

TWIRLING AT OLE MISS

The year is 1962.

INT. NEW YORK HIGH-RISE OFFICE-DAY

We hear the din of city traffic churn in the background as a finger dials an office rotary phone. In ECU the camera follows the spinning dial and travels up the telephone cord to the phone receiver.

HOLD ON:

ECU of MOUTH on receiver. This is the mouth of DAVID-I'm-a-fan-of-your-work-NEWMAN, editor of Esquire magazine. A ring is heard on the line, after a beat.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Haalllloooo?

MOUTH  
Ah, is this Terry?

VOICE  
Ah, yeah?

MOUTH  
It's David Newman.

VOICE  
Yes?

MOUTH  
I am a great fan and an editor at Esquire and we would love you to do something for the magazine.

VOICE  
Grand idea, Big Dave, Dave New.

MOUTH  
Come down to the office...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - LATER

MOUTH  
...to talk.

FROM BLACK:

An office door swings open. A big smile. David gleams as he sees...

DAVID'S POV:

A man in his late thirties in shades, with dark hair, wearing a blue suit, stands in the RECEPTION AREA. It is TERRY. The suit he is wearing has a hole in the knee the size of a half dollar. His hands fish in his pockets as he scopes-out the RECEPTIONIST and her desk. He is in a bit of a quandry.

DAVID

Ah, Terry! I am so thrilled to meet you, David Newman.

Terry turns to David and cordially offers a hand and a polite smile, but he is still puzzled.

TERRY

Oh, Big Dave. Yes...

DAVID

Please come in.

David guides Terry into the office. David works his way back to his chair, sits down and plops his elbows on the desk. Terry continues to pat his pockets. His eyes look over the items on Dave's cluttered desk. As Terry sits on the couch, we see the hole in his suit pants showing bare skin and flesh.

DAVID (CONT'D)

What a thrill! The Magic Christian had been so important to me in college.

TERRY

Have you a pen? A pen with blue black ink? I need a pen with blue black ink.

David scrambles through his desk drawer.

DAVID

Yeah, there must be some pen around.

David pulls out a pen. He hands it across the desk to Terry.

TERRY

Fab, Dave New.

DAVID

So, there is a brief news item I read about on the wire...

The camera follows as Terry rolls up his pant leg, and colors his knee and skin with the pen ink. He then rolls the pant leg back down.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
...there's a baton-twirling school  
at Ole Miss. We want you to go  
down to Oxford, Mississippi, home  
of William Faulkner, and talk to  
the students.

TERRY  
(after a beat of  
consideration)  
I think that's a grand idea Big  
Dave. Terrif.

Terry leans across the desk and hands the pen back to David.  
David counters the handoff by presenting Terry with a first  
edition copy of The Magic Christian.

DAVID  
Would you mind signing this copy  
for me?

Terry gleefully accepts and inspects the cover.

CLOSE UP on cover of book.

THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN

WRITTEN BY TERRY SOUTHERN.

Terry opens the book to the title page and handwrites:

TO DAVID - A GRAND GUY. YOURS TRULY, TERRY SOUTHERN.

Terry snaps the book cover shut.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STATION MEMPHIS, TENNESEEE - DAY

A bus signboard is flipped from reading CHATTANOOGA to  
MEMPHIS/OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI.

Terry, still wearing his shades, swings a ratty rucksack over  
his shoulder.

He bolts for the bus carrying a yellow legal pad and a  
newspaper under his arm. The bus doors open, Terry steps out,  
the bus doors shut, and pulls away.

HOLD ON: Bus tires kicking up dust as the camera follows the hubcaps brilliant spinning chrome.

CUT TO:

ECU: A PRINTER HEAD OF AN ASSOC. PRESS WIRE/TELEX spitting ink onto a sheet of paper.

NEWFLASH: Letters rapid fire to form words. The words build to the...

TITLE SEQUENCE: TWIRLING AT OLE' MISS

SPIN OUT OF  
GRAPHICS INTO:

CU OF A NEWSPAPER HEADING : IN BOLD CAPS ABOVE THE FOLD

Oxford Eagle: WILLIAM FAULKNER, AMERICAN WRITER: DIES AT AGE 65 FUNERAL CEREMONY IN HOMETOWN OF OXFORD, MISS.

The graphic flips to reverse. The HEADLINE is now a distorted reflection framed by dark sunglasses.

INT. BUS - DAY

CU ON TERRY'S SUNGLASSES AND GRADUALLY PULL OUT WIDE as he reads the news with sorrow.

TERRY (V.O.)  
Fab Faulk.

