

SAMMY

Written by

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Based on the book

"Yes I Can" by
Sammy Davis Jr. - Jane and Burt Boyar

INT. VAUDEVILLE STAGE - NIGHT

A banner across the stage reads, "HOLIDAY in DIXIELAND."

The hall is packed with a loud rambunctious crowd.

A very pregnant ELVERA SANCHEZ is dancing in a chorus line. Watching in the wings is a tuxedo-clad SAMMY DAVIS Sr. He smiles wide as she exits the stage holding her back.

SAMMY SR.

What a trouper!

ELVERA

This trouper is about to drop.

He tenderly kisses her and takes her arm as he leads her away.

SAMMY SR.

Let's get you a seat.

Sammy Sr. bounces back to the wings to a waiting WILL MASTIN, also tuxedo-clad, as the announcer bellows, "and now the dancing dual of Will Mastin and Sammy Davis Sr.!"

They enthusiastically take the stage to loud applause and proceed to perform a dance routine.

INT. TENANT APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DECEMBER 8, 1925 - NIGHT

On a snowy, cold winter night, in a poorer tenant apartment, a baby is born to a Cuban mother, Elvera, and an African American father, Sammy Sr.

A lamp by the bed illuminates a mother in labor.

The baby, SAMMY DAVIS Jr., screams loud and long as he comes into this world. A NURSEMAID tends to the mother.

NURSEMAID

Whew, he's a lively one.

ELVERA

He's full of fire.

NURSEMAID

I'll say.

INT. LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nervously pacing is Sammy Sr.

SAMMY SR.
(to himself)
Listen to the lungs on that baby.

After a few minutes, the nursemaid emerges from the bedroom carrying the still screaming baby. She hands the baby to an uncomfortable, stumbling, Sammy Sr.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
(shocked)
What, how, what am I supposed to do?

NURSEMAID
Comfort him. Talk to him. His mother will feed him after I tend to her.

SAMMY SR.
He's a boy?

NURSEMAID
Yes, you have a boy.

He smiles wide and starts to tear up.

SAMMY SR.
I have a son.

The nursemaid returns to the bedroom.

Sammy Jr. starts to calm down as he and his father look into each other's eyes.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
(tearing more)
My son.

Sammy Jr. is cooing now.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
You're going to be something.

A knock on the door

Sammy Sr. swings the door open still holding his son in his arm. In pounces, Will Mastin, dressed in a tuxedo.

WILL
(surprised)
What, look! Your baby is here!

SAMMY SR.
He sure is.

WILL
He?

SAMMY SR.
(proud)
That's right I got a son, Sammy
Davis Junior.

WILL
That's great. Now give him to his
mama and get dressed, we gotta get
to the show.

SAMMY SR.
Okay, okay.

Sammy Sr. knocks on the bedroom door. After a minute the
nursemaid appears at the door.

NURSEMAID
You can come in now.

She takes the baby from Sammy Sr. and places him in his
mother's arms.

Sammy Sr. sits on the bed and strokes Elvera's hair. She
starts to breastfeed.

SAMMY SR.
He's beautiful!

ELVERA
He's loud.

SAMMY SR.
Maybe he'll be a singer/dancer,
like me.

ELVERA
Dancers run in the family.

SAMMY SR.
I'll have him on the stage as soon
as he starts walking.

A tap on the bedroom door.

WILL
(oc)
We gotta go.

Sammy Sr. jumps up, grabs his tuxedo, and heads to the
bathroom.

ELVERA
You're leaving?

SAMMY SR.
(oc)
You know I have to. Gotta get to
the show.

ELVERA
I know.

SAMMY SR.
(oc - to the nursemaid)
The nurse can stay, I'll pay extra?

NURSEMAID
Yes, I can stay.

Sammy sr. quickly emerges from the bathroom kisses his wife
and child before bounding out the door.

SAMMY SR.
I'll be home right after the show!

ELVERA
Don't forget, I've got a career
too!

INT. LAFAYETTE THEATER, HARLEM - NIGHT

Elvera is dancing in a chorus line as Sammy Sr. watches from
the wings. He is holding a fussy Sammy Jr.

The number ends and the dancers rush off stage.

Sammy Sr. pushes Sammy Jr. into her arms. She clumsily takes
him.

SAMMY SR.

I gotta go.

ELVERA

Okay, but we gotta do something different.

Sammy Sr. rushes off.

SAMMY SR.

I know, I know.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Elvera carrying Sammy knocks on a door in a dark hallway. A female voice screeches.

FEMALE

(oc)

Come in!

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Elvera enters a small, dirty, low-rent apartment. An equally unkempt female is sitting in a chair smoking and drinking a beer.

ELVERA

Thanks so much for doing this.

FEMALE

Just so those dollars keep coming.

Elvera hands her two dollars.

Elvera bends down and kisses Sammy.

ELVERA

I'll be back after the show. Love you baby.

Sammy Jr. stands motionless as his mother rushes out the door. He stares at the female who goes back to reading a magazine not acknowledging Sammy. Sammy plops on the floor.

FEMALE

Better not fuss.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

GRANDMA DAVIS, elderly and heavy-set, knocks on the apartment door. A determined look on her face.

FEMALE

(oc)

What!

GRANDMA

You got my grandbaby in there?

After a few seconds, the female comes to the door and opens it a crack.

FEMALE

Who are you?

GRANDMA

(stern)

You got Sammy in there? I'm his grandmother.

FEMALE

Who's Sammy?

GRANDMA

(louder)

The baby you been watching!

FEMALE

Oh, that's his name.

She opens the door and steps aside. Grandma Davis brushes past her and picks up Sammy.

Sammy is dirty and his clothes are soiled.

GRANDMA

Why is he so dirty.

FEMALE

I don't know, kids get dirty.

Grandma Davis scowls at the female.

GRANDMA

I'll be taking him!

FEMALE

Okay with me. He wasn't supposed to be here all night anyway.

GRANDMA

(angry)

Has he eaten?

FEMALE

No one told me to feed him!

Grandma picks up Sammy and leaves in a huff.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER - DAY

Grandma Davis is sitting in a chair reading to Sammy Jr.

Sammy Jr. is cleaned up and he is wearing new clothes.

A knock at the door and Sammy Sr. enters.

SAMMY SR.

(somber)

Hi, mama.

GRANDMA

It's about time.

SAMMY SR.

I know.

GRANDMA

I ain't goin raise no more babies!

SAMMY SR.

I know. I'll think of something.

GRANDMA

Where's that wife of yours?

SAMMY SR.

She left.

GRANDMA

(loud)

She left!

SAMMY SR.

She left. She packed up and was gone when I got home from the club. She had to dance in Atlantic City.

GRANDMA

What about Ramona? Where's your baby girl? And what about this one?

SAMMY SR.

My baby daughter is with Elvera's family.

GRANDMA

What kind of mother is that?

SAMMY SR.

I know but it's who she is, who we are.

GRANDMA

No kind of mother would do that.

SAMMY SR.

I know. She hasta dance, I guess.

GRANDMA

More than raising her babies? What are you going to do with this three-year-old?

Sammy Sr. pauses as if to think.

SAMMY SR.

Take him on the road with me, I could do that.

GRANDMA

Hell, Sam, that ain't no life for a child.

SAMMY SR.

I know, mama.

GRANDMA

(tense)

I love my grandkids but I ain't goin raise them and he can't go on the road with you!

SAMMY SR.

I can't give up the act, what would I do? There ain't no jobs.

GRANDMA

Poor child.

SAMMY SR.

Come on son. I'm his father and I say he goes on the road with me. I'm not going to let Elvera take him away from me I don't know where he'll end up. Besides I want him with me.

Grandma shakes her head.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Sammy Jr. is staring out the train window at his grandma standing on the platform. They wave to each other. He looks sad.

Sammy Sr. puts his arm around him.

SAMMY JR.

Daddy, where are we going?

SAMMY SR.

We're going into show business, son.

INT. PITHEON THEATER, BACKSTAGE - DAY

Sammy Jr. is standing by himself among the hectic scene of a vaudeville show as the performers rush past him. He looks bewildered and a little scared. He moves over and stares at the stage.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sammy Sr. is dressing in his tuxedo as Sammy Jr. sits on the bed watching.

SAMMY SR.

How do I look?

Sammy Jr. shrugs his shoulders.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

Now you stay in this room. I'll be back after the show.

Sammy Jr. remains quiet as he watches his father.

Sammy Sr. hugs and kisses his son before rushing out of the room.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

Be a good boy. I'll be back soon.

A sad Sammy Jr. is left alone. He lays his head on the bed.

Shadows show time passing until Sammy Jr. is in total darkness. He slowly closes his eyes and falls asleep.

It's morning and Sammy Jr. is jolted awake by the door opening.

Entering the room is an upbeat Will Mastin.

WILL

Hi, little guy.

SAMMY JR.

Where's daddy?

WILL

A, he got tied up. He told me to come over and feed you.

SAMMY JR.

Oh.

WILL

Let's see, he said there was some malted milk. Here we go.

Will proceeds to mix the malted milk with hot tap water.

Sammy Jr. Gulps his food as Will sits and watches.

WILL (CONT'D)

It's not good you being here by yourself all this time. Let's see.

Will looks around the room.

WILL (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm goina to gives you a bath
in the sink, and then I'll take you
to the theater.

He then makes a funny face at Sammy Jr. making him laugh.
Sammy Jr. makes a funny face back. They giggle together. This
continues as he baths him.

INT. PITHEON THEATER, BACKSTAGE - DAY

Sammy Jr. is wandering around the hectic scene. He stops to
watch his father and Will perform on stage.

Sammy Jr. continues to wander around through the chaos until
he enters the makeup room. He watches a performer apply
makeup. The performer finishes and departs. Sammy Jr. takes
her place and proceeds to do the same.

Enters Will who upon seeing Sammy Jr. struggling with the
makeup, burst out laughing.

WILL

Here, let me help.

Will applies blackface to Sammy Jr. After that he takes a
tube of clown white and draws big lips on him. He winks at
him. Sammy Jr. winks back.

WILL (CONT'D)

There, now you look like Al Jolson.

Will snaps his fingers.

WILL (CONT'D)

I got an idea!

He takes Sammy Jr. by the hand and rushes off.

They come upon a beautiful woman dressed in a sparkling gown.

Will pushes Sammy's hand in hers.

WILL (CONT'D)

Here, take him on stage with you
and sit in a chair, put him on your
lap when you sing.

She looks bewildered.

WOMEN

Sing from a chair, okay, if you say
so.

On stage, the woman is seated with Sammy Jr. on her lap. Will is watching in the wings.

As she begins to sing, "Danny Boy," Will makes a face at Sammy Jr. Sammy Jr. makes a face back.

The crowd roars. Will continues this banter with Sammy Jr. And the crowd loves it.

When Will rolled his eyes, Sammy Jr. rolled his eyes. When Will held his nose when the lady hit a high note, so did Sammy Jr.

After a bit, Sammy starts to mimic the singer. The crowd loves it.

With the crowd roaring, the woman and Sammy walk hand in hand off the stage to a waiting Will and Sammy Sr.

Will crouches down to Sammy Jr.

WILL

(enthused)

Listen to that applause, Sammy,
some of that's for you!

Sammy Sr., with a big smile on his face, crouches down to Sammy Jr.

SAMMY SR.

You're a born mugger, son, a born
mugger!

Will and Sammy Sr. both have their arms around Sammy Jr.

INT. STANDARD THEATER, PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

Will and Sammy Sr. are in the wings watching Sammy Jr. dancing on stage in blackface.

The act is finished and Sammy Jr. rushes to his father and Will.

SAMMY SR.

Great, Poppa!

WILL

Yes, sir. Better each time.

SAMMY SR.

