

The Good, Bad, and Ugly

Written by
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FADE IN:

EXT. AMERICA - 1920S - MONTAGE

Flappers dance in smoky clubs.

Gangsters spray Tommy guns in alleyways.

Babe Ruth slams a home run at Yankee Stadium.

Charlie Chaplin slips in a silent film.

A city fades into the sea.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

They called it the Roaring Twenties.
Gangsters. Baseball. Silent movies. A city
swallowed by the sea.

EXT. AMERICA - 1800S - FLASHBACK - DAY

A split map: North and South divided.
Plantations buzz with slave labor. Northern cities rally protests.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Violence didn't start in the twenties. It came
from the chains of slavery.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

ABRAHAM LINCOLN sits at his desk, pen trembling in his hand. He signs the
Emancipation Proclamation.

LINCOLN
(softly)
Let it end.

Applause. Then —
BANG!
Lincoln collapses.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Freedom on paper. Hatred in the streets.

EXT. JENKINS SETTLEMENT, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

A dusty, sun-baked town. Kids run barefoot. Women hang laundry. Men till
the fields.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Jenkins Settlement. Where everyone was
family, by blood or by marriage.

EXT. DIRT ROADS - DAY

A child trips over rocks. A shoe heel snaps off.

MOTHER (V.O.)
We patched shoes till they couldn't hold
patches.

Wagons rattle down rocky roads, on the verge of falling apart. Horses
stumble, losing shoes.

INT. SMALL CABIN - NIGHT

Children study by candlelight.
A stern FATHER paces.

PAPA FATE
You will finish school. You will graduate.

Kids nod, exhausted but determined.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Eighth grade was enough to teach. Enough to
survive.

EXT. OAK GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Gospel music drifts from inside.
SAMMY TAYLOR (20s, tall, sharp suit) sings with a quartet.

MOTHER, young and hopeful, watches from a pew.

MOTHER (V.O.)
When my brothers and sisters left Mississippi...
I stayed for Sammy Taylor.

Their eyes lock.

EXT. HILLTOP HOUSE - DAY

A run-down shack, high on blocks. Gaps between boards.

SAMMY and MOTHER hammer planks, laughing.

MOTHER (V.O.)
We patched that old house... and made it
home.

A baby's CRY cuts through.
JOHN WESLEY is born.

INT. EMMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

EMMA holds her newborn — pale, almost glowing.

MOTHER rocks the baby, puzzled.

MOTHER
(softly)

She's albino.

Emma and her husband GEORGE exchange nervous looks.

EMMA
(relieved)
She's ours. That's all that matters.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

A beat-up bus, "DETROIT" sign in the window, loads desperate families.

MOTHER hugs her siblings goodbye.

MOTHER
Stay safe. Don't look back.

The bus pulls away, kicking up dust.

EXT. AMERICA - 1940s - MONTAGE

Protesters demand equal rights.

Violence breaks out in the streets.

Families cling tighter.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
They fled lynchings. They fought for names.
For dignity. For life.

EXT. HILLTOP HOUSE - SUNSET

MOTHER stands tall, holding John Wesley.

MOTHER
We just wanted what everyone else had. A
home. A name. A chance.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - 1940s - DAY

Crowds fill the streets. Black, White, Brown — hands in fists, signs raised high.

Tension, hope, revolution in the air.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In the North and East Coast, alliances were forming.

People of color, and even some Whites, demanded justice.

EXT. HARLEM - DAY

A MAN strides proudly down the street — regal, powerful.

This is MARCUS GARVEY (40s), dressed in royal garb, a black king in a modern world.

He rides in a horse-drawn carriage, standing tall.

GARVEY

(shouting to the crowd)

You are kings! You are queens! Stand and reclaim your glory!

The crowd cheers wildly.

EXT. STREET CORNER - LATER

Small groups gather, whispering urgently.

Flyers with Garvey's face pass from hand to hand.

MAN IN CROWD

(whispers)

They say the government's watching him.

WOMAN

(whispers back)

Good. Means he's dangerous... to them.

EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - DAY

Newspapers slap against stands:

"MARCUS GARVEY DEPORTED"

Garvey boards a ship in chains, but his eyes blaze with pride.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

They shipped him out... but they couldn't kill
the fire.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

Another man rises — DREW ALI (30s), charismatic, calm.

He teaches a small group gathered under a tree.

DREW ALI

Drop the master's names. Return to Bey. El.
Ali.
You are not who they named you to be.

Heads nod. New hope lights their faces.

EXT. JENKINS SETTLEMENT, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

Dust kicks up in the fields.

MOTHER (early 30s) carries a heavy basket, sweat streaming down her face.
Children trail behind her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In the South, life was still survival.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - NIGHT

Mother cradles a tiny baby. Her face is heavy with grief.
A small wooden box — a coffin — sits nearby.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

By 1952, she had lost four babies.
James Robert. Loretta. Betty Joe. Josephine.

She clutches the living close:
Robert Earl, Mary Lynn, Wanda Jean, and Jerry Wayne.

EXT. ALABAMA - MILITARY AIRFIELD - DAY

Black pilots, the TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, climb into planes, leather jackets tight,
goggles on.

COMMANDER

(voice booming)

Prove them wrong, boys. Fly like hell.

Engines roar to life.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - BROOKLYN - DAY

JACKIE ROBINSON (20s) steps up to first base, the crowd roaring — part cheers, part boos.

He adjusts his glove, jaw set.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mother lies in bed, pale, frail.

John (9) stands by her side, confused and scared.

MOTHER

(weak)

John... help me. Hold Jerry for me... so he can nurse.

John awkwardly positions the baby.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

She was crippled. John had to become the man of the house.

MONTAGE:

- John stirs a pot of watery grits.
- He cracks a few eggs, adds baking powder to make them fluff.
- He ties his little brother's shoes.
- He carries water from the well.

EXT. WOOD YARD - DAY

Mother drags heavy bark, stripping it off logs.
Sweat soaks her clothes.

Other workers — rough men — eye her with pity and respect.

EXT. MOTHER'S YARD - DAY

A truck pulls up.

MR. BUCKHAULT (50s, gruff but decent) climbs out.

He blows the horn.
John helps Mother onto the porch.

Mr. Buckhault shakes his head sadly.

MR. BUCKHAULT
I can't, Hattie. I can't put you to work in this
shape.

He tips his hat, climbs back into his truck, and drives away.

Mother watches him leave.

She grips the porch rail, hard.

MOTHER
(to herself)
Lord... they got nobody but me.

She calls out.

MOTHER
John! Bring me a chair.

John drags out a chair. Mother sits, stares at the sky.

MOTHER
(voice cracking but strong)
Lord, I'm gonna sell whiskey, beer, wine...
cook food... feed these people... and raise my
babies.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

Papa Fate, in a crisp suit, marries a smiling woman, ADDIE M. MILLIAN.

Mother watches from a distance, emotion unreadable.

EXT. SMALL TOWN BAR - NIGHT

Sammy Taylor, once dashing, now ragged and drunken, plays a sad tune on
his guitar.

Women laugh too loud. Men curse.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Sammy... handsome, charming... but sorry.

Mother rocks Jerry on the porch, listening to the distant music.

MOTHER

(quiet, to Jerry)

We got us. That's all we need.

She kisses the baby's forehead.