

Mississippi Exchange

by

Micah Moses

Godsofold@hotmail.com
WGA #1376093

FADE IN:

EXT. FALKNER MISSISSIPPI, COUNTRY ROAD - EVENING

HOLLIS RAY (20) eagerly pedals his bike down a dusty road. A smile lights his face in anticipation of his good friends and his second home, Sweetly's juke joint.

Ahead he sees the small dilapidated shack with four men sitting on the porch. Three of the men he knows, the last is unfamiliar and the smile quickly becomes a look of concern. Within yards of the shack Hollis hops off his bike like he can't get away from it fast enough... the bike keeps rolling.

Hollis comes to an awkward running stop and looks sheepishly at the men. The men watch as the bike continues on. MR. SWEETLY (60), the central figure of the group looks to Hollis...

MR. SWEETLY
Evening Hollis.

HOLLIS
Evening Mr. Sweetly

MR. SWEETLY
There go your bike.

Both Hollis and Mr. Sweetly watch the bike with the other men as it wobbles and finally falls over in the grass. Hollis looks back to Mr. Sweetly...

HOLLIS
Yes sir, I reckoned it would park
itself when it found the
appropriate time.

Hollis looks back to the group and squints as he stares at the stranger. He fidgets nervously, wringing the newspaper in his hands. Mr. Sweetly notices...

MR. SWEETLY
Hollis, this here my cousin Junius
from up round Brownville.

Hollis nods his head as Mr. Sweetly addresses Junius.

MR. SWEETLY
Junius this Hollis Ray, the white
boy we was tellin you about that
been comin over for a while.

JUNIUS (30), a very tall and pleasant looking black man, stands up and extends his hand to Hollis.

JUNIUS

Pleased to meet you Mr. Ray.

Hollis immediately tucks his hands into the back pockets of his coveralls. Junius looks to the others unsure, like he did something wrong.

MR. SWEETLY

He just nervous cuz he don't know you.

TENLEY (60), another older man, takes a swig out of a whiskey bottle and addresses Hollis...

TENLEY

Boy he ain't gonna bite you, he just sayin hello.

PENDLETON, is in his late 20's and is Mr. Sweetly's only grandson. He sits bare footed with the others.

PENDLETON

No sense in acting shy Hollis, inside of five minutes you gonna be gabbin his ear off anyhow.

Hollis squints and addresses Junius.

HOLLIS

Sir.

Hollis takes a tentative step forward and gingerly extends his hand. The two men shake.

HOLLIS

Please to meet you sir.

Junius laughs a bit.

JUNIUS

Oh I ain't no "Sir", Mr. Ray. You can just call me Junius... friends just call me June mostly.

HOLLIS

Well... I ain't no "Mr. Ray" Sir. You can call me Hollis... cuz that's just my name.

(MORE)

HOLLIS(cont'd)

Except my Grams when she's mad, she calls me "Dummy". Actually, she calls me dummy when she ain't mad either.

All the men on the porch laugh. Then Hollis laughs nervously as well.

HOLLIS

She says that's what's called a term of dearment. But I, I don't know what that means.

Pendleton shakes his head...

PENDLETON

I think that mean it ain't as bad as being called stupid.

HOLLIS

Probably you're right.

MR. SWEETLY

Don't matter no way Hollis, cuz you ain't no dummy to us and you close to being kin anyhow.

Hollis smiles at this and stands there for a moment looking at the ground.

PENDLETON

Hollis?

Hollis looks at Pendleton.

PENDLETON

You gonna sit down?

HOLLIS

Uhhh... that'd be nice.

Hollis turns to Tenley very excited.

HOLLIS

Caught me a big old fat rabbit today, just like you taught me Tenley. I snared him good.

TENLEY

Just like I showed you?

HOLLIS

Yes'sir, real fast too.

JUNIUS

Did'ja cook him? They go real nice with a little bit of mashed potatoes and some mustard sauce, or you can just fry'um right up. People say they taste a bit like chicken... but I think they taste kinda like, y'know rabbit mostly.

