

Mr. Sam's Place

by

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Cast of Characters: (7 actors required)

1. Sam Chambers: Caucasian Male; 40s-60s
2. Edna Chambers: Caucasian Female; 40s-60s (doubles as Audrey, the journalist in the 21st Century writing the story)
3. Willie Williams (boy): African American; 10 years old (doubles as the narrator / Greek Chorus leader)
4. Willie Williams: African American; to play Willie in flashbacks from his teens up until his late 20s
5. Virgil Williams: African American; 40s-60s (doubles as the grown-up Willie in the present day, telling the story to Audrey)
- 6-7. Ensemble: Two Caucasian Males; 20s To play various small roles as customers, other employees, racist hecklers, etc...

Scene:

A diner in a small Mississippi town

Time:

Early 21st century, plus a variety of flashbacks

Notes on Design:

Two important set pieces shall indicate the changes in time, as we go back and forth between the various flashbacks and the present day:

1. The Television: Can just be referred to by actors, probably beyond the 4th wall and suggested by a flicker of light onstage when it's supposed to be on... Mostly it is indicated simply by the recorded sound cues at the start of new scenes to indicate what year we're in based on what's in the news
2. The Flag: Referred to throughout the play, the upstage wall should have a large flag which changes periodically from American to Confederate, the other sign of the changing times. If the theater has fly space, it is recommended to have a two-sided flag hanging from that space, so that it rotates from one to the other... Otherwise, a changing projection on the wall will suffice.

ACT IPrologue

(The CHORUS leader enters, and walks downstage. During this prologue, the flag is continuously changing, not settling on which one it's going to be until the start of scene one)

CHORUS

There is a distinct, lingering smell that bacon grease leaves behind in a kitchen. I like that smell. Sure, people who work in places they have to deal with it always want to know... know from someone who spent as much of his life at a place like this as I did: "just how do you get rid of that bacon smell?" Hey, why would you want to get rid of it? It sure beats the heck out of Potpourri or Febreeze! Or whatever the latest thing it is that they're using these days.

(he takes out a newspaper)

Yes, we folks down here are aware of the ongoing obesity epidemic in this country. But, see... that's not what this story is about. It all started around the beginning of this century, and it started with guys like me that just couldn't seem to let go of the one that was coming to an end with the approaching millennium. When was that? January of 2000? 2001? Oh, yeah. People couldn't ever seem to get that one right. But that's not what this story is about either.

(he walks upstage to the counter and takes a seat)

Oh how we all used to love this place! And I'm no exception. Now, you don't need me to tell you the downside, especially for me and my family. There were reasons that this just couldn't be allowed.

(he walks downstage, as three apparitions from the past appear: SAM behind the counter, and the other two Chorus members at opposite ends of the stage... a businessman, JIM BOB, and JUDGE BORK)

Folks down here? Yeah, they all had their own reasons why.

JIM BOB

I run a business here.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

That's the way things have always been.

JUDGE BORK

Hey!

JIM BOB

I'd lose half my customers!

SAM

That's the way they'll always be.

JIM BOB

They'd never stand for it.

JUDGE BORK

Don't do that!

SAM

Young man, I don't want any trouble.

JIM BOB

What are you, a communist?

CHORUS

That one there is Jim Bob Davis. Founder of the company that's got the contract to tear this place down in the morning. And me? Yeah, I'm the villain in this tale. The guy that... let me make sure I've got this right...

(opens the paper and reads)

"is standing in the way of thousands of jobs that the community he represents so desperately needs".... jobs!

(smiles)

Well, I was one lonely vote, so there was only so long that I could do that. Since the story you're about to hear came to an end those jobs have come alright. And, as in most of the South, the centerpiece of ole' Jim Bob's development is now this town's number one employer.

(he crosses to the jukebox)

Oh, and that downside I mentioned? Well, that wasn't ever going to be a problem in any company that Jim Bob brought to town.

JUDGE BORK

I am against forced segregation.

SAM

Things is the way things is.

JUDGE BORK

And I am against forced integration.

(CONTINUED)

JIM BOB

I have a business to run here.

JUDGE BORK

He has a business to run.

SAM

There ain't nothing I can do about it, you know that.

JUDGE BORK

"The principle here is that if I find his behavior ugly by my standards...

SAM

It is the law, you know.

JUDGE BORK

... I am justified in having the state coerce him into more righteous paths...

JIM BOB

Wait a minute!

JUDGE BORK

... That is, itself, a principle of unsurpassed ugliness."

JIM BOB

Hey!

CHORUS

You see, Jim Bob here wasn't like that.

JIM BOB

No.

CHORUS

Things changed a lot more quickly in his company. Changed long before the "unsurpassed ugliness" that forced it upon the rest of the South. Jim Bob was different. A visionary. A real progressive. He had his own reasons for beating the Sam Chambers' of the world to the punch.

JIM BOB

Oh well, I suppose them folks' money is just as good as anyone else's.

(the apparitions disappear as a 1920s
jazz tune starts on the jukebox)

(CONTINUED)

CHORUS

But as our story here begins it is me, one of the more backwards thinking individuals, that's here- trying to cling to the past. In fact, and this may just be a rumor, they say there's a piece of it still here. Right behind the counter. I've been wondering for the longest time if there's any truth to it.

(he picks up a tool box, goes behind the counter and kneels, disappearing, as the flag stops changing:)

Scene 1

Present Day: The Confederate Flag

(The 1920s music continues to play on the jukebox as AUDREY enters from the back door.)

AUDREY

Hello? Is anybody here?

(The sounds of floor boards being torn up are heard from behind the counter, but nobody comes out)

Councilman Williams?

(The song finishes, and the adult version of WILLIE emerges from behind the counter in place of the boy. He holds the box that he has found underneath the floor. He sets it down, and goes over to the jukebox to select a new song. He starts dancing to it, as Audrey watches)

AUDREY

This the kind of stuff that used to pass for music around here?

WILLIE

Ms. Walker!

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you... I thought I'd probably find you here

WILLIE

How long you been standing there?

AUDREY

Long enough.

WILLIE

Wonderful...

(pause)

You know, he used to tell me that particular number was playing at the high school dance where they met. 1927. Quite a story surrounding that...

AUDREY

I'd love to hear...

WILLIE

Yes, you would, wouldn't you? I knew you had to have had ulterior motives for following me here.

AUDREY

No, Councilman. I just meant-

WILLIE

Yes, I know what you meant... but that's just the thing, I wouldn't be able to tell you. Oh, there was some story about what went on at that dance, alright. He just didn't seem comfortable talking about it. And seeing as it obviously was very personal to him, I never saw the need to press the issue.

(pause)

Although I'm sure that concept must be foreign to you.

AUDREY

I thought we were gonna dispense with the suspicions of my motives.

WILLIE

Yes, yes, I know. It's all water under the bridge now.

(long pause)

AUDREY

Amazing that thing still works.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

Yes, and especially with all those old records still in it. Customers used to give him a hard time about that.

AUDREY

I can imagine why.

WILLIE

Oh, he eventually broke down and allowed some rock and roll records in there, but some of the selections just never changed.

AUDREY

I understand it was his wife, especially, who was no big fan of the, uh, shall we say... updates?

WILLIE

No. ma'am. She was not. Had to spit teeth to get "the boss", as he used to call her, to allow that.

AUDREY

I understand she had her own, particularly strong reasons for objecting...

(imitating Edna)

"The respectable folk of the South should not be trying to sing and dance like the coloreds....."

(long pause)

WILLIE

I suppose you got that from the folks down at the-

AUDREY

Word gets around...

WILLIE

Yes, it sure does. Listen, if you'd known her... if you'd known them personally, it would be...

(pauses and chuckles)

But that was good, though.

AUDREY

What was good?

WILLIE

The Ms. Edna bit...

AUDREY

Oh well...

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

Hey, that was her! Put on that affectation during all your work these past few weeks you could have passed yourself off as a local.

AUDREY

Maybe... given the town less to suspect in the motives from the "Yankee bitch from the Times"

WILLIE

(doing George Wallace)

Just another one of "them outside agitators"?

AUDREY

Yes... but I always liked... "the Wicked Witch of the North"... just a personal favorite.

(long pause)

AUDREY

So... looking for souvenirs?

WILLIE

You could say that.

AUDREY

Anything in particular?

WILLIE

Actually...

AUDREY

What?

(he indicates the box)

What's that?

WILLIE

I was just about to find that out for myself when you came in.

AUDREY

You don't know?

WILLIE

Until now, it's just been a rumor around here for the longest time. They say that, when she passed on, he saved some of the things that were personal to the two of them, put them in a box and buried them underneath the counter... kind of a time capsule, to keep her spirit preserved here for all time.

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

And you just found...

WILLIE

That's what I'm assuming... I guess we're about to find out together. So, you came all the way down here. Would you like to...?

AUDREY

No, you should... you do the honor.

WILLIE

Alright.

(he opens the box, and smiles)

AUDREY

What? Anything you might have expected?

WILLIE

Oh yes, you can say that.

(pulls out Edna's apron)

I can practically still see her in this.

AUDREY

Nice.

WILLIE

And... oh my gosh.

AUDREY

What?

WILLIE

(pulls out an American flag)

This can't be...?

AUDREY

Something strange about that? I heard all about it, about how that used to be there up on the wall instead of...

WILLIE

Yes, I know that, but that was long after...

AUDREY

After what?

WILLIE

It wasn't until many, many years later that they took it down and... you know. Not until he had moved on... somebody else must have... maybe Tyrone... must have wanted

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE (cont'd)

to save it too, and known exactly where to put it along with the other mementos.

AUDREY

So you're gonna keep all this so that you won't miss this place?

WILLIE

I'm afraid that will be impossible. But you know... make it a little easier to bear. Too bad I can't...

AUDREY

What?

