

GET ON UP

Story by

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Screenplay by

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6 INT/EXT. PICKUP TRUCK / PARKING LOT 6

A fifty-five year, out of shape black man in mirror shades and a shell-suit. He's breathing heavily. Patting the dashboard, as the song ends. The man sits there a moment and exits.

JAMES BROWN hitches up his pants, and walks across the lot.

7 INT. NONDESCRIPT OFFICE 7

There's no one around. He's jumpy. His movements odd. Twitchy.

JAMES
(To himself)
Where's everybody?

Around a corner he comes face to face with a cleaner, **MAVIS**, who is wearing headphones as she vacuums.

Mavis screams and removes her headphones.

MAVIS
Mr. Brown. You scared me!

JAMES
Mavis. Where's everybody at? I got a meetin' this mornin'.

MAVIS
It's Sunday, Mr. Brown.

JAMES
No, it's Tuesday, Mavis.

James is caught flat-footed. SOMEWHERE OFF a toilet flushes.

He rounds the corner. No-one. Opens the bathroom door. Looks inside. Sniffs. Slams it and storms off down the corridor passing a sign outside his office that reads: **GET ON UP.**

8 INT./EXT. ADJACENT OFFICE/ PARKING LOT. DAY. 8

As the INSURANCE SEMINAR presenter continues, the woman who was on the toilet takes her seat.

SEMINAR PRESENTER
Now, understand that not all people have the same type of needs. When it comes to an insurance plan everyone is different.
(MORE)

SEMINAR PRESENTER (CONT'D)

You can't possibly sell the same monthly premium to just anyone who strolls through your door. If you learn one lesson this weekend, let it be this: We must accommodate the specific condition of the client. Bottom line! Their needs are-

The adjoining door flies opens as James enters, pissed.

JAMES

OK Stop. Sir. Stop. Who been in there?

SEMINAR PRESENTER

Excuse me?

JAMES

I own this building, someone has been in there used my commode. Now who was it?

SEMINAR PRESENTER

Sorry. We're actually renting this part of the building today, and we're in the middle of a seminar.

JAMES

I don't care if you're in the middle of a heart attack son. Someone been in there, I hear the chain flush, I can *smell* it. Now who it was?

INSURANCE SALESMAN

It is. It's fuckin' him.

BACK AT THE FRONT someone sniggers.

James spins round. SILENCE. Someone sniggers behind him. James spins back round and approaches the salesman.

JAMES

Something funny?

INSURANCE SALESMAN

No, sir.

JAMES

Then why you cats laughing?

INSURANCE SALESMAN

I wasn't laughing. It wasn't me.

James stares at the man. Turns on his heel.

He storms out of the building and across the lot to his pickup truck

THE PAYBACK starts: insanely tight, deep funk.

INSURANCE SALESMAN (CONT'D)

I'm telling you that was James Brown.

Outside a window behind the seminar presenter, James can be seen rifling through the back of his pickup truck.

The woman who used his bathroom watches James' every move.

SEMINAR PRESENTER

Look, I suggest we just continue... OK. So. How does the program work? Initially, participating dentists undergo an extensive credentialing process which, if approved, allows customers to pay the minimum deductible allowed and the remainder is insured. But with non-participating dentists the cost per visit is much higher and comes completely out of pocket. So some people may want a high deductible because they have more to cover, but most common folks simply want the lowest possible plan... and remember our key takeaway!?

Entire seminar in UNISON.

We must accommodate the specific condition of-

The office door flies open. James comes back in with a SHOTGUN.

JAMES

OK listen up people.

The room goes still and completely silent.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Being it's Sunday and all I'm gone ask each of you to imagine you're sittin' in church right now. While today's sermon may be good they's something else on your mind. You realize you gotta take a shit.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Real bad. And you don't want to
shit at the church house, naw sir.
So you just sit there and think
about getting home to your own
toilet in your own master bath on
Beech Island, South Carolina. I
gotta a bidet in my master bath.
Love my bidet. And a big pretty
oval tub too.

James spins around to man.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You got a bidet, Sir?

He shakes his head. James looks to a woman.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You?

She shakes her head.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Well you gotta get you one. You all
gotta get you a bidet. Are y'all
sure its really Sunday today?

A woman nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What was just saying... Oh, that's
right. Yes! You gotta take shit.
So, after church, you speed back
home and you run like hell to the
house scared you ain't gonna make
it. But you do. Now imagine
unhitching your pants as your open
your bathroom door. And then you
see me. James Brown. Sittin' on
your master toilet taking a break.
What would you do?

More sniggers from all over the room. James raises his gun
and KABLOOM!!!

James accidentally blasts an enormous hole in the ceiling.

SCREAMS AS EVERYONE HITS THE DECK. James looks up the the
hole in the ceiling.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Good God. Tear up the devil. I'm
gone have to get that fixed.

James looks to the gun unsure of how it went off.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Now I'm a busy man, and I'm guessin' you cats are too. But someone has abused a personal convenience. Now I ask you nicely. I'm gone ask you again. Which one of you gentlefolk hung a number two in my commode?

James approaches the salesman.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Was it you, Sir? Was it you?!

INSURANCE SALESMAN

Don't shoot.

JAMES

I ain't gone shoot nobody, son.

Then, as if told by God, James spins around and locks eyes with the woman who used his bathroom. He approaches her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Ma'am, it was you wasn't it? You took a break in my bathroom, didn't you?

She shakes her head and begins to cry.

FEMALE SALESWOMAN

Yes sir, Mister Brown.

JAMES

Yes you did. Now, don't cry. It's gone be okay.

James lowers the gun to the floor. As he tries to console the woman.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You had to use the toilet. You saw an opportunity and you took it. Yeah, I got mad but, Lady, you did right by yourself. I've spent my whole life doing right by myself. I'm James Brown and I made a difference.

JAMES LOOKS TO CAMERA AND TALKS DIRECTLY TO US:

James stands next to the bullet riddled wreckage of his pickup, hands above his head. He leans back and sings to the sky.

JAMES

"I Don't Feel Noways Tired".

17

EXT. AUGUSTA COUNTRY CLUB. NIGHT. 1942 JAMES 9 YRS

17

A wide, opulent looking club has taken residence in a huge antebellum home with wrap around porches.

A crowd of Deep Southern white folk, in cocktail attire, fill both levels of the porches and spill out onto the lawn surrounding a BOXING RING.

A GROUP OF SIX BLACK MUSICIANS FORM A DIXIELAND BAND. Without inspiration they play methodically to the all white crowd.

A FAT, SWEATING ANNOUNCER, walks into the ring, grasps a dangling mic.

ANNOUNCER

Aaand now folks, before the main event, the Augusta Country club is proud to present to y'all it's Annual Charity ex-travagaaanza..!

(Drum-roll)

Ladies and gentlemen..The *Battle...*

Royale!

Music. HALF A DOZEN BLACK BOYS enter the ring. Hyped. A glove is pulled onto one hand. The other tied behind their backs. They are blind-folded.

A WHITE MAN with a BUCKET OF WHITE PAINT daubs a number onto each boy's chest.

DING! DING! The boys stagger out, blindly swinging. The crowd roars, bangs the tables as they stumble, lurch, in the baying din.

The smallest of the boys stands stiff. He struggles to throw much less land a punch. The number "One" is painted on his chest.

A much bigger boy, "Number Six" punches "One" in the gut. "One" goes down but then slowly rises.

The dixieland band watches the exploitation with both horror and intrigue as they can't help but wonder who will be left standing.

The band's sound begins to change. It becomes as energized as the match before them. They sink into the rhythm, and the effect is one of heightened energy.

The drummer begins to pull the beat and the bass player instantly follows suit finding the new pocket. The drummer and bass player share a glance.

This inspired pocket soars across the lawn and into the ears of boy "Number One".

We are now transported into the mind of "Number One". Complete silence except for the sound of the band. Then one by one all other instruments fade away leaving only the drum and bass.

James turns to the band and lowers his blindfold from over one eye. He catches eyes with the drummer and bass player. The drummer nods at James and smiles.

James nods back and closes his eye. The sound morphs again as "Number One" begins to arrange the music in his head to his own liking.

James opens his one eye and sees only the drummer and bass player on the stage. They are now playing what we and James are hearing in his head.

James covers his eye again with the blindfold and forms a slight smile. His stance becomes more relaxed. His body begins to swing and morph like rubber.

He throws a punch. IT LANDS.

ALL AT ONCE "Number One" dances forward, dips, swings and sweetly CONNECTS to "Number Four". As the vanquished head hits the canvas, the victor, "Number One", bloodied, panting in the waves of laughter and summer heat, stands alone.

As the boys hit the deck and are deemed "out" they are pulled off the mat and carried to the bed of a parked truck.

"Three" goes down. Then "Two" and "Five". A ringside punter THUMPS the canvas with a fistful of dollars, berating him. People screaming with laughter. Only "One" and "Six" remain. Panicky, jerky, they stalk one another. Listening.

"Number One" connects with lightning speed. "Six" removes his blindfold, jumps off the ring and runs across the lawn disappearing into the nearby woods.

MACEO (CONT'D)
 (Shaking)
 Oh. My. God.

Drummond taps the soldier opposite. Points out the window. A soldier looks out, turns white.

SOLDIER
 Holy shit.

IN THE COCKPIT - The pilots wrestle to keep the craft upright. Between them, a completely unruffled James Brown is holding court.

JAMES
 See Captain Jenkins, the James Orchestra is a 22 piece, but the Gov'ment or the Army, powers't be say I can only bring six fellas. Right now I got 16 pieces sittin' in a Bangkok hotel. If I'm paying my own money to be here, and I am, I oughtta bring as many cats as I want. Breaks my heart, son. 'cause I know they all wish they was here right now.

PILOT
 Mr. Brown, it's probably best if you go back now.

JAMES
 We gone be fine, Captain.

PILOT
 We're under attack Mr. Brown.

JAMES
 Settle down, Captain. James Brown was born dead but then I breathed. God didn't want me then and he sure ain't gonna call me back now.

The soldier from the back rushes in.

SOLDIER
 The port engine's on fire.

The PILOT looks back.

PILOT
 How far to Tan Son?

IN THE BELLY - Everyone is frozen. Saying prayers. Moaning. James appears.

JAMES
Marva, fellas, Listen up. We under
attack.

MACEO
No shit, Mr. Brown.

James flashes five fingers at Maceo four times.

JAMES
Watch that mouth, Maceo. That's
twenty dollars right there.

The plane suddenly lurches forty five degree and lets out an awful groan. Everyone screams. Except James who is still standing like rubber even though he wasn't holding onto anything. Bobby sees this.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Mr. Byrd, I've decided to open
tonight's show with "I Got The
Feeling".

James demeanor somehow gives comfort to Bobby. James nods at Bobby and smiles.

JAMES (CONT'D)
How's that sound?

BOBBY
Sounds good, Mr. Brown.

Bobby smiles at James. The plane lurches again, Bobby screams.

21

INT. HANGER - SAME TIME

21

A very white female news journalist talks into a camera, as scores of rowdy troops rush toward a make shift stage. Next to her, a group of BLACK SOLDIERS wait to be interviewed.

NEWS JOURNALIST
Soul Brother Number One James
Brown, the Hardest Working Man in
Show business is embarking on a
tour with a difference.
(MORE)

NEWS JOURNALIST (CONT'D)
 In association with the USO, Mr.
 Brown is playing a series of shows
 for battle fatigued US troops
 across Vietnam-

A BLACK INFANTRYMAN grabs the mic and looks into the camera.

BLACK INFANTRYMAN 1
 80 percent of 9th Division is
 brothers. We been here 2 years.
 What do we get as thanks?

Another Infantryman leans in.

BLACK INFANTRYMAN 2
 Country music.

BLACK INFANTRYMAN 1
 Country and fuckin' Western. But
 James is ours, man. He's comin'.
 Bringin' some fuckin' soul,
 brother.

The other Infantryman grabs the mic.

BLACK INFANTRYMAN 2
 Welcome to the shit, nigger!

The Infantrymen laugh and slap hands. As they walk toward
 stage...

NEWS JOURNALIST
 (To Cameraman)
 We can't use that.

22 **INT. PLANE. IN THE COCKPIT.**

22

PILOT	SOLDIER
I'm losing her. We're going down.	Oh mother of Christ!

The wounded beast judders in low over the canopy and starts
 sinking into it when the jungle suddenly clears.

23 **EXT. TAN SON NHUT AIRFIELD 9TH DIV INFANTRY CAMP OUTSIDE
 NOM PEI. JUNE 1968. SAME TIME** 23

The damaged plane breaks out over the field with both engines
 smoking. Barely regaining control, the pilots make a very
 hard landing.

MUSIC: "There Was A Time" begins.

Army personnel race toward the plane. Next to the runway an old hanger is teeming with soldiers.

24

EXT. AIRFIELD. MOMENTS LATER

24

Biblically pissed, James and Bobby walk from the flaming plane alongside CORPORAL DOOLEY.

Behind them, in deep shock, Maceo and the rest of the band, clutching instruments.

CORPORAL DOOLEY

Welcome to Bear Cat, Mr. Brown.
Corporal Dooley. USO Liaison
officer. Can I first say I'm a big,
big fan of your mus-

JAMES

You in charge when Bob Hope was
over Corporal?

CORPORAL DOOLEY

(proudly)
I was.

JAMES

(to Bobby)
Mr. Byrd, You think Bob Hope's
plane got shot down?

BOBBY

No sir, Mr. Brown.

As they approach the hanger filled with troops, a chant begins inside.

TROOPS

James Brown! James Brown! James
Brown!

CORPORAL DOOLEY

(Tightly)
Sorry about the plane trouble-

JAMES

Plane trouble? They tried to kill
James Brown today. You wanna go
down in history as the man who
killed the funk?

James and crew near the rear stage entrance of the hanger.

CORPORAL DOOLEY.

About the show, if you could just
keep it to 25, 30 min-

JAMES.

(Interrupting)
Whoa, whoa, whoa.

BOBBY

(under his breath)
Oh no.

JAMES

Corporal, let me tell you the first
thing about James Brown. The first
thing is James Brown don't tell no
man his business. He won't tell you
how to take Pnom Ridge or how you
screwed up the Tet offensive. I
don't tell you how to fight your
war Corporal. So don't tell me
when, where or for how long I can
be funky.

25

INT. HANGAR. CONTINUOUS.

25

HUNDREDS OF HOT, STEAMING TROOPS ROAR, like a thousand space
rockets taking off at once. It's awesome, shaking the stage.

TROOPS

James Brown! James Brown! James
Brown!

James and Bobby enter the hanger. We walk with them and strut
up six steps and onto the stage.

Bobby stands back and watches as James grabs the mic and
looks out over the sea of faces.

JAMES

Sorry we're late. Are you cats
ready?

The troops roar even louder.

James turns straight to camera, flashes his smile and talks
directly to us.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (quietly)
 Are you cats ready?

26

EXT. A PINE WOOD. 1941. DAY. JAMES 8 YRS

26

A cold fog hangs in the fading sunlit trees.

Eight year old James stands alone in a forest clearing. He looks all around him.

JAMES
 Momma?

He scans the trees. He's alone.

SUDDENLY in the trees he glimpses someone. A woman. 30. Red dress. She giggles as she scampers from behind one tree to another. She peeps round. He beams.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Momma!

He chases her. She's laughing.

SUSIE
 You can't catch me!

Each time he loses her she peers from behind a tree he squeals in delight but she disappears. He is suddenly alone.

JAMES
 (Scared)
 Momma?

She jumps out from behind a tree and scoops him up.

SUSIE
 I gotcha!

He squeals and laughs in her arms.

27

EXT. WOODED PATH. DAY. 1941

27

Susie and James walk hand in hand.

JAMES
 Momma, I'm hungry.

SUSIE
 You ain't hungry baby. That feeling
 in yo tummy?
 (MORE)

SUSIE (CONT'D)

That feelin' is the spirit inside
you. He's in there tickling your
belly right now cause he knows you
such a good boy. You ain't hungry.
He's just trying to make you laugh.

Susie begins tickling James. James starts to laugh.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Are you a good boy?

He tries to speak but can't from laughing.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

I can't hear you.

Susie continues to tickle James.

JAMES

(through laughter)
I'm a good boy!

28 **EXT. SHACK. BROWN FAMILY HOME. DEEP WOODS. SOUTH CAROLINA.** 28

Cold. James sits on the porch with a stick. He continually
beats the stick on the porch post forming a beat.

He suddenly stops as a man in a thick worn work coat and
heavy boots, is approaching singing the blues to himself.

The man puts his pack down, ruffles the kid's hair, says
nothing and walks inside.

SUSIE

Where you been? I been sittin' here
for nine days with your child. You
nine days late Joe. Where you been?

JOE

Working turpentine, baby. Chippin'
trees.

James peers around the opened door and watches.

SUSIE

Where you been? Gamblin? You spent
the money again?

JOE

No.

SUSIE
DON'T LIE TO ME JOE! Give me some
money.

JOE BROWN
I ain't lyin'!

SUSIE
Give me some money!

Susie tries to put her hands in Joe's pocket. He shoves her hand to his side.

SUSIE (CONT'D)
I'm here all alone here for four
weeks. And we got nothing. *Nothing!*

JOE
Susie. Shut your sweet mouth get
those panties off baby.