HOLD ON TERRY as the bus rambles down the bumpy highway.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

The bus scoots to a halt. Terry, a bit jostled by his long bus ride, steps off. The driver floors the pedal and the Greyhound pulls away leaving a trail of billowing smoke. Terry emerges from the blackened cloud as a single figure in the empty town square. Terry sees no sign of life in the square on this particularly hot July day. In the distance, a Negro laborer pulls away with a mule and cart filled with cotton.

Terry meanders across the square to the only sign of life by the COUNTY COURTHOUSE.

EXT. OXFORD COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Terry spots a row of short-sleeved men sitting on benches by the front of the courthouse, a sort of permanent jury. He approaches the row of men friendly-like, with an easy stance. He pulls off his shades.

TERRY

Howdy...Whar the school?

The group of short-sleeved men are barely distracted.

BARNEY

What that he say, Ed?

Big Ed shifts his wad, sluices a long spurt of juice into the dust, gazes at it reflectively before fixing Terry with gun blue-cold eyes.

BIG ED

Reckon you mean, whar the school  
at? Don't you stranger?

TERRY

Yea, I reckon. Whar it at?..

Besides the benches, about three feet apart, Terry eyes two public drinking fountains. One is boldly marked "**For Colored**", and sits squarely in the shadow cast by the justice symbol on the COURTHOUSE FACADE.

BIG ED

Wal, now that would take a little  
studyin'....

The other boys join in randomly with their own rather circuitous directions.

Terry listens and feigns a polite demeanor. Out of the corner of his eye he spots a cab pull up across the square. He graciously thanks the boys before jetting off.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI- DAY

Terry crosses the square and approaches the driver.

TERRY

Which is nearer? Faulkner's house  
or his grave?

CAB DRIVER (BOON)  
(without looking around)  
Wal, now that would take a little  
studyin', if you were gonna hold a  
man to it, but offhand I'd say they  
were pretty damn near thee same  
about ten minutes from where we're  
sitten and fifty cents each.  
They're in opposite directions.

Terry takes it in, and loads into the back seat of the cab.

TERRY  
By the way, where can a man get a  
drink of whiskey around here?

BOON  
Place over the county line, about  
eighteen miles: cost you four  
dollars for the trip, eight for the  
bottle.

TERRY  
I see.

Boon half turned, gives Terry a curious look.

BOON  
Unless, of course, you'd like to  
try some nigger-pot.

TERRY  
Nigger-pot? Great God yes, man.  
Let's move!

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. COLORED SECTION - MOMENTS LATER

The yellow cab races down a dirt road lined with tin roofed  
shacks. A group of YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN in tatters and no  
shoes, play a game of tag around chickens that shuffle  
through the dust.

BOON  
So where you from, up north?

TERRY  
Alvarado, Texas...near Dallas.

## EXT. PLANTATION DAY - CONTINUOUS

Corn and cotton chafe floats in the air as the oppressive sun beats down on laborers pulling mules through the fields. A small hut stands at the end of a beaten path in the shade of a dead tree. From a slit in the side of the tin shack, an eye and a tuft of wild black hair peek out, then disappears. Terry, with Boon in toe, strides into the hut.

## INT. MOONSHINE HUT DAY - CONTINUOUS

REVEAL: A tiny butt sticking up in the air attached to a pair of small legs bent over a box of kindling wood. A black BOY of about nine turns to greet the two men, in each hand he is holding an unlabeled pint of "pot".

BOY

This here's a mighty fine batch.

Boon, from behind Terry, cocks his head to one side and gives a short laugh.

BOON

Why, boy, I wouldn't thought you was a drinkin' man.

BOY

Nosuh, I ain't no drinkin' man, but I sure know how it suppose to taste thas' 'cause times nobody here I have to watch it and I have to taste it too, see it workin' right. We liable to lose the whole batch I don't know how it suppose taste. You all taste it.

He holds out one of the bottles. Shaking it in Terry's happy face.

BOY (CONT'D)

You see if that ain't a fine batch!

Terry takes a swig and winces as the fire of the white lightning blasts his throat.

TERRY

(handing the bottle to  
Boon)

...a bit edgy perhaps, but plenty  
of warmth and body.



The boy smiles wildly at the men. Terry lays out a pocketful of change on the counter and grabs three bottles.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLOPING GROVE (OLE' MISS CAMPUS) - LATER

The cab stops by the entrance of the grove. In the distance, we hear classes already in progress. Terry steps out of the cab and bids adieu to Boon who barrels off.

A gentle breeze blows as Terry turns towards the sweet sounds coming from over the crest of the hill.

The SINGSONG CHANTS GET LOUDER as Terry verges the zenith of the hill. Witnessing something of another age, something strange and wonderful, he fills his lungs with the fresh air blowing up from the grove.

