

Bus Ride to Justice

by  
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With  
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And  
Fred Gray

(Based on the Book "Bus Ride to Justice" by Fred Gray)

Current Revisions by  
(Tom Roush, 4th Draft)

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FADE UP:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - SUNRISE

The sunrise slowly lightens the starry, starry night. It rises on a field of waist high plants.

Dark shapes can be made out against the fading stars; three MEN in overalls with big white sacks at their sides. They huddle for a moment for a prayer.

SHARECROPPER

Lord, bless these crops and these folks that will bring 'em in. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The landscape of oaks, pines, magnolias and crepe myrtles reveals that this is the Deep South. Macon County, Alabama to be exact.

CUT TO:

As the sun rises even higher, the men start to sweat. A car approaches on the nearby road, and all three men stand to see the approaching vehicle. It is a giant gleaming new 1932 Chevy.

The car stops, and the man behind the wheel, a white DOCTOR, steps out. A young black nurse, EUNICE RIVERS, is in the passenger seat.

DOCTOR

Any of you boys being treated for bad blood?

The men say nothing, glance at each other, at Nurse Rivers.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

I'm a doctor. Going to Notasulga to give out the treatment.

One of the men raises his hand.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Good. The rest of you, don't miss out. Get up there today, you'll get a free examination.

The doctor gets back in his car and drives off, while the men go back to the rhythm of the harvest.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In a small home, many PEOPLE have gathered but all are quiet. PEARL, a young girl, holds a small boy, YOUNG FRED, as others murmur and huddle around NANCY GRAY, the mother of the children. Something is wrong; death is in the air.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A PASTOR prays from a worn Bible; just his lips move. Beside him, ABE GRAY lays perfectly still. No doctor present here.

After finishing his prayer, the Pastor reaches down and touches Abe's neck. He is dead.

PASTOR  
God's will be done.

The Pastor leaves the room and he is heard speaking to the family. There is a great wailing cry of grief from the front room.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

As the Pastor leads a prayer in front of a gathering CONGREGATION, Young Fred looks across the road to a much larger white church and sees another cemetery and another service going on there.

He notes the police vehicles that have escorted the WHITE MOURNERS and sees a WHITE LITTLE BOY about his age looking over at him.

The impulse is so natural to wave, so Fred does it. The white little boy has no chance to wave in return as an adult hand turns his head away.

But no hand causes Fred to turn away so he watches as the giant white casket across the street is lowered in to a hole by a mechanical crane. He looks back at his father's casket and sees it lowered by ropes held by several sad MEN.

Fred's eyes settle on the hole where his father now rests. Only in death are the two groups truly equal.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Now 12 year old Fred sits in a sparse office with another BOY and a stern looking older man, BROTHER KEEBLE. Keeble wears a suit as do the boys.

KEEBLE  
Shut your books.

The boys do so and Keeble sets his aside.

KEEBLE (CONT'D)  
Now, who can recite the preamble  
from memory?

Fred raises his hand.

FRED  
We the people of the United States  
in order to form a more perfect  
union, establish Justice, insure  
domestic tranquility, provide for  
the common defence, promote the  
general welfare, and ensure the  
blessings of liberty to ourselves  
and our pos... our posteriority...

The other boy snickers which causes Keeble to slam his hand  
on the desk.

KEEBLE  
Posterity. Which means?

OTHER BOY  
Your children.

KEEBLE  
Everyone's children. Go on.

FRED  
Do ordain and establish this  
constitution for the United States  
of America.

Keeble leans back, pleased, but not showing it.

KEEBLE  
Go wash up for supper.

The boys stand and exit.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Fred rides along a dusty Midwest highway in an ancient  
automobile with Brother Keeble, who quietly sings a  
spiritual. He notes Fred's look of concentration.

KEEBLE

You're thinking. I love to see kids thinking. Little Socrates. What will you preach on?

FRED

Can't say yet. It's not ready to come out.

Keeble smiles; he is proud of his pupil. Fred shows a seriousness of purpose even at this age.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Keeble has stopped at a gas station to ask directions. Fred is still in the front seat and can hear Keeble talking to three WHITE MEN in overalls.

Gone from Keeble's bearing is the ram rod teacher. What Fred sees is a smiling Negro with, literally, his hat in his hands.

One of the white men points further down the road. Keeble smiles and nods and gets back in the car.

FRED

(angry)

Why do you talk different to those men? I never saw you do anything like that.

KEEBLE

You hush. We aren't from around here. Don't know who's who. It's dangerous for us where we aren't known. We disappear, no one knows or cares.

Fred looks out the back window and sees the men laughing and pointing at Keeble, mocking his demeanor.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Fred is sitting on the hood of the car behind a country church, looking through the fence at an American military base as a parade of WHITE SOLDIERS marches by. World War II is raging and the US military is pouring thousands of men through makeshift bases like this.

Beyond them, he sees a NEGRO WORK CREW digging latrines.

INT. COUNTRY CHURCH - NIGHT

Fred stands in the pulpit of a tiny country church before 25 PARISHIONERS. He is small, but he holds their attention completely.

FRED

And Moses said: Lord, who am I to  
make a speech before Pharaoh? For  
Lord, you know I'm slow of tongue.  
But God said: I will be thy mouth  
and I will be thy tongue;  
therefore, Moses, go down, go down  
yonder into Egypt land, and tell  
Old Pharaoh to let my people go.  
And Moses, with his rod in hand,  
went down and said to Pharaoh: Thus  
saith the Lord God of Israel, let  
my people go! Let them go!

The crowd responds enthusiastically to the boy preacher.

EXT. CHURCH - SUNRISE

Fred wakes on the back seat of the giant car; he and Keeble have spent the night there. He steps out of the car to pee, and sees the American flag rising on the military base. In the distance he hears the faint reveille.

He walks to the fence and peeks through, and sees SOLDIERS raising the American flag.

EXT. CITY BUS TRANSPORTATION YARD - MORNING

A Montgomery City bus numbered 2857 pulls out of the transportation yard. The white uniformed driver, JAMES BLAKE, nods to his fellow BUS DRIVERS as he lights up his first smoke of the day.

The landscape around Montgomery is green and lush. The air is full of the humidity of deep summer.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

At a bus stop stands 20-year-old FRED GRAY. He waits with OTHER AFRICAN AMERICANS who are headed off to work. The bus driven by Blake arrives.

INT. BUS - MORNING

Fred enters behind the others, drops his dime in the fare box and walks past several rows of empty seats. One lone WHITE RIDER reads a newspaper as the Negro riders settle in behind.

CUT TO:

Fred watches downtown Montgomery pass as the bus starts and stops, with AFRICAN AMERICAN RIDERS getting on and off, and a few WHITE RIDERS come and go as well.

The black riders glance at each other nervously. One more white rider and someone is going to lose their seat...

EXT. ALABAMA STATE COLLEGE - DAY

Fred exits the bus. He steps off at his all-black college, Alabama State.

The school is like any other, full of STUDENTS dressed in the clothes of the day. Black COLLEGE PROFESSORS walk past the Georgian style red brick buildings.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Fred enters the class and sits just as PROF. PIERCE is getting started. Pierce is stiff and formal.

PROF. PIERCE

Last Monday, I asked each of you to go to the courthouse downtown and attempt to register to vote. Did any of you do so?

There is an uncomfortable silence, which brings a stony look from Pierce.

PROF. PIERCE (CONT'D)

Not one of you will take an afternoon and go to the County Courthouse and just ask, simply ask, to participate.

Fred looks around. Eyes fall to the ground; no one did, including him.

PROF. PIERCE (CONT'D)

Open your books to 155. You're going to write a paper for me, right here and now on the Constitution.

The students groan.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fred stops by Pierce's office to drop off his paper. The older man takes Fred's paper, sees his name at the top.

PROF. PIERCE  
 Gray. You're the one they call "the newspaper boy."

FRED  
 Yes, sir. I don't like it much.

Pierce chuckles.

PROF. PIERCE  
 Don't let it bother you.  
 You write well. What will you do after college?

FRED  
 My Mom wants me to go in to the ministry.

PROF. PIERCE  
 Ever think about being a lawyer? We need them. Right here, in Alabama.

Fred pauses to think. Lawyering has not occurred to him.

FRED  
 Can I study law here?

PROF. PIERCE  
 No. You'd have to go away to get educated. But you can do it. Ever hear of Arthur Shores?

FRED  
 No, sir.

PIERCE  
 He's a lawyer in Birmingham. Look.

Pierce holds up a newspaper clipping from the Birmingham news that shows a picture of Shores.

PIERCE (CONT'D)  
 A great man, a fearless man. We need more men like him.  
 (pauses, lights his pipe)  
 (MORE)



PIERCE (CONT'D)

Too many Negroes are happy right where they are. They don't mind being treated like children.

FRED

I'm not anyone's 'boy'.

PROF. PIERCE

Good. You know, I can vote. Didn't make any friends at the court house, but I got it done. It's possible. But we need more educated Negro citizens and we need more Negro lawyers. Interested?

FRED

My mother wants me to be a preacher...

Just then another STUDENT arrives to turn in his paper. Prof. Pierce waves Fred away.

PROF. PIERCE

OK, then. Go preach, be a delivery boy. Folks will have to get their rights without your help.

INT. BUS - DAY

Fred enters the bus, places his dime in the slot. He notes that the DRIVER is talking on the radio excitedly, and then he turns to tell a WHITE PASSENGER behind him something.

The White Passenger tells another, and after a moment, all of the WHITE RIDERS are staring back at the Negro section. Something unusual is up..

INT. MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER - DAY

Fred walks the halls of the busy daily paper that is full of busy chattering PEOPLE. He's carrying a large stack of newspapers for delivery.

INT. BUS - AFTERNOON

Fred is back on the bus, this time with a heavy stack of bundled newspapers on his lap. The bus is getting crowded as both white and black PASSENGERS head home.

Finally, the last white seat is taken.

As the bus rides along, the black passengers look tensely at the white seats and each other. What will happen at the next stop? Will more whites get on than get off? If so, someone in the Negro section is about to lose a seat.

The bus stops at the next stop, and a few white passengers stand to exit as several more pay their fare and enter. Then it happens: there is a white passenger, A MIDDLE AGED WOMAN, with nowhere to sit.

She looks at the black section then turns to look at the DRIVER who is already assessing the situation. The Driver gets on the intercom.

DRIVER

I need rows five and six cleared out. Ya'll get on up.

The black riders in the fifth and sixth row stand and move to the back. Fred is in the sixth row with his giant stack of papers, and he hesitates to clear for a woman who now has six empty seats to choose from. She starts to sit in front of him, but then stops and looks back at the Driver.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Come on, boy. Ain't going to be no trouble on this bus. Not today.

Fred slowly stands with his papers and moves towards the back of the bus.

EXT. EAST SIDE - AFTERNOON

Fred throws papers in his neighborhood. He sees a young lady sitting on the front porch. This is BERNICE HILL. She sets her book down and watches Fred.

Seeing that she is watching him, Fred gathers up his courage and approaches her.

FRED

(formal, nervous)

Good afternoon. My name is Fred Gray.

BERNICE

I know who you are. You preached at my church before.

FRED

I thought you looked familiar too. You're Bernice, right? You go to the church up on Gail Street.

BERNICE

Yes. So, you a preacher or a newspaper boy?

FRED

I'm the district manager for this neighborhood, not a boy. I'm looking for someone to take this route. Do you know anyone needs a job?

BERNICE

I'll think about it.

FRED

I'd appreciate that. Do you like ice cream? I'd like to take you to Gordon's for some ice cream.

Bernice stands and heads back in the house.

BERNICE

I don't date preachers. But come back tomorrow and I'll have you a list of paper boys, or paper men, whatever you call them.

Fred watches as she goes inside and closes the door. His appetite has been whetted masterfully.

As he turns to go, Bernice is seen peeking out a side window.

INT. BUS - EVENING

Fred enters the bus but sees no seats in the black section so he must stand.

The seats in the Negro section are filled mostly with domestics headed home, but instead of watching the white seats fill, many talk intensely to each other.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - EVENING

Fred reaches his Mother NANCY GRAY'S tiny grocery store on Jeff Davis Street. His mother steps out and hugs him, nearly in tears.

NANCY

Thank God you're home. Thank the Lord... Now get busy on them coolers.

Fred is confused by his mother's outburst, and looks at his brothers HUGH and THOMAS who have stepped outside as well. She retreats back in to the store as a tear rolls down her cheek.

FRED  
What's wrong? What's everybody  
talking about?

HUGH  
You know Eddie Brooks?

FRED  
No.

HUGH  
Yes, you do. Over on Madison. Tom  
Brooks, people called him Eddie.

FRED  
I don't know him.

THOMAS  
He's dead. Police shot him on a bus  
up on Cloverdale. Mama heard about  
a boy getting shot, thought it was  
you.

Fred hangs his head at the news.

FRED  
I do remember him. He's married. I  
know his wife.

HUGH  
Mattie Johnson called Mr. Nixon  
about it. He went to the police but  
they won't say nothing. He's  
getting some things together for  
the family.

Fred looks inside the store and sees the tall, strong profile of EDGAR DANIEL NIXON (called E. D.), and CLIFFORD DURR. Durr is rail thin and tiny compared to Nixon as well as white with longish gray hair. Nancy is putting groceries in a box to deliver to the family.

FRED  
Who's that with Mr. Nixon?

THOMAS  
Some lawyer.

Nixon exits the store carrying the grocery box, Durr right behind him. Nixon stares at the three young men, sees their grief and frustration.

NIXON

Don't do nothing right now. You see the police, you go the other way. They're looking for more trouble, don't help them.

HUGH

What are we going to do about this?

NIXON

We're organizing. There's power in numbers.

Hugh starts to protest further but Nixon shuts him down with an icy powerful glare. Durr steps around and introduces himself.

DURR

Hi, I'm Cliff Durr. Very nice to meet you.

Durr shakes hands with all three young men.

NIXON

Mr. Durr is a lawyer.

THOMAS

What you going to be able to do for this family? What's the law going to do?

DURR

I can advise them of their rights. That will provide some comfort.

NIXON

You three stay out of trouble.

Nixon turns on his heels and leaves, Durr follows.

NANCY GRAY

Ya'll come on in, now, we got to clean up.

The young men head inside.

INT. HOLT STREET CHURCH OF CHRIST - NIGHT

Later that evening, Fred stands by his mother and other EXTENDED FAMILY. Fred sings the hymn his mother was humming earlier along with the rest of the CONGREGATION.

The singing stops and the PASTOR looks to Fred.

PASTOR

Fred Gray, will you lead us in prayer?

FRED

Dear Lord, we call on you to bless the soul of Eddie Brooks.

The assembly voices it's approval.

FRED (CONT'D)

Help us, Lord, to be merciful, but also, help us to never, ever forget. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, Lord. Deliver us from evil.

Fred doesn't go on. Heads are hung in prayer and mourning.

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

As the sun rises a few days later, the grave of Thomas Edward Brooks is seen. A bus passes by in the background.

CUT FORWARD:

EXT. MONTGOMERY WEST SIDE - NIGHT

Buses come and go throughout the west side neighborhood. It is near Christmas and everyone wears a coat to brace from the cold coming off the nearby Alabama River.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

On the back row of the bus sits Fred holding hands with Bernice. She has gone for him in a big way, it is clear, and he for her. They smile and point out the Christmas lights.

EXT. BALL GAME - NIGHT

Fred and Bernice sit on the back row of bleachers watching a baseball game. Bernice has a Christmas pin on her lapel.

Fred takes the last bite of his hot dog. Bernice holds her half-eaten hot dog out to him.

BERNICE  
You can finish it.

FRED  
I can't. I'm full.

BERNICE  
Yes, you can. Look how skinny you are. I eat that and I'll get as wide as a bus and you won't like me anymore.

FRED  
I'd still like you, but from a distance.

Bernice giggles as E.D. Nixon sits nearby with his wife ARLET. Something about Nixon's brooding ever-serious countenance wipes the smile off Fred's face. Nixon reminds him of the real world.

ARLET  
(to Bernice)  
Bernice, good to see you. That is a nice pin.

BERNICE  
Thank you. Fred bought it for me.