Joe grabs Susie and carries her into the cabin.

28A **INT. CABIN. CONTINUOUS.**

28A

Joe and Susie kiss and begin tearing at each others clothes.
Joe's been gone A LONG TIME.

As they lower to the bed, we see James watching through the
opened door.

James soon turns his head and walks off into the woods.

28A **EXT. FOREST. BARNWELL. DAY. LATER THAT DAY**

28A

James walks down a worn path deep in the woods singing a song
to himself. He suddenly stops.

*There, about ten feet up in the air, hanging in a tree is a
black man. Aged about eighteen.*

The child stares up at the lynched man who is dressed in nice
clothes. Then to his feet within beautiful leather shoes.

Silence. He looks at him carefully.

James reaches his small hand up to touch the suspended foot
of the man. Pulls on his laces. His shoe comes off.

JAMES

I said I didn't want to be
disturbed.

(holds out his hand)

That'll be twenty dollars.

Gertrude walks over and hands James the same twenty spot Ben gave her. Ben winks at Gertrude as she exits.

BEN BART

James, I just spoke to the
producers. They've requested the
Rolling Stones close the show.

James looks confused.

JAMES

Huh?

BEN BART

Rolling Stones, James. You'll go on
right before them. It'll be you,
then the Rolling Stones top of the
bill.

JAMES

The Rolling Stones, huh?

James to Bobby.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Then why we here, Bobby?

BOBBY

We here to play, James.

BEN BART

You're here because they want you
here, James. You're James Brown! I
want you here. Because this isn't
the chitlin' circuit man. We're
done with that shit. This is an
audience full of white faces and
you're gonna make them love you.
You're just not closing the show.

His eyes focus.

BEN BART (CONT'D)

James. Now don't start. Let it go.

BOBBY

This don't matter, James.

THE DOOR FLIES OPEN. JAMES BROWN STRUTS DOWN THE CORRIDOR AS BEN BART FOLLOWS.

JAMES

The Rolling Stones ain't even had a hit record here.

They pass several dressing rooms along the way.

JAMES (CONT'D)

They ain't even ever played in America. Have they?

James passes a dressing room where a group is rehearsing.

BEN BART

They're just kids. In a year from now we won't even know who they are. It's business, James.

JAMES

And it's my business to hear what they got to say about this.

He passes another dressing room with a group of guys harmonizing.

James stops, glances at the VERY WHITE CALIFORNIA GROUP and then to Ben.

BEN BART

James, don't...

James is off again. He rounds the corner walks straight up to the Stones dressing room. On the door it says THE ROLLING STONES.

A guy on the door stands but knows he can't stop James Brown who walks straight in. Ben stops at the door and watches.

JAMES BROWN

Fellas, how ya doin'. Mr. Jagger. Mr. Richard. Hear you boys are closing the show. Did you know that?

MICK JAGGER

Uh..That's what they're saying. Yeah. They just told us.

Mick looks over to Keith and the rest of the Rolling Stones.

JAMES BROWN

Uh-hmm. Well, I was told I'm closing the show. That's why I flew out here.

Mick leads James to a couch. They sit.

MICK JAGGER

Listen man. We're filming a movie here today. This isn't live.

JAMES

I know that.

MICK JAGGER

What I mean is, the order in which we play makes no difference. They're going to edit and arrange the show any way they want later.

James raises and shakes Mick's hands. James shakes a couple of the other guys hands.

JAMES BROWN

Y'all have a great show, fellas.

We march out with James. He turns to Ben.

JAMES

I'll be on stage in five. They better be ready. And the white people.

BEN BART

Yes Sir, Mr. Brown.

JAMES struts to the side of the stage. On a television backstage we see a live feed of:

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE: THE SUPREMES FINISHING THEIR PERFORMANCE.

James waits in the wings. On the other side of the stage, the Rolling Stones watch. James flashes his trademark smile. They all wave back.

Archival Footage:

JAN AND DEAN approach the microphone and introduce the flames.

ZAP -a white follow spot burns into James as he stands head bowed. Check jacket, waistcoat, black pipes and mirror boots.

He throws his head back, steps forward and the groove starts. The screams rise to a deafening pitch-

He's already on the move, in a snake hipped side slide, mash potatoes, up on one leg, level with the mike, spin and BAM!

JAMES

You got your high-heel sneakers on-

The teens in the audience lose it. Bobby Byrd and the Flames in immaculate tuxedos snap and step in time.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You know you out of sight-

IN THE WINGS - The Stones and Ben Bart watch a television being fed the show in real time.

A big smile crosses Ben's face.

CLOSE ON TELEVISION/INSERT ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

INTERCUT FILMED STAGE AND ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OF JAMES AND THE FLAMES ON TELEVISION.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Say I...I...I...I love you *so!*

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE: Teenagers shake their heads completely in the thrall of the minutely controlled and manipulated frustration and reward.

BACK STAGE - James stalks off past the Stones and Ben.

Keith Richards is slack jawed. Ben swallows a laugh. James continues on. We go with him.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Welcome to America.

James looks right at us. Sweating. Focused. Wide awake.

CLOSE ON TELEVISION/INSERT ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

The Rolling Stones begin their first song. **TIME IS ON MY SIDE** The crowd goes wild. A sea of white faces screaming for Mick.

James is watching the monitor. His face registers a realization. James stays on the Stone's as he talks to us.

CLOSE ON JAMES MOUTH IN PROFILE SURROUNDED BY BLACK AND WHITE SCREEN

JAMES (CONT'D)

The British Invasion make a man strong. Make him stand up. You ain't never been down how ya gonna get on up?

James turns to us with an even deeper intensity.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can't never quit cause it get hard. You quit, you going backwards. You going backwards, you dead. So, I take it. But I take it and flip it. I go forward. And I live.

31

INT. SHACK. WOODS. DAY. 1941. JAMES 8 YRS

31

Fall day. Under the eaves, James climbs round the side of the house. He reaches the corner to see HIS MOTHER STANDING ON THE PORCH of the cabin, a suitcase packed. Her eye is swollen.

JOE BROWN

You leavin' you take your child, girl. You his momma. I don't need no hungry child.

Confused, James approaches. Looks up at his mother.

SUSIE

You keep him. You can feed him. I can't.

(She holds him, kisses him)

Bye, baby. You be good.

She leaves. Joe calls after her.

JOE BROWN

That's right. Why don't you go try to sell your ass on Twigg Street. That's right. Buy yourself a dress. Maybe I pay you a *visit*.

Alone with his son, Joe stares at him. The boy stares back.

CUT TO:

Music stops. (Tom Newman theme here) James watches the cast, crew and Flames doing their thing for camera.

James turns to us and speaks.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Take it and flip it.

END SLOW MOTION. END TOM NEWMAN THEME.

James removes his sweater and begins dancing and singing again but now to a faster version of "I GOT YOU". He smiles at us, looks into our eyes. We push in tight.

We pull back to reveal James now singing this song in the future at The Olympia show. He's sporting a "natural". Beautiful girls dancing behind him.

Flash- We are back to "Ski Party". Now the boring extras are up on their feet. They dance with precision the way Mr. Brown would prefer. Just for us, James has transformed the "Ski Party" into something way cooler.

James' feet slide and move him back toward the door of the ski lodge set.

JAMES (CONT'D)
*I feel good and I knew that I would
now. So good. So good. Cause I
got you.*

James moves outside the door and does a split in the pile of fake snow.

We are now back to reality. James is again wearing the sweater. The extras are now seated and clapping in a corny fashion.

The stage bell rings. Over a loudspeaker-

VOICE
That was great James.

Frankie Avalon runs up to James. James remains in his split.

FRANKIE
Wow, James. You've got some groovy
moves my friend.

JAMES
Thank you, Mr. Avalon. And please
call me, Mr. Brown

James sudden bolts out of the trees with the stolen suit and runs down the embankment.

Just then a police car speeds down the road towards him. James drops the suit and runs to the opposite embankment.

As James tries to climb the embankment, the police car stops, two officers get out.

James can't get a footing on the steep embankment. We now see that James is wearing the lynched man's shoes.

CLOSE ON SHOES:

Digging deeper and deeper in the soil embankment. BLAM! A gun fires.

James stops climbing and turns to see two guns pointed at him. He slides back down the embankment and raises his hands.

CUT TO:

FLASH! James gets his mug shot. Front and side.

JAMES (O.S.)
I'm seventeen...

45

EXT. RICHMOND COUNTY JAIL - THAT NIGHT

45

CLOSE ON: James speaking through bars.

JAMES
Know what that means, Big Junior?
Means they can try me in Superior
Court. Means they can send my
juvenile ass down for a man's term.
3 maybe 4 years.

Reveal a young man, **BIG JUNIOR, 25**, standing on the lawn by the jail house holding a lantern. He looking up to James on the second floor speaking out of the window.

BIG
For robbing a *suit*?

JAMES
You reach my daddy?

BIG
He's in the Army, James.

JAMES

I know he's in the Army. So you gotta go find him.

Big Junior looks to the ground and nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What'd Aunt Honey say?

BIG

Aunt Honey say she can't help you right now. Not this week.

JAMES

Go find my daddy, Big. Please! Okay?

Big Junior sighs, really uncomfortable.

BIG

Aunt Honey already talked to him, James. Your daddy say it's a bad time too.

James fills with panic.

JAMES

So, he knows I'm here?

Big looks all around, everywhere except at James.

BIG

He say ain't nothing he can do. Got money problems. Sorry.

He shrugs and walks away.

46

INT. CELL. NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

46

James turns from the window. He goes to the sink of his tiny cell, heaving for breath. He looks at himself in the tiny cracked mirror.

JAMES

Don't cry Junior. Don't cry now.

James begins expertly tapping his sliding his feet on the floor. A more developed version of the tune he arranged in his head during the boxing match is heard. James stares at us in the mirror. He smiles.

WARDEN (O.S.)
*And you were thinking of this as a
 profession...*

47 INT. PAROLE REVIEW BOARD, ALTO REFORM SCHOOL. 1952. DAY 47

James, 19 years old, sits on a bare wooden chair. James' aunt, **HONEY, 40**, is in attendance. Next to her sit **two young black women** dressed very sexy.

WARDEN
 So you want to be a singer?

JAMES
 Oh no Sir. Truth is I ain't really
 into all that so much. Not no more.

Five white adults sit behind a long table, studying him.

WARDEN
 But the other boys, they call you
 Music-box.

JAMES
 It's just a old nickname is all.
 I'm looking for something stable.
 Steady. I want to be a Mechanic.

WARDEN
 So first a singer and now a
 Mechanic?

JAMES
 Yes Sir. There's a fella I know
 back in Augusta, he owns a garage,
 he said he could find me a job if-

WARDEN
 You can't go back to Augusta.
 In the event of parole, the Court
 in Augusta ruled you not be allowed
 to set foot in Richmond County til
 the full term of your sentence.

James is silent. Aunt Honey locks eyes with the Warden and smiles.

WARDEN (CONT'D)
 Do you know anyone outside Augusta
 who could act as your parole
 sponsor? Any family? Associates? Is
 there anywhere else you could go?

Aunt Honey and the girls raise their skirts up there legs ever so slightly with subtle sexual gestures.

The Warden gives Aunt Honey and the girls a disapproving stare.

STAMP! A red stamp hammers down - REFUSED.

48

INT. HALL. ALTO. DAY. JAMES 19 YRS

48

A **BAND, The Starlighters** "entertains" the inmates. A tall black kid in a white tux, flanked by four other boys.

BOBBY BYRD

We the Gospel Starlighters, from
right here in Toccoa. Three Four..

The vocal group rip into a juiced up "**Mary Don't You Weep**". And its good. James watches intently. The music plays over...

James begins to sing along and dance. Two rows back, a huge, badass looking kid is staring. James turns and stares straight back.

The big kid walks up to James.

BIG KID

You eyeballin' me, Music-Box?

The big kid punches James in the gut. James struggles to his feet and punches the BIG KID and fights back fearlessly.

All hell breaks loose. Two rough factions break out and the melee spreads. James picks up a chair and throws it at the big kid. He ducks.

CUT TO:

49

INT. INFIRMARY, ALTO. LATER THAT DAY

49

Bobby sits in a chair outside the infirmary. He holds a cold press to his nose.

James, bruised and torn but apparently victorious is led by a warden into the infirmary to cheers from his friends. He's seated next to Bobby and cuffed to the chair.

JAMES

What happened to you?

BOBBY

Someone threw something.

JAMES
Gee, that's too bad.

They sit there. James shrugs.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Walk in the jungle sometimes you
get bit by a snake.

BOBBY
(Deadpan)
I'll try an' remember that.

They sit there.

JAMES
Say. What's that song you done?

BOBBY
We only done half of it. "Mary
Don't You Weep" is an old gospel,
man. You ain't heard that before?
Everybody be doin' it.

JAMES BROWN
I ain't heard nothing since my
radio got busted. That's a cool
song bro'. You sung it great. That
sounded real sweet.

BOBBY BYRD
Crowd sure went crazy.
(James smiles. Then:)
You like music?

JAMES
Only thing keeps me sane in here.

BOBBY
How long you in for?

JAMES
Five to thirteen years.

Bobby moves his chair an inch or two away.

BOBBY
What did you do?

JAMES
Robbed a suit.

A nurse leads Bobby inside the exam room.

BOBBY
They give you five to thirteen
for...
(Shakes his head)
That's time man.

James turns to the doorway and continues talking to Bobby as the nurse tends to his nose.

JAMES
Tell me about it.

BOBBY
You get parole?

JAMES
Board say I need a permanent family
address and a job. But see I don't
know no folks here.

BOBBY
Where yo' folks at?

JAMES
My Daddy's in the army. And my
momma... well, she left.

BOBBY
Sorry to hear that.

They sit there.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Seriously. You think I sung it
good?

James looks at Bobby. He moves his seat a bit closer to the door.

JAMES
You got that swing feel. Hittin' it
late. Buh, dum, Bop. That's what a
song need.

James rises up, pulling the chair with him.

JAMES (CONT'D)
See without that feel, song just
sit there. Don't move. You gotta
fill it with something. You know
what I'm sayin'?

Suddenly James breathes in deep, and sings "Mary Don't You Weep". It's sweet, hard, deep, raw all at the same time. James holds the chair and begins to dance.

The nurse shuts the door. Bobby and James stay on each other through glass.

James' talent hits Bobby like a ten pound hammer between the eyes. A warden forces James to his chair. We hear one unforgettable line of the song before we...

50 **ESTABLISHING. TOCCOA STREET. THE BYRD HOUSE. 1952. DAY.** 50

BOBBY (O.S.)

*He can do Roy Brown and The
Dominoes and Louis Jordan and
and...*

51 **INT. BYRD HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY** 51

Bobby, panting, petitions his impassively busy mother.

BOBBY

-you should hear'm *holler* momma!
You ain't heard nothing *LIKE IT*. He
sings every day in chapel. He's a
very, very religious boy Momma.
He could sing in St. Stephens!

MRS. BYRD

Bobby. We got us enough mouths to
feed an' enough butts to clothe.
(Yelling out the door)
Daryl! Sarah! Get down here!

BOBBY

He sings every day in chapel. He's
a very, very religious boy Momma.
He could sing in St. Stephens!
Since Old Henry passed you been shy
a baritone...he a showstopper.
Momma? This is it. It's like a
miracle. This is what *Jesus wants!*

He knows he's over-done it.

MRS. BYRD

Jesus speak to Bobby Byrd now. He
tell you that himself?

BOBBY

Momma, he could be in there another ten year just 'cause he got no folks. He got no-one.

MRS. BYRD

Bobby. The answer is NO. Now, go on outta here and get cleaned up.

Crestfallen, he plays his final card.

BOBBY

What's that thing you always told me, since I was real small. About Mercy. What's that saying momma? That thing you always say?

She glares at her son.

52

INT. BYRD HOUSE. DAY JAMES 19 YRS

52

Dinner at the Byrds. Mom, Pop, and Grandpa, sister SARAH, ten year old brother DARYL, BOBBY.... and James. He's clearly uncomfortable.

James' eyes dart around the well-appointed dining room with its beautiful wallpaper and curtains hanging from a window.

James traces the lines of the curtain noticing its lace and perfect pleats.

MRS. BYRD

Like I always say.
(Sighs)
"Its a sin to stand in Mercy's way".

JAMES

Thank you, Mrs Byrd.

Grandpa stares hard at James for a moment. Then...

GRANDPA BYRD

So what you in the pokey for?

BOBBY

Grandpa-

GRANDPA

(to Bobby)
You know how would have felt you bringing this boy over here?

BOBBY

Big momma married you and you were
in the pokey before.

Bobby gets a look from his mom.

MRS. BYRD

Bobby Byrd!

GRANDPA BYRD

(to Bobby)

If I'm going to be forced to have a
jailbird in my house I at least
like to know what I'm dealing with.

BOBBY

Grandpa-

James looks to Bobby.

JAMES

No. He got a right to ask. I am a
jailbird. I've done wrong and I
gotta own up to that.

James turns to Bobby's grandfather.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I stole a man's three piece suit.
You want to know me? I tell ya.
My daddy is in the army. My momma
left when I was five. I'm skinny
but I'm strong. I can read a little
bit and I like to sing. That's
who's sittin' here.

James becomes emotional and sincere.

