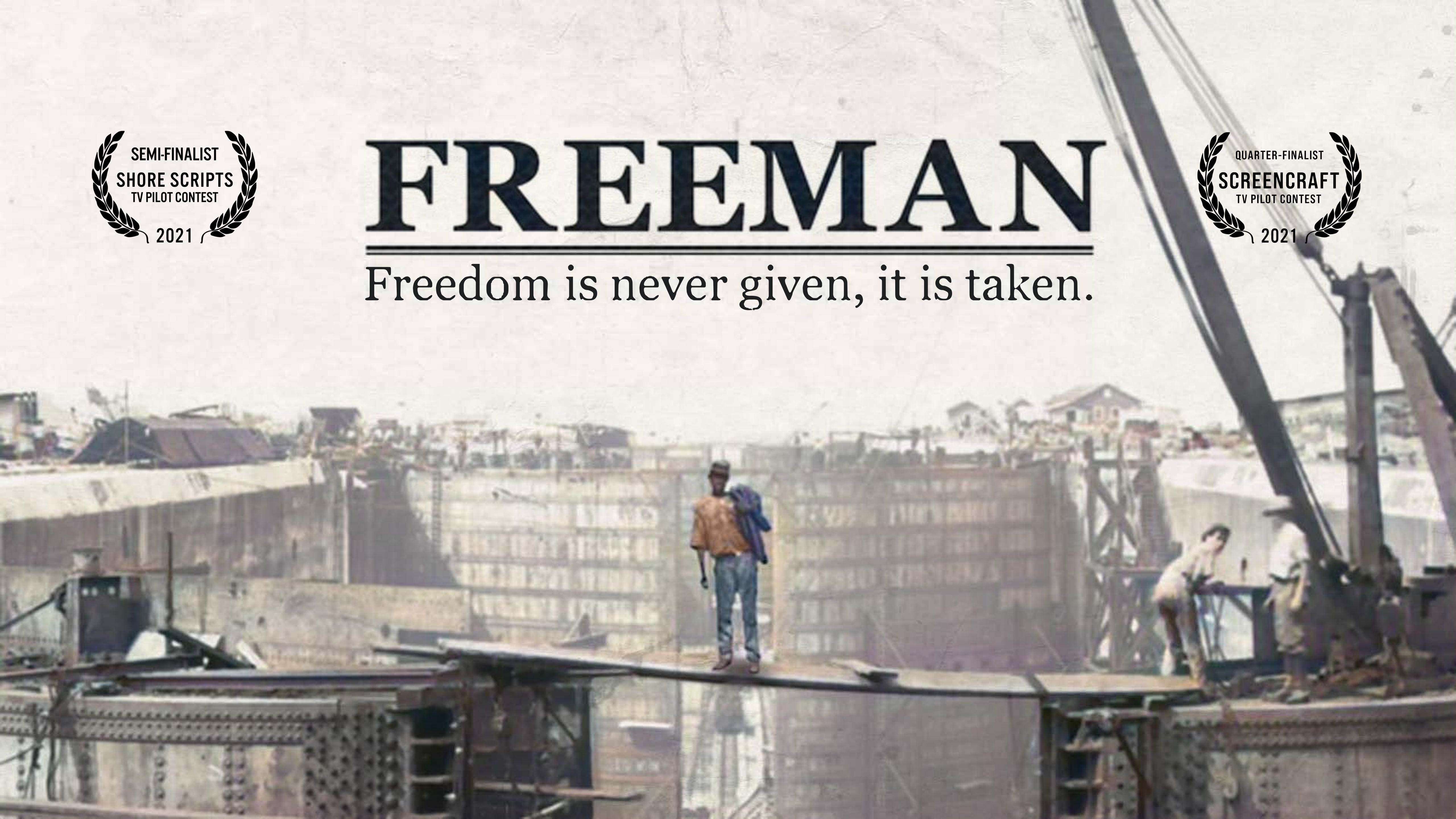




FREEMAN



Freedom is never given, it is taken.



INTRODUCTION

In 1882 a young Jamaican travels to Panama to work on the Canal, in his struggle to survive he finds that capitalism is another type of slavery.



SYNOPSIS

Escaping post-colonial racism and abject poverty in his native Jamaica, BENJAMIN FREEMAN is recruited into the ranks of the French Panama Canal Company.

Bright - but naive and ambitious - he rises quickly, navigating the dangers of the canal works and the callous leadership of the Chief Financier FERDINAND deLESSEPS, a man who places little value on human lives - and no value on black lives.

As the works progress conditions worsen and Ben's work crew are killed in a landslide. His search for justice finds a partner in JEANNE, Ferdinand's idealistic daughter-in-law, and their common cause brings them dangerously close together.

When their relationship is uncovered Ben is forced to flee into the jungle. Wounded, starving and malarial he is rescued by the local EMBERA TRIBE. He is healed and recruited into their fight against the canal's expansion.

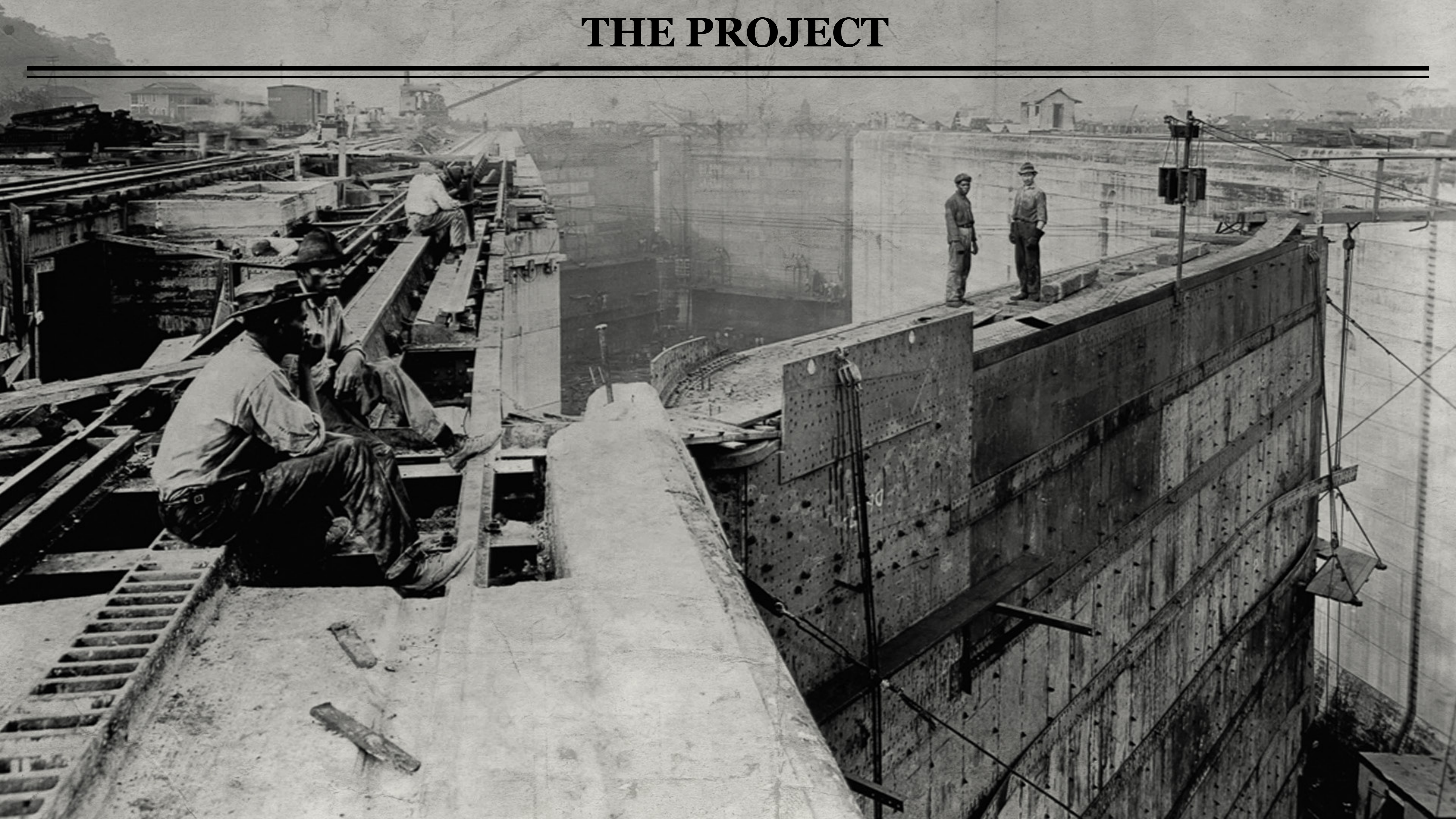
In retribution for destroying the dam that has dried up the river - and their food source - the tribe are massacred and Ben is captured and hauled back to the canal. By now it is a disease ridden hell, kept in check by a camp militia under the leadership of Jeanne's sadistic husband CHARLES.

Ben is used as an example against further dissent, but the cruel treatment which he suffers has the opposite effect, triggering a riot and a rebellion among the Caribbean workers.

Realising the symbolic power that Freeman has over his men, Ferdinand offers him a deal - his freedom in exchange for an end to the rebellion.

Ben's choice triggers a final bloody uprising. In the midst of the violence Ben escapes to the jungle once more - but this time he goes with Jeanne - carrying enough evidence of the deLessep's crimes to bring them to justice and end the horrors of the canal once and for all.

THE PROJECT



FORMAT & INFLUENCES

Format: 7 x 1hr episodes

Genre: **Historical drama/ Action romance**

Certificate: 12A

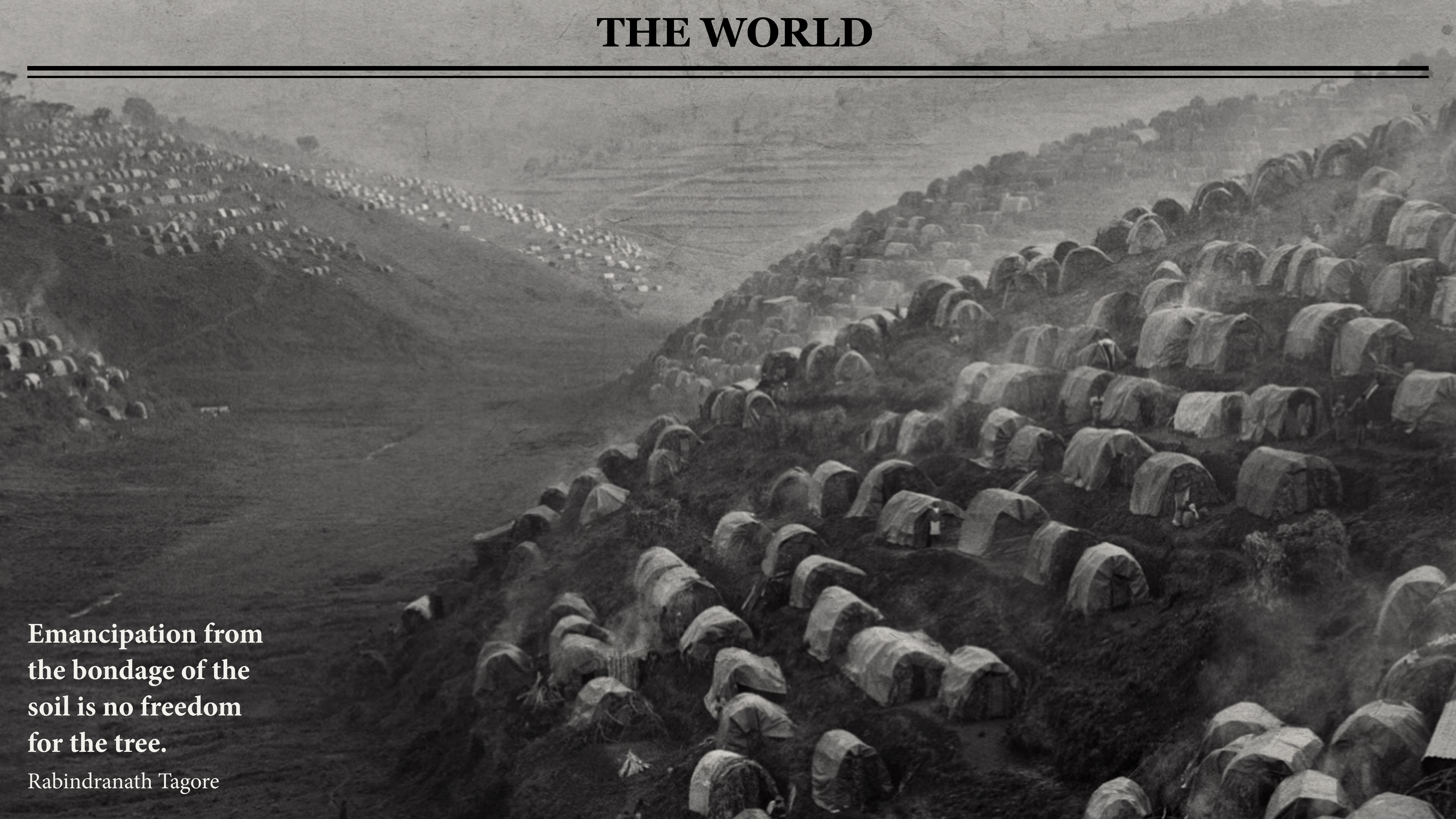
Influences: **The Harder They Come, There Will Be Blood, Fitzcarraldo, Apocalypto, The Last of the Mohicans, Spartacus, 12 Years a Slave, The Underground Railroad**