HOLLIS

Well, I took him inside and fired up that big ol'pot up of Grams but, but he just sat there and got to starin at me with them big ol'eyes... and that wrinkly little nose and I got to starin at him. And we just, well we just stared at each other for a spell...

Hollis drifts off like he's staring at the rabbit and forgets about the conversation.

TENLEY

Hollis?

No answer from Hollis. Pendleton passes a hand in front of Hollis' face.

PENDLETON

Hollis?

HOLLIS

Oh... well his names Charlie.

All the men laugh. Hollis gets it and chuckles a bit as well.

JUNIUS

Uh, pardon Mr. Ray?

HOLLIS

Yes'sir.

JUNIUS

See, the reason I came round was... well, they was tellin me about you teachin readin. An I was wonderin, y'know if it ain't too much trouble, if you might, if you might could teach me how to read too.

Hollis lights right up.

HOLLIS

Oh sure! It's real easy. We just start with your given name, then your surname if you know it cuz some folks don't, then the alphabet, that's real easy too, like A, B, C, D and so on...

Hollis starts using his fingers to count off...

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

...then the "at's", y'know like cat, rat, hat, pat, sat, fat an such. When we finished up with the main lesson, I also do reading out the papers...

Hollis unrolls his newspaper for Junius to see.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

...newspapers are good cuz of all the variety sometimes even the funny's. We can get to learnin right away sir, it's my favorite really.

JUNIUS

Funny's?

HOLLIS

Huh? Yes'sir funny's, they're funny too, just little strips of pure comic enjoyment. They called comic strips too.

Junius still doesn't get it.

HOLLIS

They little pictures with words on'em.

Junius nods his head like he understands.

JUNIUS

Oh.

MR. SWEETLY

Hollis you sayin that learnin's your favorite?

HOLLIS

Yes'sir it certainly is.

Tenley laughs a bit.

TENLEY

Well how you think Ms. Patty gonna feel when she find that out.

Hollis is alarmed.

HOLLIS

Finds what out?

MR. SWEETLY

That you would rather learn then dance with her. She been teachin you an awful long time how to dance. You know she gonna be awfully sad to know you like learnin more than her.

Hollis is deeply concerned now and Mr. Sweetly winks to Pendleton.

PENDLETON

Yes'sir an awful long time.

HOLLIS

...no I didn't mean that I didn't like Ms. Patty.

Tenley joins in on the friendly ribbing.

TENLEY

So you like Ms. Patty?

HOLLIS

Yeah, of course.

PENDLETON

I think she sweet on you too.

Hollis is confused.

HOLLIS

I don't mean I like Ms. Patty, just...

PENDLETON

...then you don't like her hips niether?

HOLLIS

Huh? She got mighty fine hips. I didn't say nothing bout her hips.

TENLEY

Boy you sure are in a heap of trouble when she get here.

HOLLIS

Trouble?

Sweetly chuckles at Hollis' confusion.

MR. SWEETLY

Let's go inside so we can start.

Hollis' head is spinning as he stands with the others.

HOLLIS

It ain't like that though.

Pendleton clasps Hollis on his shoulder.

PENDLETON

You in for it bad when Ms. Patty find out.

HOLLIS

She gonna find out? How? How she gonna find out Pedleton?

PENDLETON

...I'll probably just tell her what you said.

Pendleton flashes a bright smile.

CUT TO:

INT. SWEETLY'S JUKE JOINT - NIGHT

Hollis stands in front of his makeshift class, with newspaper in hand. He privately finishes the comic and laughs his head off as the other's just watch him.

PENDLETON

What it say?

Hollis pays no attention and continues to laugh. ALONZO, the only Puerto Rican of the group, speaks out loud from the back and throws his hands up frustration.

ALONZO

(in Spanish)
What is this?

(MORE)

ALONZO(cont'd)

What are we supposed to be learning when he just sits and reads the comics to himself? Obviously it's something funny, so you'd think he'd share, but no he just keeps reading...