JAMES (CONT'D)

And I think God knew that when I
took that suit that I might end up
with you. I ain't never sat at a
table with such a fine group of
people in my life.

Sarah looks admiringly at James.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I used to wish I could put that suit back, but now I'm here with y'all. Fried chicken. Green beans. Corn bread. Those nice curtains.

Grandpa Byrd turns to the curtains.

JAMES (CONT'D)

A house smells good. I'm happy I stole that suit. And I thank you for having me here.

GRANDPA

Boy, pass them beans before you get your bullshit all over them.

MRS. BYRD

(Changing subject)

James is going to sing with us in church this Sunday Sarah.

SARAH BYRD

Really. Well maybe we could work up a little harmony together.

Sarah turns to James and gives a tiny wink. James stops chewing.

52A **INT. BYRD HOUSE. NEXT MORNING.**

52A

Bobby Byrd sleeps in his bed. James sleeps in a cot that has been brought into Bobby's room.

Grandpa Byrd enters the room holding a suit. He approaches the sleeping James.

GRANDPA BYRD

Jailbird!

Startled, James and Bobby rise up from their pillows.

GRANDPA BYRD (CONT'D)

(to James)

This out to fit ya.

Grandpa Byrd throws the suit on top of James and exits. James smiles at his new suit.

53

INT. BYRD HOUSE. NEXT MORNING.

53

Bobby comes in with NAFLOYD and BABY ROY who are all dressed for church

BOBBY

There's coffee in the kitchen,
Nafloyd. Make yourselves at home.

(Calls)

James!

Bobby vaults upstairs.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

James. Come meet the band.

Opens a door. INSIDE James has Sarah pressed up against the wall. They are having vigorous sex. James' pants are around his ankles. Sarah's church dress is pushed up her body.

Sarah has her hand over James' mouth trying to keep him quiet.

Bobby throws it into reverse, shutting the door. Did he just see that? A full gamut of emotions cross his face.

Mrs. Byrd starts up the stairs.

MRS. BYRD

Sarah! I ain't tellin' you again.
Get down here.

Bobby panics. He crosses and meets his mother at the top of the stairs.

BOBBY

She's coming, Momma. She's coming.

MRS. BYRD

Sarah!

BOBBY

Go fix Nafloyd and the boys some
coffee. We got guests, Momma.

Mrs Byrd nods and heads down the stairs.

MRS. BYRD

Nafloyd?! Where you boys at?

54 **INT. ST. STEPHENS CHURCH. DAY.**

54

A congregation watches as BOBBY, NAFLOYD, BABY ROY, SARAH AND JAMES sing righteous gospel. "Steal Away To Jesus".

Above their heads a HOME-MADE SHEET-BANNER: "The Gospel Starlighters"

Bobby looks to Sarah and James with a searing gaze. Sarah innocent, James really giving it up.

James steps out front. His voice soars sweetly over the congregation. Bobby's gaze softens.

MRS. BYRD and GRANDPA watch on. Mrs. Byrd leans forward and catches Bobby's eye. Gives a small nod of approval. Bobby's smile is...more equivocal.

56 **FLASHBACK: INT. SHACK. BARNWELL. DAY. 1942 JAMES 9 YRS** 56

James is asleep in his bed. Alone. It's been a year after his momma left.

Suddenly, Joe approaches and throws a burlap sack at James.

 JOE BROWN
 Pack up. We leaving.

James wakes and sits up in bed. Joe is clean shaven and wears his nicest shirt and neck tie.

 JOE BROWN (CONT'D)
 Hurry up.

James waits a beat to make sure his father is gone.

James gets out of bed and crawls deep underneath. **He backs out holding the dead man's pair of shoes and places them in the burlap sack.**

57 **EXT. AUNT HONEY'S HOUSE. LATER THAT DAY.**

57

Joe and James walk down Twigg street. Joe pulls his donkey along with them.

 JOE BROWN
 You miss your momma, boy?

James nods.

 JOE BROWN (CONT'D)
 We gone fix that.

James flashes a hopeful smile.

58

EXT. TWIGG STREET, THE TERRY. DAY. 1942 JAMES 9 YRS

58

Red dirt street. Shacks. Joe and James walk around to the back of "AUNT HONEY'S" house. The donkey has been tied to Aunt Honey's fence.

BACKYARD

We find Aunt Honey sitting a chair. She holds a small dog in her arms.

SEVEN PROSTITUTES wash clothes in tubs and hang them on a line to dry.

Aunt Honey clearly runs the house. She rises from her chair. Clearly she takes no shit.

JOE

..S'much appreciated Honey. Sure is mighty kind..

AUNT HONEY

What the hell am I supposed to do with that donkey, Joe?

JOE BROWN

Thought you could sell it.

AUNT HONEY

I don't sell donkey, Joe. And Jumpin' in the Army ain't gone make this boy go away.

Joe looks away from Honey.

JOE

(to James)

Look after yourself Junior.

Aunt Honey and James watch Joe cross the street and disappear.

AUNT HONEY

Everybody gotta be somewhere. What's your name, sugar?

JAMES

Junior.

AUNT HONEY

Guess you Little Junior now.

Honey turns to a small two story building in the rear of the yard.

AUNT HONEY (CONT'D)

Big Junior!

A huge 15 year old boy comes out of the building and begins walking down the stairs. *This is the younger version of Big Junior who we met outside the jail.*

AUNT HONEY (TO JAMES) (CONT'D)

You show me you can bring it in you
an me ain't got no problem.

(as Junior approaches)

Junior'll show y'how to do.

59

EXT. THE TERRY. STREET. DAY.

59

Big Junior leads James away from Aunt Honey's. Big Junior turns to James.

BIG JUNIOR

I do this...

(BJ touches his hat)

You say 'Pretty girls', unnerstand?
So when they come, you be ready,
alright? I'll say-
Yessir, yessir, come on down the
street-we got sweet whiskey, we got
music-

(touches his hat)

JAMES

Pretty girls.

BIG JUNIOR

We got cards, we got dice, dancing-
(touches his hat again)

JAMES

Pretty girls.

CUT TO:

60

EXT. BUS STOP. THE TERRY. AUGUSTA. DAY. JAMES 9 YRS

60

Soldiers disembark from a troop Bus. Big Junior and James stand on the platform playing and dancing in bare feet. The soldiers ignore James.

JAMES
 What you think "Caldonia" is,
 Nafloyd.

NAFLOYD
 (Ruffled)
 We just playin' around with
 "Caldonia" when we practicing.
 That don't make us R & B. We still
 Gospel.

63

INT. BIG BILL'S RENDEZVOUS. TOCCOA, 1954. NIGHT.

63

The place is packed. On stage the 22 year old Little Richard is all over the piano, singing the hell out of *Tutti Frutti*.

AT THE BACK -- Bobby and the band stand in shock and awe.

NAFLOYD
 I swear he's gonna *break* that
 piano.

James is transfixed. Motionless. Soaking it up.

ON STAGE -- The song ends. The crowd explode.

LITTLE RICHARD
 We'll be back in ten to flip you
 again! Whoooo! Yeah!

Bobby scans the crowd.

BOBBY BYRD
 (Frustrated)
 Look at these people James. Man!
 I'm ready. You know'm saying? When
 it gone be us up there?

James hasn't moved. He's still staring at the stage.

JAMES BROWN
 Now.

BOBBY BYRD
 What?

James turns to Bobby.

JAMES BROWN
 There's a piano. And a stage. And
 right now.
 (Looks at it)
 Ain't no one on it.

NAFLOYD

What you talking about? We can't go up there.

JAMES BROWN

Why not? Like you said, Nafloyd, "We just playin' around with "Caldonia". So let's go play around.

Bobby nods, and James strides towards the stage and gets up. The others look at each other: HOLY SHIT! and scramble after him. James gestures to them to pick up instruments.

JAMES BROWN (CONT'D)

Ladies 'n Gentlemen. Hope you're enjoying the show.

Nafloyd speaks into his mic.

NAYFLOYD

We're the Star-

James quickly interrupts.

JAMES

We're the Famous Flames.

Nafloyd looks at Bobby.

NAFLOYDS

Flames?

BABY ROY

Famous?

James hollers. The Flames hit their queue, bang on, and they *TEAR INTO* Caldonia. James loosens with every bar. Unhooks the mic. Throws a move. As he hits the hook again the audience is drawn to his energy like a magnet.

BACKSTAGE DOOR - Leaning against a wall backstage, Little Richard looks up from his pocket mirror. Frowns.

LITTLE RICHARD

What is that?

IN THE WINGS - the club manager watches on unsure what to do.

ON STAGE - James and Bobby, hollering into the same mic are ripping the place up.

IN THE WINGS - Little Richard appears at his side, fuming.

LITTLE RICHARD (CONT'D)
Get those bitches off my stage!

Power to the stage is cut off. The performance is over but the crowd go batshit. NAFLOYD, BABY ROY are shaking.

NAFLOYD
We the Flames.

BOBBY looks at JAMES. A new, knowing look. They bow as one, turn, and walk offstage, CLEAN PAST a furious Little Richard. James returns his glare with an even straighter one.

JAMES BROWN
(Deadpan)
Just keepin' it warm for ya.

He walks past.

LITTLE RICHARD
Hey. What's your name?

JAMES
The Famous Flames.

James looks back levelly.

LITTLE RICHARD
No. What's your name?

They look at each other. Neither blinks.

64 **EXT. MALT SHOP. NIGHT.**

64

2AM. James sits alone at a table off to the side of the order window.

Little Richard dressed as a chef comes out of the kitchen and drops two burgers in front of them. James and Richard, cigarette in a long holder, holds forth.

LITTLE RICHARD
I play a show in Lafayette last week twenty thirty girls pass clean out. Need oxygen. I'm killing 'em James. They should lock me away. I cut loose it's like a spaceship land. Did I say I got a record out? They drop it five times a day on WIBB. Five times a day.
(He looks at James)
And I'm flippin' burgers. You know why?

(MORE)

LITTLE RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Cause WIBB antenna reach 60 mile.
 60 mile. This country is 5000 miles
 top to toe and 7000 coast to coast.
 You catch the wind, get a hit, a
 real hit, every inch of that is
 yours.

JAMES BROWN
 So how we catch the wind?

Richard smiles. Stops the waitress. All charm.

LITTLE RICHARD
 Sugar, may I borrow your pencil?

He takes a napkin. Starts writing on it. All business.

LITTLE RICHARD (CONT'D)
 You got a hundred bucks?

JAMES BROWN
 No.

LITTLE RICHARD
 Rob a liquor store. You take a
 hundred bucks to WIBB in Macon. Ask
 for Big Sauk. Say Richard sent you.
 You make an acetate. Ten copies.
 You send them to these people.

He writes them down. James watches.

JAMES BROWN
 It's that easy why don' you do it?

LITTLE RICHARD
 I already did. Baby, this is the
 last time you're gone see my
 beautiful ass 'cep on TV. Six
 months the whole world gone know
 me. I gone be bigger than
 Cleopatra. It's written in the
 stars James. Yes Sir. I'm gone have
 the world on a string.

(Then)
 And that's when the trouble start.

JAMES BROWN
 And why that.

He fixes James. The air turns cold.

LITTLE RICHARD

That when the Devil come. And he
ain't gonna be red with no fiery
tail. He gone be white. In a fancy
suit. And he gone look you in the
eye and he gonna ask what you want.
And you best not shake, nor
tremble. You best not blink one
eye.

Swats a fly on the table. James doesn't blink.

LITTLE RICHARD (CONT'D)

You gone be ready for him James?
You got it inside?

JAMES BROWN

You tell me Richard. You tell me
what you see.

James stares at Richard, who stares the same stare back.

LITTLE RICHARD

What happen to you?

He looks real hard.

LITTLE RICHARD (CONT'D)

I know what happened to me. What
happen to you?

James looks away.

65 **OMITTED** 65

66 **OMITTED** 66

67 **INT. UPSTAIRS AT TWIGG STREET. DAWN. 1942 JAMES 9 YRS** 67

James lies awake in a bed with four or five other sleeping
bodies. He looks out of the window. Dawn is breaking through
a cracked pane.

Way off in the distance he hears music and singing. He gets
out of bed.

He passes a room, **TWO SOLDIERS** wait their turn with one of
Aunt Honey's **PROSTITUTES**.

James reaches the front of the house. He looks to Honey, out
cold in a chair. A needle protrudes from her harm.

He walks out of the house passing several people asleep in the yard.

68 **EXT. CHURCH/ DIRT ROAD. DAY** 68

Early morning. James continue his walk towards the music.

69 **INT. UNITED HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE. DAY** 69

A evangelical congregation lit up by the spirit.

SWEET DADDY GRACE: a suavely coiffed but ferocious southern firebrand preacher wearing a suit made of dollar bills screams and berates the congregation into a frenzy.

DADDY GRACE
Do you love him?!

People are having fits on the floor, beating themselves. Shrieking and weeping hallelujah.

DADDY GRACE (CONT'D)
(even higher pitched)
Say you love him!

Daddy raises his voice even louder ending in a shrilling falsetto.

DADDY GRACE (CONT'D)
Say it louder for Jesus! Say it
louder!

Daddy Grace falls to the floor and is attended by alter boys who drape a cape around his shoulders which he flings aside.

James looks around the room at the people. Then at the preacher.

70 **EXT. TWIGG STREET BUS STOP. NIGHT. 1942** 70

James stands silhouetted against the high beams of the approaching troop Bus. James begins to dance to the theme in his head. He's dancing differently now. Mimicking the moves of Sweet Daddy Grace. James does a spilt in the beams of light.

71 **OMITTED** 71

71A **INT. BYRD HOUSE.** 71A

Mr. and Mrs. Byrd listen to *Please Please Please* on the radio. They aren't pleased.

71B **INT. AUNT HONEY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT** 71B

Aunt Honey has just injected herself with Morphine. She opens a drawer and places a needle and vial inside.

She crosses to her bed and lays down. *Please Please Please* plays on a radio. Aunt Honey sings along and closes her eyes.

71C **INT. CAR - NIGHT** 71C

RALPH BASS drives and hears *Please Please Please*. A smile crosses his face.

71D **EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT. 1954** 71D

Establishing of exterior boarding house with the crappy station wagon parked out front.

72-73 **OMITTED** 72-73

74 **INT. BOARDING HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT.** 74

All the flames asleep laying across as single bed in one motel room.

CUT TO:

75 **INT. BOARDING HOUSE. NIGHT.** 75

James and Bobby sleep next to each other. James whispers to Bobby:

JAMES
Bobby. I can't make practice
Thursday. I gotta get married.

BOBBY

(Whispers)

What are you talkin' about? Who you marryin'?

JAMES

That chick I met after the Stone Mountain Show. Velma.

A silence falls.

BOBBY

What about my sister?

James flashes a devilish smile.

JAMES

Oh, I'll still harmonize with Sarah from time to time.

BOBBY

I ain't playin', James. How you gone do all this?

JAMES

Do all what?

BOBBY

Practice. The road. Makin' records. Startin' a family.

JAMES

I ain't startin' nothin', Bobby. Except what we doin'.

James reaches under the bed and pulls out the acetate they just recorded.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That us. We in there Bobby.

James holds the record close and studies it with Bobby.

BOBBY

That's all the money we got. And some we don't.

JAMES

But, it is beautiful. All those little grooves. That's us. It's been written.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Now, men gone lay with women.
That's nature. But a woman ain't
never gone stop a real man from
what he's supposed to do. That's
God. Husband? Daddy? That gives a
man purpose. Man gotta have
purpose. But purpose don't stop me
neither, Bobby. Ain't nothin' gone
stop us. Nothin'. And that's God
too.

CUT TO:

76

INT. KITCHENETTE. 1955. DAY. JAMES 22 YRS

76

James Brown stares back at his infant son with the same wary
look.

JAMES

You gone smile for me, Teddy Brown?

He bounces him on his knee once.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Come on, boy.

Twice. The kid smiles. James suddenly becomes moved. He
leans over and kisses his son.

VELMA

We out of greens. You want me to go
pick some up?

Velma, a cute nineteen year old girl is fixing dinner.

JAMES

No baby.

A car horn outside. He looks out the window.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Baby. I gotta go.

VELMA

But I got your supper.

He hands her the baby, kisses her passionately. She melts.

VELMA (CONT'D)

Wake me up.

James pretends to look shocked, covers Teddy's ears.

77 **EXT. JAMES AND VELMA'S KITCHENETTE**

77

James bounds off the porch towards the station wagon.

Velma steps onto the porch with the baby. She suddenly looks very young.

James turns to his family and pats his hand over his heart.

JAMES
(shouts out)
I got you right in here, Teddy
Brown.

Velma raises Teddy's hand and waves it at James.

James begins to serenade "Lost Someone" to his family...

78 **EXT. CRAPPY STATION WAGON. RURAL ROAD - SUNSET. 1955**

78

CLOSE ON:

James continues to sing. Only now he's humming as if working out a new way into "Lost Someone".

We widen to see The Flames, Baby Roy, Nafloyd, Bobby and James pushing an old crappy Chevy station wagon down the road. Nafloyd has the easy job of keeping the steering wheel straight.

Nafloyd is clearly annoyed by James' humming.

JAMES BROWN
Nafloyd, you know in "Let's Make
It" when it goes (he hums). If you
go up there and hold it, like.
(hums). It's gone be sweet. Make it
like you got a harmonica stuck in
your throat.