THE WORLD

**Emancipation from
the bondage of the
soil is no freedom
for the tree.**

Rabindranath Tagore

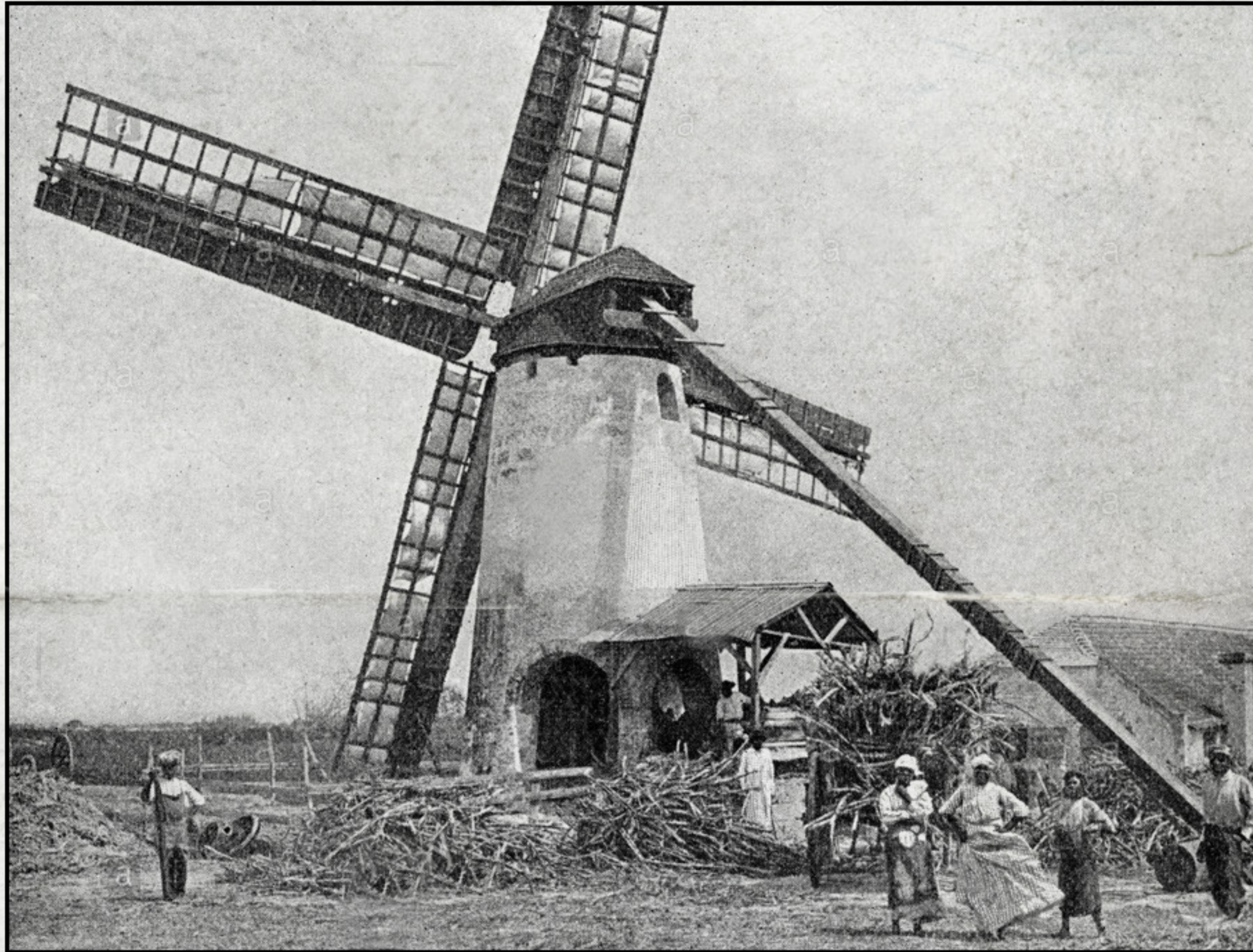


THE WORLD

Caribbean Sea



THE WORLD



Jamaica

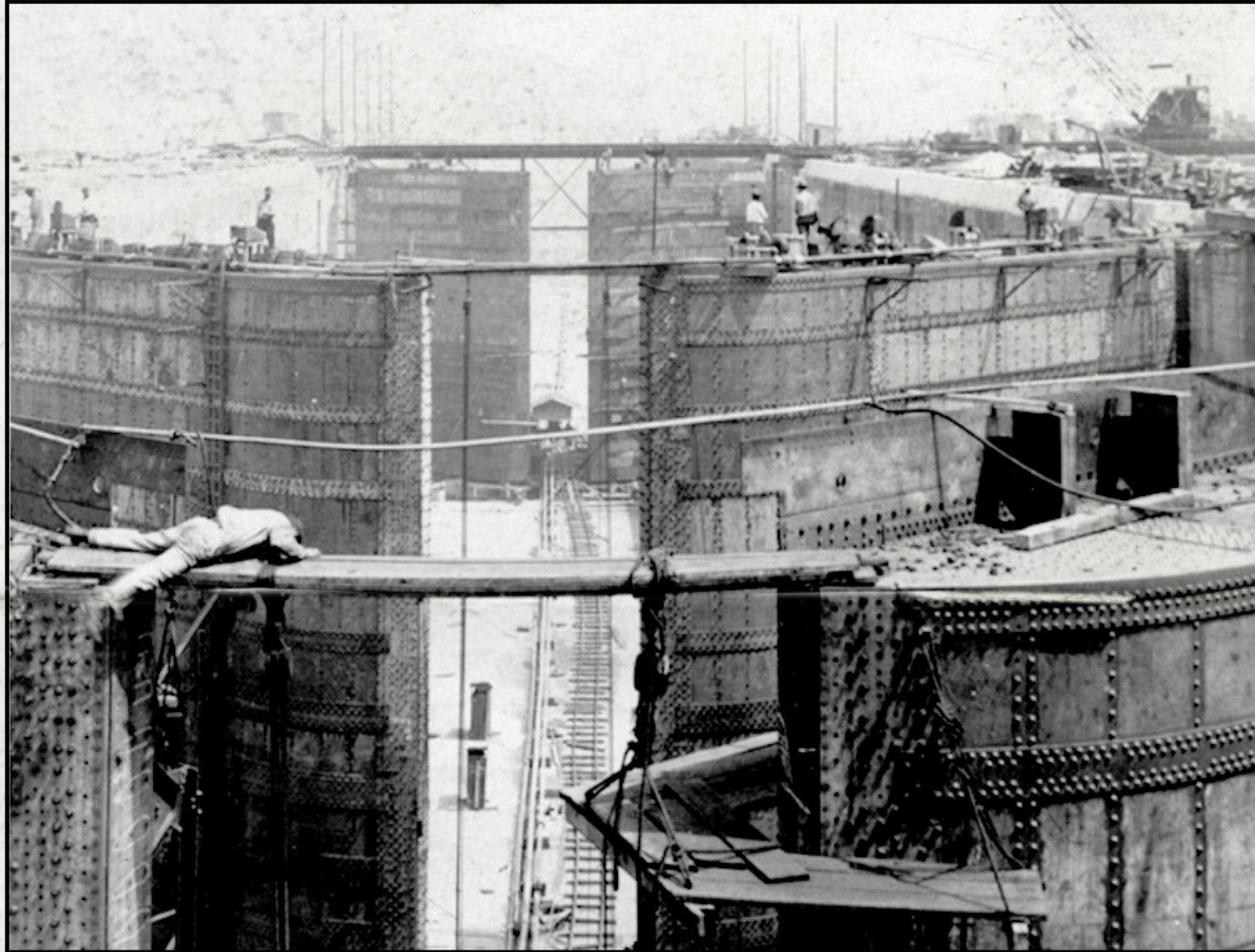
The story begins in the hills outside Kingston. After the end of slavery in 1841 the growing of cane and cotton becomes unprofitable and many of the English flee the colony. The emancipated slaves are left with an impossible choice, turn to subsistence farming or work for the remaining mill owners - their former slavemasters - for poverty wages.



Panama - Mount Hope and the Camp

A seething mass of humanity, the camp sprawls for miles from Colon harbour to the canal works. Each race is segregated, with the whitest, and wealthiest, living above it all in colonial splendour on Mount Hope. Strict boundaries are enforced by the camp overseers, with the Jamaicans kept in squalor far away from the town.

THE WORLD



The Canal Works

When Freeman arrives in Panama the canal is no more than a gully cut into the red clay, but throughout the 1880's the canal works grow to become a feat of engineering of breathtaking scale. Tens of thousands of lives are lost in raising hundreds of thousands of tonnes of concrete and steel to hold back the tide, and bridge the world.



The Jungle

Thick rainforest surrounds the camp. Drums from the shadows and rare glimpses of the native tribe stoke fear and superstition within the crew. But it is here that Freeman finds his way, where he sees the cost of his ambition, where he begins to make recompense for his part in the expansion of the canal and the destruction of the tribe.

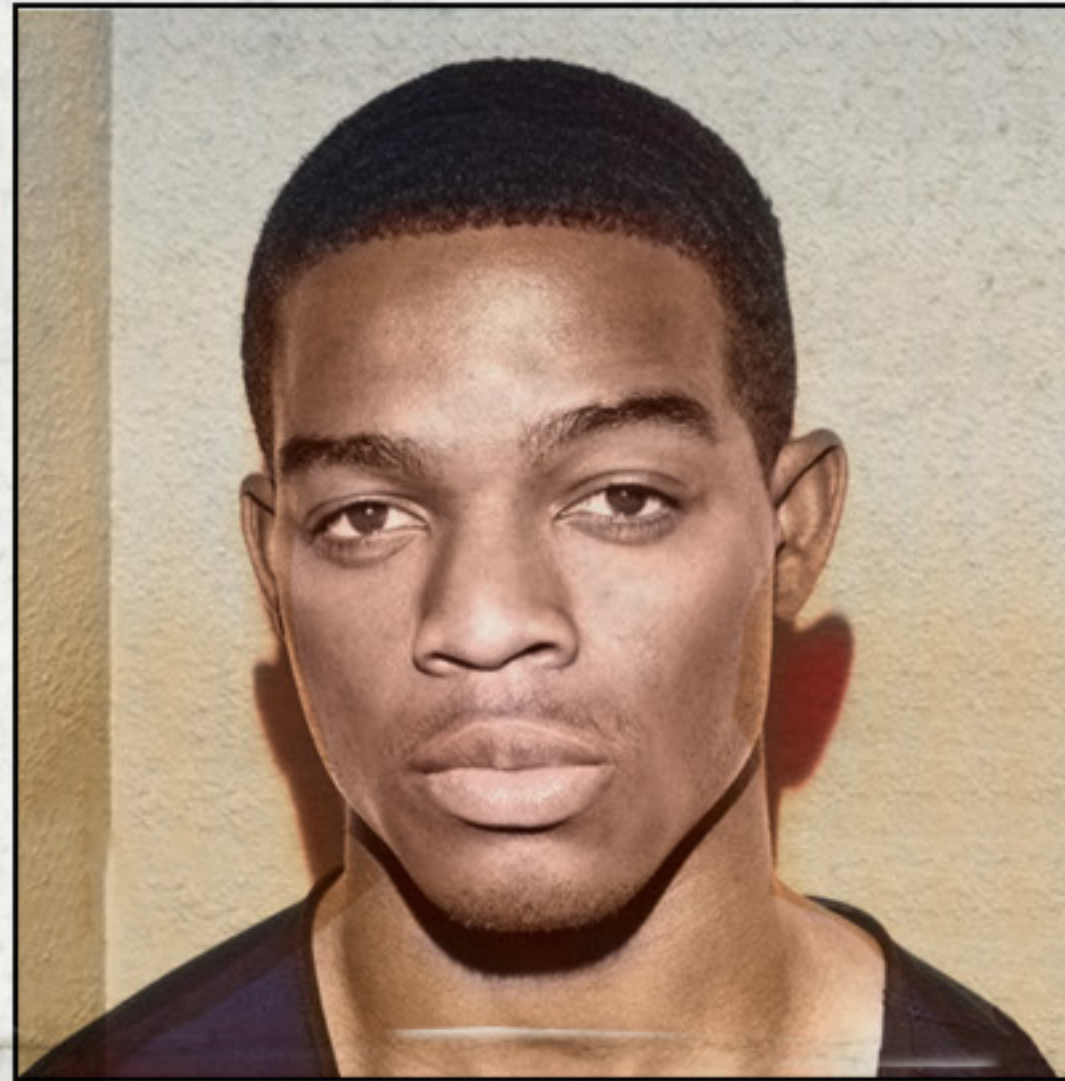
CHARACTERS & SPECULATIVE CASTING

Struggle is a never ending process.
Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.