PENDLETON

...I know, I know.

MR. SWEETLY

Uh, Hollis?

JUNIUS

Mr. Ray sir?

Hollis finally looks up.

HOLLIS

Yeah.

JUNIUS

We was just wonderin what the funny was about sir.

Hollis looks down and again laughs at the comic.

HOLLIS

Oh, it's just a little mouse that they made out to be cute. He's called um, Mickey Mouse...

Hollis gets a tad serious for a moment.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

...but really a mouse is a rodent, basically a dirty rat really, they carry lots of germs and diseases an such but they made him up cute though to sell the funnies...

Hollis looks back at the paper and chuckles...

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

...it works though, see.

Hollis spins the newspaper around so they can all see. Only Pendleton can see the characters best from his close position.

PENDLETON

Oh, he black and white. Hey Jame, you see that? He like you, kinda got the same ears too.

Everyone laughs and JAME (20) sinks down, blushing. A knock on the door and Pendleton jumps up to get it.

PENDLETON

Woo wee, that time already.

TENLEY

Sure is, I'll get the whiskey ready.

A dozen or so men and women patrons come streaming through front door. Dancing and good times are what they've come for. The lesson is soon forgotten.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODED AREA - NIGHT

A large black man sprints bare footed through the woods, he's in the grip of panic. Small branches snap off here and there as his arms swing wildly and leaves are stirred under his fast moving feet.

Not far behind him a half dozen white men are in pursuit. Their torches struggle to stay alight as they run, giving off just enough firelight to illuminate the area in front of them keeping their prey in view.

CUT TO:

INT. SWEETLY'S JUKE JOINT - LATER

Hollis and a very pretty Ms. Patty are getting down to some sultry Delta Blues being played in the corner by the three musicians. Others are gathered round as Ms. Patty moves very seductively and Hollis still moves spastic even after two years of coming to Sweetly's. But he's having a great time as usual.

As Hollis skips around he grabs a hold of Junius and the two begin to skip around together, then separately. They both intermingle with the other dancers. Then Junius takes center stage as the others watch. Hollis stops to talk with Sweetly.

HOLLIS

He sure is a fine dancer Mr. Sweetly.

MR. SWEETLY

Ain't he though? I thought you two might get along quite nicely.

(MORE)

MR. SWEETLY(cont'd)

He can teach you thing or two. Get on over there.

HOLLIS

Yes'sir.

Hollis jumps back into the mix as the front door of the shack comes flying open and the VERY large man comes bursting through. WILLIE CARR (30) is out of breath, like he's been running for his life... because he has. The music and dancing abruptly stops. Willie starts talking a mile a minute...

WILLIE CARR

They after me y'all and I didn't do nothin I was just minding my own bidness and they started chasing me for no reason honest they just up an started after me with guns an all an I was just walkin...

MR. SWEETLY

...whoa, Willie Carr, slow down. Who after you, what happened.

WILLIE CARR

The sheriff and them. I didn't do nothin Mr. Sweetly nothin, what ever it is, it wasn't me I swear.

PENDLETON

Sheriff Bailey.

WILLIE CARR

Uh huh, him an the others they chasing me like I was a slave, a slave...

MR. SWEETLY

Now hold on now, hold on.

A voice from outside the joint stops Sweetly.

JIMMY (O.S.)

Mr. Sweetly! Pendleton, we know y'all in there. Come on out.

Sweetly looks to Pendleton.

MR. SWEETLY

Get everyone out the back. Get'em out now. Alonzo you load my shotgun... but keep it in here and ready.

Alonzo nods and takes off. The patrons make their way out the back door.

EXT. SWEETLY'S JUKE JOINT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Pendleton, Tenley, Junius, Alonzo, Jame and Mr. Sweetly step outside. Pendleton leads the way as the men gather on the front stoop.

PENDLETON
Evening Jimmy.

JIMMY
Pendleton. Um, a big negro ran this way a minute or so back. Wouldn't happen to know where he's at would ya?

