeing as I can't convince you to come work with my administration in an official capacity inside the White House, well, I... I just feel damn fortunate having someone as statesmanlike as you leading the movement and I want you to go on leading it. No one else. None of those militant Malcolm X types. So I wanna help. Tell me how.

KING

Mr. President, I share your pride in the Civil Rights Act and your understanding that if these issues are not addressed there will be repercussions on our country's trajectory, such as the unbridled violence that continues to be inflicted upon its Negro citizens. Including our children.

At mention of the children, Johnson bows his head in respect.

KING (CONT'D)

To that end, Mr. President, I'm here to speak specifically about the denial of a basic American right for the Negro citizen.

(wait for it)

The right to vote.

King smiles. Johnson smiles - knowing King is goading him.

JOHNSON

Well, Martin, technically . . .

KING

. . . we already have it. Yes, Mr. President. But we both know that in the South, black voters are kept off the rolls and out of the voting booth by fear and intimidation. And that - is a national disgrace.

JOHNSON

It is! It is, Martin . . .

KING

I'm so pleased you agree, Mr. President. You asked how you can help. We want Federal legislation granting Negroes the right to vote - unencumbered. We want Federal protocol to eliminate the decades-long dismissal, intimidation and illegal denial of blacks seeking to vote, by local registrars who seek to withhold this right. And... we want robust enforcement of that protocol.

Johnson takes a moment to digest. A little taken aback.

JOHNSON

Well, Martin. That's just fine but most of the South is still not even desegregatin'. First, let's concentrate on getting the '64 act up and runnin'. Folks are fatigued. Folks need an intermission. We need to heal some wounds first. Don't let's start the next battle before we've won the first.

King is thoughtfully silent for a moment.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

And you know what that next battle should be? The eradication of poverty! Poor people too busy survivin' to participate in the democratic process. I'm putting together the most ambitious program of welfare reforms this country's ever seen. Callin' it "The War on Poverty."

Johnson is on his feet, returning from his desk with a bundle of briefing papers in his hands. He drops them on the table.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

It's a simple matter of political priorities. The *votin'* has to wait.

King stares regretfully at Johnson for several seconds. Is he really going to have to go full-throttle on another cause?

KING

It can't, Mr. President.

JOHNSON

Well, Martin, why not?

KING

Because there've been thousands of racially-motivated murders in the South, including those four little girls, and -

JOHNSON

I know that, but -

KING

And you know the astounding fact that not *one* of those criminals, who murder us when and why they want, has *ever* been convicted.

JOHNSON

Martin, I know we got a lot more work to do down there -

KING

Not one conviction. Because they're protected by white officials chosen by an all-white electorate. And on the rare occasions they face trial, they're *freed* by all-white juries. All-white because you can't serve on a jury unless you're registered to vote.

Johnson has since taken a seat. A bit less emboldened.

KING (CONT'D)

Mister President, can you interpret the "full faith and credit" clause of Article IV, section 1 of the US Constitution also known as the "privileges and immunities" clause?

JOHNSON

What? I'm lost here.

KING

That's a question on the Alabama literacy test required for blacks who attempt to register. A Fisk University alum named Bernard Lafayette got it right, God bless him. But he was flunked anyway because he didn't write the answer in cursive, which was the white local registrar's preferred style of writing on that particular day.

Brief silence. Johnson looks into King's eyes.

JOHNSON

My administration has to be done with this for a while. Just for awhile. You can understand.

KING

(a beat)

I understand, Mr. President.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Young and Vivian look up expectantly as King enters with concerned determination.

KING

(firmly)

Selma, it is.

Off Young and Vivian, beyond satisfied.

EXT. U.S. HIGHWAY - DAY

Dense woods on both sides of a four-lane interstate. The kind of southern forest where TALL TREES loom large and ominous, having borne the strange fruit of someone's last breath.

We find KING in the backseat of a blue Pontiac seated between ANDREW YOUNG and another man, RALPH ABERNATHY, three years older than King and the picture of Southern Baptist distinction.

The car is driven by a very large, young man. At 6'3" and over 300 pounds, JAMES ORANGE could easily be a linebacker.

Next to him in the front passenger seat is DIANE NASH, a startlingly beautiful woman with a serious demeanor.

The radio hums with THE SUPREMES singing "Come See About Me."

ORANGE

Big speech lined up for these folks, Doc?

KING

We need to see what's what first, Big Fella.

YOUNG

Maybe Doc'll let you make the big speech this time, Ralphy.

ABERNATHY

That'll be the day...

A highway sign proclaiming 'SELMA: 28 miles' zips by.

ABERNATHY (V.O.)

What you got us into, woman? We got twenty-eight miles to come to our senses, gentlemen.

NASH

Hush. This here's the place we need to be. This right here is the next great battle.

(off Orange's nod)

They'll see soon enough.

Off King, Abernathy and Young in the rearview. Not so sure.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - DAY

The car passes beneath a sign bearing a large Coca-Cola logo, stating 'SELMA, ALABAMA - Progressive & Friendly,' onto a steel arched bridge into town. Painted across an overhang: EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE.

YOUNG

What'd Mr. Edmund Pettus do so well they gave him a bridge in these parts, Orange?

ORANGE

Um, I'm not sure.

ABERNATHY

I can only imagine. Decent looking  
place to die though.

King looks up from some papers and nods matter-of-factly  
along with Young as the small town comes into full view.

EXT/INT. HOTEL ALBERT - DAY

A sign greets the group: 'HOTEL ALBERT - Serving Whites Only  
Since 1855.' KING and his crew pull up in front.

A dashing man in a shirt, tie and denim overalls approaches  
the car at the curb. JAMES BEVEL sticks his head through the  
window. He gives a nod to the men, then a quick caress to  
Nash's cheek.

BEVEL

Ms. Nash.

NASH

Mr. Bevel.

A loving smile between them. The others look on, smiling too.

BEVEL

(back to business)

Doc, we'll get you checked in here.  
Then, the local leaders'll stop by  
to conference with us. But, this is  
it. Selma's the place. A lot of  
groundwork's already been laid by  
the people here. They're ready.

King looks to his right at Abernathy. To his left at Young.

KING

Here we go.

From inside, the white Chief of Police WILSON BAKER stands in  
the hotel lobby amidst an ALL-WHITE CROWD, waiting to witness  
the passing of an era.

Baker spots another 'Serving Whites Only' sign. He thrusts it  
at the bitterly resentful hotel staff.

BAKER

Get rid of it! It's illegal. And in  
about ten seconds, it'll also be a  
lie.

A sudden hush as BEVEL appears, leading KING, ABERNATHY,  
YOUNG, NASH and ORANGE through the crowded lobby.



King approaches the reception desk. Abernathy and Young appear tense. Orange watchful. Nash and Bevel radiate intense satisfaction as King signs the silently proffered register.

An earnest-looking younger white man approaches the group.

EARNEST WHITE MAN  
Dr. King. May I introduce myself?

King looks at him and smiles.

KING  
Yes. Of course.

King steps towards him, holding out his hand. Orange senses danger and moves forward. Too late.

The man SLAMS HIS FIST into King, landing a punch to the head and a kick in the groin as King goes down. A well-dressed white WOMAN smiles on her tiptoes for a better view.

Orange is first in. Pulling the man off King. Baker and TWO OFFICERS drag the attacker away while Young and Abernathy form a protective barrier against further attack. Nash has a handkerchief to his forehead. King is quickly on his feet.

ORANGE  
(mortified)  
Doc! Doc! I'm sorry! I... I...

KING  
It's okay. I'm okay, Big Fella.

Abernathy, fiercely proud of his friend's courage, snatches the room keys off the counter and looks around defiantly.

ABERNATHY  
This way, Doctor King!

INT. HOTEL ALBERT GUEST ROOM - LATER

KING sits on the bed with a cold compress. ABERNATHY, YOUNG, ORANGE, NASH, BEVEL and police chief WILSON BAKER are near.

So are local leaders AMELIA BOYNTON, a professional woman of about 60, and FREDERICK REESE, a thin preacher in his 30s.

SUPERIMPOSE: Hotel Albert, Selma. 4:14 pm. King, Abernathy, Young, Bevel, Orange, Nash w/ local dissidents. LOGGED

KING  
I tell ya, that white boy can hit.

BAKER  
You wanna file charges?

KING  
We prefer to remain focused.

ORANGE  
Chief, who was that?

BAKER  
Part of the White Citizens Council.

YOUNG  
No better than the Klan.

BAKER  
Don't worry. They're here too.

The locals REESE and BOYNTON exchange a look. They're angry.

REESE  
Then, why don't you ban them from congregating like you ban us? Sure was a lot of them in that lobby. Why isn't Clark harassing them?

BAKER  
Reverend Reese, you know darn well that the courthouse is Sheriff Clark's territory and the city is mine. Now, I've done right by you people. But don't push me.

BOYNTON  
Why'd you let him in the hotel?

BAKER  
Come again?

BOYTON  
Why would you allow a known white supremacist to be in a place where he could attack this man?

King and his staff watch slightly wide-eyed as these small-town leaders pepper their Police Chief with tough questions.

BAKER  
Mrs. Boynton, you know darn well that every nut in America is here! And that is not *my* responsibility!  
(at King)  
It's his! They're here because he's here! And vice-versa!

BOYNTON

No, Chief Baker! No, sir. Dr. King is here because my late husband and I wrote to him on behalf of the Negro citizens of this community, a community that we helped build with our backs and our bare hands. And we told him of our situation here. Of our organizing here. We told him of the disgraceful attitude of the authorities in this town towards the rights of its Negro citizens. And we called for him to come down and help us. *That's* why he's here.

King smiles at these fiery locals, impressed by them both.

KING

See, Chief? Just obeying orders.

BAKER

All I know is you folks booking into this place for one night is a calculated act of provocation.

KING

A calculated act of *desegregation*. Part of our job. *That's* what we do.

BAKER

What you do - is cause trouble.

Baker turns away abruptly and goes. King shakes his head.

KING

Well? Let's not disappoint the man.

The camera pulls back as everyone leans in. Then, letter by letter as it is being TYPED...

INT/ EXT. KING RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON

KING is RUNNING - as he plays dodgeball with his children. YOLANDA (10), MARTIN JR. (8), DEXTER (4), BERNICE (2).

KING

Dexter, be careful with Bunny now. She's just a baby, ya hear?

Little Bunny gets hit and begins to cry. King picks her up.

KING (CONT'D)

You're okay, darlin'. You're fine.  
C'mon, let's tell Dex to leave you  
be. Let's tell him don't do that.

He jogs her over to Dexter. Yolanda and little Martin laugh.

BERNICE

Don't do that, Dex! Don't do it!

KING

What do you say, son?

Dexter doesn't know whether to laugh or take this seriously.

DEXTER

Um. I'm sorry, Bunny.

Through the back window, Coretta smiles at the exchange.

INT. KING KITCHEN - NIGHT

Coretta sits, folding shirts by light from another room when the PHONE RINGS. She answers to hear INSULTS and THREATS. She hangs up and turns to find her husband in the doorway.

KING

Same thing?

She nods. He TURNS ON THE LIGHT, ties the trash, replaces the bag. She takes her seat and resumes her folding. They're both exhausted. Not only by the day, but by their life.

CORETTA

When are you all heading out?

KING

They're picking me up at 5AM. Full  
day planned.

CORETTA

I see. That highway is nice now.  
Get you there in a couple hours.  
Going from Marion to Atlanta when I  
was a girl was a half-day trip.  
Good people in those parts though.

KING

I'm worried about the ones who  
ain't so good. This local Sheriff  
Jim Clark's supposed to be bad  
business. Won't go down without a  
fight, they say.

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

And since we don't fight? Someone might rightly get killed before its over. As good a place to die as any I guess.

CORETTA

I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

KING

I know. It just takes the edge off.

CORETTA

You and your friends can joke about that. I don't joke about that.

KING

I know, Corrie. I'm sorry.

A long beat. We feel the strain between them.

CORETTA

I'll put these in your bag now. I didn't realize you were leaving so early.

She rises, takes the clothes. He reaches for the phone and his wallet. Then dials from a slip of paper. A WOMAN answers.

KING

Halie?

WOMAN (O.S)

Martin.

We see a HEAVY-SET WOMAN with a heart-shaped face in her pajamas. Her husband is nearby. INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION.

KING

I need to hear the Lord's voice.

WOMAN

Surely, Martin. Surely.

She begins to SING in a powerful contralto, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." King TURNS OUT THE LIGHT and listens alone.

SUPERIMPOSE: Telephone communication from M. King at residence to Negro entertainer Mahalia Jackson. 10:07 pm. LOGGED

EXT. SELMA RESIDENCE - MORNING

The blue Pontiac followed by an Oldsmobile pull up in front of a cheerful A-frame house with a wrap-around porch.

A distinguished man, DR. SULLIVAN "SULLY" JACKSON, walks across the well-kept lawn to greet them. Handshakes replaced by hearty hugs when he reaches Abernathy, Young and King.

SULLY  
Morning, Doctor.

KING  
Morning, Doctor.

ABERNATHY  
Off to torture some poor soul?

SULLY  
If you don't want to brush proper,  
I don't know what to tell you. I  
have to do what I have to do.  
(laughs all around)  
Drive alright?

YOUNG  
Smooth. No problems.

SULLY  
Word's getting out so it's good you  
got in today. Folks gettin' eager.  
You'll have a huge crowd tomorrow.

KING  
Eager to be in harm's way? 'Cause  
I'm not eager to put 'em there.

Sully pats his friend on the back. Sympathetic to the burden.

SULLY  
Good news is... Richie Jean's in  
there. She's ready for you.

ABERNATHY  
Negro, that's all you had to say.

King chuckles a little and makes his way inside.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

In the kitchen, we find an apron-clad woman, RICHIE JEAN JACKSON, standing with her DAUGHTER, 6, at the stove.

DAUGHTER  
Uncle Marty!

KING  
(picking her up)  
There's our girl! And, Richie Jean!

RICHIE JEAN  
(hugging them)  
Martin! Hey, Ralphy. Andy!

YOUNG  
Happy to see you, Richie Jean.

ABERNATHY  
I'm happy to see *this*!

King and Abernathy have already settled into the side table, uncovering homemade buttered biscuits and thick crisp bacon.

RICHIE JEAN  
Grits are on. How many today, Andy?

Young looks to Abernathy. Richie catches the look. Uh oh.

YOUNG  
Well now, Sister Jackson. You know about our group, the SCLC, right? The Southern Christian Leadership Conference? Well, a few of our top SCLC leaders are with us this time since we're going to be here in town a little longer than expected.

Just then, CT VIVIAN enters with a smile and two briefcases.

YOUNG (CONT'D)  
This here's Reverend C.T. Vivian. Coordinates all the SCLC branches.

VIVIAN  
Ma'am.

Next, JIM BEVEL enters in his trademark overalls and tie.

YOUNG  
This here's Reverend James Bevel.

As Bevel crosses the kitchen, the large James Orange appears.

YOUNG (CONT'D)  
And this is James Orange.

RICHIE JEAN  
Whoa. A tall one. Wait, two James'?

BEVEL  
You can call me Jim, sister.

ORANGE  
Orange is fine by me, ma'am.

KING  
(eating)  
Or, Big Fella!

RICHIE JEAN  
Oh, okay, well, that's just fine.

She turns back to the stove when another man with a warm smile and booming voice appears, REVEREND HOSEA WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS  
Mrs. Jackson, I'm Hosea Williams.

KING  
Or, Castro!

WILLIAMS  
(off Richie's look)  
Long story.  
(picking up a ladle)  
Grits need stirrin'. May I?

Richie Jean takes in King and his crew, eating up a storm.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - NIGHT

We move through the large dark house to find every man asleep in his own corner. James Orange under the dining room table. C.T. Vivian on the couch. Jim Bevel in a recliner. Young and Abernathy in twin beds in a kid's room. All snoring.

King is awake in a side bedroom in pajamas, writing by a lamp. Hosea Williams comes to the doorway.

WILLIAMS  
Turning in, Doc. You okay?

KING  
Yessir. Good night to ya.

WILLIAMS  
Um, want to let you know that the students are in town.



KING  
Local students?

WILLIAMS  
No. The Student Non-Violent  
Coordinating committee.

Off King taking this in with a bit of uneasiness.

KING  
Ah, okay. Our young friends at SNCC  
(pronounced "SNICK"). Good to know.