CUT TO:

TERRY'S POV:

A PANORAMIC VIEW of a sloping, fairyland grove with Broadleaf elms where some seven hundred young girls in scanty attire practice various baton twirling routines. With ballet-like artistry, the Twirlers swivel and weave on the sloping hills of green as the PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM BLARES DIXIE.

HOLD:

Terry stands and straightens, taking the sylvan scene in. He checks his notes scribbled on the legal pad and sees. CU on notepad: Sartell, Don, "Mr. Baton" - Director.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLOPING GROVE (OLE' MISS CAMPUS) - CONTINUOUS

Terry parades down the sloping grove and spots a WOMAN WITH A BEEHIVE writing on a clipboard by the bleachers. She converses with a man who has his back to us. She curtly nods to the man as she notices Terry advance down the hill.

TERRY

Pardon me ma'am. I'm lookin' to  
speak with a...

The man turns to camera. He's a handsome and personable young fellow of about 35 years wearing a monogrammed shirt sleeve top labeled DON SARTELL, DIRECTOR.

TERRY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
You must be Mr. Baton himself?

MR. BATON  
Correct. Donald Sartell. You must  
be from the magazine?

TERRY  
Yes, I'm...

MR. BATON  
Welcome. The Dixie National Baton  
Twirling Institute was recently  
founded in 1951.

Terry makes a note on his pad and nods.

The camera travels with Don and Terry as they walk and talk  
around the classes in progress.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)  
Baton twirling is the second  
largest girl's youth movement in  
America the first, of course, being  
the Girl Scouts.

NOTE: Mr. Baton is constantly interrupted with administrative  
tasks during their walk through majorette boot camp. During  
the intermittent breaches, Don cordially lays out the facts  
to Terry, but always maintains a watchful eye on the classes.  
Don is a multi-tasker!

They pass a CLASS INSTRUCTOR giving notes on speed and  
manipulation of the baton to a group of very young, well  
focused twirlers in swimsuits.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)  
The popularity of baton twirling  
has a three-fold justification.

The CLASS INSTRUCTOR counts down as each move is  
choreographed.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)  
One, it is a sport which can be  
practiced alone;

INSTRUCTOR #1  
One...

MR. BATON (O.S.)  
Two, it does not, unlike other solo  
sports - sailing, skiing, shooting,  
etc...

INSTRUCTOR #1

...two, pretzel, tourjete, walk-over to aaaaaa, three, cradle and out. Gooooood ladies, now from the tippy top again.

MR. BATON

Require expensive equipment...

The PAGEANT CHAIRWOMAN and HER ASSISTANT present Don with a "uniform check". First, they exhibit a pair of white short shorts with a sequined halter top. Second, they display a choice between a blue top hat garnished with a white plume, and a green hat with tassels and fringe.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)

(not losing a beat, points to the blue and nods to the white short short number)

...and, three, it does not require travel, but on the contrary, may be practiced in one's own living room or backyard.

The ALUMNI HOUSE REGISTRAR interrupts with a folder marked "Scheduling". Don scans the paper and points to revisions.

TERRY

(straining to be heard over the PA system)

Right, so far, so good, Mister Baton - Don... but just what is the point of it all?

MR. BATON

The point, aside from the simple satisfaction of mastering a complex and highly evolved skill...

Out of nowhere, a SCOREKEEPER AND JUDGE interrupt Don to inspect an array of award ribbons, plaques and trophies.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)

(points to the red with gold label and nods to the larger garish plaque)

The development of self-confidence, poise...

Hold on: Terry taking it in.

A DELIVERY MAN carrying a large opened cardboard box presents Mr. Baton with the package and hands off paperwork and a pen.

He balances the box under his arm and points to the line on the paper where signature is required.

Terry pulls the bottle of pot from his rucksack.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)  
...ambidexterity, discipline and  
coordination.

He offers Don the pint bottle.

TERRY  
Would you like a drink of nigger  
pot?

Don signs the invoice, and gives a rapid glance at the bottle.

MR. BATON  
(without losing a beat)  
I don't drink or smoke.

Don pulls something from inside the box.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)  
More information can be gathered  
from the source.

He hands Terry a weighty six hundred page copy of WHO'S WHO IN BATON TWIRLING.

MR. BATON (CONT'D)  
...this is compliments of THE  
INSTITUTE, gratis.

Terry gladly accepts and eyes the cover before flipping through the book.

From OFF SCREEN we hear the crunch of tires on gravel.

GROVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

A red Cadillac convertible cruisin' easy pulls in under the bunting and BANNER OF THE INSTITUTE.

MR. BATON (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Better late than never, Miss Muffy  
Lee Mirken has arrived.