Coretta Scott King



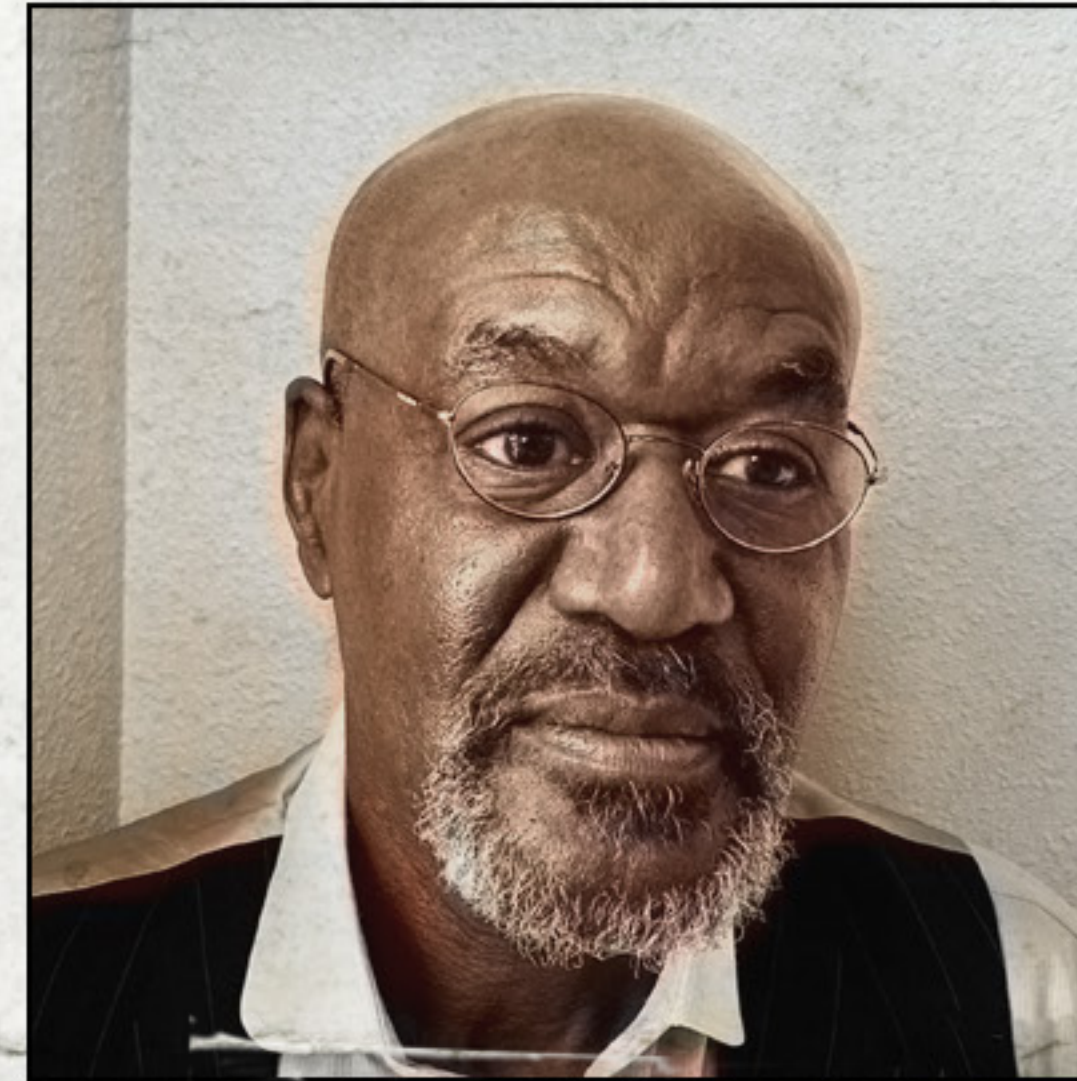
THE JAMAICANS



Benjamin Freeman

Stephan James

The idealistic 19 year old son of a poor tenant farmer. His lofty goals are inspired by his name, fueled by his education, mocked by his enemies and manipulated by his bosses. His journey takes him from selfishness to selflessness, with tragic consequences.



Walter Freeman

Delroy Lindo

Ben's father grew up in the last days of slavery. On the date of emancipation he rented a worthless patch of land and took the name Freeman. He has fought hard to survive, raising Ben as a single father in the cruelty of post-colonial Jamaica..



Horace Newton

William Catlett

A street-wise survivor with a quick tongue. Horace takes Ben under his wing, finding in the naive young man both a source of humour and a willing pupil. Horace and Dennis join the Canal project together - bonded by their secrets, their own reasons for joining are a mystery.



Dennis Shaw

Winston Duke

Dennis is a giant of a man with a gentle heart and an intelligence that is often underestimated. He speaks an almost incomprehensible patois that few can understand. Dennis is the steady force in the men's friendship, their protector and lynchpin.

THE FRENCH



Jeanne deLesseps

Marion Cotillard

The proud daughter of a French aristocratic family, Jeanne is married off to Charles deLesseps at an early age - into cruelty, infidelity and a cage that she can't escape, but doesn't meekly abide. Jeanne has a power that slowly awakens through her relationship with Ben.



Ferdinand deLesseps

Jean-Paul Belmondo

The Chief Financier of the Panama Canal Company is a man of vision, of ambition, and of unbounded callousness. If the canal is Hell, Ferdinand is the Devil. His charm and erudition mask a disdain for human life and his drive is unstoppable.



Charles deLesseps

Matthieu Amalric

The first son of the deLesseps family is a nasty stew of racism, ambition, mysogyny and self-hate. Growing up in his father's shadow he is twisted by his desire for respect, maddened by his wife's emnity, and controlled by his mistress Marceline's scheming.



Théogène Esclaves

Hubert Kounde

Charles' right hand man Esclaves is the muscle to his bosses' twisted will. He is the Overseer of the Caribbean work gang. He uses violence and manipulation to keep the workers in check. He sees Ben as an easy mark, a view that will eventually cost him dearly.

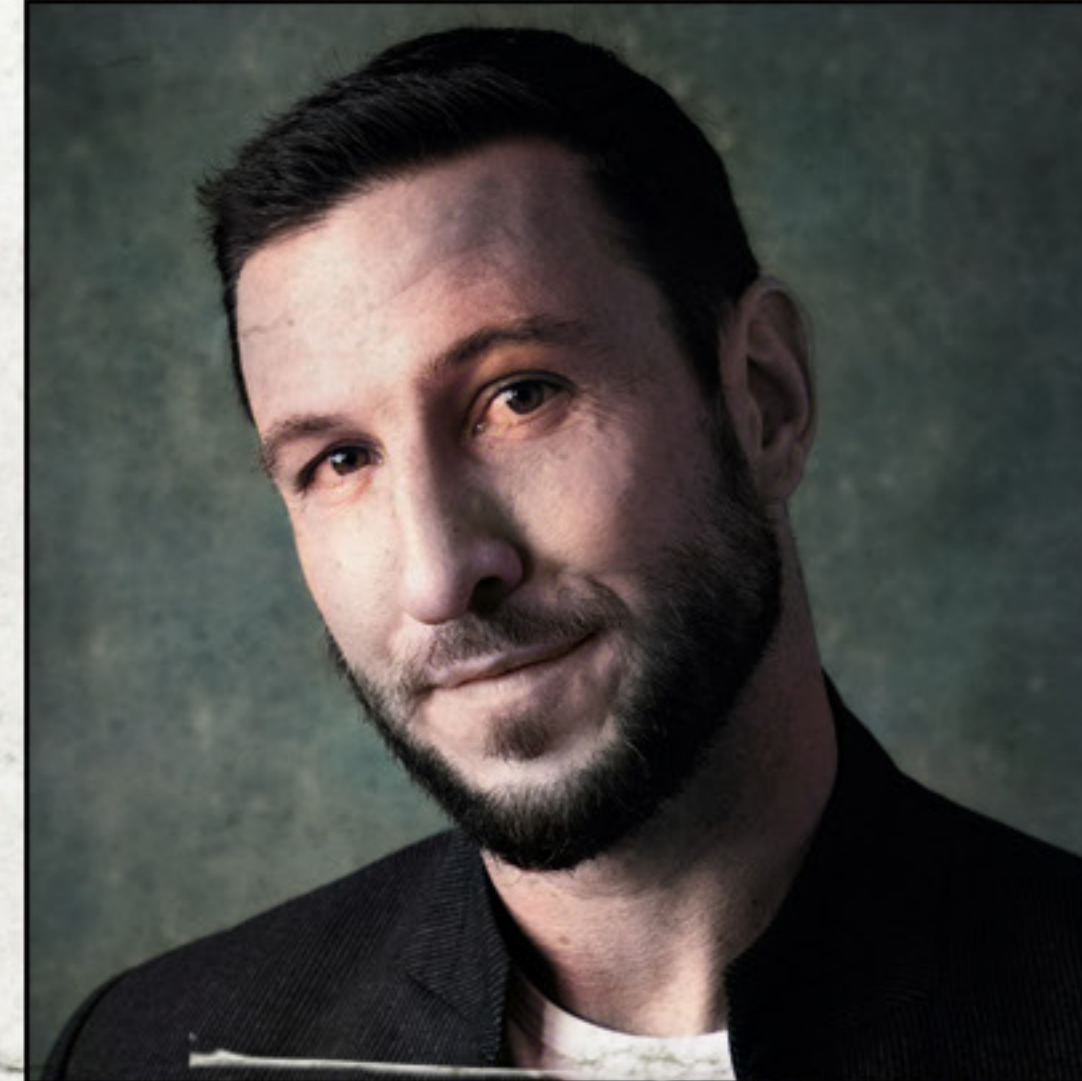
ENEMIES & ALLIES



Marceline Boyer

Antonia Thomas

The creole mistress of Charles deLesseps is a survivor, a schemer, and ultimately a victim. Plucked from New Orleans by Charles she lives in luxury at the margins of the camp, an incruitable presence and a constant reminder of Charles's hypocrisy and cruelty.



Bill O'Shaughnessy

Pablo Schreiber

The Overseer of the Irish work gang. Bill is no stranger to hardship, having survived the potato famine and escaped from the horrors of the American Civil War. A hard man, he looks after his own, demanding and rewarding the loyalty of his men.



Imbichu

Sophia Hammons

After the death of her mother, Imbichu is raised by her father with little regard for her gender. With a huge capacity for giving life, and a natural ability to bring death, she is a force of nature. Central in saving and rehabilitating Ben, her choice will determine the fate of her tribe.



Tagua

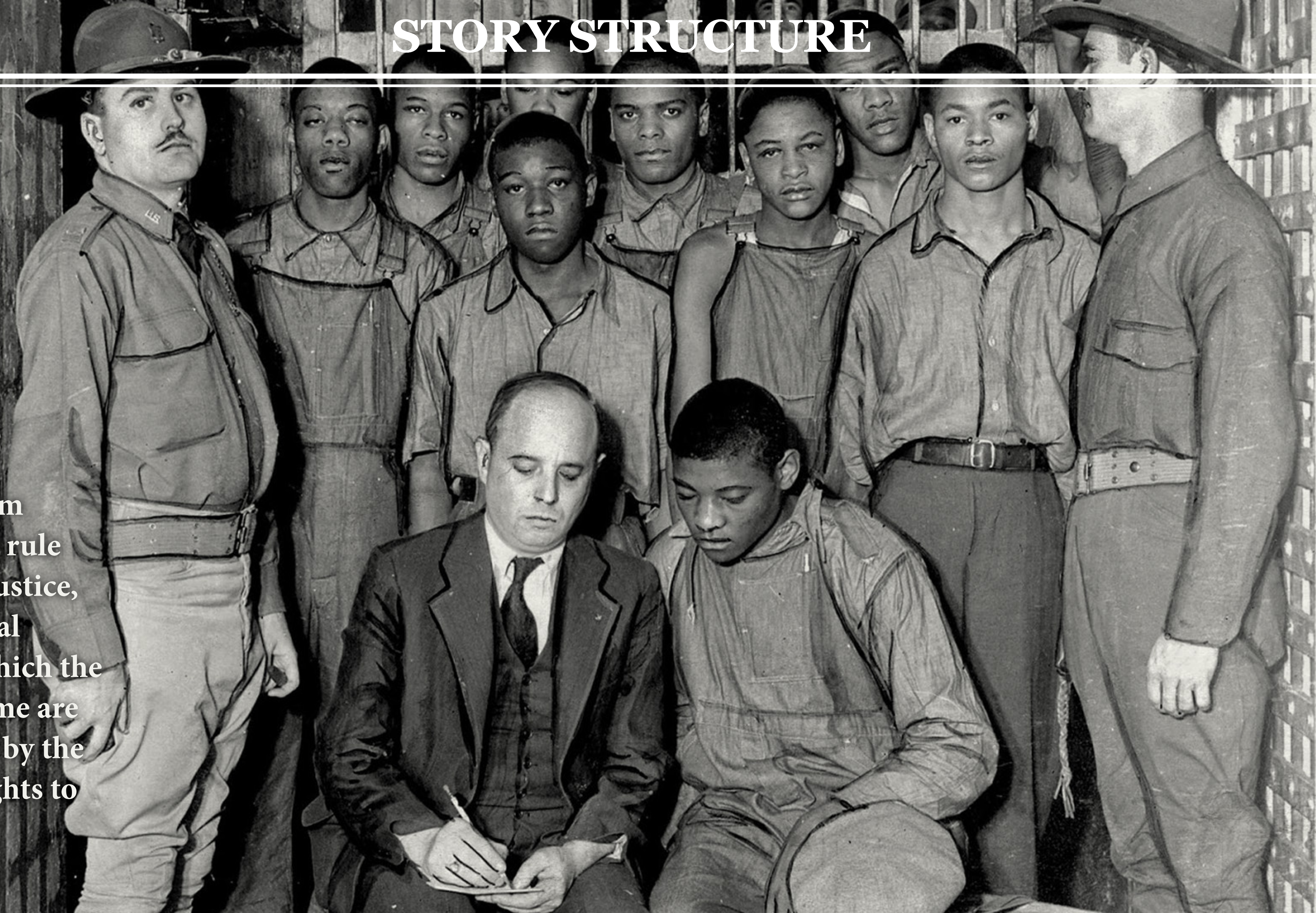
Rudy Youngblood

Still keening from the loss of his wife, seasoned warrior Tagua pours all of his hunger for vengeance into his daughter Imbichu. Pivotal in steering the tribe to rebel against the incursions of the canal, Tagua's anger will find a fatal match in Ben.

STORY STRUCTURE

True freedom requires the rule of law and justice, and a judicial system in which the rights of some are not secured by the denial of rights to others.

Jonathan Sacks



EPISODES

Episode 1 - 'Call', 1882

19 year old Benjamin Freeman works on his father Walter's tenant farm. The work is endless and the cane crop yields no profit. Lonely, abused and restless, Ben is easy pickings for a Panama Canal Company recruiter.

Leaving his father behind, Ben boards a company clipper to Panama. During the voyage Ben falls in with a crew of Jamaican émigrés. Their shared optimism blinds them to the conditions of the long journey and the dangers of the Company.

On arrival they are taken to the camp and for the first time Ben sees life - other races, languages, women - and is immediately drawn in. Ben sets out to explore and quickly finds that this is a dangerous place. He is saved from a beating by Overseer Esclaves - to whom he now owes a debt of gratitude.

Episode 2 - 'Rise', 1882-85

The scale of the project is breathtaking. Huge machines and thousands of men swarm over the landscape and widen the deep cut that grows daily through the red clay. Progress is good and Ben shows great ability.

Ben's ambition and naivety catch the attention of Esclaves and he starts to rise through the ranks. He soon sees the rewards of loyalty to Esclaves. Encouraged by his new mentor he starts to take a firmer hand over his crew, growing hardened to the suffering and danger around them.