Good news, Poppa. There's a dance contest here after we close. You'll be against sixteen other kids. All of them older than you. You supposed you could beat them.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, daddy.

The next day at the Standard theater, a children's dance contest is underway.

Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr. are watching the contestants dancing a fox-trot.

When it's Sammy Jr's. turn, he mimics what he saw his father and Will perform.

Sammy Jr. and a beaming Sammy Sr. are center stage collecting a trophy and ten dollars. The crowd cheers.

Sammy Sr. has his arm around Sammy Jr. As they walk off the stage.

SAMMY SR.

Son, you're really something. We're going to buy you something.

SAMMY JR.

Really, daddy.

EXT. A.S. BECK SHOE STORE - DAY

Sammy Jr. has a broad smile as he and his father emerge from the store with Sammy Jr. holding a new pair of black pumps with taps. He smiles up at his father as he fingers the taps.

INT. THEATER - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Will and Sammy Sr. are putting on makeup in a crowded, hectic, dressing room. Sammy Jr., in blackface, is standing watching the scene.

The stage manager enters the room with a paper in his hand. No one notices until he speaks.

MANAGER
Everyone, listen up.

He only gets the attention of a few.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
(louder)
Everyone!

This draws the attention of the room.

He starts to read.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
By order of the management, this
theater will be closed. Tonight is
the last performance!

The manager quickly departs.

The crowd reacts with bewilderment.

Will and Sammy Sr. look at each other as the room is a buzz.

SAMMY SR.
(to Will)
What does this mean?

WILL
It means they ain't making any
money.

SAMMY SR.
The crowds have been thinner.

WILL
Yeah, especially the matinee.

SAMMY SR.
What do we do?

WILL
What we always do, look for work.

Start Montage:

Will, Sammy Sr. with Sammy Jr. following close behind,
approaches a man outside a theater. The man shakes his head
no. The two men have the look of dejection as they walk off.

At another theater, the trio is backstage speaking with a man who again shakes his head no.

Another theater with the same rejection.

Another theater. This time Will is carrying Sammy Jr. And Sammy Sr. is enthusiastically speaking with a man. He walks away with his head down.

Another theater with the same results. Sammy Jr. is asleep in his father's arms. The sun is setting.

The sun has set and the two men, with Sammy Sr. carrying his son, are walking down a barren street occasionally illuminated by the dim street lights.

End Montage:

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sammy Sr. and Sammy Jr. are laying in one bed. Sammy Jr. Is asleep. Will is in another bed. Both men are staring at the ceiling.

SAMMY SR.

Any ideas, Will?

WILL

It's been a long time since we haven't found somewhere to perform.

SAMMY SR.

We've had a good run.

WILL

We may have to get regular jobs.

SAMMY SR.

Been a long time since I've done that.

WILL

Me too.

SAMMY SR.

How much money's left?

WILL

Enough for two nights in this dump.

SAMMY SR.
What about food?

WILL
Back to the soup kitchen.

SAMMY SR.
I gotta do something about my boy.

WILL
Yeah, what kind of life is this for
him?

Sammy Sr. sits up and heads for the door.

WILL (CONT'D)
Where you going?

SAMMY SR.
To call mama.

WILL
Oh.

SAMMY SR.
She'll send some money.

Sammy Sr. exits the room.

Sammy Sr. returns.

WILL
Well?

SAMMY SR.
She'll send some money but only if
we go home.

WILL
Oh... Maybe that's best.

SAMMY SR.
Maybe. At least for the boy.

WILL
We'll pick it up again.

SAMMY SR.
Sure, sure we will.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Sammy Sr. And Will are saying goodbye.

SAMMY SR.

Guess my mama is right. This ain't
no life for a kid.

Sammy Sr. has tears in his eyes.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

I always wanted to be in show
business, Will, so anytime you need
me, I'll be there, just say the
word.

WILL

You know I will.

Will picks up Sammy Jr. and hugs him.

WILL (CONT'D)

Be a good boy, Mose Gastin. And
don't worry. We'll be working
together again sometime.

Sammy Jr. giggles.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - NIGHT

Grandma is waiting up for them when they walked in. Hugs all
around.

SAMMY SR.

Thanks, mama.

GRANDMA

I'm just glad you're home safe.

SAMMY JR.

Mama, mama, look what I got.

Sammy Jr. rushes to open the suitcase and pulls out his new
shoes.

GRANDMA

Well, I'll be, ain't those pretty.

She turns her attention to Sammy Sr.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

(stern)

You bought those fancy shoes and
you got no food!

SAMMY SR.

No, mama. He won the money in a
dancing contest.

GRANDMA

Still! I'll say!

SAMMY JR.

(excited)

Mama, look what I can do!

Sammy Jr. puts the shoes on and starts dancing around the
room.

GRANDMA

Oh, my. You're a real dancer now.

Grandma goes to the piano and starts to play. Smiles and
laughter all around.

Next morning.

Sammy Sr. is dressing as mama is busy preparing breakfast.

Sammy Sr. gulps his food in a rush as he finishes dressing.

SAMMY SR.

Okay, I'm off to find that job.

GRANDMA

Try down at the meat plant, I hear
they need workers.

SAMMY SR.

I will, mama.

He hugs his son and mama before rushing out the door.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

I'll be back for supper.

Start montage:

Sammy Sr. is backstage of a theater speaking with the stage
manager.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

I can do anything! I can assist the
acts, sweep up, stand outside and
hand out playbills, hell, I can
even clean toilets!

The manager shakes his head.

MANAGER

Sorry, we got nothing here.

Sammy Sr. knocks on another theater door. A man sticks his
head out and shakes his head no. A dejected Sammy Sr. walks
away.

Sammy Sr. is in the front row seats of an empty theater
watching a rehearsal. A man walks by and he grabs his arm.
The man shakes his head no. Sammy Sr. sits back down and
continues watching.

Sammy Sr. approaches another theater. This one has an outside
ticket booth. He speaks with the ticket taker briefly. She
disappears inside the theater. Moments later she returns with
a man. Sammy Sr. and this man speak as Sammy Sr. points to
the ticket booth. The man shakes his head no. Hanging his
head, Sammy Sr. walks away.

End montage:

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER - NIGHT

Sammy Sr. enters the apartment to find mama and Sammy Jr.
dancing. Looking dejected he goes to stare out the window.

After a few minutes, he looks over at the dancing and jumps
up.

SAMMY SR.

That's not how you do the "time
step!"

Sammy Sr. demonstrates. Sammy Jr. attempts to follow.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

No, no, like this.

Again he demonstrates.

Again Sammy Jr. attempts to follow.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
No! More like this!

SAMMY JR.
I'm trying daddy.

Sammy Jr. keeps dancing until he gets it.

SAMMY SR.
That's it, son, that's it!

Sammy Sr. grabs his son and they fall on the floor laughing.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
This boy is a natural!

Suddenly Sammy Sr. stops and looks at mama.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
Mama, I gotta dance.

He rushes to put on his coat and heads for the door.

GRANDMA
(concerned)
Where you going?

SAMMY SR.
To send Will a telegram! I'm in the
wrong business here.

GRANDMA
You ain't in no business here!

SAMMY SR.
Maybe so, but it's better to go
hungry when you're happy than to
eat regularly when you're dead.

Grandma shakes her head as the door shuts behind him.

Days later:

Sammy Sr. is rushing about the apartment filling his
suitcase. Sammy Jr. is standing next to the suitcase with a
bewildered look on his face. Grandma is sitting on her chair,
a disgusted look on her face.

Sammy Jr. grabs his shoes from the closet and puts them in
the suitcase.

Sammy Sr. picks the shoes and fondles them in his hand looking down at his son.

Suddenly a smile takes over his face.

He then slaps his son on the back and laughs.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
Okay, Poppa, you're coming too! Get
your suit and clothes.

Grandma has a look of disgust.

Sammy Jr., suddenly exhilarated, runs to get his clothes.

GRANDMA
That's no life for a child!

SAMMY SR.
I know mama, I know.

The pair are holding hands as they skip and dance down the street.

SAMMY JR.
Where we going, daddy?

SAMMY SR.
Back into show business, son.

Start montage:

Will and Sammy Sr. are on stage performing a dance routine to a roaring audience. Sammy Jr. is watching in the wings.

Sammy Sr. with Will carrying Sammy Jr. on his shoulders is among a throng of people boarding a train.

Sammy Sr. and Will, in costumes, along with Sammy Jr., in blackface, are in the wings watching an act on stage.

Sammy Jr. is on stage sitting on a lady's lap making faces as she sings.

Sammy Sr. And Sammy Jr., are unpacking their suitcases in a low-income hotel room. Sammy jr. moves right along with his father putting their clothes in a dresser and placing their shoes in a row under their hanging clothes. Sammy Jr. struggles with a makeup case as he places it upon the dresser.

End montage:

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

Sammy Jr. is walking through the halls of the rooming house. He comes upon the parlor.

Sitting in a chair reading a newspaper is one of the dancers, Rastus Airship and on an upright piano is Obie Smith. Sammy Jr. starts doing the whole show with him.

After a few minutes, Rastus leaves the room and comes back with Will. Sammy Sr. and Elvera enter a minute later.

Sammy Jr continues acting as the other performers filter into the room.

Sammy Jr. finishes performing the whole show to enthusiastic applause.

WILL

(excited)

From now on you're going to perform
in the show, regular like singing,
and dancing!

A jubilant Sammy Sr. picks Sammy Jr. up and parades him around the room.

SAMMY SR.

(boastful)

Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to
meet my son, Sammy Davis Jr.!

As he reaches Elvera she has tears in her eyes.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

Son, this is your mother.

This does not register with Sammy Jr.

He has a blank look.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

You're not in the show tonight,
you're going to spend time with
your mother.

Sammy Jr. does not react. Elvera starts to sob.

Sammy Jr. offers his hand. She reaches over to hug him.

SAMMY JR.
You crying?

ELVERA
I'm just happy to see my boy,
that's all.

SAMMY JR.
I can dance.

ELVERA
No kidding, let's see.

Sammy Jr. performs one of his dad's routines.

She starts crying again.

SAMMY JR.
Don't you like the way I dance?

ELVERA
Darlin, I love everything you do. I
know that dance and you do it as
good as your daddy.

She takes his hand.

ELVERA (CONT'D)
Come on let's go for a walk.

EXT. STREET - DAY

They are strolling down the street.

ELVERA
You like show business, Sammy?

SAMMY JR.
Yes.

ELVERA
You happy?

SAMMY JR.
Yes.

ELVERA
How would you like a nice ice cream
soda?

SAMMY JR.
No, thank you.

They come upon a toy store.

ELVERA
Let's go in and buy a present.

They enter the store and a few minutes later they come out
with a ball.

ELVERA (CONT'D)
Let me see you catch it, darlin.

She tosses the ball to him and it hits him in the face,
startling him. He watches it roll away.

ELVERA (CONT'D)
Is there anything you want to do?

He looks up at her and does not say a thing.

They continue walking until they come to the theater.

She looks down at him.

She walks him into the theater.

INT. THEATER - DAY

Sammy suddenly gets excited pulling on his mom's hand into
the theater and into the dressing room where his dad is
putting on makeup.

SAMMY JR.
You do the show yet, daddy?

SAMMY SR.
(smiles)
No, why don't you get ready.

ELVERA
He's gotta dance.

Elvera starts to leave and Sammy Jr. grabs her skirt.

SAMMY JR.

Don't go.

She smiles down at him.

Elvera is watching in the wings as Sammy Jr. dances between Will and his father.

He looks over to his mother and sees tears in her eyes.

He glances over several times smiling and winking at his mother. Through tears, she smiles back.

He spins and turns towards where his mother was and she's gone. His smile turns to a blank expression.

As the act ends they rush off stage and head towards the dressing room. Sammy Sr. picks up his son and hugs him.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

(sad)

Where did she go?