WILLIE

(indicates the jukebox)

You know, that would actually be really nice to take... would fit in my office just perfect.

AUDREY

Well, why don't you? I don't imagine anyone's gonna be fighting you for it now.

WILLIE

I would, it's just... how? I'd need moving carts and, there's uh... not exactly the space for it in my trunk, and it's a little late to get a U-haul.

AUDREY

I'm sure we could arrange something, I mean... look they even left a TV!

WILLIE

Trust me, if I wanted it that's one more thing that nobody alive in this century would be fighting me for.

AUDREY

Black and White?

WILLIE

Oh yeah. Last person anywhere in this town, probably in the country to hold out against that abomination that the rest of the world had been going over to. He didn't believe in it.

AUDREY

So I've heard...

WILLIE

So you wanted to talk with me one more time before the workmen arrive in the morning, I suppose?

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

Unless you had somewhere to go...

WILLIE

You should know, I got no place to go...

AUDREY

Good...

WILLIE

I gotta go to the john. Will you excuse me for a moment?

AUDREY

I'm not going anywhere.

WILLIE

Good. I'll see you in a minute.

TRANSITION:

(There is no blackout. As he exits to the bathroom, Audrey puts on the apron, transforming herself into EDNA, who goes about working at the counter while SAM enters with a broom, as the flag changes and the TV comes on)

Scene 2

1960: The American Flag

TELEVISION VOICE

... and while there is still no word from King himself regarding this unprecedented action on his behalf by the Senator, his father, the Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. has spoken with the press and indicated that, while he had always been uncomfortable with the idea of having a catholic for president, he says that, quote: "if he can wipe the tears from my daughter in law's eyes, then I have the courage to vote for a Kennedy for President, and I have a suitcase full of votes". Unquote. In related news, Vice President Nixon takes his campaign into...

(The words trail off... SAM and EDNA are preparing for opening as WILLIE, aged 10, appears at the back door and knocks.)

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

Mr. Sam! Ms. Edna!!

SAM

(not looking up from his broom)

We not openin' for another half an hour.

WILLIE

Ms. Edna's pies baked yet? I just wanted-

SAM

Son, I told you we was closed. Now you just come on back after-

WILLIE

I gots to get to school, sir. But my daddy promised I could take a slice of Ms. Edna's-

EDNA

(peering over the counter)

Is that you, Willie?

WILLIE

Yes'm

EDNA

Honey, it's the Williams boy.

SAM

Hello, Billy.

WILLIE

Willie, sir.

EDNA

Yes, honey the pies is all baked.... Sam, it's just Willie he don't mean any-

SAM

Alright... door's unlocked, come on in.

(He keeps sweeping while Edna goes for the pies. As she talks to Willie he comes over to the counter and sits)

EDNA

Father's treating you to some pie again, that it Willie?

WILLIE

(setting money on the counter)

Yes, ma'am. Every day for a week.

(CONTINUED)

EDNA

Report cards musta just come out...

WILLIE

Yes'm... three A's and two B's

EDNA

(setting pies down on the counter)

Now, that's a good boy. Your father tells me he has a new job at-

(sees where he is sitting)

Ahem-

WILLIE

(moving from the stool)

Yes, ma'am. Daddy's been working at Miller's Garage for two weeks now.

EDNA

Well, good. So which one of these would you like today, Willie? Got the cherry, right here, your favorite...

WILLIE

I think I'll have me the apple this time, Ms. Edna.

EDNA

This one right here?

WILLIE

Yes.

EDNA

(starting to cut a slice)

Alright, now you just let me know if-

(Sam, who has come up from behind, claps a hand on his shoulder and shakes him)

EDNA

Sam!!!

SAM

What did you say, boy?

WILLIE

Uh, nothing sir. I....

SAM

I asked you a question, young man. What did you just say to my wife?

(CONTINUED)

Uh.... I, I....

WILLIE

SAM
Son, if you ever say "yes" to my wife again, I'm gonna have to slap you!

EDNA
Sam...

SAM
Are we clear?

EDNA
Sam, the boy just-

SAM
Quiet, Edna.... are we clear?

WILLIE
Yes, sir.

SAM
Now, what was you askin' my wife for?

WILLIE
Nothing, sir.

SAM
Which pie did you tell her that you wanted?

WILLIE
The... the-

SAM
Don't tell me, tell it to Mrs. Chambers.

EDNA
(coming to his rescue)
This! This was the one you wanted, was it not?

WILLIE
Yes, ma'am.

(With that, Sam finally lets go of his shoulder and goes back to sweeping)

EDNA
Alright, Willie. Now you just wait there while I package this up for-

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

(starting to go)

It's okay, Mrs. Chambers. You don't have to-

EDNA

But you-

WILLIE

I ain't hungry anymore, ma'am.

EDNA

(picking the money up from the counter)

But Willie, you already...

(He is gone)

EDNA

Sam? Sam, sweetheart, is there something bothering-

SAM

You filled the salt shakers, Edna?

EDNA

No, Sam, not yet.

(she starts doing it)

You know, Sam, I ain't seen you act like that since the night at the high school dance. Sam, you do remember that, don't you?

SAM

Remember what, Edna?

EDNA

At the high school dance... when Harold Rogers came over and put his hand on my leg...

SAM

That was thirty years ago, Edna.

EDNA

Oh Sam, I didn't mean to...

(he has crossed to the counter and
picked up the money Willie left)

Sam? What were we gonna-

SAM

Honey, make a note.

(puts the money in his pocket)

Remind me I owe Virgil Williams thirty-five cents.

(CONTINUED)

EDNA

Sure, honey.

SAM

What time you got, Edna? Look like there's enough time before opening for me to go and...

EDNA

(looking out the window)

Yes, Sam... Looks like the coast is clear.

SAM

Alright, I'll be back in in a few minutes.

EDNA

You got your...?

SAM

(feels around in his pockets)

Actually... no, why don't you...

EDNA

(takes a pack of gum from under the counter and tosses it to him)

Here you go, you bad boy.

SAM

Thank you, Edna.

EDNA

I can't keep covering for you like this all the time, you know that!

(He chuckles and goes out the back door while she continues getting ready)

EDNA

Lawd, lawd, you'd think we was still in High School...

(she continues working for a few moments, and then suddenly:)

VIRGIL

(calling offstage)

Mr. Sam!! Mr. Sam!!!!!!!

EDNA

He's out in the back....

(calling back)

Sam, you got company, I think you better-

(CONTINUED)

VIRGIL
(bursting in the front door)

Mr. Sam!

EDNA
Virgil, what on earth do you think you're-

VIRGIL
Where your husband at Mrs. Chambers?

EDNA
Now you just wait a darn minute...
(calls outside)
Sam, you told me you locked the front door before closing
last night!

VIRGIL
Mr, Sam!!!!!!

EDNA
Now you listen here, that door was supposed to be locked,
and you know better than to-

VIRGIL
I ain't leavin' until I speaks to your husband, Mrs.
Chambers...

EDNA
Sam!

SAM
(re-entering)
Yes, Edna? Oh, hello there, Virgil. I didn't see you
comin' in.

EDNA
That's because he come in the front door

SAM
He done what?

EDNA
You musta forgot to lock-

SAM
Well, you just gonna go right on back out the way you came
now, ain't you boy?

VIRGIL
No sir, I isn't.

SAM
 (walking towards the counter)
 Well, well... looks like we gonna-

EDNA
 Sam!

SAM
 Be still, Edna.

EDNA
 I'll call the Sheriff...

SAM
 You ain't gonna do nothing of the kind, Edna.

(He has now gotten to the counter, face
 to face with Virgil across the counter,
 and it should be suggested he has his
 hand on a gun underneath the counter)

SAM
 Now Virgil, I guess you didn't hear me right.

VIRGIL
 I heard you just fine, Mister!

EDNA
 (gets the phone from under the counter)
 Virgil, you need to leave this place right now, or I am
 going to have to call-

SAM
 Stay out of this, Edna.

EDNA
 I'm calling the-

SAM
 Put the phone down, Edna!!!!!!

VIRGIL
 Mr. Sam, all I needs-

SAM
 We gonna have a problem here, that-

VIRGIL
 That's for you to decide, Mr. Sam....
 (calling offstage)
 Willie.... Willie!!!

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE
(offstage)
Yes, daddy?

VIRGIL
Come on in here...

WILLIE
Daddy, I can't-

VIRGIL
Get in here, boy!!

WILLIE
But Daddy...

SAM
(with his eyes still fixed on Virgil)
Willie, you heard your daddy, get in here!!!

EDNA
Sam!

SAM
Quiet, Edna.

(Sam finally shifts his focus to Willie
as he enters and walks to his father)

SAM
Hello, Willie.

WILLIE
Hello, Mr. Sam.

SAM
I'm glad you came back, Willie... reminded me I owed your
father some money...

VIRGIL
No, Mr. Sam...

SAM
Yes, Virgil.

VIRGIL
No, Mr. Sam, you don't owe me nothing!

SAM
What do you want here, Virgil?

(CONTINUED)

VIRGIL

I wants to show you something... get up here, boy.

(Tension mounts as it becomes apparent
that he is trying to get his son up onto
the stool at the counter again)

EDNA

Sam...?

WILLIE

Daddy, I can't...

VIRGIL

(forcibly putting him in the seat)

Sit down, right here, you hear me?

EDNA

Alright, now this has gone to far! You two will both have
to-

SAM

Edna, I told you to keep out of this...

VIRGIL

Now, I wants you to take a good look at this here boy, Mr.
Sam.

SAM

Virgil...

VIRGIL

Are you looking?

SAM

I'm looking, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Then I'm sure you don't need me to tell you that this boy is
far too black for you to be his father.

SAM

Yes, I sure do see that, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Well, good... from now on, he give you any trouble, you just
come to me, and I'll discipline him. That I promise you...
we clear?

SAM

(after a long pause)

Are we done here, Virgil?