Nafloyd looks back at Bobby Byrd.

NAFLOYD SCOTT
You know what? Why don't you sing
it, James?

JAMES BROWN
What? I can't sing it. It's your
song man.

NAFLOYD SCOTT
But I ain't singing it right James.
I just ain't.

(MORE)

NAFLOYD SCOTT (CONT'D)
 I ain't got a harmonica in my
 throat. But you do. We all know
 you do.

James continues with his humming. Nafloyd stops pushing and
 walks alongside with a finger on the wheel.

NAFLOYD SCOTT (CONT'D)
 You know how it be done. You got it
 all worked out. Don't you?

BOBBY BYRD
 James ain't saying that 'floyd.
 He's just hearing something.
 Get back to pushing the car.

NAYFLOYD
 Let's all take a break for a
 minute.

Everyone stops pushing. Bobby turns to Nafloyd. Fuming.

BOBBY BYRD
 What I say in Peterstown? Huh?

NAFLOYD SCOTT
 I know what you said.

BOBBY BYRD
 What I say?

NAFLOYD SCOTT
 You said 'Fill her up Floyd.

BABY ROY
 That's right. That's what he said.

NAFLOYD SCOTT
 I know you he said fill her up,
 Baby Roy! Problem is we don't got
 the dough to fill it.
 (to Bobby)
 We don't got the dough because
 Bobby here let James spend all our
 money on some fake record which is
 right now sittin' in trash cans
 outside King, outside RCA, outside
 Chess.
 (to James)
 You took all our money, James.
 Where my money at?

They are about to throw down.

BABY ROY
Cool it Floyd!

NAFLOYD SCOTT
Where my money, James?!

JAMES
I'm taking you to the money,
Nafloyd.
(James tap his head)
Right now.

This lands hard on Bobby's ears. He smiles

BOBBY BYRD
So, push the Wagon, Nafloyd.

Nafloyd resumes pushing the wagon.

79 **INT. PEACHES DINER. 1955. EARLY MORNING.** 79

James stands in the rear of an African American diner talking on a pay phone. He's a sweaty mess having walked through the night.

His face drops. It registers sudden concern.

JAMES
Are you sure, Baby?

80 **INT. PEACHES DINER. MOMENTS LATER** 80

James joins Bobby at a booth of the diner. Bobby is also a sweaty mess.

BOBBY
The Tuxedo Room already cancelled tonight's show. Said if we couldn't show up last night then why we gonna show up tonight.

James shrugs.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Now we got twenty four hours to get to Prestonville. Hundred and forty miles West. We got no gas. No bread. No show. I miss anything?

JAMES
Velma's pregnant again.

Bobby looks at him. Deadpan.

BOBBY
Congratulations.

James nods.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
So now, we gotta make us a business
decision.

He reaches in his pocket. Puts a few coins on the table.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Thirty cents. The question is, do I
call the Two Spot, find out we got
any messages. Or do I get me a
coffee. Or do I skip the coffee,
and get me a donut.

James considers this. Reaches in his pocket. Puts some coins
on the table.

JAMES
Knock yourself out.

A black waitress comes over. Bobby acts as if he's a high
roller. Living the life. Perusing the menu.

BOBBY
Hey honey. Can I get me a coffee...

Looks at James. Now for the ultimate luxury.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
..and...let's see...a donut?

WAITRESS
You boys from outta town?

JAMES
We're Musicians. We the Famous
Flames.

WAITRESS
Flames?
(noting their disheveled look)
More like a flicker.

James reaches over and grabs the waitress' hand.

JAMES

All we need is a spark, baby. So we can turn the lamp down low till this sun rise up on us in the morning.

The waitress pulls her hand back.

WAITRESS

Y'all's broke ass is splittin' that donut, ain't you?

Bobby starts to laugh.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)

I'll bring it with a knife.

James winks before the waitress walks away.

BOBBY

I gone call the Two Spot.

James expression instantly changes.

JAMES

Oh no.

BOBBY

What?

Over at the door, A white guy. Obviously a cop. He waves our waitress over.

WHITE GUY

Excuse me ma'am, I just came from a place called the Tuxedo Room. I'm looking for the boys who were supposed to be playing there tonight?

JAMES

(whispering)

I ain't supposed to leave Bibb County without telling my parole officer.

BOBBY

Shit James! What we do?

Bobby looks around and James has disappeared under the table. Bobby drops like a stone under the table as well.

Bobby peers around the booth for a peek.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
He's coming this way. Oh shit.

JAMES
I can't go back to prison Bobby.

The waitress sits the man down at a nearby table.

WHITE GUY
I've been driving across over two states looking for these boys. They have to be here in Macon. Tell ya what, I'll make it worth your while if you can tell me where they are.

The man hands the waitress ten bucks and a business card. The woman shrugs as she reads the card.

WAITRESS
King Records? What did they do?

WHITE GUY
Everything right.

Bobby and James look at each other.

JAMES BROWN
(pole-axed)
King records?

Bobby crawls out from under the table suddenly all business.

BOBBY
Evening, Sir. I'm Bobby Byrd this is my associate James Brown.

James crawls out and stands before **RALPH BASS**.

JAMES
Hi.

BOBBY
I understand you're looking for the Famous Flames.

LATER AT THE DINER - Bobby and James sit with Ralph Bass. The breakfast crowd has cleared out.

RALPH BASS
I'm Ralph Bass from Federal records in Cincinnati. An imprint of King Records. I heard your acetate. I want you to come to Cincinnati. I want you to make a record for King.

Bobby looks back at him. Nods.

BOBBY
King records. As in King Records.
The King records.

The waitress arrives with a donut and a plate of steak and eggs. She places the steak and eggs in front of James and winks.

RALPH BASS
You sure put a lot into that cut.
The main vocal. You got some soul
right there.

BOBBY
Uh.. That's not me. That's uh.
That's James.

RALPH BASS
That you singing?

James looks BACK TO US.

JAMES
Yeah. That's me.

81 **EXT. FEDERAL/KING RECORDS, CINCINNATI. DAY. 1956** 81

James stands alone looking up at the towering building.

CUT TO:

82 **INT. RECORDING STUDIO. DAY. JAMES 23** 82

JAMES BROWN
Please, Please, Please....!

They put everything they've got into "Please, Please, Please".

James leans into a chrome studio mic and sings: Please... please...please... He leans out and the Flames lean in to the same mic. "Please please don't go"..

IN THE BOOTH --

Gene Redd mans the desk. Ralph stands nervously while SYD NATHAN, the impressively fat 60-year-old owner of King sits in jamjar spectacles and Bakelite Headphones, listening.

JAMES

Wait...wait a second here-

Raggedly they all come to a halt. Nafloyd seems annoyed.

NAFLOYD

What we stop for? That was cookin'.

Everyone looks pissed at James who seems agitated. Byrd's nervous they're wasting time.

BOBBY

It's OK sir we OK. We can just start right at the top.

JAMES

It ain't right. It's too slow. We gotta pick up the pace fellas.

James begins to pace. Bobby grows concerned.

BOBBY

What are you doing, James? These men been doing this for a long time. We need to listen to them.

JAMES

I need to come in early..push it. Drive it. Early. Before the beat. Then speed it up, man.

Ralph Bass speaks to James from the booth.

RALPH

James, this is a ballad. The pace we've set is perfect.

JAMES

I know it's a ballad, Mr. Bass. But a ballad is supposed to get her in the mood, not put her to sleep.

The Flames all look at Bobby who looks at the impatient faces waiting on the other side of the glass.

BOBBY

Let's just get it done OK?

JAMES

But it ain't right.

THEY LAUNCH INTO PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE. JAMES NAILS HIS LEAD but the pace remains the same.

IN THE RECORDING BOOTH

Syd Nathan, takes off his headphones, and turns to Ralph, pissed as hell.

SYD NATHAN
 (Takes off cans. Yells)
 What the hell is this Ralph?!
 Where's the rest of the song?

RALPH BASS
 Syd-

SYD NATHAN
 He just keeps hollering that one
 word over and over. "Please".
 "Please" what, Ralph?! Please jerk
 my dick? What the hell does he
 want? If he doesn't tell me, you're
 fired.

IN THE STUDIO

Bobby and Nafloyd can see something is wrong. James oblivious still singing, lost in the moment.

IN THE BOOTH

RALPH
 Listen, Mr. Nathan. This song-

SYD NATHAN
 I don't hear a song Ralph. A song
 has verses. A snappy chorus. It's
 not just some unfortunate nigger
 pleading. Who needs that? Give me
 the fucking song Ralph. The song.

RALPH
It's not about the song.

Nathan stops. This is sacrilege.

SYD NATHAN
 What?

RALPH
It's not the song.

Nathan turns to and looks again. His eyes narrow UPON James Brown, his heart and soul pouring out onto the tape.

CUT TO:

82A INT. BIG BILLS RENDEZVOUS. 1954. NIGHT.

82A

THE FAMOUS FLAMES are back on stage at Big Bills only now THEY OWN THE ROOM. A packed standing room only house is going wild for James and the flames.

Side doors to the club have been opened. People pour outside and dance.

James sings *PLEASE!* at a much faster pace than at King. Aunt Honey and her girls bump and grind to the music.

JAMES
Please! Please! Please.

James lowers to the floor and belts his heart out as the song concludes.

James walks off stage and just outside Big Bills. A bath towel is put over James' back and head to absorb his sweat.

James is breathing hard, completely exhausted. The crowd is not wanting the show to end. The band is vamps amid cheers.

CROWD
James Brown, James Brown, James
Brown.

James slowly rises his head from under his towel and looks right at us. He begins to smile.

He then looks over to Bobby and nods. The band resumes *Please, Please, Please.*

Suddenly James throws the towel off of himself and runs to the stage. The cape act is born.

JAMES
Please! Please! Please!

James jumps onto the floor singing as if for his life. He soon disappears into a sea of women pulling at his clothes.

83 INT. KING RECORD. MEETING ROOM. DAY JAMES 23

83

James Brown sits on a couch next to Ralph Bass.

RALPH
James. I want you to meet somebody.

Ralph Bass gets up and opens the door. On the chairs outside the meeting room a friendly looking man looks up from a magazine.

RALPH (CONT'D)

James, this is Ben Bart. Ben is President of Universal Attractions. New York's biggest booking agency.

BART

That was a great show last week over in Jersey.

JAMES

Well thank you Sir, we worked real hard to-

BART

Not we James. Not the Famous Flames. You. James Brown.

James looks from one to the other.

RALPH

What Bart is saying James is-

JAMES

I know what Mr. Bart is saying. I heard him. Loud and clear.

He looks at them both.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I see where we goin'. Saw it this morning when your secretary called ask me to come here an hour early. Alone. I knew it six months ago. Hell, I knew it the day I was born.

James looks back. He doesn't blink. He looks to us.

JAMES (CONT'D)

There's some things I'm gonna want.

83A **INT. KING RECORDS. CONFERENCE ROOM. LATER THAT MORNING.** 83A

A receptionist shows the rest of the band in. The Flames join Ralph, Syd Nathan, Ben Bart, and James.

BEN BART

Come in Boys. Come in.

There's no chairs. They stand.

BEN BART (CONT'D)

Boys, I have something to show you.

He hands them each a record sleeve. They look down.

BOBBY

I don't understand. Is this some sort of mistake?

NAFLOYD

(Reads)

His Famous Flames?

The sleeve has clearly printed on it "James Brown and *his Famous Flames.*"

BABY ROY

Sir, this ain't right.

BEN BART

We agree. See I believe it should say simply James Brown. The fact is Gentlemen, James Brown doesn't need the Famous Flames. King records and Universal don't need the Famous Flames. But James has requested that the name remain in some form. Now if you want to stay, stay, but from now on you work for James Brown, on James Brown's records. Should you find this disagreeable in part or whole, you can go home.

NAFLOYD

(Stunned)

James?

James stares straight ahead. Nafloyd throws the record at the wall. Bobby stands there, stunned.

Slowly, James looks at Bobby and then crosses to him.

JAMES

Bobby. It's just a name. Ain't nothing different between us. This for all us not just me. It's gone be good.

Bobby stares back. Nafloyd steps up to James.

NAFLOYD

James Brown. I never liked you. Come on. Let's get outta here..

He turns and walks away with the band. Bobby rises and follows out the door.

PUSH IN

On James. Bart sits down opposite him.

BART

So. Do you know what you want James?

84 **EXT. WOODS. DILAPIDATED CABIN. 1941.**

84

FLASHBACK - JAMES, **aged eight**, outside the shack in Barnwell, beating his stick against the shack.

YOUNG JAMES

(Incredulous)

I know exactly what I want.

85 **INT. KING RECORDS. CINCINNATI. DAY. 1962 JAMES 29 YRS**

85

SYD NATHAN

Forget it. King doesn't make live albums. They're too expensive.

JAMES

I think a live album-

SYD NATHAN

James, your audience is Negro. Negroes don't buy albums. They don't have the resources. Especially not for a bunch a songs they already got.

James turns to Ben Bart.

BEN BART

James, Recording live is five, six times as expensive as the studio. And that's for some violin concerto at the Met. No one jumps up and shouts "Blow it fucker!" in the middle of *The Magic Flute*.

JAMES

But, Pop, you know my show.

James turns to Syd.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Mr. Nathan, you ain't ever even
seen the show. My show.

SYD
Don't need to.

Syd rises and begins to dance. He attempts the "Mashed Potato".

JAMES
Mr. Nathan-

JAMES (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

SYD
The "Mashed Potato".

JAMES
That ain't the "Mashed Potato".

SYD
Exactly.

SYD (CONT'D)
I can't do the "Mashed Potato".
That's your job. That's the show.
But what I can do is *the business*.

Syd goes back to his desk and sits.

SYD NATHAN
So *I* stick to what I know. You
stick to what *you* know. And that's
the showbusiness.

86

INT. ELITE RESTAURANT. 1962. DAY.

86

Ben Bart and James, in a booth. James silent, tense.

JAMES
Book the Apollo. I'm gonna spend my
own money on this. Syd Nathan's
wrong.

BEN BART
I'm not going to let you do that,
Jimmy.

JAMES

Book it out next week for the whole week, go in, we drill it, we drill it, we drill it, then we drop it.

BEN BART

Forget it, Jimmy. It's too big of a risk. Let's order something to eat.

Ben signals for a waitress to come over. James grows intense.

JAMES

I don't understand risk?

James stiffens.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I don't understand cos I'm just the "show"? Is that all I am to you, Pop? The show? The money?

BEN BART

Of course not, Jimmy.

JAMES

Sure it is. That's all me and my black brothers are to the "White Devil". We the show and you the money. And that's how the White Devil keeps it all.

BEN BART

I'm not the "White Devil". I'm trying to protect you. I'm doing my job.

James becomes intense. A waitress walks over.

JAMES

Pop, look me in the eye.

Ben stays on his menu.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Pop.

Ben looks up. The waitress scurries away.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Yeah, I'm the show. But, if I'm spendin' my own money on the show, then I'm gone be the business too.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

And after we kill The Apollo, I'll kick over a few bucks to the white devil. Whatever I think he deserves. And If I'm payin' you, Pop, you gone show me how to do it.

Ben takes this in.

BEN BART

I'll call Nola Sound. They got these new three track stereo recorders from Ampex.

JAMES

And I want the best engineer in town. I don't care what it takes. I don't care what it cost. I want everyone in uniform, the ushers, front of house, the peanut peddlers.

BEN BART

We'll need the band in New York immediately.

JAMES

And I want 'em in Sapphire blue suits. Pop. Sapphire.

BEN BART

Sapphire Blue. Underwear too. How does that sound?

Pop smiles as does James.

87

INT./EXT. CAR/ APOLLO THEATER. 1962. NIGHT.

87

Ben Bart drives a sedan. James rides in the front seat.

JAMES

It's cold. It's cold. It's too cold man. It's too cold. Cold. Cold.

They round the corner.

JAMES (CONT'D)

C'mon. C'mon. C'mon. C'mon. C'mon.

SUDDENLY and for the first time, we hear the classic James grunt, guttural.

A THUMPING RHYTHM BEGINS. James, stock still, no longer looking out of the window. Head completely still.

Out of the window: a line of people. On and on. We round the corner. More people. Another corner. More.

The doors of the theatre open as we pass. People rush forward as THE CAR PULLS UP. James gets out outside by the stage entrance. Ben follows.

GERTRUDE

Evening, Mr. Brown. Cold out tonight.

JAMES

Gertrude. See if you can get some coffee for the folks in line.

James walks into the stage door entrance of the Apollo. Ben follows with a big smile. It's happening.

88

INT. APOLLO THEATER. STAGE. NIGHT. 1962

88

ONE BY ONE TWELVE PAIRS OF PATENT LEATHER SHOES HIT THE STAGE.

THE NEW JAMES BROWN REVUE file in with instrument cases like some ultra hip sect.

In the dimly lit back stage we see the motions of opening their cases and begin setting up their stations, A beautiful black girl pulls up her mini to reveal even more leg.

James enters looking amazing in a cobalt sharkskin. He approaches the all new band.

A member of the band, whose back is to us, peers out of the scarlet curtains towards the packed house.

JAMES

You ready Mr. Byrd?