Terry averts his eyes from the Who's Who to see the approaching Red Caddy. The camera follows the convertible as it glides down the road. The driver is obscured by the bright reflections gleaming off the windshield.

Behind the wheel, through the reflection, we see a hint of blonde hair, a flowing red scarf and dark glasses.

The TWIRLERS by the side of the road take a break in their routine to throw a "hi y'all" greeting towards the rolling red car.

BACK TO TERRY:

POV - CU ON FULL PAGE SPREAD IN WHO'S WHO

A head-to-toe snapshot of a 38-year-old washed-out blonde swinger posing in front of a wall of trophies and medals. Staff in hand, she is dressed in an orange-sequined-get-up complemented by a white-plumed drum major hat.

Caption reads: MISS MAJORETTE OF AMERICA (Now turned Pro)  
MISS MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN Pensacola, Florida.

EXT. GROVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

As Terry lifts his head from the book, a flock of butterflies flit in the air around the Caddy as it eases to a halt. MISS MAJORETTE OF AMERICA bounces out with her 34-24-34 bod wearing tight rolled-up shorts.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN  
I do declare, Mista' Donald y'all  
had me fixin' to be tied...

Muffy removes her scarf, opens the trunk, and strides over to Donald right as a butterfly lands on her shoulder. Trying to hide the smirk on his face, Terry scribbles notes cool and deliberate.

CU Terry's notepad: Pencil writing 34-24-34.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN (CONT'D)  
I took a wrong turn at Honey Pass  
and lost my liddle ol' self, some  
nice gentlemen aided my distress by  
golly...

With defined allegiance to Muffy-Lee's arrival, an entourage of Black servants in white uniform (MABLE, CURLY, and BEE) ramble to the front bumper of the car.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN (CONT'D)  
Mable! Now, the items in the trunk  
should be treated with the grandest  
care.

MABLE  
Yesem', Mizz Muffy.

Mable and Bee bolt to unload the trunkfull of heavy suitcases. Miss Muffy, arm extended with hand out, presents the car key to CURLY, but snatches it back.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN  
Now, you niggers don't go mussin'  
up my brand new car now, ya' heah'?

Muffy gently releases the key into CURLY'S big black hand.

CURLY  
Yesem' Miss Muffy.

A crowd of practicing majorettes make way as the renowned Miss Mirken, as if floating on air, glides through the congeries. She stops by the STRUTTERS PLATFORM and approaches a GROUP OF TWIRLERS standing by.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN  
Why now, sweetie pie honeybunch,  
can you kindly hand me (pointing)  
this heah baton?... For jus a sec?

In awe, the YOUNG MAJORETTE tosses over her baton, and drops into a bashful southern curtsy. The row of nymphets around her are glued to the toss off.

Muffy-Lee, not changing a beat in her brisk stride, catches the baton and spins a double fingerroll, behind-the-back pretzel-extravaganza with lightning speed and flawless manipulation. She executes a shoulder-roll-back-pass. The baton climbs around her sequined torso like a wild vine. After a deek left and right, Muffy throws the baton for a high toss as the CAMERA FOLLOWS it seventy feet in the air.

HOLD ON THE METAL STICK as it becomes a blinding silver whir in the Mississippi sunlight. WHOOSH! The baton whirligigs back towards terra firma where MUFFY catches it between her legs. With a sleight of hand, fueled by torqued wrist action, she whips the baton back into the CROWD OF JUNIOR MAJORETTES on the sidelines. A HAND EMERGES from the CROWD and nabs it from the air.

THE HAND, is the rightful owner of the wand, the YOUNG MAJORETTE - who ogles the metal stick as if it has been anointed with special powers.

HOLD:

CUT TO:

EXT. STRUTTERS PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

CU: Needle drop on 45 record. The Potato Peel song blares on the PA system.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN (O.S.)  
Y'all know how to twirl?

Flanked by her TWO ASSISTANTS on a slightly raised platform, MUFFY faces the class. Staff in hand, MUFFY-LEE grinds out a proud burlesque-house number.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN (CONT'D)  
...but THE ALL OUT STRUT is why  
we're heah' ladies!

The class picks it up. A row of little girls smile wide and stomp proud to the ditty.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN (CONT'D)  
Keep the beat, and now, don't lose  
your charm, you've got ta' smile!  
It won't mess up your hairstyle.

The TWO ASSISTANTS share a glance of joyful affirmation.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN (CONT'D)  
Remember, ladies, beauty knows no  
pain.

CUT TO:

EXHIBITION CIRLE / GROVE - CONTINUOUS

A FLAG CORPS practices a wave and strut groove while a MILITARY CORPS punches out a toy-soldier-pivot-deek-and-turn routine. The camera floats along to reveal a FIRE BATON DUET carefully counting out the cadence in their moves at quarter speed.