At the topping off ceremony for the second lock gate Ben meets Jeanne de Lesseps, the daughter-in-law of the canal's powerful chief financier Ferdinand. Jeanne's relationship with her abusive, cheating husband Charles is fractious, she and Ben make an immediate connection.

EPISODES

Episode 3 – ‘Fall’, 1886

The rainy season brings terrible suffering – cholera, typhoid and malaria sweep the camp and the Jamaicans are denied medical help. The machines rust and break and the Jamaicans are ordered to pick up the heavy work - Freeman starts to push his crew beyond the limits of safety.

After weeks of torrential rain a huge landslide tears through the timber shoring of the canal side, killing many of Ben’s crew. In desperation he takes his men to the Infirmary, but they are denied access, left to die in the mud and the rain.

Ben’s grief and guilt find a partner in Jeanne. Brought together by loneliness and desire they head for the jungle and a dangerous tryst. But they are followed by Esclaves - Ben is beaten and threatened with death, badly wounded he is forced to flee into the jungle.

Episode 4 - ‘Awakening’, 1886-87

He is rescued by Tagua and his young daughter Imbichu, natives of the Embera tribe. They take him back to their village where, under Imbichu’s care, he is healed.

The tribe live on a river that feeds into the Caribbean sea, fishing provides much of their food, strong poison their weaponry. But the river dries up, the hunting is poor, and the Embera go hungry.

A scouting party is sent out. They return with dead, wounded, and news - the canal works have moved inland, the river has been dammed. Amongst their spoils is a crate of dynamite, in a twist of fate Ben is given the means to destroy what he has helped to build. Against Imbichu’s wishes Ben is enlisted into the Embera war party and they set out to bring down the dam.

EPISODES

Episode 5 – ‘Fight’, 1887

The war party overrun the works crew and breach the dam. The battle is brutal and the Embera kill every man bar one - an old enemy who Ben spares out of mercy, and who will come to play a part in his own future survival.

Life returns to the river and the Embera village. Ben is initiated into the tribe and celebrated as a hero, but Imbichu is not so easily convinced and remains guarded.

With good reason - the act of sabotage leads to a further militarisation of the Canal Company, and the canal militia come down on the village. A massacre occurs, during the fighting Tagua is killed and Imbichu - holding Ben responsible - escapes to the jungle. Esclaves and Ben meet in the midst of the fighting and the Overseer dies at Ben's hand. Ben is captured.

Episode 6 – ‘Capture’, 1887-88

Ben is taken back to the canal. The works have grown in his absence and men line the main cut like ants. Ben is strung up for a public hanging but thanks to the intervention of Jeanne - and the threat of a Jamaican revolt - his life is spared.

Ben is kept prisoner, tortured at night by a suspicious Charles, forced back to work on the digging crew by day. In his absence the working conditions have worsened tenfold and disease, starvation and criminal negligence are rife.

The workers are on the verge of mutiny. Emboldened by the presence of Ben they begin testing the strength of the defences - patrolled by a hired battalion of Colombian troops - that now surround the camp. Ferdinand, in an attempt to remove Ben's influence over the workers, offers him safe passage home, and his freedom.

EPISODES

Episode 7 – ‘Flight’, 1888

Sensing a trap, Ben refuses and stands with the men. A bloody uprising results in a pitch battle between the canal militia and the Jamaicans.

Ben, Marceline and Jeanne are thrown together in the chaos. They steal the company ledger and fight their way out of the burning camp. As they flee they are spotted by Charles and the militia. Marceline is shot and killed and as Ben and Jeanne run for the jungle, Ben is shot in the stomach.

With Ben in agony they head for the ruined Embera village. Here they find Imbichu, living alone in the ruins. Torn between her anger at Ben, and her sense of responsibility to him, she helps them find a boat.

With Ben losing consciousness the boat drifts downriver, towards the sea, and Ben finds the only freedom that he will ever really know.



WHY NOW?

Most men today
cannot conceive
of a freedom that
does not involve
somebody's slavery.

W. E. B. Du Bois



WHY NOW?

***Freeman* is drawn from history but speaks directly to the concerns of a modern audience.**

The story takes on globalised capitalism and its detrimental impact on workers, the environment and native cultures. It highlights some of history's most extreme inequalities in health and wealth. It takes a clear eyed view of racism and its pernicious economic bases. It celebrates the power of the individual and the strength that we have in numbers.

Above all *Freeman* investigates the nature of freedom - its price for the rich, and its cost for the poor.

While these are serious themes the

answers are uplifting and energising.

In answering the question "what would a monomythical story with a *black* hero look like" we have produced a tale that speaks to the resurgent civil rights movement, avoiding worthiness in favour of pure entertainment, romance and spectacle on a scale rooted in classic Hollywood cinema.

The Panama Canal Company were one of the first pan-global enterprises and *Freeman* is a melting pot of language and culture - Caribbean, French, Irish, English, Native and Latin American characters ensure that the show has a truly global appeal to match its ambition.

Freeman - Pilot Episode

Draft 3.8

Freeman ©2022, AltShift

EXT. JAMAICAN HILLS - DAY

Heat haze. Rolling hills. Fields of sugarcane.

A road leads past an old plantation house - it is covered in ivy, its windows hollow, insides rotting away - a pair of overgrown gateposts flank the drive, topped by peeling lions, flakes of whitewash cling to the mortar.

TITLE OVER:

JAMAICA, 1882

48 YEARS AFTER THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

By the roadside a thin grey MULE is tied in the shade of a stand of Poui trees.

The drowse is split by the CRACK of an axe on wood.

A horsefly BUZZES around the mule's rump, it SWISHES its tail, lets out a gentle GRUMBLE of discontent.

CRACK

The mule STAMPS.

CRACK

A CREAK from the trees, a GROAN and the canopy is split as a tree comes CRASHING down.

SHRIEKING, a flock of parakeets takes flight.

The surrounding trees SWAY and MOAN as they recoil, recovering in moments from the fall of their neighbour.

The downed tree has flattened a line in the brush...

BENJAMIN FREEMAN leans his axe against its trunk.

He is sweat drenched, his muscles are rope and rope ties up his cotton trousers - a few sizes too big. He arches his back, squats on his toes and leans back against the fallen Poui.

He wipes his brow with a forearm. His face is a deep brown,

well-made, he's 19, no more than that, there's a stubbornness in the set of his jaw, optimism - and a little naivety - in his eyes.

He blinks away the sweat and closes his eyes to the glare of the sun.

Horseflies DRONE.

He grows still as his BREATHING slows.

FOOTSTEPS in the undergrowth...

The shadow of a man passes over him.

Ben opens an eye...

The man is silhouetted against the circle of light that the fallen Poui has cut in the canopy.

Ben swats away a fly.

BEN

I'm nearly done.

MAN

It doesn't look that way to me.

BEN

An hour more and I'll have it ready to drag up the hill.

MAN

An hour more and I'll have to drag you up the hill.

Ben frowns up at the man.

The man proffers a hand, dark brown, calloused - the knuckles are criss-crossed with deep scars.

MAN

There's more important work to do.

Ben squints up, stubborn, unmoving...

The man's hand hovers...

MAN

Don't be a fool son.

Reluctantly, Ben reaches up and grasps the hand.

He is hauled to his feet and sways for a moment before being steadied by the man's firm grip on his shoulder.

Ben looks up to meet his father's gaze.

WALTER FREEMAN returns the stare - he's 55, his lined forehead betrays a lifetime of worry, the glint in his eye attests to a quick anger.

WALTER

Come on, let's eat.

Walter puts a heavily muscled arm around Ben's shoulder and steers his son away through the brush.

Sweat stains the back of Walter's shirt, the rough cotton is pulled taut across his powerful shoulder blades...

The shirt is tied in a tight knot at his left bicep...

The BREEZE catches Walter's empty shirtsleeve...

Sends it FLUTTERING...

Weightless in the wind.

EXT. FARM TRACK - DAY

They climb the track that cuts the cane brake, Walter leads the mule, Ben SCUFFS along behind.

They pass rows of terracing that step the hillside - each row a wall of timber cut clean from the trunks of Poui, irrigation channels SPILL a pool of muddy water into a trench in each field.

The mule DRAGS its hooves.

A skinny rabbit hangs from the saddle, blood drips from its

snared neck and hits the white dust with a PUFF...

The blood stain dries to a crust, in seconds.

EXT. THE FREEMAN TENANT FARM - DAY

They step into a clearing in the sugarcane, a small shack sits atop a hillock in the centre.

Ben ties the mule by a stream-fed trough in the shade of a flowering Mahoe tree.

The mule bends its head to DRINK, Ben leans beside the animal, cups his hands, SCOOPS clear water over his head.

He GASPS in the cold...

Stands...

Turns away dripping.

Walter pushes open the shack door, goes inside.

Ben traipses across the yard - with a lazy playful lunge he sends a hen CLUCKING - he climbs the stairs and sits down on the porch swing, bends to unlace his shoes, carefully places them on the boards beside him.

He wiggles his toes.

Looks up with a bored eye to survey the view...

The mule track cuts on down through the cane, past the old plantation house...

A windmill turns lazily beyond...

Further yet lies a city, spread out in the haze, smogged by the fires of cane refineries and clouded by the smokestacks of steamers in the bay.

Ben frowns, rises and pushes open the shack door.

INT. THE FREEMAN TENANT FARM - DAY

Inside it is cramped, cool and dark. Two pallet beds stand on opposite sides of an alcove - a blanket hangs between them, for privacy. A shelf of books. A table. Two chairs.

Walter stands over the table, SAWING bread, a bowl of peas and a knot of stringy meat are already plated up.

WALTER

Eat.

Ben wearily sits.

They eat without talking.

Walter CHEWS with gusto, shovels peas and RIPS at the bread with his teeth, SWALLOWS noisily.

Ben eats slowly, takes sips of water from an earthenware cup, shoots an irritated glance at his father.

Walter CHASES the last of the peas around his plate.

Finished, Ben straightens his posture, watches his father, a wrinkle of disgust on his lip.

Walter looks up, catches the look on his son's face...

Embarrassed, angry, he lays down his fork and meets his son's stubborn gaze.

WALTER

We'd better get the first cut down
to the mill before it turns.

BEN

I need to finish shoring up the new
plot.

WALTER

We need to sell what we've cut
before planting more.

Ben GRUNTS.

BEN

What are we asking for it?

WALTER

Last season's price was six and six. We can't take any less than that. Whitley'll say the market's down. He'll give you a song and a dance, I guarantee.

BEN

Give me a song and dance?

Walter nods.

BEN (CONT'D)

You're not coming?

WALTER

It's about time you took some responsibility.

BEN

What you mean is Whitley won't see you. After what you did.

WALTER

What I mean is it's about time you took some responsibility.

BEN

By selling the first cut.

WALTER

I can trust you.

BEN

But Whitley...

Walter SLAMS the table with a fist - the criss-cross of scars whitens at his knuckles.

WALTER

Whitley's a whelp...

He leans back in his chair, smiles with his teeth.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Are you?

EXT. THE OLD PLANTATION - DAY

The cart RATTLES down the hill, a tall load of trimmed sugarcane RUSTLES and teeters in the wagon bed, the mule in harness, Ben walks beside riding the BRAKE.

They pass the Poui stand and on downhill.

The jungle clears and a rusty fence lines the track, overgrown fields, behind them the old plantation house.

Ben SPITS.

The cart rolls on past a small row of huts, ramshackle, silent bar the SCREAM of a BABY. An OLD LADY chews her gums and rocks on the porch...

Ben tips his hat...

She ignores him.

On, past the skeleton of a church. The small cemetery is better tended. Beside this a large shack, its hand-painted sign reads: LIQUOR FOOD WHORES MUSIC

As the track starts to flatten out the mule starts to STRUGGLE - Ben lends a shoulder to the tailgate, his muscles strain to keep up the momentum.

They pass a covered wagon, a poster pinned to its side reads: HIRING ABLE BODIED MEN

Beneath, a printed daguerrotype shows a line of smiling men on the bank of an enormous cut in the earth.

FRANCOIS - 40, high yellow, grey suit with a glint of silver at the cuff - sits behind a trestle table talking to an EMACIATED YOUTH.

Francois looks up as Ben passes.

His eyes follow closely as Ben pushes the wagon on down the street.

EXT. THE MILL - DAY

The mill looms overhead, its sails SWEEP the sun and cast a moving shadow across the road.

Ben shields his eyes against the rhythm of sun flare and shade.

The cart LUMBERS to a halt at the mill's base and the mule TREMBLES, exhausted, in its harness.

Ben - in no better state - PATS it gently on the flank, looks up.

A barn door opens into the side of a large stone building that adjoins the mill - smoke and SPARKS, STEAM and darkness within.

INT. THE MILL - DAY

Ben walks inside, head high - he's here on business.

All is activity, SWEAT DRENCHED MEN AND WOMEN - all of them black - feed machines that THRASH and SQUEEZE, BOIL and DISTIL cane into sugar.

Ben passes a ONE-ARMED MAN - a neat stump mid-bicep - awkwardly STIRRING a cauldron of molasses.

Ben nods his sympathy.

The man returns a stony look.

Beneath the mill wall GRINDING wheels are carefully fed with cane stalk by TWO MEN - their hair cropped tight, naked bar tight fitting undershorts.

An axe - sharpened to a shine - leans against the wall close beside them.

Ben walks on, stops at a door.

Stencilled type reads: H.WHITLEY, OWNER, MANAGER.

The glass is criss-crossed by wire reinforcement...

It has been smashed in, but the window has held firm.

Ben KNOCKS. Waits.

KNOCKS again.

Nothing.

He pushes the door open quietly.

INT. WHITLEY'S OFFICE - DAY

It's bright inside the office after the gloom of the refinery, afternoon sun pours through the dirty windows.

Ben squints to make out the interior...

A mahogany desk, sweet meats on a fly-specked plate, a pile of papers, pen and ink, abacus.

A stained leather swivel chair is empty.

There is a SNORTING, a SNORFLING and a GROAN.

Against the panelled wall on a leather sofa STIRS a man - HENRY WHITLEY - 30 going on 50, pink faced, bloated, dressed in sweat drenched clothing of a flamboyant cut.