SAMMY SR.

She had to go, Poppa. She told me to tell you she loves you.

Walking in silence, Sammy Jr. starts to sob.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

I know, I know.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - DAY

Sammy Jr., now seven-years-old, Sammy Sr., and Will, are alone in the apartment.

WILL

Get your coat Mose Gastin.

SAMMY JR.

Where we going?

WILL

You'll see. I want you to listen carefully to everything that is said, Sammy. There's two words in show business, "show," and "business," and one's as important as the other.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

The dancing and knowing how to please the audience is the "show" and getting the dates and the money is the "business." If you don't get the money, then you ain't doing nothing but having a good time.

SAMMY JR.

Okay.

WILL

We got a man to see.

SAMMY SR.

Listen to Will, Sammy. He knows his business.

SAMMY JR.

Okay.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr. are seated in the office of BERT JONAS, a well-dressed, distinguished gentleman, with a taste for diamond rings.

BERT

Well, son, you're learning from the right man. Follow his ways. His handshake is all the contract anybody needs.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, sir.

Bert looks over to Will.

BERT

I've got a great spot for you with Minsky in the Liberty Theater. I didn't realize Sammy was still so small. I'm afraid he's going to be a problem. The Geary Society's got that law that no kid under sixteen can sing or dance on stage.

SAMMY SR.

(chuckles)

Don't give no thought to that,
Bert. We been working Sammy under
the cork. We black's him up, he's
got a Jolson suit and we bill him
as "Silent Sam the Dancing Midget."
The way he dances there's no chance
of anyone catching on.

BERT

Okay, it's your fine.

Will stands and shakes his hand.

WILL

Thank you, Burt. We'll be in touch.

BERT

I'll keep you in mind.

In the hall.

WILL

(to Sammy Jr.)

Learn anything.

SAMMY JR.

I think so.

WILL

Be real friendly and honest. A
man's word has got to be good.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, sir.

INT. LIBERTY THEATER - NIGHT

A packed house is watching Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr. on
stage.

Suddenly, without warning, two women and three cops climb on
stage over the footlights.

SAMMY SR.

(yelling)

It's the Geary Society! Go to mama!

Sammy Jr. slips through the cop's legs and takes off running.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Sammy Jr. is running down the street. A scared look on his face.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER - NIGHT

Sammy Jr. runs into the apartment and burst into tears.

Grandma looks into Sammy's eyes.

GRANDMA

What's wrong, Sammy? Somebody hurt you?

Sammy shakes his head and sits in a chair.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Then why you crying?

Sammy looks down at the floor and says nothing.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Well, wash up for dinner and stop crying because if there's nothing wrong then there's no need to be crying.

Sammy walks toward the bathroom.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Sammy, where's your father?

SAMMY JR.

(sobbing)

I don't know, mama. We was doing the act when some cops came.

In walks Will. Grandma turns to him.

GRANDMA

(tense)

Mastin, is Sam in jail?

WILL

Well, uh, yes, Mrs. Davis.

GRANDMA

What'd he do?

WILL

Well, it's a long story.

GRANDMA

(Angry)

I think it's a short story! I told him don't take Sammy downtown on that stage! That's a burlesque theater you're in! All those naked girls and this little child!

WILL

(head down)

Yes, ma'am.

An hour later Sammy Sr. comes in smiling. As he sees mama he sits down and stares at the floor.

GRANDMA

So you finally got yourself locked up, Sam. That's lovely. That's a fine thing to show a little child. That's real good bringing up!

Sammy Sr. jumps up.

SAMMY SR.

Come on, Will, we better get outta here.

He turns to Sammy Jr.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

Start gettin' your stuff together.

GRANDMA

(snaps)

Don't you do it, Sammy!

Sammy Jr. stands up and sits down fast.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Where do you think you're going, Sam?

SAMMY SR.

Hell, mama, they want me in front of a judge tomorrow, so I'm getting as far outa New York as I can get. And I'm taking my son with me.

GRANDMA

You ain't takin' Sammy nowhere, or I'll have the bulls on you! You got no bookings. You got no money, you got no nothing! You think I'm going to let you take this child running from the bulls, wandering, begging for food with no place to sleep! I don't want him hungry and Naked!

SAMMY SR.

Mama, you got no say. Sammy's my son and I say he comes with me.

GRANDMA

Well, he ain't going to be your son. I'm takin' him from you and from Elvera.

She puts her arm around Sammy Jr.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

You'll have to kill me before I let him go with you like this!

Sammy Sr. jumps up.

SAMMY SR.

Come on, Will.

Will sheepishly follows Sammy Sr. out of the apartment.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Grandma is standing on the steps with her arm around Sammy Jr. facing Sammy Sr. And Will.

SAMMY SR.

Well, mama, I guess you did it. He's yours now.

GRANDMA

It's best for the boy.

SAMMY SR.

Is it?

GRANDMA

I will always do what's best for
the child just like I did for you.

SAMMY SR.

I know, mama.

GRANDMA

You're still his father.

SAMMY SR.

Okay, mama.

GRANDMA

Now, come home and get some supper.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - DAY

Grandma is speaking to Will and Sammy Sr.

GRANDMA

You heard with your own ears. The
judge said his own father and
mother ain't capable of raising him
and he gave Sammy to me. Legal! So,
from now on, you can't just pack up
Sammy and go to this place and that
place and just leave me a note.

Sammy Sr. says nothing. He stares at the floor.

WILL

(clears his throat)

Um, Mrs. Davis, I just got us a
fine booking up in Boston next
week. Naturally, it's your say if
we can take Sammy along with us.

Mama looks at Sammy Jr. and strokes his head.

GRANDMA

All right, Sammy. I know you want
to sing and dance and be in show
business more than anything, so you
can go.

Sammy smiles and hugs his grandma.

SAMMY JR.

Thank you, mama.

GRANDMA

(to Sammy Sr. and Will)

You two sit and listen to me. You feed this boy good. No hotdog and pork. That's okay for you two but give this boy chicken.

SAMMY SR.

All right, mama, we'll do what you say.

Later.

Mama is washing dishes and Sammy is drying. Will and Sammy Sr. are gone.

GRANDMA

Sammy does your father ever take your money to a table where he puts it down and sometimes he can't pick it up.

SAMMY JR.

Sure, mama, he gambles.

GRANDMA

That's what I thought.

SAMMY JR.

But he gives me what I want.

GRANDMA

While you on the road, you ever go hungry?

SAMMY JR.

No. Massy and daddy been hungry, but never me.

Grandma nods and smiles.

GRANDMA

But the first time you come home and tell me you've been hungry then that's the end of show business.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, mama.

GRANDMA

Your my little boy now, Sammy, and
I love you like I always loved you
and I'll always be there 'til you
don't need me anymore.

Sammy smiles and hugs his grandma.

EXT. STREET, GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

A smiling, Will, Sammy Sr., and Sammy Jr. are walking and
skipping down the street. Suitcases in hand.

SAMMY JR.

Where we going, daddy?

SAMMY SR.

We're going to the railroad
station.

SAMMY JR.

But where else we going?

Sammy Sr. winks at Will.

SAMMY SR.

Well, let's see... from there we're
catchin the smokey to Boston.

SAMMY JR.

I know that, but where else!

A laughing Sammy Sr. hoists Sammy Jr. on his shoulders.

SAMMY SR.

We're goin back into show business,
Poppa. Back into show business.

They laugh more and pick up their pace.

INT. THEATER - DAY

Will and Sammy Jr. are in the dressing room getting ready for
the show. Sammy Jr. is brushing their high silk hats.

Sammy Sr. walks in and goes straight to Will, not stopping to say hi to Sammy Jr.

SAMMY SR.

I just got word that Timmy French gave up the ghost. Let everybody go and he's running an elevator at some hotel.

A long silence.

WILL

Timmy had a good show.

SAMMY SR.

He's not the only one.

WILL

Bleak times. I ain't never seen nothing like this.

SAMMY SR.

Not in my life.

A performer sticks his head in the door and points to Sammy Jr.

PERFORMER

Not much point in that. There's hardly anyone out front to see 'em. They're all across the street at the goddam talkies!

Sammy Jr. puts the brush down.

WILL

Sammy, brush that hat 'til it gleams. And remember this like it's your bible. If there's one person or one thousand sitting out there, you gotta look good and work as hard for that one man as you would for the one thousand. Never shut off the audience.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, sir.

WILL

They paid their money and you owe them the best you got in you.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, sir.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER - DAY

Grandma is reading a magazine to Sammy Jr. In burst an excited Sammy Sr. and Will.

WILL

C'mom, Mose Gastin, you're gonna be in the talkies!

Sammy Sr. goes to the closet and retrieves Sammy Jr.'s suit.

SAMMY SR.

Ethel Waters is doin' a two-reeler called, "Rufus Jones for President." And you've gotta audition, 'cause they're looking for a seven-year-old who can sing and dance to play Rufus. And that's you!

GRANDMA

Now, wait a minute. Are you forgetting something?

SAMMY SR.

Oh, yes, mama. It's an opportunity of a lifetime.

GRANDMA

I see.

WILL

You gotsta, ma'am. He's perfect for it!

GRANDMA

You think so?

WILL

Not many his age can sing and dance like him. Maybe none.

SAMMY SR.
That's right, mama.

Excitement fills Sammy Jr's. face as he looks at his grandma.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
Yeah, Rufus falls asleep on his
mother's lap and dreams he's been
elected president.

GRANDMA
Sounds silly. A black president,
never happen.

SAMMY JR.
(excited)
I can do it, mama. I can sing and
dance!

WILL
You can.

SAMMY SR.
Nothing you haven't already done.

Sammy Jr. Looks into his grandma's face.

SAMMY JR.
Can I mama, please?

GRANDMA
I can't say no. It's what you want.

She turns her attention to Will and Sammy Sr.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
But you two watch out after him.
Don't work him too long.

SAMMY SR.
No, mama.

WILL
We'll take real good care of him,
ma'am.

GRANDMA
You better.

SAMMY SR.
Come on boy, let's get you dressed.

An excited Sammy Jr. jumps off his grandma's lap.

INT. MOVIE SET - DAY

Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr. are walking onto the set of the movie, "Rufus Jones for President." A bewildered look in their eyes. They are approached by Ethel Waters and director Roy Mack.

ROY

(to Sammy Jr.)

Are you ready? Have you had enough rehearsal?

SAMMY SR.

He shore has, Mr. Mack. We rehearsed all weekend.

ROY

Okay, then, Ethel, ready.

ETHEL

Let's go.

ROY

Okay, Sammy, just like we rehearsed.

The first scene of the movie, "Rufus Jones for President," is played out.

A dejected Sammy Jr., "Rufus," sits on Ethel Water's lap as she comforts him and tells him he can become president of the United States. She sings to him as he falls asleep.

Sammy Jr. goes into a dream world where he envisions himself as president.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - DAY

Grandma is sitting in her chair reading a magazine. A loud banging and grunting noise comes from outside her door. She rushes to open the door only to find Sammy Sr and Sammy jr. lugging a victrola up the stairs.

GRANDMA

Lordy, lordy, what is that!

SAMMY JR.
(excited)
It's a victrola, mama!

SAMMY SR.
Now we can listen to Cab Calloway,
Duke Ellington, and all the others.

GRANDMA
My, my.

Time has passed and Grandma and Sammy Jr. are listening to
Chick Webb. Sammy Jr. is play air drums.

SAMMY JR.
Mama, I need a set of drums like
Chick Webb.

GRANDMA
You do. Well, we'll see.

Time has passed and Grandma enters the apartment carrying a
toy drum. She hands it to Sammy Jr. Sammy looks surprised.

SAMMY JR.
Oh.

GRANDMA
It's that what you wanted?

SAMMY JR.
Well, not exactly, but I'll make it
work.