Bobby Byrd turns from the curtains. *THE ONLY SURVIVING MEMBER OF THE STARLIGHTERS*. His profile lighted by a powerful spot.

BOBBY BYRD

(Ice cool)

Ready Mr. Brown.

Gertrude rushes to James with his jacket. He smooths his hair.

FATS V/O

Are you ready for *star time*? Thank you and thank you very kindly-

89

INT. APOLLO. STAGE. NIGHT.

89

Syd Nathan and Ben Bart stand in the wings. Syd shouts in Ben's ear.

SYD

We got the level on his main mic
way up to drown out the crowd. You
gotta get him to hold back a little
in the first number!

CLOSE UP: Big two inch tape magnacorders turn on brushed aluminium spindles. Recording live.

Ben Bart looks over at James at the curtain edge. A man possessed.

BEN BART

I think its too late for that. You
ain't got a breeze, Syd. You got a
hurricane.

James looks at Bobby. Bobby nods. James nods back. The band vamp.

JAMES

Watch me.

The curtain opens. BANG! James Brown & the New Revue are in perfect timing **looking impeccable in their new sapphire blue suits**. The crowd goes wild with excitement.

Mr. Dynamite steps on stage-- and floats and dances across bare planks like they were polished ice. He reaches the mike.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You know I feel alright.

(Yeah!)

You know I feel alright children.

(Yeah!)

I feel aaaaaaallllriiiiiight.

Les Buie whacks the guitar strings and the world ceases to spin. A rising 6/8 blues riff pulses up like adrenaline.

As he sings the song, a shock wave blasts out from the stage of the theatre on 125th street and into the Universe.

Bobby might as well be sitting on the moon. He never misses a beat.

CUT TO:

James Brown and the New Revue are tearing up their second number, "Think."

SYD NATHAN now sits in the audience surrounded by a SEA OF BLACK FACES. We gather that Syd has never really experienced "The Show". He smiles and nods to the beat.

Just then a female seated behind him shouts as the horns kick in.

FEMALE IN AUDIENCE

Blow it fuckers!!!

James stares into the darkness. He's already begun to sweat. The drums stop a six punch combination from the horns dead. He reaches for the mic without looking. Leans in and locks eyes with Syd.

JAMES

*Think...Think...Think...About your
bad self...*

James drops to his knees. The crowd goes wild.

A few rows behind Syd, we find Susie Brown sitting in the audience. James' mother has come to the show.

90

INT. APOLLO DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT.

90

After. The cheers still ringing out. People packed into his dressing room. Champagne corks pop. Congratulations from all.

JAMES

Thank you. That's very kind of you.

Bobby, at the door. Can't get to him. Turns to Gertrude.

BOBBY

Gertrude. Get everybody out.

GERTRUDE

What?

ACROSS THE ROOM

JAMES

We gone celebrate tonight. And then tomorrow we gone Wilmington and do it to it all over again.

BOBBY
Mr. Brown. Excuse me. Mr. Brown.
(Then)
...James.

James stops. Turns to face Bobby's grave expression. Bobby whispers in James' ear.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
There's a woman here, Mr. Brown.
She says she's your mother.

James stops dead. COMPLETELY STILL. We push in. He doesn't blink.

91 **FLASHBACK - EXT. STREET. NIGHT. 1942. JAMES 9 YRS** 91

Little Junior walks Twigg street at night. Passing dives and joints.

Suddenly he stops, across the street, he sees a woman coming out of a bar arm in arm with a **BLACK SOLDIER**.

He follows her up the street. She's weaving and laughing with the drunk soldier.

JAMES
Momma?

SUSIE and the soldier walk into a side yard where a party is in full swing.

James approaches her from behind.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Momma it's me. It's me.

She turns. Focuses blearily.

SOLDIER
You know this little nigger?

For a moment it looks as if there is a flicker of recognition. Then swivels her head to look at the soldier. She shakes her head.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Beat it.

YOUNG JAMES
But Momma!

The soldier picks up a rock a throws it.

SOLDIER
Get the fuck out of here.

92 **INT. AUNT HONEY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT. 1942**

92

Aunt Honey and James lie in bed together. James has been crying.

AUNT HONEY
Don't cry, Little Junior. Don't cry. Now, child, I want you to listen to me. You gone be okay. You hear me? Little Junior, you were born dead. Did you know that?

James shakes his head.

AUNT HONEY (CONT'D)
When your great Aunt pulled you into this world you were dead. You had gone cold. She slapped your ass hard too but you never drew a breath. Your momma and daddy had to say goodbye to you. But then your Great Aunt breathed in you one last time. And then you turned warm and then you screamed. So loud we heard it all the way here in Augusta. You're special, boy. Cause you got the spirit in you. And that spirit told me you gone be a rich man, Little Junior. And Everybody gone know your name. Ain't nothin' can touch you. You hear me? Nothin'.

James nods.

92A **INT. TOUR BUS. DAY. 1964**

92A

The band on the bus. Bobby Bennet frowns and turns to Bobby Byrd. A new girl, **YVONNE FAIR**, gets on.

DOWN THE BUS -- The others watch.

MACEO
Who's this?

BOBBY BENNET
(quietly)
James gone wear that seat out.

MACEO
Which seat. Her's or the bus?

Having overheard, Yvonne spends around.

YVONNE

I'm Yvonne! I'm a singer. Let me worry about my seat.

Bennet and Maceo snicker.

93

EXT. STREET/FISH HOUSE. DAY. 1965

93

James and Ben Bart walk up a street. They turn a corner to see a gleaming new Cadillac parked next to the Fish House.

We see a DRIVER inside. The driver exits.

BART

Compliments of Universal Attractions.

JAMES

This for me? Looky this! We got us a chauffeur.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(to the chauffeur)

Gimme the keys. What they payin' you?

James takes the keys and then pulls out a roll of bills and counts out six hundreds. He hands them to chauffeur.

JAMES (CONT'D)

This here's a month's pay, help you get yourself another job. I gone drive myself.

The chauffeur smiles, hands Bart his hat and walks off down the street.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Don't mention it.

(turns to Ben Bart)

That's six a month goin' somewhere else.

94

EXT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

94

James and Pop sit at a small dining table outside the Fish House.

JAMES

Pop, see there's something I been meaning to ask you.

BART

What's that Jimmy.

JAMES

I got a seventh grade education Pop, so you'll have to excuse me. I was looking over those figures you sent me, and something occur to me: we don't pay the promoter, the promoter pay us.

BART

Just standard Jimmy. Guarantee against fluctuating ticket sales. Lets plan a-

JAMES

-sure we planning, see I ask myself, what if we don't got fluctuating sales. What if you knocking the tar out of every show.

Ben Bart watches James with a new outlook on his partner and friend.

BART

Well let me explain the way it works. When you book a show. Take Chicago. Now our promoter in Chicago is-

BART (CONT'D)

Lenny J Frank. Lenny's the number one promoter in Chicago has been for twenty years.

JAMES

I don't doubt it.

BART

Now when Lenny pays us a flat rate, we can account. You know, number one, you're getting top rate and number two-

JAMES

What if we took the gate?
(Bart stops JAMES looks over)
What if we took it ourself.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

And still got the show promoted,
but better.

BEN BART

Better than Lenny Franks?

JAMES

Lenny Franks a James Brown fan? How
old he, sixty? Why's he gone try
harder for James Brown than for Sam
Cooke? Or Ray Charles. Or Tom
Jones. See Pop. We go to the radio
stations.

BART

Jimmy, I understand your
frustration but you gotta realize
you're entering a game where the
rules are set out. If you were a
ball player you can't walk in and
change how many innings they're
gonna play just because...

As Bart drones on, James loses interest and starts addressing
us directly.

JAMES

You see my point right? OK. Listen
up. We go to the radio station. We
go to the young cats. The hungry
cats. The late night cat.

95

INT. RADIO STATION.

95

James talks to us as he stands next to a DEEJAY, **ALAN LEEDS**,
The deejay doesn't hear James talking to us.

JAMES

The twenty year old white deejay in
Richmond Virginia who's getting
paid nothing and is only doin' it
because he loves music. We go to
him we ask him if he want to be the
sole James Brown promoter for the
Richmond show. For a percentage. He
gone say:

The deejay suddenly looks up to James.

YOUNG RICHMOND DEEJAY

Are you fucking kidding me? Do you
know how much they pay me?

JAMES WALKS PAST THROUGH THE STATION TALKING TO US.

JAMES

Between nothing and fifty bucks a week. But he love my music. He digs James Brown. And he got a microphone and a turn-table and four hours airtime to kill.

YOUNG RICHMOND DEEJAY

Screw Payola.

LATER - THE RADIO STATION.

He spins it. *MUSIC starts: "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."*

JAMES BEGINS TO GROOVE.

JAMES

And at the end he gone say..

95A **ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE. VOICE-OVER OF DEEJAYS ANNOUNCING THE UPCOMING SHOWS OVER.. "MAKE SURE YOU CATCH JAMES AT THE ARENA IN RICHMOND THIS TUESDAY!!! " ETC.** 95A

96 **INT. FISH HOUSE. DAY.** 96

BACK AT THE FISH HUT, JAMES IS TALKING TO US AS HE ORDERS A PLATE OF FISH.

JAMES

Now because he's twenty he's got strong legs. And he knows everyone.

97 **EXT. THE STREETS. 1965.** 97

THE VARIOUS DEEJAYS -- riding around town on bikes, on skates, diving out of cars, pasting up posters everywhere.

JAMES (V.O.)

He know the guy in the barber shop knows the guy at the pool hall, the guy at the garage.

98 **INSIDE JAMES PAYS FOR A LARGE PLATE OF FISH.**

98

JAMES

(to us)

That way we get our record played
outside Payola, we get our show
promoted better, harder, cheaper,
and we keep the gate.

99 **EXT. FISH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

99

James exits the fish house and sits down at a rickety card
table with Bart.

JAMES

(to Bart)

And the best part is, you can put
it all through the books. Item.
Promoter.

(He turns to Bart)

What'd you think Pop?

BART

Its beautiful Jimmy. I can't do it.

Bart picks up a piece of fish and eats it.

JAMES

Why not?

BART

Universal Attractions promotes many
acts. I can't piss off the 60 or 70
promoters in this country to skim a
little extra on the James Brown
Show.

JAMES

It's not a little. If the show
sells, and it's sellin', we talking
thousands of dollars a night.
Difference per year between 2 and 3
million dollars.

BART

And I'm out of a job. Think you're
forgetting I don't just work for
James Brown.

JAMES

And there's my next point Pop. Why
not?

(Bart stops)

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can do something for you, and you can do something for me, and it ain't buy me no Cadillac. Did you buy Wilson Pickett a Cadillac? Did you buy Jackie Wilson a Cadillac? You know which way this thing is going Pop. I got people around me who don't see it.

Bart looks at him for some time as a black 1965 limousine pulls up to the fish house.

James looks straight back to us. Smiles. Ben Bart rises and grabs a piece of fish.

BEN BART

(to James)

I thank you for the fish. And I'm gonna need some benefits, boss.

Bart crosses to the limo and leaves.

BLACKOUT. SCREAMS. HORNS VAMPING.

100 INT. THEATER. NIGHT. 1965 JAMES 32

100

The whole band on stage looking sharp. Knocking the shit out of MAN'S WORLD. James falls to his knees

James turns to backup singer, **YVONNE** and winks. She winks back.

James scans the front row and sees a very beautiful black woman, **DEDE**, dancing in the audience.

James and Dede lock eyes. The attraction immediate.

Man's World continues over the next three scenes.

CUT TO:

101 INT. SECURE ROOM

101

Ben Bart counts bundles of cash. He shuts a case full of money. Hands it to 300lb MINDER. An ASSISTANT tries to handcuff it to his wrist. It won't close.

BART

Po-lice have the same problem.

Bart looks at the three hundred pound minder. Tacitly decides it's probably safe.

Puts out his hand. NEW BAND MEMBER counts off bills and walks down the corridor.

James turns around to find a beautiful black woman staring back at him. She holds a notebook and pen.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Hello pretty thing. You want an autograph?

She nods.

James approaches and tries to grab the notebook. She pulls it back from his grasp with a smile

JAMES (CONT'D)
You want to come with me? So I can sign it somewhere private?

James flashes that million dollar smile. They walk away together.

105

INT. JAMES BROWN'S HOME. BEDROOM. WALTON WAY. AUGUSTA. 105

James walks into the bedroom of his home. Dede is sitting at the end of their bed looking beautiful in a sexy negligee.

JAMES
I called you yesterday, you ain't home.

DEDE
I was home all day.

JAMES
You were home all day. So why you didn't pick up the phone?

DEDE
I don't know. What time you call?

JAMES
I call you at one and quarter past one, then I call you at two. And I call again at three.

DEDE
You must've wanted to talk to me pretty bad.

JAMES
Where were you?

DEDE
 Yesterday. I don't know..in the
 bath?

JAMES
 For two hours?

DEDE
 You want me to take shorter baths?
 You don't have a phone in the
 bathroom, James. What you gonna do?
 Fine me?

He looks at her levelly as he walks past and grabs a phone
 from the bedside table.

He yanks it out of the wall. Dede turns, James races towards
 her but passes and heads into the bathroom.

106 **INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

106

James walks in with the phone. James throws the phone at a
 bathroom mirror. It shatters.

BACK IN THE BEDROOM

Dede is still as stone. James looks to Dede and then begins
 to smile.

JAMES
 I ain't gone fine you, baby. You
 fine enough already.

Dede smiles.

DEDE
 Then get over here, Mr. Dynamite.

James approaches Dede and begins taking off his clothes.

JAMES
 Got you a phone in the bathroom
 now.

James and Dede begin making love.

MUSIC. MONEY WON'T CHANGE YOU. Over.

107

EXT. CADILLAC. 1965. DAY.

107

James, Dede and Bobby are standing outside James' Cadillac. Dede has her hands over Bobby's eyes. Dede has a huge diamond ring on her finger.

DEDE

Keep your eyes closed Bobby. Keep 'em closed.

BOBBY BYRD

They're closed, Dede.

JAMES

You peekin' brother? OK. OK.
 (James stops the car.)
 You ready. You ready? OK. Open 'em.
 (Bobby does.)
 Check it Bobby. Is that something?

Bobby opens his eyes and sees a Lear Jet stands on a runway. "James Brown" on the side.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That something Bobby? Is that *something*?

BOBBY

Yeah brother. That's something.

Velma pulls up in another car. It's full of James kids. Teddy plus four more. He picks them all up and hugs them. As he does, Bobby sheepishly greets Velma.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Hey Velma.

VELMA

Hey Bobby.

James and Dede come over. Bobby takes a step back.

VELMA (CONT'D)

Teddy got impetigo.

JAMES

Impetigo?

DEDE

It's a skin infection.

VELMA

All that mess round his mouth.
That's impetigo. It's highly
infectious.

Velma turns to Dede.

VELMA (CONT'D)

I'm just sayin' Mrs. Brown, I
wouldn't go too near Teddy. Not
unless you wanna catch impetigo.

DEDE

Thank you, Velma. I'll consider
myself warned.

VELMA

Warned? Oh, that's a whole other
conversation. Welcome to the
family.

Dede and Velma smile at each other.

James looks at the two women then to Teddy. He pulls Teddy
in close. James turns to his other kids.

JAMES

Listen up. Which one of you cats
want to fly to Reno on daddy's
airplane?

The kids all say "me!... me!" The kids, Bobby and Dede walk
up the steps onto the plane as Velma gets in her car.

James lingers.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(to Velma)

You need anything?

VELMA

I'll let you know. I'm putting a
big list together right now.

Velma smiles and cranks her car.

108 **EXT. RENO PRIVATE AIRPORT. ESTABLISHING. DAY. 1965** 108

109 **INT. PRIVATE AIRPORT TERMINAL. LATER THAT DAY. JAMES** 109

James is giving a press conference to a group of journalists.

Bobby, Teddy and Dede stand next to James.

INTERVIEWER

Welcome to Reno, Mr. Brown. What exactly do you call your style of music?

JAMES BROWN

I call it James Brown music. What I mean is, it's so far ahead of it's time that they ain't got a name for it yet. Take another record, any record from your stack at home. I don't care if it's from Motown or Stax or whatever...and put it on your box. None of them are gonna sound like mine. Not even my own old records. Just like the title says, it's a "new bag". See the funk is in the bass. The bass never changes. It's a groove, lady. Soon as you hear that groove, I know I got you.

INTERVIEWER

And what exactly is the groove?

JAMES BROWN

The groove is something you feel. The groove is solid. Bam Bap. It don't move. It's like a heartbeat. It's inside you, driving everything. Hard. Flat. A groove.

INTERVIEWER

But how exactly do you define it?

JAMES BROWN

I just did.

(Then)

See Miss. See there's some things, they're just too big to fit in a magazine. But we all feel it. Even little Teddy here know it when he feel it.

James groans "Um booga chooca. Um". Teddy is lit up; thrilled. He sings.

TEDDY

"Um Booga Choooca"

JAMES BROWN

See. Right there. We all feel it together. And that's the groove. Understand?

INTERVIEWER

(Checks her questions)

So what's your favorite food?

James catches Dede's eye. She and James share a knowing look with Bobby. Bobby takes the mic as James walks away to a side room where Ben Bart is waiting.