Pendleton plays dumb.

PENDLETON
A big negro ya said?

JIMMY
Yep, he was mighty big.

Pendleton takes a moment to look over his small group, then nods to Junius.

PENDLETON
Hmmm... this here a big negro.

Jimmy looks at Junius a second.

JIMMY
Nah, wasn't... wasn't that there negro.

PENDLETON
Well what he look like then?

JIMMY
Oh... he was dark that's for sure. He was big about the shoulders. He wasn't big in an off puttin way, but had more a muscular way about him. Had a good stature to him.

PENDLETON
Was he in a fit way?

JIMMY

I reckon I'd call him fit. Yeah fit about describes him... and he was FAST! Blazes was he fast.

PENDLETON

Huh, a negro being chased by a mob of white men... and you say he was fast?

JIMMY

Lord Jesus yes. Had a heck of a time keeping up with him. Had a stride like a giant.

PENDLETON

I see. Would you call him pleasant lookin'?

This question strikes Jimmy as especially odd.

JIMMY

Y'mean, like in a... in a feminine sorta way?

PENDLETON

Yeah.

JIMMY

Truth be told I didn't get good look at his face, what with it being dark an all and him being so dark an all.

Jimmy addresses the group of men he's with.

JIMMY

Anyone get a good look that negro's face?

They shake their heads no.

PENDLETON

Oh, I see you was just chasing some big, dark, fit negro.

JIMMY

And fast.

PENDLETON

...and fast. So it COULD be this here negro.

Jimmy studies Junius for a sec...

JIMMY

Well... I suppose so, but...

SHERIFF ROOSEVELT BAILEY, late 40's break in.

BAILEY

...Jimmy shut up. He's makin a fool of you. Pendleton I know that big lumberin negro ran in there so have him come on out.

PENDLETON

Sheriff I don't know what...

BAILEY

...enough! You want me to set fire to that shack to get him out?

Mr. Sweetly steps thru the other men.

MR. SWEETLY

It's okay Pendleton. Evening sheriff.

BAILEY

Sweetly.

MR. SWEETLY

What this man do, sheriff?

BAILEY

That don't concern you. Just turn him loose so we can go about dealin with him right now.

MR. SWEETLY

You mean gettin him a fair trial for what ever offense he accused of... right?

BAILEY

Right, yeah, exactly... now hand him over.

MR. SWEETLY

Oh, right away sheriff, we don't want to stand in the way of the law.

Pendleton begins to protest as Sweetly turns to leave, then turns back to Sheriff Bailey.

MR. SWEETLY
I'm sorry, excuse my ignorance
sheriff, but what this lumberin
negro name is?

BAILEY
Come again?

MR. SWEETLY
His name. The statured negro with a
good stride y'all chasing... what
his name?

Bailey lets out a little chuckle...

BAILEY
Well Mr. Sweetly, I'm kinda
embarrassed... but I don't rightly
know his name.

MR. SWEETLY
Then how you know who you after?

Bailey turns to his men.

BAILEY
Boy's how do we know this is the
correct negro?

They mumble among themselves then Jimmy speaks up.

JIMMY
He was the one that was runnin.

Bailey turns back to Sweetly.

BAILEY
There ya go, he was runnin.

Mr. Sweetly is genuinely intrigued now.

MR. SWEETLY
So some law breakin incident
occurred an y'all chased the first
negro that ran.

Bailey looks to his group for confirmation and they nod their
heads.

BAILEY
Uhhhh... Yes'sir, that seems to be
the case.

(MORE)

BAILEY(cont'd)

But regardless, this is serious business Sweetly so you hand that boy over and stay out of it.

MR. SWEETLY

Well, I wouldn't exactly feel right about that sheriff as it seems to me that y'all was merely chasing skin color.

Bailey's anger rises.

BAILEY

I ain't gonna stand here and argue all night about this Sweetly. We done talkin.

Bailey turns to his men.

BAILEY

Set it ablaze boys.