Nixon looks at Fred, at the pin, and back at Fred.

NIXON  
(to Fred)  
How's your Momma? You helping her out?

FRED  
Yes, sir.

NIXON  
Good. Stay out of trouble.

Bernice suppresses another giggle, and Fred cuts her a look.

BERNICE  
(imitating Nixon)  
You help out your Momma, Mr. Gray and stay out of trouble.

FRED  
 (laughing)  
 Shhh!

EXT. ROAD NEAR BALLFIELD - NIGHT

Fred and Bernice are leaving the game and walking behind Nixon and Arlet.

Just then, a car load of WHITE TEENS drives by. One leans out the window and throws a water balloon at Nixon which hits him in the back.

The teens hoot and holler as they drive out of sight. The smiles are gone as Fred and Bernice watch Arlet wipe the water off of Nixon's shoulders and face. Nixon doesn't flinch or show any emotion.

INT. ALABAMA STATE - DAY

Fred is walking down a hallway when he sees Prof. Pierce step out of an office accompanied by ARTHUR SHORES and a woman, JO ANN ROBINSON. Pierce sees Fred.

PROF. PIERCE  
 Mr. Gray, come here.

Fred walks over.

PROF. PIERCE (CONT'D)  
 This is Arthur Shores. Mr. Shores is a lawyer up in Birmingham. He's argued cases all the way to the Supreme Court. Arthur, this is Fred Gray.

Shores extends his hand. Shores is dignified, very well dressed and friendly. He beams with intellectual power.

SHORES  
 Pleasure to meet you.

FRED  
 (nervously)  
 Mr. Nixon lives in my neighborhood.  
 Do you know him?

SHORES  
 Quite well. A real champion. Good man to have on your side in a fight.



FRED

What's it like, being a lawyer?

SHORES

It's a lot of hard work, Fred. But when you know you're right, and you lay your arguments out for a jury or a judge, and you win, it's just wonderful. Feels fantastic. Nothing better in this world.

Pierce sees the look on Fred's face. As planned, meeting Shores has fired his imagination and made being a lawyer real.

SHORES (CONT'D)

A pleasure to meet you. If you have any other questions, you call me.

Shores hands Fred a business card and walks away.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Christmas music pours out of a radio in his mother's store. She is inside cleaning up when Fred steps outside in an apron and sits.

He pulls a letter out of his pocket. Nancy Gray appears at the door.

NANCY

Need you to wipe out the cooler.

She sees Fred looking at a piece of paper and sits down beside him.

FRED

It's an application to law school.

Nancy lets this news settle in.

NANCY

You're such a good preacher, and your prayers give folks hope...

FRED

Hope for what? That they might not get trampled on that day? Something is wrong, Momma. Something has always been wrong. The way we get treated, it's not right.

Hugh passes by, sees the paper.

HUGH

He telling you about law school? I think that one is crazy, Momma.

Hugh disappears back in the store.

FRED

One of my teachers told me that if I can get accepted in a law school somewhere else, the state has to help pay for it since they won't let me go here. Those are the rules.

NANCY

Where's this school you want to do to?

FRED

In Cleveland. That's up north.

NANCY

I know where Cleveland is. Long way away. Long way. Always some reason to send my children away.

She goes in and shuts the door to the cold.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Fred, Thomas and Hugh are all waiting for a bus in the cold.

HUGH

(to Thomas)

He tell you about going to law school?

THOMAS

What? You're going to be a preacher.

HUGH

Not now. Says he's going to be a lawyer.

THOMAS

Why you want to do that?

FRED

Being a lawyer is a good job.

HUGH

How would you know?

FRED

I met one.

THOMAS

What's got in to you? You never said anything about this before.

Just then, the bus arrives. Hugh gets on, pays his fare and heads for the back.

HUGH

He's planning something. Look at his eyes.

THOMAS

Be a preacher, you get your own car. Don't have to take a bus.

Thomas pays and starts to head to the back but Fred hasn't moved.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You coming?

FRED

I'll see you later.

He turns and starts to walk. He is just not up to the ritual humiliation of the bus on this day.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

Fred is walking quickly, lost in thought. He looks up and suddenly notices that he is in front of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, one of the oldest Negro congregations in the nation. Beyond is the Alabama Capital Building with the Alabama flag flying. He enters the church.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Fred kneels in a pew in the empty church, his fingers meshed together, furiously in prayer

FRED

Lord, if this isn't you moving in me, then you need to let me know right now. They won't let me learn the law here because I'm a Negro, but they're going to help pay for it if I get in somewhere else. Lord, they are making a mistake.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Because unless you stop me, I AM going to get in to law school, and I AM going to go, and then I AM going to come home. And when I do, with you as my holy witness, I am going to destroy everything segregated I can find. Everywhere my people can't go, I'm going to look for a door. Everywhere they don't want us, I'm going to see that we can get in there. I'm going to do it. The law made it, and the law can unmake it. If you're not with me, you best speak up. Because this is where I'm going. Amen.

Fred stands and exits.

EXT. EAST SIDE - MORNING

Fred stands with his suitcase at the front door of Bernice's home. All is quiet; no one is awake. He starts to knock, but decides not to. But the door opens and Bernice is standing there.

BERNICE

This won't work. You'll find someone else.

FRED

I don't think I will. I won't be looking.

BERNICE

Even so.. You made your choice.

Fred starts to respond but she looks down, then slowly closes the door.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Fred hears the all aboard call and starts to gather his things. Suddenly, a big black paw clamps to his suitcase. He looks up and sees E.D. Nixon, wearing his porter's uniform, lifting his bag.

FRED

I can do that. And I don't have a ticket to the Pullman car.

NIXON

You do your job, I'll do mine. You need anything, you call me, hear? Go on and find a seat. Long ride where we're going.

Nixon carries his heavy bag away.

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

Fred is settled in to his seat on the train as it passes through the countryside just north of town.

As it passes through an intersection, Fred sees a white DOCTOR (different from the one seen previously) and an older Eunice Rivers, on the side of the road with CHARLIE POLLARD, one of the farmers seen earlier. Rivers takes the lead.

Pollard has his eyes closed and looks to be in pain. The nurse and doctor are drawing blood from Pollard as they pass from Fred's sight.

FADE:

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Fred steps off a train back in Montgomery. He wears a much sharper suit, and a bit more age sits every well on him. He is older, smarter, better educated and clearly ready for his mission.

Fred takes a moment and looks around. There they are; white water fountains and colored water fountains. He sees the separate bathrooms as well. Yes, it's all still here and he's ready to attack it.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Fred walks to the grocery store, smiling and waving to the FOLKS in his neighborhood.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Fred enters and sees his mother talking to a white POLICE OFFICER named CAINE. She is nervous and he watches for a moment before she sees him. Her eyes light up.

NANCY GRAY

Son! Oh, son, you're back!

She comes around the counter and hugs him. He hugs her back but has his eye on the Officer.

FRED  
What's going on?

NANCY GRAY  
Oh, this Officer is asking me if I sell drugs to folks around here. I told him, I don't even sell beer, why would I sell drugs?

The officer sizes up Fred. He can detect a new attitude.

FRED  
What makes you think my mother sells drugs?

OFFICER CAINE  
I'll ask the questions around here, boy.

Fred chokes back a response, remembering where he is and what his mission is.

FRED  
My mother doesn't sell or use drugs. If you believe she does, get a warrant and conduct a search.

Caine doesn't like that, so he grabs Fred by the arm and spins him around for a pat down.

OFFICER CAINE  
I think that's a good idea. Let's see what you hiding here.

Fred starts to resist but his mother's wide eyes causes him to submit to a pat down. Just then, Thomas runs up to the door.

THOMAS  
What's going on?

Caine finds little but a train ticket in Fred's pocket.

OFFICER CAINE  
What have we here? Oh, now this explains a lot.

He throws the ticket on the floor.

OFFICER CAINE (CONT'D)  
 Don't forget how things are done  
 around here. Ms. Gray, you keep  
 your eyes open, you hear? You don't  
 want no drug pushers doing business  
 around here.

With that, Caine leaves, and Thomas pats Fred on the back and  
 smiles.

THOMAS  
 You're going to need to hire  
 yourself a lawyer!

EXT. DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY - DAY

Fred waits outside a department store on the sidewalk.

Just then, Bernice exits with another YOUNG MAN. She sees  
 Fred and stops dead in her tracks. She whispers to the young  
 man then approaches Fred.

FRED  
 You look more beautiful than ever.

BERNICE  
 What are you doing here?

FRED  
 Your Mother told me I might find  
 you downtown. How have you been?

BERNICE  
 So you're a lawyer now?

FRED  
 No, not yet. I have to take an exam  
 first. I'm taking the exam here if  
 I can get enough lawyers to vouch  
 for me. If I pass it, I'm staying.

BERNICE  
 (sarcastic but softening)  
 Well, that's nice. It's been a long  
 time. I hope you don't think we're  
 going to just pick up where we left  
 off.

Bernice turns to leave.

FRED

That's exactly what I was thinking.  
Can I call you at your house?

BERNICE

I don't date preachers.

FRED

What about lawyers?

BERNICE

I'll think about it. Don't call me.

Bernice goes back to the young man she was with. He wraps an arm around her and directs the stink eye at Fred.

INT. DURR OFFICE - DAY

Fred waits in the lobby of Clifford Durr's office. A RECEPTIONIST eyes him warily as she files her nails.

Just then, the door to the offices opens. A man in a cheap ill-fitting suit steps through: this is House Representative GEORGE WALLACE.

WALLACE

Well, thank you again, and I'm going to go tell the Governor right now that he can count on your support.

DURR

You better hurry on over then because it's near lunch time and he'll be too drunk to remember what you say after that.

WALLACE

Now, that there is just a scandalous rumor. But you know what isn't a rumor? That Cliff Durr hires the most beautiful receptionists in the whole state. Where did you find this lovely young lady here?

The Receptionist just beams at the compliment, and begins to blush. Wallace extends a hand.

DURR

Susan is from up in Anniston. She's been with me for years.



WALLACE

Susan. Well, it's a pleasure to meet you. Fine folks up in Anniston.

RECEPTIONIST

The pleasure is all mine.

DURR

George, let me introduce you to a friend that Mr. Nixon sent on over.

Wallace glances at Fred and moves quickly towards the door.

WALLACE

I got to get moving on now, we'll be seeing you later!

With that Wallace is out the door. Durr smiles and shakes his head.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Fred and Clifford Durr are sitting at a table in a private courtyard. Durr is trying to light a cigar.

DURR

I'd offer you a cigar and a brandy, Mr. Gray, but you strike me as a man who doesn't drink.

FRED

Thank you, but I don't smoke or drink. I'm a lay minister in the Church of Christ.

DURR

That may come in handy in this life as well as the next.

Durr gets the cigar lit.

DURR (CONT'D)

So, let's get down to business. E.D., he tells me you want to be a lawyer here in Alabama. That true?

FRED

Yes, sir. He's done a lot for our people. And I want to do the same.

DURR

Exciting times to be in the legal profession. But... Fella that just left here, Representative Wallace from Barbour County, he's not so excited about changes to the law. These landmark cases, Brown versus the Board of Education, him and folks like him, they are not pleased. And he's got the ear of the governor. He might be governor one day.

FRED

I'm sure you're right. But we have the constitution on our side.

DURR

Slaves had the constitution on their side, Mr. Gray. I believe it defines the Negro as three fifths of a person, didn't it? Don't kid yourself. Some people are going to get killed. Are you sure this is the right job for you? There will be no brotherly love in the fights that are coming.

FRED

As a minister I believe Jesus loves me. That's all the love I need.

Durr laughs.

DURR

I'm glad he does.

He takes a folded piece of paper out of his coat pocket and hands it to Fred.

DURR (CONT'D)

I think this is what you've come for. This will clear you to take the Alabama bar.

Fred opens it and sees that it's a needed character affidavit.

FRED

Thank you.

DURR

You're welcome. I'm afraid we both labor under the Chinese curse, Mr. Gray. Ever heard of it?

Fred shakes his head.

DURR (CONT'D)

It's a curse they wish upon their enemies. It has three parts: 'May you live in interesting times. May you come to the attention of the authorities. May you find what you are looking for.'

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Fred SITS in a room with 19 other APPLICANTS while CLERKS pass out the bar exams. All the other applicants are white.

CUT TO:

Fred is lost in his own legal world as he takes the long and tedious exam. Periodically, he bursts into a spasm of writing in his test book, then goes back to the questions.

EXT. MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER - DAY

Fred exits the building with a stack of newspapers for delivery when he sees E.D. Nixon and ROSA PARKS walking by.

NIXON

You ain't heard nothing yet?

FRED

Still waiting.

NIXON

(to Parks)

This here is Fred Gray. He took the lawyer's test recently, waiting to hear back.

Parks smiles brightly.

PARKS

I know Fred, he grew up in my neighborhood. I've known his mother forever. How are you doing? She must be so proud of you.

INT. BUS - DAY

Parks sits next to Fred on the bus. He has a thick stack of newspapers on his lap.

PARKS

You know who I was talking to just the other day about you? Virginia Durr.

FRED

You know the Durrs?

PARKS

Oh, yes. They're a wonderful couple and I do some sewing for her. Her husband spoke very highly of you.

FRED

It scares me a little, these important people doing things for me.

PARKS

They see good things in you. They're helping me to go to a school in Tennessee next summer that teaches about how we can get more Negroes registered to vote. There are so many things to learn. But look who I'm telling this too. You're one of the best and brightest.

FRED

Thank you. You know, with Professor Pierce, and even with Mr. Nixon, all these things we have to do makes them mad. But with you, it doesn't seem like it gets to you. You smile more.

She beams in her trademark way.

PARKS

That's so nice of you to say. I feel like God smiles on me. And, well, people are just people and all of them want to be good. But sometimes, they have to be shown the way.

Just then, the bus stops and the DRIVER stands to tell more Negroes to get up and make way for WHITE RIDERS.

Fred and Rosa are in the back already, but they watch as NEGRO RIDERS get up and are forced to stand.

The sight causes Parks to visibly stiffen.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - EVENING

Fred has delivered his last paper and is walking towards his mother's store when he sees Bernice running towards him. She is waving a piece of paper in her hands.

BERNICE

You did it! You did it!

She reaches him out of breath and thrusts a piece of paper in his hands. In the fading light, he sees it is a letter from the state regarding his exam.

Fred holds the paper out so the light from a nearby street lamp illuminates it.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

It says you passed. You passed your exam. You're a lawyer now!

FRED

But... why are you here?

BERNICE

Your Mom called me looking for you and told me. YOU PASSED IT!

She leans in and whispers into his ear.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

Don't you ever hide from me again.

Fred smiles and hugs her deeply. They walk arm in arm to the store where his family is waiting. He reaches down and hugs his mother who has tears streaming down her face.

NANCY GRAY

I'm so proud of you, son. So proud.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fred has secured his first office. It is sparse to say the least. He sharpens a pencil and lays it neatly beside some stacked papers at his desk, takes a deep breath and lean back in his chair. He's a lawyer now... with nothing to do.

Suddenly the phone rings! He sits up smartly and answers.

FRED

Fred Gray's office, Fred Gray  
speaking.... No, I think you have  
the wrong number.

He hangs up. After a moment he crosses to the only small window in the office and looks out at Montgomery. Below, he sees Negroes getting on and off a city bus.

INT. BUS - DAY

Seated in the middle section of the bus is 15-year-old CLAUDETTE COLVIN. She keeps to herself, lost in thought. As usual, white folks are seated to the front, black folks towards the back.

The bus stops, and after a moment, Colvin looks up and sees a WHITE WOMAN waiting for Colvin to give up her seat. She then hears the bus driver, ROBERT CLEERE, who's glaring at her in his mirror.

CLEERE

Hey! I'm talking to you! Get on up,  
now. This lady needs to sit down.

Colvin exhales deeply. Not this time, she won't do it.

COLVIN

No! I got here first.

Conversation around the bus stops. For Colvin, time stands still. She has refused; consequences will follow.

CLEERE

I'm only going to ask once more.  
You get on up!

Colvin looks straight ahead. Cleere picks up his radio mic and starts to talk. All eyes rest on the girl as the tense moments pass by.