CUT TO:

110

INT. AIRPORT MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

110

BART, James study at a map. BOBBY sits across the aisle.

BART

Then we got a day between Raleigh, Carolina and Columbia two days after.

JAMES

Day off?

BART

Sure. Regroup. Rest the horses.

JAMES

We ain't payin' the horses to rest 'em. Besides, we got a day off in two weeks in New Orleans. The boys can get their wives, girlfriends along, kick back. What's between Raleigh and Columbia? Spartanburg?

BACK THE PRESS CONFERENCE:

BOBBY BYRD

Well see, James started out in Augusta. Then his family moved to Toccoa. That's where we met.

JOURNALIST

And tell me about James' first band, the Famous Flames.

BOBBY BYRD

Well there was five of us to start with. Nafloyd Scott, Baby Roy Scott, Sylvester Keels..

JOURNALIST

And they left...

BOBBY BYRD

Yeah. They left.

James walks into the interview area.

JAMES

(interrupting)

Bobby? What's the name of the theater in Spartanburg...

BOBBY

Uh.. The Viceroy. The..

JAMES

The Regal!

BOBBY

Yeah. That's it. The Regal.

JAMES

(to Bart)

On Howard Street and main. Hold about 750 people. Guy named Bennett used to own it. Yeah, Spartanburg. Yeah, we'll play there and I can bring in my masseuse from Anderson.

James disappears again.

JAMES (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Call 'em up, Pop.

The journalists laugh.

JOURNALIST

Wow. He's got an amazing memory.

Bobby nods to himself.

BOBBY

Yeah. James remembers everything.

111 **EXT. JAMES BROWN'S HOME. WALTON WAY. 1967. CHRISTMAS.** 111

On the lawn of James' and Dede's new home a Christmas spectacular is staged. The Brown's Colonial is smack dab in the middle of Augusta's most elite, white neighborhood.

Fake snow is being sprayed on the lawn by Teddy. Kids of all races play in the white stuff.

We widen to see a huge line of people waiting to meet James who is dressed as Santa Clause.

Dede is dressed as a sexy Mrs. Clause. Dede wears sexy fish net hose which rise up her legs, disappearing into a short red skirt. Dede holds an infant girl.

One by one, kids and their parents approach James. He hands each Kid a five dollar bill.

A little white boy approaches.

JAMES

Hey little man, you been good this year.

LITTLE BOY

Yes, Mister Brown.

James hands him a five spot. Dede hands the little boy a candy apple.

Another little white boy and his father approach. James as James speaks to the little boy.

JAMES

Merry Christmas, Little Man.

James then notices the boy's father checking out Dede.

The little boy moves on to Dede. She leans over and picks up an apple from a tray.

The boy's father takes full notice of Dede's ass. James takes full notice of the entire thing.

112 **INT. JAMES BROWN'S HOME. WALTON WAY. AUGUSTA. LATER THAT DAY.** 112

James and Dede enter the Brown home, passing a huge life size portrait of James hanging in the foyer.

DEDE

Great crowd today, Baby.

James passes Dede without a word and heads to the back of the house.

Dede follows James thought the living room and into the kitchen.

James disappears around a corner.

DEDE (CONT'D)
You want some dinner?

Dede follows James around the corner and disappears.

JAMES (O.C.)
You stand up in James Brown's yard dressed like that? So every man can see you?

Then suddenly, A **SMACK** is heard. Dede's Body falls back into frame and collapses on the kitchen floor.

A towel flies into frame and lands next to Dede.

JAMES (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Cover yourself up.

113 **INT. JAMES BROWN'S HOME. WALTON WAY. AUGUSTA. CONTINUOUS** 113

We are now with James in the room off the kitchen. Behind James we see Dede starting to get up off the floor.

The camera is on James' face. We get the sense that James wants to look at us and talk directly to us but he won't.

Out of Shame, James leaves the room and goes to Dede's aid.

CUT TO:

114 **EXT. HOTEL POOL. NEW ORLEANS. 1967. DAY** 114

The long awaited day off. The James revue kicks back by the pool in the sunshine, wives, girls, and kids.

An idyllic scene. Kids playing with fathers. Kids towelled down by mothers.

115 **EXT. HOTEL POOL. CHECK IN STAND. CONTINUOUS** 115

A WHITE FEMALE TOURIST in swimming kit has been complaining to a HOTEL MANAGER. Her HUSBAND, tries to make peace.

HUSBAND

(regarding the manager)
Honey, his hands are tied. The pool
area has been reserved for a
private function.

WIFE

We're good people and we've paid
good money. We didn't come all the
way to New Orleans to swim in a
pool full of-

WIFE (CONT'D)

Niggers.

HUSBAND

Entertainers.

Just then a band member's kid does a cannonball in the pool.

BACK AT THE POOL

Bobby, poolside, messes about with the new singer, Vicki
ANDERSON.

VICKI ANDERSON

You a bad man Bobby Byrd.

Suddenly he pulls her to him. They NEARLY share a kiss. But
laugh instead.

Bobby turns his head to a hotel balcony. Vicki grabs Bobby's
face and turns it back toward her.

VICKI ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Quit lookin' for James Brown and
keep your eyes on me, Bobby Byrd.

She sexily rises and goes and sits on a lounge.

Bobby watches her all the way. She catches his eye. Looks at
him, raises an eyebrow like "what you looking at?" He feigns
innocence, turns, and smiles.

116 **EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - SAME TIME**

116

James discreetly watches from behind a blind on his balcony
high above.

117 **EXT. HOTEL POOL. CONTINUOUS.**

117

Pee Wee, in jams, walks with a new band member, **FRED WESLEY**,
who is still wearing a suit.

PEE WEE
 Fella's this is Fred. I thought
 we'd show him how things work?

Pee Wee pulls out a cheap wig from his pocket and puts it on.

Everyone around the pool begins to laugh as Pee Wee begins
 demonstrating how things work to Wesley. Pee Wee is full on
 imitating James Brown

PEE WEE ELLIS
 So when I do this..
 (Turns head, stamps foot)
 Means you give it some punch. See.
 When I dip like this.
 (Dips hip and slides)

BOBBY
 Means less sharp. Bring it down.

Fred nods.

PEE WEE ELLIS
 When I do this.
 (Juts chin back and forth)

MACEO
 Mean I give it some heat.

PEE WEE ELLIS
 Right. Now when I do this.
 (Stamps foot and moves elbow.)
 And you stab..

ALL
 On the one.

PEE WEE ELLIS
 See? And when I pop his head like
 this, it mean.

ALL
 Take it to the bridge.

MACEO
 What about when he do this..?

Maceo crunches his shoulder blades together.

PEE WEE ELLIS
 I ain't ready to tell you that one
 yet. I'm in control Mr. Parker.
 Got it. Don't ask about that again.

Pee Wee flashes his hand at Maceo.

PEE WEE
That'll be ten thousand dollars.

The band loses their shit at this one. Laughs all around.

An hotel employee walks out with a note and hands it to Pee Wee. Pee Wee reads. Pee Wee removes the wig.

PEE WEE (CONT'D)
He's called a rehearsal.

BOBBY
When?

PEE WEE
Now. We gotta go get dressed.

MACEO
You're kidding. Tell me you
kidding.

118 **EXT. HOTEL ROOM BALCONY / POOL.**

118

Hiding behind a partition, James raises a cigarette to his mouth.

119 **INT. NEW ORLEANS HOTEL REHEARSAL ROOM. 1967 JAMES 34 YRS** 119

The band, all in their suits, with their instruments. All glaring. One more pissed off than the next. Vicki stands in the corner.

James is in the middle of an extended anecdote.

JAMES
See My great grandmother on my
momma's side, she Asian. She got
Asian blood. See Asians are a
flexible race.
You get with an Asian chick? That a
whole other story. No spank but
they got it baby they got it.
Anyway what was I talkin 'bout?

MACEO
Your Chinese knees Mr. Brown.

JAMES
That's right. That it. I got these
Chinese knees.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
 That's how come I can dance the way
 I do. Anyway. One. Two. Three.
 Four. Hit it.

The band starts up. During the introduction to COLD SWEAT,
 MACEO comes in late on the Sax. Everything stops.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Stop. Maceo.
 (Laughs)
 What you doing man? You coming in
 maybe a little too late. What's the
 matter son. You lost your feeling?

MACEO
 (Flatly)
 No Sir. I ain't lost no feeling.

SILENCE. James tunes into the vibe for the first time.
 SOMETHING'S wrong.

JAMES
 (Innocently)
 Something wrong, Maceo?
 (SILENCE. Directly)
 Is something wrong, Maceo?

BOBBY BYRD
 James-

James rounds on Bobby.

JAMES
 You got something to say Mr. Byrd?
 (Silence. Smiling)
 Because a man got something to say
 he should say it. You got something
 to say?

SILENCE. Vicki looks away. All at once James loses it.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (Shouting)
 Well then you just HOLDING UP THE
 REHEARSAL Mr. Byrd.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 I can't have people HOLDING UP THE
 REHEARSAL. If I can't do it right I
 ain't gone do it at all. We got to
 GET ON. GET AHEAD. Now you know the
rule.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
 You late, you off or you hold us
 up, it's no good, Mr. Byrd. Its
 gonna cost you 50 dollars.

Bobby's jaw tightens. Everyone holds their breath.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Now are you ready Mr. Byrd. Are you
 ready Mr. Byrd?

Pause.

BOBBY BYRD
 Yes, Mr. Brown.

James glances to Vicki and winks.

JAMES
 Good. I ain't fattening frogs for
 snakes. From the top. One Two...

COLD SWEAT resumes. Bobby sings his backing part.

James stands in the middle of the floor. Its good but-

JAMES BROWN
 Quit it.
 (They all stop)
 Clyde man. Lets get that POP! Dee..
 app..POP! Unnerstand? It drop
 before you reach the beat. Dig?

Jimmy Nolen looks worriedly at Pee Wee.

MACEO
 (Whispers to Waymon)
 Does he mean top of the bar?

PEE WEE
 (To Maceo)
 He means the down beat.

JAMES
 It goin' wrong there Pee Wee, when
 it rise up.

MACEO
 But Mr. Brown.

Maceo pauses and waits to be acknowledged by James. James
 turns and glares at Maceo.

MACEO (CONT'D)

We rehearsed it like you told us.
We got it like you like it.
Jimmy can't do that with the part
he's playing. We can change the
part if you want.

JAMES BROWN

(Suddenly angry)

Did I say change the part? Don't
change the part. How many records
you got?

James sarcastically responds to Maceo's silence.

JAMES

Thank you! I like the part he
playin' now. I just want it in a
different place.

Blank stares from the band. James walks over to Clyde's snare
and points.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What's this, Maceo.

MACEO.

It's a snare, Mr. Brown.

JAMES

A snare what?

MACEO.

Drum.

JAMES

Correct.

James moves over to Jimmy. Points to his guitar.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What's this, Maceo?

MACEO

Guitar, Mr. Brown.

JAMES

No it's not.

James goes back to Clyde and points to Maceo's sax

JAMES (CONT'D)

What's that, Pee Wee?

PEE WEE.
A drum, Mr. Brown?

JAMES
Now you're getting it.

James crosses to Pinckney and points to Odum's guitar

JAMES (CONT'D)
What's that he's holding.

PEE WEE
A drum?

James points to the horn section.

JAMES
You Fellas. What are those shiny things you holding.

EVERYBODY IN THE ROOM
Drums.

JAMES
Now we all got our drums. Now when you're playing the drum it don't matter what key you're in, what bar your in or what planet you on. Dig?

MACEO
(With trepidation)
But Mr. Brown.

Maceo pauses and waits for JB to acknowledge him.

MACEO (CONT'D)
Clyde'll be in a different time to the rest of the band. That doesn't work musically.

They all know it.

JAMES BROWN
But does it sound good?

The band nods.

JAMES BROWN (CONT'D)
Does it feel good?

More nods.

JAMES BROWN (CONT'D)
 Then it's musical. So play it like
 I say. From the top.

The groove of *COLD SWEAT* comes to life. The beat heavier, almost irregular but actually in the pocket, the horns and Bass clipped, drum-like, the off rhythm of Jimmy's guitar bringing the whole room together.

119A **EXT. POOL AREA BAR. SAME TIME.** 119A

Our racist couple has now bellied up to an outside bar. *Cold Sweat* leaks out into the bar area.

Unable to help themselves, the couple rises and begins to dance.

119B **BACK INSIDE THE REHEARSAL:** 119B

The band is really hitting it hard. Vicky, Bobby...everyone feelin' it.

JAMES BROWN
 Mmmn! Huh! Now that a groove.

By God it is. James starts singing the cut.

120 **INT. HOTEL BAR. NIGHT. 1967** 120

The recording session is over. James has long since gone. Maceo and Bobby relax at the bar.

MACEO
 Bobby, James Brown's my meal ticket. So I just shut my ears and chomp down his bullshit. But why you soak it up man? You his best friend. You know him for time brother. And he treat you like that. I was you I'd bust him in his damn mouth.

Bobby Byrd nods his head.

BOBBY BYRD
 I hang in there cause I remember the day that I knew. Knew I was never gonna be in front.

He looks at Maceo with a calm, measured sense of reality.

BOBBY BYRD (CONT'D)

You work so hard at this one thing and then one day you realize it ain't supposed to be you. You can get mad. Try to fight it but if it's God's truth. It's God's truth. James is supposed to be in front. I saw it happen. And the man in front has to *BE the man in front*. It ain't always pretty but that's the man's responsibility if he wanna stay there. And you and me can't know what that is. We ain't supposed to. So, don't lie to yourself Maceo.

Every man in this band walks taller because he with James Brown. Every man in this band believe in himself a little more because he's with James Brown.

MACEO

You sure you just ain't too scared to be in the front?

BOBBY BYRD

No. But my ears a' open. Open your ears, Maceo. He's a genius. And he's takin' us with him.

CUT TO:

121

INT. KING RECORDING STUDIO. DAY. 1968 JAMES 35 YRS

121

Boiling studio. James drenched in sweat howls at the microphone.

JAMES

Mother, she got to have. Say, you got to have a mother for me. Yeah, popcorn!

The band sit right into the groove of **MOTHER POPCORN** and sweet thunder rolls onto another master tape. Everyone's eyes are glued to James standing in the centre: directing them with body movements and gestures, playing the whole band like a single instrument.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Quit it.

(They stop.)

We missing something.

(They look at each other. It was perfect.)

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Pee Wee, get over here by the microphone. And bring that horn box. That's where you keep the wig, right?

They all stop. Oh. Shit.

PEE WEE

Mr. Brown?

CUT TO:

Now Pee Wee stands at the Microphone, uncomfortable, with the wig on, singing the song.

James is in with the horns, who are all crying with laughter, enjoying the hell out of this rare moment of levity. James, deadpan, eggs him on. Pee Wee calls for a horn solo from him.

SUDDENLY there's a commotion in the mixing booth. James brings them to a stop.

JAMES

What is it? Why we stop Henry?

The engineers hands go to their faces. Shaking heads.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What? What is it?

Bobby enters the room.

BOBBY BYRD

It's King. They shot Dr. King.

121A **BLACKOUT: SFX: BURNING. SIRENS. GUNFIRE.**

121A

TELEVISION FOOTAGE. Riots all over America. Police beating back groups of rioting youths.

122 **INT. KING RECORDS - SYD NATHAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT.**

122

James sits watching the carnage unfold. Ben Bart knocks and enters

BART

Jimmy, Mayor of Boston's office called. Wanted you to know they've cancelled tomorrow's show at the Garden. For reasons of public safety. He's worried about rioting.

James doesn't look away from the screen.

JAMES BROWN

Tell the Mayor, I sold 30 million records and ninety five percent of them are to the black community. They listen to me. They won't riot

BART

We have virtual race war looming across the South, Jimmy. Politics, 101? Don't put 10,000 angry blacks together in one place in the middle of a city, and broadcast it live to the world.

JAMES

Get the Mayor on the phone.

CUT TO:

123 **INT. KING RECORDS. SYD NATHAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT.**

123

James is on the phone with the mayor

JAMES

Mr. Mayor, the way I see it, you already lost your next election. You lost it at 7:05 PM Memphis time.

CUT TO:

124 **INT. BOSTON MAYOR OFFICE - NIGHT.**

124

The mayor listens intently with the phone pressed to his ear.

JAMES

Now tomorrow night, you either got 10,000 angry folks in the Boston Garden, or you got 10,000 angry folks on your front lawn. Take your pick son. Which one you want?

125 **INT. BOSTON GARDENS. NIGHT. 1968 JAMES 35 YRS**

125

Tension in the air. Police on every exit. Dogs. On stage, **MAYOR WHITE** speaks to a restless audience.

MAYOR

All of us are here to night to listen to a great talent. James Brown. But we're also here to pay tribute to one of the greatest Americans, Dr. Martin Luther King. So, let us look at each other and pledge that whatever else any other community might do we in Boston will honour Dr. King in peace.

James steps forward.

JAMES

Brother before I get to this next thing I wanna say. He's a young man you dig. He's a young man so he's thinking together. The man is together. Give him another round of applause.

James watches the restless, shouting, crowd. He looks at the cameramen. The tension is unbearable. He lets it build.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Hit it.

A fast, rhythmic drum solo. Building. Faces in the crowd. The police. Tense promoters and politicians to the beating rhythms.