Sammy Jr. looks over the drum and suddenly jumps up and
proceeds to build a trap set with tin pans, bottles filled
with different amounts of water, and blocks of wood.

Time has passed and Sammy Jr. is practicing on his handmade
trap set. Chick Webb is on the victrola.

Sammy Sr. comes roaring in.

SAMMY SR.
Hell, mama, damn! He don't never
stop playing! He's drummin and the
neighbors are goin' knock, knock,
knocken! He's gotta cut it out.

GRANDMA

You don't like it? Move out.
Sammy's got to practice.

SAMMY SR.

Practice for what? Playing music,
that ain't gonna be!

He leaves slamming the door.

Smiling, Grandma turns to Sammy.

GRANDMA

Sammy, you just keep practicin.

Time has passed. Grandma is in the kitchen cooking and Sammy is playing on his drum kit.

Out of breath, Will runs into the apartment. Grandma rushes from the kitchen.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

What's all the ruckus about?

Will takes off his hat.

WILL

(excited)

We're booked, Mrs. Davis. Six weeks
firm and maybe more after that.

GRANDMA

Well, heaven-sent.

WILL

I'm tryin to fight the talkies,
trying to sell the bookers on how
much show business we can put on
stage with our big shows. What the
theaters need is small acts that
can give them eight or ten minutes
while the stagehands are setting up
the horns for the talkie. And
that's us. The business has
changed, Sammy, so we have to
change with it.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Sammy Sr. is in the wings as the curtain goes up and the announcer is heard.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, for your
pleasure the greatest dancer in the
world, Mr. Bill "Bojangles"
Robertson!

The crowd roars. Sammy Sr. focuses on Bojangles. Sammy Jr.
comes up behind him.

SAMMY SR.

Son, come here! Watch this. This is
greatness.

They are both transfixed on the show.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

Look how he glides across the
floor. No effort. Smooth.

Bojangles finishes to a loud, screaming crowd and runs off
stage past the two, stopping when he sees Sammy Sr.

BOJANGLES

Hey, Sammy!

SAMMY SR.

Hey, Bill, great show as always,
This is my son, Sammy Jr.

BOJANGLES

A junior. Come upstairs we'll catch
up.

Upstairs dressing room.

They enter a large room. A valet takes Bojangles jacket and
helps him put on a robe. He hands him a pint of ice cream.

The valet then pushes back a curtain to reveal a long rack of
suits and shoes.

Sammy Jr. with his mouth open bends down and counts the
shoes.

Bojangles and Sammy Sr. watch.

SAMMY JR.
Are all these yours?

Bojangles laughs.

BOJANGLES
Of course.

SAMMY SR.
My son is a dancer.

BOJANGLES
Learned from you I bet.

SAMMY SR.
And learned real good.

BOJANGLES
(to Sammy Jr.)
Are you going into show business
like your daddy?

SAMMY JR.
Yes, sir. I'm going to be big, real
big, the biggest.

Bojangles burst out in a belly laugh.

BOJANGLES
Looks like he got the fever.

SAMMY SR.
Yes, sir, shore has.

EXT. THEATER - DAY

Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr. are standing in front of a
theater admiring the marquee.

SAMMY SR.
Look at that.

WILL
Yes, sir. Beautiful ain't it.

SAMMY SR.
Shore is.

SAMMY JR.
What does it say, uncle Will!

Will reads.

WILL

Will Mastin trio - Featuring Little
Sammy Davis Jr.

SAMMY JR.

What's featuring mean?

SAMMY SR.

That means you something worth
seeing. Ain't many eight-year-old
kids got their name out front like
this.

SAMMY JR.

Oh.

WILL

From now on it's just the three of
us. We're a trio and we'll split
our money three ways. You're an
equal partner now, Sammy, and we're
counting on you.

SAMMY JR.

Okay.

SAMMY SR.

You can do it, son.

WILL

There's only two things to remember
in show business, making an
impression and keeping them with
it.

SAMMY JR.

Okay.

SAMMY SR.

And I thought the act was over.

WILL

The big act is over, now we have a
smaller one. No more, "Holiday in
Dixieland," or "Shake your Feet."

SAMMY SR.

Or "Hanna from Savannah."

WILL
I'll miss 'em. Those were real
shows.

SAMMY SR.
They were.

WILL
Yes, they were.

SAMMY SR.
At least we have an act.

Will puts his arm around Sammy Jr's shoulder.

WILL
Do your best, Mose Gastin, but
don't worry 'cause whatever you do
your daddy and me'll come on and
it'll be okay.

SAMMY SR.
That's right, son.

The three shake hands.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
Now, let's go look at our dressing
room.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr. are dressing after the show. They dress in identical suits with breast pocket-handkerchief, vests, gold watch and chains, spats, and a cane.

WILL
I shore am hungry.

SAMMY SR.
So am I. You hungry, Sammy?

SAMMY JR.
I am.

Entering the dressing room are fellow performers Vern and Kissel.

VERN

Don't you three look spiffy. Going out on the town?

SAMMY SR.

Just to get something to eat. What to come along.

KISSEL

Sure, I could eat.

VERN

Yeah. Good crowd tonight.

WILL

God bless the talkies.

They took off walking down the street. Happily talking show business along the way.

KISSEL

We're moving on to Detroit after this. You should see about coming along.

WILL

We's already booked for the next six weeks.

VERN

Just like old times.

WILL

Only easier. Not so many acts to shuffle around.

SAMMY SR.

And pay.

They enter a large dinner. In this dinner, there is a round counter with one side of the countertop painted white and the other side brown.

The group sits on the white side. They are immediately approached by a counterman.

The counterman smiles a friendly smile.

COUNTERMAN

(points to the brown
section)

Evening folks. You niggers will
have to sit on the other side.

VERN

(suddenly standing)

But we're together!

COUNTERMAN

Sorry, bub, you ain't together in
here. Black 'n white don't sit
together in here even if you're
brothers. Although ain't likely.

VERN

(tense)

Let's get out of here!

Will looks at his watch.

WILL

No point in spoiling your meal. If
we leave here we won't have time to
find someplace else before the next
show.

The counterman shrugged.

COUNTERMAN

Fact is it's no different elsewhere
in these parts so you might as well
make do.

Sammy Sr. stands and takes Sammy Jr.'s. hand and with Will
they move over to the brown side. Vern and Kissel move over
to the white seats next to them.

COUNTERMAN (CONT'D)

That'll do fine.

They eat in silence.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Upon returning from the dinner Sammy Sr., Will, and Sammy Jr.
are watching from a distance as Vern and Kissel are in a
heated discussion with the stage manager.

Shortly the manager approaches the trio. The manager shakes his head and before reaching the trio, he goes over to a bulletin board and rips off the restaurant sign.

MANAGER

Sorry, Mr. Davis, Mr. Mastin.

Sammy Sr. eyes his son.

SAMMY SR.

I'd rather not talk about it.

MANAGER

Okay.

Will takes Sammy Jr.'s hand and continues up the stairs as Sammy Sr. stays and talks with the others.

WILL

Come on, Sammy, let's get ready for the show.

Sammy Sr. calls out.

SAMMY SR.

I'll be right up, Poppa.

Dressing room upstairs.

SAMMY JR.

Massy?

WILL

Yes, Sammy?

SAMMY JR.

What's goin' on?

WILL

Nothing for you to worry yourself over.

SAMMY JR.

I'm not worryin', I'm just wonderin' what happened. We were havin' fun and then everybody got mad and now downstairs their talkin' about it.

WILL

Talking, Sammy, say the word as it's supposed to be said. Don't be lazy.

SAMMY JR.

What's a nigger?

WILL

That's a nasty word some white people use about us.

SAMMY JR.

About show people?

WILL

No. It's a word some white people use about colored people. People like us with brown skin.

SAMMY JR.

What's it mean, Massy?

Will faces Sammy.

WILL

It don't mean nothing except they don't like us.

SAMMY JR.

But Vern and Kissel like us, don't they?

WILL

Yes. But show people are different. Most don't care about nothing except how good your act is. It's others I'm talking about. Some of the people outside, ... well someday you'll understand.

Just then Sammy Sr. walks in.

SAMMY SR.

Don't you ever think about it, Poppa. That man was just jealous 'cause we're in show business and he's gotta be pushin' beans all his damn life.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Tommy Dorsey Orchestra is finishing their set. FRANK SINATRA is the headline singer. A teenage Sammy Jr. is watching in the wings.

Frank strolls off stage to enthusiastic applause.

SAMMY JR.

That was wonderful, effortless. The audience loves you.

FRANK

Thanks.

Frank offers his hand.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I'm Frank.

SAMMY JR.

Sammy.

FRANK

You're a great dancer. I love your act.

SAMMY JR.

Thank you.

FRANK

Sure. I love the dancers. Something I can't do. You're the best act we've had opening for us.

SAMMY JR.

Thanks.

FRANK

Maybe Tommy will keep you on.

SAMMY JR.

I hope so, great crowd.

FRANK

I'll talk to him.

SAMMY JR.

Great.

FRANK
You want to get a drink.

SAMMY JR.
I'm only fifteen.

FRANK
That's okay, I know a place.

Start Montage:

The trio is on stage at the Montauk theater of New Jersey.
The place is packed.

The trio in the wings at the Proctor's Palace theater of New Jersey watching the Marx brothers perform as they wait to go on.

Will, Sammy Jr., and Sammy Sr. are debarking a bus at a bus station in Detroit.

The trio is on stage in the Orpheum theater. The crowd is large and lively.

Will and Sammy Jr. can be seen in a bus window as the bus passes the country line into Canada.

The trio is performing on a stage to a large well dressed, white audience. There is a sign next to the stage that reads, "The Ontario Hilton presents, "The Will Mastin Trio."

The trio is performing on stage at the Copacabana in Florida. Frank Sinatra is watching from the wings.

End Montage:

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Sammy Sr. and Sammy Jr. are standing on the platform as travelers rush past. Their suitcases are at their feet.

SAMMY JR.
(sad)
Do you think we'll ever work again?

SAMMY SR.
If it's meant to be it's meant to be.

SAMMY JR.
Where's Will?

SAMMY SR.
Pawnshop. He's getting us train
fare.

SAMMY JR.
We hardly worked this year.

SAMMY SR.
This reminds me of when vaudeville
was ending. You were seven or
eight. We went home to mama.

SAMMY JR.
Yeah. I remember.

SAMMY SR.
And now we're headed back to mama.

SAMMY JR.
What's next?

SAMMY SR.
Leave it up to Will. He always
comes through.

SAMMY JR.
Do you think we'll ever make it
big?

SAMMY SR.
If it's meant to be it's meant to
be.

Will comes strolling up.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)
Where's your suitcase?

WILL
Where do you think?

SAMMY SR.
That bad. And all your clothes and
shoes.

WILL
Everything but what I'm wearing.

SAMMY SR.

It's been years since we've been this low. How many times have we started over?

WILL

Too many.

SAMMY SR.

You think we're out for good this time?

WILL

I'm getting too old to reinvent the act. Everything is going to the talkies or that new television thing. And how many blacks do you find there?

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - DAY

Sammy Sr. and Sammy Jr. are sitting around the dinner table. Grandma is preparing food in the kitchen. Sammy Sr. walks into the kitchen and takes a big whiff of the food on the stove.

SAMMY SR.

Ahhh, turkey and dumplings tonight, mama.

GRANDMA

You wish. Only you could dream neckbones and greens into something good.

SAMMY SR.

Dreamin is all we got.

GRANDMA

(agitated)

I took care of that family for years and they just up and left town! Now I can't find nothin.

SAMMY SR.

None of us can. Not a single bookin in six months. No regular jobs neither.

GRANDMA

First time in my life I've been on relief.

SAMMY SR.

I know, mama.