WILLIAMS  
You're the one told them to  
organize. They took it to heart.  
But don't be surprised if those  
boys give us grief tomorrow.  
Townsfolk might be happy to see us.  
But SNCC? They feel we're in their  
territory.

KING  
They're young and full of spirit.  
Not a bad thing. It'll sort out.

Williams exits with a nod, leaving King to his notes. We push  
in to see him writing a speech which gains its VOICE in...

INT. BROWN CHAPEL - EVENING

We catch King mid-throttle at the pulpit before 700 people  
who shout in call and response, praise and encouragement.

KING  
Boycotting the buses in Montgomery.  
Segregation in Birmingham. Now?  
Voting in Selma. One struggle ends  
just to go right to the next and  
the next. If you think of it that  
way, it is a hard road. But I don't  
think of it that way. I think of  
these efforts as one effort. And  
that one effort is for our life. As  
a community. As a nation. For our  
lives. We can do this. We *must* do  
this! We see children become  
victims of one of the most vicious  
crimes ever perpetrated against  
humanity within the walls of their  
own church. They are the martyred  
heroines of a holy crusade for  
human dignity.

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

And they have something to say to each of us in their death. They say to us, black and white alike, that we must do this! We must substitute caution with courage. They say to us that we must work unrelentingly. They say it is unacceptable that more than 50% of Selma is Negro and less than 2% of Negroes here can vote. They say that the local white leadership use their power to keep us away from the ballot box and keep us voiceless. Those that have gone before us say "no more!" No more! That means protest, that means march, that means disturb the peace, that means jail, that means risk! And that is hard! But we cannot wait any longer!

JIMMIE LEE JACKSON, a young man of radiant good nature, puts his arm around a white-haired man, 83 year-old CAGER LEE. Next to Cager is his daughter VIOLA, Jimmie's mother.

JIMMIE

No, sir! Wait is over!

ANNIE LEE COOPER, the proud woman who attempted to register earlier, watches King with fierce approval.

Behind her are WHITE REPORTERS taking notes.

KING

So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably have the right to vote, I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my own mind. It is made up for me. I cannot live as a full citizen. I can only submit to the will of others. Others who do not have my best interests at heart.

(cries of 'That's right!')

We will not wait any longer! Give us the vote!

MEETING

Give us the vote!

Two young activists, JAMES FORMAN and JOHN LEWIS, listen too.

KING

We're not asking, we're demanding!  
Give us the vote!

MEETING  
GIVE US THE VOTE!

KING  
GIVE US THE VOTE!

SUPER: Brown Chapel, Selma: 6:30pm - King and SCLC co-horts incite approx. 700 locals. Several members of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) present. LOGGED

INT. BROWN CHAPEL - MINUTES LATER

King makes his way through an ADORING CROWD to the church basement when he's approached by an assertive white reporter, ROY REED, and a short white photographer, SPIDER MARTIN.

REED  
Dr. King. Roy Reed of the New York Times. Are you truly non-violent if you're provoking violence, sir?

KING  
(to the photographer)  
Hey, Spider!

SPIDER  
(slapping hands)  
Doc! Good to see you again!

KING  
(to Reed)  
We are here, using our very bodies in protest, to say to those who deny us that we will no longer let them use their billy clubs in dark corners and halls of power. We make them do it in the glaring light of day. The onus for their behavior rests with them, not us. Thank you for being here, Mr. Reed.

King continues to the basement. Exhausted, but determined.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL MEETING ROOM - LATER

A strategy meeting in progress. In addition to King and SCLC staffers we've met, the young men we saw in the audience are present. We soon learn that they are leaders from the student group, SNCC. FORMAN is a firebrand. Lewis more measured.

BEVEL

Is SNCC standing with us on this or not, gentlemen?

FORMAN

You want us to bring our people in, but you're not giving nothing in return. We're asking for some kind of commitment here.

LEWIS

Respectfully, we've been working on voter registration in this town for two years.

WILLIAMS

You ain't got very far have you?

LEWIS

Maybe not. But at least we're still here, Reverend.

WILLIAMS

Meaning what?

FORMAN

This time next month, you won't be!

BEVEL

That's outrageous!

FORMAN

Just like you left Albany. Those people are pathetic down there now. Like their Daddy left home!

LEWIS

(appealing for calm)

We're trying to explain that...

WILLIAMS

You know what? I think we should leave Selma now. Leave it to these two. Come back in another two years and see how much further ya got!

KING

That's enough. Enough of this now. I haven't the time for this. None of us got the time for this.

The room is instantly silent. King gets to his feet. All look in his direction with respect. For Lewis, with a bit of awe.

KING (CONT'D)

John. James. The way our organization works is simple. We set up a confrontation - and wait for our adversary to make a mistake. We were in Albany for nine months. But their sheriff, Laurie Pritchett, never made a mistake. Kept his cool, kept arresting us in a humane way, carried people to the jail-wagons on stretchers. Day in, day out. There was *no drama*.

FORMAN

(disparagingly)

You mean there was no cameras.

KING

Exactly. Now I know, we all understand, that you young people believe in working in the community long-term. Doing the good work to raise black consciousness. Going door to door. Educating people about government and history. Being in the trenches for years if necessary. It's good grassroots work. I can't tell you how much I admire that. But what we do primarily is raise *white* consciousness. In particular the consciousness of whichever white man happens to be sitting in the Oval Office. Kennedy ignored us in Albany - because he could - because the press and the TV ignored us. And right now Johnson has other fish to fry and he'll ignore us, too - if he can. The only way to stop him doing that is by being on the front page of national press every morning and on the TV news every night. And that... requires drama.

(off their intense gaze)

Now, John, James, answer me one question. I've been told the Sheriff in this town ain't like Laurie Pritchett in Albany. He's a big ignorant bully like Bull Connor in Birmingham. You tell me. You know Selma. You know Sheriff Jim Clark. Is he Laurie Pritchett? Or is he Bull Connor?

Should they answer? A moment between Lewis and Forman. Then.

LEWIS  
He's Bull Connor.

KING  
Good! That's good. But, it gets better...

EXT. STREETS. DAY

King, Abernathy and Bevel lead MARCHERS through the streets in the bitter Alabama cold. Forman and Lewis are behind them.

KING (V/O)  
Clark doesn't control the streets like Connor did. Clark's the County Sheriff and all he controls in Selma is the County Courthouse. So relatively speaking, we have clear avenues of approach to a defined battle-zone. In the courthouse sits the heart of the matter...

From KING'S POV, we pick out a building in the distance.

KING (V/O) (CONT'D)  
... the voter registration office. Now this is an exceptional circumstance. In Albany, there was no clearly-defined battle-zone. The issue was segregation, and segregation was everywhere. In Selma, we can concentrate all our action on one building. A citadel -

EXT. COURTHOUSE. DAY

CLOSE-UP on the single word 'NEVER!' on a lapel badge.

KING (V/O)  
- defended by fanatics.

We PULL BACK to see the badge is worn by a man impersonating General Patton. The large man wearing a white combat helmet, tight-fitting military-style uniform, a six-shooter and carrying a club is SHERIFF JIM CLARK - dressed for war. Clark stands atop the courthouse steps flanked by a line of DEPUTIES with billy guns and clubs drawn.

KING (V/O) (CONT'D)  
Selma Courthouse. A perfect stage.

CLOSE-UP of Clark: outrage and aggression as he eyes with fierce hostility a group of journalists, slowly walking in single file, reluctantly protected by city policemen.

Across the street is a group of POSSEMEN. A motley vigilante crew, bearing nothing more official than crudely made pin-badges stating 'Sheriff's Posse.'

They are even more heavily-armed than the deputies and carry a strikingly varied assortment of side-arms, home-made clubs and electric cattle-prods.

To jeers and abuse from RACIST ONLOOKERS, King and the Marchers line up at the foot of the courthouse steps.

King looks up at Sheriff Clark, who stares down at him from the top stair.

CLARK  
You all deliberately causin' an obstruction! If you don't disperse, you'll be arrested! I promise you!

KING  
Sheriff Clark, we're trying to gain access to the registration office. Which is our legal right.

From the other side of the street, TWO YOUNG REDNECKS walk across the road, stop in front of Amelia Boynton, spit on her and march off. Amelia takes out a handkerchief and wipes the saliva from her coat.

CLARK  
There's too many of you and you know damn well there is! You're going to have to wait at the rear!

KING  
No, Sheriff Clark. We're going in the front and we're waiting right here. Segregation is now illegal in this country, sir.

CLOSE-UP of King: the hard stare of a prize-fighter.

CLOSE-UP of Clark: his anger and frustration at a new pitch.

Clark and King stare at each other for a long moment. Then Clark starts moving along a line of marchers outside the courthouse to get to King, jabbing people with his stick, elbowing and shoving them against the wall.

The deputies move in on the marchers, clubs raised, hoping for resistance, but are confounded by an orderly process. VOLUNTEER ARRESTEES, including Bevel, Orange and Williams, sit on the ground with their hands over their heads.

This upsets Clark even more and he continues to poke and shove when he comes to old Cager, daughter Viola and grandson Jimmie, who we saw in the church. The tiny family is trying to help elderly Cager sit down like the other demonstrators.

CLARK

Keep the sidewalk clear! Get over there! You! Over against the wall!

JIMMIE

Sheriff, ain't nowhere to go. He's tryin' to sit. You askin' him to walk through walls. He can't do that.

CLARK

Then he better learn!

Clark shoves Cager and he falls on Annie Lee Cooper, who we also saw in church. She is smashed hard against the concrete.

CLOSE on Annie, angry. But Clark doesn't register this. He's now focused on Jimmie who has stepped between Clark and Cager. Clark pushes his stick into Jimmie's chest.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Well, what we got here? You got a problem, boy?

Jimmie stares at Clark.

CAGER

Son, no! He ain't worth that.

Clark jabs Jimmie.

CLARK

So what you think, boy?

Clark sneers and gives another sharp prod.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Come on, boy. I'm worth it.



Jimmie balls his fists at his sides and takes a step forward. Clark raises his club to strike Jimmie, when - BANG!

Clark is KNOCKED SIDEWAYS. Annie Lee Cooper has gotten to her feet and PUNCHED him. The punch connects with surprising force, catching Clark under the eye and knocking him down, his helmet clattering loose onto the road.

King, the journalists, the deputies and marchers alike, all watch in STUNNED SILENCE as Clark gets to his knees - and Annie steps forward and WACKS HIM AGAIN. Clark falls onto his side and Annie moves in for another blow, but two deputies are behind her now. They WRESTLE HER VIOLENTLY to the ground.

Additional officers hold back King and his men.

Sheriff Clark, now on his feet, stands over Annie who is being held down. Clark STRADDLES her, swinging his billy club up to strike her. Then, bringing it down with a LOUD CRACK on Annie's skull.

The image FREEZES in a camera-flash from Spider's camera.

CLOSE-UP on King as horror and disgust turn to steely resignation amidst flashbulbs. PHOTOGRAPHERS surge toward the awful scene. This is drama. And he asked for it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - VARIOUS MORNING

President Johnson is eating breakfast, alone. An aide enters carrying several newspapers.

AIDE

Good morning, Mr. President.

JOHNSON

Mornin'.

The aide places the newspapers on the table and goes. As he eats, Johnson stares at the New York Times.

On the front page is the SENSATIONAL PHOTOGRAPH: Clark astride Annie, holding his club in both hands and driving it down onto her head as three deputies hold her down. Johnson groans.

MONTAGE as Selma reports greet Johnson on VARIOUS MORNINGS:

- He reads a headline of 200 senior citizens being arrested.
- He watches a TV report showing Sheriff Clark punching C.T. VIVIAN in the mouth as the preacher attempts to register.

- Another newspaper headline with King railing against the arrest of 300 juvenile marchers who were abused and arrested.

- A TV report highlighting the fact that for the first time ever, esteemed teachers marched en masse. We see them walk with pride to cheers, led by the local REV. FREDERICK REESE.

- Johnson watches HIMSELF on television from the day before stating that the government will use the tools of the 1964 Civil Rights Acts to enforce voting and that no new legislation is in play at this time.

- The same report highlights Alabama Governor GEORGE WALLACE - short, intense, stocky - railing against King as an "outside agitator."

- A photograph showing ORANGE being whipped with a lash by local whites as he tries to deliver water to the marchers in line at the courthouse.

- A TV report with Selma Mayor JIM SMITHERMEN at a press conference referring to "Martin Luther Coon."

- A headline that BEVEL was hospitalized after being beaten in jail and left naked near an open window overnight.

Johnson slams the table in frustration and grabs the phone.

MONTAGE ENDS

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE-UP of an ageing J. EDGAR HOOVER. Hoover stands in front of Johnson, who sits behind his desk. They are watched from the sidelines by Lee White.

JOHNSON

What's the FBI's current info regarding Martin Luther King?

HOOVER

My information can be summed up in a few words. King is a political and moral degenerate.

JOHNSON

J. Edgar you say that, so that's something I have to take seriously. Whether King writes love-letters to Kruschev or whether he'd like to drop an atomic bomb on Moscow, I can't be sure.

(MORE)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

And whether he has a woman in every town or a man, again I don't really know. But if King's a degenerate, what I do know is - he's a non-violent degenerate. And I want him to go on leading the civil rights movement - not one of those blood thirsty militants. So what I need to know right now is, what's he about to do next?

HOOVER

We've picked up communication that he's going to be inciting an arrest for himself within a few days by refusing to stand in a single-file line at the courthouse. Get himself some more press.

JOHNSON

Well, fuck me. This circus just keeps getting bigger and bigger. Bastard's got every bleeding heart callin', telegramin', writin'. He's trying to back me into a corner on this thing. It's overshadowing everything else!

HOOVER

Mr. President, you know we have intel that shuts men with power down permanently and unequivocally.

The look that passes between them is heavy with irony. We can only wonder what Hoover has on Johnson.

JOHNSON

(terse, eye trained)

I'm very aware, Mister Director.

Hoover breaks the stare.

HOOVER

If you'd prefer a different approach...

(off Johnson's interest)

We can go with the wife. We know there's tension in the home already. We can weaken the dynamic. Dismantle the family.

Off Johnson, deep in thought.

EXT. SELMA JAIL - NIGHT

WIDE on heavy rain and strong wind battering trees and shrubbery outside of the local jailhouse. It is late and slightly eerie as the camera draws closer and closer until we come to an OPEN DOOR at the side of the building. Oddly, open. This is a jail afterall.

INT. SELMA JAIL, WOMEN'S CELL - NIGHT

AMELIA BOYNTON sits in a large cell huddled with a group of WOMEN MARCHERS, shivering next to a door deliberately left open to the cold night air.

A FEMALE MARCHER, deeply embarrassed, close to tears, suddenly hitches up her skirt and squats down.

FEMALE MARCHER  
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

INT. SELMA JAIL CELL, MEN'S CELL - SAME TIME

From through the bars, we hear the women weeping. The men are in pain too, clustered together shoulder-to-shoulder.

KING and ABERNATHY sit side-by-side on a bunk.

ABERNATHY  
Johnson'll flinch.

KING  
Tired, Ralphy. Tiring of this.

ABERNATHY  
Eyes on the prize, Marty.

KING  
What's the prize?

Looking out on the jailed men, the old friends speak in hushed tones.

KING (CONT'D)  
How does it help a black man to be able to eat at a lunch counter, if he doesn't earn enough to buy the burger or can't even read the menu 'cause there was no Negro school where he's from? Is that equality?

ABERNATHY  
Amen.

KING

And what about equality in the black psyche? Look at these men. Beaten and broken down for generations. What happens when one stands up, says enough is enough?

ABERNATHY

The leaders get struck down.

KING

Look at Medgar. Murdered the man in his own driveway. Kids and wife right there inside the house.

ABERNATHY

George and Hebert Lee, Lamar Smith.

KING

A man stands up, only to be struck down, and what happens to the people he led?

(a beat)

What are we doing, Ralphy?

ABERNATHY

We take it piece by piece. Like we been doin'. We build the path as we can. Rock by rock.

KING

(distracted)

This bunk is probably bugged. They're going to ruin me - so they can ruin this movement. They are.

ABERNATHY

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"

KING

Matthew 6:27, yessir.