(CONTINUED)

VIRGIL

Are we clear, Mr. Sam?

SAM

We's clear... are we done here, Virgil?

VIRGIL

Yes sir.

SAM

(seeing the pies still out, and looking
for a way to diffuse the situation)

It don't look like it... Edna, will you please get Willie
here the pie he paid for earlier?

EDNA

Yes, honey... Virgil, Willie here was telling me all about
your little agreement for this next week. You must be very
proud.

VIRGIL

'Scuse me...?

EDNA

I said I'm sure you're proud of your boy.

VIRGIL

Yes ma'am, I sure am.

EDNA

Well, what can I say, so am I.

SAM

No, Edna get Willie his pie.

EDNA

Sam?

SAM

Not the piece you cut for me. Here, let me...
(he goes to the pies and cuts a much
larger piece than the first one)
How about yourself?

VIRGIL

I'm okay, Mr. Sam.

SAM

(noting Virgil's thermos)

That thing full?

(CONTINUED)

VIRGIL
No, sir.

SAM
Coffee ready yet, Edna?

EDNA
Yes, honey.

SAM
Here let me take that for you...
(takes the thermos and gives it to Edna)
We both got a long day ahead of us... you're gonna need it.

VIRGIL
Yes sir, I'm sure I will... how much do I owe you?

SAM
I can't hear you, Virgil.

VIRGIL
I said, how much-

SAM
I know what you said... but I can't hear you.

EDNA
Here's your coffee, Virgil.

VIRGIL
Thank you, ma'am.

EDNA
Your pie, Willie...

VIRGIL
What do you say?

WILLIE
Thank you, Mrs. Chambers.

VIRGIL
And thank you, Mr. Sam.

SAM
Y'all take care of yourselves now, you hear?

(Edna escorts them out the back, as Sam,
still at the counter, has unwrapped his
gum and is taking his first piece)

(CONTINUED)

EDNA
You just starting that now?

SAM
You think he smelled my breath?

EDNA
Oh no, Sam I'm sure-

SAM
Edna...?

EDNA
Okay, maybe he knows, but-

SAM
There anyone in this town that don't know?

EDNA
If there is, I don't imagine they spend too much time around here...

SAM
That's what I thought...

(lights fade to black)

Scene 3

1966: The American Flag

TELEVISION VOICE
And in Baltimore, it is all over. Drysdale, putting in another fine outing, gave up only one run, but once again that was all that was needed as the Orioles shut out the Dodgers again, to complete their four game sweep, and for the first time in history, the Baltimore Orioles, are world champions! In other news...

(SAM at the counter, on the telephone, as the teenage WILLIE comes to the back door and knocks.)

SAM
Door's open.

(Willie comes in)

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Sam? WILLIE

Just a moment, son. SAM

(into the phone)
Yes. Yes, Mrs. Jackson, I understand that, but there ain't nothing I can do about it.

(pause)
Ma'am it is the law. Mrs. Jackson...?
(sighs and hangs up)
Now, how can I help you, young man?

Sir, is that position filled? WILLIE

The...? SAM

For the dishwasher. WILLIE

Dishwasher... oh, yes. Have a seat. SAM
(looking under the counter)
I'm sorry, I just... when we spoke on the phone it didn't sound like you was colored.

That wasn't me, I just walked in. But if you've already offered the job to somebody else... WILLIE

What? Oh, no you got just as much right as anyone else to... SAM

(he finds the application, and brings it to him)

Alright, you just go on and fill this out, and-

You don't remember me, do you? WILLIE

What? Should I? SAM

It's Willie. WILLIE

SAM
Willie...?

WILLIE
My father used to come in every-

SAM
Your father... Willie? Oh my gracious, Willie! How you doin', son?

WILLIE
I'm doing alright, Mr. Sam.

SAM
I haven't seen you around here in a long time, Willie.

WILLIE
I've been living up in the North. Family in-

SAM
How's your old man, Willie?

WILLIE
Uh, he died two years ago.

SAM
Oh.
(turns, embarrassed)
Gee Willie, I... I...

WILLIE
That's what I was trying to tell you. My auntie in Chicago. When Daddy died, she let me come live with her.

SAM
Just back in town visiting?

WILLIE
Well, no. Actually, I can't really stay there any longer.

SAM
She don't want you around any more?

WILLIE
She was actually never really happy with that arrangement in the first place. I guess she kind of felt obligated for a while, but she and my father... well they never, really... you know?

SAM
Yeah, she wants you out.

WILLIE

Well, now that I'm getting to that age she expects me to start paying my own way, but up there I just can't really find anything.

SAM

Did you apply at-

WILLIE

Everywhere. There's nothing out there. I just just sort of figured I might have better luck back where people know me.

SAM

Well, that's nice Willie. But that reminds me... Say, how'd you like a Coke?

WILLIE

I'd love one, Mr. Sam.

(Sam starts opening two bottles and crosses over to the table where Willie is sitting as he talks)

SAM

Well, listen. What I was trying to tell you was this. Just before you showed up here, I was on the telephone with this other boy, and we talked for a while, and... well, as a matter of fact, he's on his way over here right now.

WILLIE

I understand.

SAM

Now, it's not like there was any kind of a promise, or nothing, but-

WILLIE

It's alright, Mr. Sam.

SAM

Thanks, Willie. I appreciate your understanding.

(They sit and drink for a moment)

WILLIE

You sure nobody's gonna make a fuss about this?

(CONTINUED)

SAM
About what?

WILLIE
You and me sitting here like this. If somebody walked in and saw us...

SAM
(chuckles)
It's after hours now, Willie. Besides, that's just what I was telling Mrs. Jackson right when you came in. It is the law now.

WILLIE
Not around here, it's not.

SAM
Well, it is for you.

WILLIE
That's good.

SAM
Yeah.

WILLIE
Although it's kind of hard to imagine what Ms. Edna would have to say about that.
(pause, as Sam reacts)
I'm sorry.

SAM
Don't be.
(rising, and moving back to the counter)
You know, some things just don't die so easy. And Edna wasn't any different.

WILLIE
I never noticed.

SAM
Well, no she didn't wear it on her sleeve, or nothing but... see, her granddaddy was a Brigadier General in the Lost Cause. Rode with Jeb Stuart. And when we was openin' this place up way back in the day, he provided most of the cash to get us started. Now, I know you's too young to remember this, but for years, right where that flag you always seen hanging up on the wall...
(he finds what he was looking for under the counter- a Confederate Flag)
... there used to be this.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

They used to tell us about that.

SAM

Yeah?

WILLIE

Yeah. So why'd you take it down?

SAM

Oh, I don't know... I guess it was just time. I mean, it was still a struggle with Edna, but she saw what I saw during the war. All the servicemen coming through, stopping in here. Now they may not have liked it anymore than we did, but the fact was that this just wasn't the flag the boys fighting to preserve our way of life was fighting under... that one was.

WILLIE

A lot of the guys who told me they saw that in here weren't that much older than I am.

SAM

So?

WILLIE

So that'd mean you still had that one up a long time after the war was over.

SAM

Well, like I said, some things just don't die so easy. But then certain things come to pass, and then you know it's time.

WILLIE

Certain things?

SAM

What?

WILLIE

Folks used to talk about it, the day the flag came down. Said they always suspected there was something more specific that caused you to take it down. People used to ask you, but you'd just say what you said right now... "it was time".

SAM

(uncomfortable)

Yeah.

WILLIE

But you just said certain things come to pass to let you know that it was time.

(pause)

Did something happen?

SAM

Look. I told you. It was time. Let's leave it at that.

(Willie smiles)

What are you smilin' at?

WILLIE

Nothing, it's just... that's just what they told me you would say if I ever asked.

SAM

Alright, then.

(walking back to the table)

Look, Willie. I'm really sorry I couldn't help you out with the job, but I know some people in town. I can give them a call and ask them, as a favor to me...

WILLIE

No, no sir. You don't have to do that.

SAM

Yeah, I know I don't have to, but I'd like to.

WILLIE

I just don't think it'll do any good. I've been back in town a week, and checked up on all the want ads.

SAM

(hurt)

You came here last?

WILLIE

No, no it's not that. I just thought it would be a little awkward, that's all.

SAM

I understand. Look, just let me make those calls for you. Here, I really can't afford to take on more than one extra person... payroll's gotten pretty tight since the new cooks I had to hire after Edna passed. But I'm sure I can find you something.

WILLIE

Mr. Sam, I think-

SAM

I'm not taking no for an answer here. Now where are you staying?

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

That's just the thing. I was staying at a hotel, but my money's all gone now. So I was just gonna give it one last try here, and then I'm moving on.

SAM

How you expect to get back to Chicago with no money?

WILLIE

I don't. I can walk to the next town... something's bound to come up sooner or later.

SAM

Where you gonna sleep?

WILLIE

I'll figure something out, Mr. Sam.

SAM

Oh, Willie don't be ridiculous
(goes to the cash register)
Now how much they charge at the place where you was staying?

WILLIE

Oh no, Mr. Sam.

SAM

No, Willie come on.
(hands him money)
Here, that oughta set you up for at least a couple more days while I make those calls.

WILLIE

Sir, I can't let you do that.

SAM

Willie, I insist.

WILLIE

No!

(pause)

Look I'm sorry I just can't let you do that.

(A white TEENAGER arrives at the back door)

TEENAGER

Hello? I'm here about the-

(CONTINUED)

SAM

We're closed.

TEENAGER

This is about-

SAM

I'm busy now, you need to come back later.

TEENAGER

I just spoke to you on the phone, you said you'd be expecting me.

SAM

Oh... Willie, will you excuse me for a moment?

(walks to the back door)

Uh, look son. I'm really sorry, but uh... the job is taken.