YAWNING gently Whitley swings his legs off the sofa and pushes himself upright.

He peers, blinking, at the dark doorway.

WHITLEY

Step out of the shadows boy, you
have me at a distinct disadvantage.

Ben steps into the office, he removes his hat and clutches it to his chest.

WHITLEY (CONT'D)

Ah, young Master Free Man. How
wonderful to see you.

Whitley struggles against his own weight to rise from the sofa.

Ben struggles, and fails, to maintain a polite expression.

Whitley - now vertical and fully aware of Ben's disgust - offers Ben a seat with a facetious flourish.

WHITLEY

Do sit down boy, you look all done in.

Ben steps forward and takes a chair...

On the other side of the desk Whitley sinks into padded leather with a CREAK and a gentle HISS of expelled air.

Whitley casts a glance at his smashed-in office door.

WHITLEY

Tell me young man, how is your father keeping?

BEN

He's keeping well. Thank you. Sir.

WHITLEY

And how is his hand?

Whitley's jovial, glib tone catches Ben off-guard.

Finding no reply, Ben simply shakes his head.

WHITLEY

Well, no matter. I expect it has healed rather better than my door. Perhaps it is well that he lost the other arm...

Whitley leans forward, whispers in confidence.

WHITLEY (CONT'D)

For as we both know his remaining limb is quite vigorous enough.

He takes a sugary pastry from the plate, pops it delicately into his mouth, chews with a SQUELCHY vigour.

WHITLEY

Sweet meat, Mister Free Man?

Again Ben shakes his head.

Whitley lets out a gentle SIGH of disappointment, he straightens his papers.

WHITLEY

I await the reason for your visit with excitement and trepidation.

BEN

I'm here to sell cane.

WHITLEY

Are you really! And what makes you think I'm buying?

Ben looks confused...

WHITLEY (CONT'D)

Allow me to rephrase the question. What makes you think I'm buying - from you?

BEN

You always have done before.

Whitley WHINNIES, studies Ben's face.

WHITLEY

I have bought from your Father before. At a price that was far too dear.

BEN

His prices have always been agreeable to you.

WHITLEY

His prices? I think you'll find that they are my prices. And my prices are always agreeable to me. That is to say, I pay what the market will allow - and what my

(MORE)

WHITLEY (CONT'D)
conscience demands of me.

BEN
So. What is your price?

Whitley leans back in his chair. Knits his chubby fingers over his bulging waistcoat.

WHITLEY
You young boys, always in such a hurry. Didn't your father teach you to slow down, to savour life's little challenges?

BEN
There's a wagon with 2 tons of trimmed cane outside. It's the first cut of the season, green and full of sap. Last season you paid 6 shillings and 6 pence. This season we're looking for 7 shillings.

Whitley SHRIEKS with laughter and CLAPS his hands.

WHITLEY
Oh very good. Very good indeed.

BEN
So, we have a deal.

Ben stands and sticks out his hand.

Whitley remains seated, looks up at Ben with feigned sympathy.

He purses his lips.

Shakes his head sadly.

Ignoring Ben's outstretched hand he reaches for his abacus, pen and parchment.

He starts to rapidly calculate, a SCRATCH of nib, a CLACK of abacus beads, he MUTTERS as he writes...

WHITLEY

2 tons of cane yields 20 pounds of sugar market value 10 cents a pound 2 dollars deduct 25% for refining 10% for transportation. Factor in a further drop in value of...

(He looks up at Ben)

The Beet industry is thriving and the Americans are flooding the market as a result of their more efficient labour practices... shall we say 5%? Thats a 40% deduction on 2 dollars is 1 dollar twenty at 5.2 dollars to the pound...

He spins the parchment around with a flourish to show Ben the bottom line...

Beneath a spider's web of sums it reads 4/9.

Ben looks down at Whitley, his anger mounting.

BEN

4 shillings and 9 pence?

WHITLEY

The Americans are causing the most terrible ructions in the markets.

BEN

It's not worth pulling it out of the ground for 4 and 9.

WHITLEY

I know. I know.

BEN

I'll take it to Kingston.

WHITLEY

That of course is your prerogative. Although should your old mule survive the journey I fear you will not arrive until after supper, and Harris will not attend to business at such a late hour.

Ben, still standing, finds no argument.

A bluebottle BUMPS against the grubby glass.

BEN

I'll take 6 shillings and sixpence.

WHITLEY

That was your father's price. As I've just told you, your father's price is not my price.

BEN

6 shillings.

WHITLEY

Have I given you the impression that I am haggling young man. If so that was really not my intention.

BEN

5 and 9.

WHITLEY

It is not worth a penny over 5 shillings.

BEN

5 and 6, or I find another buyer.

Whitley shakes his head sadly.

BEN (CONT'D)

Please. Mr Whitley. Sir. You'll starve us.

Whitley lets out a deep, aggrieved SIGH.

The bluebottle lands on the desk.

WHITLEY

5 and 3...

Whitley SLAMS his hand down on the fly.

WHITLEY

...and you unload it yourself.

Whitley drags his palm across the parchment leaving a streak of fly innards across his spidery workings.

He holds his hand up limply to Ben.

WHITLEY

Do we have a deal, Mister Free Man?

EXT. THE MILL - DAY

A bundle of sugarcane lands with a RATTLE on top of a large pile in the corner of the loading bay.

Ben trudges back to the empty wagon, leans against the side panel, bends double, PANTING.

A BELL rings out in the refinery interior.

With a SCUFF of feet the workers leave, heading into the gathering dusk.

The one armed molasses stirrer shoots Ben a look of deep mock sympathy as he passes.

As the last of the workers straggle past, Whitley appears from the gloom of the interior.

He casts a glance at Ben and SWINGS shut the heavy door.

Ben waits.

Whitley turns an iron key in the lock with a CLUNK, pockets the set and walks, rolling, straight past Ben.

BEN

Mister Whitley. Aren't you forgetting something?

WHITLEY

Ah yes, you.

He reaches inside his frock coat and pulls out a small bag of coins, dangles it in front of Ben's face.

Ben takes it, BOUNCES it in his hand.

BEN

A moment.

He SHAKES the coins out on the wagon running board.

Stacks 5 shillings...

Picks up a Tuppence coin and holds it up to Whitley.

BEN

We said 5 and 3.

WHITLEY

Oh, I am sorry boy, how very
careless of me.

Whitley pulls out a purse and rummages...

He finds a penny and presses it into Ben's palm with a
reassuring shake.

WHITLEY

Give my regards to your father,
won't you. And remind him that the
rent is almost due?

Whitley turns on his heel and strolls away, up the hill, in
the direction of the old plantation house.

Ben looks down - exhausted, disgusted - at the penny in his
hand.

The setting sun burns like a fire on Queen Victoria's crown.

INT. THE PLANTATION SHEBEEN - NIGHT

The penny lies in a puddle on a worm eaten bar.

A hand slides it away and replaces it with a dirty glass of
thick cane liquor.

Ben lifts the glass, tosses it back, grits his teeth.

The room is filled with a gentle MURMUR of voices, a BANJO

picks a repetitive PENTATONIC MELODY.

LAUGHTER from a group of THREE WOMEN at the other end of the bar.

Ben looks over.

They meet his gaze, WHISPER, NUDGE, LAUGH again.

One of them - AGNES, an overly made-up and under-nourished looking woman around Ben's age - peels off and sidles down the bar, sits beside Ben.

She notes the coin purse tied to the rope at his waist.

AGNES

Buy me a drink Benjamin.

BEN

You know that I can't.

AGNES

Then buy me. Benjamin.

Ben looks up to meet the girl's eye.

BEN

Agnes I...

AGNES

...can't afford to, wouldn't even
if you could.

Ben frowns, turns a shoulder.

AGNES (CONT'D)

High and mighty Benjamin. Won't dip
his wick for love or money.

She catches herself, changes tack, leans in close and with more than a hint of desperation:

AGNES (CONT'D)

Come on Ben, I've always been
curious how big your cock is.

She places a hand in Ben's lap...

He JUMPS as if electrocuted.

The girls at the end of the bar SHRIEK with laughter.

Ben, humiliated, turns away.

Agnes stands and returns - shrugging - to her friends.

Ben looks down at his clenched fists.

A shadow sits down beside him.

BEN

Agnes. I said. No.

He turns and looks up angrily.

Beside him sits Francois - the well-dressed recruiter who had marked Ben earlier in the street.

Francois pulls out a coin purse and lays a shilling on the bar.

FRANCOIS

A bottle of Rum. And an extra glass
for my friend here.

Ben starts to protest...

Francois, without even turning, raises a palm.

FRANCOIS

You look like you need a drink.

Before Ben can reply a glass appears before him.

The glass is clean.

Ben looks at the retreating back of the barman.

When he looks back the glass is filled with amber rum.

Francois CORKS the bottle.

FRANCOIS

Drink.

Ben picks up the glass, places it slowly to his lips...

SIPS.

BEN

It's good. Thanks.

FRANCOIS

It's nothing.

Ben kicks back the shot. THUMPS the glass down.

BEN

It's really good.

For the first time Francois turns to look at Ben.

Ben holds the man's gaze for a moment.

BEN

What?

FRANCOIS

I just wonder. Why is a bright young man like you eating shit from whores in this rat trap?

BEN

I've known them my whole life.

FRANCOIS

That's not an answer.

Francois's voice carries a subtle accent, something exotic in the vowels.

BEN

Where are you from?

FRANCOIS

Port au Prince, originally.
Now, not from anywhere.

BEN

Well... I'm from here.

Ben sticks out a hand.

BEN

Benjamin. My friends call me Ben.
Ben Freeman.

FRANCOIS

And are you?

BEN

Am I what?

Before Francois can answer they are surrounded by the three girls - sweat stained cotton frills, dangling arms.

AGNES

Who's your friend Ben? Aren't you
going to introduce us?

Agnes runs a surveying hand over the cloth at Francois's shoulder, makes round eyes at her friends.

She drapes herself over Francois and looks up at him.

AGNES

Aren't you a handsome man.

BEN

Agnes leave us al...

With a BANG a knife is driven deep into the bar.

The handle is ivory and silver, it quivers where it stands.

All eyes are on them now...

FRANCOIS

Return my purse or I will cut a
hole in you that doesn't make
money.

Agnes stands, hands clasped, feigns insult and innocence.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

Do you think that I am joking. Open
your hands.

Agnes shakes her head.

Quick as a flash Francois grabs her wrist, squeezes.

Ben looks from Francois - who has a lethal look in his eye -
to the girl.

BEN

Agnes you better do what he says.

She eyeballs Ben...

BEN (CONT'D)

Agnes!

She breaks...

SLAMS the coin purse down on the bar and quickly turns...

BARGES her way past the onlookers...

Tips a table over with a CRASH and with a SLAM of the
shebeen door she is gone.

Francois calmly pulls the blade from the bar, folds it and
slots it into his inside pocket.

He opens the coin purse and pulls out a ha'penny.

He holds it up to the remaining two girls.

FRANCOIS

Take it. And leave.

One of them snatches the coin and the girls turn away.

Francois leans forwards and takes a sip of rum, he wrinkles
his nose in distaste.

He turns, fills Ben's glass to the brim.

FRANCOIS

And so. Ben. Tell me about
yourself.

EXT. THE PLANTATION SHEBEEN - NIGHT

Freeman's wagon stands in weeds at the roadside. The mule -
tethered to the cemetery fence - SHIVERS in its harness,
this time from the cold.

The MUFFLED SOUND OF MUSIC AND LAUGHTER grows louder as the
Shebeen door is opened.

FOOTSTEPS SCUFF through the dust and VOICES grow louder.

BEN

...well. This is me.

Ben climbs into the wagon, with some difficulty.

He peers down at Francois.

BEN

I'm obliged for the drinks. We
should do this again.

FRANCOIS

I don't think so. I leave the day
after tomorrow.

Ben nods his head once, clearly disappointed.

Francois hands the reins up to Ben:

FRANCOIS

Why don't you come along?

Ben looks down at Francois, unsure if he's being messed
with.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

I'm serious. Look.

He reaches into a pocket and pulls out a roll of papers.

He licks his thumb and forefinger and carefully peels away a

sheet...

Passes it up to Ben.

Ben squints at it.

FRANCOIS

You can read?

BEN

You're damn right I can read.

In the moonlight the flyer's header, set in Blackletter, reads: PANAMA CANAL COMPANY - HIRING ABLE BODIED MEN

The pitch is set in ever decreasing point sizes beneath - WAGES, TRANSPORT, PROSPECTS, TERMS - the smallest print is all but impossible to make out.

The mule WHICKERS gently.

FRANCOIS

It seems to me that there is nothing for you here. And we need skilled men like you. We need hard workers.

Ben looks from the flyer to Francois.

BEN

Panama?

FRANCOIS

The boat sails from Port Henderson quay at 10, day after tomorrow.

Francois smiles.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

You must tell them that Francois sent you.

EXT. THE FREEMAN TENANT FARM - DAY

A gentle rhythmic SQUEAK, Ben rocks slowly back and forth, opens an eye to the glare of the midday sun, runs a hand

over his face.

He pushes himself upright and places his feet on the boards to steady the swing.

Squinting, he looks around at the front porch of the farm, a little confused.

THWACK.

Ben's eyes follow the sound...

THWACK.

At the edge of the clearing his father places a bare foot on a cane stalk, he cuts, drops the cane knife, throws the trim into the wagon, picks up the knife, repeats.

THWACK.

Ben's hand goes to the rope at his waist...

The coin purse is gone.

He frowns.

Pushes himself up off the swing, rocks for a moment on the balls of his feet.

Walter, without looking up.

WALTER
I've got the money.

Ben nods.

He climbs carefully down the stairs to the yard, SCUFFS over to the trough and plunges his head into the cold clear water.

When he lifts his head out Walter is standing beside him, cane knife gripped in hand.

WALTER

There's only 5 and two in that purse. How much money did you pour down your neck last night?

Ben stares down into the water, thinking hard.