Finally, Cleere opens the door and two POLICE OFFICERS enter. Cleere points out Colvin and the Officers make their way back to her.

An Officer leans in to Colvin.

OFFICER

Now, I'm only going to say this one  
time. You get your black ass off  
that seat now.

Colvin winces. This will be ugly. Without a word, she closes her eyes and shakes her head. She won't move.

The Officer grabs her by the arm and yanks her to her feet.

COLVIN

I got a constitutional right to sit here! You're violating my rights.

Colvin thrashes in an effort to hang on to her seat, but the officers spin her and pin her arms.

OFFICER

You're making it a lot worse on yourself.

COLVIN

I paid my dime and it's my right to sit there! It's my rights!

OFFICER

We'll tell you what your rights are.

With that, they drag Colvin towards the door. When she gets a foot on a seat back, they lift her and carry her off the bus. She thrashes violently. An officer strikes her on the rump.

COLVIN

I got constitutional rights!

As Colvin's voice is heard on the sidewalk, the White Lady stares at her now vacant seat and then at the many Negro eyes upon her. This empty seat is now a symbol. She juts out her jaw, and sits down, and sets her purse on the now empty seat beside her.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fred reads from a heavy law book when the phone rings. His first case is calling.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Fred stands with Nixon as Rosa Parks comforts Colvin. Colvin is weeping and she has a swollen lip.

PARKS

Oh, honey, it will be OK. You'll see, it will be OK.

Parks looks to the men for support, but Nixon is uncomfortable with emotional displays so he just turns away. Fred moves over and sits with Colvin as well.

FRED

Uh... I think that they'll have a hard time proving assault... The officers didn't have any injuries... Uh... on the segregation charge...

Parks shoots him another look. The girl needs comfort, not legal opinions. Fred places his hand on Colvin's.

FRED (CONT'D)

It's going to be OK. You'll see.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Fred sits at a table with Nixon and Rosa. Each is quiet. Each is thinking.

PARKS

That little girl showed a lot of courage on that bus.

NIXON

She was stupid. That ain't the way to fight, having the police drag you off to jail. She's lucky she just got a little whipping. You got to have a plan, and an organization. You fight the police, you'll lose.

PARKS

She didn't have that, did she? She didn't have a plan or an organization but she did it anyway. She refused to give up her seat with no plan other than the plan to do what was right.

NIXON

What do you think will happen?

FRED

She'll be convicted and fined. She's probably in more trouble with her parents right now.



PARKS

She didn't know what would happen  
but she did it anyway.

Another long silence.

PARKS (CONT'D)

Now, if there was to be a plan,  
what kind of plan would it be?

NIXON

I didn't say I had a plan. At  
least, not for the buses. But I  
know it ain't right. If the courts  
say we can't have segregated  
schools, like they just did over in  
Little Rock, how can we have  
segregated buses?

Nixon and Rosa Parks both look at Fred. It's a legal question  
and he's the lawyer.

FRED

Brown versus the Board of Education  
was about schools, not public  
transportation.

NIXON

What's the difference? It all comes  
down to blacks and whites and who  
sits where.

FRED

Well, one of the big differences is  
that the Brown case had Thurgood  
Marshall to litigate it. He's the  
top Negro legal scholar in the  
country. They had the right case  
with the right lawyer, and they  
chose the right venue, they got in  
front of the right judge... It was  
a complicated legal strategy.

PARKS

It doesn't sound that complicated.  
We just need the right case, right  
court, and right lawyer. Right?

That statement sits in the air for a long moment. Fred  
absorbs it as his friends and mentors continue talking.

EXT. MONTGOMERY COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Fred and Bernice stand in front of the court house with Nixon, Parks and JO ANN ROBINSON. Fred is nervous, but dressed well. Bernice tightens his tie.

PARKS

Here she is.

Claudette Colvin arrives with her father, MR. COLVIN. She is in a dress but Mr. Colvin is dressed for work in his overalls.

MR. COLVIN

Morning.

(to Claudette)

Now you listen to your lawyer here.  
You be polite and look the judge in  
the eye.

Claudette starts to cry.

COLVIN

I'm so sorry, daddy. I'm so sorry.

MR. COLVIN

You don't have to be sorry, baby  
girl. You did the right thing. It  
was brave what you did. I'm proud  
of you. I'd be there with you but I  
got to go on to work.

Mr. Colvin is nearly overwhelmed with emotion himself so he turns to go.

COLVIN

Daddy!

Mr. Colvin keeps walking. Nixon steps forward and directs the girl up the steps. The rest follow.

INT. MONTGOMERY COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

It is a slow day in juvenile court. There are no spectators, no D.A.; just a JUDGE who reads over the case file. He is suspicious of this situation given the entourage of people who have shown up with this girl.

Fred shuffles his papers, reading and re-reading the legal notes before him. He is obviously nervous.

JUDGE

Young lady, you created quite a disturbance on the bus. What do you have to say for yourself?

FRED

Your honor, I can speak for my client. I'm her lawyer. She made a statement as did several witnesses...

JUDGE

I see.

The judge doesn't want to hear it and goes back to the notes. Finally, he closes the file.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Mr. Gray, as to your long assertion that the constitutional rights of your client have been violated, there are too many flaws in your complaint for me to issue a ruling. Not in my court room, boy. And as to the facts regarding the violations, they speak for themselves. It's all right here in the police report. I find her guilty of battery upon an officer of the law, and of violating segregation ordinances well known to everyone who rides the city buses. Sentencing will be...

FRED

Your honor, I have the appeal bond right here. We're.. We'll appeal.

JUDGE

You're going to appeal? From juvenile court?

FRED

Yes, your honor.

The judge sighs; something is fishy here.

JUDGE

Mr. Gray, I sentence her to probation for 6 months, and a \$15 dollar fine. Appeal if you have that kind of time.

The Judge bangs his gavel and leaves. Colvin, who has been staring at her hands, lifts her eyes. It's over.

COLVIN  
What happened?

FRED  
You were found guilty.

Her eyes drop to her hands.

FRED (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry. You've been sentenced to  
6 months probation.

Colvin starts to cry again. Parks leans over and hugs the tiny girl.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fred is typing at his desk when Bernice enters. She is in a chirpy mood but he is serious.

BERNICE  
There you are. Why aren't you  
answering your phone? I've been  
calling you all morning.

FRED  
Busy.

She looks over his shoulder to see what he is typing. He stops and covers it up.

FRED (CONT'D)  
I don't like for anyone to read  
over my shoulder.

She steps back. Fred is grumpy and curt in a way she hasn't seen.

BERNICE  
Well, excuse me. I didn't know. I  
was going to invite you to the  
picture show this afternoon but  
never mind. And by the way, I type  
much better than you so if you  
really wanted to impress Thurgood  
Marshall, you'd have me type that  
letter. Good bye.

FRED

Wait. I don't want anyone to know. Arthur Shores told me to ask for a meeting, but it needs to stay a secret. It's important.

BERNICE

I won't tell anybody. In fact, I'll just forget I was here.

She turns and leaves, Fred goes back to his letter. After a moment, she comes back in.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

Move over. I can do this faster and better than you so if you want it to be perfect, let me help you.

Fred thinks for a moment and then relents. Bernice sits down and starts to type from Fred's hand written note.

EXT. EMPIRE THEATER - DAY

Fred walks past the Empire Theater on a clear December day heading east. He carries a paper sack

INT. THE MONTGOMERY FAIR DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Several SEAMSTRESSES are taking their lunch break in a room dominated by long tables and sewing machines. Many of the younger seamstresses are sneaking glances at Fred, who is having lunch with Rosa Parks.

PARKS

Lots of pretty girls trying to catch your eye.

FRED

My eye got caught a long time ago.

PARKS

You're going to ask Bernice to marry?

Fred smiles.

FRED

Maybe.

PARKS

What a wonderful time of life you're in.

(MORE)

PARKS (CONT'D)

When you're young, everything is so full of possibility. Raymond was so romantic when we first met. Now we get home and talk about all our aches and pains.

FRED

You never act like you have any aches or pains.

She takes a moment, carefully weighing her words.

PARKS

Sometimes my feet bother me. When I sit down, I don't want to get back up. I get tired, especially after a long day at work.

She lets this sink in. Fred has stopped chewing.

PARKS (CONT'D)

I hope I don't have to get up today when I'm on my way home. If someone told me to get up, I don't think I would do it.

FRED

If someone tells you to get up and you don't do it, you might need a lawyer.

PARKS

Maybe I will. But I don't need a lawyer waiting for me. That might look like there was some sort of plan or organization.

Fred finishes his sandwich and swallows hard.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Fred drives along a country road in his 1954 Ford. He is deep in thought.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Fred enters a country store searching for a phone. A CLERK is arguing with Eunice Rivers, seen again and dressed in her nurse uniform.

CLERK

I don't want to give him no messages; I don't know when he'll be back.

RIVERS

But he does still work here?

CLERK

I told you, he shows up for work some days, but I don't know when he'll be back.

RIVERS

Please, it's very important that I reach him..

CLERK

It's important to you but it ain't to me, now I don't want to be responsible for finding no country nigger...

FRED

Sir, you have a phone here?

CLERK

Back by the bathrooms.

Fred goes back to the phone and deposits a dime in the slot and dials. As the phone rings he observes Rivers arguing with the Clerk. He sees a car outside and notes that a white doctor sits in the front seat, the same one seen earlier.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Bernice types at a small desk in Fred's office. The phone rings.

BERNICE

Fred Gray, attorney at law.

FRED (O.C.)

They let Fred Gray practice law in this state?

BERNICE

Oh! Oh! You got to come back. So many people have called. I got all the messages right here.

INTERCUT:

FRED  
What happened?

BERNICE  
They arrested Mrs. Parks! On the bus today, they arrested Mrs. Parks! She wouldn't give up her seat. They took her to jail!

FRED  
OK, now, this is what I want you to do. Call Mr. Nixon and..

BERNICE  
He called, he was looking for you. Mr. Durr called... They went to get her out but they're looking for you.

FRED  
You close the office, go on home. I'll be back tonight.

INT. NIXON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nixon answers the door with a rifle in his hand and sees Fred and waves him in. Fred enters to see Jo Ann Robinson is there as well.

INT. NIXON'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fred, Nixon and Robinson sit around the tiny table drinking coffee. Nixon is excited.

NIXON  
They done made a mistake this time arresting Mrs. Parks. We'll fight this thing standing up. We're getting off those buses until she goes to trial. We're going to get every Negro in the city off those buses until we can get some justice. Word done went out.

FRED  
We need to call it a protest, not a boycott. There are laws against boycotts.



ROBINSON

Rosa Parks is perfect for a lawsuit. She's got a perfect reputation.

FRED

After her day in court, Rosa Parks can't be included any more, at least in the legal sense.

ROBINSON

But she's beyond reproach. She didn't resist, there was no violence.

FRED

They'll just say that we launched a lawsuit to get around her conviction. Also, we can't use the NAACP as the plaintiff.

Nixon glares at Fred.

FRED (CONT'D)

I've been thinking about this whole thing. What we need is a new organization, something that everyone can be a part of. We need everyone, especially the ministers, to get a protest to work. To file the lawsuit, we need plaintiffs with no other distracting legal issues pending. The NAACP has other battles to fight with the state of Alabama. And most of all, we need a leader. We need someone who can unify, someone who can be our face and our voice. That's not me. And I don't think it's anyone in this room.

Anger rises again in Nixon, but then he relents.

NIXON

It ain't about me. Someone else can step up, and I'm all for it.

ROBINSON

I know who! I know the man! That new pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist. He's perfect. And he's so handsome!

The men pause, and glance at each other. This is not the endorsement that they would like for a leader in a fight. Robinson cracks a smile.

ROBINSON (CONT'D)

I'm just saying, he's a very attractive man.

INT. DEXTER AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Fred and Nixon have taken seats on the back row of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church for a specific reason. They are here to see the man they are told should lead them in to the coming battle.

A hush has fallen as the speaker lets the normally restive church service settle. MARTIN LUTHER KING glances at his notes, then lays them aside and begins to speak.

KING

My friends, we have serious business to discuss this morning. For many years now, Negroes in Montgomery and so many other areas have been inflicted with the paralysis of crippling fears on buses in our community. On so many occasions, Negroes have been intimidated and humiliated and oppressed because of the sheer fact that they were Negroes. Just the other day, just last Thursday to be exact, one of the finest citizens in Montgomery, not one of the finest Negro citizens, but one of the finest citizens in Montgomery—was taken from a bus and carried to jail and arrested because she refused to get up to give her seat to a white person. Mrs. Rosa Parks is a fine person. And since it had to happen I'm happy that it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks, for nobody can doubt the boundless outreach of her integrity. Nobody can doubt the height of her character. Nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment and devotion to the teachings of Jesus. And I'm happy, since it had to happen, it happened to a person that nobody can call a disturbing factor in the community.

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

Mrs. Parks is a fine Christian person, unassuming, and yet there is integrity and character there. And just because she refused to get up, she was arrested. You know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.

At this, the gathered congregation, which has been getting more and more vocal, bursts into applause and confirmation.

Nixon leans into speak to Fred.

NIXON

He sure can speak! He sure can.

Fred nods in agreement. King holds his audience at the edge of their seats.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Fred sits in his car at sunrise waiting for the first bus. He sees no African-American riders at the station but a few walking past and heading off to work on foot.

Finally, the first bus arrives. It stops, the white BUS DRIVER opens to door and steps out to look around. He sees no riders, so he gets back in and drives away.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Fred, Nixon, Bernice, and Rosa Parks have all linked hands. They pray before leaving for court.

FRED

Almighty God, we ask that you put your protective hand over us as we set forth today to seek justice for this Godly woman. Put your protection over her, over those that would support her, even on the hearts and minds of those that would do her harm. We pray that you would protect our hearts, Lord, and keep us from hate, and lead us in love. We pray these things in the name of Jesus.

GROUP

Amen.

Everyone takes a breath and looks around. They are in this together.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Fred, Rosa and the rest step outside of Fred's law office to find a substantial CROWD of AFRICAN-AMERICANS waiting for them outside, and all turn to walk towards the Montgomery County Courthouse which can be seen in the distance.

Fred leads with Rosa at his side.

The crowd moves silently up the sidewalks. White folks stop and stare as they pass, not knowing that in the years to come such processions will get bigger and more vocal. It is a solemn march towards the court, with nothing but the sounds of footsteps on the pavement.

EXT. STREET - DAY

George Wallace sits in the passenger seat of a car that must wait while the procession passes. His cigar hangs from his mouth as he catches Fred's eye. He wonders where he has seen this Negro before. The driver, SEYMOUR TRAMMELL, speaks up.

TRAMMELL

What in God's name are these niggars up to now?

WALLACE

I met that one there before. He's a friend of Cliff Durr's.

TRAMMELL

Durr's a communist.

They just watch as the parade of Negroes block the intersection long after the light has turned green.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The court room is packed with WHITE VIEWERS on the left, BLACK VIEWERS on the right. Unlike Claudette Colvin's case, this one has drawn the lightning.

Fred sits on the front row with Parks, King, and Nixon waiting for her case to be called. The atmosphere is tense and COPS situated on the corners of the room keep a wary eye.

JUDGE JOHN B. SCOTT reads a case file then gets started.

JUDGE SCOTT  
Next case 41464, the City vs. Rosa  
Parks, parties please step forward.

Fred and Rosa both approach the Judge's bench. From the D.A.  
table EUGENE LOE stands and also approaches the bench.

JUDGE SCOTT (CONT'D)  
Parties please identify yourselves.

ENGENE LOE  
Eugene Loe for the City of  
Montgomery.

FRED  
Fred Gray, your honor, representing  
Rosa L. Parks.

JUDGE SCOTT  
Mr. Gray, how does your client  
plead?

FRED  
Not guilty, your honor.

This brings a murmur of support from the black side of the  
room which Scott quells with a stern glance.

JUDGE SCOTT  
Sit down and we'll proceed.

The parties move back to their tables. Loe moves first.

LOE  
Your honor, the City would like to  
amend the complaint from a  
violation of the city ordinance on  
the matter to the state ordinance.  
The court will note that they don't  
differ in any substantive manner.