TEENAGER

But you told me-

SAM

Yes, I know what I told you, son. And I'm really sorry, I was under the impression that the first boy I offered the job to was turning it down, but that misunderstanding was all completely my fault. I wish there was some way I could make it up to you... are you hungry, can I get you anything? On the house?

TEENAGER

(seeing Willie)

Never mind!

(He storms out and slams the door)

WILLIE

Mr. Sam, you didn't have to do that.

SAM

I suppose you'll be starting tomorrow?

WILLIE

Sir...

SAM

I'm not in the mood to argue with you... tomorrow? Seven AM?

WILLIE

Right, Mr. Sam.

(CONTINUED)

(lights fade to black)

Scene 4

1968: The American Flag

(While the lights are still out on most of the stage, the CHORUS leader appears downstage, dressed in the track suit of the '68 U.S. Olympic team, with a black glove on his right hand. The ending of the "Star Spangled Banner" is heard coming from the TV. When it finishes, GREEK CHORUS # 1 appears and puts the gold medal around his neck and goes off. We hear cheering from the TV, and then the Chorus raises his fist in the "Black Power" salute, at which point the cheers turn to boos, and the other ensemble partner appears:)

GREEK CHORUS # 2

Hey! Get the hell out of here!

(as he chases him offstage)

That's the way you feel about it you can leave the country, nigger!

(nobody is onstage when the lights come up, and teenage WILLIE is heard shouting offstage)

WILLIE

All done, Mr. Sam!

(comes onstage from the kitchen)

Mr. Sam? I'm going now.

(SAM enters through the back door, furtively sticking a piece of gum in his mouth)

SAM

Willie?

WILLIE

Yes sir.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

(embarrassed)

Oh, you almost...

WILLIE

It's alright. I was just letting you know I'm going.

SAM

Oh. Well, alright. But hey, take some of the pie home with you.

WILLIE

No, thank you. I'm alright.

SAM

No, no please. We don't usually have any leftovers, but after the shennanigans this afternoon, business got kinda slow.

WILLIE

I'm sorry.

SAM

What? You don't got nothing to be sorry about.

(picking up a pie)

Well, if you won't, I will. All the phone calls I've had to be making I haven't had anything to eat since lunch.

(walks to the table)

You sure you don't want to join me? You love these pies, Willie.

WILLIE

Oh, you know. I used to.

SAM

Oh come on, you know I saved all of Edna's old recipes... passed 'em all on to the new gal when I hired her.

WILLIE

Yeah, but somehow it's still just not the same.

SAM

I know what you mean, but hey, what can we do?

(pause)

So, you gonna join me or not?

WILLIE

Sure.

(he goes to the table and they both sit there for a moment, and then:)

(CONTINUED)

SAM

So what do you think?

WILLIE

What do you mean?

SAM

Look, I know I probably could have handled the situation better...

WILLIE

I don't reckon what I think about it makes any difference.

SAM

Sure it does. I like you, Willie.

WILLIE

I think you handled it just fine.

SAM

Really?

WILLIE

If I'd been in your position I'd have done the same thing. That's just what I told that attorney when she- Oh, I almost forgot, she called again.

SAM

Oh brother... why didn't you tell me?

WILLIE

Yeah, I'm sorry. You couldn't hear me when I called to you, you were out back having a-

(he catches himself and pauses, but finally Sam just smiles at him)

SAM

It's alright, you've known me long enough.

WILLIE

It's not just me, you know.

SAM

Maybe.

WILLIE

You do know that everyone here knows what you're doing when you go back there, don't you?

(CONTINUED)

SAM

Yeah, pretty much. But the way I see it, a man don't have to wear his sin on his sleeve.

WILLIE

It's nothing to be ashamed of. Most of the customers-

SAM

Oh, no no no. Don't you do that. I don't want you to think... you haven't? Come on please tell me you never started...

WILLIE

One time. Some friends made me... I didn't like it, and so I never tried it again.

SAM

Well, good. Just promise me this... I like you, Willie, so promise me you ain't never gonna do that again.

WILLIE

Trust me, I'm not.

SAM

Well, good.

(pause)

The doctors used to tell me that it probably wasn't just me that it was affecting... other people breathing the same air... who knows, Edna might still be with us if it wasn't for my-

WILLIE

Aw, now don't do that. Look, like I was saying, you're here most of the time and you got all these other people smoking in here already.

SAM

Yeah, I know. But they bring their kids in here and I like to think that this is place is an important part of the community. Person that runs it should be setting a better example for the children.

WILLIE

We can't change what they see in the home.

SAM

Yeah, but its a start.

(sighs)

You know, if it was up to me they would be the folks who was asked to take their meals to go. But, of course, if I did that I wouldn't have a business. But that reminds me, I better go brace myself and get back on the phone with that snotty girl.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

She didn't come across that way to me.

SAM

Well, sure. She could tell she was speaking to-
(catches himself)
Look, Willie. You know that ain't what this is about.

WILLIE

Yeah.

SAM

I mean it'd be one thing if she was colored herself. I could understand that tone of hers if she was, but it's that... that... these kids, these days. Fresh out of them colleges and universities...

(pause)

Now don't take that the wrong way. You go right on with your studies, and don't let nothing stand in your way.

WILLIE

I will.

SAM

Just don't ever let that get you to thinking you can talk that way to a man twice your age just cuz you got some fancy degree and he don't.

WILLIE

I won't.

SAM

The way things are these days... some people just don't seem to know their place anymore.

WILLIE

Times have changed. The country's changing. This place has changed... and you've changed too. I know you probably don't want to hear that, but I've seen it, and it's true.

SAM

Maybe I have, son. Maybe I have. I know, it's like that fellow up in Illinois said a couple years back, all over the news... Dixon, or something like that... help me out here, college boy.

WILLIE

I'm sorry, I don't know... Dixon...?

SAM

"The armies are all stronger than..."... "no army can defeat an idea..."

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

Dirksen. Senator Everett Dirksen. "Stronger than all the armies is an idea that's time has come"

SAM

Dirksen.

(chuckles)

I always liked that one.

WILLIE

Of course that wasn't him. Hugo. He was paraphrasing Victor Hugo.

SAM

Victor who?

WILLIE

Hugo. French writer.

SAM

French?

(chuckles)

One year in, and you're already making me feel stupid.

WILLIE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything.

SAM

I'm just kidding with you, Willie.

(sighs)

Oh well, I guess we can't expect to be an army against it all, but I like to think that somewhere deep down, there's something that just can't be...

(pause)

You know what I think really got under my skin the most when she called me this afternoon?

WILLIE

No, what's that?

SAM

The way she kept calling me "Sam".

WILLIE

That's your name.

SAM

Well yeah, but she don't live in this town. Don't know nothing about me. Just some nasty young woman seen the name "Sam Chambers" on the business license she's looked over for all of five minutes after a couple of kids called her office looking to make trouble, and the next thing you know it's: "I got something to tell you Sam.... Sam, if you're

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (cont'd)

smart you'll get your own lawyer and have them call me back..."

WILLIE

Yeah, I know what you mean. Not polite to address your elders by their first name. But it's different with you. Everyone calls you "Sam".

SAM

Yeah, everyone here! Everyone in this town knows me. Knows this place. But some outsider that don't even know me... And look, it ain't just my being older than she is. It's... you remember when the schoolteacher came in here the other day?

WILLIE

Miss Brown?

SAM

Yes, Miss Brown.

WILLIE

She was my English teacher last year.

SAM

You don't say... well, anyhow you remember when she first come in... I said "Good afternoon, Helen." And you looked at me like I'd just shot her dog.

WILLIE

I guess it's hard for me to imagine that I would ever call her that, no matter how old I got.

SAM

Yeah, but I don't think it was that. You don't usually hear me addressing any of my customers like that, now do you?

WILLIE

No, sir.

SAM

First time that I ever did call her that... and you know why? Three days earlier I come up to her table and say "What can I get you today, Miss Brown?", and she says, "please, call me Helen. I'm a teacher, you keep calling me Miss Brown I'm gonna start thinking I'm still at work"

(Willie laughs)

Now on the other hand there's her cousin, Mrs. Johnson. Married to the policeman, you know her?

(Willie nods)

Now she's even a couple years younger than ole' Helen Brown. Heck, I knew her when she was just a little

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (cont'd)
girl. Her daddy and me went to high school together. But still, despite all that, I wouldn't never be so forward as just to say "hello Rebecca" when she walks in that door. And you know why that is?

WILLIE
Because she's married?

SAM
No.
(chuckles)
It's because she's over twenty one now.

WILLIE
I see.

SAM
It don't matter how old you is yourself. You don't call adults by their first name unless you've been asked to. It's rude.

WILLIE
I really think I should be going now, Mr. Sam.

SAM
Right. That's just me babbling here. But you go on home now and get your rest. I know you got class in the morning. And I got phone calls to make.
(goes to the counter to get bags)
But you take some this home with you now, you hear?

WILLIE
(wrapping up pie with Sam)
Yeah, sure. Thank you.

SAM
Alright. Well, goodnight Willie.

WILLIE
Good night, Mr. Sam.

(he heads for the back door as Sam goes for the phone. He is almost out the door when he turns back)
Uh..

SAM
(setting the phone down)
Willie?

WILLIE

Oh well... it's nothing really.

SAM

No, no. You was gonna say something...

WILLIE

No, I just... was just wondering how long it was that you knew my father.

SAM

Oh, gosh... long, long time. Since before you was born, you know that.

WILLIE

Yeah, I do. Daddy told me that. I just... well, I never asked him just how long before.

SAM

Oh... I don't know. Five... six years.

WILLIE

That's all?

SAM

Well, yeah. I'd say that's about right. What, you didn't think we went to school together or nothing, did you?

WILLIE

No, of course not... I just thought maybe somewhere else, when you were boys...

SAM

No.

WILLIE

Alright.

SAM

Why'd you wanna know that, Willie?

WILLIE

Just, something else I was thinking about.