BEN

A penny?

WALTER

Horse shit you did. Either you're a liar or you're a goddamned Mary. Which one is it?

BEN

I'm not a liar.

WALTER

Then you're a Mary.

BEN

Not a Mary neither.

WALTER

You telling me you got in this sorry state from one glass of cane liquor?

BEN

And some rum.

WALTER

Rum? Are you stealing now son?

BEN

Got bought it. Met a man at the shebeen.

WALTER

So... a Mary after all.

Ben clenches his fists.

Walter looks up at the sky in disbelief, LAUGHS, locks eyes with Ben.

WALTER

A penny.

Ben holds his father's gaze. Nods once.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Which means you sold our cane for five shillings and thrupence.

Ben doesn't reply.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You sold the first cut for five shillings and three pence.

BEN

Whitley...

WALTER

Whitley's a businessman. And you've just set our price for the season.

BEN

You should have gone yourself.

WALTER

And yet I trusted you.

BEN

Only because you couldn't trust yourself.

Walter swings the cane knife down HARD into the side of the trough.

He balls his fist.

Ben holds his chin up, defiant, but tears have started to well in his eyes.

Walter lets out a single bitter LAUGH.

WALTER

(Gently)

Mary.

Ben ROARS. He throws himself at Walter knocking him off balance and down to dirt...

Ben straddles his father's chest, PUMMELS him.

Walter, winded, raises his forearm to ward off Ben's BLOWS.

Ben catches him in the EAR and Walter WINCES, angers, swings a powerful backhand BLOW that catches Ben in the neck and sends him down...

CLAWING at his throat...

GASPING for breath.

Walter struggles to his feet, rubbing his ear.

He looks down on his son.

WALTER

Don't make me whip you boy.

He takes a step towards the water trough.

Ben doubled up in pain shoots a look of hatred at his father's back, he takes a RASPING breath and croaks.

BEN

Sorry. Mas'er.

Walter stops, turns.

His face is incandescent with rage.

WALTER

Say that again.

Ben struggles to his knees and looks up.

He takes a deep breath, WHEEZES.

WALTER

I said. Say. That. Again.

Ben locks eyes with his father.

He reaches into his trouser pocket.

Pulls out Francois's flyer.

He unfolds it and tosses it down at Walter's feet.

Walter looks down at the flyer...

It lies in the muddy runoff at the base of the trough -
HIRING ABLE BODIED MEN - the contents clearer by day.

Dark water starts to trickle into the fold.

Walter looks down at his son, he shakes his head.

WALTER

You fool.

He steps forward, places a foot on the flyer, sinking it deeper into the mud, he steps over Ben, across the yard, and slowly climbs the porch steps.

The front door swings shut behind him with a gentle BUMP.

Ben looks up at the sky, takes a WRACKING BREATH.

He STRUGGLES to his knees, peels the flyer from the puddle.

He stands, steps to the trough and carefully rinses the paper clean, drapes it over the edge to dry.

He looks up at the shack.

INT. THE FREEMAN TENANT FARM - DAY

Ben STEPS QUIETLY through the door.

Walter lies on his bed, his forearm over his eyes.

Ben skirts the table, his fingertips brush the smooth wood as he passes.

He sits down on the edge of his bed.

He looks up at the threadbare blanket that separates his bed from his father's...

The pattern on the blanket is faded - Poui trees above swaying cane, a hut on a hill - hand sewn in pastel colours.

Ben puts his head in his hands.

BEN

We can't survive like this. You said it yourself.

Silence.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'll send money as soon as I can.

Silence.

Ben balls his fists, knuckles his scalp, tries again.

BEN

The boat leaves tomorrow.

A RUSTLE of straw and a CREAK of wood from Walter's bed.

Ben can make out his father's form through the weave of the blanket - he sits, hunched, smaller somehow.

Walter's voice comes quiet.

WALTER

When I was your age the Panama Railroad Company came recruiting. All of the able bodied men left to take work. Only the lucky ones made it back. Although most weren't able bodied anymore. The rest. They died of dysentery, yellow fever, swamp fever. They got bit to death by spiders, scorpions, snakes, alligators. Jesus, they say even the air can kill a man. And that's before the work got started killing. You think this canal is going to be any different?

BEN

They're paying three shillings and tuppence a day. I can make more in a week than we both make in a month.

WALTER

They'll skin you for passage, food, medicine, tools. You won't see a ha'penny of that money. Did you even look at that flyer boy? Why do you think that your mother taught you how to read?

Ben puts his head in his hands, chooses his words carefully.

BEN

She taught me how to read... so that one day I could get out of here.

Silence.

Walter CLEARS HIS THROAT.

WALTER

Speaking of which...

The bed GROANS as he rises, he crosses to the door, PUSHES it open, stands silhouetted in the threshold.

WALTER (CONT'D)

...I've got work to do.

The door swings SHUT.

Ben lies back on his bed.

He covers his face with his hands and roughly wipes the tears from his eyes...

Screws them shut and grows still.

INT. THE FREEMAN TENANT FARM - DAY

A cock CROWS a garbled alarm call.

Ben's eyes snap open.

He sits bolt upright, swings his legs off the pallet and sits for a moment at the edge of the bed...

His mother's blanket has been taken down...

And Walter's pallet is empty.

Ben pauses for a second, his hand strays to massage his bruised neck.

He rises, walks over to the table.

On it sits a parcel, wrapped in wax paper and tied in bailing twine.

Next to the parcel is his mother's blanket, neatly folded.

EXT. PORT HENDERSON DOCKS - DAY

A CROWD of men, 200 strong, JOSTLE and PUSH, SWEAR, LAUGH and SHOUT as they wait on a wooden jetty.

Above them stand the three masts of a clipper, SAILORS climb the rigging, the CAPTAIN - in full regalia - BARKS orders in FRENCH as he struts about on deck.

Ben, a gunny sack slung over his shoulder, stands on the dockside, scanning the crowd.

DENNIS

You lost something man?

Ben turns around and faces the chest of a man...

He cranes his neck up, up, to see the faintly mocking face of DENNIS SHAW - 25, 6'10" of physical menace offset by a disarmingly gappy smile - beaming down at him.

BEN

I'm meeting someone.

DENNIS

Ha. Hey Horace, your man says he's meeting someone!

From behind Dennis comes a bored voice.

HORACE

If you're looking for Francois,
he's not here. His job's to secure
the cargo, not to load it.

Ben leans around Dennis' imposing frame to see a short wiry man, HORACE NEWTON, 30, dressed in a natty city hat and suit, smoking a hand rolled cigar and observing the ruckus below.

BEN

I don't...

HORACE

Panama Canal Company - Hiring Able
Bodied Men...

Horace looks Ben up and down with a bored, discerning eye - the baggy trousers, threadbare cotton shirt, ratty straw hat - he shakes his head.

HORACE (CONT'D)

That Francois sure knows how to
pick 'em.

Ben hikes up his gunny sack and, raising himself up to his full height, he takes a step towards Horace.

He finds his way blocked by an enormous arm.

Dennis smiles down at him, this time apologetically.

DENNIS

Don't mind him. We're all here for
the same reason.

Ben shoots a dangerous look at Horace.

Horace gives a nonchalant shrug and goes back to watching the scrum below.

A bell RINGS out and with a SLAM the clipper's gangplank is lowered onto the quayside, the HUBUB increases as the crowd starts to push forwards.

Dennis bends and picks up a duffel bag from his feet, STRIDES past Ben.

Horace straightens his hat and flicks away the butt, follows close behind in formation.

He beckons to Ben as he passes.

HORACE

Come on then if you're coming.

Ben hesitates for a moment...

He takes a wary look at the jostling crowd below...

Hurrying to catch up he falls in step behind the two men.

EXT. PORT HENDERSON QUAY - DAY

As they leave the stone dockside Dennis' boots hit the wooden quay with a sound like THUNDER, and the men at the back of the crowd turn, look up...

DENNIS

Excuse us. Coming through.

Dennis gives a polite smile and a bow of his head to each man as the crowd parts in front of him.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

'Scuse us. Thank you. Thank you.

BEN

He's like Moses.

HORACE

That's funny. Now stay close or the Egyptians will catch you.

The three of them cut through the crowd - angry eyes shoot daggers at Ben as he passes.

They find themselves at the foot of the gangplank.

A trestle table, a ledger open, a SUITED CLERK dabs a bead of sweat from his top lip.

CLERK

Next.

Horace steps forward to take the lead, with a cocky tone.

HORACE

Three of us. Chalk it up to
Francois.

The clerk purses his lips and looks at Horace...

His eyes drift up to Dennis. He pauses.

He dips his quill and fills three rows of the ledger:

927, F

928, F

929, F

CLERK

Your names?

HORACE

Horace Newton, Dennis Shaw and...

Horace turns to Ben and doffs his hat.

BEN

Benjamin Freeman.

The clerk looks up at Ben, a small smile flickers on his moist upper lip.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER DECK - DAY

The ship's bell RINGS.

Ben leans over the clipper's gunwale and watches the quayside slowly gain distance, 1 metre, 2 metres, 3.

On either side of him stand Horace and Dennis - their heights step up as steeply as the Freeman farm.

The deck is packed with STANDING MEN, kit bags, barrels, tarp covered cargo - there's no room to move.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER - DAY

The ship rides low in the water as it is HAULED away from shore by a team of pilot boats, men STRAIN at the oars.

The sails UNFURL and the pilot boats STROKE away as the Clipper GROANS into motion.

As it swings around the breakwater waves start to CRASH on the bow, sending SPRAY across the deck.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER DECK - DAY

Ben holds his face up to the spray - his stony exterior belied by the excitement in his eyes.

The horizon starts to dip behind the rising SWELL.

Horace looks up at Dennis.

HORACE

We'd better stake out a bivvy or
we'll be sleeping in a barrel
tonight.

BEN

We should look down below for our
bunks.

Horace and Dennis look at each other and start to LAUGH.

Ben turns to Horace, his anger rises...

And falls at the sight of Dennis.

HORACE

You're an optimist Freeman, I'll
give you that.

Dennis, still LAUGHING, SLAPS Ben on the back, nearly
knocking his head off.

Ben rubs his shoulder.

BEN

(Beneath his breath)
Goddamn rantallions.

This sends Dennis and Horace into HOWLS of laughter...

Finally Ben breaks, his face cracks into a smile.

DENNIS

There he is. There's the man.

HORACE

(Still laughing)
Who taught you how to cuss Freeman?
Your nana?

Ben, now LAUGHING himself, knocks Horace's brim down over
his eyes and gives him a playful shove.

The three men start a childish play fight at the gunwale.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER - DAY

The sound of their LAUGHTER grows faint as the ship makes
good speed towards the horizon, its white sails filled with
a steady trade wind.

A FLOCK OF GULLS wheel behind...

They SQUAWK and CACKLE...

Their CRIES a mocking echo of the men's laughter.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER DECK - NIGHT

Knees pulled up to his chest for warmth - and for lack of room - Freeman SHIVERS.

Beside him Dennis lies on his back, hands behind his head, watching the sky turn red.

Horace DOZES against a crate, hat brim pulled down low.

Ben opens his gunny sack and peers inside...

He pulls out his mother's blanket and wraps it tightly around his shoulders.

He looks down, looks around - embarrassed by the soft pastel shades and feminine pattern.

He extracts his father's wax papered package and places it in his lap, unpicks the bailing twine and SPREADS the paper smooth...

A heel of bread, a hunk of cheese, a chunk of meat, 2 boiled eggs - a little crushed in all of the excitement.

He pauses a moment.

Lost in thought.

He snaps out of it, turns to Dennis.

Nudges him, hands him an egg.

Dennis nods his gratitude and sits up.

Ben watches, entranced...

As Dennis's enormous brown fingers delicately peel away the shell from the small white egg.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER DECK - DAY

First light. The deck is silent - every inch is covered by men, packed tight they lie on the wooden boards in foetal balls, pinned together in fitful sleep.

Ben sleeps on his side, wrapped in his blanket.

Beside him - huddled tightly together - sleep Horace and Dennis.

A trapdoor leads below deck, it swings open and a CREWMAN climbs out, WINDS a handle rigged to a pulley...

A steaming cauldron rises from the trapdoor.

He grabs it and swings it - SLOP SPILLING - over the deck, lowers it onto a stained stone flag with a CLUNK.

CREWMAN
Manger! Aller manger!

Horace's eyes snap open...

Quickly, he lifts Dennis's arm off his chest.

He sits up, looks around - everyone is still stirring...

Gently, he shakes Dennis awake.

HORACE
Petit déjeuner big man.

Dennis opens an eye and GROANS.

Horace looks down at Ben, curled up in his pastel blanket.

He KICKS him awake.

DENNIS
Wake up pretty boy. Breakfast.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER CHOW LINE - DAY

A ladle SPLASHES into the cauldron of watery broth, DEPOSITS its contents into a metal bowl, followed with a PLOP by a hunk of bread.

The bowl is passed to Ben.

Swaying from side to side in the rolling swell, he looks down at his dismal breakfast swilling in the bowl.

Bubbles rise and POP...

A small cockroach floats to the surface.

Ben curls a lip at the crewman.

BEN

I'm not eating this...

The crewman reaches out a hand to take the bowl back.

CREWMAN

Rends-le moi alors.

Ben eyeballs him, picks out the roach, drops it to the deck.

The crewman GRUNTS, raises his ladle and waves him away.

CREWMAN

Rapidement il y a une file
d'attente!

The bowl clutched in two hands, Ben sways off, picking his way across the deck.

Horace steps forward in line.

The ladle returns to the cauldron, SPLATTERS slop into his metal bowl.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER GUNWALE - DAY

Ben hangs over the gunwale and VOMITS noisily over the side, head swaying with the pitch and roll of the ship.

He leans back and wipes his mouth - his face has taken on a grey tinge and his eyes are bloodshot.

He GROANS and rocks unsteadily on his feet.

He HEAVES...

PUKES again

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER DECK - DAY

The deck is still and quiet, a torpor has set in among the men.

Ben slumps against a crate, wrapped in his blanket.