The men with torches start toward the shack.

The shack door opens and Willie Carr steps out. The men stop as Willie walks into the group of his friends.

WILLIE CARR

It's alright y'all. Mr. Sweetly, thank ya sir. But if this gonna cause y'all trouble, then I should just go.

MR. SWEETLY

Hold now Willie. Sheriff what this boy did?

BAILEY

That's none of your business Sweetly.

MR. SWEETLY

Well we ain't fixin to turn him loose till we know the charges against him.

Bailey huffs under his breath.

BAILEY

Only cuz we go back Mr. Sweetly and only cuz of that. Let me talk to the boys.

Bailey turns to confer with his men. Sweetly whispers over his shoulder to Junius.

MR. SWEETLY
Junius, them legs still like
greased lightnin'?

Junius smiles.

JUNIUS
Faster than that.

MR. SWEETLY
Bout how quick you can make it to
Brownville?

JUNIUS
Bout ten minutes.

Sweetly nods his head. He speaks to Junius but keeps his eye on Bailey.

MR. SWEETLY
I want you to run over to
Brownville and fetch my cousin
Douglas and his brothers. These men
fixin to do wrong by Willie Carr...
and we can't let that happen.

JUNIUS
Ought they bring guns.

Sweetly looks directly at Junius.

MR. SWEETLY
They ought.

Junius sneaks off around the back and melts into the night as Bailey turns back to Mr. Sweetly.

BAILEY
One of two options is fixin to take
place here Sweetly. You either give
him up... or y'all get your just
due as well.

Pendleton steps defiantly forward.

PENDLETON
Well he ain't about going no where.

BAILEY

You stay out of this Pendleton,
that mouth already got you in
trouble plenty of times.

Tenley grabs Pendleton by his elbow and whispers harshly to him.

TENLEY

Boy watch your tongue you fixin to
bring hell down on us all.

Pendleton throws a hard stare at Tenley.

PENDLETON

You wear the skin color of a proud
black man, but there ain't nothin
proud about you is there?

Pendleton snatches his elbow back as Jame speaks up from the side.

JAME

Pendleton speakin for all of us.
Willie ain't goin no where.

BAILEY

Willie this is a bad decision.
These people gonna get hurt cuz of
you. You want that?

Willie looks at his friends then at Bailey.

WILLIE CARR

But I didn't do nothin.

BAILEY

Then you come with us and we'll
decide that.

PENDLETON

You'll decide that with a noose and
some double odd buck.

BAILEY

You shut your mouth boy!

Hollis steps out of the shack, wringing his newspaper and walks the few feet by the black men. One of Bailey's men, Jimmy, gets his attention and points to Hollis...

JIMMY

Bailey, lookie yonder.

BAILEY
 What? Hollis? Boy what the hell in
 God's creation is you doing over
 there?

HOLLIS
 Nothin.

Bailey takes a step forward.

BAILEY
 Nothin? Was you inside that shack?

Hollis glances at the shack, then to Bailey.

HOLLIS
 Yes'sir.

BAILEY
 Well please tell me I'm dreamin, an
 just upon happenstance you come
 waltzin into this nightmare. Tell
 me that or something similar. Or,
 or tell me that you was kidnapped
 by these folks and dragged here
 against your will. Please tell me
 that at least?

HOLLIS
 No sir. You ain't dreaming and no
 one forced me here.

BAILEY
 You mean to tell me you down here
 on your own free will?

One of Bailey's men pipes up.

REDNECK #1
 You consortin with coloreds?

HOLLIS
 I don't know nothin about coloreds,
 but I was having fun with
 Pendleton, Alonzo and such. My
 friends been teaching me how to
 dance. You should see Roosevelt I'm
 gettin real good...

Hollis gets animated and starts to do a little jig.

HOLLIS
 My friends taught me this one...

He performs an awkward little movement...

HOLLIS

And this one called...

Whistles and small breathes of exasperation come from the men in Baileys group. Hollis takes notice of the stares and stops dancing.