SAM

And what's that?

WILLIE

Nothing, it's fine... I don't need you to tell me that.

SAM

You don't need me...

(long pause)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (cont'd)

What was that other question that you didn't need me to answer, after I answered your first one?

WILLIE

(slowly)

If... if, before you and he got to know each other better, you used to call him "Mr. Williams".

(there is a long silence. And then, finally:)

SAM

Willie... things is the way things is. I wish there was something I could do about it. But there ain't. I hope you can understand that.

WILLIE

Yeah... yeah, I do. Goodnight, Sam.

(Sam, taken aback at the dropping of the "Mr" doesn't respond as Willie exits and stands there, frozen, for a moment. Then he smiles, and starts dialing as the lights fade, and the flag changes)

Scene 5

Present Day: The Confederate Flag

(It is later that evening. AUDREY and adult WILLIE sitting at the table. Audrey has her notepad out.)

AUDREY

So, what... that was your big breakthrough for the month, or something?

WILLIE

If that's what you want to call it.

AUDREY

Because you told him what he wanted to hear?

WILLIE

That's not-

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

Because if it's okay with you, then-

WILLIE

You know, I can name a lot of... I'm sure you're aware there were plenty of "people of color" who were just as offended by that gesture.

AUDREY

And I suppose they all went around starting fights with anybody that disagreed?

WILLIE

That's not the point.

AUDREY

Look, you were there. You saw the whole thing, did you not?

WILLIE

I did.

AUDREY

So are you going to contradict anything my other sources have told me about it?

WILLIE

It's not that simple.

AUDREY

Are they lying about which group it was minding their own business until the other one came over and-

WILLIE

Both groups said plenty of things that... would "not have been fit for Miss Edna's ears".

AUDREY

So you were listening pretty closely... Then I'm sure you heard how many times the kids who were not asked to leave had used the "N" word?

WILLIE

Your sources tell you anything about how many times the kids who were had used the "M.F." word?

AUDREY

So that was the official justification for how "reserving of the right to refuse service" wasn't motivated by the color of their skin?

WILLIE

It was a fact.

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

Did you ever see the man "reserving that right" when it came to a white customer?

WILLIE

If they spoke like that in his restaurant-

AUDREY

But did you ever see it happen? Some loud, obnoxious redneck making a scene because he doesn't like the service, and good 'ole Sam saunters on over with a brown paper bag and.... wait, let me see if I've got this right...

(walks back to the bar, and comes back over doing the impression she's been taught)

"Scuse me... I'm gonna have to ask you boys a favor..."

(mimes opening the brown paper bag)

"You need to take this order to go!"

WILLIE

Back then, I spent most of my time back in the kitchen...

AUDREY

So that's a "no"?

WILLIE

It's a... look, I'll make you a deal. I'll answer your question if you'll answer one that I have for you.

AUDREY

Umm... okay.

WILLIE

Why didn't you go after Jamil like this?

AUDREY

Jamil?

WILLIE

Why didn't he get the third degree like this?

AUDREY

What are you even...?

WILLIE

Basketball player at your college. You know who I'm talking about.

(the CHORUS appears downstage, wearing a college basketball uniform)

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

You read that story.

WILLIE

Oh, I did my homework on you, too.

AUDREY

So what did you want to know about him?

CHORUS

So what did you want to ask me?

AUDREY

(to the Chorus)

Well, as you know I'm writing a story on-

CHORUS

Yes, I know.

AUDREY

About the player at the other school...

CHORUS

I know who you're talking about.

AUDREY

Yes. They just announced that he's off the team until he calls off this little... "stunt".

CHORUS

I heard. So?

AUDREY

Then I'm sure you're also aware that, before all this happened, he already had offers already from more than one team in the NBA?

CHORUS

Yes.

AUDREY

I wanted to ask you what you thought about that... maybe get a quote for the paper.

CHORUS

And you need me to tell you that, because...?

AUDREY

Well, you know...

CHORUS

Because I'm muslim too.

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

No, that's not-

CHORUS

And if I'm okay with it, then all of us should be okay with it.

AUDREY

Okay fine, but it's also... come on, Jamil. You're our school's big star. I'm sure next year you're gonna be expecting professional offers yourself... expecting to someday be in the same position that he's in right now...

CHORUS

What "position" is that? All the man's got to do is stand up, and this whole thing goes away.

AUDREY

So you're saying you do approve of the school's decision?

CHORUS

I'm saying... look, you said it yourself. And yes, I do expect to be in the NBA someday.

AUDREY

And...?

CHORUS

What do those guys make nowadays?

AUDREY

I don't know... a lot.

CHORUS

That's right. For that kind of money, I don't think it's that hard to just stand up and salute their flag.

AUDREY

(writing)

Can I quote you on that?

CHORUS

Be my guest.

(The Chorus disappears)

WILLIE

So that was it?

AUDREY

What do you mean "that was it"?

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

You were willing to leave it at that?

AUDREY

He answered the question.

WILLIE

He did?

AUDREY

Yes. And I think I've answered yours... so now I think it's your turn...

WILLIE

(giving up)

Alright, fine... what was the question, again?

AUDREY

Did you ever see Sam Chambers-

WILLIE

Oh yeah, that one. I thought I did answer it.

AUDREY

You said you were usually in the kitchen most of the time.

WILLIE

Okay, then I didn't, but that doesn't mean it never happened.

AUDREY

I know that. That's why... look, word gets around. Maybe you never saw it, but you were around here all the time. Knew everybody. Shared all the stories about the comings and goings in this place. It obviously meant a lot to you, or you wouldn't have done everything you did.

WILLIE

It did.

AUDREY

So then, from somebody who knew this place better than anybody, tell me... to your knowledge, was any white person ever "asked" to leave...

(anticipating his response)

... besides for saying "fuck"?

WILLIE

(chuckles)

You don't intend to make this easy on me now, do you?

(pause)

No, I can't say I have any knowledge of that.

(pause)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE (cont'd)

But that doesn't mean-

AUDREY

Yes, I know. I'll be careful how I write it. I promise.

WILLIE

Thank you.

AUDREY

(at the door)

You know, I've got to say I am impressed. I can't imagine how anybody could have gotten their hands on that old article from my college paper.

WILLIE

Oh, I have my sources too.

AUDREY

You know, before I started work on that article I had only just settled on journalism as my major... that was the very first article I ever wrote for a paper.

WILLIE

Except your old high school paper.

AUDREY

(stunned)

What?

WILLIE

Well, that would have been under the other name.

AUDREY

Other...?

WILLIE

Before you changed it.

AUDREY

How did you...?

WILLIE

Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you knew that I...

AUDREY

Knew?

WILLIE

I mean, I thought you knew that that was my point in bringing up Jamil... I thought everything was... I figured there weren't any secrets between us anymore.

(he gets up)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE (cont'd)
Look, I didn't mean to suggest...

AUDREY
No! Just stay the hell away from me.

(she exits and he follows her out to the door)

WILLIE
Ms. Walker, I had no idea... I'm sorry, I didn't. Ms. Walker... Audrey!
(walks back inside and sits down)
I'm sorry.

(lights fade to black)

ACT IIPrologue

(GREEK CHORUS # 1 and # 2 stand at opposite ends of the stage, as their leader enters through the back door)

CHORUS

Okay, sure. I knew it would get some kind of a reaction out of her. Maybe not anything like what we saw, but... yeah, that was the idea. Because I had to find out.

GREEK CHORUS # 2

Bitch!

CHORUS

I was able to speak to a few of her old classmates.

GREEK CHORUS # 1

She was always making trouble.

CHORUS

Naturally, I was able to draw some conclusions of my own... just a few general ideas...

GREEK CHORUS # 1

Hey, I'm as liberal as the next guy.

GREEK CHORUS # 2

Go home!

CHORUS

My guess was obviously a lot closer than I thought.

GREEK CHORUS # 1

But, I'm sorry. When I see those people now, all I can see is... you know...

GREEK CHORUS # 2

Get the hell out of my country!

CHORUS

But still... I just wanted to see it.

GREEK CHORUS # 1

... our boys in those blindfolds, paraded around for the whole world to laugh at...

(CONTINUED)

GREEK CHORUS # 2

Deport them all!

GREEK CHORUS # 1

... those bastards on television, burning our flag!

CHORUS

I wanted to see just what it was she wrote that... well, that changed everything. From what I did hear about it... well, whatever it was, I just couldn't help but imagine that the person who wrote it wouldn't have chosen to make me the bad guy in this story.

(the other members of the chorus disappear as he pulls out a newspaper and walks over to the counter. He sits down and starts reading from it:)

CHORUS

"The Pathfinder Gazette: John C. Freemont High School. Spring Edition, 1980. *What Makes Us Strong*, by Audrey Sassani. Like any American, my heart goes out to the families of the hostages. Like any patriot, I am hurt by the continuing dishonor to our country. But as a proud Iranian American, I am obligated to state a few facts about the current atmosphere here on campus, and in the country at large, that simply need to be said. To begin with-

(the toilet is heard flushing, and so he stops reading. He gets up, places the paper on a table and exits:)

Scene 1

Present Day: The Confederate Flag

(It is a few hours after Audrey ran out. A different 1920s tune starts playing on the jukebox as adult WILLIE emerges from the bathroom and sits at the table where the paper was placed, but he doesn't acknowledge it. He drinks coffee and listens to the music for a bit, and then AUDREY enters, very drunk.)

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY
Listening to that crap all night?

WILLIE
(turning, startled)
Huh?

AUDREY
Planning on being here in the morning? Chain yourself to the front porch or something?

WILLIE
Maybe... You came back.

AUDREY
The bars just closed, where the hell else do I have to go?

WILLIE
You have someone to give you a ride?

AUDREY
What's it to you?

WILLIE
Why don't you let me drive you back to your hotel.

AUDREY
Why don't you go fuck yourself?