(closes his eyes)

Yessir.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL - EVENING

We see BEVEL, WILLIAMS and ORANGE from King's SCLC and the young LEWIS of SNCC huddle in conference outside of the church. Something is wrong. Urgently wrong.

BEVEL

Where'd you hear that?

ORANGE

I overheard them talking about him coming this evening.

Orange is motioning to Lewis, who is taken aback.

LEWIS

Heard us? I'm learning about this just like you. We didn't do this.

WILLIAMS

That Negro cannot be talking all that "by any means necessary" madness to these people. They 'bout ready to bust as it is. These people pick up their guns and start shooting white folk, National Guard'll be here firing on us so quick we won't realize it til they lower us into the ground. We gotta plan goin'. For real progress.

BEVEL

Well, he's on his way. So we gotta figure this out. Right and fast.

ORANGE

(looking beyond the men)  
He ain't on his way.  
(off their confusion)  
He's here.

They all turn to find a tall, fair-skinned black man approaching. He is flanked by an aide. As the man comes closer, the faces of the movement leaders change.

BEVEL

Holy shit.

The man reaches them and takes off his hat.

MAN

Evening, brothers. I'm looking for Mr. James Forman of SNCC.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Malcolm, welcome!

To the leaders' surprise, JAMES FORMAN walks out of the chapel and vigorously shakes hands with MALCOLM X. The men, including Forman's own comrade Lewis, look on in disbelief.

FORMAN  
Gentlemen, this is Malcolm X. I invited him to come speak to the people.

MALCOLM  
(shaking all hands)  
Actually, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.

FORMAN  
Yessir. Well, we welcome you.

As Forman takes MALCOLM X inside, Williams turns to Lewis.

WILLIAMS  
What are you boys trying to do?

LEWIS  
(upset)  
I didn't know about this.

WILLIAMS  
What are you trying to pull, Lewis?

LEWIS  
I didn't know, and I don't like it.

Bevel, quiet until now, sparks a little as an idea emerges.

BEVEL  
Orange, go get Diane. Ask her to bring Coretta here.

ORANGE  
Mrs. King, Coretta? That Coretta?

BEVEL  
She's in town while Doc's in jail. We'll ask her to ask our Muslim party-crasher here not to speak. Out of respect for her husband being in jail at the moment and all. It'll be hard from him to tell her no. Right?

EXT. AMELIA BOYNTON RESIDENCE - EVENING

Diane Nash knocks on the front door. The local leader AMELIA BOYTON answers, then Coretta appears behind her.

CLOSE ON Coretta. Her face contorts in fear.

Diane immediately raises her hands in understanding.

NASH

No, no. He's okay. He's fine.

CORETTA

(gathering herself)

What's going on then, Di?

NASH

We need your help.

INT. CAR - LATER

Nash drives Coretta, now smartly dressed for an appearance.

CORETTA

If they sent you, it's serious.

NASH

Well, I think they're taking this a bit more seriously than it is. But, wouldn't be the first-time I disagree with the boys.

CORETTA

(a beat)

I admire you. I do. I wish I were more out there. In the trenches.

NASH

You do more than you know, Mrs. King.

CORETTA

Martin often speaks of that night after the bombing, the girls. Says you gave him a lot to think about.

NASH

Yeah?

(a thoughtful beat)

You know, I don't know how many arrests. How many times spat on and pushed. Hair yanked. Punched and slapped. Lost count.

(MORE)



NASH (CONT'D)

But nothing ever made me want to hurt someone like those four little girls laying in the rubble. I cried and cried. That night, Bevel and I decided to do one of two things. Either, kill the bombers ourselves...

In shock, Coretta slowly turns her eyes from the road ahead to this outspoken young woman by her side.

NASH (CONT'D)

... or drive dishonorable Governor George Wallace - who *let* it happen, *encouraged* it even - drive that bastard out of office.

Coretta raises her eyebrows. Nash wonders if she's said too much to the reserved First Lady of the movement. A tense beat. Then...

CORETTA

(chuckling)

Girl, you are something else!

NASH

(joining in)

Doc might talk about it kindly now but at the time, he didn't respond all that well.

CORETTA

To the killin option'?!

NASH

No! I kept that one to myself! I ain't crazy. To the Voting Project. I had a whole plan I presented to him. A trained nonviolent army that would surround Wallace's offices in Montgomery and sever communication from the state capitol building. Lay our bodies on railroad tracks. Close down the power company. A protracted sit-in on the scale of the March on Washington.

Coretta listens, enthralled.

NASH (CONT'D)

It was too aggressive for Doc. I knew it, but I was just... so mad.

(beat)

(MORE)

NASH (CONT'D)

So, Bevel and I came here to Selma and started some legwork with the locals. And Doc eventually came on board when the community raised their voices. All I know is... things are happening now. And I'm glad for it.

CORETTA

Yes. Yes, I'm glad too.

Off these two very different women, driving on side-by-side.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL MEETING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

A cluster of SCLC leaders - BEVEL, NASH, WILLIAMS, ORANGE - watch the spectacle before them, wide-eyed. CORETTA SCOTT KING speaking intensely with MALCOLM X in a corner.

MALCOLM

I mean no disrespect. I come with great respect for your husband, Mrs. King.

CORETTA

You've said disrespectful things in the past, Minister. So you'll understand why there is some alarm here tonight.

MALCOLM

I do. I understand that. Your husband and I, we do not see exactly eye to eye on how to achieve progress for the Black man. And yes, I've been piercing in my critiques of non-violence. But because we don't agree does not mean I'm the enemy.

CORETTA

What do you intend to say to these people then, sir? A lot of work has been done here. I don't intend to see it undone tonight.

MALCOLM

Mrs. King, I have recently traveled to Mecca, the Holy Land. And I've learned more than I ever previously knew. During the Hajj, several million people of different nationalities worship in unison.

(MORE)

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Let's just say, my eyes see in a new way. But your local Sheriff here? He doesn't know that. So allow me to be the alternative to your husband. The alternative that scares them so much they turn to Dr. King in refuge. Let my being here represent the factions that *will* come if they don't give the good Reverend what he's asking for - and soon.

CORETTA

If what you're saying is true, I'm not opposed to you speaking here tonight. Am I to take this as truth? Are you sincere, Minister?

MALCOLM

I have no army behind me anymore. I have myself and the truth. That's all I stand on today. And I hope it is enough for you, sister.

Off Coretta, convinced.

INT. SELMA JAIL CELL - DAY

Separated by bars, CORETTA stands outside of KING's cell. She's face to face with her husband as a WHITE JAILER occasionally looks on from several feet away.

CORETTA

He spoke well but with less... um, fire, I guess is the word. It seemed to be just as he said. His intention wasn't to...

KING

What did he say again? Exactly this time if you can recall please. This is important.

He's trying to hide his irritation. But she knows him.

CORETTA

He talked about petitioning the United Nations for human rights violations if we didn't get what we are asking for. He talked about the field Negro and the house Negro and...

KING

I wonder which one I am in his scenario? Not hard to figure out.

CORETTA

It wasn't like that this time.

KING

Do you know what he's said about us in the past, Coretta? He's called us "ignorant Negro preachers." He's called me a "modern day Uncle Tom." Said on national television that the white man pays me to keep Negroes defenseless. The white man pays me! How could you allow it?

CORETTA

It wasn't like that, Martin. I'm telling you he spoke with some of the words he's used before but it wasn't aimed at you. It was... it had more to do with helping us.

KING

Helping us. Okay.

CORETTA

Not that you need his help, I'm just telling you how it was.

KING

This movement, our movement has been the one that's moved the needle. Our movement changes laws and day to day life for our people. We lay down *our* lives against those dogs and those bombers and those billy clubs. While people like him, talk and shout about it. But what has he changed? Actually changed.

CORETTA

You don't sound like yourself. You sound tired.

KING

And you sound enamored.

She reacts, shocked. As soon as he says it, he regrets it. He reaches through the opening, pulling her to him by her waist.

KING (CONT'D)

I didn't mean that. I just don't want this, all our momentum, to be in jeopardy - with the people, with the President - because of some violent rhetoric that ain't ever gonna happen. I'm disappointed that he was invited here. I'm upset that you were pulled into it. I... I'm... I'm tired... You're right.

Exhaling, he leans his head against the bars. She looks at him with concern. Pity even. Then, leans her head too. Faces close. Bodies close.

CORETTA

Rest then. Rest tonight, Martin.

A long, resistant beat. Then, a reluctant nod.

EXT/INT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

The center of Montgomery. Sunny and pleasant. The buildings display civic pride. We look up at the imposing state capitol.

GOVERNOR GEORGE WALLACE stands in the middle of his wood-paneled office, smoking hard. Pacing in front of COLONEL AL LINGO, 50ish and the commander of the Alabama State Troopers.

WALLACE

(in a quiet rage)

This is NOT what I want to hear. How in fuck's sake does Malcolm X slip into MY state, meet with the wife of the other one, and make an ACTUAL SPEECH to these nigras who are already riled up enough? How does that happen, Colonel Lingo?

LINGO

Governor...

WALLACE

Is every spook militant in existence gonna pay us a visit? Huh? Do you know what this means? Johnson's gonna get jumpy. King and X together is sending him through the cotton pickin' stratosphere. And pictures of nigras getting beat in the street doesn't help the matter!

LINGO

Governor...

WALLACE

Now I can't make a move against that backwoods, white trash Sheriff Clark 'cause it'll be seen as I'm helping King. But someone got to get Jim Clark under control. Election year's coming up and this black voting business won't abide. He's got to start giving them nigras access to the courthouse. Let 'em fill in a few applications. Treat King with kid gloves. Like they did in Albany. And pretty soon the whole damn rodeo'll leave town. It's that simple. I mean, what's not clear about that?

LINGO

Jim Clark just don't like to see niggers in his courthouse. It's that simple, Governor.

WALLACE

Jesus H. Christ. Will Clark listen to you directly?

LINGO

Not a chance.

Wallace obliterates his cigarette on an ashtray.

WALLACE

Goddamit Lingo, you telling me I gotta go down there and sweet-talk that crazy bastard myself?

LINGO

George, I'm telling you if the Lord Jesus and Elvis Presley came visiting and they said, 'Jim, we want you to treat them niggers nice', Jim Clark would beat the shit out the pair of 'em, then throw 'em in jail.

A beat of disbelief.

WALLACE

Jesus H. Christ.

LINGO

Look, Jim Clark's a good old boy  
and a friend of mine - but Jim  
Clark just ain't that scary. He's  
playing into their hands. Now, if  
you want to get a handle on this?

WALLACE

Go on.

LINGO

Find a reason to send some of my  
troopers in there. See what Jim  
don't understand is this is about  
dominance. He puts 'em in jail. But  
King's lawyers get 'em out in a day  
or so. Then they go home feeling  
good. Tell their kin they saw  
action. Now, if you want fear, you  
need dominance in Selma. Find a  
reason to send us in there, scare  
some real sense into those fuckers.

Wallace is all ears.

LINGO (CONT'D)

Hoover picked up some intel about a  
night march. Wasn't announced. It's  
some locals outside of King's  
group. Unofficial, they call it.  
Supposed to happen tomorrow night  
once King leaves jail. He bailed  
himself out to go to some bleeding  
heart fundraiser in California.

A thought strikes Wallace. He's putting it all together.

WALLACE

King's out of town? Fewer cameras.  
And at night.

Lingo nods.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A poorly-lit side street. STATE TROOPERS have penned a group  
of JOURNALISTS and PHOTOGRAPHERS against the wall. From the  
end of the street come SHRIEKS OF FEAR AND PANIC. Journalists  
strain to see what's happening.

ROY REED

(to a trooper)  
You can't do this!

SPIDER

What's happening down there? I need  
to get down there!

The troopers are a stark contrast to Clark's possemen and even his deputies. More disciplined, cold, formidable, scary.  
CLOSE-UP: A trooper slips a KNUCKLE-DUSTER onto his hand.

Suddenly - THE STREETLIGHTS SWITCH OFF.

It's what the troopers have been waiting for. They launch into the journalists and photographers - clubbing, punching and stomping. Every camera is seized and smashed to pieces.

EXT. STREET - SAME TIME

TROOPERS chase a small group of MARCHERS along a street.

We pick out old CAGER LEE, his daughter VIOLA and grandson JIMMIE LEE JACKSON trying to run. They catch the attention of a trooper, who focuses on them, giving chase. Others follow.

INT. MACK'S CAFE - CONTINUOUS

A quiet little soul-food café. All black patrons. A few CUSTOMERS talk, eat and drink coffee in a subdued atmosphere. There's a jukebox playing John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme."

Suddenly, the door CRASHES open. Jimmie and Viola drag Cager, depleted and limp, into the café. Customers stare at the out-of-breath threesome.

Then, TROOPERS burst in. One strikes Cager; Viola tries to protect her father. Another turns on her. Jimmie lunges at him. A third trooper clubs Jimmie then hurls him at the wall.

The trooper who was battering Viola takes out his gun and calmly SHOTS Jimmie twice in the stomach.

A moment of stillness - before Viola screams and the troopers rampage out of the café. Jimmie slumps to the floor.

VIOLA

Jimmie! Jimmie!

Coltrane's horn wails too.

INT. CITY MORGUE - DAY

KING walks down a sterile white hallway with a passionate JAMES BEVEL.



BEVEL

We have to be aggressive! I say we lay Jimmie Lee's body at George Wallace's door is Montgomery! It's no time to be soft, Doc!

King stops in his tracks and glares at Bevel. That word - "soft" - does NOT sit well. But just then, CAGER LEE slowly emerges from the exam room.

BEVEL (CONT'D)

(quietly)

That's Cager Lee. That's the grandfather.

King drops his head. A moment to gather himself. Then, he tentatively makes his way to the old man.

KING

Sir.

CAGER

Dr. King?

KING

There aren't words to soothe you, Mr. Lee. There are no words. But I can tell you one thing for certain. God was the first to cry. He was the first to cry for your boy.

CAGER

Yessir. I believe that.

BEVEL

Is your daughter... is Jimmie's mother here with you, Mr. Lee?

CAGER

She couldn't...

KING

May I ask your age, sir?

CAGER

I got 82 years. 1883. Jimmie born '38. He an Army man. Was an army man. In the Army for a spell. Say, "Pa, you gonna vote before you done." That's what Jimmie say. We been tryin' to register 'fore you came. Five times before. I studied it. He took me. A good boy. Always good. The man just...

He makes a gun with his gnarled hand and presses it to King's stomach.

CAGER (CONT'D)  
 ... just shot him right here like  
 this. Two times. Right like this  
 here. Then, Jimmie gone. He gone.

King can't move. Silent tears stream down the faces of all three men.

Then, slowly, he clasps the old man's hand in his. Any reserve, any distance King has held to prevent himself from becoming fully entrenched in Selma and its people vanishes. He's in it now. Deep.

And, beyond the exam room door that Cager came from, we see JIMMIE'S BODY. On a steel table. A strong build. Now awaiting a coffin.

KING (V/O)  
 Who murdered Jimmie Lee Jackson?

INT. BROWN'S CHAPEL - DAY

CLOSE-UP of King, enraged. Jimmie's open casket before him.

KING  
 Who murdered Jimmie Lee Jackson?!

A church packed with MOURNERS. Cager and Viola in the front.

KING (CONT'D)  
 We know a state trooper acting  
 under orders of George Wallace  
 pointed the gun and pulled the  
 trigger! But how many other people  
 had a finger on that trigger?! I'll  
 tell you! Every white preacher who  
 preaches the bible, but stays  
 silent before his white  
 congregation! Every white  
 politician who feeds on hatred and  
 prejudice! Every white lawman who  
 abuses the law to terrorize! And  
 every Negro man and woman who  
 stands by without joining this  
 fight as their brothers and sisters  
 are humiliated, brutalized and  
 ripped from this earth!

This ripples through the congregation.

KING (CONT'D)

(quieter)

When I heard President Kennedy had been shot and killed... And when I heard just yesterday that Malcolm X, who stood in this very church just three weeks ago, had been shot and killed... I turned to my wife Coretta and said the same thing I often say when one of our leaders is struck down, "If we haven't found something worth dying for, we're not fit to live."

King looks down at the casket.

KING (CONT'D)

But today, we're doing the living, Jimmie, and you've done the dying.

Cries among the gathered. We see CORETTA, with soft tears.