Fred is on his feet. He's loaded for bear and ready for all  
challenges.

FRED  
Your honor, I object to the change.  
My client has been charged under  
Chapter 6, section 11 of the City  
code, not a state violation. It's  
right here on the arrest warrant.

JUDGE SCOTT  
Mr. Loe?

ENGENE LOE

It's a procedural change only, your Honor. The laws are identical as are the penalties. The city has the right to charge under the relevant section of the law. We feel the state statute is most appropriate. It covers all modes of transportation in every city and deals specifically with the powers of the drivers, which is relevant to our case. The arresting officers simply wrote in the wrong code on the arrest warrant. It was an honest mistake.

JUDGE SCOTT

Fine.

FRED

Your honor, the statutes are not identical. My client is charged with disorderly conduct which isn't covered under the state statute. That's why he wants the change.

JUDGE SCOTT

Mr. Gray, sit down. You'll have your say shortly. Mr. Loe, do you have any witnesses to call?

LOE

Yes, your honor, we call James Blake of the Montgomery City Lines.

James Blake, looking nervous and out of place in a suit, steps forward and into a witness stand. A COURT OFFICIAL swears him in.

COURT OFFICIAL

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

BLAKE

I do.

Blake sits.

LOE

Mr. Blake, where do you work?

BLAKE

I'm a driver for the city bus lines.

LOE

Were you working last Thursday, December 1?

BLAKE

Yes, I was.

LOE

Can you tell the court what happened in regards to the defendant, Mrs. Parks?

BLAKE

Well, we had a full bus. There was 22 niggars, I mean Negroes, and 14 whites and that's a full bus. I asked some of the blacks to move towards the back. They all did it except her there.

LOE

Let the record show that Mr. Blake has indicated towards Mrs. Parks. Go on.

BLAKE

So, I asked her to get up and she wouldn't do it. I asked her again and I warned her of what would happen, but she just wouldn't get up, so I called the police.

LOE

Do you think you were clear with her? Might she have had trouble understanding what you were asking?

BLAKE

No, she understood fine.

LOE

Thank you.

JUDGE SCOTT

Mr. Gray, any questions?

Fred stands and approaches Blake.

FRED  
Mr. Blake, did Mrs. Parks raise her  
voice at you?

BLAKE  
No.

FRED  
Did she resist you or the police?  
Did she try to hit you?

BLAKE  
No.

FRED  
Did she make any sort of  
disparaging comment about you, or  
encourage others on the bus to do  
so?

BLAKE  
No.

FRED  
Did you observe that she was drunk?

BLAKE  
I didn't see her drinking.

FRED  
So, other than not getting up when  
you told her, was her conduct  
disorderly?

LOE  
Objection. Mr. Blake isn't here to  
decide if she was disorderly, just  
to report what he saw.

JUDGE SCOTT  
Sustained. Mr. Gray, he's a  
witness, ask him what he saw, not  
what he thinks.

FRED  
So, your decision to call the  
police was strictly based on her  
refusal to get up and give her seat  
to a white rider?

BLAKE  
I called the police because I told  
her to get up and she didn't do it.  
(MORE)



BLAKE (CONT'D)

I tell you on my bus where to sit or don't sit, and you do it. That's how it works. That's the law.

Fred pauses; clearly, Blake has been coached.

FRED

You said that there were 22 Negroes and 14 whites so you needed the seat that Mrs. Parks was sitting in to give to a white rider, is that correct?

BLAKE

Yes.

FRED

If the situation was reversed, and there were 22 white riders and 14 Negroes, would you do the same thing? Would you ask a white rider to get up to allow a Negro to sit down?

LOE

Objection. It's hypothetical, not within his scope as a driver.

JUDGE SCOTT

It's relevant. Overruled.

FRED

Mr. Blake? Would you ever ask a white rider to give up a seat for a Negro?

BLAKE

No.

FRED

Why not?

Now Blake pauses. This is the crux of the matter and he must answer.

BLAKE

The way it works is that the white riders sit and the blacks stand. If there ain't no whites, then the blacks sit, but if a white needs a seat, the blacks got to move. That's just how it works.

FRED

That's the law as you understand it. Your honor, I move that all charges be dropped against my client based on the unconstitutionality of a law that deprives a Negro bus rider the same protections and status as a white rider due to the equal protection clause under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. My client has a right to sit in a seat on a public bus the same as anyone else!

This brings forth a round of applause from the Negro section. Scott pounds his gavel.

LOE

Objection, your honor! Objection. This is neither the time or the place for this kind of grandstanding behavior.

The Negro section of the crowd boos and the police grip their batons and the white section starts to rile as well. Police move in to the aisle.

JUDGE SCOTT

Mr. Gray, this is neither the time or the place. Do you have any more questions for Mr. Blake?

FRED

No, I do not.

JUDGE SCOTT

Mr. Blake, please step down.

Blake steps down and quickly exits the court room.

JUDGE SCOTT (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Loe, do you have anything else?

LOE

The arrest records are entered into evidence and they support the testimony of Mr. Blake.

JUDGE SCOTT

Yes, I've seen them. Mr. Gray, do you have any witnesses to call?

FRED

No, your honor. My client will not testify.

JUDGE SCOTT

Then we're done. I find the defendant guilty. She knew what she was doing. Every Negro who rides the bus knows the law regarding seating. She knew yet she didn't follow the law. It's the law, Mrs. Parks, the law! And you don't have a choice as to if it must be followed. Guilty as charged. You're to be fined \$10 plus \$4 court costs, that's my verdict.

The Negro section of the court rises to leave with much grumbling and hostile looks.

EXT. MONTGOMERY COUNTY COURT HOUSE - DAY

Fred, Rosa and Nixon and others exit the building to find a throng of SUPPORTERS and press waiting outside for them. A roar goes up from the crowd. They leave the court together as an empty bus passes.

NIXON

Thank you all for coming. There's going to be a big meeting at Holt Street Baptist, you all come there tonight.

EXT. HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

PEOPLE are streaming to the church as word spreads about the massive rally. Cars are parked as far as the eye can see as Montgomery's black citizens pour forth and file into the church.

INT. HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is completely filled with PEOPLE. The CHOIR is singing and there is an atmosphere of ecstasy as people stand and sing. The pulpit area is filled with BLACK CLERGY who each plays some part in orchestrating the event.

INT. HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Fred hears the meeting called to order and the REV. W. F. ALFORD offer an opening prayer. He notes Martin Luther King talking calmly with others but notes that King has started to enter a state of concentration as he gets ready to speak.

Nixon stops on his way to the podium.

NIXON

We're going to meet right after.

Fred nods as Nixon heads out to speak. He hears an ovation as Nixon is introduced to the assembled crowd.

INT. HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Several WHITE REPORTERS line the back walls of the church as well as a TV camera crew. The atmosphere is electric.

Nixon is characteristically blunt in his speaking style.

NIXON

If you scared, if you're afraid,  
you might as well gather up your  
coat and your hat and go home right  
now. Before this thing is done,  
someone's probably gonna die. It  
might be me. But the only thing I  
ask is don't let me die in vain!

The crowd jumps to it's feet, clapping and stomping. They are with him. No one is leaving.

NIXON (CONT'D)

For years, I've fought because I  
didn't want our children to grow up  
and suffer the same insults, the  
same attacks that I did. I wanted  
something different for them.  
But... I think I've changed my  
mind; I want a little freedom and  
justice for myself!

Again, the crowd is on their feet standing with him.

NIXON (CONT'D)

Now, I'm an old man, and I know  
that my time is short.

(MORE)

NIXON (CONT'D)

If we're going forward, we need to go forward with the many fine young men that are ready to lead us forward. Like the pastor of the Dexter Avenue. Baptist Church, and now, we're going to have him up here and say a few words. Reverend King?

King comes out to a mix of applause and hush at the same time. Word has spread about him, and there are those already who view him as something other than a normal man.

King takes the pulpit as Nixon sits. Fred steps out from back stage to see King speak.

KING

Thank you Mr. Nixon. Thank you for everything you've done for so many people here through the years.

There is more applause as Nixon is given his due. As King speaks, the audience calls affirmations forth to encourage him on. "Amen," "Tell the truth," and "That's right," are heard throughout.

KING (CONT'D)

There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation, where they'd experienced the bleakness of nagging despair. And we are here, we are here this evening because we are tired now. And I want to say that we are not here advocating violence. We have never done that. I want it to be known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation that we are Christian people. The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. That's all. And certainly, certainly, this is the glory of America, with all of its faults. This is the glory of our democracy. My friends, don't let anybody make us feel that we are to be compared in our actions with the Ku Klux Klan or with the White Citizens Council. There will be no crosses burned at any bus stops in Montgomery.

(MORE)

## KING (CONT'D)

There will be no white persons pulled out of their homes and taken out on some distant road and lynched for not cooperating. And we are not wrong; we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to Earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie, love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity. And now we are reaching out for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality. May I say to you, my friends, we must keep God in the forefront. Let us be Christian in all of our actions. But I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love. Love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian faith, but there is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. The Almighty God himself is not the God just standing out saying through Hosea, "I love you, Israel." He's also the God that stands up before the nations and says: "Be still and know that I'm God, that if you don't obey me I will break the backbone of your power and slap you out of the orbits of your international and national relationships." We are going to work together.

(MORE)

## KING (CONT'D)

Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, "There lived a race of people, a black people, 'fleecy locks and black complexion,' but a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization."

The assembled crowd is swept with euphoria. The TV camera in the back has captured it all.

## INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Fred reads from a heavy book of legal code and Bernice types up notes. Her brow is furrowed in concentration.

## FRED

You told me you didn't date preachers. Why not?

## BERNICE

You still preach plenty. You warm the pulpit at that little church you go to every Sunday.

## FRED

But why didn't you want to date a preacher?

## BERNICE

Because they kind of cozy up to you, and smile and say 'Tell me what's wrong, child' when you know they got something else on their mind, like where they're going to eat next or when they can get back up in front of an audience. Full of themselves. You're not like that.

Fred thinks for a moment, and then asks her in a quiet voice.

## FRED

What am I like? To you?

Bernice stops typing and sees the genuine inquiry in Fred's eyes. He is vulnerable.

BERNICE

You're the kind of person that just grows on you. Real slowly, when you're not looking.

FRED

You aren't like that to me. You grew on me real fast.

BERNICE

You haven't dated that many girls.

Fred closes his book and goes over to the desk where she is typing. She stops and looks up at him quizzically.

FRED

Excuse me.

He reaches in to the desk drawer and pulls out a ring box, and sets it down on the desk beside her. Then he goes back over to his book and opens it again.

Bernice stares at the box, at Fred, back at the box.

BERNICE

Just what do you think you're doing?

FRED

I'm letting that little box grow on you.

Bernice waits a moment longer, then opens the box. Inside is a simple engagement ring. She stands, and lifts the ring from the box.

BERNICE

It's beautiful.

Fred closes his book and stands, and walks slowly back to her. When he reaches her, he takes the ring gently from her and drops to one knee.

FRED

I don't have much in this world, but whatever I have, I give to you. Whatever I get, I want to share with you. Whatever may come, I want you at my side. Will you marry me?

Bernice wipes a tear away from her face, and lifts him back to his feet.



BERNICE

Where ever you're going, I'm going  
with you. We're going there  
together. I will. I will.

He slides the ring on her finger and they kiss.

EXT. TRANSPORTATION YARD - DAY

It is winter and cold when Fred drives by the transportation area and sees RIDERS still lined up to ride in a fleet of private cars. The boycott is holding, but the wear on the people is evident.

INT. DINER - LATE NIGHT

A heavy rain falls outside. Fred sits at a lunch counter alone reading his notes. A WAITER is cleaning ketchup bottles when JACK CRENSHAW, a white attorney, enters. Crenshaw is soaked to the bone.

Fred and everyone else in the all black diner stares as Crenshaw crosses and sits down beside him.

FRED

Are you lost?

CRENSHAW

No, I'm not lost. I'm Jack  
Crenshaw, for the bus company.  
We've met.

Crenshaw sits and slicks back his wet hair.

You think I've never been in a  
Negro drug store before? We got  
them where I'm from.

(to Waiter)

Can I get just a cup of coffee?

FRED

Can't say I've been able to get  
served much at a white drug store.

CRENSHAW

That's unfortunate, Mr. Gray, and I  
really believe that. But the world  
we live in is unfortunate. I've  
come to deliver a message. Governor  
Folsom and the Mayor, they're  
looking for a way out of this  
thing.

(MORE)

CRENSHAW (CONT'D)

If you'll end the boycott, and your people will get back on the buses, they'll appoint a special committee that meets weekly to discuss ways to make it better for your people. They'll hire more Negro bus drivers for the Negro routes. They're ready to end this.

FRED

What about the seating?

CRENSHAW

The Mayor can't break the law on segregation. You know that. We have to frame this in a context that the Mayor can accept.

FRED

We've offered to accept first come first serve on seats. Still segregated, but they turned it down. We're clear on what they want, and we won't accept it.

CRENSHAW

I'll take any reasonable offer back to the Mayor and my client about seating arrangements. Speaking as one lawyer to another, be careful not to over play your hand. People get tired of walking to work every day. What if your people get back on the buses on their own? You're negotiating position depends on their sacrifice and you're asking a lot. Maybe your people are ready to get back to normal.

FRED

(angry)

It's never going to get back to normal. Not after this long. You tell the Mayor we aren't tired, we can keep going forever.

CRENSHAW

It doesn't have to come to that. Just give the city some cover, so they can say they didn't give in and you'll see. It will get better.

FRED

I'll take it up with my clients.  
But I have to tell you, they want  
to take their chances in the  
Federal courts. We're going to the  
Middle District court soon. I  
assume you've heard?

The blood drains from Crenshaw's face; he hasn't heard. Just then, the rain starts to come down even harder. Crenshaw stands.

CRENSHAW

I think you're going to lose. You  
know how to reach me?

FRED

I do. They sell umbrellas here.

CRENSHAW

That's OK. I'm wet already.

With that, Crenshaw heads out into the rain.

INT. CLERK'S OFFICE OF UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA - DAY

Fred enters the clerk's office holding a huge file folder containing the case. Clifford Durr and Arthur Shores are at his side.

He drops the file on the desk of a CLERK who does not look happy to see him and his team.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The District Court is not like a county court that is filled with agitated spectators; it is a clean, sparse venue for legal debate. Fred stands at a desk and addresses a three judge panel who are seated at a large elevated bench; they are JUDGE LYNNE, JUDGE RIVES, and JUDGE FRANK JOHNSON, JR.

Behind Fred are a few observers, including Clifford Durr, Martin King, Arthur Shores and Bernice. Bernice has her arm around Claudette Colvin.

On the other aisle sits Eugene Loe and other CITY OFFICIALS. Fred speaks with confidence as he attacks the foundations of discrimination.

FRED

Your honors, it is my privilege and honor to present this case before you today. The purpose of this action is to test the constitutionality of both the statutes of the State of Alabama and the Ordinances of the City of Montgomery which require the segregation of the white and Negro races on the buses of the Montgomery City Lines.

Fred refers to a heavy pile of papers.

FRED (CONT'D)

Regarding what the law requires, there is little question. Citing Title 48 of the Alabama Code, Section 301, subheading 31a, it says 'All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored race, BUT such accommodations for the races shall be equal.'

Fred picks up another stack of papers.

FRED (CONT'D)

The state statutes, however, aren't alone in authorizing this segregation. Section 10, Chapter 6 of the Code of the City of Montgomery provides 'Every person operating a bus line in the city shall provide equal but separate accommodations for white people and Negroes on buses by requiring the employees in charge thereof to assign passenger seats on the vehicles under their charges in such a manner as to separate the white people from the Negroes where there are both white and Negroes in the same car; provided, however, the Negroes nurses having in charge white children or sick or infirm white persons, may be assigned seats among white people.'

Fred sets the papers down and takes off his glasses. Fans slowly turn overhead but the room is hot and quiet.