WILLIE
Audrey let's-

AUDREY
No, fuck you! Fuck this place, fuck this town and every one of these goddamn...

WILLIE
I'm sorry.

AUDREY
Yeah. Aren't we all?

WILLIE
You wanna talk about it?

AUDREY
Sure, why the hell not? We got no secrets anymore, right?

WILLIE
That's not how it has to be.

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

Yes. Yes it is.

WILLIE

Look, I tried to tell you, I didn't think you still would have had strong feeling about that or anything.

AUDREY

Strong feelings?

WILLIE

I'm sorry. I... I thought you were an atheist.

AUDREY

I am now.

(pause)

So why don't you tell me the rest now.

WILLIE

Tell you what?

AUDREY

You know... about my high school article.

WILLIE

Actually, that's what I wanted to ask you about.

AUDREY

What do you mean? You sure made it clear that you already got the goods on me.

WILLIE

I got the gist of it... what the article was about. But nobody could find it for me.

AUDREY

Don't worry. You would have approved of it.

WILLIE

You think so?

AUDREY

I know so. Wrote it just the way you thought I should have written the article on Jamil.

WILLIE

I don't think you really know what I-

AUDREY

Oh, come on! I'm not as stupid as you think I am. "Was I willing to leave it at that"?

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE
Look, let's just forget about-

AUDREY
Let's not!!

WILLIE
Alright.

AUDREY
I didn't. Not at first.

WILLIE
What?

AUDREY
"Leave it at that"... not asking him the question you
thought I should have asked him... I did.

WILLIE
Alright, I'm sorry I-

AUDREY
No secrets!

(the CHORUS leader appears downstage, in
the basketball uniform)

CHORUS
No secrets...

AUDREY
Goddamn right!

WILLIE
Audrey...

CHORUS
For that kind of money, I don't think it's that hard to just
stand up and salute their flag.

AUDREY
Yes, I get that, but...

CHORUS
But what?

AUDREY
That wasn't my question... do you think it's right?

(CONTINUED)

CHORUS

Does it matter what I think?

AUDREY

I guess not... not to my editor, at least. We'll go with your quote. I'm sure they'll love it.

CHORUS

But what about you?

AUDREY

What about me?

CHORUS

You got the quote you needed, but... are we off the record now?

AUDREY

Sure.

CHORUS

Right and wrong. It does still matter to you... doesn't it?

(long pause)

AUDREY

There was a time, yes.

CHORUS

And then something changed...

AUDREY

Yes.

CHORUS

What changed?

AUDREY

My father lost his job. I lost most of my friends... listen, what you said. About "off the record"... that was a two-way street, correct?

CHORUS

Of course.

(the Chorus disappears and Audrey turns back to Willie)

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY

Yeah, we stayed "off the record" for another hour, at least. Talked about everything that happened to me since the high school article, and he shared his stories. The man actually tried to convert me back to the faith. Like that was ever gonna happen.

WILLIE

That's why you had nothing to say after 9/11 in response to your paper's editorial about-

AUDREY

(exploding)

Fine, ban all muslims!

WILLIE

Audrey...

AUDREY

Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists... ban 'em all!!! From the Inquisition, to the Salem Witch Trials, to the Black Hole of Calcutta, to the World Trade Center... that's organized religion for you!

WILLIE

I don't think you want to print that.

AUDREY

Wrong!! I did... at least I tried to. What do you think got me sent down to this godforsaken... You really think this is the story I chose to cover?

WILLIE

I'm sorry.

AUDREY

Look, will you just quit saying that? Nobody's got to be sorry for a damn thing. We all learn the hard way the consequences of opening up our mouths... of giving two shits about who owns a restaurant, or a shopping center or whatever it is that's so goddamn important to you... Learn that whatever principles we think we're standing up for are shit. All of them, they're all bullshit! Don't you get it? There are no principles. There is no right. There is no wrong. There is only the steady march of civilization! It's continuous, it's colorblind, and it's inevitable. And there's nothing you, me, or anybody else can do about it, it just keeps rolling along. You can enjoy it, or you can stand in the way and get run over...

(pause)

Like Sam did. Like all the rest of these...

(CONTINUED)

(grunts)
 ... where did they get it from, again? The Tower of Babel? Yeah, well wherever you all are right now, fuck you too!!

(she's getting sick, and heads for the bathroom. Willie calls after her:)

WILLIE

You know, I found their old coffee maker. Fortunately for us, that's something else around here nobody wanted that still works...

(he gets up, and we hear her vomiting offstage)

I'll make some more...

(He heads back into the kitchen as the lights and the flag change...)

Scene 2

1975: The American Flag

(the CHORUS appears downstage as the TV comes on:)

TELEVISION VOICE

And in response to the President's call to "Whip Inflation Now", Americans everywhere are showing their support with their "WIN" buttons.

(the CHORUS pins on his button)

Furthermore, patriotic citizens are asked to show their devotion to the cause by signing the following form. It reads:

CHORUS

"Dear President Ford, I enlist as an inflation fighter and energy saver for the duration. I will do the very best I can for America"

(He goes and takes a seat at the counter where he'll watch the action, unseen, for the next couple scenes as young WILLIE enters from the kitchen as a businessman, MR. RAULSTON, enters through the front door)

(CONTINUED)

Can I help you? WILLIE

He in? RAULSTON

Sir, is there something I can- WILLIE

Where's the man in charge of this place? RAULSTON

I'm the manager. WILLIE

Well, isn't that nice... I came to speak to the owner. RAULSTON

You Mr. Raulston? WILLIE

Well, good. You know what I'm here for. RAULSTON

Mr. Chambers isn't in at the moment. WILLIE

Well, then you just get him on the phone and- RAULSTON

Sir, I don't think he wishes to speak with you. WILLIE

Look, let's not have any trouble... RAULSTON

SAM
(entering through the back)
Willie, it looks like you're gonna need to- Oh, hello.

Mr. Chambers? RAULSTON

Yes? SAM

This is Mr. Raulston from the bank. WILLIE

Yes, we spoke on the phone. How are you? SAM

(CONTINUED)

RAULSTON

I'm well, thank you.

WILLIE

I was trying to explain to Mr. Raulston that you didn't want to-

SAM

It's alright, Willie.

(motions to a table)

Why don't you come step into my office?

RAULSTON

I think maybe we should have this conversation someplace where...

(indicates Willie)

SAM

You only want to say this to me, that's fine.

(sits)

But there ain't gonna be any secrets between myself and the manager.

RAULSTON

Very well, then...

(sits)

Now, as I was trying to say to you on the phone, the board of directors over at the bank has been taking a long look at your balance sheet, and quite frankly we don't see how you're gonna pull yourself out of this hole you've gotten yourself into.

SAM

Things is gonna be fine after the summer.

RAULSTON

Look, some of our other clients have expressed an interest-

SAM

This place ain't for sale.

RAULSTON

That isn't what I was talking about. Although-

SAM

What was you talking about?

RAULSTON

Well, we'd been discussing the changes this town has gone through over the past ten years or so, how perhaps the resulting change in the demands of the local community might lead you to...

(sees Willie)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RAULSTON (cont'd)

You looking at something, boy?

SAM

Speak to me, Mr. Raulston. That is what you said you was interested in, now wasn't it?

RAULSTON

The needs of this community have changed, Mr. Chambers.

SAM

So you've said.

RAULSTON

Well, it's the truth.

SAM

So it is.

RAULSTON

This is not the part of town people take the wife and kids to anymore. Now the mill workers, they may stop by for a quick bite before they head home, but most of them pass this place up completely nowadays. Too many of them, you may have seen, just wanna get a quick drink and-

SAM

This place ain't never served liquor, you know that.

RAULSTON

I'm aware of that. Maybe that's what you need to start thinking about.

SAM

This is a family place.

RAULSTON

Not anymore, it's not. That's what I've been trying to tell you.

SAM

Those the "other clients" you was referring to?

RAULSTON

Yes. Now I can introduce you to some of the men whose businesses may have an interest in yours.

SAM

Liquor licenses cost money. And they got to be approved by the state.

(CONTINUED)

RAULSTON
The bank can take care of that for you.

SAM
Oh, really?

RAULSTON
Yes.

SAM
How many of them fellas in Jackson you got in your pocket?

RAULSTON
It isn't that simple.

SAM
Unless there's something else, Mr. Raulston...

RAULSTON
Yes, yes there is. Please...

SAM
What?

RAULSTON
We also wanted to talk to you about your payroll.

SAM
And that's precisely what I was telling you is going to get better after the summer.

RAULSTON
And how is that?

SAM
Willie here is moving on.

RAULSTON
Is that a fact?

SAM
That's a fact. Passed the bar exam six months ago, and has a job offer with a firm in Jackson.

(to Willie)
Ain't that right?

WILLIE
Yes, sir.

RAULSTON
Well, isn't that nice...

SAM

So I'll go back to doing more of the work of running this place myself again for a while. At least until things start to improve around here.

RAULSTON

And when your boy here comes back to you...

SAM

What do you mean when he comes back?

RAULSTON

When things don't work out for him in Jackson. Only so long people need to keep their... "window dressing" out on display before the novelty wears off.

SAM

That ain't gonna happen.

RAULSTON

And what if it does? That's how you got yourself into this mess with the payroll to begin with.

SAM

That was an entirely different situation.

RAULSTON

How was it different?

SAM

Alright, it was the same. But that ain't gonna happen this time. Tyrone saw that other job offer fall through just after he quit me. Came back here, and didn't have no other place to go, but Willie had already hired the new boy. What else was we supposed to do?

RAULSTON

Well...

(looks at Willie)

They do take care of their own, now don't they?

SAM

(after a pause)

Mr. Raulston, first of all, I think you should know that it was the manager here made the business decision that we couldn't afford to take on both employees at the same time... a judgment that was overruled by the owner... isn't that right, Willie?