KING (CONT'D)

We *will not* let your sacrifice pass in vain, dear brother. We *will not* let it go! We will finish what you were after! We will get what you were denied! We will vote and we will put these men out of office! We will take their power! We will win what you were slaughtered for!

The crowd answers back in determined agreement.

KING (CONT'D)

We're going back to Washington! We're going to demand to see the President! And I'm going to tell him: Jimmie was murdered by an administration that spends millions of dollars every day, to sacrifice life in the name of liberty, in Vietnam! Yet lacks the moral will and the moral courage to defend the lives of its own people! We will not let it go! And if he does not act? We will act! We will act! We will do it for all our lost ones! All those who have gone too soon, taken by hate!

A roar of support rises from the people. JOURNALISTS scribble furiously, some already hurrying out to get to a phone.

INT. JACKSON HOME - SAME MORNING

RICHIE JEAN shuttles sandwiches into her crowded living room. All of King's comrades are there.

Voices are loud and urgent, often overlapping, as each tries to convince the others and make their point.

YOUNG

We need a new plan! Doc can't waltz into LBJ with a list of empty demands. Johnson still has no real intention of moving forward with voting laws. If we're not even to the starting point with him, how we look talking about the finish line?

BEVEL

(at the top of his voice)  
Because we need to dictate this conversation, Andy! Tell them what we want in no uncertain terms!

WILLIAMS

Or else, they'll try back-peddling!

ABERNATHY

Look! Maybe we compromise. We pick two or three issues for Marty to demand. Get things started.

NASH

Wait. Think this through. He goes in there with just two or three things and we diminish the negotiation before we even start it. Better to engage Johnson with all our grievances and let *him* whittle it down. Because you know they *always* whittle it down.

ABERNATHY

It's always all or nothing with you, darlin'. We need finesse here.

BEVEL

Ralph, don't patronize her. Listen for a change, man!

ABERNATHY

I'm listenin' to a lot of hot air that's what I'm listenin' to!

KING

C'mon now. Focus. Please! Let me hear on the top-tier elements that should be in any legislation we want passed. Let's get specific.

The group settles down. A few moments of all in deep thought.

ORANGE

Banning laws that if a Negro tries to register, their name and address is published in the paper. It gives anyone who wants to do them harm, their exact location and....

Williams rises to his feet at full volume, sparking the cross-talk and interruptions again.

WILLIAMS

.... C'mon, the poll tax has got to be our focus! Blacks are dead broke, but expected to pay for every year they weren't legally registered before they can register. What the hell is that?

ABERNATHY

I agree with that. If you do ever actually register to vote, let's say at the age of 30, you gotta pay back taxes going back to age 18, before you can cast a vote.

WILLIAMS

Who has that kind of money?

More ideas and loud voices. King looks on, taking it all in.

BEVEL

I hear you! I hear you! But the real issue is the literacy exam! The average person can't pass it. And if you can, it don't matter, when the local registrar can flunk you for missing a damn comma.

VIVIAN

Listen! I think the big issue is voting vouchers. C'mon, listen! Everybody forgets this part. That if you're Negro, you can only vote if an approved registered voter *vouches* for you. So in Lowndes County for instance...

NASH

Where not one single Negro has successfully registered to vote in the 20th century, by the way.

VIVIAN

Exactly! If you live in a place like Lowndes County where no Negroes are registered and you've got to have somebody who *is* registered to vouch for you, who do you go to? No one you know - not one Black person for tens of miles - is registered. How do you get the voucher... to get you in the courthouse door... to take the literacy test... to pay the poll tax... to get your name published and get yourself dead?

KING takes a deep breath, then looks to Young. So much to do.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

CLOSE-UP of Johnson, furious. LEE WHITE is with him.

JOHNSON

*No one* invites *themselves* to the White House!

He's so enraged he needs a few moments to get a grip.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

Well, let him come! I ain't seeing him! I'm done talking to King!

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

JOHNSON and KING are alone. They're both standing. Close.

JOHNSON

(challenging)  
So what's your next move?

KING

A march from Selma to Montgomery. To protest and amplify. On Monday.

Johnson's jaw drops.

JOHNSON

Selma to Montgomery. Well, I'll be damned.

(MORE)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

This was always the plan, wasn't it? Wait 'til you provoked some tragedy in lil' ol' Selma then go big. Get someone killed then go marching to the state capitol!

That hurts, but King maintains an unflinching silence.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

Selma to Montgomery must be fifty miles! You march those people out into rural Alabama unprotected and it'll be open season. It's too fuckin' far and too fuckin' dangerous!

A strategic beat.

KING

Then, propose legislation, sir.

For a moment, the cool matter-of-factness of this hugely significant demand takes Johnson's breath away.

JOHNSON

*I can't do that this year! I won't do it! I told you. I already got one war! I'll be damned if I'll start another over state law!*

KING

Eligibility to vote in the United States is determined by both federal *and* state law.

JOHNSON

I already lost the South for you people. You *want* George Wallace to be the next President of the United States?! That's where you're headed by pushing this!

KING

By enabling Negroes to vote without fear you make *certain* that George Wallace will *never* be the next President of the United States.

(rising intensity)

We need your involvement here, Mr. President. We deserve your help as citizens of this country under attack. And if you won't offer it...

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

Well if you won't offer it, I'm going to have to demand it. Publicly. In every way I know how.

Stung, infuriated, Johnson comes out of his corner. So close they make physical contact. Johnson stares down at King.

JOHNSON

You listen to me good. You're an activist, I'm a politician. You got one big issue. I got a hundred and one. Now, you demanding more, you putting me on the spot with this visit, okay. That's your job, that's what you do. But, I'm sick and tired of you demandin' and telling me what I can do and what I can't. Now, you want support from me on this voting thing, I need some quid pro quo from you.

Eye to eye.

KING

What do you want, Mr. President?

JOHNSON

I announce a special commission to investigate electoral abuses in the South, stating specifically it's being set up in response to the Selma campaign. And you respond by declaring the Selma campaign a major victory - exactly what it would be - and then you announce its conclusion.

Brief silence.

KING

Our campaign plan does not include a special commission as one of its objectives. And certainly not as its final objective.

JOHNSON

Meet me halfway on this, Martin.

KING

I can't do that, Mister President.

JOHNSON

Can't? Or won't?



KING

I came here prepared to talk to you about people. People are *dying in the street* for this. Punished for wanting, for *needing*, to participate in the American political process. It *cannot* wait, sir. I came here hoping to have a true collaborative conversation with you. And, respectfully, Mr. President, if you're not ready to have it now, then I'll leave as I came. But the conversation *will* be had. If not here? Out there.

Johnson stares at King. King stares at Johnson.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITTING ROOM - SAME TIME

LEE WHITE enters to find Andrew Young, waiting.

WHITE

Andy.

YOUNG

Lee.

WHITE

(sitting)

I'm told they're just finishing up. Was hoping for a word though. Where is Dr. King off to after DC?

YOUNG

Back in Atlanta. Home for a day, then back to Selma Sunday. The details of his return is what he's speaking to the President about right now.

WHITE

He should stay home a bit longer. Can you have him in Atlanta longer?

YOUNG

That's not going to happen.

WHITE

Andy, we've got a line on threats that are particularly troubling.

YOUNG

What's new?

WHITE

No, no. These are particularly troubling. It's serious, Andy. Credible threats - with detail.

YOUNG

Okay, well.. if you've got such detail, why can't you shut it down?

WHITE

We can, I think. But we need time.

YOUNG

This information coming through the FBI, I assume? High-level?

White nods.

YOUNG (CONT'D)

The same high-level that's been tracking us like animals, bugging our homes and hotel rooms? Digging for things that aren't there, Lee?  
(off Lee's regret)  
Listen, this feels very convenient.

WHITE

Threats are always swirling around. We know this. But since Kennedy, there's been an increased level of outreach and intel on said threats. There are some things we can anticipate now that we never knew to look for previously. This is coming from Lowndes County, Alabama. Between Selma and Montgomery. This is real, Andy. I'm telling you, if he were my guy? I'd keep him off the frontlines. Just for awhile.

Off Young, taking this to heart.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

WHITE enters to find JOHNSON sitting at the Resolute Desk, his back to the door. But, we see his face. He is troubled.

WHITE

Mr. President. How'd it go?

No reply. A long, awkward silence. White shifts uncomfortably, concerned by the President's behavior.

WHITE (CONT'D)  
Mr. President?

Another beat, then...

JOHNSON  
Get me Edgar Hoover.

EXT/INT. KING RESIDENCE - NIGHT

It's late. A streetlamp glows through the King front window.

The neighborhood is quiet. Except for -- the SOUNDS OF SEX. We hear moans and groans with growing intensity.

We pull back to find King standing in his living room, listening in shock to a tape cassette deck unspooling on the coffee table.

Coretta is seated in an armchair near the window, looking out at nothing in particular. She's heard it already.

Suddenly, the SOUNDS END and a MALE VOICE begins to speak.

VOICE  
King, look into your heart. You know you are a complete fraud and a liability to all Negroes. You are evil. You could not believe in God. Like all frauds your end is approaching. You are done. Your degrees and your Nobel Prize, that grim farce, will not save you. The American public will soon know you for what you are - an evil, abnormal beast. There is only one thing left for you to do. Do it yourself before it's done to you.

King is stunned. Coretta continues to look out the window. He struggles to speak. What to address first? What to say?

KING  
That... that isn't me there.  
(beat)  
It isn't me, Corrie.

CORETTA  
(quietly)  
I know. I know what you sound like.

A long, painful beat.

CORETTA (CONT'D)

If I ask you something... will you answer me truthfully? No matter how difficult the answer?

(off his silence)

I deserve that.

KING

Yes. I'll answer.

She finally looks up from the window directly at him.

CORETTA

(measured)

I've gotten used to a lot. All the nights alone wondering after your safety, worried about how you are. This house. Renting here. No foundation. Without the things our children should have, all because of how it would look. We live below where we should be with our education and the hours and hours and hours that you work. We own nothing. Not a thing. But, I've become used to it. For better or worse.

He looks away, not able to withstand her gaze.

CORETTA (CONT'D)

But what I've never gotten used to is the death. The constant closeness of death. It's become like a thick fog to me. I can't see life sometimes because of the death constantly hanging over. People actually form their mouths, people actually say, they will stop the blood moving through the hearts of my children. One time that's what they said on the other end of that phone line. It's always something like that. For how many years now? How many years I've had to hear how they're going to kill our children. Hear what they say they'll do to you and how they'll do it. The filth. Deranged and twisted and just ignorant enough to be serious.

(beat)

This though? This is the worst of it. Because they're trying to get inside of this family.

(MORE)

CORETTA (CONT'D)

Inside of your head. Trying to get you to do it yourself? And I can't have that happen. So, whatever they thought this would do, it has failed. Do you hear me?

He nods.

CORETTA (CONT'D)

If I ask you something, you'll answer me with the truth?

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

Good. Because I'm not a fool.

She stands. They look eye to eye from across the room.

CORETTA (CONT'D)

Do you love me?

What? How could she ask that? How could she doubt that?

KING

Yes, Coretta. I love you.

Then.

CORETTA

Do you love any of the others?

It's as if he's been struck. The others. Did she say that?

All the oxygen leaves him. He is deflated. The anguish on his face doesn't break her resolve.

She stands, solid. Ready for the answer. Whatever it may be.

He gathers himself, pushing through the guilt.

KING

No.

Coretta takes this in. The acknowledgment of what she feared. There are others. The truth she needs to continue.

Off of this man and wife, standing on the edge of a marriage.

INT. KING HOME/JACKSON HOUSE - NIGHT

KING is at home on the phone to YOUNG and ABERNATHY, who are on two separate phones at the Jackson house. We INTERCUT.

KING

I need to put the march back a day.

ABERNATHY

Why?

KING

I have to be at home right now.

YOUNG

This is good. It's just fine. I'd rather you be home for the start of it anyhow. The real deal is the finale when we land in Montgomery.

Abernathy motions toward Young, confused by his response. What are you saying? Young ignores him.

YOUNG (CONT'D)

You join in along the way, make the big speech at the end. Unless you want Ralphy to give the big speech?

King plays along, offering a reluctant chuckle.

KING

Ralphy *says* he wanna give the big speech, but he'd start sweatin' fo' he hit the stage, trust me.

Abernathy takes the ribbing.

ABERNATHY

Man, I taught you everything you know, jack. You'd still be preaching *Boston University style* if I hadn't shown you how its done.

KING

Well, if you both think we'll be okay with a start without me...

YOUNG

Organization looks good. The mood is strong. The SNCC boys are ready to go. It'd be a mistake to hold people back when their blood is up.

Young is overselling. Abernathy mouths: "What are you *doing?*"

KING  
Any national TV there?

ABERNATHY  
An ABC camera crew and two  
reporters arrived this morning.

That's not a lot. Another moment in thought.

KING  
Okay, let's proceed. But only one  
of us walks to start. I don't want  
to get back Monday and find all my  
leadership in jail. Just one.

YOUNG  
Understood.

KING  
Let me know who you choose.

YOUNG  
Yes, indeed.

KING hangs up, walks through the house. He checks on his  
children, on Coretta. All are sleep.

He enters his office, pushes rewind on the TAPE RECORDER. He  
sinks into a chair to listen to the THREATENING VOICE again.

INT. WALLACE PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

CLOSE-UP of WALLACE - ready to fight to the death. He reads a  
statement to national journalists who have gathered.

WALLACE  
There will be no march from Selma  
to Montgomery. It is not conducive  
to traffic flow on Route 80 and to  
public safety. Such a march will  
not be tolerated whatsoever.

INT/EXT. BROWN CHAPEL MEETING ROOM - DAY

ABERNATHY, YOUNG, BEVEL, WILLIAMS, VIVIAN, ORANGE, NASH of  
SCLC and FORMAN and LEWIS of SNCC watch Wallace on TV.

WALLACE

(on television)

We will not tolerate a bunch of nigra agitators attempting to orchestrate a disturbance. Not as long as I'm Governor.

NASH

You won't be Governor for long.

VIVIAN

Amen to that!

ORANGE

You and ol' General Patton impersonatin' Jim Clark!

Loud amens all-around. So loud no one notices Forman motion for Lewis to step into the hall. They keep their voices low.

FORMAN

We shouldn't do this, man. This is not us. This is not SNCC. It's some bullshit. This is gonna do more for King and the SCLC than Selma.

LEWIS

I disagree. He's not even here. How's it gonna do more for him?

FORMAN

Why ain't he here then?!

LEWIS

You listening to yourself? First, it's gonna do more for him, now it's where is he? Do you want him here, or do you not want him here?

Tension courses through both men.

FORMAN

Honestly, I don't give a rat's ass about the man. That's *your* hero.

LEWIS

(beat)

You're far out, man. You're off base with this. All this damn nonsense ain't what SNCC is about.

FORMAN

No, *this* nonsense ain't what SNCC is about. The tide is turning.

(MORE)



FORMAN (CONT'D)

Away from King. There are other ways. We need to help *the people*, not this man's political aspirations.

LEWIS

Yes! The people! Did you see the people's faces at Jimmie's funeral? At those marches on the courthouse? They don't want it done for them. The people are ready to do for themselves and they have been. They're hurting! They're ready!

FORMAN

They need guidance. They need us! Don't make me the bad guy here.

LEWIS

I'm not!

FORMAN

Don't demonize me because I'm not holier than thou. Because I disagree with him!

LEWIS

You're the one playing me small. Like I'm a follower without a mind of my damn own!

LEWIS (CONT'D)

You're mad because they called him in. We were here first and they called him in. I get it. I felt it too. But if we are really and truly "for the people" and the people of Selma called *him* - then they have spoken. And if the people want to march, I'm marching with 'em.

FORMAN

(regretfully)

Then brother, you're marching as John Lewis. Not as part of SNCC. It's been voted on and decided. For this march, you're on your own with 'De Lawd' and his disciples.

With that, Forman turns and leaves Lewis shell-shocked.

Lewis walks slowly back into the room to find C.T. VIVIAN holding out four straws with NASH and ORANGE looking on.

YOUNG, ABERNATHY, WILLIAMS and BEVEL draw in turn. They all hold up their straws. WILLIAMS has the short one.

INT/EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS, TIMES

MONTAGE as the preparation for the march is underway over Martha and the Vandellas' hit "Nowhere To Run."

- A BLACK MOTHER pleads with her COLLEGE-AGED DAUGHTER not to march, fearing the danger. The young woman can't obey and joins her BOYFRIEND as she heads out the door.