FRED (CONT'D)

Both the state and the city statutes state quite clearly that the races are to be separated, that their accommodations are to be equal, and that the employees of the authorized bus lines are to assign seating in such a way to assure that Negroes and white people will sit separately, unless, of course, there is a Negro who is attending to a white person. The law fails to elucidate what the bus company operators are to do should it ever occur that a white person was attending a sickly Negro.

Fred puts his glasses back on. For his young age, he is able to cast a glow of experience on these matters because he has, in fact, lived these situations first hand.

FRED (CONT'D)

In practise, your honors, my client's experience is that the bus drivers interpret their authority to include telling a Negro to get up, move towards the back of the bus, and let a white person sit down in his or her place. Not only are the races segregated, as the law requires, but Negroes are routinely asked to surrender seats to white riders and if they do not, the drivers summon the police, and the Negro riders are taken away to jail. This is what happened to my client Aurelia Browder. This exact event happened to Susie McDonald. It happened to my client Claudette Colvin when she was only 15 years old. And it happened to my client Mary Louise Smith. It has happened over and over to thousands of Negroes in Montgomery and so I submit to you that even if the statutes were constitutional, and I strongly believe that they are not, it is surely not equal as the law demands if Negroes are required to stand specifically so that white people may sit!

Fred allows this to sink in.

FRED (CONT'D)

It isn't equal, your honors, because separate is never equal. We submit to you that the doctrine of separate but equal as established under the case of Plessy v. Ferguson was always a legal fiction that is incontrovertibly in conflict with the very letter as well as the spirit of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The 14th Amendment states '... nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.'

He pauses, allowing the words and ideas to sink in.

FRED (CONT'D)

In the State and City Code, we find the institutional support for perpetuating a customary segregation of the races and the lending out of the authority to do so to a private company. Even under the tortured logic of Plessy v. Ferguson, this is bad law. But we are not here today to discuss whether Negroes are getting equal treatment. Such a discussion would need to occur between the blind, the deaf and the mute. We are here to consider if the doctrine established by Plessy v. Ferguson is still the law of our land. The whole concept of separate but equal started before Plessy in the case of Roberts v. The City of Boston in 1849, and then affirmed in Plessy and then one hundred and five years later, just two years ago, the whole doctrine of separate but equal was repudiated in the very field of education, right where it started, when the courts ruled in the case of Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

The concept of separate but equal has been assailed in the cases of Morgan v. Virginia, in Merchant v. Pennsylvania Railroad, in Muir v. The City of Louisville Park Theatrical Association. The Supreme Court has upheld these and other decisions. It has repudiated the separate but equal fiction over and over, and we ask that you do the same.

Fred moves back to his desk, gathers his papers and holds them up.

FRED (CONT'D)

We are asking for a declaratory judgement as to whether the enforcement of said statutes and ordinances abridges the privileges and immunities of the plaintiffs as citizens of the United States or denies to them the equal protection of the laws, as secured by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and we pray that the defendants be permanently enjoined from enforcement these statutes claimed to be in conflict with Federal law. This is what we want. This is what we are asking the court for. This is justice. Thank you, your honors.

The courtroom lets out a collective sigh.

INT. HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The date is June 17, 1956. A huge CROWD again fills the venerable Holt Street Baptist Church and music is heard. It would appear that another mass meeting is about to occur but a closer look shows flowers around the church and several men dressed in tuxedos rather than suits.

Finally, the music stops and the distinctive melody of 'Here Comes The Bride' is heard. Everyone stands and turns to the back of the room where Bernice stands with her FATHER.

She starts down the aisle, and a look around sees Fred at the altar with his brothers Hugh and Thomas beside him.

The Reverend K. K. MITCHELL stands in front of the pulpit waiting for Bernice who takes her time.

Her father glances at Fred and then hands her off. The couple hold hands and face the Reverend.

MITCHELL

Friends, we are gathered here today to bring these two together in the bonds of holy matrimony...

Fred and Bernice glance at each other and smile. Behind them sit all the protest figures; Martin Luther King, E.D. Nixon (looking dour and uninterested), Clifford Durr and his wife, Robinson, Rosa Parks and her husband, and finally Nancy Gray who wipes tears from her eyes, thinking even now of Abe Gray and how much he missed.

INT. THE DERBY SUPPER CLUB - NIGHT

The wedding reception is in full swing. Hundreds press around the room, and at the center of it is Fred and Bernice, smiling, shaking hands and taking pictures.

In the middle of the mayhem, Bernice leans in to Fred and rests her head on his shoulder.

BERNICE

I hope it isn't always like this.

FRED

What do you mean?

BERNICE

I hope there isn't always lots of people around and a protest and a boycott. I want to live a normal life and have friends and children. Do you think this will go on forever?

Fred thinks for a moment and chooses his words carefully.

FRED

There won't always be a boycott. It will end and I think it will end before Christmas. But, I've made a goal for myself. I'm going to destroy everything segregated I can find. I want children, of course, but I don't want them to know about the things we do. I want them to know and see a world where they aren't treated like horses.



BERNICE

You're doing a fine job now. People love and respect you for what you do.

Fred sees King talking and laughing with Nixon. Martin seems to be the only one that can get a smile out of E. D. Nixon.

FRED

I don't want to let them down.

BERNICE

You won't. You never could.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Court is in session, JUDGE CARTER presiding. Fred sits and waits as does the city attorney WALTER KNABE. By now, legal action regarding the buses is routine so there are no reporters present, just a few interested WITNESSES.

Finally, the judge lifts his head up and takes off his glasses.

JUDGE CARTER

Mr. Gray, would you please tell me in your mind the difference between a protest and a boycott? You're clients are being sued for maintaining a boycott but you seem to have a curious set of definitions here.

Fred stands.

FRED

Your honor, the word protest in this instance is used as a noun, and it means, according to the dictionary, "an expression or declaration of objection, disapproval, or dissent, often in opposition to something a person is powerless to prevent or avoid." That is what my client is engaged in; not a boycott.

Knabe rolls his eyes and stands.

KNABE

Your honor, if I may?

Carter nods.

KNABE (CONT'D)

A protest is a part of a boycott. To use the dictionary definition, if we are going to have dueling dictionaries, a boycott is "to abstain from or act together in abstaining from using, buying, or dealing with as an expression of protest or disfavor or as a means of coercion." It's the coercive nature of this kind of protest that makes it illegal. These Negroes are trying to coerce the city into giving in by boycotting the buses. It's all they talk about.

Carter nods, and goes back to his notes. Fred and Knabe sit back down and wait.

Just then, the rear door opens and JOE AZBELL enters. He looks at Fred, obviously has news. A BAILIFF enters the front of the court room and hands Carter a note.

JUDGE CARTER

We're going to recess for the day.

With that, Carter quickly leaves the bench. Knabe looks at Fred and then back at Azbell. Fred gathers his notes and leaves.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Fred exits with Azbell on his heels. He sees a camera crew setting up.

AZBELL

We've heard from the court, and you've won your case. The Supreme Court upheld it. Segregation on the buses is dead. Do you have any reaction?

Just that moment, the camera crew turns on the lights. Fred is blinded and raises his hands to shield his eyes.

FRED

I... I need to confer with my clients. It's..

AZBELL

Come on, I can't write that! You won! It's over! Say something.

Fred is stunned and decides to bolt. He heads for the door.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Fred pulls up to his office and sees Bernice at the door. She comes outside beaming.

BERNICE

We won! We won! You did it! We won!

She jumps in the car and hugs and kisses Fred.

FRED

It's amazing. We did it. Listen,  
they're talking about it on the  
radio!

On the radio, a reporter describes what has happened. Bernice is laughing and yelling at people in the street as the pass!

BERNICE

We won! We won! We did it! We're  
getting back on the buses!

EXT. DEXTER AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Fred pulls up to the church and sees a large crowd has already gathered. Martin L. King and Nixon are standing on the steps when they see him arrive.

Fred gets out of his car to cheers from the CROWD. He smiles and walks up to both men who hug him. Tears flow freely and unashamedly from the old eyes of E. D. Nixon.

INT. DEXTER AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

King, Nixon and Fred with Bernice enter the church to cheers. They make their way to the pulpit to cheers and tears and celebration.

King steps to the pulpit.

KING

We're getting back on the buses and  
we aren't moving to the rear!

The house erupts in further cheers.

Fred's mother and brothers reach him and they hug. King is walking back to his office with others, and Fred sees his smiling face as the door is closed.

EXT. BULLOCK COUNTY - DAY

Fred drives by a field full of SHARECROPPERS. Some time has passed and Fred is dressed nicely and appears prosperous

INT. BULLOCK COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Fred sits next to a scrawny country boy in overalls. This is his client EDDIE LEE JORDAN. In the back sits Seymour Trammell, last seen with Wallace in Montgomery.

On the bench sits Judge George Wallace. He has changed little, still sports thick slicked back jet black hair but now is dressed in black robes.

WALLACE

Mista Gray. Can you approach the bench please?

Fred approaches the bench. Wallace makes no acknowledgement of their previous encounters.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Planning on taking this here speeding ticket up to the Supreme Court, are you?

FRED

Your honor, I find it wise to try every case like it's a constitutional case.

WALLACE

Speeding is not a constitutional issue. Your client is guilty of speeding. He's been convicted twice now. I'm just wondering where it ends? He could just serve his time and be done with it.

FRED

Three months to a seventeen year old is a long, long time.

WALLACE

I see an appeal bond here with nothing filled in for fines and days in jail. You're going to appeal regardless of sentence, aren't you?

FRED

If that's what my client wants.

WALLACE

Here's what's going to happen.  
Under fines, we're going to fine  
Mr. Jordan twenty five dollars.

Wallace writes in the fine amount on the bond.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

And under sentence, we're going to  
write in three months. Now it's all  
filled out.

He hands the bond to Fred. Eddie Lee's eyes fall; he's going  
to jail for three months.

FRED

Thank you, your honor.

WALLACE

Hold on, I'm not done yet. I've got  
another order here. This will place  
Mr. Jordan on unsupervised  
probation and in the custody of his  
father. And, it will suspend his  
sentence. Enough is enough. Just  
tell him to slow down.

Wallace smiles, bangs his gavel and leaves. Trammell snickers  
at Wallace's theatrics.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Fred waits in a waiting room with Cliff Durr.

Fred has cigars sticking out of his coat pocket. He offers  
one to Clifford. Cliff pats his pocket.

DURR

You gave me one already. But..  
Don't mind if I do.

Durr takes another and tucks it away for future enjoyment.

DURR (CONT'D)

I hear you tried a case before  
Judge Wallace.

FRED

I did. He was fair.

DURR

He's ambitious. That judgeship is a  
stepping stone for him.

(MORE)

DURR (CONT'D)

He's put together an exploratory committee to run for governor.

FRED

He won't win. Patterson has it sewn up.

DURR

Patterson's a war hero too, and he'd love to tell you all about it.

FRED

I'm going to subpoena him in regards to Act 140.

DURR

You're going to subpoena the sitting Attorney General over the boundary act?

FRED

The legislature wrote Negroes out of the city by changing the boundaries. They just don't want them to ever be able to vote. And AG Patterson doesn't have a problem with that.

DURR

Well, he'll grandstand for the media. It will be great PR for his campaign.

FRED

I don't know PR but I know that boundary act is going to fall.

Durr smiles. Fred is growing as a legal scholar.

DURR

They'll keep handing you opportunity after opportunity to test every corner of the law in this state. Useful idiots.

Just about then, a DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR

Fred Gray?

Fred stands. A NURSE enters.

NURSE

It's a girl. You can come on back.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Fred enters and sees Bernice holding the baby girl. Bernice is exhausted but she opens her eyes.

Fred is all smiles.

FRED

You did good! You did so good!

Bernice just smiles, she's too tired to talk.

They both relax and marvel at the new life that has been handed to them.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Fred passes in his car on his way to the Tuskegee Institute.

EXT. TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE - DAY

Fred parks his car in front of the famed Tuskegee Institute, founded by a former slave. The Institute is at the heart of Macon County, one of the poorer counties in Alabama.

As he passes through the front door, he runs in to Nurse Rivers coming out. She drops the folders she is carrying.

FRED

I'm so sorry.

RIVERS

It's my fault. Wasn't looking where I was going.

Fred helps her gather her files and they stand.

FRED

My name is Fred Gray.

RIVERS

Eunice Rivers. Are you the lawyer?  
You're Rosa Parks' lawyer?

She beams, happy to meet a celebrity.

FRED

Yes, ma'am.

RIVERS

Well, I'll be! It's so nice to meet you. I've read all about you in the papers!

FRED

Have we met before?

RIVERS

Oh, no, I'm sure not. I'd remember that.

Fred smiles and starts to walk away.

FRED

Well, it was good to meet you now.

RIVERS

My pleasure Mr. Gray. And thank you for all you've done.

Fred smiles and heads into the building.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Fred sits with a legal pad and listens as DR. LUTHER FOSTER and DR. C. G. GOMILLION lay out the facts of what has happened recently in the town of Tuskegee.

FOSTER

You have to remember, Macon County itself is 85% Negro. We've always had cordial relations between the white folks and those connected to the Institute. But they've tried everything to keep the voter rolls as white as possible. They'll even register white voters and then go into hiding.

FRED

How has your boycott worked so far?

FOSTER

It's worked very well. Believe me, when 85% of your population stops coming to your businesses, it has an impact.

GOMILLION

Frankly, that's why we think the Legislature worked with the city to change the boundaries.

(MORE)



GOMILLION (CONT'D)

They know that eventually, we'll be able to get voters registered. So, they moved us out of the city by changing the boundaries.

FRED

How many Negro voters are in the city now?

GOMILLION

Five.

FRED

Do you have a map that shows the new boundaries?

GOMILLION

Sure...

Foster gets up and goes to a shelf and pulls down a rolled up map. He spreads it out on the table.

FOSTER

The old boundaries were easy; it was a square that extended out a mile and a half from the courthouse. But now...

Gomillion points out the various turning points on the map.

GOMILLION

The new boundaries start here, goes up to here, jogs back this way, goes just up this street to cut out all these homes, goes back over here to include all of this neighborhood and then comes back to the old boundary. The only thing these twists and turns have in common is that they cut out areas with Negro populations.

FRED

They cut this Institute out of the city?

FOSTER

Yes, they did.

Fred stares at the marks that Gomillion made, his mind turning.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Fred sits on the back porch with Bernice, who is feeding the baby a bottle. She is pregnant again. They are watching the news on a tiny TV.

Fred sees ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN PATTERSON on the screen making a stump speech supporting further segregation and attacking the NAACP.

FRED

There he is.

BERNICE

I don't like him. So full of himself.

Fred stares at Patterson, sees the stern uncompromising look on the man's face.

FRED

We'll see if he's as full of himself under oath.

BERNICE

It scares me when you go up there. It's such a long drive and you're out there alone. You need to do what Nixon told you and get a gun.

FRED

If I ever used a gun, no matter how justified, you know they'd find a way to put me in jail forever. I'd be no more use to you that way than dead.

BERNICE

Don't talk that way. This is my family, and I can't have it without you.

Fred looks away from the TV to Bernice. She wells up at the thought of losing him.

FRED

I'll be careful.

She nods, then leans in and kisses the baby on the head.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Another court room, another CROWD has gathered including the media. All are standing. Fred stands at his table with his notes and files in front of JUDGE WILL WALTON.

Sitting off to one side are George Wallace and Seymour Trammell. This is a media circus trial and all are interested.

At the table with Fred is Arthur Shores. Fred is nervous and sweating.

SHORES

He's just another witness.

FRED

I know that. But everyone in the state government is here. I didn't know this would happen.

SHORES

Well, it did. And you're here which is what's important. You are in control. This is your arena. He'll tear you apart if he thinks you're scared. So don't' be.

At the other table sits several DEFENSE ATTORNEYS including JAMES CARTER.

JUDGE WALTON

This court is now in session.

CUT TO:

The trial is well underway. The assembled crowd watches silently and with rapt attention.

FRED

Your honor, we call Attorney General John Patterson.

This creates a serious buzz in the courtroom. From the front row, JOHN PATTERSON stands. He is tall with thinning dark hair. His steely glare passes over the room as he struts to the witness stand. Patterson has the patrician air of a man born to rule.

BAILIFF

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

PATTERSON

I do.