GRANDMA

Eight weeks in a row eatin nothin but necks and greens.

SAMMY SR.

I know.

Dinner is finished and all that is left is neck bones on their plates.

Sammy Sr. Sits back in his chair.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

Ahh, another filling meal, mama.

GRANDMA

You're a fool.

Sammy Sr. sits back up in his chair and slaps Sammy Jr. On the leg.

SAMMY SR.

Come on, boy. Ready to go to the Copa?

SAMMY JR.

Shore am, dad.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Sammy Sr. and Sammy Jr. are bundled up as they walk against a harsh wintery wind. Only a few people are on the street and an occasional car passes them.

They walk for several blocks until they reach a building directly across the street from the Copacabana.

They stand shivering in an inset doorway watching the action across the street. Limos pulling up in front of the Copacabana would draw their attention.

A doorman opens the door to a white stretch limo and out pops Jimmy Durante and a beautiful woman.

SAMMY JR.
(excited)
Look! Look, dad, Jimmy Durante!

SAMMY SR.
My, my.

SAMMY JR.
Look at those clothes.

SAMMY SR.
Dressed to the nines.

SAMMY JR.
We used to dress like that.

SAMMY SR.
Seems like a lifetime since we
played the Copacabana in Florida.

SAMMY JR.
Yeah.

SAMMY SR.
I miss being on the road.

SAMMY JR.
Me too.

Suddenly another limo pulls up and the doorman rushes to open
the door.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Look, look, it's Milton Berle!

SAMMY SR.
Yeah, I see.

SAMMY JR.
Look at that car. Look at those
clothes.

SAMMY SR.
Yes, son, the finest.

SAMMY JR.
That's gonna be me someday, dad.

SAMMY SR.
I hope so, son.

SAMMY JR.

Do you think we can do it, dad?

SAMMY SR.

If it's meant to be it's meant to be.

Another limo pulls up and Sammy Jr. enthusiastically points. Out of the limo steps Bob Hope and a beautiful woman. Sammy Jr. suddenly becomes excited, animated.

SAMMY JR.

Look, look, dad, Bob Hope!

SAMMY SR.

I see, son.

SAMMY JR.

Look at those clothes! Look at that car!

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

I gotta make it, dad!

SAMMY SR.

I hope so, son.

SAMMY JR.

I gotta make it!

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - DAY

Sammy Sr., Sammy Jr., And Grandma are sitting around the victrola listening to music.

Suddenly the announcer interrupts the show.

ANNOUNCER

(somber)

An unbelievable act of war has occurred against the United States!

The three lean towards the Victrola.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

The country of Japan has attacked the island of Hawaii.

(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Several Japanese planes have
dropped a magnitude of bombs on
Pearl Harbor.

The three exchanged a look of disbelief.

Sammy Jr. jumps up. Sammy Sr. sits back in his chair.

SAMMY JR.

What does this mean? What's
happening?

SAMMY SR.

It means war, son.

GRANDMA

Lordy, lordy. How could that be?

SAMMY JR.

War!

GRANDMA

How, way?

SAMMY SR.

Hard to say. Theys been waring over
in Europe for some time.

SAMMY JR.

And now it's here. I gotta do
something!

GRANDMA

Do something? No such thing. Do
something, no!

SAMMY JR.

I gotta enlist.

SAMMY SR.

Oh, son.

GRANDMA

No, you don't. That's a white man's
war.

SAMMY SR.

They just might take everyone.
Maybe even me.

GRANDMA
Oh, you damn fool. You're too old.

SAMMY SR.
Maybe. Maybe not.

GRANDMA
Damn fool.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Sammy Jr., suitcase in hand, Will, Grandma, and Sammy Sr. are on the platform among a large crowd of enlistees and their families.

GRANDMA
(tearing)
Now, you make sure you get enough to eat. Lord know what kind of food they feed you.

SAMMY SR.
And you remember, this is just a pause in the act.

WILL
That's right, your pappa and me will be working on what we'll do when you gets out.

SAMMY SR.
You just make sure you come back to us.

WILL
That's right.

Grandma gives him a big hug.

GRANDMA
You're such a good boy.

WILL
He may be a boy now but he'll come back to us a man.

Sammy Sr. reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small box.

SAMMY SR.
Sammy, we gots you something.

He hands the box to him.

SAMMY JR.
(surprised)
What!

SAMMY SR.
Something to remind you of home, of
us.

Sammy Jr's eyes widen as he opens the present.

SAMMY JR.
Oh, my! It's beautiful. But Papa,
how can you afford this. We can't
even pay the rent.

SAMMY SR.
Don't you think of that.

SAMMY JR.
I'll send money home as soon as I
can.

GRANDMA
Such a good boy.

Sammy slips the watch on his wrist and holds it up in the
sunlight.

WILL
My, my, don't that sparkle.

SAMMY JR.
It's beautiful. Thank you.

SAMMY SR.
Just make sure you bring that watch
back.

SAMMY JR.
Yes, sir. I will.

WILL
Fighting in a war ain't like
nothing you've ever done.

SAMMY JR.
I know.

A conductor walks down the platform bellowing.

CONDUCTOR
All aboard! All aboard!

SAMMY JR.
(nervous)
I guess this is it.

SAMMY SR.
Keep your head down and do what
they tell you to do. This war can't
last forever.

SAMMY JR.
I will.

Grandma is tearing up as Sammy looks back at his family as he boards the train.

EXT. ARMY BASE - DAY

Sammy, duffle bag slung over his shoulder, is walking through the base looking at the numbers at the tops of the barracks.

He comes upon a man sitting on the steps to a barrack sewing on an emblem on a shirt.

SAMMY JR.
Excuse me, buddy. I'm a little
lost. Can you tell me where 202 is?

He jerks his head around indicating around the corner.

MAN
Two buildings down. And I'm not
your buddy, you black bastard!

The man went back to his sewing. Sammy, a bewildered look on his face, stares at the man before continuing on his way.

Sammy approaches building 202 and finds a corporal standing outside the door holding a clipboard.

SAMMY JR.
A, I'm Sammy Davis.

Not looking up the corporal checks his name off on the clipboard.

CORPORAL
Yeah, well, you better sit over
there awhile 'til I figure this
out.

Three other guys arrive one at a time. He checks them off the
clipboard.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)
Name!

MAN 1
Bob Jennings.

This man looks over at Sammy before entering.

CORPORAL
Go inside and take the first bunk
you see.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)
Name!

MAN 2
Larry Bristol

CORPORAL
Go inside and take the first bunk
you see.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)
Name!

MAN 3
Dan Goins.

CORPORAL
Go inside and take the first bunk
you see.

A tall, powerfully built black man approaches the corporal.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)
(before the man could
speak)
Go sit there with Davis.

He drops his gear next to Sammy's and offers Sammy his hand.

EDWARD
I'm Edward.

SAMMY JR.
Sammy.

After double-checking his clipboard the corporal enters the barracks.

Through the screen door, he can be heard.

CORPORAL
(oc)
Look. . . We got a problem. Those niggars out there are assigned to this company. I'm gonna stick 'em down there. You two guys move your gear so I can give 'em those last two bunks.

VOICE 1
(oc)
Hey, that's right next to me. I ain't sleepin' next to no dinge.

CORPORAL
(oc)
Look, soldier, let's get something straight right off. I'm in charge of this barracks!

VOICE 1
(oc)
I ain't arguin' you're in charge. I'm only sayin' I didn't join no nigger army!

Sammy and Edward are silent as they look straight ahead.

VOICE 2
(oc)
What about the can? Y'mean we gotta use the same toilet as them?

CORPORAL
(oc)
That's right, soldier. They use the same latrine we all use. Now look, we got no goddamned choice.

(MORE)

CORPORAL (CONT'D)

They used t'keep 'em all together,
but now for some goddamned reason
they sent 'em here and we gotta put
up with 'em.

VOICE 1

(oc)

Yeah, but I still ain't sleepin'
next to no niggars.

VOICE 3

(oc)

What the hell's the army need them
for? They'll steal you blind while
you sleep and there ain't a one of
them that has any guts. They're all
yellow bellies!

CORPORAL

(oc)

Awright, knock it off. I don't want
'em here any more than you do but
we're stuck with 'em. That's
orders.

The sound of iron beds sliding across the floor.

The corporal sticks his head out the screen door.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)

Okay, c'mon in and I'll assign you
your bunks... let's go! On the
double!

INT. BARRACKS - DAY

Sammy and Edward enter the barracks to silence and stares.

The corporal points to the back two bunks.

All of the bunks were three feet apart except for these two
which were separated from the rest by six feet. The bunks
closest to these two were empty.

CORPORAL

These are yours. Now, we don't want
no trouble with you. Keep your
noses clean, do as your told, and
we'll all get along.

The corporal quickly spins and departs.

Time passes and the men are relaxing on their bunks when the corporal enters followed by the sergeant.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)
Attenshun!

Everyone jumps to attention.

SERGEANT
I'm Sergeant Williams. I'm in
charge of this company and.....

He eyes the bunks and turns to the corporal.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
What's this?

CORPORAL
(meekly)
I thought this was the best way to
handle the situation.

SERGEANT
(loud - angry)
There's only one way to do things
in here, the army way! There will
be exactly three feet to the inch
between every bed in this barracks!
You have sixty seconds to replace
the beds as you found them! Now,
move!

The sergeant comes over to Sammy.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
What's your name soldier?

SAMMY JR.
Sammy Davis Jr., sir.

SERGEANT
Of all the men in the barracks did
you arrive first or tenth or last
or what?

SAMMY JR.
About in the middle.

SERGEANT
Did you choose this bunk?

SAMMY JR.
Well, no.

The sergeant scans the room.

The room has been put back the way it was.

SERGEANT
All right, Davis. Move your gear
one bunk over.

He turns to Edwards.

SAMMY JR.
You do the same.

SERGEANT
(to all)
No man is better than the next man
unless he's got the rank to prove
it.

He quickly spins and departs.

CORPORAL
All right you heard him! Get your
gear stowed away!

INT. BARRACKS - DAY

The soldiers are having a down day in the barracks. Some are polishing their boots as others are practicing making their bunks, reading, etc.

Sammy and Edward are sitting on their bunks across from each other intently shinning their boots.

Suddenly a pair of boots lands at Sammy's feet.

JENNINGS
Hey, boy, you can do mine.

Sammy picks them up and starts to toss them back at his head before catching himself. He lobs them at his feet.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)
 Hey, boy, don't get me wrong, I
 expected t'give you a tip. Maybe
 two-bits for a good job.

SAMMY JR.
 (tense)
 I'm not a bootblack! And I'm no
 boy, either!

JENNINGS
 Whoa, don't get so uppity, boy!
 Hell, if you don't wanta make money
 it's okay by me.

Jennings shrugs his shoulders and turns to Edward as he
 tosses his boots at his feet.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)
 Here y'are, boy. You can do 'em.

EDWARD
 Yes, suh, Mr. Jennings and my name
 is Edward. Anything you need, suh.

Sammy gives Edward a look of disgust. Edward does not look at
 him.

JENNINGS
 Well, that's more like it. Glad
 somebody around here knows his
 place. And you don't have to call
 me sir. Just call me Mr. Jennings.
 Y'see in the army you only call the
 officers, sir.

EDWARD
 Yes, suh, Mr. Jennings.

Jennings walks over to three others and speaks to them.

JENNINGS
 This may work out okay. One of 'em
 not a half-bad nigger.

Jennings gathers their boots and drops them at Edward's feet.

Edward's expression drops for a second and immediately he
 brightens up.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

You oughta thank me for setting up
this nice little business for you.

EDWARD

Oh, yes suh. I thanks you kindly.

Edward continues to look at the floor. Eventually, he looks up and his eyes meet Sammy's. Edward quickly looks away.