- SHERIFF JIM CLARK holds court amidst a rag-tag group of WHITE LOCALS. Their pick-up trucks adorned with confederate flags. He is deputizing men who hold barb-wire wrapped bats.

- BLACK PROTESTORS, young and old, including the COLLEGE-AGED DAUGHTER, are trained in the CHURCH FOYER on techniques to best protect one's body from blows and the effects of tear gas.

- VIOLA LEE, Jimmie's mother, rocks in a chair on the front porch of RAMSHACKLED HOUSE. She's tuned out from the world.

- PRESIDENT JOHNSON is badgered by press at the White House, bombarding him with questions about King and voting rights.

- A dozen VOLUNTEER DOCTORS AND NURSES, black and white, land in a single-engine plane at an airstrip en route to Selma.

- ROY REED tries to interview a REDNECK who spits at him.

- KING and CORETTA eat dinner at the table with their happily unaware children. They work together to cover their tension.

- GEORGE WALLACE on the phone in his office with AL LINGO at the ARMY base as he watches troopers load into transport trucks.

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE, SELMA SIDE - DAY

It is a chilly March morning. Black men and women make up a silent regiment of MARCHERS, close-ranked and walking steadily toward the Pettus Bridge.

WHITE ONLOOKERS, mostly women, yell and scream insults. Spitting and cursing at the marchers who struggle to just look straight ahead and continue.

They're led by WILLIAMS and LEWIS, who keep on steady, focused step. They are vets who've done this before.

With swampy green water on either side, the formidable steel bridge rises before them in a dramatic arch, obscuring the far side - the Montgomery side. And what lies ahead.

As we watch this unfold, we hear a WHITE MALE VOICE describe the action we are witnessing in vivid detail.

V.O.

About 525 Negroes had left Brown Chapel and walked six blocks to cross Pettus Bridge and the Alabama River, where a cold wind cut at their faces and whipped their coats. They were young and old and they carried an assortment of packs, bedrolls and lunch sacks.

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE, MONTGOMERY SIDE - SAME TIME

We have a CLOSE VIEW on the necks and backs of a tight squad of STATE TROOPERS. They do not move.

V.O.

The troopers were waiting 300 yards beyond the end of the bridge.

From behind the troopers, we can see a small and distant line of heads - the front rank of the MARCHERS - beginning to rise above the bridge's crest.

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE, SELMA SIDE - SAME TIME

A CLOSE-UP of LEWIS, WILLIAMS and others in the front of the march line shows their dawning alarm.

We REVERSE ANGLE onto their POV. And finally see what they see...

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE, MONTGOMERY SIDE - SAME TIME

An army. Behind the small front-line TROOPERS are nearly 200 mingled TROOPERS, DEPUTIES and POSSEMEN. Some of them on horseback.

On either side in storefronts and empty fields are scores of WHITE SPECTATORS, parked up in cars, standing around in groups, some standing on car roofs or the backs of pick-ups. They wave Confederate flags, brandish clubs, hold banners saying 'Niggers, Go Home!' and 'Who Needs Niggers?'

V.O.

Behind the troopers were dozens of possemen, 15 of them on horses, and perhaps 100 white spectators.

We pick out the ABC NEWS REPORTER and CAMERA-CREW, tensing for action, sensing something significant is about to unfold.

A low growl of aggression and excitement rises from the white spectators as they see the MARCHERS. A small crowd of PRESS are penned away from the road by TROOPERS.

Nearby, are a handful of AMERICAN NAZIS, including the one who assaulted King in the hotel. They eye the journalists with hostility.

Beyond all this are TROOPER TRUCKS blocking off all four lanes of Route 80. AL LINGO leans on the hood of one them, arms folded. Next to him, on horseback, SHERIFF JIM CLARK.

Clark urges his horse forward to join his deputies. He nods to the POSSEMEN around him. One in particular is tightening the barbed wire around his club.

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE. DAY

LEWIS, WILLIAMS and the front rank of MARCHERS have taken in the extent of the forces confronting them. Williams looks nervously down into the muddy waters of the Alabama River, choppy in the wind. Struck by a thought, he turns to Lewis.

WILLIAMS

Can you swim?

LEWIS

No swimming pools for black folk where I come from.

WILLIAMS

Yeah.

The troopers are flanked shoulder-to-shoulder across both sides of the divided four-lane highway. They hold nightsticks at the ready while the marchers make their approach, walking two by two. Slowly and silently.

V.O.

The Marchers descended the slope towards the small army. TROOPERS, DEPUTIES and POSSEMEN formed into ranks. When the Negroes were 50 feet away, a voice came over an amplifying system commanding them to stop. They stopped.

A trooper comes through from the rear and hands the officer-in-charge, MAJOR CLOUD, a bullhorn.

We notice the troopers have GAS-MARKS and TEAR-GAS GRENADES hanging from their belts.

Lewis, Williams and the marchers halt a few yards from Cloud. Everything goes quiet. Cloud raises his bullhorn.

CLOUD

This is an unlawful assembly. You have two minutes to disperse.

Brief silence. Williams is surprised by the ultimatum.

WILLIAMS

(mutters to himself)

Two minutes...?

The troopers put on their gas-masks, becoming strikingly alien and sinister. Williams takes a step towards Cloud.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

May we have a word with the Major?

CLOUD

There is no word to be had.

The camera picks out AMELIA BOYNTON, ANNIE LEE COOPER, DR. SULLIVAN AND RICHIE JEAN JACKSON, COLLEGE-AGED DAUGHTER and HER BOYFRIEND and other familiar faces all waiting for the next move with mounting anxiety.

LEWIS

Major Cloud, may we speak with you?

CLOUD

Troopers! Advance!

The troopers advance at an aggressive RUN, smashing into the front rank of marchers, immediately creating a grotesque rag-doll domino-effect deep into the crowd.

Williams falls. Lewis is battered down. The troopers tear into the screaming throngs of black citizens, who cover their heads with their hands as instructed.

Two gun-shots: Cut to CLARK on horseback, pistol raised in the air. Clark and his possemen race forward with rebel yells. Horses ride into a low-lying fog of tear-gas. Masked troopers rear and strike like monsters from the deep. One of them smashes his stick down onto LEWIS as he tries to get up off the ground. AMELIA BOYNTON lies on the ground unconscious.

The WHITE MALE VOICE continues his description. And as he says it, we see it.

V.O.

The troopers rushed forward, their blue uniforms and white helmets blurring into a flying wedge as they moved. The first 10 or 20 Negroes were swept to the ground screaming, arms and legs flying and packs and bags went skittering across the grassy divider. Those still on their feet retreated. The troopers continued pushing, using both the force of their bodies and the prodding of their nightsticks. A cheer went up from the white spectators lining the south side of the highway. The mounted possemen spurred their horses and rode at a run into the retreating mass. The Negroes cried out as they crowded together for protection and the whites on the sideline whooped and cheered. Suddenly there was a sharp sound, like a gunshot, and a gray cloud spewed over the troopers and the Negroes. "Tear gas!" someone yelled. The cloud began covering the highway. Newsmen, who were confined by four troopers to a corner 100 yards away, began to lose sight of the action. But before the cloud finally hid it all there were several seconds of unobstructed view. Fifteen or twenty nightsticks could be seen through the gas flailing at the heads of the marchers.

We see the DOCTORS and NURSES watch in horror from the Selma side of the bridge as BLACK MARCHERS stream back across, running for their lives. Troopers and possemen, on horseback and on foot, give chase after them. Running them down with whips and cattle prods.

SEVERAL PEOPLE still lay on the grass strip where the troopers had knocked them down, including JOHN LEWIS and AMELIA BOYNTON. Two troopers order them to get up, but the injured cannot move.

The DOCTORS and NURSES make a move to go help, but are held back by Posseman. To their disbelief, a trooper drops a tear gas cannister near Amelia's limp body. Lewis, laying injured nearby, struggles to his feet, blinded and gasping, to pick Amelia up and drag her across the bridge.

All of the DOCTORS and NURSES are in tears of anger as they watch this unfold, still held back by jeering possemen, until the duo stumbles into their arms.

EXT. TELEPHONE BOOTH - DAY

We finally see the MALE VOICE who has narrated the terror. It is reporter ROY REED, breathlessly reading copy from his steno pad into a pay phone.

ROY REED

From the hospital came reports of victims suffering fractures of ribs, heads, arms and legs. Negro leader John Lewis was severely injured. His colleague Hosea Williams remarked...

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

We then see Williams outside of church amidst hundreds of marchers, ranging from the injured and to the outraged.

WILLIAMS

(indignant)

I fought in World War II and I want to tell you that the cold inhumanity of the German army was rivaled today by state troopers of Alabama.

EXT/INT. CAR - SAME TIME

A car whizzes by at maximum speed. CLOSE on a film canister, gripped by the ABC JOURNALIST. He's a passenger being driven beyond legal limits by his CAMERAMAN.

ABC JOURNALIST

Please don't get us killed before we get this on-air. This is gold right here in my hands. Gold!

EXT. KING RESIDENCE - DUSK

Coretta hands King his hat in a hurry. There is a tentative moment of understanding between them. Then, he crosses their yard to the car at a rushed pace with suitcase in hand.

SUPERIMPOSE: King Residence, Atlanta, GA. 7:20 pm. M. King  
departs home. C. King present and remains in family  
residence. LOGGED

INT. BROWN CHAPEL - SAME TIME

The interior of the church has been turned into a casualty station - gassed and beaten MARCHERS everywhere. The DOCTORS and NURSES we saw before tend to them.

Three very ANGRY MARCHERS appear in the entrance. They're looking for someone.

ANGRY MARCHER  
Gerry! Gerry! Come with us!

GERRY  
I can't walk!

ANGRY MARCHER  
We need your gun, man!

YOUNG overhears them and approaches quickly.

YOUNG  
Hey! What you need guns for?

ANGRY MARCHER  
Bible says an eye for an eye,  
Reverend. I'm sick of this shit!

YOUNG  
Yeah? You got any idea how many  
guns they got out there? That's an  
entire army out there. What you  
got? A couple of .32s? A .38 maybe?  
Couple of old scatter-guns? What?

ANGRY MARCHER  
Enough to kill a couple of them  
crackers, that's what we got!

YOUNG  
And how many of us you think  
they'll kill in retaliation? With  
their Colt automatics? Their 12-  
gauge pump-actions? Their  
Remingtons? Their helicopters!  
Their tanks!

A moment between Young and the Angry Marchers.



YOUNG (CONT'D)

We won't win that way. I ain't talking the Bible. I ain't talking what's right by God. I'm talking facts. Cold, hard facts. You take two of them, they take ten of us. We have to win another way.

These men are livid, but they hear him. He's talked them down off the ledge. This time.

We now see ABERNATHY who has watched the whole exchange on high alert. He crosses out the entryway and into an usher's chamber, where he dials the phone. We hear KING answer.

KING (O.S.)

Hello?

ABERNATHY

(burdened)

Marty.

EXT. AMELIA BOYNTON RESIDENCE - NIGHT

A phone is ringing. KING hovers over AMELIA who is seated in an arm-chair with her feet propped up, still weak from her beating on the bridge. He stands over her, handing her a cup of coffee. He places a comforting hand on her shoulder. Guilt-ridden and lost in his thoughts, figuring out the next move.

BEVEL, YOUNG, ABERNATHY, WILLIAMS, NASH, ORANGE, VIVIAN and LEWIS, whose head is bandaged, are also there. All are standing, pacing, drinking coffee in a collective daze.

The phone is still ringing. Finally, Young snaps out of it and answers.

YOUNG

Yes.

(listens)

Now? Yes.

Young, still on the phone, turns to the others.

YOUNG (CONT'D)

Turn on the television set! ABC!

Bevel turns on the TV, which remains blank as it warms up. Young listens to the person on the phone.

YOUNG (CONT'D)

(incredulous)

How many? Seventy?!

(MORE)

YOUNG (CONT'D)

(pause)

Yes. Yes. Okay, thank you.

ABERNATHY

What is it?

Young points at the screen as picture and sound gradually emerge. It's Spencer Tracy talking to a middle-aged couple in a scene from 'Judgement at Nuremburg.'

BEVEL

Um...

YOUNG

Keep watchin'.

The picture changes abruptly to an ANNOUNCER.

ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

We interrupt our feature *Judgement at Nuremburg* to bring sensational pictures of astonishing events from earlier today in Selma, Alabama.

We see a snippet of TELEVISION FOOTAGE of the bridge attack.

Everyone present stands close and around the television with King in the middle. The light of the transmission flickers across their faces.

King stares at the screen, staggered and appalled - he's been told what happened, but now he's seeing it with his own eyes.

YOUNG

Seventy million people are watching this, Marty.

King takes in this amazing fact.

INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - SAME TIME

A MONTAGE as we see a broad cross-section of Americans watch the TV. All are aghast, glued to the images.

- A group of WHITE BEATNIKS in a New York diner.

- A group of BLACK TEENS watch from beyond the glass of an electronics store window in Los Angeles.

- A DISTRAUGHT WHITE WIFE cries as she watches in her living room. Her husband holds her shoulders, consoling.

- MAHALIA JACKSON watches from a dressing room. She calls out to "Harry" and HARRY BELAFONTE enters. They watch in horror.
- A WHITE PREACHER and his wife stare on, moved beyond words.
- PRESIDENT JOHNSON curses at the TV to LADY BIRD'S dismay.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - SAME TIME

The television broadcast has reverted to 'Nuremburg.' King and the others stand there, still for a beat.

BEVEL

They just interrupted a film about fascist criminals to show a bunch of fascist criminals.

King is suddenly energized. Clear. Determined.

KING

To seventy million people. We got our hands 'round their throats.

The team watches him grow larger before their eyes.

KING (CONT'D)

We go back to the bridge. We're going to finish this, we promise you that, Ms. Amelia. We go again.

IXT. PRESS CONFERENCE - NEXT DAY

KING addresses a rabid group of JOURNALISTS, PHOTOGRAPHER and TELEVISION CAMERAS.

KING

In the vicious maltreatment of defenseless citizens of Selma, where old women and young adults were gassed and clubbed at random, we have witnessed an eruption of the disease of racism which is destroying all of America. No American is without responsibility and it is fitting that all Americans help bear this burden. I'm appealing to men and women of God and goodwill everywhere. White, black and otherwise! If you believe all are created equal, come to Selma! Join us!

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)  
 Join our march against injustice  
 and inhumanity! We need you to  
 stand with us!

The press clambers.

INT. REEB HOME - NIGHT

We see the WHITE PREACHER and his WIFE from the montage.  
 JAMES and MARIE REEB, 30s. They watch King on TELEVISION.

KING ON TV  
 Join our march against injustice  
 and inhumanity!

Reeb stands. Behind him are photos his four kids.

MARIE  
 What are you doing?

REEB  
 Packing.

MARIE  
 No. I'll pack. You book a flight.

They split up and get to work.

INT. LUIZZO HOME - NIGHT

In a less affluent home, the DISTRAUGHT WHITE WIFE is putting  
 things into a carry-all while her pleasant-looking, blue-  
 collar husband, ANTHONY, is on the phone. He puts his hand  
 over the mouthpiece and speaks to her, VIOLA LIUZZO, 30s.

ANTHONY  
 All scheduled flights to Montgomery  
 are full for the rest of this week.

VIOLA  
 Is there another route?

ANTHONY  
 (into the phone)  
 Do you have anything nearby?  
 (listens briefly)  
 Okay. Thanks.

He hangs up.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)  
 No flights open to Alabama at all.

VIOLA  
I'll have to take the car. That  
okay?

ANTHONY  
(proudly)  
'Course it's okay.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - DAY

The Jackson family's small DAUGHTER answers the back door and her eyes open wide in surprise.

DAUGHTER  
Mama! Santa Claus is here!

We see what she sees now. A white man with an impressive white beard and long black robe. He is Greek Orthodox ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS. He gives her a warm smile.

Iakovos enters to find KING, who is very moved. They embrace.

KING  
You came.

ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS  
You called and we came. You're not  
alone.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - SHORT TIME LATER

KING stands with ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS in the laundry room as the high priest takes off his hat and coat, and places them in a small satchel on a washing machine hard at work.

KING  
Is this all you brought, my friend?

IAKOVOS  
More than enough.