BAILEY

Your friends? FRIENDS?! This where you been comin all these nights to do your "fun dancin"?

HOLLIS

Yes'sir.

BAILEY

Cousin... I knew you was slow, but I didn't know you was stupid too?

PENDLETON

He ain't stupid, he smarter than all us...

Bailey turns to Pendleton...

BAILEY

...did I say something to you? Did I?! Anybody's smarter than you any how.

Bailey turns back to Hollis.

BAILEY

Hollis, I don't understand why you down here with all this... this mixed bag of chocolate tricks.

HOLLIS

We was just learning and having fun. I was teaching them reading and they was teaching me how to dance. But Ms. Patty... y'know Ms. Patty says they was mostly teaching a white boy how loosen up and shake some of the uppity stiffness out my hips.

Bailey starts out condescendingly.

BAILEY

Oh, I see. So you teachin them?

HOLLIS

Yes'sir.

Bailey turns to his men.

BAILEY

You hear that boys, the dummy is teaching the dummies.

The men laugh as Bailey turns back to Hollis.

BAILEY

You even know what'chu doin boy? This a game to you? You know who these people are?

Bailey begins to slowly pace and starts pointing at the men individually. He starts on Tenley...

BAILEY

Look over here, you got this ol'nasty drunk Creole, started drinking when his pappy passed and never been sober since. Never. Couldn't climb out of a bottle if you gave him a ladder and two helping hands.

HOLLIS

Your brother Ellis is a drunk. You mention quite often that he couldn't stay on a wagon if his naked ass was tacked to it. You say that.

Bailey raises his voice to try and counter Hollis.

BAILEY

This Creole even Ran out on his woman at that! What kind of man does that Hollis?

He moves on to Pendleton...

BAILEY

You got this here ignorant monkey that don't know a shoe from a pigskin and I know that for a fact. Been dumb as a kid and even dumber as a man.

HOLLIS

Grams calls me a dummy, but she said Jesus has a soft spot for children and dummies named Hollis.

Bailey ignores Hollis and turns his attention else where.

BAILEY

Look back there... I see these two other dirty sons of midnight back here loiterin.

He addresses Mr. Sweetly directly.

BAILEY

Sweetly, who are these two other illiterate rascals you got hiding back there?

Sweetly places a hand on Alonzo's shoulder.

MR. SWEETLY

This here Alonzo, from up round Bainbridge.

Bailey settles in, enjoying the exchange.

BAILEY

A Mexican from up round Bainbridge, go on.

Sweetly points to the other man.

MR. SWEETLY

This here Jame, we took him in. He from round Tallahassee.

BAILEY

Jame from round Tallahassee. You hear that boy? See what I mean Hollis? You was teachin them readin? God almighty, you can't teach colored's nothin, because that skin prevents them from thinkin. This man can't even pronounce a simple name...

Bailey looks straight at Sweetly for emphasis...

BAILEY

...it's "James" for all those who can't spell, with an "s". An that means it's plura.

(MORE)

BAILEY(cont'd)

Put up your hands up if you can't
even spell your own name.

None of the black men do.

BAILEY

C'mon now, put them hands up.

Bailey has his back to his men, but one of them tentatively raises his hand half way up. Then Jimmy shyly puts his hand in the air as well. Bailey see's none of this.

Sweetly takes his turn.

MR. SWEETLY

His name is Jame... it's singular,
not plural. And we can all spell
our name just fine sheriff, cuz of
Hollis.

BAILEY

My patience is awfully, awfully
thin Mr. Sweetly and I'm trying
with great restraint not to use
hard words with you. And who gives
a damn about HIS name. So you took
in some high yella octoroon and a
spic... so what? That still don't
make him but a light skinned nigga
with some spice.

Alonzo has had enough. He angrily curses Bailey and starts
after him...

ALONZO

(in Spanish)
I'm a proud Puerto Rican, not a
Mexican, and we don't hide behind
our badges and terrorize innocent
people like you, you filthy
country...