Sammy, staring at Edward, goes back to rigorously shining his boots.

Jennings plops on his bunk which is next to Sammy's bunk.

After a few minutes, he reaches over and plucks Sammy's watch from his bed.

JENNINGS

Say, this ain't a half-bad watch.

SAMMY JR.

Put it back.

JENNINGS

Hold on now. My, but you're an
uppity one.

Jennings stands up.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

Hey, Phillips, catch.

He tosses the watch across the room to Phillips.

Sammy reacts chasing after his watch. As soon as he reaches Phillips, Phillips toss the watch to another man. The chasing continues until Jennings ends up with the watch.

Suddenly a Sergeant Williams enters the barracks.

SERGEANT

Attenshun!

Every head in the barracks snaps towards the doorway and the men come to attention.

Sergeant Williams walks straight to Jennings.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

What've you got there?

Jennings opens his hand and shows him the watch.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Whose is it?

SAMMY JR.

It's mine.

Sergeant Williams takes the watch from Jennings and hands it to Sammy.

JENNINGS

Hell, Sarge, we were just kiddin' around. I was just showing the watch to the guys.

SERGEANT

You're a wise guy, Jennings. In this army, we respect another man's property! You just drew K.P. for a week!

He spins and leaves the barracks.

Jennings stares at Sammy with hatred in his eyes.

JENNINGS

You just wait. I'll fix you for this, black boy.

Lights out. Sammy is laying on his bed with his hands behind his head staring at the ceiling listening to the sound of heavy breathing and snoring.

SAMMY JR.

(v.o.)

How many white people had felt this way about me? All the agents, managers, and the white acts, were friends, weren't they? Sure they were. The dressing room, were we purposely put in the back dressing rooms? Naw. The dressing rooms were assigned by our spot on the bill. There were almost always colored hotels and houses. But, did we always have to go to them? Didn't we just go to them because they were the cheapest? Maybe that wasn't the reason.

(MORE)

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

Sure there were people who didn't like us, but papa always told me not to pay attention. They don't like us 'cause we're in show business, he said. Huh. Will said, someday you'll understand. I don't know if I'll ever understand.

INT. BARRACKS - EVENING

Jennings is laying on his bunk staring at the ceiling as Sammy is dressing.

Sammy goes to slip on his watch and it falls to the floor.

Quickly Jennings jumps out of his bunk and with the heel of his boot, grinds the watch into the floor.

With a coy smile, he lifts his foot.

JENNINGS

Oh, what have I gone and done? Sure was foolish of you to leave your watch on the floor. Too bad, boy. Tough luck.

Sammy glares at Jennings before bending down to pick up the mangled watch.

He places the pieces on the bed and attempts to put them back together.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

Awww, don't carry on, boy. You can always steal another one.

SAMMY JR.

What've you got against me?

JENNINGS

Hell, I ain't got nothin' against you, boy. I like you fine.

EXT. ARMY BASE - EVENING

Sammy and Sergeant Williams are walking out of the mess hall together.

SERGEANT
Walk with me, Davis.

SAMMY JR.
Yes, sir.

SERGEANT
I was looking over the service records and I see you were in show business.

SAMMY JR.
Yes, sir.

SERGEANT
We have shows at the service club every Friday. If you cared to help out I'm sure it would be appreciated, and perhaps you might enjoy it.

SAMMY JR.
Yes, sir. That would be great, sir.

SERGEANT
Report to the service club. I'll clear the time.

SAMMY JR.
Yes, sir.

INT. SERVICE CLUB - NIGHT

Friday night.

Sammy is standing backstage with one of the black musicians after the show.

SAMMY JR.
Let's go out front and have a coke.

MUSICIAN
Ah, maybe we should go over to the colored service club. You don't want trouble, do you?

SAMMY JR.
Trouble? I just entertained them for an hour! They cheered me.

(MORE)

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

God knows I don't want trouble but there's gotta be a point where you draw the line. Now, I don't know about you, but I'm thirsty and I'm goin' for a coke.

Some of the guys from Sammy's barracks see them walk in and pull chairs up for them at their tables.

Jennings was at another table with four of his buddies. They look over at Sammy and smirk.

After of hour of good cheer and acceptance from his squad, Sammy stands and heads for the door.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

Thanks, guys. Time for me to turn in.

As Sammy walks past Jennings's table, Jennings stands up and holds out his hand.

JENNINGS

(smiling)

Hey, Davis, c'mon over, let's get acquainted.

Sammy hesitates.

SAMMY JR.

Well, I was going back to the barracks.

JENNINGS

Hell, you got time for a little drink with us.

Jennings pulls out a chair.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

Man, where did you learn t'dance like that? I swear I never seen a man's feet move so fast... You noticed I ain't calling you boy.

Sammy forces a smile.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

Have a beer, Davis.

One of the guys pushes a bottle towards Sammy.

SAMMY JR.

If you don't mind I'd rather have a coke.

JENNINGS

Hey, old buddy, you're in the army. It's time you got over that kid's stuff. You gotta learn to drink like a man. Try it. You're gonna like it.

The others are watching Sammy. One of them grins.

MAN 1

Yeah, you outta learn to drink if your gonna be a soldier.

JENNINGS

Listen, you're gonna insult me in a minute. Any man who won't drink with me.....

SAMMY JR.

Okay, I'll try it.

JENNINGS

That's better. Now I'll tell you how to drink beer. It can't be sipped like whiskey or a coke. To really get the taste of beer you've gotta take a good long slug.

The men raise their bottles in a toast.

Sammy picks up his bottle to return the toast. With a puzzled look on his face, he feels the bottle with both hands.

He takes a whiff.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

Hell, don't smell it, man! Drink up!

Sammy slams the bottle on the table.

SAMMY JR.

(angry)

Drink it yourself, louse!

Jennings and the others roar with laughter.

JENNINGS

Hell, he even curses like a coke
drinker.

Sammy starts to stand and Jennings pushes him back into his
seat.

Jennings turned the bottle on its side soaking Sammy in
urine.

Anger fills Jennings's face.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

You wanta live with us and you
wanta eat with us and now you come
in here and you want to drink with
us!

Sammy looks bewildered at the stain on his khaki clothes.

Jennings jumps up, points at Sammy, and starts to jeer
loudly.

JENNINGS (CONT'D)

Silly niggars can't even control
themselves! This little fella got
so excited sittn' with white men,
look what he did to himself.

In a flash that shocked everyone, Sammy jumps up and has his
hands around his throat. Jennings is gasping for air.

Out weighing Sammy by fifty pounds, Jennings swings him
around and Sammy goes crashing onto a nearby table.

The room circles the two making a ring.

As Sammy raises, Jennings moves around him slamming his fist
into his hand.

Jennings moves in and slams his fist into Sammy's face
opening a cut above his eye. Sammy staggers.

Jennings moves in with a fury of blows on the top of his head
putting Sammy on the floor.

Jennings stands above him hitting him at will.

MAN 1

(shouting)

Don't hit 'im in the head, Jen. Ya
can't hurt a niggar 'cept below the
forehead.

Sammy grabs his shirt pulling himself up.

Sammy starts to slam his fist into Jennings's face over and
over again until he starts to stagger. Blood flows from
Jennings's face.

EXT. PX - EVENING

A man from Sammy's barracks, "O'Bryon," is holding a wet
cloth against Sammy's face.

O'BRYON

You'll be okay. The bleedings
stopped.

MILLAR

(another man from the
barracks)

You might feel better to know you
got in your licks. I think you
closed one of his eyes and you
definitely broke his nose. He's
wearing it around his left ear.

Sammy attempts to laugh.

SAMMY JR.

Ooh.

O'BRYON

Take it easy.

O'Bryon grins as he holds up the cloth he was wiping Sammy's
face with.

BRYON

You ripped his shirt as you went
down. You had part of it in your
hand. Come on let's go.

They proceed to walk him back to the barracks.

Upon reaching the barracks, Sergeant Williams is in the doorway.

He shakes his head.

SERGEANT

Very smart! Well, get over to the infirmary with Jennings.

The Sergeant quickly retreats into his bedroom.

Sammy starts to laugh but recoils in pain.

SAMMY JR.

(smiling)

I sent him to the infirmary. Take me to the barracks. He's not going to see me there.

In the dark, as Sammy climbs into bed a man raises on one elbow.

MAN 1

You should know, Bryon and Millar pulled him off you.

SAMMY JR.

Okay, thanks.

Start montage:

Sammy is being shoved behind three white men in the line at the mess hall.

Sammy is having a fistfight behind the barracks. He is the only black man and is encircled by a group of white men. Sammy is bloodied.

Sammy is second in line at the washbasin in the latrine. When the front man finishes Sammy steps up to the basin. He is suddenly grabbed by the t-shirt and yanked back so hard he smashes into the back wall. A big Southern with a heavy drawl stands over him.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

What's that for?

MAN 1

Where I come from niggers stand in the back of the line!

Sammy grips his toiletry bag and with all his might hits him in the mouth, knocking him to the ground.

Sammy stood over him with his fist ready.

The man remains on the floor with blood trickling out of his mouth.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

But you're a niggar.

End montage:

INT. SERVICE CLUB - NIGHT

Sammy finishes his dance routine. As he rushes to the wings he is greeted by GEORGE M. COHAN JR.

GEORGE

That was one hell of a show you just did. Will you come out front and have a drink with me? I'm George Cohan.

He offers his hand.

SAMMY JR.

Sammy. Sure, why not.

The two are sitting at a table. The show is over and the room is mostly cleared.

GEORGE

You've heard about the big show every camp's going to be doing for the inter-camp competition?

SAMMY JR.

Sure.

GEORGE

Well, with all the stuff you know and my dad's special material, which I know backwards, I bet we could get that assignment.

SAMMY JR.

Your father?

GEORGE

Yes, George Cohan Sr., The movie producer.

SAMMY JR.

Really, I see.

GEORGE

You know as well as I do that all the guys who'll be trying out for it will just be using stuff out of the Special Services books.

SAMMY JR.

Yeah, I guess.

GEORGE

But with us writing our own, something fresh, we couldn't miss. Whatya say?

SAMMY JR.

Well, naturally, I'd love to do it.

GEORGE

Great. The General has the say. I'll make an appointment to see him about it.

SAMMY JR.

Sounds good to me.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT

Camp tryouts.

The General is sitting next to his adjutant, a WAC Captain. They are among the camp brass.

A male guitarist is playing as a female stands next to him sings, "This Land is Your Land."

They finish with very little movement, sporadic applause, and a heavy sigh from the General.

ADJUTANT

Okay, thank you. Next.

Out of the wings comes Sammy dressed like Sinatra in a suit and fedora.

He lights a cigarette at the microphone as the light dims.

Sammy is on stage impersonating Frank Sinatra singing, One for my Baby. The crowd is mesmerized.

When Sammy finishes he is met with applause. The General nods his approval.

Sammy rushes off stage to a jubilant George.

GEORGE

(excited)

Great! Wonderful! Amazing! I thought Sinatra was on stage!

SAMMY JR.

I nailed it, Huh?

GEORGE

You sure did. Did you see the General?

SAMMY JR.

Yeah. I think he moved an eyelid.

GEORGE

He sure did!

A PFC RANDEL approaches the two men.

SAMMY JR.

Hi.

The PFC does not look at Sammy but directly at George.

PFC RANDEL

The Adjutant Captain requests a meeting tomorrow at ten hundred hours.

GEORGE

Yes, we'll be there!

The PFC spins and departs not acknowledging Sammy.

Sammy and George face each other, hold hands, and giggle.

INT. ADJUTANT CAPTAIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Sammy and George enter the front office. PFC Randel is at the file cabinet.

GEORGE
We're here to see the Captain.

PFC RANDEL
(droll)
Yes, both of you.

He moves over and opens the Captain's door and leans in.