KING  
It gets very cold here. You might  
need a heavier overcoat for the  
march. I'll see about it.

IAKOVOS  
I'll be fine. This feels like home.

KING  
Greece?

IAKOVOS  
No, Connecticut!

They chuckle at this. Then, a seriousness overcomes King.

KING  
My friend, it's not Connecticut. I  
need you to stay very close to us.  
And to be very, very careful. Don't  
take anything for granted with the  
white citizens here.

IAKOVOS  
I understand, Martin.

Iakovos puts his hand on King's shoulder, as an old friend  
would.

IAKOVOS (CONT'D)  
Do not allow the darkness to  
envelop your soul, my friend. When  
you see it approaching, you keep it  
at a distance with your courage and  
determination. There are so many  
blessings surrounding you today.  
You are armored with all the  
spiritual weapons of legitimate  
opposition. And you will march  
forward to a new world. You will  
find critics, even opponents, even  
enemies, even faults and errors in  
your own thinking and  
understanding, but nothing should  
discourage you or turn you into a  
deserter.

King is moved by the intention and intensity of his friend's  
words, and takes it all in.

IAKOVOS (CONT'D)  
Ours is a commitment to true  
justice and to true peace, founded  
upon a respect for life and liberty  
and justice for everyone.

King nods solemnly.

IAKOVOS (CONT'D)  
That last part was from the Pledge  
of Allegiance.

They smile.

IAKOVOS (CONT'D)  
So it's got to be right. Right?

Off these two men, letting a little light into a dark day.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

From a White House window, we see PICKETERS in the distance.  
JOHNSON reads aloud from a newspaper with disdain.

JOHNSON  
'Thousands Head South in Moral  
Crusade.'

WHITE  
You want my advice, Mr. President?

JOHNSON  
Do you have to ask?!

WHITE  
He's won.

JOHNSON  
That's advice?!

WHITE  
No. That's reality. This is advice:  
instruct the attorney general to  
petition alongside King's lawyers  
in the federal court in Montgomery;  
get Wallace's ban over-ruled as  
quickly as possible. Then, send in  
Federal troops.

JOHNSON  
The hell I will.

WHITE  
Give King his march to Montgomery.  
Do that and Selma is over. You are  
back in control.

JOHNSON  
Of what? Another civil war?

Johnson snatches the paper and thrusts it at White.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)  
This ain't just about the goddamn  
march. You think he cares about the  
march? He wants laws changed - and  
now.

(MORE)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

I've got Congress calling me by the dozens. I've got picketing outside that gets bigger and bigger every day he tugs on their goddamn white liberal fucking guilt. Every march pulls at 'em! Especially when folks are getting beat in the fucking streets! These pictures are moving around the *world*! You tell Wallace and those backwater hicks that I don't want to see any more of *this horseshit*! And you tell King he best not march, you hear me? And, I damn well mean it! King needs to stop and Wallace needs to stop or I'll stop 'em both!

He slams the paper down and we see a photo of AMELIA BOYNTON being dragged unconscious through clouds of tear-gas.

WHITE

SCLC already filed an appeal to Wallace's order this morning. You know whose docket it landed on?

Johnson rolls his eyes and looks up at the ceiling, both hands on his hips. He can't catch a break.

INT. CAPITOL BUILDING - SAME MORNING

Wallace has stepped away from a meeting in a conference room to take a call. We see the people he's meeting with react.

WALLACE ON THE PHONE

You get it moved off of his court!

(listens)

The hell we can't. If that low-down, nigra-lovin traitor tries this case, they win.

(listens)

Are you listening to me? I know this man. Went to school with his pansy ass. He's been ruling in their favor for years now! We've lost before we've begun!

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Behind closed doors, a black attorney, FRED GRAY, stands before the white jurist in question, JUDGE FRANK JOHNSON.



GRAY

Judge Johnson, in light of Sunday's bloody turn of events, we're proceeding with extreme caution and commitment to safety. The SCLC is seeking a federal court order enjoining the state authorities from interfering in the next march.

JUDGE JOHNSON

Gray, you're asking me to overturn the Governor's mandate and to do so without a hearing. Now, it might well go the way of your petition from what I've read thus far, but it's not going to happen at all without a proper proceeding.

EXT. MONTGOMERY AIRSTRIP - DAY

We watch as a cluster of CATHOLIC NUNS exit a small airplane.

GRAY (V.O.)

After Dr. King's call-to-action, which was nationally televised, sir, we've seen hundreds of people from across the country travel in for tomorrow's march. Mostly white. Most are clergy of some kind. King is positioned to lead this tomorrow, Judge.

A group of LOCAL WHITE MEN eye them nearby, making obscene gestures and lewd comments.

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Judge Johnson has now come from around his desk to speak with SCLC Attorney Gray face to face.

JUDGE JOHNSON

You'll have your day in court on Thursday. No march on Tuesday. I won't oppose him against protocol.

GRAY

You've opposed him before, Your Honor.

JUDGE JOHNSON

Indeed I have, and with pleasure. But properly. This is my offer.

(MORE)

JUDGE JOHNSON (CONT'D)  
 Cancel tomorrow and make no  
 violation of Wallace's injunction  
 until I officially hear this case  
 Thursday. Then, do what's needed.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - SAME TIME

A private conversation between KING and a suited white man at  
 the dining room table. It is ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN  
 DOAR. Young and Archbishop Iakovos are there as well.

SUPERIMPOSE: Jackson Residence, Selma: King visited by  
 Assistant Attorney General John Doar. Greek Orthodox  
 Archbishop Iakovos and Andrew Young present. See Office of AG  
 for detail. LOGGED.

DOAR  
 I'm here on the President's order  
 to try to make this work, Doctor.  
 Please work with me.

While Doar addresses King, it's Young who answers.

YOUNG  
 We give up the march and you give  
 what? We asked for federal  
 protection. And with no disrespect,  
 when the *Assistant Attorney General*  
 is the highest ranking federal  
 official in Selma, we have our  
 answer and its not the one we want.

DOAR  
 (recovering)  
 Dr. King, if you do march, not only  
 are you defying a federal judge's  
 offer, but you place yourself at  
 great personal risk.

Young shakes his head. Why'd he have to go and say that?

DOAR (CONT'D)  
 (to Young)  
 Tell me you've told him.

YOUNG  
 (unfazed)  
 Marty, they've been telling us  
 about increased threats. I saw no  
 reason to burden you with it since  
 a threat is a threat and you walk  
 with them daily.  
 (MORE)

YOUNG (CONT'D)

But so you know, the feds are suddenly and conveniently very concerned.

(to Doar)

Consider him told.

Doar is in a losing battle here.

KING

Mr. Doar, thousands have gathered here to demonstrate their dignity. I don't want to challenge Judge Johnson. I don't want to go against the President. I don't want any of this. I simply want to make certain that men like me can self-determine just like you. The President could stop this with a stroke of his pen. He chooses not to. The decision is with your side, sir, not ours.

DOAR

Dr. King, you understand the complexities here. I know you do. If you march against a Federal Judge's order, there are implications. The President doesn't want that for you.

King smiles a little at the veiled threat.

KING

I might also suggest you speak with Governor Wallace and Sheriff Clark, and urge *them* against violence, instead of trying to persuade us not to have a peaceful protest.

Checkmate. Doar gives in.

DOAR

Maybe... maybe we can make a deal.

King and Young are all ears.

DOAR (CONT'D)

What if I could assure you that the administration would endorse a later march if tomorrow is called off. We need a few days to manage this. Minimize the fall-out.

YOUNG

You mean to get on the right side.

DOAR

That's exactly what I mean.

KING

Are you authorized to offer that?

DOAR

Well... that's why I asked "what if." What if I could get that done? He's closer than you may think to coming around on this issue. I believe this compromise might be agreeable.

KING

Please express my meaning here clearly. We are not going to stop demonstrating, protesting and agitating until a law ensuring that every Negro can vote undeterred is passed. If he'll agree to not only endorse a later march, but also order protection for that march... we have a deal. If not, we're crossing that bridge on Tuesday.

Off Doar, determined.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL - DAY

Thousands gather outside. In the mix is JAMES REEB, in priest's collar, who speaks to reporter ROY REED.

REEB

I am a Unitarian Universalist minister. I've come from Boston to lend my skin color to our brothers and sisters struggling here. Maybe our skin will help their cause somehow. I do not know, but I'm here to try. Because this is wrong.

The housewife VIOLA LUIZZO is handing sandwiches to the marchers, along with other organized volunteers.

INT/EXT. BROWN CHAPEL STEPS - DAY

KING stands just inside the church doors. He leans to whisper to ANDREW YOUNG.

KING

Anything?

YOUNG

No word on an agreement. Nothing.

KING shakes his head, then steps forward to address thousands of COLLEAGUES and SUPPORTERS via bullhorn.

KING

The President doesn't want us to march today. The courts don't want us to march today. But we must march today. We must stand up today. We must make a massive demonstration of moral certainty today. I'm glad we are here together today. I thank you for standing up today!

In the background, rises the sound of a semi-rhythmic tread - the sound of a multitude on the march. Singing for freedom.

MANY VOICES (V.O.)

We Shall Overcome, Someday! Oh, deep in my heart. I do believe. That we shall overcome. Some. Day.

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE - DAY

King leads an orderly march of two thousand disciplined marchers. Many new, white faces, including the housewife VIOLA LUIZZO, the preacher REV. JAMES REEB and the Greek ARCHBISHOP.

Many black locals who marched before. Some still bearing bandages from the bridge attack just days ago. We feel both the fear and the determination.

As they walk, ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN DOAR jogs up to Andrew Young flanked by two FBI agents. Doar whispers in his ear. Young nods his understanding, then calmly picks up his pace. He reaches King in the very first row of marchers directly ahead of him. He whispers in King's ear.

YOUNG

There's a partial deal. They'll endorse a later march, but they won't order protection.

King walks on, somewhat stunned. He's negotiating a deal not to march at the very moment he's about to lead thousands to the bridge. His dilemma is written all over his face as the throngs behind him sing freedom songs in lock step.

KING  
 (to Young)  
 No deal.

Further back in the crowd, a WHITE MARCHER leans to a BLACK MARCHER as they cross under a sign: EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE.

WHITE MARCHER  
 Who is Edmund Pettus?

BLACK MARCHER  
 Don't right know. But his kin  
 prolly waitin' for us on the other  
 side of this here bridge.

As King and the crowd make their way over the crest of the bridge, we see their expressions as they face an ominous sight.

A phalanx of flashing lights and police cars. Horses mounted by local whites seething with anger - again. Confronting them all is MAJOR CLOUD, holding a bullhorn, flanked by TROOPERS.

The silence is deafening as marchers nervously look upon blue-helmeted troopers with confederate emblems who surround them on three sides, ready to charge at any moment.

And then - the unexpected...

CLOUD  
 Troopers!!! Withdraw!!!

Troopers divide and move aside, leaving the road wide open for the marchers.

Jaws drop. Some people clap. The marchers are in amazement. All stare at the road ahead, leading into rural Alabama.

But not King. He stands still. We are CLOSE ON HIM. Watching the wheels turn.

Why would they do that? Why would they make a path for a march they have forbidden? What's their play? King hesitates for a moment longer - then is certain.

KING  
 (to himself)  
 No.

He turns around to look in the faces of the men and women following him. Unsure of what to do, how to tell them.

Then slowly, he goes down on one knee. And slowly, row after row, the marchers do the same.

They pray in what seems an eternal silence - before King gets to his feet, followed by everyone else.

Suddenly, he stands and walks through the crowd back towards Selma. Marchers peel away to let him through, then follow.

In the crowd, we see JAMES FORMAN of SNCC, seething. He stares at his former friend JOHN LEWIS, who is confused.

EXT. SELMA WOODS - THAT NIGHT

We see WHITE LOCALS gathered around a pick-up truck, angry that they didn't see action.

EXT. SELMA HOUSING PROJECTS - THAT NIGHT

We see BLACK LOCALS gathered on stoops, angry they didn't make progress.

EXT. SELMA DINER - THAT NIGHT

We see WHITE CLERGY, including JAMES REEB, gathered at a local eatery, perplexed and frustrated that they came all this way to turn around.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL - LATER THAT DAY

KING, WILLIAMS, BEVEL and ORANGE approach the back-entrance to the chapel. They're confronted by a group of YOUNG MILITANTS, holding a banner saying, 'Martin LOSER King!' As King's group gets closer, the militants break into mocking cries of 'De Lawd!' and a derisive chorus.

MILITANTS

Aint gon' let nobody turn me round!

King is deeply pained by all this. Williams, Bevel and Orange instinctively form a line alongside him, a symbolic shield.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL SANCTUARY - A SHORT TIME

A tense MEETING of the Selma campaign leadership. KING is under attack and he's not taking it well.

LEWIS

People are angry, Dr. King. *Angry.*  
They went back to the bridge  
because they were hot about Sunday.  
(MORE)

LEWIS (CONT'D)

That was our moment out there today. That was our chance.

FORMAN

And you threw it away!

KING

They could've sealed off the road behind us. No food, water, no kind of support allowed through. We wouldn't have made ten miles.

LEWIS

You saying it was a trap?

KING

I don't know what it was.

FORMAN

That was no trap! You know why they opened the road to us! Because all them nice respectable white folks was with us! And we should've capitalized on that! Because they won't be around long. They never are!

King's staff is awash with mixed feelings. We see ABERNATHY, YOUNG and VIVIAN steadfast in their support. We see WILLIAMS, BEVEL, NASH and ORANGE supportive, but disappointed.

ABERNATHY

It was Marty's call! It's done!

FORMAN

He made the wrong fucking call!

The disrespect of Forman's profanity stops everyone in their tracks. Except for Lewis, who slams his hand down and stares at his former friend with rage.

LEWIS

Two days ago you didn't wanna march at all! Now you mad 'cause this didn't go the way you want? You are about you, James! This is about the people! Back off, brother. Now!

Off Forman's shock, Lewis turns to King.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

What happened out there? Tell me something. Please.



King sees this young man has a lot at stake, but holds back.

KING

I'd rather people be upset and hate me, than be bleeding or dead.

INT/EXT. KING HOME/JACKSON HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

C.T. VIVIAN peers out of the kitchen window to check on KING, who sits on the BACK PORCH of the Jackson home in Selma. King is writing a letter in a notebook.

INTERCUT with the KING CHILDREN at the dinner table in their Atlanta home, eating dinner and chattering away, as CORETTA leans against a wall in the hallway. She reads the words of King's letter with a faraway look.

KING (V.O.)

At a time when I need you, I cannot call you. And I have done this to myself. To us. Whatever I am, I owe to my family and to those who stand with me. But my biggest debt is to you. You give my life meaning, Coretta. All I can pledge to you now is that I will strive to justify the faith you once had in me. I will try more than ever to make my life one that you can be proud of. I will do in private that which I know my public position demands, and what is right and pure. It is foolish to think I can solve a problem in the same mind set that it was created. I must raise my mind higher. And I will. This is a moment, Corrie. A moment - that will not happen again.

In Atlanta, over the voices of her children, Coretta carefully folds the letter and tucks it in her skirt pocket. Then, re-joins her kids.

In Selma, King looks up suddenly as a figure approaches from the nearby driveway. JAMES ORANGE emerges from the darkness.

ORANGE

We should head on in now, Doc.

KING

Yes. Yes, okay.

EXT. SELMA DINER - SAME NIGHT

JAMES REEB and his two WHITE COMPANIONS exit the diner onto a quiet Selma street.

Watching them from a parked car, are four men - KLANSMEN.

KLANSMAN #1

Sick of these Northerners telling us when and how and where. Trying to control our niggers when they got ghettos in their own cities.

KLANSMAN #2

Told you, best we take care of this ourself. Told ya that weeks back.

KLANSMAN #1

I'm listenin' now, old friend. I'm listenin' now.

As Reeb and his companions pass, the Klan gets out their car. They talk loud enough for Reeb and the others to hear them.

KLANSMAN #1 (CONT'D)

You know what I hate more than niggers?

KLANSMAN #2

What's that?

KLANSMAN #1

White niggers.

REEB and his colleagues turn around to face their foes.

REEB

Look, we don't want trouble, okay?

KLANSMAN #1

No. You came here stirrin' trouble.

The Klansmen start toward Reeb and his friends, who begin to run. The racists catch up quickly and launch into the three men with clubs and knuckle-dusters.