He's stopped by his friends as Bailey stands waiting.

BAILEY

Whoa, you better calm that Mexican
down Sweetly.

The minority group settles him down.

BAILEY

Now I'm tired of this. Hollis you
come over here, we got other
bidness to deal with.

Sweetly looks to Hollis who has his head down, ashamed. He doesn't quite know the details but he feels the weight of previous tension has now shifted to him.

TENLEY

Nobody holdin him here sir.

BAILEY

Cousin you come over here.

Hollis stays put for a moment, then slowly starts to walk toward Bailey. Bailey lifts his head higher, arrogantly like he's won a victory. Hollis stops, confused. He looks back toward his friends.

BAILEY

Come on boy.

Jimmy calls out.

JIMMY

Better do what the sheriff says
Hollis.

Hollis takes a couple more steps, then stops.

BAILEY

Now.

HOLLIS

I... I wanna stay with my friends.

Bailey has had enough. He steps forward to cross the short distance to Hollis. He throws the boy on the ground. He starts to rough him up and slap him hard as he explodes...

BAILEY

They ain't your friends boy! Don't
you understand that? They coloreds
and that's all they'll ever be.

Hollis is scared and confused. He begins to cry.

HOLLIS

I didn't do anything wrong...

Baileys men start to cheer him on as he beats Hollis...

BAILEY

...are you thick headed?!

HOLLIS

Mr. Sweetly... help.

Sweetly stares at his friend, wanting to help. A tear rolls down his cheek.

HOLLIS
Help me. I didn't do anything wrong.

BAILEY
They colored's!

Hollis finds his voice amid the blows and yells out...

HOLLIS
I don't know what the means!

Bailey stops, he's stunned. His men are as well. Bailey stands over Hollis panting. He begins almost to himself...

BAILEY
You don't know what that means?

Bailey looks to his men.

BAILEY
He don't know what that means.

Bailey puts his hand down in Hollis' face.

BAILEY
Look at my hand.

Hollis turns his face away thinking he's going to get hit again.

BAILEY
Look at my HAND!

Hollis finally turns to look. Bailey steps to the side and grabs Sweetly. He drags the older man over to Hollis.

BAILEY
Now look at his hand. You see that color boy? See that! That is one hundred percent nigga skin. You see that now? You see that! A white man and a nigga don't you get that?

The demonstration still doesn't quite register.

HOLLIS
No... I don't understand.

Bailey sighs and he gives up. He lets go of Sweetly.

BAILEY

My God, you just a dumb and stupid
cracka aren't you boy. You too
simple to learn the difference.

Sweetly still stands close to Bailey. He reaches down and
helps Hollis up.

MR. SWEETLY

Maybe if we're all that simple,
then none of us would worry bout
color.

Bailey turns to Sweetly appalled that he's heard such a
thing.

BAILEY

People will always notice the
difference between white and a
colored... that's just fact.

He points a finger at Sweetly to punctuate...

BAILEY

Fact!

Hollis looks at his cousin.

HOLLIS

Why?

Bailey is momentarily confused.

BAILEY

Why what?

HOLLIS

Why?

BAILEY

What do you mean why?

HOLLIS

If you're talkin about their skin
color, that don't make'em bad
people. So why?

BAILEY

Hollis I don't know why. That's
just the way my daddy taught me,
his daddy taught him and so on for
as far back as I can remember.

(MORE)

BAILEY(cont'd)

That's just the way we learn cuz
it's the right, normal way things
are supposed to be. That's why.

Tenley takes a step forward.

TENLEY

Things will change...

He looks to Pendleton, then back to Bailey.

TENLEY

...some day, give it time, but some
day.

BAILEY

Things ain't NEVER gonna change
Creole.

Bailey takes a deep breath as his anger builds. He addresses
the whole minority group.