CUT TO:

Terry carefully observes a CROWD OF TWIRLERS kneeling on the sideline, listening courteously to the directives coming from the JUDGES AND SCOREKEEPER TABLE.

SCOREKEEPER (O.S.)  
(with stop watch in hand)  
The routine must have a duration of  
not less than two minutes and  
twenty seconds, and not more than  
two and thirty.  
(MORE)

SCOREKEEPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Each membah' of the competition is judged on the general qualities relating to her degree of accomplishment - including showmanship, speed, and drops, the latter, of course, counting against you.

The CROWD snickers.

JUDGE

The winner in each category receives a trophy, and the first five runners-up receive medals.

SCOREKEEPER

(checking her notes)

Let us begin with our first contestant, a Miss BETTY LOU ETRON.

BETTY LOU, a spirited young girl, leaves the CROWD and skips to center stage. She starts her routine as The Stripper roars from the PA speaker.

EXT. BLEACHER'S GROVE - CONTINUOUS

As the exhibition continues in the background, Terry catches up to Miss Muffy-Lee on her way back to the Strutters Platform.

TERRY

Pardon me, ma'am... I'd jus' like to ketch ya' for a few questions...

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN

I do declare, Donald told me you'd like a causerie! It's a pleasah' to make your acquaintance Mista' newspapah' man.

Terry offers a hand and Muffy accepts with a coy curtsy.

TERRY

Enchante'.

Muffy hops up the steps of the platform and kneels down as she rifles through a pile of 45's by the turntable.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN

Well, here at the institute, we're known for our high kicks. Some girls will kick and actually get lipstick on their legs.



Muffy chuckles. Terry takes note and stops to think. He tries to hold back, but can't.

TERRY

It's wonderful that despite people starving in India you can spend hours a day perfecting the finger-roll.

In the background Betty Lou muffs a high toss and drops her baton. The crowd reacts with a hushed AAAAAWWWH. Muffy sensing antagonism, turns on an even brighter smile.

MUFFY-LEE MIRKEN

There is nothing wrong in learning self-confidence, discipline, cooperation, and the ability to perform precision dance, along with poise, etiquette, and personal grooming, hard work, and team work. Now is there?

CUT TO:

The SOUND OF A CROWDED STADIUM CHEERS WILDLY as a baton turns, then spins to a halt.

TERRY (V.O.)

(his voice is enthusiastic  
ala WWII Newsreel)

A larger version of this same baton - metal with knob on the end - was first used, of course...

LIMBO: A SURREAL HAZY AURA

JUMP CUTS of a marching band strutting and blasting a raucous oompa ompaa beat. The camera transitions from each image in rhythmic flashes.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - DREAM

A DRUM MAJOR with a gaggle of MAJORETTES in toe, turns to the lens with an exaggerated arm wave, begging us to follow.

TERRY (V.O.)  
...to direct military marching  
bands, or, prior to that, drum  
corps - the baton being manipulated  
in a fairly straightforward, dum-de-  
dum, up-and-down manner...

The DRUM MAJOR strides with pride against the azure blue sky.

The BAND, shepherded by booming Sousaphones and blasting  
trombones, marches proudly behind in pyramid formation.

CUT TO:

A wall of acrobatic cheerleaders fly in the air to make way  
for a parade of girls throwing batons in the air.

TERRY  
...to persons of promise and  
accomplishment in the field of  
baton twirling, similar  
scholarships are available. Among  
those most keenly interested in  
mastering the skill today are drum  
majorettes from the high schools  
and colleges of the South Midwest.  
The idea of twirling it - and  
finally even flinging it - is,  
obviously, a delightfully girlish  
notion...

The images turn to a more eerie hue.

The crowd noise crescendos to a NIGHTMARISH BELLOW as we

CUT TO:

EXT. SLOPING GROVE (ELM TREE) - CONTINUOUS

Having fallen asleep against the Elm tree. Terry lays  
prostrate.

He snaps out of a slumber and is jostled by the marvelous  
colors and movement before him. Images of twirlers flit and  
flutter in his sleepy eyes like moths around a flame. He  
bolts up, and tries to find his bearings as he tries to  
focus.

A circle of young girls picnic on bologna sandwiches and  
juice in the shade of a nearby tree. Terry approaches a young  
CUTIE PIE TWIRLER sitting in the shade, baton in right hand,  
sandwich in left. Terry pulls the bottle from his rucksack.

TERRY  
...you like a drink of pot?

CUTIE PIE TWIRLER  
N... O... spells 'no'... besides  
I'm shooting for tha' Nationals.

Across the grove, Don, flanked by the Registrar, eyes Terry with discomfort.