Fred confers with Shores one more time and then comes from behind his desk.

FRED

Welcome to Macon County, Mr. Attorney General.

Patterson doesn't blink.

FRED (CONT'D)

Do you know what percentage Negroes make up of the total population of Macon County, sir?

PATTERSON

I don't know the exact figure.

FRED

It's 85 percent, sir. Eighty five percent of the population here is Negro. Given that fact, do you think it's wise for the merchants of the City of Tuskegee, who are white, to alienate the Negro population?

Carter rises.

CARTER

Your honor, relevance? The Attorney General isn't here to discuss business strategy.

JUDGE WALTON

Mr. Gray?

FRED

Your honor, the plaintiffs are asking that the courts force my clients to do business with merchants who, until very recently, had the business of my clients without the use of force. This case is about who does business with whom, so I think it's relevant to ask if it is smart business to aggravate a previously loyal customer base.

Walton nods; Patterson must answer.

PATTERSON

It would seem unwise. But it wasn't the merchants who changed the city boundaries; it was the Alabama Legislature.

FRED

Did you, in your capacity as the Attorney General, work with the Alabama Legislature to change the boundaries of the city?

PATTERSON

In my capacity as the Attorney General, I confer with members of the Legislature on a variety of relevant legal issues.

FRED

What about this legal issue?

PATTERSON

I did.

FRED

Did you know that Sen. Engelhardt, who wrote this bill, was the executive secretary of the White Citizen's Council of Alabama?

PATTERSON

Yes, I did.

FRED

Are you a member of the White Citizen's Council of Alabama?

CITY ATTORNEY

Objection, your honor. The Attorney General's memberships aren't at issue.

JUDGE WALTON

Sustained.

FRED

So you conferred with Sen. Engelhardt on Act 140?

PATTERSON

Yes.

FRED

And Act 140 changed the boundaries of the City of Tuskegee from a square to a 28 sided sea dragon? Did you know that?

PATTERSON

Are you asking me how many sides a sea dragon has?

FRED

I'm confirming that in your conference with Senator Engelhardt that you knew the impact on the city boundaries.

PATTERSON

I did.

FRED

Then isn't it fair to conclude that you, Mr. Patterson, have had a hand in inflicting this unwise business plan on the merchants of the City of Tuskegee where now they have to get the state to force their formally willing customers back in to their stores?

CARTER

Objection!

There is a silence as Walton and every one else waits for the City Attorney to state his objection. Carter scrambles.

CARTER (CONT'D)

It's an accusation dressed as a question, your honor.

JUDGE WALTON

Rephrase, please, Mr. Gray, into a question he can answer.

FRED

Did you consider the effect on the merchants when you were conferring with Sen. Engelhardt?

PATTERSON

Of course I did. I am vitally concerned with their welfare which is why I'm here today.

FRED

Did you consider the effect on the  
Negros of Macon County in any of  
your conferences with Sen.  
Engelhardt?

PATTERSON

They were not my primary concern.

FRED

Well, if it was unwise from a  
business perspective for the  
merchants, and the Negros of Macon  
County were not of your concern,  
then can you tell me who was to  
benefit from Act 140?

Here is the question with an obvious answer, but Patterson  
doesn't take the bait.

PATTERSON

I'll refer you to Mayor Lightfoot  
as to the benefits of the new  
boundaries.

FRED

So you have no opinion regarding  
the new boundaries?

PATTERSON

I have an opinion, yes. I support  
them.

FRED

Would your support of Act 140 be  
related in any way with your  
ambition to run for Governor next  
year?

This questions brings about some laughter from the crowd, but  
oddly, Carter makes no objection. Wallace leans forward in  
his seat and Patterson makes eye contact with him.

PATTERSON

I have no plans to announce a run  
for the Governorship from a witness  
stand. Being the Governor of this  
great state would be an honor, and  
I'm humble to even be considered,  
but this isn't the time or place to  
make such an announcement.

FRED

Can I count that as a yes answer?

Now, Carter stands.

CARTER  
Objection.

FRED  
I withdraw the question. That's  
all.

Patterson smiles, reaches over and shakes the hand of the Judge and leaves the stand. Fred notes Wallace conferring with his supporters.

SHORES  
One of these men will be the next  
governor and they both hate you.  
Nice work.

Fred exhales.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Fred arrives home late in the evening. Bernice and Deborah, now a healthy two year old, are sleeping on the couch in front of the TV. A news report about the Kennedy/Nixon debate is replaying.

Fred lifts Deborah off of Bernice and carries her off to her room.

Fred takes the comforter off the couch and lays it over Bernice. He turns off the table lamp and lays down on the couch beside her to watch TV.

Suddenly, the phone starts ringing. Bernice is up in a heart beat and Fred as well. Deborah is heard wailing in the other room; the phone has woken the sleeping baby.

She rushes off to comfort the baby as Fred goes to the phone. She re-enters with the baby.

BERNICE  
Hush, now. You're OK.

Fred comes back in, looking stunned.

BERNICE (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

FRED  
That was Cliff Durr. The Supreme  
Court is taking up our appeal.  
(MORE)



FRED (CONT'D)

I'm going to argue before the Supreme Court.

Bernice rocks Deborah.

BERNICE

I can't believe you woke this baby. Here.

She hands the screaming child to Fred and starts to leave.

FRED

Did you hear what I just said? I'm going to argue before the Supreme Court.

BERNICE

I heard you. Now hear me. You haven't been home before 11 o'clock for weeks, and I got one baby kicking me in the ribs and another one hanging off my arm and I'm tired and you woke me up and the baby. So I'm going to bed and you can get her back to sleep. Good night.

FRED

Hey, I wasn't off at a juke joint until 11 o'clock. I was at work.

BERNICE

What, I don't work?

FRED

I didn't say that. But my work is important.

Bernice fumes. She is angrier than she has words to express.

FRED (CONT'D)

I didn't mean it to sound that way. Now, take this baby, I think she needs changing.

Bernice takes Deborah, turns and leaves without further words.

EXT. SUPREME COURT BUILDING - DAY

It is October 18, 1960. The Nixon/Kennedy election is red hot.

On this bright clear fall morning Fred, ROBERT CARTER, Gomillion, Foster and OTHERS mount the long steps that lead to the doors of the Supreme Court.

INT. SUPREME COURT - DAY

This is it: the holiest of holies in US Law. In front of Fred and Carter sit 9 Judges in black robes. They are Justices WARREN, BLACK, FRANKFURTER, DOUGLAS, CLARK, HARLAN, BRENNEN, WHITAKER, and STEWART. Fred and Robert Carter have the floor.

Chief Justice Warren starts the proceeding.

WARREN

Number 32, Doctor C.C. Gomillion and petitioners versus Mr. Phil Lightfoot, Mayor of Tuskegee. Mr. Gray?

Fred stands and takes a deep breath.

FRED

If it please the court - The argument of the petitioners is divided into two parts. I will argue the facts of this case, and Mr. Carter shall argue the applicable laws. We feel that the facts in this case are so important that we have produced a large map, seen here and on page 13 of the record, that will demonstrate both the old boundaries, before Act 140 was enacted and the new boundaries after Act 140 was put into place.

Fred moves a large map of the City of Tuskegee forward. It is secured on an easel and can easily be seen by all. It is the same map seen in Dr. Foster's office earlier but now has the boundaries of the city in sharp black lines.

Many of the Justices turn to page 13 where each finds their own copy of the map.

FRANKFURTER

Are we to understand that these black lines seen here are the boundaries of the city?

FRED

What is in the black lines is in the city, what is outside the black lines is outside. The outermost lines near the edge of the map, that form a square, are the old boundary lines.

BLACK

How long were the old boundary lines in place?

FRED

I believe that they have been in place for at least 10 years.

BLACK

And where is the Tuskegee Institute on this map?

FRED

Your honor, this area up here is the institute.

BLACK

Here? Is it not in the city of Tuskegee?

FRED

The Institute is now outside the boundaries of the city. It was in the city previously, but is now outside the city boundaries.

WARREN

What year was this city founded?

FRED

I'm not exactly sure but I think it was in 1865.

Fred takes a moment to let the Judges study the map.

FRED (CONT'D)

The action is brought by 12 Negroes that live in what used to be the City of Tuskegee, and now are outside the boundaries of the city.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

When the Alabama Legislature passed Act 140, the city boundary was changed and each of the 12 Negroes that used to live in the city suddenly did not, and they were denied the ability to vote in city elections as a consequence. We filed this action in the Federal District Court in Montgomery and were subsequently denied relief at which point we appealed to the Fifth Circuit Court where we were also denied relief on a two to one vote. But we have argued that the previous cases that have dealt with municipal boundaries are not relevant to this action. Act 140, unlike other boundary changes in the state of Alabama, does not state any purpose. The state has not given a reason for the boundary change, one way or the other. They have not stated which political thicket they sought to enter or stay out of. They passed the act and the boundaries were changed.

WARREN

What county is Tuskegee in?

FRED

It is in Macon County of which Tuskegee is the county seat.

WARREN

And what is the population of the City of Tuskegee?

FRED

Your honor, the population before Act 140 was put in place was 6700, but we have not been able to determine the population since the boundaries changed. The petitioners allege in this complaint that Act 140 exists solely to deny the petitioners and the class they represent who used to live in the city that right to live in the city and to vote in municipal elections. It is meant to deny them the right to vote because of their color.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

We further allege in the complaint that the exclusionary purpose and effect of the Act is revealed by the map. Prior to Act 140, as you can see, the city was a perfect square. Now, the city goes up here and weaves around and as far as we can detect, has 28 sides. Before the act, the population of Negroes in the city was 5397 out of a population of 6700. Of those 5397, prior to the act, there were 400 qualified Negro voters. Since the act, all of the concentrated areas of Negro voters have been excluded, including the areas around the Institute.

BLACK

There were 400 Negro voters before? Did they exercise their vote in municipal elections?

FRED

Yes, they were qualified voters and they voted in municipal elections all the way to voting for the President. Just in the last month, there has been an election and they were not able to vote in the most recent municipal elections.

WARREN

So they can vote for everything else relevant to the county but not in municipal elections?

FRED

That is correct. As far as we can ascertain, none of the white people who lived in the old boundaries has been excluded from the city under Act 140. This action must be considered, we submit, in light of the history and the racial composition of Macon County, and by that I mean that Negroes have had a hard time registering to vote. This has long been a problem. Approximately 85% of the population of Macon County is Negro.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Act 140 is another attempt to disenfranchise the Negro population and assure white control of the city of Tuskegee. For example, in the past four years, since 1956, only 3 Negroes have been able to register to vote. We allege that Act 140 exists solely to deny Negroes the right to vote, and it therefore violates both the due process clause of the 14th Amendment as well as the 15th Amendment right to vote. Mr. Carter shall now argue the relevant sections of the law.

Fred has done his part and he steps back and sits as Robert Carter, who has been here before, stands to speak. Carter is Negro legal royalty and he is silky smooth.

CARTER

As Mr. Gray has pointed out, there was no stated purpose of Act 140. That being so, its practical effect is all there is to know about the act itself and the effect is clear; it denies Negroes the right to vote. Act 140 did exactly the same thing as demanding that the Negroes move out of the city. It does not matter if this clear constitutional violation is done openly or covertly. It's as gross a case of racial discrimination as has ever come before this court.

Fred sits, confident that he has driven home his case as he listens to Carter. His exhilaration is evident.

EXT. NEWTOWN CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY

Fred is painting an old building in a poverty stricken area with many other PARISHIONERS. Bernice is there cleaning windows with the other women, DEBORAH and VANESSA, their daughters, are beside her. And she is pregnant again.

INT. NEWTOWN CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY

Fred is leading the small congregation in a song. While the church is small and the congregates poor, great joy comes from the music.

Much to Fred's surprise, the back door opens and Clifford Durr slips in with VIRGINIA, his wife, at his side. Bernice sees them and brings them over to her seat.

As the song continues, Fred watches as Clifford writes something on a church bulletin. He walks over and hands it to Fred. It reads "Gomillion affirmed, 9-0, unanimous decision. Congratulations."

Fred raises his voice and arms in praise. Bernice can see something happy has happened and she smiles as well.

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

Another lonely highway. Mockingbirds and crickets fill the humid air. Fred is changing a tire while Nixon sits in the car listening to the radio. Nixon is older and clearly slowing down. He mops his sweating brow.

On the radio, George Wallace is heard at his inaugural address.

WALLACE (O.S.)

Today I have stood, where once  
 Jefferson Davis stood, and took an  
 oath to my people. It is very  
 appropriate then that from this  
 Cradle of the Confederacy, this  
 very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon  
 Southland, that today we sound the  
 drum for freedom as have our  
 generations of forebears before us  
 done, time and time again through  
 history. Let us rise to the call of  
 freedom-loving blood that is in us  
 and send our answer to the tyranny  
 that clanks its chains upon the  
 South. In the name of the greatest  
 people that have ever trod this  
 earth, I draw the line in the dust  
 and toss the gauntlet before the  
 feet of tyranny . . . and I say . .  
 . segregation today . . .  
 segregation tomorrow . . .  
 segregation forever.

There is thunderous applause. Fred is having trouble turning a lug nut and finally explodes in anger.

FRED

God...

He almost takes the Lord's name in vain but stops himself. He wipes away sweat from his brow and sits down. Nixon steps out.

NIXON

What's wrong?

FRED

I'm fine. It's just hard. We get order after order, but still, the white folks send this kind of man to the govenor's mansion. And every time, I know I shouldn't be surprised, but I am. I think we're making progress, but then I hear that. It just makes me mad!

Fred throws his tire iron on the road. After a moment, he sees Nixon smiling.

FRED (CONT'D)

What's funny? I don't think I've ever seen you smile.

NIXON

I never seen you mad.

FRED

I am mad! I'm mad as hell! Did you hear what he just said? They want segregation forever. And when I go home, Bernice is mad at me. We barely see each other any more except on Sunday and when we do, she won't speak to me. But here I am, off to another court. What are we doing out here? Is it worth it?

Nixon laughs again and sits by Fred.

NIXON

I ain't one to ask for advice about women. When I was 10 years old, I worked at a grocery store. All during the day, there was old men who would sit in front of that store and play checkers. These men were mean. Some of them were Confederate soldiers, some missing arms and legs. I heard them talking about lynchings and folks they killed. Now, this fella Wallace, he ain't tough. He's not more than knee high.

(MORE)



NIXON (CONT'D)

He don't believe what he says, not  
in his bones. He'll have his day,  
then be gone. So you can get mad,  
but don't you ever get sad. And  
let's fix this tire cause I'm hot.

Nixon struggles to stand and retrieves the tire iron.

FRED

What am I going to do about  
Bernice?

NIXON

Women like to stew about things  
then they get over it. Get her some  
flowers. That might help.

INT. HOME - EVENING

Fred arrives home late with a huge bouquet of flowers and  
sees Bernice on the couch surrounded by folded laundry, baby  
toys and a dirty dish.

She takes her eyes off the TV for a moment, sees him and then  
returns to her show.

He sits and holds out the flowers. She glances at them then  
turns away.

FRED

These are for you.

BERNICE

I know. They're nice. But I'm too  
tired to enjoy them right now. And  
I don't want flowers from you.

FRED

I'm sorry about all the time I'm  
away. But you knew when you married  
me what my goals were and I just do  
what it takes to win.

BERNICE

When we married I didn't know I was  
going to become an integration  
widow. And it's not just me. You're  
missing out on so much of the  
girl's lives. They don't even ask  
when you'll be home.

FRED

I'm doing what I do for them.  
They'll live in a better world  
because of the sacrifices we make.  
I thought we were in agreement on  
this. I know what I'm doing and my  
conscience is clear.

BERNICE

I'm sure it is. And you're doing  
important things. But I don't know  
that you really miss us when you're  
away. I don't think you do.

This angers Fred. He lays the flowers down and heads back to  
the bedroom.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A close up of a young Negro female reveals VIVIAN MALONE in  
Fred's office. She is neither crying nor shaking, but it is  
clear that she is scared.

Fred waits with Malone and OTHERS who work in the office.  
Also present is NICHOLAS KATZENBACH, the assistant attorney  
general of the United States. Katzenbach is on the phone.