WILLIE

I don't think Mr. Raulston needs to hear about that now.

(CONTINUED)

Well, isn't it? SAM

Something like that, Mr. Sam. WILLIE

And...? RAULSTON

And what? WILLIE

You said "First of all..." Was there a "Second of all"? RAULSTON

Yes. Yes, there was. Second of all, we're done talking here. SAM

Mr. Chambers... RAULSTON

(standing)
There ain't a thing you can ask me about this place that the manager on duty here can't help you with. You got anything else left to say, say it to Mr. Williams. SAM

(he exits... after a moment, Raulston approaches Willie at the counter)

You got any idea what the old man is getting himself into... RAULSTON
(mocking)

Mr. Williams?

We'll find out. WILLIE

(exiting)
That's what I thought. RAULSTON

Hey, Tyrone! WILLIE
(calls into the next room)

Yeah, Willie? TYRONE
(entering, with dishes)

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE
Why don't you go ahead and take your ten now.

TYRONE
Okay. Let me just-

WILLIE
(taking the dishes from him)
No, I'll get that.

TYRONE
Thanks.

(Tyrone starts getting out his
cigarettes)

WILLIE
Hey, hey, hey. Outside. You know the rules.

TYRONE
Yeah, yeah. I'm going.

(he heads for the back door, then turns
back)

Hey... were you...?

WILLIE
What?

TYRONE
Were you listening to any of that?

WILLIE
I was trying not to.

TYRONE
Well, so was I, but you know...

WILLIE
Yeah.

TYRONE
You think he knew who I was?

WILLIE
I don't know. I doubt it.

TYRONE
You think it would have made any difference?

WILLIE
Probably not.

TYRONE
That's what I thought.

(lights fade to black as the flag
changes)

Scene 3

1980: The Confederate Flag

RONALD REAGAN
(recorded, on the TV)
For those who've abandoned hope, we'll restore hope and
we'll welcome them into a great national crusade to make
America great again!

(wild cheers from the crowd)

TELEVISION VOICE
As Governor Reagan continues his campaign swing through the
South this week, President Carter is continuing with his
efforts to shore up his support with...

(The words trail off... The CHORUS
is still sitting at the counter,
unseen, watching the action, and
TYRONE is working at the counter as
the lights come up, and a CUSTOMER
approaches the counter)

TYRONE
Yes, sir? Can I help you?

CUSTOMER
You the manager?

TYRONE
I am. What can I do for you?

(CONTINUED)

CUSTOMER

(pointing)

Isn't that the non-smoking section over yonder?

TYRONE

Well, um... no. Partition dividing those tables near the center of the dining room... that there is the divider.

CUSTOMER

Yeah, well we's at the table right on the other side of that there partition. I mean, I understand the division and all, but we're still two feet away... not like that makes a bit of difference in the air we's breathing...

TYRONE

Yes, I understand. I'll go see what I can do.

CUSTOMER

I appreciate it. I don't mean to be a bother...

TYRONE

No, no bother at at all.

CUSTOMER

... just my wife is pregnant, and I don't think it's good for her.

TYRONE

Yes, I understand. I'll go see if maybe we can move you to another table at the far end of the room.

CUSTOMER

I appreciate it.

(Tyrone exits to the dining room, and the customer sits at the counter. After a moment, young WILLIE walks in:)

WILLIE

Hello.

CUSTOMER

How you doin'?

WILLIE

I'm well, thank you... You in line to be seated?

CUSTOMER

No, they's trying to move us... he'll be back in a moment.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE
(indicating the adjacent stool)
May I?

CUSTOMER
I don't own the place.

WILLIE
(sits)
Thank you.

CUSTOMER
Haven't I seen you around here some place?

WILLIE
I worked here for ten years.

CUSTOMER
Oh yes, of course. How could I forget?

WILLIE
It happens.

TYRONE
(re-entering)
Sir?

CUSTOMER
Yes?

TYRONE
There wasn't any problem, we got your wife moved over to that table over there.

CUSTOMER
Oh right, I see. I really do appreciate it.
(exiting, to Willie)
Good seeing you again.

WILLIE
You too.

TYRONE
Willie?

WILLIE
Hello, Tyrone.

TYRONE
Willie, how the hell are you?

Hanging in there. WILLIE

(hugs him)
TYRONE
So good to see you again.

(looking at the flag)
WILLIE
Just what have you done to this place?

TYRONE
That wasn't me, you know that.

WILLIE
Of course.

TYRONE
Marketing decision. The new management says that down here
folks'll like that a lot better.

WILLIE
Think it's working?

TYRONE
Yeah.

WILLIE
What I was afraid of...
(looks outside)
"Sam's Place"... ha.

TYRONE
Yeah, that sign was another one of their little... you know,
marketing ploys.

WILLIE
I can't imagine he'd have wanted that.

TYRONE
He didn't. How long you been in town? You seen him?

WILLIE
Yeah, I visited the nursing home. He didn't seem very
responsive.

TYRONE
No...

WILLIE
But otherwise, this place still looks the same.

TYRONE

Well, that was intentional. They felt that the quaint atmosphere he'd built up added to the appeal.

WILLIE

He didn't insist on it when he sold the place?

TYRONE

He was kind of at the end of his rope, not in much of a position to demand anything. But they say that there was just two things he insisted on that he was able to get them to accept before he signed the papers. One was that no liquor would ever be served here, and the other was...

WILLIE

What?

TYRONE

(chuckles)

Believe it or not, the flag.

WILLIE

But...

TYRONE

Yeah, I know. But that's just the thing. He came back in here himself, barely able to walk, and pitched a fit when he found out. But the company's lawyers went over the contract with him, and well... contract specified that the American flag was always to be hanging up there: it didn't say which American flag.

WILLIE

He should have called me. I'd have been his lawyer.

TYRONE

Would you have won?

WILLIE

Probably not.

TYRONE

So what're you doing back in town? Just came to see the old man?

WILLIE

Well, actually, I been thinking about moving back home.

TYRONE

Seriously?

(CONTINUED)

Yeah. WILLIE

TYRONE
Don't tell me it didn't work out for you in-

WILLIE
No, no. Things are fine, I just kinda... just miss the old town, that's all.

TYRONE
This place?

WILLIE
Yeah, I know what you mean. But it does have its... you know.

TYRONE
Yeah.

WILLIE
I was thinking about opening an office. Starting my own practice. Local clients.

TYRONE
Well, good luck to you then.

WILLIE
It was just a thought.

TYRONE
Oh.

WILLIE
Maybe I did just want to stop by and visit.

(the Customer re-enters from the dining room)

CUSTOMER
Excuse me.

TYRONE
Yes?

CUSTOMER
Look, I'm sorry to bother you again, but...

TYRONE
(looking into the dining room)
Oh...

(CONTINUED)

CUSTOMER

Well... aren't you gonna do something?

TYRONE

(uncomfortable)

You see, I can't really...

CUSTOMER

Alright, now. That is very clearly on the other side of the partition you showed me. He needs to put that out.

TYRONE

I'm not really allowed to...

CUSTOMER

What do you mean, you're not allowed? You're the manager here?

TYRONE

Yes, but-

CUSTOMER

Them's the rules, right there on your signs.

TYRONE

See, I'm under instructions from the new owners.

CUSTOMER

Instructions not to follow their own rules? They made 'em didn't they?

TYRONE

Yeah, I know that...

CUSTOMER

They make the rules, and then they don't want you to enforce them?

TYRONE

I'm just... I've been told not to say anything as long as they're spending money here.

CUSTOMER

Oh, well isn't that just...

(starts back to the dining room, then turns back)

Your boss aware that now, because of his policy, we are leaving and not going to be spending our money here?

TYRONE

I understand. I even mentioned that, but apparently they did the math on that... it was a... uh...

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE
(jumping in)
... a marketing decision.

(the customer rolls his eyes and exits
to the dining room. They sit there
quietly for a moment)

WILLIE
I guess I'd better be going.

TYRONE
Alright... come back again soon.

WILLIE
(heading to the door)
I intend to.

TYRONE
Good. You're still thinking about... you know, moving back
here?

WILLIE
Yeah, actually I am.

TYRONE
You're not gonna let what you saw here influence your
decision at all?

WILLIE
I think it already has.

TYRONE
It doesn't make you less likely to wanna come home?

WILLIE
More.

TYRONE
Good.

(lights fade to black)

Scene 4

Present Day: The Confederate Flag

(AUDREY and WILLIE sitting around a
table)

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

I meant to return earlier. It was at least... oh, I don't know, maybe two... three years before I was able to get things off the ground here.

AUDREY

And by the time you got back...?

WILLIE

Oh, yes. That was the last time I saw him. They say it was only a couple months after I went back to Jackson that he passed on.

AUDREY

You didn't hear?

WILLIE

No. Nobody told me anything. Not until I got back did I hear about it. I came back in here. Meant to ask Tyrone why he didn't call me, but he wasn't still around either. Nobody I asked had ever heard of him.

AUDREY

I see.

WILLIE

Gone the way of your high school article...
(pause)

Sorry.

(the CHORUS finally gets up from the counter and starts walking, unseen, over to their table.)

AUDREY

Forget it. I told you, we're cool.

WILLIE

I still would love to read it.

AUDREY

I'm sure you would.

WILLIE

Not even one copy you might have saved somewhere?

AUDREY

I wouldn't be that stupid.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

Gone with the wind...

(the Chorus picks up the paper he left
on their table earlier and exits)

AUDREY

Interesting choice of words.

WILLIE

Indeed...

(pause)

So, I was thinking... I mean if you wouldn't mind. As part
of our little *quid pro quo* here, one last, uh...

AUDREY

(smiles)

Go ahead.

WILLIE

How did you ever settle on Walker?

AUDREY

What do you mean?

WILLIE

The name. I mean, there's so many others you could have
chosen that sound so much closer to "Sassani".