HARD CUT TO:

CU ON A MOP plopping into a bucket of soapy water and sloshing on the floor. REVEAL: An OLD BLACK MAN, framed by a kitchen doorway, cleaning a white tiled floor.

EXT. REBEL DEVIL COFFEE SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

ESTABLISH A CAFE bathed in late day sunshine with a rebel flag proudly pegged above its doorway.

INT. REBEL DEVIL COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Terry enters the cafe, passing the man with the mop, and takes a seat at the empty counter.

TIME CUT:

A black woman busses a heavy tray of dirty dishes as Terry balances his elbows on the counter and looks at the specials on the board above.

The cafe is mostly empty. A radio plays in the kitchen.

A GROUP OF CLEAN-CUT YOUNG MEN in their mid-twenties, dressed in summer suits, occupy a booth within earshot of Terry and eye him askance.

Their table is littered with unfinished glasses of pop, piles of law books, and papers. A SERIOUS YOUNG MAN wearing glasses, looks over his shoulder at Terry.

LAW STUDENT #1  
(just loud enough for  
Terry to hear)  
We nevuh had no Negra problem heah.

Shaking his head in mock sadness. The others join in.

LAW STUDENT #2

Theah just weren't no problem -  
wasn't till these agitators from  
the Nawth' came down heah started  
all this problem business.

They continue to stare at Terry.

LAW STUDENT #1

Trouble, an I mean real trouble.  
That Negro student, James Meredith?  
They'll find dope in his room the  
first night he's heah.

Terry shifts his head and eyes ever so slightly towards the  
booth, then aborts the move.

LAW STUDENT #3

Dope, a gun, something - anything,  
just plant it in theah an' find it!  
And out he'll go!

LAW STUDENT #1

We're above this sort of thing,  
being mature and nonviolent  
persons, and Ole' Miss being the  
finest law school in the South.

The STUDENTS all share a giggle.

LAW STUDENT #2

But now these heah young  
undergraduates, they're hotheaded.  
Why, do you know how they feel?

An objective shot of the cafe shows that Terry is still alone  
at the counter. To the tune of John Brown's Body, the LAW  
STUDENTS begin to sing, almost simultaneously.

LAW STUDENTS

Oh we'll bury all the niggers in  
the Mississippi mud...

Terry feels the air of tension building around him.  
Suddenly, Terry's SUIT JACKET IS TUGGED at the elbow,  
catching him by surprise. Terry turns, looks down, and sees a  
pair of BRIGHT INNOCENT EYES staring up at him.

LITTLE GIRL

Hey, Mista', my pa wants to know if  
ya' hankerin' for some biscuits and  
gravy?

Terry smiles at her warmly. But is still puzzled. Terry scans the room and comes upon BOON, sitting in a booth at the far end of the cafe. Boon throws a salute and a smile back at Terry.

The camera isolates Terry as he walks across the diner over to the booth.

LAW STUDENT #1 (O.S.)  
I betcha he don't even know what  
the stars and bars stand for.

TERRY  
(under his breath)  
Yeah...they flew over my high  
school.

The five sets of eyes are on Terry as he crosses the room and sits opposite Boon at the table. The Little Girl races across the room and crawls over Boon to sit next to him. Terry looks down at the awaiting hot biscuits set on the table.

BOON  
No ya'll mus' be gettin' a hole in  
your belly with all the chin music  
coming from those over theah?

Terry looks back at the STUDENTS who continue to leer from across the room. He then eyes Boon with a look of solace.

TERRY  
In the movies, they call those  
"Country Witticisms".

Boon agreeing, pours a beer into his own glass and slides it over to Terry.

BOON  
With all their schoolin' they  
should have betta' manners.

Boon slides the steaming gravy boat over to Terry's plate. Oblivious, the LITTLE GIRL sits beside Boon and plays a game of finger puppets on the tabletop.

Terry digs his fork into the steaming plate as Boon turns around and leans out of the booth to face the students at the far end of the cafe.

From across the diner, the students' eyes connect with Boon's. Boon smiles wildly at them. After a beat, he turns his animated smile into a defiant scowl.

CUT TO:

SNOW/WHITE NOISE FLICKERS ON A BLACK AND WHITE TV SCREEN.

As reception fizzles in, we see a disembodied head appear through scrolling horizontal bars. It is a live broadcast of a politician on a podium making a campaign speech. As reception becomes clearer, we make out the infamous heavy-handed Arkansas Governor, ORVAL FAUBUS-orating with six cross-purpose facial ticks going strong.

GOVERNOR FAUBUS  
(compulsively gulping  
water after every pause,  
hacking and spitting.)  
I do declare, the indecent exposure  
of our peoples in the eyes of God  
and America.