We watch the priest and other religious men be BEATEN, with Reeb taking a particularly devastating blow to the head. All three are BARELY CONSCIOUS when the attack finally stops. The main attacker whispers in Reeb's bloody ear.

KLANSMAN

Now you know what being a nigger feels like 'round here, boy.

One last, SKULL-FRACTURING KICK to Reeb's head. Then, the Klan saunters to their car, honk the horn and drive away.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - EARLY MORNING

BEVEL and NASH walk slowly through the house. They pass the men of the movement preparing for the day in every corner.

CT VIVIAN irons on the dining room table. The ARCHBISHOP puts on his habit and robes in the living room. WILLIAMS cleans his shoes. ORANGE stirs his coffee.

All the while, RICHIE JEAN cooks.

Bevel and Nash find KING shaving in the bathroom with the door slightly ajar. Bevel knocks and goes in. Nash waits outside. We stay with her near the door, listening to the conversation from the hall. The others begin to gather near her to listen as well. We watch their faces react.

KING (V.O.)  
What's the matter?

BEVEL (V.O.)  
Doc, someone's been hurt. A priest  
who came from Boston. White.

KING  
Hurt how?

BEVEL  
Dead.

KING  
(devastated)  
No. No.  
(beat)  
It wasn't... It wasn't a black man  
that did it, was it?

BEVEL  
Some local whites got him. Kicked  
the man to death. Last words he  
heard was "nigger lover."

Silence. Then suddenly, we hear a SMASH.

King storms out of the bathroom. All have now gathered around the bathroom door. King barks with anger.

KING  
I need the phone! Now please!

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

King talks on the TELEPHONE in the guest bedroom. The towel from his shave is still around his neck.

KING (CONT'D)  
 (controlled anger)  
 I can't stop them, Mr. President.  
 And sir, I wouldn't if I could.  
 This is not why I phoned you, sir.

On the other line is...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BARBER ROOM

JOHNSON, pacing as he talks on the phone in the White House barber room. Streaks of shaving cream still on his face.

JOHNSON  
 (pissed off)  
 Chicago, Detroit, Boston, I don't care. Hell, two thousand people marching for you in Harlem. Good for you! But when you have people coming *inside* the White House? Inside! On a tour? They just sat down, Martin! Sat right in the main floor corridor, singin' and shoutin'. *I won't have it!* I'm trying here. We're getting close on the figuring something out about this voting thing. But I won't have this!

INTERCUT KING and JOHNSON PHONE CALL

KING  
 Mr. President, I do not control every American who is outraged by your inaction. But you control your in action, sir.

JOHNSON  
 Now, you wait a minute!

KING  
 I cannot stop any...

JOHNSON  
 You can! You can stop it!

KING

No, YOU can stop it. YOU, sir, can do more. I'm glad to hear you called Rev. Reeb's widow, sir. That's very fine and it is right. I only wish Jimmie Lee Jackson's family would have received the same consideration from their President.

JOHNSON

Don't lay your guilt at my feet, Reverend! You are the choosing to be away from your family and your wife to be sending those people out to slaughter when we *told* you there was trouble.

That hits a nerve. The guilt of all of this is weighing on King and the cracks are becoming larger.

KING

You could stop this by protecting us. We won't sit idle while you wait a year or two to send this bill up at your leisure. *That should be clear by now.* Why has it taken so long to send the bill to Congress, sir? Why are...

JOHNSON

You listen to me...  
(deep breath)  
This bill has been nearly impossible to craft, you hear me? You're not the only one jugglin'. I'm jugglin, Martin. It's got to be bullet-proof. This is not a two-line bill. It's got to pass or I look like a horse's ass siding with you. We can't risk defeat or dilution on this one. It's got to go up there clean, simple and powerful. That requires consensus and that is not an easy task! It takes time, don't you understand? I *cannot* snap my fingers on this.

KING

If I concede that, then can you tell me this, sir?

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

Why do you allow your citizens to walk into harm's way without protection or at the *very least* harnessing the men who mean to do them harm? That has nothing to do with drafting a bill.

JOHNSON

You listen to me. I will not be blackjacked into hasty action, do you understand me, sir? I will not.

King is insulted. But he takes a moment, lowers his voice and evens his tone with calculation.

KING

I'm a preacher from Atlanta. You are the man who won the presidency of the world's most powerful nation by the greatest landslide in history four months ago.

Johnson remains silent, deep in thought.

KING (CONT'D)

And you are the man dismantling your own legacy with each passing day. No one will remember the Civil Rights Act. They will remember the stand-off in Selma while you never set foot in the state. When you refused to protect old women who marched for their rights. They'll remember men being slayed in the streets while struggling for their dignity unprotected. You'll be remembered in the same way they'll remember George Wallace and Jim Clark. They will remember you saying "Wait," and "I can't."

(a beat)

Unless you act, sir.

A long pause. Each man only hears the other breathing.

JOHNSON

I'm a greatly anguished man, Martin.

KING

(burdened)

I know how that feels, Mr. President.

EXT. SELMA STREET - EARLY EVENING

JOHN LEWIS stands curbside on a residential street. He looks antsy. Or is it nervous?

Moments later, the familiar blue Pontiac rolls towards him.

When the car stops to let him in, Lewis is surprised to find King, driving alone. He climbs in.

KING

Evenin'.

LEWIS

Evenin'.... You're driving alone.

KING

A rare treat.

LEWIS

Is that a good idea?

KING

Well, I rather enjoy it.

LEWIS

But... it's not very safe. You being alone just driving around.

King nods at the rearview mirror. Off King, Lewis does too. Behind them, he sees a follow car driven by JAMES ORANGE.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

Oh.

They pass through the local housing project, a bleak, miserable set of stubby brick buildings.

KING

I wanted to speak privately. I know there are troubles with your group. I apologize that our efforts have caused a rift between you all. That's a painful thing, I know, and I'm truly sorry it's happened.

LEWIS

I... yes, it's... painful.

KING

I've watched you and I wish I could say you remind me of myself.

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

But when I was your age, I only wanted to marry this beauty I'd met named Coretta Scott and lead my own church away from my Daddy. Wasn't half as activated as you, John.

LEWIS

Thank you, Dr. King.

A comfortable silence as they drive along.

KING

LBJ is not moving, John. I thought he would but... our efforts are not working. I can't risk another march with people getting killed when its not working. I won't do it. I wanted you to hear it from me.

LEWIS

But... The people were ready. They're ready. They asked for this. They asked you to do this with them.

KING

Even if we do get the court mandate tomorrow, what are we walking toward? We need voting not marching. You know that. We need to move beyond these protests to some real political power. This cannot go on forever like this. I can't go on like this.

King stops himself. Too much. He's confided too much. As the car rides along in the night, Lewis finds his voice.

LEWIS

When... when I headed up SNCC's Freedom Ride and the bus reached the Montgomery city limits, the police escort disappeared. We saw the Greyhound station completely deserted, and I thought, "This... is not good." We got off. And out of nowhere, from all directions, they came. Men, women. Kids too. A couple hundred white folk. They came out of alleys and side streets. From all directions at once like they'd been let out of a gate somewhere.

(MORE)



LEWIS (CONT'D)

They had every makeshift weapon you could think of. Bats, bricks, boards, chains, tire irons, pipes, rakes. "Git them niggers" was all I heard over the screaming. I remember a little kid clawing her nails into the side of the face of my friend Jessie while her Daddy beat him with an ax handle.

King is entranced by the story.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

Jessie was unconscious but they kept beating on him. I passed out on the asphalt, I guess. Later on, they told me someone had swung a wooden Coke crate against my skull.

(off King's grimace)

Next day, I found myself patched up sitting in a church. I could barely hold my head up, but you were gonna be speaking and... I needed to hear you. I needed to hear you.

(beat)

Outside the church, we could hear the white mob chanting "Nigger King!" So I knew you were close.

At this, the two men involuntarily chuckle. A laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. A laugh to keep from crying.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

You got up there. I was feeling down. And you got up there. Do you remember this at all?

KING

I don't think we remember it the same way.

(beat)

What'd I say, John?

Lewis takes a moment, to conjure the memory.

LEWIS

You said that... on television and in the papers the congregation might look to some like just a mass. But you knew that every person sitting there had overcome something great to even be there. You praised them for their courage.

(MORE)

LEWIS (CONT'D)

You criticized the officials who created the hostile environment in which we're made to live.

He continues to describe that night, full of emotion.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

And you told us that we would triumph. That we would triumph because there could be no other way. You said, "The people who oppose us will have to face the fact that we are determined to be free." And then you said... you said... what I'm about to tell you now. And I hope you hear me. "Fear not. We've come too far to turn back."

Off King, deeply moved, as they ride on in the night.

INT. WALLACE'S OFFICE - MORNING

Wallace reads the paper about to explode as LINGO looks on.

The headline of the Montgomery Advertiser reads:

WALLACE BLOCK OF KING MARCH MAY BE  
OVERTURNED IN FEDERAL COURT

WALLACE

Mary!

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

President Johnson and Governor Wallace sit on opposite couches in the Oval, smiling cordially.

JOHNSON

Well, Governor. You wanted to talk.

WALLACE

Mr. President, malcontents are disrupting Alabama and it is your responsibility to stop them.

Wallace doesn't look as strong as his words, especially under Johnson's withering stare.

INT. FEDERAL COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

JUDGE JOHNSON is on the bench. KING and SCLC attorney FRED GRAY look on from the plaintiff's table.

JOHNSON  
Southern Christian Leadership  
Conference vs. State of Alabama.  
I'll now hear plaintiff testimony.

CUT TO:

GRAY  
Can you tell the court what  
occurred on the Edmund Pettus  
Bridge in Selma this past Sunday?

One at a time, we see an array of PEOPLE WE RECOGNIZE stand with one hand raised and one hand on the bible, pledging to tell the truth. And one by one, we watch them do just that.

We see LEWIS, WILLIAMS, BOYNTON, ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS, SULLIVAN and RICHIE JEAN JACKSON and ANNIE LEE COOPER tell their stories with animated hand gestures and determined expressions as STATE ATTORNEYS and SEATED OFFICIALS glare at them in open contempt.

Then, we watch the defense call SHERIFF CLARK and CHIEF BAKER give their accounts of the incident with the same vigor.

Over these testimonials, WE HEAR...

JOHNSON (V.O.)  
Governor, you can't stop a fever by putting an icepack on your head. You've got to get to the cause of the fever. All the dramatics you got going down there won't solve the issue. They're protesting for the right to vote and the way they're treated in your state. That's *your* problem, *your* responsibility, on *your* watch.

WALLACE (V.O.)  
Well, Mr. President... I disagree. We have a certain way things are done. It's the way it is and its the way the people want it to stay.

JOHNSON (V.O.)  
George, why ya doing this? Spent your career working for the poor. Why you off on this black thing?

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Johnson is now on the edge of his couch with an aggressive posture.

WALLACE

Because you can't never satisfy them. First, it's the front seat on the bus, next it's takeover of the parks, then it's the public schools, then it's voting, then it's jobs, then it's distribution of wealth without work.

Johnson look upon Wallace with impatient pity, then rises and walks over to him. At 6'4, the President towers over just about everyone when standing. But with Wallace seated, his hovering is particularly intimidating.

JOHNSON

George, you see all those demonstrators out in front of the White House keeping my Lady Bird awake all the damn night?

WALLACE

Oh, yes, Mr. President. I saw them.

JOHNSON

Well, why don't you and I go out there, and let's announce that you've decided to let the blacks vote undeterred and this whole mess will go away. And I don't have to draft bills and force the issue and all that. Let's do that, George. Why don't you just let the niggers vote? You agree they got the right to vote, don't you?

WALLACE

There's no quarrel with that. I know that. That's the law.

JOHNSON

Well, then why don't you let 'em vote?

WALLACE

I don't have that power. That belongs to the county registrars.

JOHNSON

George, don't shit me as to who runs Alabama.

WALLACE

I don't have any legal power over the county registrars, Mr. President. They have their regulations and they adhere.

JOHNSON

Why don't you persuade them?

WALLACE

I don't think I could do that.

JOHNSON

Now, don't shit me, George Wallace! Are you trying to fuck over your President? Are you?

WALLACE

Mr. President...

JOHNSON

You and I shouldn't be even thinking about 1965. We should be thinking about 1985. We'll both be dead and gone then. Now you've got a lot of poor people in Alabama. A lot of people needin' jobs. You could do a lot for them. In 1985, what do you want left behind. You want them remembering you sayin' "Wait," and "I can't," and "It's hard?"

Wallace gathers his strength and looks Johnson in the eye.

WALLACE

I don't right care what they think. And you shouldn't neither.

Not the right answer. An infuriated Johnson leans in close. So close Wallace can feel the breath on his ear.

JOHNSON

I'll be damned if history puts me in the same place with the likes of you.

INT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - LATER

KING stands in the hallway in conversation with his staff as they await a decision. Suddenly, everyone starts to look behind him in surprise.

He turns around to find CORETTA walking toward him. He walks toward her.

KING  
You're here.

CORETTA  
Yes. I'm here.

KING  
I'm glad.

CORETTA  
Good.

No grand gestures. No romantic glances. Just a first step. And right now, it's enough.

INT. FEDERAL COURTROOM - DAY

KING is on the stand, visibly nervous and very clearly exhausted, as the STATE ATTORNEY questions him aggressively.

STATE ATTORNEY  
Mister King, you went out on that bridge in direct violation of this Judge's order not to march. You intentionally disobeyed this Judge and the Governor, did you not?

KING  
I respect this Judge perhaps more than any other jurist on the bench. We know that in his court we would at least be given a fair proceeding as is our rights as citizens.

STATE ATTORNEY  
I don't need you preaching and prancing in here, ya hear? I want an answer.

JUDGE JOHNSON  
Watch it, Counselor.

STATE ATTORNEY  
I'm trying very hard, Judge.

JUDGE JOHNSON  
(to the Attorney)  
Try harder.  
(to King)  
Answer the question posed.

King's staff watches the testimony with sympathy, now understanding his burden more than ever. Coretta looks on with deep concern for her husband under such stress.

KING  
Thousands of people came to Selma aroused by Sunday's brutal acts exacted by officials of the city of Selma and the state of Alabama. I felt if I had not lead the march, pent up emotions and inner tensions would have led to an uncontrollable retaliatory situation, a violent situation on both sides. I made a difficult decision not wanting to see violence. Otherwise, I would have never proceeded anywhere against this court's order.

Off Judge Johnson, who doesn't look pleased.

CUT TO:

JUDGE JOHNSON is about to rule. KING and GRAY on one side, STATE ATTORNEY and CLARK on the other side, and everyone behind them await the fate of the campaign.

JUDGE JOHNSON  
I've heard testimony from both sides and reviewed the march logistics proposal. The evidence of this case reflects a continuous pattern of action to provoke disturbance and arrest by the SCLC and affiliated organizations. The evidence also reflects an almost continuous pattern on the part of defendant Sheriff Clark and cohorts of harassment, intimidation, threats and brutal mistreatment toward the plaintiffs.  
(MORE)

JUDGE JOHNSON (CONT'D)

It seems basic to our constitutional principles that the extent of the right to assemble, demonstrate and march peaceably along the highway in an orderly manner should be commensurate with the enormity of the wrongs that are being protested and petitioned against. In this case, the wrongs are enormous. Therefore, the extent of the right to demonstrate in an estimated five day March from Selma to Montgomery has been approved accordingly.

The courtroom hums with reaction from both sides. King doesn't react, but remains still as he continues listening to the Judge's instructions.

DIANE NASH leans over to whisper to CORETTA.

NASH

Doesn't look very happy about it.

CORETTA

Now, he has to actually do it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAWN

In casual clothes, JOHNSON stands at a window listening to the singing from protestors holding a weekend vigil outside.

PROTESTORS (V.O.)

We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand... We'll walk hand in hand someday.

Behind Johnson, on the table, is a half-eaten breakfast, briefing books and the usual selection of newspapers. Every front page is about Selma. A New York Times headline below the main story is 'Thousands More Head South in Protest.'

WHITE is standing by the table, watching Johnson.

PROTESTORS (V.O.)

Here in my heart, I do believe.  
That we shall overcome, someday.

Johnson turns from the window, looks at White and gives a long, deep sigh of acceptance.

JOHNSON

Lee, I need a speech. A good one.