The band whipcrack into ***I GOT THE FEELING***. James pulsates. Spins. Pushes the stand away. Zip! It's back.

A kid at the front gets onto the stage and sprints for James only to be tackled by James' security. Another clammers up but is kicked back by a police officer. The audience react badly.

Another kid gets on stage and cops harshly push him to the floor and throw him back into the audience. Police come out onto the right side of the stage and shine torches down into the audience. They shove people back down.

A kid in a white jacket leaps on stage right in front of James. For a moment everyone stops. A white cop appears from nowhere and viciously bodychecks the kid back into the front row in full view of the cameras.

The mayor stands in the wings flanked by policemen. Dede stands behind them watching nervously.

MAYOR

Oh no.

On stage James stops the band.

JAMES

Wait a minute. Step off. Move off.
I'll be a'ight here. I be fine.

James waves the police off the stage on either side to cheers and whistles from the audience.

Suddenly a ten year old kid appears next to James from out of the audience. He seems amazed to find himself there.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Do you wanna dance son? You dance.

No longer held back by police more kids invade the stage. James respects them all, shaking hands and looking at them eye to eye. Kids throng around him on stage. He's losing control.

JAMES (CONT'D)

C'mon. C'mon now. Y'all go down. Go back down. Don't nobody else come up. Wait a minute. Wait. Ladies and gentleman. This is no way. This is. We are black. We are black.

(Cheers.)

Wait a minute go back. Can't y'all go back down and lets do the show together. We're black don't make us all look bad. Let me finish the show. Step down there. Be a gentleman. Lets represent our own selves. Lets represent our *own* selves.

One by one they step back down into the crowd.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Now I ask the police to step back because I figure I could get some respect from my own people. Now we together ain't we.

(Cheers! Screams!)

Hit that thing man.

The band strike back up and James kicks back into "**I Can't Stand Myself**" The stage clear. The crowd calmed. The panic over.

MAYOR

(to a policeman)

Holy shit. He did it.

DEDE
 (sotto)
 Of course he did.

Dede smiles proudly.

**I Don't Want Nobody To Give Me Nothing kicks in over intercut
 Archival footage of Newscasters discussing the last minute
 decision for the concert to go ahead.**

126

INT. ARCHIVAL NEWS REPORT.

126

HEADLINE, under a picture of James: *RACIAL PEACE RESTORED IN
 CAPITOL AFTER RIOTING.*

ARCHIVAL NEWS REPORT
 City officials in Washington DC
 have praised James Brown. Order has
 returned to the city hit by rioting
 largely because of radio and
 television appeals from the soul
 singer over the weekend.

**OVER JAMES' PERFORMANCE AT THE GARDEN AS YOUNG BLACK GUYS
 DANCE.**

JAMES (V.O.)
 In America today you've either got
 to be an entertainer or a ball
 player or what? If you poor, young
 and black, what is there? And you
 ask me why they on the street? It
 ain't politics we watchin'. It's
 economics.

127

INT. JAMES BROWN PRODUCTIONS LEAR JET. NIGHT.

127

James is on the plane with Ben Bart.

JAMES
 You got kids out there that can't
 eat, robbing and stealing and doing
 what they have to do to make it.
 And if you don't do something about
 it we gonna lose the country. I go
 to Harlem, talk to Rap Brown, talk
 to the Nation they call me a
 separatist. Here we're on our way
 to the White House, Pop, and they
 already calling me an Uncle Tom. So
 what I supposed to do?

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Write a check for Rap so he buy rifles, machine guns, rally on 125th and take it south? What it say to you, a street kid from Augusta, Georgia in the White House?

BART

It says you kissin' up to the Man James.

James is taken aback. No-one else in the world could say this.

JAMES

You asking me to turn this plane around and stand up the President?

BART

No. I'm saying who gives a shit. You're already screwed, James. Think about it. If you stand up Lyndon Johnson to go kiss up to the Panthers, you ain't gone be playin' Vegas anytime soon because if they think you can stop a riot, they sure as hell will expect you to start one.

JAMES

So here I am. Just a sorry soul brother whining inside his private jet, huh?

They both laugh. But James is troubled. Bart tone changes.

BART

Don't be scared my friend. Because if *you're* scared, it doesn't end well for the black man. Do your thing, James.

(He looks at him hard)

It's worked for you so far.

128

INT. WHITE HOUSE - NEXT MORNING - 1968

128

CLOSE ON JAMES WITH HIS HEAD TILTED BACK TALKING UPWARD:

JAMES

I want to go to Vietnam. I want to show unity for the boys out there. The beleaguered, the tired and in the dark.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

And we need to bring awareness, and
Mr. President, we need to bring the
super heavy funk.

We widen to see 5'7" James looking up to the 6'4" Lyndon
Johnson. President Johnson shakes James' hand.

128A **INT. HANGER. VIETNAM.**

128A

We are now back in Vietnam at the hanger concert. James
looks right at us.

JAMES

Take it and flip it.

129 **EXT. GOLF COURSE - MORNING.**

129

Ben Bart is playing golf with several friends. Bart drives
the ball straight and hard. We watch as the ball land three
hundred yards down the runway.

Back on the tee box. Ben Bart lays face down dead in the
turf. His friends race to his side in shock.

CLOSE ON:

Ben's face is pressed sideways on the grass. His opened,
dead eyes stare right at us.

130 **EXT. CEMETERY - DAY**

130

A casket lays at the bottom of a grave that has been dug.
TEN MALE FUNERAL ATTENDEES IN SUITS AND YAMMAKAS take turns
shoveling dirt onto Ben Bart's casket.

Dede and James stand to the side. Completely distraught.
James starts to panic and lowers to the ground. Dede catches
him under the arm.

One of the men approach James with the shovel. James can't
bring himself to put dirt on the casket.

131 **INT. RECORDING STUDIO. LOS ANGELES. NIGHT.**

131

BAND MEMBERS FITTED WITH THEIR AFRICAN DASHIKIS are rolling a
funky vamp together into a groove. Clyde hits a fat 'pop pop'
beat. Sweet Charles locks the bass line in to the beat.
Country finds a chunky B-flat-9 rhythm on the guitar and the
groove takes shape.

The door opens. James and Teddy walk in. James and Teddy's hair is cut into a short natural. Everyone looks at each other.

JAMES

Hit it.

The band starts. James makes a few adjustments. Jimmy Nolen strikes up a womp-womp sound on a single string. The horns do the James trademark ladidadidat.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Quit it.

(he pushes the intercom to the booth)

Bring 'em in.

The door opens. 32 children enter the room. Most kids are black, except for a few Mexican children. Dede and Teddy are there, along with some of James' other kids.

JAMES (CONT'D)

How we all doin'. Hope this ain't too late for you folks.

James and Teddy stand before the group. James puts his arms around Teddy as he addresses the kids.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I brought you all here today so I could tell you something very important.

I want you all to know that you can do or be anything you want in this world. Don't let anybody tell you anything different. You understand? When I was a boy I used to shine shoes in front of radio station. Now I own that radio station. You got to build it. And then you gotta learn it... and that's when you earn it.

James gets all the kids around one mic. He puts Dede and Teddy to the side of the kids.

CUT TO:

Later everyone is cued. Maceo whispers to Pee Wee Ellis.

MACEO

You think they fuck up he gone take they pocket money.

Pee Wee laughs and nods his head.

JAMES
We ready fellas?

The groove starts again. James flies into *I'm Black and I'm Proud.*

WHICH PLAYS OVER ADDRESSING US DIRECTLY

JAMES (CONT'D)
I think about a lot of things.
About problems. About solutions.
You know one way of solving a lot
of problems that we've got in this
country...is letting a person *feel*
that they important.
Feel that they somebody. It's it.
Man can't get hisself together...
...until he know *who* he *is* and be
proud of *what* and *who* he *is* and
where he come *from*! WHERE WE ALL
COME FROM!

James leaves us and continues with the song. He looks to the children

JAMES (CONT'D)
Say it loud!

They scream into the mic.

CHILDREN
I'm Black and I'm Proud!

James catches eyes with Teddy. He nods proudly. Teddy smiles.

JAMES BROWN - GHETTO REALITY BEGINS TO PLAY AND CONTINUES
OVER THE NEXT FEW SCENES

131A **EXT. AUNT HONEY'S 1968 HOUSE IN THE LATTER YEARS - DAY** 131A

James and Teddy pull up in front of a small shotgun house in the Terry. They exit and walk up to the house.

131B **INT. 1968 AUNT HONEY'S 1968 HOUSE IN THE LATTER YEARS- DAY** 131B

Aunt Honey, now 70, sits in a chair in front of a small TV. We soon gather that she has "retired" and is at the end of her colorful life.

James has brought Teddy to meet Aunt Honey for the first time.

Teddy extends his hand toward Aunt Honey. Aunt Honey shakes his hand and then brings him in close for an embrace.

132-134 **OMITTED**

132-134

135 **INT. JAMES BROWN PRODUCTIONS. JAMES BROWN'S OFFICE. NIGHT** 135

James is standing in his office bathroom smoking a joint. He lights it and has four or five epic pulls as he scans the walls admiring his framed accolades and gold records.

END GHETTO REALITY:

135AA **INT. JAMES BROWN PRODUCTIONS. NEXT MORNING.**

135AA

James Brown enters his recording booth to find Teddy at the controls. Gertie sits in a chair behind Teddy.

JAMES

You the man, Teddy Brown?

TEDDY

I'm the man, Mr. Brown.

James notices the band sitting idle on the other side of the glass.

JAMES

Gertie. The band ready?

GERTRUDE

They're ready Mr. Brown.

JAMES BROWN

Don't look like it.

James grabs Teddy.

JAMES BROWN (CONT'D)

Come watch how Poppa don't take no mess.

He and Teddy walk straight into the-

135A **INT. JAMES BROWN PRODUCTIONS. STUDIO. DAY.**

135A

The band is there.

JAMES BROWN

Y'all act like y'all don't know
what time it is. What you doin'?

Nothing happens. James looks Maceo in the eye. Maceo approaches.

MACEO

I've been elected spokesman to
speak on behalf of the band.

JAMES

Spokesman? Elected?

MACEO

We asked to get paid on time. We
haven't been paid in weeks. We
asked for scheduled days off. Every
day off we get you make us
rehearse.. We asked to get paid for
recording but you included it in
our salary.

James turns to Teddy. The two stare at each other.

JAMES BROWN

Teddy, go on and wait outside.

TEDDY

Yes, Sir.

Teddy exits.

JAMES

Fellas. I hear ya. I really do. And
I appreciate the honesty. That
can't be easy. No Sir. You got
grievances. You got your own selves
to think about. Hell, you're men. I
dig it.

PEE WEE

I don't think you understand.

James looks to Bobby.

MACEO

We know you owe the government back
taxes.
Your restaurant, radio stations,
recording studios, labels, all
different businesses, Unaccounted
cash passing between them.

(MORE)

MACEO (CONT'D)

It's a mess, Mr. Brown and if you
want us to be a part of it, we
gonna need our cash too. Right now.

James looks at them all for a very long time hiding his
shame.

MACEO (CONT'D)

And most of all none of us ever
want to be fined for anything ever
again.

James nods. Studying them.

JAMES BROWN

I'll tell ya what I'm gonna do. I'm
gonna think about it. That's all.

They look at each other and file out. Waymon, Pee Wee, Maceo,
Kush and Jimmy Nolen file out. Leaving Bobby and James alone.

SILENCE.

He looks at the empty room. Smiling. Unable to show any pain.

JAMES

(He shakes his head.)

It's like I always say Bobby. You
gotta know who you are. You got to
know where you are in this world.
Five minutes ago, those boys were
the best band on the planet. Now
they nothing. Now they a bunch of
sidemen with their hearts beatin'
fast. Maceo comin' in here talking
about my taxes. All I've done for
this country and they comin' after
James Brown? How you gone keep
everybody happy? Huh? And stay on
top? You along for the ride while
everything is groovy and now they
gone kick me when I'm down? People
either on the bus or they off it.

James crosses to the door and opens it for Bobby to exit

JAMES BROWN

(He turns to Bobby.)

Well go on. Get out of here.
Y'might catch 'em they gone need a
singer.

Bobby rises and walks past James into the foyer. He turns.

BOBBY
Negro, what makes you think I'm
leaving? I been here all the time,
Mr. Brown. I'm still here.

James looks at Bobby.

JAMES
See that's the thing about the
funk. The funk don't quit.

BOBBY
Last time I checked.

JAMES
Cause if the funk gone up'n'quit
that's it.

BOBBY
That's why the funk don't quit.

JAMES
Are we done here Mr. Byrd?

BOBBY
I'm afraid we ain't Mr. Brown.

JAMES
Are we done?

BOBBY
I think we got more funk in the
trunk.

James laughs.

JAMES
That's right. Two Musketeers.

Bobby looks at James. Remembers. Beams. James beams back.
Then, James is all business.

JAMES (CONT'D)
What's those kids from Cincinnati.
The New Dapps...Blackenizers? Who
that kid play bass?

BOBBY
(Smiles)
Bootsy.

135B INT. OLYMPIA THEATRE

135B

A pre-show theater in action with stagehands and riggers busy setting up. The new kids are now all in suits and bow ties.

CATFISH

Fancy suit bro'.

BOOTSY

Backatcha slick. How you doin,
Chicken?

CHICKEN

Just shit my pants.

BOOTSY

Easy now. Don't forget. Don't ever
call him James or nothin'. He ain't
no-one but Mr. Brown.

CATFISH

Check.

CHICKEN

Gotcha.

James Brown walks in from the wings. They all stand straighter. He looks at them.

BOOTSY (CONT'D)

Good evening Mr. Brown.

CHICKEN

Mr. Brown.

CATFISH

Mr. Brown.

JAMES

Do that button up son.

(Chicken does)

You know *Kansas City*?

(Blank faces)

You know *Cold Sweat*? Do you know
Please Please?

BOOTSY

Can I stop you Mr. Brown. We been
learning off yo' records since we
was nine years old. You *already*
taught us the songs. So with
respect. We ready. Mr. Brown.

JAMES

They say they ready Mr. Byrd. What
you think?

CATFISH

We been waiting for this moment our
entire lives, Mr. Brown.

JAMES

How old are you son?

CATFISH

Twenty.
(Then)
Mr. Brown.

JAMES

Cats know *Super Bad*?

Bootsy lays down a mammoth bass line on his plugged in bass.

135C

INT. PARIS HOTEL ROOM. LATE AFTERNOON.

135C

The backup singer, Yvonne, nude, carries two glasses of champagne from a wet bar to a very sweaty James who is lying in bed.

YVONNE

Why won't you say it? I said it.
Why won't you say it back?

JAMES

Baby, I gotta get to my show. I
can't be playin' around right now

YVONNE

I love you.

Yvonne rests the cold glass on James' stomach. He squirms.

JAMES

You know I don't drink.

Yvonne pours a little champagne onto James' stomach. She then begins licking it with her tongue.

YVONNE

Say it, Mr. Brown. Say you love me.

In a flash James rolls over and pins Yvonne down on her back. She screams with delight.

He whispers in her ear.

JAMES

Happy now?

She kisses him.

YVONNE

I'm pregnant.

James stares back at her without expression.

135D **FLASH FORWARD - ADULT JAMES, IMMACULATE, LOOKING AT US. 135D**
THE SKYLINE OF PARIS IS BEHIND HIM. 1971

James walks along the outside of Olympia Theatre in Paris in full costume.

JAMES

Now it's true, we work hard. A man gotta work hard if he wanna break ground. And we breaking new ground everyday...

James enter the theatre front door.

135E **INT. OLYMPIA THEATRE. LOBBY. CONTINUOUS. 135E**

James begins walking toward us.

JAMES

My record *Live at the Apollo* is the first R&B album in the history of the world to go top ten. Stayed up in there for 66 weeks..

James walks into the rear of the packed house.

GIRLS AND GUYS SCREAMING, DANCING. JAMES IS INVISIBLE TO THEM.

From the rear of the house, James watches himself and the band performing on stage. He and his band are IN MID-GROOVE. A BEAUTIFUL BLACK DANCER DANCES ON A RISER BEHIND THE BAND.

Vicki Anderson, sings backup.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That record come across. I mean it hit hard!!! Uhn!

135F **INT. OLYMPIA THEATRE. STAGE. CONTINUOUS. 135F**

James walks among his performing band members. He watches himself on stage at the microphone driving the crowd crazy.

JAMES

And slowly, the whole World knew
who we were.

James walks to each band member and places a twenty dollar bill in each of their pockets. They don't see the James who is talking directly to us.

He straightens a band members tie. James turns to stage left and sees his son, Teddy Brown, dancing. He then gives Yvonne a wink who's also standing in the wings looking HOT.

JAMES (CONT'D)

See in showbusiness, you got two parts. You got the show and you got the business. And brother.

(Deadly serious)

You better believe. You looking at both.

He spins around and runs up to the microphone. He replaces himself and begins to sing.

SCREAMS. HORNS VAMPING. James performs out of his skin. A medley of three songs, "Soul Power," into "Sex Machine," into "Super Bad".

Backup dancers and singers are tearing it up!

On James' signal the rag tag band of kids behind the godfather of soul take off like a rocket ship into one of the above songs. It sounds nothing like the old version. Its raw urgent, stripped down. The Bootsy's bass rumbles like trouble brewing and Catfish's over driven guitar slicing clean through the hook.