AUDREY

I'm sure I could have.

WILLIE

So then, what was it?

AUDREY

I don't know, I guess I'd probably have to say it was...
well, Vince Walker.

WILLIE

Vince Walker?

AUDREY

You've seen the movie *Gandhi*?

WILLIE

Of course... took home the Academy Award for Best Picture,
in... what was it...?

(CONTINUED)

AUDREY
1982. So, anyway. You remember the journalist?

WILLIE
Oh yes... played by Martin Sheen, right?

AUDREY
Yeah.

WILLIE
He was a pivotal figure. His reporting on the brutality of the raid on the Salt Works was credited as-

AUDREY
He was fictional.
(pause)
Now do you get it?

WILLIE
Yes, I think so.

AUDREY
If they wanted to get their story right, they might have asked other Indians... what do they believe in?

WILLIE
What?

AUDREY
Their faith, the Hindus. What do they say?

WILLIE
Karma?

AUDREY
Karma... Destiny... "Do what you will, but the outcome has already been decided"
(she starts to get up)
Look, I'd better-

WILLIE
He was fictionalized.

AUDREY
What?

WILLIE
I just remembered. That character, Vince Walker. He wasn't fictional, just fictionalized. Based loosely on Webb Miller.

AUDREY
Loosely...

WILLIE
Hey, Webb Miller did report on that raid. And his story is credited by many as a major factor in turning world opinion against British colonial rule in India.

AUDREY
If they say so.

WILLIE
But you knew that when you first saw the movie.
(pause)
So maybe you did still believe that-

AUDREY
Maybe I just happened to think Martin Sheen was gorgeous, did you ever think of that?

WILLIE
(laughs)
If you say so.

AUDREY
Last thing I'd seen him in before that was *Apocalypse Now*... he gets naked in that one, you know!

(They both laugh, and there is a knock at the back door. Two of Audrey's ASSISTANTS have appeared)

AUDREY
Come in.

WILLIE
Oh. I'm sorry, we were just... we were just clearing out.

ASSISTANT # 1
No, no its alright.

WILLIE
You're a little early.

AUDREY
They're not the...

ASSISTANT # 1
So where is it?

AUDREY
(points to the jukebox)
Over there.

ASSISTANT # 2
Oh that shouldn't be too hard.

ASSISTANT # 1
We'll go get the moving carts.

(they exit)

WILLIE
What's going on here?

AUDREY
I'm sorry we didn't have the article you wanted, but we do have trunk space and moving carts.

WILLIE
You mean these guys...

AUDREY
In the news van.

WILLIE
Uh, look you're going to a lot of trouble for...

AUDREY
Well, do you still want it in your office, or not?

WILLIE
I can't let you do that.

AUDREY
You gave me the information I needed. You can't say I don't owe you.

WILLIE
Yeah, but-

AUDREY
What do you think I was doing when I stepped out earlier?

WILLIE
Well, I figured you were out catching up on some drinking.

AUDREY
Okay, that too.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE
Although that was just a wild guess.

AUDREY
You're not ever gonna let up on me, are you?

WILLIE
No. Don't take it personally, but I still don't like you very much.

(they both smile)

AUDREY
Good. I still haven't altered my opinions on any of you guys down here either.

WILLIE
Of course not.

AUDREY
Well, maybe just one.

WILLIE
Oh yeah?

AUDREY
A little... It's not you, so don't get any ideas.

WILLIE
Really?

AUDREY
Really.

WILLIE
Good.

(he goes to the box)

So, since you feel that way, is there anything here you'd like to keep? You know, something to remember this place by?

AUDREY
I guess that would probably be a good idea.
(indicates the flag)
No, you should keep that.

WILLIE

Good. I was ready to fight you for it.
 (picks up the apron)
 Why don't you....?

AUDREY

Oh no, that's obviously very personal to you as well.

WILLIE

No, you take it. I insist... hey, you gave me something.

AUDREY

(takes it)
 I'll cherish it.

WILLIE

You better.

(the two assistants return)

WILLIE

Thank you fellas. I really do appreciate this.

ASSISTANT # 2

Don't mention it.

WILLIE

(heading to the bathroom)
 I'm gonna go to the john. I'll see you folks outside.

TRANSITION:

(there is no blackout. AUDREY looks around for a moment, then picks up the apron, and puts it on, transforming into EDNA, while the two ASSISTANTS take a seat at the table, transforming into the two REDNECK customers from the Summer of 1955. The lights change to indicate a change from the middle of the night to early afternoon of this scene:)

Scene 5

1955: The Confederate Flag

TELEVISION VOICE

... and while the District Attorney for Tallahatchie County will announce within the week whether he plans to convene a new grand jury to seek new indictments on the outstanding

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TELEVISION VOICE (cont'd)
kidnapping charges, for the time being Bryant and Milam have
been acquitted of capital murder.

(the REDNECKS applaud rowdily as the
broadcast continues)

One member of the jury, which deliberated for just 67
minutes, has stated that, quote: "if we hadn't stopped to
drink pop, it wouldn't have taken us that long". Sheriff
Strider, who expressed doubts on the witness stand as to the
actual identity of the body recovered from the river-

(EDNA switches off the TV, as SAM
emerges from the kitchen with his broom)

REDNECK # 1

Hey, what the hell do you think you're doing, lady?

EDNA

I think maybe we should take a break from the television for
a little while.

REDNECK # 2

Turn that back on!

SAM

There a problem here, Edna?

EDNA

No, Sam. We just-

REDNECK # 1

Yeah, you bet you got a problem. We was watching that!

SAM

Edna?

EDNA

The local news... getting people a little riled up around
here. I thought maybe...

SAM

Alright, whatever you say. Honey, I think the order is up.

EDNA

(exiting to the kitchen)

You boys just sit tight, I'll go get your order.

(CONTINUED)

REDNECK # 1

That the way things work around here?

SAM

The boss says something on the idiot box ain't appropriate, then it don't stay on.

REDNECK # 2

"The Boss"...?

SAM

Either of you boys married...?

(pause)

If you was, you'd understand.

REDNECK # 2

Bible says the wife shall submit to the husband.

REDNECK # 1

Well, maybe this peckerwood just ain't got what it takes to control his woman.

SAM

You will keep a civil tongue in your head, young man, or eat your meals someplace else.

REDNECK # 1

Whatever you say, Mrs. Chambers.

SAM

(walking away)

Ed Sullivan's on in twenty minutes. We'll put the tube back on then.

EDNA

(coming out with their order)

Alright, boys. Here you go.

REDNECK # 2

(not looking up)

Salt.

EDNA

Coming right up.

(to the other redneck)

Anything else for...?

(she sees he's ignoring her too, already stuffing his face, and walks away to get the salt)

REDNECK # 2

Well, anyhow, you know what they was about to say about Sheriff Strider.

REDNECK # 1

No...

REDNECK # 2

Testified that he believed the NAACP probably put the body in the river.

REDNECK # 1

That after he gave the Yankee press up north the quote they wanted about what a strong case he actually had?

REDNECK # 2

Well, the man seen the light and come around to do the right thing.

REDNECK # 1

Isn't he a credit to his race?

REDNECK # 2

Hey, it could be worse. How 'bout that nigger loving D.A. that chose to spit on the graves of the Confederate dead by pursuing this whole sham.

REDNECK # 1

Man's got a job to do.

REDNECK # 2

Job my ass!

REDNECK # 1

No, no, no you listen here. My uncle's a lawyer, so I know a few things about this, you hear? A lawyer's got a case, he gotta take it. The District Attorney had a case... and just why did he have a case?

REDNECK # 2

The uncle...

REDNECK # 1

Damn right... stood up there on that witness stand...
(mimics)

"THAR he!!!" Now, he better hope them Chicago relatives are gonna take him in, cuz he shows his face around here, that nigger's dead!

REDNECK # 2

Look, I don't give a good goddamn about that Mose Wright. The man's family, and we take care of family. Dogs take care of their own. And so do niggers. That's just the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REDNECK # 2 (cont'd)

way things is always gonna be. But you know who it is that's got no excuse... it's the white niggers! It's time the good people of the South rise up and run out of town every one of them white niggers, starting with that fuckin' D.A. who-

SAM

(shouts from across the room)

Young man!!!!

(silence as he approaches the table)

You do not use that word in my wife's restaurant, do you understand?

REDNECK # 2

You gettin' crabby without your nictoine fix, old man?

SAM

Are we clear... sir?

REDNECK # 2

Yes, sir.

REDNECK # 1

We's clear... "boss"...

SAM

Can I get you boys anything else?

REDNECK # 2

No.

REDNECK # 1

We's fine here.

(SAM slowly walks away)

REDNECK # 1

So... you seen the picture in Life Magazine?

(The other redneck just laughs, and is soon joined in by his friend)

REDNECK # 2

You know that's exactly what they all looked at when they came to pay their final respects. Mother insisted on a open casket funeral.

(CONTINUED)

REDNECK # 1

(mimicing)

"I want the whole world to see what they did to my boy"

REDNECK # 2

She think she gonna win over a bunch of bleedin' hearts over to her cause with crap like that?

REDNECK # 1

I reckon maybe she already has...

REDNECK # 2

Well, of course. All them communists up in New York City.

REDNECK # 1

Nigger's family is from Chicago.

REDNECK # 2

Same difference.

REDNECK # 1

Yeah... but be careful what you say now... they gonna send Sherman back down here.

REDNECK # 2

Well, if they do we gonna kick his ass this time around.

(They both start laughing. SAM has approached them from behind with a brown paper bag)

SAM

'Scuse me...

(opens up the bag)

I'm gonna have to ask you boys a favor.

(Blackout of everything except the flag. The light stays focused on it as it slowly changes into the American flag. The light stays on it for a few seconds after it has changed, then goes out.)

END OF PLAY