INT. ALUMNI HOUSE ROOM - NIGHT

Terry, with his feet up on a pillow and his notepad on his stomach, is sprawled out on the bed in boxers and a T-shirt. He puts down his number two pencil and takes a hit from the bottle of pot. As he watches the tube, Terry rests his head against the headboard.

GOVERNOR FAUBUS  
The communist and the long-haired  
idealist - one and the same. They  
are twins.

At first, Terry is mixed up, and kicks out a few laughs.

GOVERNOR FAUBUS (CONT'D)  
The seven headed monster of evil  
and degradation.... Segregation,  
Now and Forever!

As the sound of the voice reverberates dissonantly, WE HOLD ON TERRY in shock - eyes frozen on the TV.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA HALLWAY - MORNING

CU on green chalkboard with delicately handwritten letters scribed in multi-colored chalk. The CAMERA SLOWLY TILTS DOWN TO READ:

**Schedule - Baton Twirling Institute-July 14**

7:30 Up and at'em

8-9 Breakfast-University Cafeteria

9-9:30 Assembly, Limber up and Review  
 9:30-10:45 Class no. 4  
 10:45-11:30 Relax-Make Notes  
 11:30-12:45 Class no. 5  
 1-2:30 Lunch-University Cafeteria  
 2:30-4 Class no. 6  
 4-5:30 Swim Hour  
 6:30-7:30 Supper-University Cafeteria  
 7:30 Dance-Tennis Court  
 11 Room Check  
 11:30 Lights out (NO EXCEPTIONS)

The camera pulls back to reveal Terry reading the sign as a few early-rising Twirlers twitter down the hallway.

EXT. OLE' MISS LIBRARY STEPS - EARLY MORING

Terry hikes up the steps and passes a few book-carrying law students as he enters the building.

CUT TO:

INT. OLE' MISS LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

CU ON HANDS paging through a card catalogue of a library file. Flip to reveal "LIGHT IN AUGUST" BY WILLIAM FAULKNER. Card catalogue #P94065 Faulk, W.

CUT TO:

Terry browses his way through the literature section of the library and comes upon a row of mint copies of William Faulkner novels.

The camera follows Terry's finger as it slides gracefully down the bindings, exposing the titles, one after the other- The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying: Go Down, Moses, Reivers: A Reminiscence, Intruder in the Dust, Sanctuary, Absalom, Absalom!, The Hamlet, The Unvanquished. His finger stops on Light in August. His hands gently pull the heavy book from the shelf.

CUT TO:

CU on Terry as he carefully opens the immaculate first-edition copy of the novel.

TERRY'S POV: As his hands peel open this treasured volume he sees **NIGGER-LOVER** scrawled across the title page in bold letters. Bludgeoned by the violent scribble, Terry's eyes turn dour. His face loses color and a shock of pain wends through his entire body.

He can't take it. Terry closes the book and shelves it.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLE' MISS LIBRARY STEPS - CONTINUOUS

WIDE SHOT of the weighty architecture of the LIBRARY glowing in the morning sunshine.

It is very quiet all around. Still shaken by the title page incident, Terry sits on the steps and takes in the hot sun.

He lights a cigarette and artfully blows smoke from his mouth when a BELL RINGS LOUDLY. Class has let out, and GROUPS OF LAW STUDENTS parade down the steps and into Terry's peaceful moment. The uproar of activity disperses quickly and the steps are empty except for Terry. The sound of the students chattering carries into the distance.

Again, it becomes unusually quiet all around.

CUT TO:

TERRY'S POV:

A PAIR OF LEGS appear from around the balustrade at the base of the steps. The legs turn the corner, and the camera REVEALS: an immaculate, pink-faced man, with spectacles attached by a silver loop to his lapel, nails buffed to a gleam, carries a smart leather briefcase and a couple of English-literature textbooks. The man rests the pile of books on the balustrade and smiles down on Terry with what seems to be extraordinary happiness.

AMIABLE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN

My, but it's a mighty warm day, an'  
that's no lie.

He withdraws a dazzling white linen handkerchief and touches it carefully to his brow.

AMIABLE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)

An' I expect you all from up Nawth,  
find it especially so!

Terry nods and smiles back warmly.

AMIABLE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)

(beaming and nodding his  
head)

And you know the natural tolerance  
of the people of Mississippi.

(MORE)



## AMIABLE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)

Don't mind nobody's business but  
 yoah own! Live and let live! That's  
 how the people of Mississippi feel-  
 always have! Why Look at William  
 Faulkner, with all his notions, an'  
 him livin' right ovah heah in  
 Oxford all the time an' nobody  
 botherin' him...

Terry takes it in but can't make out the point.