Before them a standing room crown dance and sing from the stage to all the way back to entrance

James and Bobby look at each other. Holy shit.

James drops into the splits, flips up again.

The crowd is seeing something for the first time on European soil. They erupt with joy and begin dancing in their seats.

CUT TO:

139

INT. OLYMPIA STAGE. SAME NIGHT.

139

The crowd has left. A custodian roams the isles picking up trash. James and Bobby sit on the edge of an empty stage, laughing.

BOBBY

You know what I think? After we put out my next solo album, I bet I could play Paris or the Apollo.

James TUNES IN

JAMES BROWN

How's that?

BOBBY

I was just saying when me and you put out my new record, I bet I could fill this place all myself. No problem.

James stiffens at this comment.

JAMES BROWN

What the hell you talking about? "Fill this place all myself"? "No problem?" You sayin' I'm slippin'?

BOBBY BYRD

No I don't think you slippin'. You James Brown. You ain't never slippin'. I was just...

JAMES BROWN

People copy me, Mr. Byrd. People gonna copy my moves till the earth goes dark. You understand? You think people are gonna buy that record like they buy my record? That what you sayin'?

BOBBY

No.

JAMES BROWN

Who you been tellin' this too? You been telling that to the Apollo?

Bobby gets mad.

BOBBY

No, James! I haven't told nobody but you. We were just talking.

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I thought you be cool with that.
You always been talking about...
About... About... standin' on my
own feet.

JAMES BROWN

Bobby, how you gone stand on your
own feet? You just spent twenty
years gettin' fat on a man's
dollar. I produce a record for you
and now it's gone to your head.
You go talking big behind my back.
You go sneaking round, raising heat
off another man's name. We here, we
doing something and you making
plans sucker?

Bobby gets more upset. He's using a tone with James we've
never heard before.

BOBBY

(Shouting)

I ain't told nobody or made any
plans. We just talkin' about it.
Now. That's it.

JAMES

I'm ashamed of you, Bobby. And you
should be ashamed of you. Now you
tryin' to run around with Vicki.
Don't jive yourself bro'. Now,
Vicki, she could fill this place.

BOBBY

Well, Vicki ain't yours. So, Vicki
and me ain't none of your damn
business.

James smiles.

JAMES

But she's been my business before.

Bobby walks up close to James and stares him in the eye. He
balls his fist.

BOBBY

I can't do this no more, James.

JAMES BROWN

Damn right you can't do this no
more.

BOBBY

I said I can't do this no more.

James looks absolutely poleaxed. THEN. He laughs. And looks at Bobby, almost affectionately.

JAMES BROWN

See, the funny part. You say that like it's a *big* thing. Like "oh my God, Bobby Byrd gone leave James Brown on his own."

Bobby fights to control himself. To find anything left to give.

BOBBY

I ain't leaving you on your own, Mr. Brown. You *already* on your own. Always were.

He shakes his head and walks across the stage. He turns.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Is that God too?

Bobby turns and leaves James ALONE.

140 **INT. OLYMPIA. NIGHT. 1970**

140

Bobby walks across the big empty stage and **for a split second looks right at us**. He continues past us and away.

CROSSFADE TO:

141 **INT. APOLLO CORRIDOR / DRESSING ROOM.**

141

FLASHBACK - Corridor in 1962. The Night of *Live At The Apollo*.

MUSIC: *Wonder When You're Coming Home* plays over:

A woman in a flower print dress and a cheap hat sits on a bench with a coat over her arm. A young Bobby comes out of the dressing room. She stands.

142 **INT. APOLLO DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT.**

142

BOOM! A flashbulb goes off.

James sits next to his mother, on a couch, SMILING Happily, having the moment documented. She is smiling too. Bobby and other guests in the room watch the photographers.

The photographer is ushered out of the room by Bobby Byrd.

JAMES

Bobby? Get everybody out of here
and wait outside.

Bobby ushers the guests outside.

James sits opposite his mother. She is very, very uncomfortable but trying to appear relaxed.

SUSIE

I was on the Subway last week, and the two kids next to me was arguing who was the best, James Brown or Little Willy John. And this one boy, he was saying "James Brown the best" "There ain't no one better than James Brown", he got so mad I thought he was gonna whup this other boy. And then-

James holds up his hand. She falls silent.

JAMES

Why tonight?
(She stops, her face falls.)
Why you come here?

She starts to flap.

SUSIE

Well. Sugar, I live over in Brooklyn... and you my baby and you here playin' the Apollo.

JAMES

I don't want you to feel proud.
I ain't your sugar. I ain't your baby. Not then. Not now. And I don't want you to tell anyone you my momma, because you and me know that ain't true.

SUSIE

Your daddy beat me. Beat you. I stayed because I loved you. I didn't know nothin' about being a wife. Nothin' about being a mother. I did the best I could. I did that.

(MORE)

SUSIE (CONT'D)

I left because I loved you. I ain't had nothing to make no other choice. I was shamed. I was.

He holds up his hand.

JAMES

See I thought about this. I know it weren't personal and that's why this ain't neither. It turned out fine. I didn't need you. I looked after James Brown. Made sure he was OK. No-one else. No-one help me.

She starts to cry.

SUSIE

I never wanted to be a momma. But I carried you, boy. I didn't know nothin' about being a wife or being a momma. But I carried you and I loved you when you were in me. I chose you. I chose you.

JAMES

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

He stiffly offers her a handkerchief.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Clean yourself up. That's it.

James softens.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm James Brown. And James Brown don't need nothing. Don't need nobody.

Susie looks back a James. She doesn't move.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Why are you really here? What do you want?

She shakes her head, searching his face. James looks back unmoved. James reaches in is pocket and pulls out some money. He hands it to her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Here. That's a hundred dollars. I'm sorry but I'm gonna ask you to leave now.

He sits perfectly still as she gets up. She walks to the door and turns to James.

SUSIE

You're so beautiful. You're so pretty.

Susie exits into the party outside and shuts the door.

143 **EXT. CABIN - BARNWELL S.C. 1941. JAMES 8 YRS** 143

We return to the day that Susie left. We stay on her face as she leaves her family behind. Tears stream down her cheek.

James tries to chase after his mother but Joe restrains him.

Joe pulls a pistol from his belt. He fires.

Bark explodes from a tree a few feet from where Susie is walking.

Susie flinches but never turns.

144 **INT. CORRIDOR.** 144

Bobby waits. The door opens, and Susie comes out, tears in her eyes. She looks wildly into Bobby's face who has clearly heard everything. She runs off down the corridor.

Bobby looks through the open door. Devastated, James sits staring at the floor. He looks up at Bobby.

JAMES

Tell Pop to make sure she's taken care of. Whatever she needs.

As Bobby nods, James gets up, walks over to the door, and slowly closes it.

145 **INT. JAMES BROWN'S HOME. 1988. 18 YEARS LATER. JAMES 55 YRS** 145

CLOSE ON - Numerous framed pictures of Teddy span all ages of his life now fill the top of James' dresser.

We widen to find James Brown sitting very alone in his bedroom staring at the pictures of his son.

He wears a bathrobe. His hair is up in rollers. He's twitchy and sweating.

He raises a glass pipe to his mouth, lites the PCP within and inhales it.

146 **EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. LATER THAT DAY. 1988** 146

A peaceful road. SUDDENLY - a pickup truck passes at a hundred MPH. FOLLOWED.. A MOMENT LATER - by nine cop cars.

A cop car pulls up next to James' truck. James looks to the car.

SLOW MOTION SEQUENCE:

In the front a cop drives but James' father, Joe, rides in the back next to his mother, Susie. They stare blankly at James.

Glass shatters in the truck.

SLOW MOTION ENDS.

James turns back to the cop car next to him. The vision of his parents is gone.

Two cops ride together. The cop in the front seat aims his revolver directly at James. It's clear he intends to kill him.

James speeds up as the cop fires. The bullet strikes the truck just behind him.

147 **EXT. GRAVEL PITTS. 1988. DAY.** 147

The pickup truck rolls to a stop. Police cars from different jurisdictions take up positions blocking exit routes.

148 **INT./ EXT. PICKUP TRUCK/ GRAVEL PITTS. DAY.** 148

James sits staring straight ahead. Breathing hard.

JAMES
I'm OK. I'm OK. I'm OK.

LOUD HAILER
*EXIT THE VEHICLE WITH YOUR HANDS
ABOVE YOUR HEAD. DO NOT RUN. DO NOT
ATTEMPT TO START THE VEHICLE.*

James opens the door scattering glass onto the tarmac.

Around the perimeter armed police tense. Keeping James in their sights.

ONLY NOW, YOUNG JAMES STANDS IN PLACE OF HIS ADULT SELF. He stands next to the bullet riddled wreckage of his pickup, hands above his head. He leans back and sings to the sky.

YOUNG JAMES
"I Don't Feel Noways Tired"

149 **INT. PRISON WING. DAY. 1988** 149

A warden walks a dishevelled James along the corridor. They stop. The cell door buzzes open. They put him in the cell.

150 **INT. CELL. DAY.** 150

The doors slide close. CLANK. James leans on the tiny sink. He looks up into the mirror and faces what's he's become. His face is bloated, his eyes wild, hair unkempt. We feel James wanting to turn to us but shame won't allow it.

151 **FLASHBACK - INT. ST. STEPHENS CHURCH. DAY. 1952** 151

BOBBY, NAFLOYD, BABY ROY SARAH AND JAMES sing righteous gospel that first time together in St. Stephens Church.

James is *Really* giving it up singing *Send it on Down*. His voice soars sweetly over the congregation.

MRS. BYRD and GRANDPA watch on. Mrs. Byrd leans forward and catches Bobby's eye. Gives a small nod of approval for James.

Bobby looks to James. They catch eyes. In awe of James' talent, Bobby unconsciously, stops singing. He just stands their watching and listening to his friend.

152 **END FLASHBACK - BACK AT THE MIRROR** 152

James pulls back from the mirror and splashes some water on his face and begins to press his hair down with his hands. He breathes harder and harder as he assesses his life.

He stands straight and proud. Still looking in the mirror, he begins to chant quietly to himself.

JAMES
 James Brown, James Brown. James
 Brown, James brown.

153 **EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. ATLANTA. MORNING. 1993 JAMES 60 YRS** 153

A pool cleaning truck pulls up outside a suburban home. A thirty something white guy gets out with a satchel. He rings on the door.

Bobby Byrd, aged sixty, comes out of his house in a robe and slippers.

POOL CLEANER

Morning Mr. Byrd. Come to open up the pool.

BOBBY

Got a real algae problem.

POOL CLEANER

I'll take a look.

BOBBY

Sure. You need anything, I be inside.

As the Pool Cleaner walks around to the back yard, Bobby walks towards the pool cleaning truck parked on the street.

153A **EXT. STREET. BEHIND TRUCK. MOMENTS LATER.**

153A

Bobby pulls out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket as he walks behind the truck. He pulls out a smoke and lights up.

Bobby soon notices a Limo parked on the other side of the street. He stares at it for a while. The door opens. James Browns gets out of the Limo and waves.

Bobby watches as James approaches. He's clean and sober in a suit looking sharp. James' appearance and presence throws Bobby.

BOBBY

Mr. Brown.

They shake hands.

JAMES

What you doing out here in your robe, Mr. Byrd?

BOBBY

What? Oh. See, I snuck out for a smoke. I s'posed to quit. Vicki don't know.

He laughs. They both do.

JAMES

Well I ain't gone tell.

They laugh a little. When they stop, there's a long lull.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Well I was just passing. Playing a show tonight at the Omni.

BOBBY

Right.

JAMES

Say. Maybe you and Vicki could come along. We got a great new horn section. Tight. We getting there.

BOBBY

We got plans tonight. Vicki got family coming over.

JAMES

Well you think about it. See what Vicki say.

Bobby laughs. Rumbled.

BOBBY

Yeah. She still in charge.

They both chuckle at this. A nod of understanding. But then:

BOBBY (CONT'D)

You look well.. Man. I ain't seen you since-

JAMES

Teddy's funeral.

Bobby pauses, grows uncomfortable. Bobby throws his cigarette to the ground and stomps it out.

BOBBY

Right. Teddy's funeral. Damn. You look well. You shoulda called-

JAMES

You know, Bobby, they still don't know what happened to Teddy and that boy. Those boys weren't drinkin' or doin' drugs.

BOBBY

I know, James.

JAMES

No sir. Nothin' like that. He was a good boy. The car just hit that bridge head on. We ain't ever gone know how or why. They say he didn't feel a thing.

Bobby nods.

BOBBY

That's good, James.

JAMES

But we brought him back to Augusta didn't we? Got him home then sent him on to the Lord.

BOBBY

We did, Mr. Brown. We did.

James stands there, fixedly. The Pool cleaner comes from around the truck, breaks the tension.

POOL CLEANER

OK. Mr. Byrd. I fixed your problem. I'll be back in the Spring to open her up.

BOBBY

I'm much obliged. Do I have to-

POOL CLEANER

No no. We'll send the bill on. Well that's that. Good day Gentlemen.

He gets in his truck and pulls away leaving Bobby and James standing in an awkward silence.

JAMES

Look at that. We got white folk cleaning our pool. Come a long way huh, Mr. Byrd?

BOBBY

Yeah. We come a long way.

Suddenly this is awkward. For both of them. Bobby defuses it:

JAMES
You still makin' the steps, Mr.
Byrd?

BOBBY
Here and there.

JAMES
You hurtin' a little in the hips?

BOBBY
A little. You?

JAMES
Not me. I just get stronger ever
day. Gettin' better every day.

James pulls out two concert tickets from his jacket and hands them to Bobby.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Maybe you and Vicki got some
friends who could come tonight.
Good seats, too.

James turns sharply and walks back to the Limo. He sings to himself.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(Sings)
Oh, Mary Don't You Weep...

Bobby listens. And remembers.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(Sings)
Tell Martha Not to Moan.

He stops and turns to Bobby.

JAMES (CONT'D)
What's the next line?

Bobby looks at James.

BOBBY
I can't seem to recall. Was a long
time ago.

James nods. After a moment Bobby nods.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
See you around Mr. Brown.

Bobby turns. James watches as he walks back to his house.

JAMES
See you around Mr. Byrd.

James walks towards his Limo.

SFX: Audience noise, cheering, whistles, clapping. Louder. Louder.

154 **INT. DRESSING ROOM. 1993. NIGHT.**

154

Show time. James sits in front of the mirror, putting on greasepaint with the assistance of a make-up artists.

A much older Gertrude comes in.

JAMES BROWN
How we doin, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE
To the rafters Mr. Brown. To rafters.

JAMES BROWN
That's good. You two gimme a minute here.

Gertrude and the make-up artist look at each other. They leave him.

Alone, he looks around the dressing room. At the walls. The ceiling fan. Finally at his reflection. He holds his own gaze. We push in, as he fights it. And fights it.

Slowly, inevitably the sound from the auditorium grows. Thousands of people shouting his name: "*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*".

155 **FLASHBACK - INT. JAIL CELL. 1949. DAY.**

155

JAMES AGED SIXTEEN, SITS ALONE, staring at the wall. Incanting his name, quietly. Intently.

JAMES
(Quietly)
JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES BROWN, JAMES BROWN...

156 **INT. AUDITORIUM.** 156

The crowd are going wild.

CROWD

*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

157 **EXT. CHURCH/ DIRT ROAD. DAY. 1941.** 157

Young James, 8, walking through the forest alone, hollering his name.

YOUNG JAMES

*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

158 **INT. AUDITORIUM - EVERYONE CHANTING** 158

CROWD

*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

159 **EXT. BARREN PATH. DAY. 1942.** 159

YOUNG JAMES, nine, battered, bruised and shirtless walks toward us with the number "One" painted on his chest. He says his name to himself over and over.

YOUNG JAMES

(quietly)

*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

We soon realize this is the same path where he discovered the body of the lynched young man.

160 **INT. AUDITORIUM - EVERYONE CHANTING.** 160

We see Bobby and Vicki in the crowd.

Slowly Bobby begins to whisper..

BOBBY BYRD

(To himself)

James Brown. James Brown...

CROWD

*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

DANNY RAY V/O
 ..ladies and gentlemen its
 showtime...the one and only
 JAAAAAAMES BROWN!!!

YOUNG JAMES, eyes closed saying his name over and over.

YOUNG JAMES
*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
 BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

YOUNG JAMES suddenly opens his swollen eyes and looks right at us.

YOUNG JAMES (CONT'D)
 I paid the cost to be the boss.

James leans back, widens his arms and looks to the sky.

166

INT. THE STAGE.

166

James steps forward and strides across the stage to the mic stand.

CROWD
*JAMES BROWN JAMES BROWN, JAMES
 BROWN, JAMES BROWN.*

He looks out over the crowd. Then... He begins to sing a *capella*. He stares right us.

JAMES
*Try me. Try me. Darlin tell me.
 I need you. Try me. Try me.
 And your love will always be true*

The crowd goes silent. All we hear is Mr. Brown's soulful voice.

JAMES (CONT'D)
*Oh I need you (I need you)
 Hold me. Hold me. I want you right
 here by my side. Hold me. Hold me.
 And your love we won't hide*

Slowly Bobby smiles. Tears in his eyes.

THE END.