KATZENBACH

Yes, Mr. President. I'll tell her.  
Please do.

Katzenbach hangs up.

KATZENBACH (CONT'D)

President Kennedy, as promised, has  
just nationalized the Alabama  
National Guard. This means they are  
no longer under the supervision of  
Governor Wallace. Now, they answer  
to the President.

FRED

Will the Guard really answer to the  
President?

KATZENBACH

They'll do as they are told.

FRED

And if they don't?

Katzenbach hesitates.

KATZENBACH

I believe that at that point the President would call in the Army to settle this.

This news breaks Malone. She starts to weep.

MALONE

I can't do this. I can't!

FRED

(to others)

Can we have a minute?

Everyone files out of Fred's office and it is just he and his client, who is a girl of 20.

FRED (CONT'D)

Well, I'm really proud at how you've conducted yourself through all of this. It's a lot of pressure. But when you walk through those doors, and you register at the University of Alabama, you're going to take a whole lot of other folks with you. I wanted to go there but I couldn't.

She continues to weep.

MALONE

I just wanted to study accounting and maybe get a good job. Now the army might have to come...

FRED

I don't think that will happen.

MALONE

Do you think Gov. Wallace will get out of the way?

FRED

I think he will. He's not that tough. We'll get you in that school.

Malone wipes away a tear.

MALONE

I'm really scared.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Fred comes out of his office with Malone. Katzenbach now stands by a tall gray haired man in a uniform complete with a helmet. This is GENERAL GRAHAM. Katzenbach is on the phone.

KATZENBACH

It's the Attorney General. We're going to put him on an intercom.

He takes the hand set and puts it on a device so all can hear.

KATZENBACH (CONT'D)

OK, can you hear us still?

BOBBY KENNEDY (O.S.)

Yes, I can. Is Miss Malone present?

MALONE

Yes, sir.

BOBBY KENNEDY (O.S.)

Miss Malone, I want to assure you that we're directing the full forces of the United States government to get you into the University of Alabama safely. General Graham will escort you and we believe that the Governor will stand down at that time.

MALONE

Thank you.

BOBBY KENNEDY (O.S.)

You're welcome. Your attorney brought you this far, we're not going to let you be turned back now. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Katzenbach picks the phone back up and wraps up his conversation with Kennedy as Graham steps forward.

GENERAL GRAHAM

Young lady, are you ready to go to school?

Malone nods.

EXT. ROADWAY - DAY

A caravan of military vehicles heads for the University. They pass CROWDS that line the roads. Most of the crowds are white and they loudly boo as the vehicles pass.

Malone just keeps her eyes shut.

EXT. FOSTER AUDITORIUM - DAY

There he stands: George Wallace at his podium in the door of Foster Auditorium where Malone has to enter to register.

Surrounding Wallace are hordes of MEDIA, and ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS.

NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS start arriving and piling out of their jeeps. They begin to line the steps to the auditorium door.

Finally, the car carrying Katzenbach, Malone, and General Graham arrives. All step out of the car to a background of boos and hisses from a crowd that has been kept across the street. Wallace has been careful not to allow the conditions that could deteriorate into a real riot.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fred and all his office staff watch as the drama unfolds on live television. This is what they see:

EXT. FOSTER AUDITORIUM - DAY

Katzenbach starts up the steps with Graham. Wallace steps to a podium that has been set up for him. Katzenbach stops a few feet away and waits a moment to let Wallace take in the troops.

KATZENBACH

Governor Wallace, as promised, we're back. As you know, President Kennedy has instructed the Alabama National Guard to escort Vivian Malone in to the University of Alabama to register for classes as instructed by the courts. The Alabama National Guard has been called up by the President so they are no longer under your control. General Graham is here to escort Miss Malone inside.

(MORE)

KATZENBACH (CONT'D)

So, we are asking that you step  
aside under orders from the  
President of the United States.

At that point, Katzenbach steps back and Graham steps  
forward.

GENERAL GRAHAM

It is my sad duty to ask you to  
step aside under the orders of the  
President of the United States.

Wallace now has his moment and he isn't one to miss the  
opportunity.

WALLACE

General, this unwelcome, unwanted,  
unwarranted and force-induced  
intrusion upon the campus of the  
University of Alabama today offers  
a frightful example of the  
oppression of the rights,  
privileges and sovereignty of this  
State by officers of the Federal  
Government. It is important that  
the people of this State and nation  
understand that this action is in  
violation of rights reserved to the  
State by the Constitution of the  
United States and the Constitution  
of the State of Alabama. While some  
few may applaud these acts,  
millions of Americans will gaze in  
sorrow upon the situation existing  
at this great institution of  
learning. Out of deference to the  
President, and out of respect for  
this great nation, I will  
regretfully be forced to step  
aside.

Wallace steps back, and a Trooper removes the podium. At that  
point, Malone and Katzenbach enter the building to the whirl  
and click of cameras.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fred and his STAFF have just watched the standoff with  
Wallace on television, and they exhale as they see Vivian  
Malone enter.

Walter Cronkite comes back on screen to offer the wrap up to the news. Fred smiles and is congratulated by others in the office.

EXT. NEWTOWN CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY

The congregation at Newtown has grown. Fred, Bernice and the kids are having a dinner on the grounds at the church on a glorious spring day. EVERYONE is dressed nicely as food is passed from table to table and person to person.

Bernice observes that Fred is tense, and not really engaged with the congregation. But, she has a new baby, this time a boy, to contend with and she is pregnant AGAIN.

INT. CAR - DAY

On the way home from church, Fred listens to the radio. The children are fighting about who gets to sit in the middle seat in the back.

FRED

Hush! Hush, be quiet!

RADIO NEWS PERSON

It's tense in Selma today. The marchers have attempted to make this journey before but been turned back, and authorities have said they will not allow this demonstration to go forward. We can see a great crowd of police on the other side of the bridge...

EXT. SELMA - DAY

It is March 7, 1965. About 600 CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTORS are walking through the streets of Selma along Route 80. White TOWNSPEOPLE watch from the sidewalks as the marchers pass silently by.

EXT. THE EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - DAY

On the other side of the bridge wait several hundred ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS on foot and on horseback. They are joined by Dallas County SHERIFF officers and a host of JOURNALISTS including some with film cameras.

The marchers, led by JOHN LEWIS, reach the bridge and slow briefly as the array of law enforcement on the other side of the bridge mount up and begin to prepare.

But they press on, hugging the railing as cars continue to pass.

The police pull gas masks down over their faces. They withdraw batons from their holsters and assemble into lines. Nothing is said; they know what they are doing. The marchers draw closer and closer to their line.

The assembled media can see it coming; the marchers and the cops will collide and no one is turning back. Cameras are raised, recorders are turned on.

Then it happens. The police start to surge forward. In no time, marchers and police collide and marchers fall under the weight of the police. Tear gas canisters are fired and smoke wafts through the air.

Those marchers that do not fall under the first wave stop at the site of what has happened to those in front of them. They pause, and then start to move backwards, but not fast enough. Soon, the police are on them pushing and shoving and swinging clubs. Now the retreat is a full fledged rout as unarmed marchers are trampled by mask-wearing cops.

The scene degrades into more mayhem as marchers try to both defend themselves and give in to demands shouted from behind masks. The noise and yelling increase. Horse hooves clack on the pavement. Cars honk horns, feet scuffle on pavement. It is chaos...

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Fred is getting dressed while watching a replay of the Bloody Sunday march on TV. A phone is ringing.

Finally, Bernice picks up the phone. She calls to Fred.

BERNICE

Everyone is there, they're just waiting on you.

FRED

OK. I'm going there now.

BERNICE

I packed some clean clothes and some sandwiches. We won't see you all week, will we?



FRED

Probably not. From now on, we're going to file the next day. They hit us, we'll hit back quicker than they can imagine. We're going to fight fast and fight dirty.

BERNICE

I wonder what Martin would say about that.

FRED

As long as we win, I think he'd say hallelujah. Good night.

He kisses Bernice and heads out the door.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The District Court has not changed much since Fred argued the bus case some nine years earlier. The judge is Frank Johnson. The court is packed with MEDIA, OBSERVERS, and OTHERS.

Fred's eyes are bloodshot from the all-nighter but he stands tall beside John Lewis, who is still showing injuries from the Pettus Bridge incident. At the other table are MAURY SMITH and JOHN GOODWIN, for the state.

JOHNSON

We'll start with Mr. Gray.

FRED

Judge Johnson, this is a case of as pure an obstruction as any court in the land is likely to see and frankly, I think I speak for the vast majority of Americans who are outraged at what happened just yesterday in Selma. It was a riot not carried out by a mob, but by the police who are charged with preventing mob violence. My clients have a right to walk, to march, to skip, to hop, to run to Montgomery along a public right of way and protest their treatment in this state. It's as simple as the language of the first amendment of the constitution regarding freedom of speech.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

We're asking that the Federal court grant relief and instruct state authorities to stand down and let this lawful, peaceful demonstration go forward.

JOHNSON

That's all?

FRED

That's all.

JOHNSON

Mr. Smith?

SMITH

Judge Johnson, let me first say that Governor Wallace is shocked at what happened at the Pettus Bridge yesterday and is committed to preventing any sort of repeat of that occurrence. He's ordered a full report be drawn up by the troopers and will release his findings as soon as they are available. Now, in regards to this lawsuit drafted literally in the dead of night by Mr. Gray, we simply do not recognize the right of a federal court to determine who can carry on a protest that involves the public safety of all the citizens, black and white, of this great state. If Mr. Gray would like to carry on a dialogue with state officials about how these sorts of demonstrations can be carried out in the future, Governor Wallace would look forward to a meeting.

JOHNSON

A meeting?

SMITH

Yes, sir. A meeting, right there in the Governors office with the Governor himself. He's looking forward to it.

There is some snickering in the room as Johnson grits his teeth.

JOHNSON  
Is that all, Mr. Smith?

SMITH  
Yes, sir.

JOHNSON  
If the plaintiffs wanted a meeting, they wouldn't have filed a motion against the Governor. Tell George I said so. In the case of John Lewis et al versus George Wallace et al, I find that the plaintiffs are exercising their constitutional right to assembly and freedom of expression. They have the right to conduct this march. Therefore, I am directing Governor Wallace to provide police protection for the marchers no later than March 22, 1965. Injunctive relief is granted.

Lewis smiles broadly and hugs Fred. Media pours out of the court to file reports while Johnson quickly exits. Fred sees Smith and Goodwin conferring. They have to deliver the news to Wallace.

EXT. MONTGOMERY CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Fred has joined arms with King and THOUSANDS OF OTHERS who have reached the capital at the end of a long march from Selma. It is quiet but the march conveys power and determination.

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A group of MARCH LEADERS and WALLACE ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS along with selected MEDIA are gathered in the Governor's office for a tense meet and greet with the Governor.

Wallace is walking down a line of Negro marchers shaking hands and welcoming them to Montgomery. He is now a national celebrity and his dress and demeanor have wildly improved.

Photo cameras flash and Wallace has a huge smile on his face. Smith and Goodwin trail behind Wallace, Smith making the introductions.

Finally, Wallace reaches Fred.

SMITH  
Governor, this is Fred Gray.

WALLACE

Oh, I know Fred. We go way back. Back when I was a judge, we tried quite a few cases together didn't we?

FRED

Yes, sir, we did.

WALLACE

And I was fair, wasn't I?

FRED

You were fair.

WALLACE

See, fellas! You Northern newspaper people can report on that. The biggest Negro lawyer in the state remembers how fair I was!

Wallace throws his arm around Fred and photos are taken.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

You take care, now, Fred, ya hear?

Interaction with Fred was turned into another PR opportunity for Wallace. Fred grins and bears it.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

The family is having dinner together. The kids talk and jostle and Bernice keeps them focused on eating their dinner. Deborah has since been joined by Vanessa, Fred Jr. And baby Stanley.

FRED

I think we should move up to Tuskegee.

Conversation stops. Deborah is oldest with the most to lose.

DEBORAH

I don't want to move to Tuskegee.

BERNICE

Why? All our family is here in Montgomery.

DEBORAH

And our friends. I don't know anyone in Tuskegee.

FRED JR.  
Where's Tuskegee?

FRED  
Voter registration is going forward there. There will be more black voters there than in any other part of the state soon.

Bernice can see what's coming and is not pleased.

BERNICE  
So what?

FRED  
Someone will be first. It could be me.

DEBORAH  
First to do what?

FRED  
To get elected to the Legislature.

FRED JR.  
Mommy, I'm not hungry.

Bernice will hear no more. She gets up and stomps to the kitchen.

DEBORAH  
Daddy's in trouble again.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fred is drying dishes that Bernice hands him.

BERNICE  
You won't like it. Even if you win. All those meetings. You hate meetings. You like working alone.

FRED  
I... That's not true. I work with people all day long.

BERNICE  
People who work for you. When you have to meet with 100 people to get anything done, and when it is done, it's not what you wanted, you won't like it.

Fred thinks about that, but says nothing.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

I'm getting a real estate license. Then I can work but set my own hours. I can be home when the kids get home from school.

FRED

You weren't going to talk to me first?

BERNICE

You might not have noticed if I didn't tell you. I love you, but I have a life too, and these kids can't wait for you to finish up with the state of Alabama. Tuskegee might be a good place to buy and sell houses, so it's OK with me if you want to move. But if you run for office, you're going to hate it. That's all I have to say.

She goes back to the dishes.

EXT. HOME - DAY

The new Gray home in Tuskegee is beautiful. Lush lawns frame lovely suburban homes in a mostly white neighborhood. There are new cars in the driveway and his CHILDREN play in the yard around him.

Fred is putting a campaign sign in his front yard. He's running for congress and his name is spelled out in big block letters. He steps back to look at it.

He hears a lawn mower start and looks over. One of his WHITE NEIGHBORS waves at him and he waves back.

Fred crosses the yard and sits in a lawn chair that Bernice left out. What, he thinks, is that man really thinking?

He watches the kids for a moment. Is this what a desegregated life will feel like? Something below the surface, some current still tugs at Fred's ever-vigilant mind. Something is not right.

Bernice, suddenly at his side, snaps him back to reality.

BERNICE

Martin has been shot.

EXT. MONTGOMERY CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Pull back from a US Flag and the Alabama state flag reveals a swearing-in ceremony on the steps of the capitol. Fred is being sworn in as a member of the Alabama House of Representatives by Judge EMMETT.

JUDGE EMMETT

Do you swear to uphold the laws of the state of Alabama so help you God?

FRED

I do.

JUDGE EMMETT

Congratulations, Mr. Gray. You're the first Negro to serve in this chamber in over 100 years.

There is applause from the gathered crowd of mostly African Americans. Several WHITE BYSTANDERS and MEDIA watch from a distance.

FRED

Thank you all. Thanks for coming here today. I just want to thank all of my supporters, those that voted for me, and to say that I intend to represent all the people of my district, not just the black ones. Everyone counts, and everyone deserves to have their voice heard. My doors are always open to you. So if you'll let Governor Wallace, who I now represent in this chamber know this, I look forward to hearing his concerns.

This gets a big laugh from the crowd.

INT. CAPITOL OFFICES - DAY

Fred makes his way through the corridors of the Alabama House building. While there are polite nods in his direction, most of the WHITE LEGISLATORS literally cross to the other side of the hallway as he passes.

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred waits in the lobby of the office of the Governor, looking at the framed portraits of past state Governors.

There is John Patterson staring down at him as well as others all the way back into the past.

Finally, a SECRETARY opens the doors and nods to Fred who enters Wallace's office.

INT. WALLACE'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred enters as the Secretary leaves. Wallace has positioned himself dramatically at the window that faces the dome. He turns as Fred enters.

WALLACE

Well, is that Fred Gray?

He crosses and extends a hand to Fred. They shake hands.

FRED

It's a pleasure to see you again.

WALLACE

It's a pleasure to meet my new representative in the House. We go way back, don't we?

FRED

We surely do.

WALLACE

I remember back when you were a newly minted lawyer and I was a country judge. Seems like a lifetime ago, doesn't it?

FRED

It sure does.