BAILEY

In your dumb heads you may think
things change, but it's been like
this and it'll always be like this.
It don't matter if a hundred years
pass from now, understand that? It
don't matter how many generations
from now your dirty mixed blood
gets passed down through your
darkie offspring. You know why?
Because there will always be people
like me that know your kind... can
smell your kind no matter how much
you think your monkey blood gets
filtered to the next generation.
Regardless of how much of that
brown taint you think you can wash
off you... I can still smell nigga.

He waves his hand in a flourish for emphasis, addressing
everyone...

BAILEY

And that's all you'll ever be.

Everyone is quiet. Only the slight crackle of the torch fire
and the heavy breathing of Bailey is heard. He stands there
for a moment, all eyes on him.

MR. SWEETLY

Then learn different.

BAILEY

What did you say?

MR. SWEETLY

Learn different. You trying to say things the way they are, just because you say so, without a reason... but that ain't so. I've known you all your life Roosevelt Bailey. You was on the right track and you were once a good man... a fair and promisin man. But you ain't a good man no more.

BAILEY

Promisin? You want promisin? You just keep running that tongue and I promise that you'll find out...

MR. SWEETLY

...any promises you make are filled with a sick kind of poison that just seeps from you to the next one around you because you convince yourself that you're right... but you ain't...

BAILEY

...that's enough out of you old man...

Sweetly comes at Bailey with a stern voice full of authority.

MR. SWEETLY

You got so much bitterness and discontent in your life that you're blinded by color and you don't even know why... you don't know why. You only learned to focus on the color of a mans skin, instead of learning to live your life through the eyes of a child.

He looks to Hollis...

MR. SWEETLY (CONT'D)

...cuz a child don't see color.

Sweetly softens a bit as he addresses Bailey.

MR. SWEETLY

Isn't it exhausting to always judge a man by his skin color before you know to judge him by what's inside his heart and by the way he carries himself?

Bailey steps closer seething with anger.

BAILEY

I said enough Sweetly.

MR. SWEETLY

It's what YOU learned though ain't it? Why can't WE change that Roosevelt?

Sweetly points to Hollis...

MR. SWEETLY

I'm telling you, that boy right there don't know color and he don't NEED to know color. But you just bound and determined to force him to see it, to make him aware of a difference... when we all the same...

Bailey slaps Sweetly hard across the face. Instantly Sweetly puts a hand up to stop his men from moving on Bailey.

BAILEY

I got no nigga in me.

Bailey turns and walks toward his men. Sweetly recovers and turns his head back to face Bailey. He puts a finger to his lip and pulls it away with blood on it. He looks at the finger then holds it out for Bailey to see...

MR. SWEETLY

Same color as yours.

Bailey freezes mid stride.

HOLLIS

We all the same.

BAILEY

No we ain't.

HOLLIS

Even Mr. Ralph Emerson wrote before...

Hollis taps his temple thinking hard.

HOLLIS

...uh he said, "*Compound it how she will, star, sand, fire, water, tree, man... it is still one stuff and betrays the same properties*". That means we all the same. That's what it means.

His anger starts to boil. Jimmy talks low to Bailey.

JIMMY

Enough talkin sheriff, time for results.

Bailey turns around to face the minorities. He addresses Hollis...

BAILEY

You with them then?

Hollis quickly looks his friends over, then back to Bailey. He nods his head yes.

HOLLIS

They my friends.

Jimmy continues with Bailey.

JIMMY

Time to show the monkeys where they belong.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. FRONT OF SWEETLY'S JUKE JOINT - NIGHT - LATER

In the distance, through the trees, eye's reflect the fire light. Singular, black faces emerge from the tree line, about a dozen in all with Junius leading the way.

As he approaches, shock and disbelief quickly spread across Junius' face. The tragedy is evident in his eyes as he falls to his knees and tears stream over his cheeks. The cross that burns off to the side highlights his agony.

Others run past him, crying and yelling out in pain toward their loved ones who now hang from the tree.

One by one, seven pair of bare feet are revealed dangling lifelessly above the ground. First a few black, then a pair of lighter colored feet... the last pair are all white.

FADE TO BLACK.

-End-