PFC RANDEL (CONT'D)
They're here, Captain.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN
(oc)
Send them in.

Sammy and George enter, unable to hide their excitement.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Sit.

They sit across from ADJUTANT CAPTAIN ACOSTA. A beautiful, sterned faced, military personal.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Gentlemen. Your act is something we haven't seen before. The General likes it.

GEORGE
Thank you, ma'am.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN
Captain.

GEORGE
Yea, Captain.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN
I earned it.

GEORGE
Yes, ma'am, aaa Captain.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

The General has put his trust in me to win the inter-camp competition.

SAMMY JR.

(excited - blurts in)

We can! Ahh, Captain.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

I hope so. I want to see your whole show. I want you to write out something I can take to the General.

GEORGE

Yes, Captain.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

(softens)

Now tell me, Davis, you were in show business.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, Captain. Since I was three.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

Three? That's interesting. Tell me about that.

SAMMY JR.

My father and mother were in vaudeville. My father took me along with him. We had an act, The Will Mastin Trio.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

What did you do at three?

George is looking at Sammy with admiration.

SAMMY JR.

I started with comedy. They dressed me up like Al Jolson and I sat on a singer's knee and I made faces.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

Amazing.

SAMMY JR.

I then began dancing and singing. I learned it all from watching my dad and uncle. I sang and danced in the movie, "Rufus Jones becomes President" at seven.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

Really, seven.

SAMMY JR.

Yes. I went on to be a full member of the trio.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

Well, that explains your talent. Okay, gentlemen, get me something to show the General as soon as possible.

SAMMY JR.

Yes, Captain.

GEORGE

Yes, Captain.

EXT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Sammy, a two-pound box of chocolates in hand, and George carrying flowers and a manuscript are rushing to the office. They bound up the stairs and into the front office.

PFC Randel is at his desk. He points to the door not looking up.

PFC RANDEL

The Captain is expecting you.

They start for the door.

PFC RANDEL (CONT'D)

Knock and enter.

George knocks.

ADJUTANT CAPTAIN

(oc)

Enter.

Smiling, they comply.

Minutes later they emerge from her office upbeat.

SAMMY JR.

Yes! We've got it, I'm sure.

GEORGE

She liked us, for sure. She liked you.

PFC Randel looks up from his desk.

SAMMY JR.

She likes talent.

Happily, they skip out of the building.

EXT. ARMY BASE - DAY

Sammy is walking towards his barracks as two PFC headquarter clerks approach him.

One with a heavy Southern drawl speaks up.

PFC

The Captain told us to take you to meet her over at building 2134.

SAMMY JR.

(grinning)

Her wish is my command.

Sammy walks with them across the base to the far end to a deserted part of the base.

INT. BARRACKS 2134 - DAY

They enter barracks 2134 and one of the men closes the door behind them.

The two men shove Sammy into the latrine where four other men are waiting.

MAN 1

Sorry, niggar, but your lady love won't be here.

SAMMY JR.

What is this?

MAN 2

This ain't nothin' but a little meeting some of us in the office thought we oughta have with you.

They take hold of his arms as one man spits in his face.

He attempts to wipe it off struggling to move his arms.

MAN 1

Oh, I'm sorry. Here let me wipe it off.

He slaps Sammy across the face and then backhands him.

The six men surround Sammy.

Man one is breathing heavy and the vein in his forehead is pulsating.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

We've been watchin' you makin' eyes at the Captain for a week now, and we decided we outta have a little talk with you.

SAMMY JR.

Making eyes? Wait a minute.

Man one hits Sammy again.

MAN 1

Niggers don't talk 'less they're spoken to!

He punches Sammy in the stomach. Sammy collapses and is hanging by his arms by the two men.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now, like I was sayin', we just got so sick to our stomachs seein' you playin' up to her, bringin' her flowers, and tryin' to make time, that we thought you'd appreciate us explaining a few things. Not to say the Captain would give an ape-face like you the time of day. We figured we should smarten you up some so you won't keep makin' such a fool of yourself.

(MORE)

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now what you gotta learn is that black is black and it don't matter how white looks or feels, it's still black, and we're gonna show you a little experiment to prove it so's you won't think we're trying to fool you none.

One of the men is stirring a can of white paint.

Two of the men rip his shirt off his back.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Bring him over to the mirror.

Man one takes a small artist paintbrush and writes, I am a nigger, across his chest. He then writes something across his back.

He then takes a bigger paintbrush and covers his arms and hands.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now, we're gonna let this paint dry so we can finish our experiment proper. So while we waiting, you c'n give us a little dance.

They let go of his arms. His legs buckle and he falls to the floor.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Come on, Sambo, give us a little dance!

Sammy remains motionless.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Grab him. Bring him over to the mirror.

They hold him up as man one brushes, coon, on his forehead.

The paint starts dripping into his eyes.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now listen, you gotta understand me. When I tell you we wanta see you dance for us then you gotta believe we wanta see you dance.

(MORE)

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now we're trying to be gentlemen about this. We figured you don't teach a hound nothin' by whipping him, so we're trying to be humane and psychological with you, but if we're takin' all this trouble on your education then you gotta show a little appreciation keep us entertained durin' all the time we're givin' up for you. So come on, Sambo, you be a good little coon and give us a dance.

The men let go of his arms. Sammy remains motionless.

Man one punches him in the stomach.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

(angry)

Dance, Sambo!

Sammy slowly starts to move his feet.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

That's better, Sambo. Keep it going. A little faster.

Sammy attempts to dance faster stumbling over his feet.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Faster, Sambo, faster.

Man one punches him in the stomach again.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Didn't you hear me say faster, Sambo!

Sammy is made to dance for several minutes until he can't raise his legs anymore.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now, we figure you've got the idea you're the same as white 'cause you're in a uniform like us and 'cause you can dance at the shows and you go in and sit down with the white men and because you think you got manners like a white man with your flowers and candy you give our women. So we gotta explain to you how you're not white and you ain't never gonna be white no matter how hard you try. No matter what you do or think you can't change what you are, and what you are is black and you better get it outta your head to mess around with white women... Now, look at your arm. Looks white, don't it? Well, it ain't. Watch and see.

He pours turpentine on a rag and begins wiping Sammy's arm in one spot until his skin shows through the paint.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

There! Y'see! Just as black and ugly as ever!

He pours some turpentine on his own arm and rubs.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

See the difference? No matter how hard I keep rubbin', it's still white, so, like I said, white is white and black is black!

He then pours the rest of the turpentine down the drain.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Okay, you ugly little nigger bastard. We're lettin' you off easy this time. I mean we coulda been nasty and painted all the rest of you, but we figured you're a smart nigger and you'll get the idea fast, so because we're peace-lovin' fellas we don't wanta hurt you none, so we didn't do that.

(MORE)

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Now we're gonna be leaving you here but remember that we did this big favor, see. And if you should decide to tell anybody anything 'bout our little lesson, well, first of all, we'd just have to admit we caught you makin' passes at the Captain and that sure wouldn't do neither of you no good and then besides that we'd have to find you again and give you another lesson 'cept we'd have to try harder to make you understand, like maybe open up your skin a trifle and show you it's black under there, too. So just take our little lesson in the spirit we meant and we're willin' to let bygones be bygones and you'll stay away from the Captain!... Okay, Sambo, we'll be goin' now. Just try to remember everything we told you and we won't have no call to teach you no more lessons.

The men depart leaving Sammy on the floor.

Slowly Sammy pulls himself up to the mirror and stares. His eyes are red and he starts to tear.

He sits back down on the floor and cries.

SAMMY JR.

(vo)

Why, why. How could the color of skin matter so much?

Sammy sits there for some time.

He hears his father's voice in his head.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

Hell, Poppa, they're just jealous of our act... I wanted to believe anything but that people could hate me so much.

EXT. ARMY BASE - NIGHT

Sammy stays in the barracks until it's dark.

He creeps out the door looking around for anyone who might see him.

It's time for mess so most of the camp is in mess-hall.

Sammy sneaks behind the buildings until he comes to his barracks.

Making sure the coast is clear, he runs into the latrine.

Minutes later he hears Sergeant William's voice along with two other voices.

Sammy scurries into the showers.

He hears Sergeant Williams enter his room and the barracks becomes quiet.

Sammy rushes out of the latrine and lightly knocks on Sergeant William's door.

Sergeant Williams opens the door.

SERGEANT

(stunned - concerned)

What, the hell!

Sergeant Williams pulls him into his room.

Sammy stands quiet with his eyes down.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

(tense)

Who did this?

Sammy shakes his head.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Don't be a fool. You don't have to fear them. They'll be court-martialed and sent to the stockade for years. Nobody can get away with this.

The Sergeant cautiously opens the door and peers out.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Stay here.

He quickly, quietly rushes out.

Moments later he returns with a can of turpentine and a towel.

In silence, he proceeds to wipe the paint off of Sammy.

He finishes and gives Sammy soap and a brush.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Hit the showers.

Sammy finishes showering and crawls into his bunk. It's not lights-out yet and some of the men are talking amongst themselves.

Sammy pulls the blanket over his head.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT

Sammy and George are waiting in the wings as the band is in the middle of the overture.

George pulls back the curtains and motions to Sammy.

GEORGE

Look here! Come here!

Sammy moves so he can peer through the curtains.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Look at all that brass.

SAMMY JR.

Yeah.

GEORGE

From bases all over.

Sammy keeps scanning the audience until he spies the Texan out in the audience.

Sammy turns noticeably nervous.

George holds out his hands. Sammy puts his hands in his.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Buddy, after they see our show I'm worried they're going to want us around for ten years.

With his musical cue, Sammy takes a deep breath and rushes onto the stage.

With the last musical note, Sammy finishes his act to thunderous applause. He bows.

Scanning the crowd his eyes meet the eyes of the Texan.

The Texan remains motionless starring at Sammy.

SAMMY JR.

(vo)

But you're still a nigger.

Sammy smirks.

EXT. ARMY BASE - DAY

Sammy is on the phone.

SAMMY JR.

(excited)

I'm out of the army, dad! I'm takin' the next train!... Yeah, put him on.... Hello, Massy. Yes, it's true. Get my clothes cleaned and pressed, I'm coming back in the act... I'll call and let you know when.

Sammy hangs up the phone grinning from ear to ear. He proceeds to walk around the base looking, remembering.

He pauses in front of his barracks and flashes back to his first day and the humiliation he felt and the first time he encountered racism. His grin is gone.

This image fades and is replaced by his encounter with the Texan.

He continues walking until he comes to the officers club. He flashes back to the night of the fight with Jennings. Sweat beads upon his forehead.

He continues walking until he reaches Barracks 2134. His expression turns to fear and tears form in his eyes. He stands frozen, motionless until he begins to rub his arms.

INT. APARTMENT, SAMMY'S GRANDMOTHER'S - DAY

Sammy is changing out of his uniform and into his suit.

Sammy Sr. is sitting on the bed. He notices Sammy's bare wrist.

SAMMY SR.

Where's your watch, son?

Sammy reaches into his suitcase and pulls out the wadded-up paper and uncrumples it on the bed revealing the mangled watch.

SAMMY SR. (CONT'D)

What happened?

SAMMY JR.

A, I wore it on maneuvers. It slipped off my wrist.

SAMMY SR.

Oh, too bad.

Will comes into the room. Sammy Sr. smiles wide and hugs him.

WILL

(excited)

Poppa, here's your homecomin' surprise. We're set to go back to work as a trio. At four hundred a week. The way it come about is that we bumped into an old pal of ours, Arthur Silber. You won't remember, but we worked the same bills together 'til vaudeville went under. He's an agent now. A good one. He signed us up for a big show in Hawaii. We leave for Honolulu in ten days.

SAMMY SR.

Only thing is we gots to fly.