Dennis and Horace play poker...

Dennis plays two queens, ace high.

Horace lays down a royal flush with a flourish.

He reaches a hand toward a pile of farthings on the deck.

A CRY goes up from the crow's nest above.

WATCHMAN

Terre! Terre!

Horace gazes up...

Dennis stretches out a hand and sweeps up Horace's winnings.

All around them men rise and SCRAMBLE to the side.

Horace looks down and sees that his winnings have disappeared, he opens his mouth to object, looks up...

But Dennis is already gone.

Horace looks to Ben.

Ben shrugs weakly, pulls the blanket tight.

HORACE

You should be careful. Someone
might mistake you for a woman
wrapped up in that pretty blanket.

Horace pulls his hat down low, stands and heads for the side.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER GUNWALE - DAY

A low mountain range rises above the horizon.

Ben joins the boys, bundled tight in his pretty blanket.

BEN

We're here.

Horace looks for a moment at the distant hills.

HORACE

Don't get too excited, it'll be
hours before we reach Colón.

He turns away and the line of men at the rail thins.

Ben remains at the boat's side, eyes on the view.

The sails fill with a fresh BREEZE...

The breeze catches the hem of Ben's blanket and TUGS at it,
lifts it up, off his back.

He holds on as it WHIPS and CRACKS in the wind.

The embroidered cane ripples like the surface of the sea.

Slowly Ben opens his hand.

The blanket is carried off by the wind.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER - DAY

The blanket lands on the sea, it floats for a moment in the
boat's wake...

Then sinks slowly beneath the surface.

The ship pulls on to the horizon.

EXT. THE COMPANY CLIPPER GUNWALE - DAY

The sun sets above the bow.

An unbroken line of jungle and white sand drifts past on the

port side as the ship tracks the coastline.

Ben hangs, exhausted - his chin resting on the wooden gunwale he sways with the swell and watches...

Coming up ahead - jutting into the entrance of a deep tree-lined bay - is a half completed stone seawall.

On the scaffold at the head of the wall THREE WORKERS struggle to hoist a huge block into position as the waves BREAK beneath their feet.

On top of the wall their OVERSEER points down, gestures, giving orders.

There is a GROAN of wood and iron as a HUGE SWELL passes under the Clipper.

Ben SCRAMBLES for a grip on the side and holds on tight.

Cargo and men BUMP and SLIDE around on the deck as the ship rights itself.

Ben looks up - the back of the wave powers on towards the shore, towards the seawall...

As the wave starts to shoal it RISES...

Ben raises a hand, his mouth opens in warning but no sound comes out except for a hoarse CROAK.

On the seawall the Overseer stands, sees the wave...

The offshore wind RIPS crystals from its crest.

The Overseer looks down at his workers and starts to gesticulate, he looks up again and his gestures grow more frantic as the wave BEARS DOWN upon them.

The workers abandon the tackle and scramble to the ladder.

The wave - too big to really break - ENGULFS the wall.

The Overseer hangs onto the rail as the wave SURGES around his waist.

As the wave rolls on water DRAINS off the stones.

Below - where the three men had stood - the scaffold is shattered, and empty.

The Clipper steers hard to port as it heads into the bay and the seawall sweeps out of view behind the bow.

Ben SCRAMBLES across the deck toward the starboard side.

TREADING on men...

SHOUTS OF ANGER...

SLIDING he reaches the starboard gunwale as the head of the seawall SWEEPS past, not 50 feet from the ship.

On top of the wall the Overseer crouches, gazes down...

Planks of wood, rope and tackle float on the surface.

There is no sign of the three men.

Ben stands, GASPING, at the rail.

The Overseer rises and turns away, slowly walks along the wall towards the land.

Ben stares, transfixed...

The flotsam BOBS gently in the Clipper's wake.

A coil of rope slowly sinks beneath the surface.

As the ship sails on the wall recedes into the distance - a thin black line that separates the red sky and the mirrored red surface of the sea.

Ben passes a hand over his ashen face.

The Overseer is just a speck, silhouetted against the setting sun.

A large hand SLAPS Ben on the back...

He STARTS, turns and looks up, eyes wide.

DENNIS

What happened to you Ben, you look
like you've seen a Duppy.

Ben shakes his head.

BEN

I saw three men...

A CLANGING as the ship's bell TOLLS.

CREWMAN

Débarquement en une minute.
Emballe tes affaires maintenant.
Débarquement en une minute!

A CLAMOUR breaks out on deck as men gather their possessions
and stand, begin to JOSTLE for space and PUSH towards the
side.

Amid the sudden commotion Dennis lays a comforting hand on
Ben's arm, shakes him gently.

DENNIS

Come on man. You'll feel better
with dry land beneath your feet.

Dennis pulls him away from the rail, Ben cranes his neck as
if unable to let the vision go.

He is led back into the BUSTLE of the deck and the crowd
closes around him...

He catches a last look at the distant seawall before the
CHAOS of crew and human cargo obscures it from view.

Faces float in front of him...

A crate is HOISTED up and away...

The CACKLE of gulls and the BELLOW of ONSHORE-MEN, the STAMP
and CREAK of feet on gangplank, a glimpse of wooden
warehouses, cranes stand tall in the darkening sky.

EXT. COLÓN HARBOUR - DAY

As his feet touch the stone dock Ben sways and is steadied by Dennis, Horace gives him the side eye.

HORACE

Keep it together Freeman. Don't go soft on us now.

They are swept up by the push of men behind.

Dennis's VOCAL WARNINGS fail to calm the crowd around them as they are carried along the dockside, away from the boat...

A SHRILL WHISTLE puts a stop to the chaos.

All eyes turn to the source of the noise.

EXT. COLÓN DOCKS - DAY

Stood on a stack of crates is KLAY LIGUANEA, 60, his skin the colour of mahogany, work clothes clean and well cut, a once powerful build now a little run to fat.

The MURMURING and pushing starts again.

Klay speaks in a voice that is clearly used to commanding attention.

KLAY

Alright men. Alright. Settle down.

Beneath Klay stands a line of MEAN LOOKING MEN, arms folded they eye the Jamaican crowd with looks that add weight to Klay's words.

The crowd settles down.

KLAY

My name is Klay Liguanea. You can call me Mr Liguanea, or Boss if you prefer, because from this moment you all report to me...

His tone of voice starts the crowd to MUTTERING...

KLAY (CONT'D)
I've worked in this country since
we built the railroad...

The MUTTERING gets louder...

KLAY
...I've survived in this country
since we built the railroad.

Horace shoots Ben a sarcastic look...

Ben - looking a little better - tries a face of mock
admiration.

Klay puts his fingers to his lips and again his WHISTLE
sounds.

The CHATTER continues.

One of Klay's men adjusts his cudgel, meets his eye...

Klay gives his head an almost imperceptible shake.

KLAY
(Quietly)
You need to listen up. Because it
is my job to keep you alive.

The CHATTER falls to silence for the first time.

Ben frowns, his eyes study Klay more closely.

KLAY
Now that I have your attention. I
can tell that you're all keen to
get down to work... But first we've
got a long march to camp. So pick
up your gunnies and try to keep up,
or you'll be sleeping in a ditch
tonight... Move out.

With a nod to the line of men beneath him he JUMPS down from
the crate and STRIDES off, up the dockside.

Klay's men fan out around the crowd and start to PUSH and

PROD them with cudgels.

With SHOUTS of objection and COMPLAINTS the scrum of men starts to move forward.

At the back of the crowd Ben, Dennis and Horace break into a trot to keep up.

Two of Klay's men jog close behind them - one carries a cruel looking CLUB, the other is toothless, his burly arms TATTOOED with a running tally of who knows what.

The crowd of men JOG off, up the dockside with less than military precision.

EXT. WAREHOUSE ROW - DAY

WAREHOUSEMEN peer out of the gloom to watch them pass, suck on cigarettes, nudge each other conspiratorially, SPIT.

The group thins and slows as it squeezes between a cart and the wooden siding of a large storehouse.

Klay's two men at the back push them forward roughly.

Horace spins and throws his arms wide.

HORACE

Watch who you're pushing man.

CLUB MAN sneers and SHOVES Horace, sends him staggering into Ben, the pair CRASH to the floor.

Horace angrily disentangles himself from Ben, sits up.

HORACE

Putain de chatte.

Club man frowns, takes a step forward and raises his club...

Ben raises a hand...

Dennis turns, sees what's going on...

He holds up two huge palms, placating, he meets the aggressor's eye.

DENNIS

He's a small man with a big mouth,
he's not worth your trouble.

The man hesitates, club raised, he gathers his courage,
takes another step forward.

Dennis's hands close into fists.

TATOO MAN sizes Dennis up, places a hand on his partners
club, lowers his arm.

Taking his chance Ben scoops Horace to his feet and
manoeuvres him - MUTTERING THREATS under his breath - back
into the now moving crowd.

Ben turns, locks eyes with the tattooed man.

BEN

We don't want any trouble from you
fine gentlemen.

His polite earnest tone sets the aggressor off LAUGHING.

His partner catches the joke, the two of them share a snooty
look, Tattoo turns and attempts a bow.

TATTOOED MAN

Well then sir, if you would be so
kind as to move your cul nègre we
may arrive in time to dine.

This sets the pair of them off into FITS OF LAUGHTER.

Ben bristles visibly, but before he can counter Dennis pulls
him away and pushes him on down the now empty road.

Ben shoots a look behind...

The two men lean LAUGHING against the wagon, catch breath,
break into LAUGHTER again.

Dennis CHUCKLES, shakes his head at Ben.

DENNIS

You've got a hell of a way with people.

Ben and Dennis run on...

They catch up with the line - Horace jogs along among the men, brim low, a grim look on his face.

EXT. WASTELAND - NIGHT

The warehouses thin to a patch of dusty wasteland, fires burn against the retreating jungle.

Last light silhouettes a hill up ahead, crowned by a scattering of rooftops and Kapok trees.

EXT. BOTTLE ALLEY - NIGHT

The land starts to rise to meet the hill, wooden shacks grow more frequent until they form a street.

A crooked, hand-painted sign reads BOTTLE ALLEY.

A line of clapboard saloons and cat houses.

PUNTERS emerge from the night.

BLACK, LATINA and NATIVE WOMEN - in various states of undress - pose in windows, stand beneath gas lamps...

A LATINA WHORE sets terms with a PROSPECT - she glances over at Ben, looks him up and down, arches an eyebrow.

LATINA WHORE

Come and find me when you've got some money pretty boy.

Ben jogs on, blushes.

Dennis smiles down at him...

Ben shoots him an embarrassed grin.

The alley widens and the buildings grow in size - hotels, boarding houses and restaurants line each side of the road.

EXT. MOUNT HOPE - NIGHT

The hill looms darkly above as the street opens into a busy square.

The Jamaican crew cut a diagonal across its centre.

On one side stands a large building - THE GRAND HOTEL - inside diners in finery are served by waiters in tails.

Ben slows...

On the terrace a PARTY sits over cigars and brandy, a YOUNG BLACK MAN - in three-piece suit and leather boots - LAUGHS as one of his WHITE COMPANIONS makes a joke.

Ben stares in amazement.

CRACK - the square is flooded with blinding electric light and the jungle ERUPTS with noise as Macaws and Howler Monkeys voice their surprise.

Ben raises an arm to his eyes, squints in wonder at the Yablochkov Candles that SPARK and CRACKLE on their posts.

He looks up...

The hill above is flooded with light, a handful of neat colonial houses step up its side - topped by a large shining white house.

A movement at the ornately railed verandah catches Ben's attention...

A woman rests her chin on a lacy fist as she gazes out into the night below, her black hair is pinned high but carelessly so - a few ringlets have escaped and fallen to brush her cheek - her skin is as white as her dress.

This is JEANNE DE LESSEPS, 35 - and Ben's face shows that he's never seen anything quite like her.

A man appears at her side - this is her husband CHARLES DELESSEPS, 50 - he's wiry, shorter than her by a couple of inches, finely but sloppily dressed.

He takes her elbow and turns her toward him, speaks.

She shakes her head and turns back to the view.

He jerks her back to face him, speaks again, and in a few more words all of her poise has gone.

He turns her away from the rail, puts an arm across her shoulders and steers her back inside the house...

Ben looks up, a frown flickers, a memory perhaps.

He catches himself, looks around.

A sea of faces.

And none of the Jamaican crowd in sight.

Panicked he PUSHES through the bustle.

SHOUTS OF ANGER, INSULTS, WARNINGS.

BEN

Sorry. Pardon me. Coming through.

He pulls himself up on a lamppost and surveys the scene...

Below the square a vast camp stretches downhill into darkness as electric light gives way to gas and then to flame - the bottom is impossible to make out through the smoke and the gloom.

He sees Dennis's head above the crowd, heading downhill.

Ben takes a last glance back up at the balcony...

He drops to the ground, runs to catch up.

EXT. THE FRENCH CAMP - NIGHT

Ben RUNS across the square, DODGES through a party of ladies in fine dresses - they step aside raising nosebags and COMPLAINTS.

He RUNS on, heading in the direction that Dennis took.

Downhill between rows of neatly canvassed tents.

WHITE MEN lounge in chairs out front, tend to a pair of boots, shave with a straight razor.

Ben runs on and weaves between groups of TIRED LOOKING MEN who trudge up to the town, his eyes scan for a sign of the Jamaican crew.

EXT. THE IRISH CAMP - NIGHT

A FIDDLE PLAYS as canvas gives way to rows of prefab wooden huts that march downhill in rough lines, fanning out from the main path.

A line of BURLY MEN - blue eyed, sunburned - waits at a large kitchen.

One gives Ben a sarcastic wave as he passes by.

Ben stops staring, keeps his eyes on the path as he jogs onward.

LAUGHTER.

A BOTTLE BREAKS.

Everywhere MUSIC, LOUD VOICES, MOCKING in thick accents.

A big dog BARKS.

Ben looks up...

Dennis stands in the middle of the path.

DENNIS

Where the hell have you been?

BEN

Sorry. I got sidetracked.

Dennis SPITS.