INT. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - EVENING

CLOSE on JOHNSON. We pull back to find him standing before a majestic spectacle in the midst of a momentous event: a joint session of Congress. Rows of SENATORS and CONGRESSMEN look up at him as he begins to address the nation before TV CAMERAS.

JOHNSON

I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy. At times, history and fate meet at a single time in a single place. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL MEETING ROOM - SAME TIME

AMELIA BOYTON and her colleague FREDERICK REESE, who stood up to the Selma Police Chief in the Hotel Albert, have abandoned a planning meeting to watch.

JOHNSON (V.O.)

There, long suffering men and women peacefully protested the denial of their rights as Americans. Rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself. The issue for equal rights for the American Negro is that issue.

INT. NURSING HOME - SAME TIME

ANNIE LEE COOPER, the woman that fought back with Sheriff Clark at the courthouse, stops in the patient room she is cleaning to watch the President's address on TV.

JOHNSON (V.O.)

For this issue, many of them were brutally assaulted. Should we defeat every enemy, double our wealth and conquer the stars, but remain unequal in this issue, we have failed as a nation.

INT. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - SAME TIME

Johnson continues earnestly with a serious tone.

JOHNSON

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem.

(MORE)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem.

He pauses to receive applause from the politicians.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - SAME TIME

CAGER AND VIOLA LEE sit on the front porch of a ramshackled plank house in a wooded area. They listen to the address on the RADIO.

JOHNSON (V.O.)

For this problem, one good man - a man of God - has already died. And we met here tonight as Americans - not white or black, Democrat or Republican - to solve this problem. For to deny a man his hopes because of his color or race or his religion or his place of birth is not only to do injustice, it is to dishonor the dead who have given their lives for American freedom.

Cager closes his eyes at the slight of his grandson and continues to rock in his chair.

INT. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - SAME TIME

JOHNSON

Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex, very difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument: every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. Yet the harsh reality is that in many places in this country men and women are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes. Every device of which human ingenuity is capable, has been used to deny this right.

INT. POLICE CAR - SAME TIME

SHERIFF JIM CLARK drives in his police cruiser listening to the RADIO address.

JOHNSON (V.O)

The Negro citizen may go to register only to be told that the day is wrong, or the hour is late, or the official in charge is absent. If he persists and manages to present himself to a registrar, he be disqualified because he did not fully spell out his middle name or because he abbreviated a word on the application. And if he manages to get past that, he is given a test to which even a college degree has proven unable to penetrate. For the fact is, that the only way to pass these barriers is to show white skin.

INT. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - SAME TIME

We are back with Johnson.

JOHNSON

The Constitution says that no person shall be kept from voting because of his race or color. To correct the denial of this fundamental right, this Wednesday, I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate these illegal barriers.

INT. WALLACE'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Wallace stands over the TELEVISION, glaring at it. He loosens his tie and then plops down in a chair.

JOHNSON (V.O.)

This bill will strike down voting restrictions in all elections - federal, state and local. This bill will establish a simple, uniform standard which cannot be used, however ingenious, to flout the Constitution. On this issue, there must be no delay, no hesitation, and no compromise.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - SAME TIME

We see FORMAN and the other more militant-minded activists watching on TV.

JOHNSON (V.O.)

I recognize that outside this chamber is the outraged conscience of a nation. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement. It is the effort of the Negro to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

INT. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - SAME TIME

Johnson has the whole country in the palm of his hand.

JOHNSON

Their cause must be our cause too. The time of justice has come and I believe no force can hold it back.

INT. JACKSON RESIDENCE - SAME TIME

EVERYONE is there. KING is on the couch. CORETTA is in a nearby chair.

They all watch Johnson on a TV in the corner of the room. As he speaks, we see each of their faces.

LEWIS and WILLIAMS who faced an army of ignorance on the first bridge attempt.

BEVEL, NASH and ORANGE who pushed for Selma to be the place of this protest.

ABERNATHY, YOUNG and VIVIAN, the veterans who've been with King at every step for a decade now.

JOHNSON (V.O)

A century has passed. More than one hundred years since the Negro was freed. And he is not fully free tonight. It was more than one hundred years ago, but the emancipation is a proclamation and not a fact. The real hero of this struggle is the American Negro.

Then, we zero in on KING. We watch him as he watches the President of the United States articulate the pain and suffering that he has worked tirelessly to amplify.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

The American Negro. His actions and his protests. His courage to risk safety, and even his life, have awakened the conscience of this nation. His demonstrations have been designed to call attention to injustice, designed to provoke change, designed to stir reform. He has called upon the nation to ensure that equality does not depend on force of arms or tear gas, but on the force of moral right. And we shall do this.

(beat)

We... shall... overcome.

A gasp from the room as Johnson utters the movement's own rallying call.

CLOSE on KING, blinking back his emotions as the others stir with surprise. An incredible moment of great weight. We watch him take it in.

And then, he feels a hand on his arm. Coretta.

A look passes between them that only they fully understand. A look that communicates what they've given up for the greater good. A look of pride -- as he takes her hand in his.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - DAWN

A WHITE PAPER BOY bikes across the bridge with his transistor radio strapped to his handlebars. As he peddles across with his papers in tow, we hear a RADIO ANNOUNCER.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Eaaaarly mornin', rise and shine!  
Let's see. It's March 25, 1965  
today. The number one TV show in  
the land is "The Dick Van Dyke  
Show." The number one movie is  
something called "The Sound of  
Music." Well, I like the sound of  
that. And the number one song is  
this one by a few Negro gals from  
Detroit. Here you go! Time to WAKE  
UP!

As The Supremes begin to sing "Stop in the Name of Love," the paper boy pulls over on the side of the bridge to look over the side in the early morning light.

Above the turbulent waters of the Alabama River, he sees a US ARMY BOMB DISPOSAL TEAM combing the underside of the bridge.

INT. VARIOUS HOMES - THAT MORNING

We see shirts being tucked in, jackets being put on, boots being ties up, food being packed, blankets being folded and rolled. People are getting ready!

EXT. HIGHWAY - THAT MORNING

US ARMY SOLDIERS inspect a culvert in a section of highway near swampland. A BOMB DISPOSAL TEAM investigates a pick-up truck near the highway. A tow-truck stands by to remove it.

EXT. MONTGOMERY AIRSTRIP - THAT MORNING

A larger contingent of DOCTORS and NURSES, led by the ones we saw on Bloody Sunday, deplane with determination.

INT. BROWN MEETING ROOM - THAT MORNING

NASH, BEVEL, ORANGE and LEWIS call the shots finalizing food and medical support.

VOLUNTEERS, including housewife VIOLA LUIZZO, stacking clear plastic rain ponchos at CT VIVIAN's direction.

YOUNG and ABERNATHY work the phones with BAYARD RUSTIN.

EXT. FIELD - THAT MORNING

Volunteers, black and white, pitch a carnival-sized tent on an open field as BOMB DETECTION DOGS sniff at the perimeter.

EXT. MODEST HOUSE - THAT MORNING

The COLLEGE-AGED DAUGHTER we saw before and her BOYFRIEND exit the door of a modest house. The daughter turns and smiles. This time her MOTHER is behind her, ready to march.

EXT. TOUR BUS - THAT MORNING

We watch MAHALIA JACKSON and HARRY BELAFONTE board a tour bus, along with other performers, bound for Selma.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL HALLWAY - THAT MORNING

ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN DOAR is huddled with KING and YOUNG.

DOAR

We have definite, verified intel that there is a sniper strike confirmed. We believe we can cover you through Lowndes County, but once you have the final day's walk through Montgomery, passing all those buildings and what not, the coverage becomes challenging. Please consider driving in on the final leg. And please consider nixing the speech at the Capitol.

KING

If Wallace will see us when we arrive, there will be no need for a speech. Can you arrange that?

King and Young exchange an amused look. Doar shakes his head. They all know that's not going to happen.

King puts his hand on Doar's shoulder, letting him off the hook.

KING (CONT'D)

The fear is always with me. But I ask God to carry it for me. There's nothing else I can do. I can't hide. You understand?

Doar doesn't, but takes a deep breath and nods.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - LATER THAT MORNING

We're looking from the Montgomery side of the Pettus Bridge. It's empty. Nothing moves. Then the heads of the front rank of MARCHERS start to rise over the crest of the bridge.

They are led by KING and CORETTA, arm-in-arm. Alongside are King's band of brothers and sisters.

The REVERSE ANGLE - in dramatic contrast to the two previous attempts to cross the bridge - the road before them is open as far as the eye can see.

As they pass under the bridge sign, a YOUNGER MARCHER curiously questions a nearby ELDER MARCHER.

YOUNG MARCHER  
'Scuse me. You know who Edmund Pettus is?

ELDER MARCHER  
Old Confederate general.

The Young Marcher nods. He figured as much.

ELDER MARCHER (CONT'D)  
And the first Klan leader 'round these parts.

YOUNG MARCHER  
What?

ELDER MARCHER  
Called himself the Grand Dragon of the realm of Alabama.

The Young Marcher looks around at the bridge they are on, a bit shocked. The Elder Marcher puts his hand on the Young Marcher's shoulder.

ELDER MARCHER (CONT'D)  
Step proud. The Grand Dragon's *definitely* turning over in his grave today.

YOUNG MARCHER  
Right on.

Chuckling together, they cross the crest.

EXT. HIGHWAY - VARIOUS TIMES

- MARCHERS walk in the sunshine. Soldiers stand guard along the route, backs to the marchers, facing groups of racists.

- Heavy rain. Marchers wearing ponchos as a few glaring REDNECKS try to stare them down behind a big-finned car.

- MARCHERS mingle round campfires amidst a small canvas city, cooking, talking, singing.



- MARCHERS are silent as they pass through a sinister-looking swampland. An ARMY SNIPER keeps watch in a tall tree.

- A dirt-poor shack near the highway. Outside the tiny wooden, a VERY POOR BLACK FAMILY stares in uncomprehending silence as the group passes. One MARCHER runs over to them with some literature to explain what's going on.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - LATER

We see MARCHERS sitting in a field cheering. In the dark field, we see a solitary light shining on a make-shift stage made of coffins stacked high. And there, we watch quick cuts of entertainers who flew in to support this movement.

Illuminated by a single large light, we see HARRY BELAFONTE, JOAN BAEZ, TONY BENNETT, SAMMY DAVIS JR. and NINA SIMONE entertain the marchers.

And we see CORETTA SCOTT KING take the stage to CHEERS and APPLAUSE. She looks out into the darkness and feels the people there, then closes her eyes and recites Langston Hughes' famous poem "Mother to Son" with delicacy and grace.

CORETTA

"Life for me ain't been no crystal stair/  
It's had tacks in it/ And splinters/  
And boards torn up/ And places with no carpet on the floor-  
Bare/ But all the time I've been a-  
climbin' on/ And reachin' landins/  
And turnin' corners/ And sometimes goin' in the dark/  
Where there ain't been no light/  
So boy, don't you turn back/  
Don't you set down on the steps/  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard/  
Don't you fall now."

INT. WALLACE'S OFFICE - DAY

WALLACE stands with LINGO in his office to one side of the window, mumbling and upset.

WALLACE

My God, it looks like an army.

LINGO

An army of the next voters of Alabama.

What a disaster. Wallace shakes his head, staring down at:

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

KING stands proud in the midst of a vast crowd, beneath the Alabama State Capitol, with the Alabama and Confederate flags flying in the breeze.

They're all there with him: CORETTA, ABERNATHY, YOUNG, WILLIAMS, BEVEL, ORANGE, VIVIAN, NASH and LEWIS. They have made it to the symbolic finish line.

US Army helicopters circle above. Federal officers eye King and everything and everyone around him as he is now under their protection.

JOHN DOAR speaks urgently into his walkie talkie dispatching direction. US MARSHALLS scan the crowd from a high building with binoculars.

On the sidelines are WHITE LOCALS, none too happy about the spectacle. They have the right to protest here and they are exercising it with signs reading; "I Hate Niggers" and "Walk Coon." They wave tiny Confederate flags.

In a few moments, King will address the massive crowd. But first, he looks to Coretta who gives him a firm nod as if to say, "You've got this."

King turns and approaches the microphones linked to powerful loudspeakers that will carry his voice through the thousands and thousands of people who are gathered before Wallace's capitol building.

KING

We heard them say we'd never make it here. We heard them say they'd stop us, if it was the last thing they did. We heard them say we don't deserve to be here. But today we stand - as Americans. We are here - and "we ain't gonna let nobody turn us around."

King pauses as the crowd ERUPTS in passionate approval.

KING (CONT'D)

This mighty march, which will be counted as one of the greatest demonstrations of protest and progress, ends here in the capitol of Alabama for a vital purpose.

King's speech continues in voice-over:

MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

As King speaks, we see the faces of the main players in this epic saga transform into photographs of their REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS.

KING (CONT'D)

A decade ago, right here in Montgomery, the Negro community made a commitment. A commitment to be self-determined. To depend on one another. To face our foes with faith, and with unity, and with dignity.

We see proud Montgomery leader Amelia Boynton with TEXT ON SCREEN:

AMELIA BOYTON - Awarded the MLK Freedom Medal in 1990 at the White House.

We see old Cager Lee with TEXT ON SCREEN:

CAGER LEE - The first in his family to register and vote, at the age of 84.

KING (CONT'D)

We've not fought only for the right to sit where we please, and go to school where we please. We do not only strive here today to vote as we please. But with our commitment, we give birth *each day* to a new energy that is stronger than our strongest opposition. We arm ourselves with a longing for peace and personhood. And we embrace this new energy so boldly, embody it so fervently, that its reflection illuminates a great darkness.

We see Andrew Young with TEXT ON SCREEN:

ANDREW YOUNG - Became UN Ambassador under President Carter, then Mayor of Atlanta.

We see John Lewis with TEXT ON SCREEN:

JOHN LEWIS - Has served twenty-six years as a US Congressman for the 5th district of Georgia.

KING (CONT'D)

Our society has distorted who we are.

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

From slavery, to the Reconstruction, to the precipice at which we now stand, we've seen powerful white men rule the world offering poor white men a vicious lie as placation. And when the poor white man's children wail with a hunger that cannot be satisfied, he feeds them with that vicious lie. A lie whispering to them that regardless of their lot in life, they can at least be triumphant in the knowledge that their whiteness makes them superior to blackness.

We see Sheriff Jim Clark with TEXT ON SCREEN:

JIM CLARK - Defeated by overwhelming black vote in the next election and was never Sheriff again.

KING (CONT'D)

But, we know the truth. We know the truth. And we will go forward to that truth, to freedom. We will not be stopped. We will march for the vote, we will march for our rights, we will march to demand treatment as full citizens, we will march until the viciousness and darkness gives way to the light of righteousness.

We see Governor George Wallace with TEXT ON SCREEN:

GEORGE WALLACE - Ran for President four times, left paralyzed by an assassination attempt in 1972. Remained prominent in Republican politics of the South until his death at age 79.

KING (CONT'D)

No man, no myth, no malaise will stop this movement. We forbid it. For we know it is this darkness that murders the best of us. Whether Jimmie Lee Jackson, or James Reeb, or four blameless little girls struck down before they had even begun.

We see housewife volunteer Viola Luizzo with TEXT ON SCREEN:

VIOLA LUIZZO - Murdered five hours after this speech by white Klansmen as she carried marchers back to Selma.

KING (CONT'D)

You may ask, when will we be free of this darkness? I say to you today, my brothers and sisters, despite the pain, despite the tears, our freedom will soon be upon us. For "truth crushed to earth will rise again."

We see Coretta Scott King with TEXT ON SCREEN:

CORETTA SCOTT KING - Became President of the Martin Luther King Center and lobbied successfully for the King holiday. Never remarried. Died in 2006 at 78.

EXT. MONTGOMERY - DAY

We're back in Montgomery, watching REAL FOOTAGE of DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR delivering his speech on the Alabama Capitol building steps on a sunny spring afternoon in March of 1965.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

When will we be free? It will soon be upon us. Because "no lie can live forever." When will we be free? It will soon be upon us. Because "you shall reap what you sow." When will we be free? It will soon be upon us because "mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on."

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Four months later, Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at his side.

Three years later in 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated. He was 39 years old.

TEXT CONCLUDES:

KING looks out upon the magnificent crowd as a mighty, rolling roar of approval rises up to carry him forward.

FADE TO BLACK.