WILL

At four hundred a week, we's gots
to take it.

SAMMY JR.

I got no eye for flying, either,
but I'll fly or swim to Hawaii. I
don't care what we have to do,
we're going to make it this time.
Big. We're going all the way.

They shook hands.

SAMMY SR.

Let's go out for dinner.

Start montage:

The trio is on stage at the Providence Celebrity Club in
Honolulu, Hawaii. A very nice upscale club.

They are walking around their suit at the hotel going
from room to room examining each bedroom. Smiling broadly.

The trio is on stage at the Cricket Club in Los Angeles,
California. A club more like the clubs they played before
Sammy went into the service.

They are in a one-room dive like the ones they used to
be in. Sammy is in the single bed and Will and Sammy Sr. are
sleeping on the floor covered up with their coats.

Their show at the Ninth Street Jazz Club in Seattle is
finishing with Sammy impersonating Edgar G. Robinson.

SAMMY JR.

You dirty rat!... Thank you, good
night.

The three take a bow.

Backstage.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

You two go back to the rooming
house. I think I'll jam with the
band.

SAMMY SR.

I don't blame you. The stench in my room makes me gag.

WILL

At least we have our own rooms. Don't be too late, we gots a bus to catch in the morning.

SAMMY JR.

I won't.

Sammy is playing drums in Quincy Jones's band.

End montage:

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - NIGHT

Sammy arrives back at the rooming house to find a note attached to his door. It reads, wakes me when you get in, Will. Sammy takes the note and knocks on Will's door.

We hear the springs of the bed creak and the swooshing of slippers across the floor.

Will opens the door rubbing his eyes, smiling.

WILL

Go get your father.

SAMMY JR.

What's this, Will?

WILL

Oh, yeah, nothin' bad. Go wake your father.

Sammy leaves and comes back a few minutes later with a just wakened Sammy Sr.

Sammy Jr. looks from one to the other.

SAMMY JR.

Okay, now, we're having a pajama party. What's it all about.

WILL
 (grinning)
 We're booked as the opening act at
 El Rancho Vegas in Los Vegas,
 Nevada. For five hundred dollars a
 week. Pleased, Mose Gatin?

Sammy jumps up and starts dancing around.

SAMMY JR.
 Yeah, hoo!

Sammy Sr. is heating coffee on a hot plate.

SAMMY SR.
 The word is they're paying acts
 twice as much as anywhere else.
 Free suits and food tabs.

SAMMY JR.
 Yeah, hoo!

INT. EL RANCHO HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

The trio has arrived at the hotel suitcases in hand. Their
 heads spin none stop as they take in the surroundings.

Will approaches the check-in desk. From behind, a big Texan
 wearing a large white cowboy hat, and a badge pinned on his
 shirt, grabs his shoulder.

SHERIFF
 Where you goin', boy?

The hotel clerk smirks.

WILL
 Ah, to check in.

SHERIFF
 No, you ain't.

WILL
 We're playin' here.

SHERIFF
 Don't matter. You ain't stayin'
 here. Your kind stays at the other
 side of town.

Will has a bewildered look on his face.

WILL

But.

SHERIFF

No, buts.

Sammy Jr. picks up their suitcases.

SAMMY JR.

Let's go, dad, Will.

INT. CAB - DAY

The trio ride in silence as they pass one dilapidated hotel after another. They pass a naked black child standing in front of a shack made out of wood pallets and cardboard.

DRIVER

(embarrassed)

Guess you can't say much for housing around here. This is what they call Tobacco Road. Not much work for black folks around here. Just some hotel work.

The trio remains silent.

They stop in front of one of the few decent houses.

A woman was standing in the doorway.

WOMAN

Come right on in folks. You boys with one of the shows? Well, I got three nice rooms for you.

WILL

How much?

WOMAN

Well, they ain't cheap.

WILL

I'm sure.

WOMAN

You could always go back to the El Rancho.

WILL

Sure we can.

SAMMY SR.

Pay the lady. Will.

SAMMY JR.

You guys go ahead. I think I'll go downtown, check it out.

SAMMY SR.

Okay, son. But try to cheer up, we're in Los Vegas!

SAMMY JR.

Okay, dad.

Will and Sammy Sr. grab the suitcases and exit the cab. Sammy Jr. motions to the driver to continue.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

Take me to a movie house.

Arriving downtown, Sammy Jr. is dropped off in front of a movie theater.

The marquee reads, Mickey Rooney in "The Big Wheel."

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

Thanks.

CABBY

Yup.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Sammy pays his money and enters the almost empty theater. He picks a seat in the middle of the theater.

As soon as he sits down he is grabbed and yanked up by an almost identical Sherriff as the one encountered at the El Rancho.

SAMMY JR.

(shocked)

Woooo, what!

SHERIFF

What're you boy? A wise guy?

With a loud smack, he slaps Sammy across the face.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
Speak up when I talk to you!

SAMMY JR.
What'd I do?

SHERIFF
Don't bull me, boy. You know the law.

SAMMY JR.
I'm new in town. I've never been here before. I'm from New York.

SHERIFF
New York!

He points to a sign on the wall that reads, "Coloreds sit in the last three rows."

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
You're in Nevada now, not New York!
Mind our rules and you'll be treated square. Now, you go and enjoy the show.

Sammy, in shock, moves to the back and sits down. He stares at the screen. His eyes are glassy.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

The trio is standing in a long line at the Chicago Shubert theater.

WILL
Look at this long line. Every song and dance man in the country.

SAMMY JR.
They must have heard what we heard.

WILL
We don't get this, we's going to be sleepin' on the street.

SAMMY SR.
That might be better than the room we're in.

The trio is standing in line at the Chicago area soup kitchen.

The trio returns to their flophouse. Dejected looks on their faces.

Immediately, Will sees a note pinned to his door. Suddenly his face brightens up.

WILL

We got it! We got a callback!

Sammy Sr. and Sammy Jr.'s expressions turn to excitement.

Sammy Jr. starts to dance in the hall.

SAMMY SR.

Just when everything seems the worse.

WILL

(reading)

It's for an RKO show with Mickey Rooney.

SAMMY SR.

RKO, that's as big as bit gets.

SAMMY JR.

And Mickey Rooney, none bigger.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - COPLEY PLAZA HOTEL - DAY

Two lines of performers are on stage facing the seats.

At twelve sharp, Mickey Rooney walks onto the stage.

MICKEY

Hi, everyone, I'm Mickey Rooney.

Sammy Sr. nudges Will and motions to his watch.

SAMMY SR.

Now, that's a pro.

Mickey starts at one end and shakes hands with everyone.

He gets to Sammy Jr.

SAMMY JR.
(Blurts out)
Hi, Mr. Rooney, I'm Sammy Davis Jr.

MICKEY
The name is Mickey.

Mickey looks at Sammy and shakes his head.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
Damn, I never find anyone who's
shorter than me. Everybody's
taller. Even you. And you're a
midget.

Sparse laughter.

Mickey's singing ends the audition. The cast gives him
roaring applause.

Mickey and the director are standing in front of Sammy Jr.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
(to the director)
I want Sam here to work with me in
the act.

He turns to Sammy Jr.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
What can you do besides dancing?

SAMMY JR.
I play drums, a little trumpet, I
do some impressions.

MICKEY
You're kidding! Who do you do?

SAMMY JR.
Well, I've been doing Danny Kaye.
The "Melody in 4F," thing.

The director cuts in.

DIRECTOR
You'll do all the impression,
Mickey. They were hired to dance.

MICKEY

What you bitching about, let the kid do it!

DIRECTOR

We don't need it! You'll do all the impressions and that's it!

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Day of Opening night.

A knock on the door and in walks Mickey, turning everyone's head. He motions to Sammy Jr. Sammy Jr. follows him out into the hall.

MICKEY

Look, Sam, about that Danny Kaye impression, at least sneak it in tonight till we can make it a regular thing. Do it over your dance for the first show when the critics are there so they'll get to see it.

Mickey quickly departs.

Opening night.

The curtain goes up and out comes the trio.

The trio is on stage performing their fast-paced dance routine. Sammy Jr. does his Danny Kaye impression.

They finish their routine and rush off stage. Mickey strolls on stage. The applause intensifies. He motions to Sammy Jr.

Sammy Jr. and Mickey perform a little step. The crowd roars louder.

INT. FLOPHOUSE - HALL - NIGHT

Four in the morning.

The landlord is pounding on a door.

A sleepy Sammy Jr. Opens the door.

LANDLORD

(angry)

There's a damn fool on the floor
who keeps saying he's Mickey
Rooney! I hung up on him twice but
he keeps calling back! Now you get
down there and tell him if....

Sammy Jr. rushes past him.

SAMMY JR.

(on the phone - out of
breath)

Hello, hello!

MICKEY

(oc)

Sam, Sam listen to this! The best
dance act to hit Boston in years!
Berry Brothers, Nicholas Brothers
better forget it! The kid in the
middle is funny!

Sammy almost drops the phone. His mouth open.

SAMMY JR.

(excited)

Thank you, thank you, Mr. Roon,
Mickey!

Sammy hangs up the phone and tap dances.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

Yeah!

VOICE 1

(yells)

Keep it down!

Sammy tip-toes tap dances up the stairs.

Start montage:

Sammy Jr. And Mickey Rooney are looking up at the marquee as
it is being changed from several pictures of Mickey to a
picture of the Will Mastin Trio. Smaller letters under Mickey
Rooney's name read, "The Will Mastin Trio featuring Sammy
Davis Jr."

The trio is on stage dancing in front of a Bandstand with a banner that reads, "The Count Basie Orchestra featuring Billie Holiday." As they rush off stage, Billie Holiday takes Sammy Jr.'s hand and walks him out onto the stage where they both take a bow.

The trio is standing outside a sailor's tavern in Boston named, The Silver Dollar Bar. They exchange a look of defeat.

The trio is in a flophouse with Will sleeping on the floor and Sammy Sr, and Jr. sharing a bed.

The next morning as they are dressing, a knock on the door.

Will opens the door and receives a telegram. He reads the telegram and his face lights up. He pass the telegram to Sammy Sr. Sammy Sr. And Sammy Jr. read the telegram together and react with elation. The telegram is tossed on the bed. In capital letters, it reads, OPEN CAPITOL THEATER NEXT MONTH. FRANK SINATRA SHOW. THREE WEEKS, \$1250 per. DETAILS FOLLOW, HARRY RODGERS. Sammy Sr. and Sammy Jr. dance around the room.

End montage:

EXT. CAPITOL THEATER - DAY

A detective makes a break in a line of young Frank Sinatra fans that wraps around the building so the trio can enter.

INT. CAPITOL THEATER - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The trio is readying themselves for the show. Sammy Jr. is wearing a zoot suit and sporting a cowboy hat.

A man enters.

MAN 1

You Sam? Mr. Sinatra would like you to come by his dressing room and walk out to the stage with him.

SAMMY JR.

Oh, yes, of course.

Sammy Jr. Speaks to Sammy Sr. and Will.

SAMMY JR. (CONT'D)

I'll meet you in the wings.

SAMMY SR.

Sure, son.

Sinatra's dressing room.

Sinatra comes out of the second room of the two-room dressing room. A valet helps him with his jacket.

FRANK

Hi'ya, Sam, good to see you. How's your family? Are you ready?

SAMMY JR.

Great. Sure, sure am.

Walking to the wings.

FRANK

Glad we're working together.

Wings.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Okay, let's go.

Frank enters the stage to thunderous applause and young girls jumping in their seats.

Frank sings three songs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

We've got three cats here who really swing and they're all too much but keep your eye on the little cat in the middle because he's my boy. Here they are, the Will Mastin Trio and Sammy Davis Jr.

Thunderous applause.

The end.

(CONT'D)

(CONT'D)

(CONT'D)

(CONT'D)