## AMIABLE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)

...Just let him go on his way-why  
 we even let him teach at the  
 university one yeah! That's right  
 I know it! Live an' let live, you  
 can't beat it! I'll see you now  
 heah?

He half raises his hand in "goodbye" and hurries off.

CUT TO:

## EXT. SLOPING GROVE (OLE' MISS CAMPUS) - LATER

Terry has come across a group of girls practicing finger-rolls. He spots a GEORGIA PEACH wearing something like a handkerchief size see-through Confederate flag.

## TERRY

Do you find that your costume is an  
 advantage in your work?

## GEORGIA PEACH

(Tucking her little blouse  
 in a bit more snugly all  
 around.)

Yessuh, I do. Why, back home near  
 Macon...Macon, Georgia? At Robert  
 E. Lee High...

Terry scribbles a note and takes a peek above his shades.

## GEORGIA PEACH (CONT'D)

We've got these outfits with  
 tassels and a little red-and-gold  
 skirt?...That, you know, sort of  
 flairs out? Well, now ther'  
 pretty, awfully pretty, and of  
 course they're short and  
 everything, but I do declare those  
 tassels, and that little skirt get  
 in my way!

EXT. SLOPING GROVE (OLE' MISS CAMPUS) - THE NEXT DAY

Terry, no longer looking like a fish-out-of-water, traipses through the classes inexpressively. An INSTRUCTOR gives methods for advanced twirling techniques to a group of young college-age girls.

INSTRUCTOR

1-2-3-fingerolls to aaaaaaaaah 4  
aaaand 5 writst roll, waist roll,  
to a final neck roll...over  
aaaaaaaaaaaand out.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROVE (JUDGE AND SCOREKEEPER PADDOCK) - CONTINUOUS

Terry weeds his way through the crowd to the exhibition ring. He watches as a pretty GIRL of about twelve tosses a baton sixty feet straight up in the air. She spins beneath it like an ice skater, and effortlessly catches it behind her back, not moving an inch.

CUT TO:

HIGH TOSS & SPIN GIRL

I practice an hour a day for the last six years. My hope is to become the best in the high toss and spin. Now, I'm up to seven complete turns before making the catch.

TERRY

Is there a limit to the height and number of spins one could attain?

HIGH TOSS & SPIN GIRL

No, I guess not.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI - LATE AFTERNOON

A MARCHING BAND bellows a belchy version of *Roll Out the Barrel*. Leading the band are TWO FLAG CORPS waving the Stars and Stripes alongside the Rebel flag. Terry skips through the parade to across the street where the BUS is waiting.

The camera follows as he boards the bus and works his way to the rear.

As the bus slowly accelerates, Terry sits and looks out of the window across the square onto the COURTHOUSE.

CUT TO:

A single traveling point of view shot on the fountain in the shade of the facade.

CUT back to an isolated shot on TERRY.

**HOLD:**

TERRY (V.O.)  
 (Voiceover continues  
 through action)  
 In an age gone stale through the  
 complex bureaucratic  
 interdependencies, with its tedious  
 labyrinth of technical  
 specializations, each contingent  
 upon the next; and all aimed to  
 converge into a single totality of  
 meaning...

CUT TO:

WE CRANE UP as the BUS peels around the flag waving band while they march towards the horizon and slowly creep out of focus.

TERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 ...it is a refreshing moment indeed  
 when one comes across an area of  
 human endeavor absolutely  
 sufficient unto itself, pure and  
 free, no strings attached -- the  
 cherished and almost forgotten  
*l'art pour l'art.*

Hold as the bus drifts away and blurs into an abstract mosaic of color.

The camera shifts as it isolates another object, not yet defined, heading straight towards the lens.

TERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Such is the work being carried forward now at the Dixie National Baton Twirling Institute, down at the campus of Ole Miss - a visit to which is well worthwhile these days, if one can keep one's wits about.

Slowly REVEAL INTO FOCUS, riding towards us, a mule driving a cart filled with a FAMILY OF SHARECROPPERS, and their CHILDREN. The heat rising from the road swirls in a hazy blur before them. THE CAMERA HOLDS ON the faces of the family riding closer and closer - Faces of hope luminous in the hot Mississippi sun.

CUT TO:

WHITE TITLES AGAINST BLACK:

**Days after Terry Southern visited the campus of Ole Miss riots broke out upon the admission of its first African American student, James Meredith.**

**As a result of Meredith's admission and the resulting riots, 6,000 troops were deployed, 166 US Marshalls were injured in the melee, and 40 soldiers and National Guardsmen were wounded while two other men were murdered. It was the South's greatest crisis since the Civil War.**

**On October 1, 1962, James Meredith became the first African-American student to be enrolled at the University of Mississippi, and attended his first class, in American History.**