Wallace indicates that Fred should sit and he goes back to his desk and sits.

WALLACE

I watched you argue Browder versus Gayle. And now, here we are, you a famous lawyer and member of the legislature, and me, an amateur boxer and tired out judge the governor. Doesn't that beat all?

Fred is unsure what all this friendly remembrance of history is about so he just plays along.

FRED

It beats all.



Wallace sighs. He seems to want to say something to Fred but has trouble getting around to it.

WALLACE

How's your wife? Bernice, isn't it?

FRED

Yes, sir. She's fine. I'm very sorry about your late wife. That must have been hard on you.

Wallace smiles sadly.

WALLACE

Lurleen was a fine woman. Kind, and gentle, and caring. We went through a lot together. When I was in the army, we lived in a chicken coop for a while. Lots of changes.

FRED

A lot has changed.

Wallace manages a tight smile.

WALLACE

Yes, it has. I guess you've done as much as anyone in this state to bring about changes to our laws and our way of life.

FRED

Maybe, but if you don't mind me saying, you've done as much as anyone to stop those changes from occurring.

WALLACE

Yes, sir I sure have. I represent the will of the people and most folks liked it the way it was before you and your friends did a number on us. You and the Feds.

Wallace calms himself. This is not what he has Fred here for.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

You know, the people I represent, they aren't bad people, they don't hate Negroes the way its said. But it's more complicated than just who sits at what lunch counter.

FRED

You bet it is. A lot more complicated.

WALLACE

And what we represent, my people, isn't all bad. We've built up a civilization here that's good.

FRED

Yes, sir, and we were there with you every step up the way, Governor. Chains and all.

Wallace sighs again.

WALLACE

I'm not a bad man. What I want isn't bad.

Fred pauses. Is this a question Wallace is asking hidden in a statement?

FRED

No, sir, I don't think you are.

Wallace smiles.

WALLACE

Now let's talk about getting you on some committees over there in the House. You're working with some real snakes over there, believe me, I know them all. I want my representative to be on all the power committees so you can defend yourself.

Fred smiles. This is a day he never thought would come.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

The now LARGE STAFF at the new Tuskegee location of Gray and Langford are watching a television set in the lobby area. On the screen, George Wallace crosses the platform at the Democratic National Convention in Miami in a wheel chair being pushed by his new wife, CORNELIA.

There are cheers but it is sad to see this once proud man confined to a wheel chair due to an assassin's bullet.

Bernice has started to work with Fred again. She is dressed very elegantly. The assembled staff answers to her.

BERNICE  
He looks awful.

INT. FRED'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred hears Wallace's speech start and looks up from his newspaper, but quickly goes back to his reading.

He lifts the paper as he leans back in his seat and the headline in the New York Times is seen: 'Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years.'

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

As the staffers watch Wallace speaking at the Convention, the front door opens and a man enters. This is Charlie Pollard.

Bernice sees him and pulls away from the group.

BERNICE  
Can I help you?

POLLARD  
I need to see a lawyer about something. I want Fred Gray as my lawyer.

BERNICE  
Well, we've got a lot of good lawyers. Let me get the appointment book and we'll set you up.

POLLARD  
I want Fred Gray and I need to see him today. I was a part of the study.

BERNICE  
Well, he's...

She can see Fred in his office reading the newspaper. She can see the headline herself and puts it together.

BERNICE (CONT'D)  
I'll be right back.

INT. FRED'S OFFICE - DAY

Bernice comes in to Fred's office.

BERNICE

There's a man here who says he needs to see you. Says he was part of the study.

Fred looks away from his paper.

FRED

The study? This study?

He points at the paper.

BERNICE

I think so.

Bernice goes to the door and waves Charlie to enter. Charlie gets up from a chair and walks with some pain in to Fred's office.

FRED

Fred Gray.

They shake hands. Charlie looks at the newspaper that Fred is holding.

POLLARD

I see you heard about it now, too.

FRED

Heard about what?

POLLARD

The study they been doing over at the Institute.

FRED

You have some information about it?

POLLARD

I was in it! I been a part of it for 40 years.

FRED

What's your name?

POLLARD

Charlie Pollard.

Fred opens the article.

FRED

You're right here.

POLLARD  
So I heard.

FRED  
Would you like something to drink?

POLLARD  
Sure. Can I have a Co-cola?

Fred looks to Bernice who leaves for the Coke.

FRED  
Have a seat.

Pollard sits. Fred sits back down at his desk, still unsure if he believes any of this.

FRED (CONT'D)  
Do you have syphilis?

POLLARD  
I guess I do.

FRED  
Do you know what it is?

POLLARD  
I think so. But they been treating me for something called bad blood. Or, I guess not treating me.

FRED  
How did you find out?

EXT. STOCKYARDS - DAY

Pollard is sitting on a fence with several other MEN, when a young white woman, JEAN HELLER, approaches him.

POLLARD (V.O.)  
I was at the stockyards when this reporter from up North come up to me and was asking questions. She asked me if I knew Nurse Rivers, and I told her I did.

CUT TO:

INT. STOCKYARDS - DAY

Off to the side, Heller and Pollard are talking, and it is clear from what she is saying that Pollard is alarmed.

POLLARD (V.O.)

She told me I had a virus, and what it would do to me, and what they had been studying. I didn't know none of that before, and I been giving them my blood all this time...

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Bernice enters with the Coke and hands it to Charlie. Then she sits down, aware that something big is happening.

FRED

How long ago did it start?

POLLARD

I been a part of it almost all my life. They tested me in 1932.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Younger Charlie is back in the fields seen at the opening of the film. One of the other men in the group is the one who identified himself as getting treatment for bad blood. Charlie is right beside him.

POLLARD (V.O.)

There was a fella I knew that had been tested and was always getting the attention of the white doctors.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The younger Charlie is in church with many OTHERS. Nearby is Nurse Rivers.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

As Charlie is leaving the church, he is handed a flyer by Nurse Rivers.

POLLARD (V.O.)

Nurse Rivers told me that they was testing folks at the churches and at the Institute and that is was free.

(MORE)

POLLARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I got tested and then they started  
calling me and finding me when I  
wasn't looking for them.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Pollard is working on a tractor when he sees a car pull over,  
and Rivers along with another white doctor get out of the  
car. They start walking across the field to Pollard.

POLLARD (V.O.)  
They were real friendly, especially  
Nurse Rivers. She was always so  
nice and she seemed like she really  
cared for all of us. She's come  
looking for us every summer real  
regular.

INT. INSTITUTE - DAY

Charlie is sitting on an exam table with TWO DOCTORS who are  
getting ready to insert a huge needle in to his spinal  
column.

POLLARD (V.O.)  
Mostly, they give us some things to  
drink and some pills, and they  
always wanted to draw off more  
blood, but one time they stuck a  
needle in my back.

The needle is inserted as the men try to keep Charlie still.  
It goes in deep and spinal fluid drains out.

INT. HOME - DAY

Charlie is laying down in his house, sweat pouring off his  
body. His WIFE wipes his brow with a cloth.

POLLARD (V.O.)  
That gave me a bad headache and I  
didn't go back for a while after  
that. But later, they come back  
around, and this time, they was  
offering us some burial money if  
we'd let them treat us some more.

INT. INSTITUTE - DAY

Charlie sits with several other OLDER BLACK MEN in the lobby of the Institute.

POLLARD (V.O.)

I got to be good friends with many of the fellas that were there to get treated. Them and Nurse Rivers, we were all friends. I don't even remember when they first told me what I had, or what they said about how the pills they were giving me would make me better. Maybe they didn't tell me.

A DOCTOR comes out and starts passing out pills to the men.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Charlie and the guys are now having a meal in the cafeteria and really tucking in to the food.

POLLARD (V.O.)

Sometimes we'd get a hot meal there and for the men that travelled a ways, they'd let them stay overnight. Some of them had never been to a hospital before or been to see a doctor. I think they were just happy that someone was interested in them.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Rivers passes in her car filled with men from the study.

POLLARD (V.O.)

Nurse Rivers was always there, always looking for us and checking in on us. She would come to funerals and stop by whenever a baby was born.

EXT. STOCKYARDS - DAY

Charlie is at the stockyards when Rivers approaches him. She is asking questions about another participant.



POLLARD (V.O.)

I just seen her a few weeks ago, right before that reporter lady came by, and she was asking about one of the men that was being treated who died. We had a long visit right there.

Charlie hugs her and she turns to go.

POLLARD (CONT'D)

I hugged her when it was time to go. She's such a fine person... I just can't believe it.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Back to Fred's office.

POLLARD

I feel like a damn fool. They said in the paper that there was real medicine for this been around for 25 years. But me and those other men didn't get it. They told other doctors if we showed up anywhere, not to give us anything for it. My wife died, and maybe I gave it to her. I don't know. But I think my civil rights have been violated and I want Rosa Parks' lawyer on my side.

Fred is transfixed by the tale, and at a loss for words. He swallows back a lump in this throat.

FRED

I'll be on your side. Bernice...

BERNICE

I'll get it.

Bernice exits to get the paperwork needed to sign Pollard as a client.

POLLARD

Will Miss Rivers be in trouble?

FRED

I don't know. Do you know any of the other men that were a part of the study?

POLLARD

I knew most all of them at one time or another. Most of them are dead.

FRED

I'd like you to write down their names for me.

POLLARD

I only knew their first names for most of them.

FRED

Just tell me what you know. I'm really sorry this happened. Really sorry that it went on so long.

Pollard smiles.

POLLARD

Yea, but I got you on my side now. You'll get after them!

Fred manages a weak smile. Knowing as much about the justice system as he does, he knows that it will take a long time and some will be beyond the reach of justice.

FRED

I'll do what I can, Mr. Pollard.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Fred shakes hands with Charlie in the parking lot.

FRED

I'll be in touch with you real soon. You start writing down everything you remember. If there are other men out there that haven't been treated, we need to find them quickly.

POLLARD

We'll find them.

FRED

Good. Good.

Pollard smiles and gets back in to his old truck and drives away. Fred watches until he is gone and out of sight. The story still has him floored.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

The Gray family has moved in to a much larger house.

Fred sits in the den watching television. The coverage of the Democratic Convention of 1972 carries on with shots of protestors and the typical circus of a convention. News reports cut in clips of the Wallace speech earlier in the day and still photos of Wallace from the assassination attempt.

Bernice enters and sits down beside him.

BERNICE

Every time they show that  
assassination, I think about  
Martin. I'm always so glad his wife  
wasn't there when he was shot.

Fred takes a breath. He is struggling to hold back his emotions.

FRED

I wonder what he'd say about what  
we heard today.

BERNICE

I think he'd say the same things he  
was always saying. He'd talk about  
loving your enemy, about being non-  
violent.

FRED

This is different. These men were  
not treated for a deadly disease.  
They were being used as lab  
animals. And this was an agency of  
the federal government. George  
Wallace, Patterson, all the  
segregationists we been doing  
battle with, they had nothing to do  
with it.

BERNICE

It's horrible. Think about their  
wives and children. They weren't  
treated either.

FRED

When I went off to study law, I  
wanted to come back here and  
destroy everything segregated I  
could find. But this... This is  
different.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

And it was happening right here,  
right around us all along.

A tear rolls down his cheek.

FRED (CONT'D)

It's deeper than just some law  
meant to keep us off the buses.  
It's deeper down than just trying  
to keep us from voting or getting  
in to a college or hold an office.  
It goes to the heart of man. And..  
It won't get fixed in my lifetime.

Bernice hugs him. It's all she can do.

FRED (CONT'D)

It never ends, no matter how good a  
lawyer I am.

EXT. TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE - DAY

Fred is walking in to one of the buildings when he sees Nurse Rivers from a distance. She is in her uniform, and then he puts it together; this is the woman he met and also the nurse in the study. He was that close to it all along.

FRED

Miss Rivers!

She sees him, but starts walking away faster.

He runs to catch up to her.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

He catches up to her and she finally stops and leans against a tree.

FRED

(out of breath)

Miss Rivers. Are you Eunice Rivers?

RIVERS

I don't have any comment. Please  
leave me be.

FRED

We've met before, haven't we? I'm  
Fred Gray.

She lowers her head and nods.

FRED (CONT'D)

You're the nurse that looked after  
the men in the syphilis study?

She nods again, and a huge tear rolls off the end of her  
nose.

RIVERS

God as my witness, I didn't know it  
was wrong!

FRED

You didn't know it was wrong not to  
treat men for their disease? To  
tell them they were being treated  
when they weren't?

RIVERS

They told me they would all be  
treated when the study was done,  
but... then they didn't do it. The  
doctors decided not to treat the  
men with penicillin, not me. The  
men, they were friends. I did what  
I could for them. It was my job, I  
didn't control anything, no one  
asked me what I thought.

She bows over in pain from her guilt. Fred takes a moment,  
then puts his hand on her back.

FRED

It wasn't your study. You couldn't  
control what was going on. I'm sure  
you were a good friend to those  
men. God knows that.

RIVERS

Only God knows... Only God knows...

She continues to wail in deep wracking sobs. She is beyond  
the law, and Fred knows; all he can do is stand as a witness  
to her deep and abiding pain. This is a job for Fred the  
minister.

EXT. DINER - TWILIGHT

Through the windows of a diner can be seen Fred and Nurse  
Rivers. She speaks zombie like, pouring out details of her  
many years of involvement with study. Fred takes notes  
furiously.

Just then, a white WAITRESS arrives at the table and re-fills their coffee cups. The waitress sees her tear stained face and hands her a tissue, then leans in and hugs her. This diner serves both races.

The perspective pulls back further to show a bus stop beside the diner where white and black riders get on and off, taking their seats regardless of color. The bus pulls away in to the sunset.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Bernice wakes to the sound of music. Fred has the radio on in the bathroom. After a moment he comes out dressed for the beach.

BERNICE

What are you doing?

FRED

Getting ready to go to the beach, and so are the kids. We're going down to the Gulf, go do some fishing.

BERNICE

What?

FRED

Let's take the kids down to the Gulf today and go fishing. It's beautiful weather. I told them and they think it's a great idea.

BERNICE

You told the kids already? You didn't tell me?

FRED

They got up early and I wanted to let you sleep. We didn't have any plans. Let's go. Let's have fun.

(Singing) )

'This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made, that the Lord has made. I will rejoice, I will rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it.'

The kids come running into the room and pile on the bed as Fred stands and sings at the top of his lungs.

FRED (CONT'D)

This is the day that the Lord has made! I will rejoice and be glad in it!

Bernice smiles. Something new and good is blooming in him.

INT. NEWTOWN CHURCH - DAY

Fred stands in a pulpit days later, and delivers a fiery sermon to his congregation.

FRED

I come here today poor of spirit but full in heart. And I am reminded of the words of my friend, Martin King. Martin once preached a sermon about unfulfilled dreams. He began by talking about how King David wanted to build a temple to honor God. In 1st Kings we read "And it was in the heart of David to build a house in the name of the Lord God. The Lord said unto David.. "whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Now, David did not finish that temple. It fell to his son, Solomon, to finish the work. But David's heart was right. Martin said "So many of us in life start out by building temples: temples of character, temples of justice, temples of peace. And so often we don't finish them. We, like David find ourselves having to face the fact that our dreams are unfulfilled."

Fred takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes.

FRED (CONT'D)

We are, all of us, building some kind of temple. And, it's hard work building a temple. Like David, we might not complete our temple, but thank God.. Thank Almighty God, that we have temples to build in this life, no matter when they are complete! Thank God that we have hearts to put something meaningful in to!

For the 100 or so folks in this tiny church, so different from the masses that were at the early boycott rallies, these are words of wisdom and they respond in kind. "Amen" and "You tell it" ring out. Fred is filled with the spirit.

FRED (CONT'D)

We have to face that there is a tension in the universe between good and evil. And this, we know, is true. There is tension between God and man. But God does not judge us by the mistakes that we make. He is a wise and loving God, and knows better of us. He knows we are fallen and weak. But he also knows our heart. He knows that it's about being on the right road. Friends, I know that justice for all will not happen in my lifetime. But I know this, because I heard Martin say it: The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice.

Pulling back from the door of the church, a bus, full of black and white people intermixed in the seats, drives by.

FADE OUT