DENNIS

I know exactly what you got. Are you looking for trouble out here Ben? Because there's plenty of trouble to be found.

BEN

You sound like my father.

DENNIS

Then he's got a lot more sense than you. Come on, they're up ahead.

They break the last row of huts and head out into an expanse of land...

It's a hundred feet wide, barren bar the stumps of trees.

A fire break perhaps, a no-mans land...

Or something.

EXT. THE FIRE BREAK - NIGHT

QUIET descends as they cross the dark wasteland and the noise of the IRISH CAMP falls behind.

They catch up with the back of the Jamaican line as the men pick their way slowly through the darkness.

Below sprawls a ghetto of wood and tin, mud and straw - fires burn at intervals giving the view a hellish tint.

A PATTERN OF DRUMS sounds in the distance.

Ben nervously scans the wall of wood-rot and metal ahead.

He stumbles over a stump, CUSSES.

VOICES ahead.

The group slows to a standstill.

Dennis stops, looks over the heads of the crowd.

Ben climbs onto a stump to get a better vantage.

EXT. THE OVERSEER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The crowd is gathered in front of a large, solid building at the edge of the shanty, a high fence separates it from the surrounding sprawl, thick shutters are closed to a loophole.

Klay stands on the front step, talking to a man who looks down on him from the porch above.

This is THEOGENES ESCLAVES, 50, black, and judging by his build he'd give Dennis a run for his money. At his side stands a HUGE WHITE MASTIFF. At his belt hangs a .41 Long Colt revolver.

Klay turns to address the crowd.

KLAY

This is Overseer Esclaves. He'd like to extend a warm welcome to you all.

Horace climbs up onto Ben's stump to see better.

Esclaves puts a hand on Klay's shoulder, leans in and speaks to him quietly, Klay looks up.

KLAY

He trusts that you all enjoyed your tour of the town. He says that now you have seen it, you must try to forget it. Up there is not for you. This...

(An expansive sweep of his arm that takes in the shanty)

...is for you.

Above him, Esclaves flashes a wide smile at the crowd.

A MURMUR of discontent spreads amongst the men.

Ben turns to Horace.

BEN

He's got to be joking.

Esclaves looks aggrieved at the noise, he gestures for

silence, steps up and speaks with a deep French accent.

ESCLAVES

Quietly now, there is no need for your grumbling. All of your needs have been catered for. You shall find in this place a veritable heaven on earth.

A huge smile, met by silence, and not a little confusion.

ESCLAVES (CONT'D)

Good. Very good. Now. It is late and you must all be very tired after your long journey. Mr Liguanea's men will show you to your accommodations.

With a nod to Klay, and a last smile for the crowd, Esclaves enters the building.

Horace turns to Ben, sarcastically.

HORACE

A veritable heaven on earth.

Klay's VOICE rises above the RUCKUS giving orders as the crowd is separated into groups and the pushing and shoving begins again.

Ben, Dennis and Horace are prodded into movement...

Downhill past the Overseer's house...

On into the camp.

EXT. THE CARIBBEAN CAMP - NIGHT

They pass tarp clad bivvys and rusted shacks, lean-to's, rooves patched with jungle leaves, a chaos of wormwood and tin.

A fire burns close to a parched wooden shack, MEN lean in and SPEAK QUIETLY as the new recruits pass.

One of their number looks up and shouts.

FIRE MAN

Welcome to Heaven boys!

One of Klay's men peels off from the crowd and heads over to have a word...

Ben is moved on before he can see the outcome of the altercation.

The SOUND OF DRUMS grows louder as they head on downhill.

They come to a large building, nailed together from pallets and planks, no glass in the windows, though a broad expanse of shiny new tin covers the roof.

They file in through the door and peer into the candlelit gloom of the interior.

INT. THE BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

MEN are scattered about the floor, their few possessions kept close to hand, they lie on bedrolls, stare at the ceiling or eye the newcomers warily.

KLAY

Piss bucket's in the corner.
Bread's on the board. Find
somewhere to throw down and get
some sleep. We start work at dawn.

Klay and his men exit as the new recruits spread out.

Ben, Horace and Dennis head for a patch of light that shines through one of the empty windows.

Wearily Ben sits and starts to unpack his sack on the floor, lost in thought.

Horace and Dennis go to the window, they gaze out into the night, speak quietly.

DENNIS

It could be worse.

HORACE

That's the best you've got?

DENNIS

We had no choice and you know it.

HORACE

We had choices.

DENNIS

We had only bad choices. Here at least we have a chance. They would have hanged us if we'd stayed.

Horace looks up to meet Dennis's eye.

Dennis lays a hand on Horace's arm, rocks him gently, he smiles his gap toothed smile.

DENNIS

Get some sleep Horace, we'll see what the morning brings.

Ben - a slight frown betraying his unease at what he's overheard - lies down on the boards.

Arms folded behind his head for a pillow, he gazes up at the rafters.

MEN bed down and SETTLE in the gloom.

MOSQUITOS drone and Ben grows drowsy.

He closes his eyes.

Opens them...

He must have drifted off as the whole room is now asleep.

Ben tosses...

Turns...

Stares at the ceiling...

CUSSES.

He stands.

Stepping carefully over the sleeping men he makes his way to the bucket in the corner of the room.

It is overflowing with piss.

He wrinkles his nose.

Heads for the door.

EXT. THE BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

He climbs a low bank beside the bunkhouse, loosens the rope at his waistband and PISSES.

He looks around...

From where he stands he can see the camp spread out uphill...

Bright light shines down from Mount Hope - from the White House on the hill.

He gazes up at the house...

Sounds of MUSIC and LAUGHTER float down on the breeze.

Around him nothing, nothing but shanty, dust and silence.

He looks up at Mount Hope again.

BEN

To hell with it.

He finishes, shakes.

EXT. THE CARIBBEAN CAMP - NIGHT

Ben moves quickly and quietly through the sleeping camp.

The moon casts long black shadows across the path, Ben sticks to the darkness as he climbs uphill.

The men's fire has burnt to embers - a faint splash of blood dries on the parched wooden wall beside.

Ben looks uphill, the Overseer's house looms ahead, standing guard over the path.

He veers off between a pair of shacks and works his way on up, between the ramshackle huts and lean-tos, emerges at the edge of the Fire Break and looks nervously up and down the line...

The White House shines like a beacon on the hill above.

Ben steps out into moonlight.

INT. THE OVERSEER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

In the dark window of the Overseer's house the glow of a cigar's cherry illuminates Esclaves's face as he takes a draw.

He smiles.

There's a LOW GROWL from the darkness.

Esclaves bends down and knuckles the dogs head.

ESCLAVES

Alors. Prom prom.

EXT. THE FIRE BREAK - NIGHT

Ben's shadow slips across the stubble and stumps as he darts for the other side, and the Irish Camp.

He glances behind, nervous...

Makes a final BURST for the first row of wooden huts and the safety of the shadow.

He slides between two huts and into the second row.

EXT. THE IRISH CAMP - NIGHT

It's dark aside from one or two gaslights that burn in the windows.

Ben tracks back towards the path, more relaxed now that he's clear of the Caribbean camp and the wasteland.

A short PEAL OF LAUGHTER close by puts him back on guard.

FOOTSTEPS...

He hunkers down in the shadow of a porch.

QUIET VOICES...

Coming nearer...

THREE IRISHMEN - the one in the middle the size of a Redwood tree - appear around the corner of the hut.

The Redwood - BILL O'SHAUGHNESSY, 40, looks down at where Ben squats with an amused glint in his eye, LAUGHS.

BILL

The night is dark boy but it's not
as dark as you.

The men on either side of him take a step forward...

BILL (CONT'D)

Didn't they tell you to stay down
below with your own kind? Or maybe
you didn't rightly understand?

Ben stands as the two men flank him.

BILL (CONT'D)

Perhaps you need a lesson in Canal
Company policy?

Quickly the men grab Ben by either arm.

Ben STRUGGLES and THRASHES but can't break free.

Bill takes a step forward.

BILL

It's a good thing that you've got
me for a teacher.

He swings a THUMPING blow to Ben's stomach, bending him double and knocking the wind out of him.

The men on either arm pull Ben upright.

BILL
Because I'm very thorough.

Again Bill lands a solid BODY BLOW and Ben folds in half.

BILL
Come now. Let's have a proper look
at you.

The men hoist Ben to his feet...

He holds his head up - chin sticking out, he meets Bill's eye with a look of defiance.

BILL
You're a handsome one aren't you.
I'm sure your mother's a beauty.
I'd wager she's had some Irish in
her.

He turns and LAUGHS at his men.

With a RAPID TWIST Ben slips his captors' grip and makes a dash for it, he RACES down the row of cabins towards the main path but before he can reach it a PAIR OF MEN step out of the shadows and block his way.

Ben stops, checks behind, he's trapped...

Bill and his men saunter up.

BILL
You're a slippy one too. Hold him
tightly boys.

Ben is seized from behind.

Bill grabs Ben's face, his fingers dig into Ben's cheeks as he twists his head around.

Ben's eyes are locked to his, refusing to be broken.

Bill looks at his men, smiles.

BILL

Such a brave handsome nigger. It'd be a tragedy if something happened to him on his first night here.

Bill draws his fist back...

A DEEP RUMBLING GROWL stops him short.

Esclaves and the Mastiff step out of the shadows.

ESCLAVES

That is enough for one evening, don't you think?

Bill looks from Esclaves to the dog...

The dog pulls its lips back, its TEETH CLACK in threat.

BILL O'SHAUGHNESSY

I'll decide when he's had enough.

ESCLAVES

Of course you will, of course. But really, he seems to have learned his lesson.

BILL O'SHAUGHNESSY

I don't think so. We've only just begun.

Esclaves bends down and pats the dog...

He slowly unclips the lead and speaks to the animal in a sing song.

ESCLAVES

Oh, but he looks like such a fast learner, doesn't he... You are a fast learner, hmm, young man?

He turns and looks at Ben for the first time.

Slowly, Ben nods his head.

ESCLAVES

Bravo. Didn't I tell you? An exemplary student. I am sure he will not enter your camp uninvited again. Mmm?

Ben shakes his head.

ESCLAVES (CONT'D)

C'est bon. Now boy, please run on home before you get yourself in any more trouble.

Ben's two captors hold his arms, they look to Bill...

Bill looks at the dog...

It is tensed to spring, waiting only a word from its master.

Esclaves smiles.

Bill gives his men the nod.

Ben shakes them off, shoots a look of gratitude at Esclaves - a look of death at Bill - and staggers off toward the path.

ESCLAVES

Young man. Just one more thing please.

Ben turns and meets the overseer's eye.

ESCLAVES (CONT'D)

What is your name?

Ben looks uncertain.

Esclaves smiles broadly, tilts his head, reassuringly.

Ben pauses, quietly.

BEN

Ben. Ben Freeman.

ESCLAVES

Hah! À Bientot then Monsieur
Freeman. Until we meet again.

Ben turns and hits the path...

Disappears behind the huts...

And is gone.

Bill raises an eyebrow at Esclaves.

Esclaves grins.

He steps forward...

Puts his hands on Bill's shoulders and the two men start to
LAUGH...

The Mastiff lets out a low WHINE.

Bill bends and gives the dog a playful SLAP around the
muzzle, it takes his hand gently in its mouth and shakes
him, he allows himself to be pulled down...

The Irishman and the Mastiff ROLL and TUMBLE on the dusty
ground - the dog GROWLS and Bill SCREAMS in mock agony.

Esclaves LAUGHS...

He looks to the path where Ben has gone.

His smile slowly hardens.

EXT. THE FIRE BREAK - NIGHT

Ben staggers on downhill across the wasteland.

He hears the SCREAMS and GROWLING from the Irish camp and
picks up the pace.

Behind him the moon sinks low - the stumps cast shadows as
long as trees.

The lights go out on Mount Hope.

In the darkness it looks a long way away.

INT. THE BUNKHOUSE - DAY

DENNIS

Ben wake up. Wake up. Freeman...
Freeman!

Ben opens his eyes.

Dennis looms over him.

DENNIS

You sleep like a dead man. Get up.

Ben gingerly pushes himself to an upright position.

First light breaks through the open window, all around him
men dress, COUGH, pull on boots and GRUMBLE.

BEN

What is it?

DENNIS

Wait till you see.

He hoists Ben to his feet.

Ben sways, clutches his stomach, GROANS.

DENNIS

We need to find some breakfast. But
first come. See.

Ben limps along behind Dennis as the big man strides across
the room.

EXT. THE BUNKHOUSE - DAY

At the doorway Ben squints in the low sunlight.

Dennis beckons him on.

BEN

What are you so fired up about.

Dennis climbs onto a barrel, hoists himself up onto the metal roof of the bunkhouse and drops a hand to Ben.

Ben takes it and is lifted off his feet, he grabs the guttering and Dennis pulls him up.

Ben rolls onto his back and BREATHS deeply against the pain.

Dennis CLOMPS up the pitched roof toward the apex and joins Horace, who sits staring over the ridge.

Ben struggles to his feet.

Walking low he climbs the tin roof.

He reaches the ridge and stops, stands slowly upright.

He raises his hands to his head, a look of awe on his face....

EXT. THE CANAL WORKS - DAY

The canal works stretch out beneath the camp...

A great tear in the earth, 2 miles long and 100 feet deep.

At the oceanside a giant dredger floats in brackish swamp.

Closer, red clay sprouts scaffold and towering concrete casts, shored up by the trunks of giant jungle trees.

Huge machines - cranes, excavators, conveyors, steam shovels - wait on the banks.

A train track winds through the mud at the side of the cut, heading inland.

Beside it the cut gradually shallows...

Becomes no more than a red gash in the earth.

Thick jungle presses in on its sides. Dark and dangerous.

EXT. THE BUNKHOUSE - DAY

Ben stands above it all on the bunkhouse roof, frozen in awe at the scale of the works.

He looks down at his friends...

The two men sit, taking in the spectacle.

Horace stares, his face a mix of curiosity, and fear.

Dennis turns, grins up at Ben.

The sun rises over Mount Hope and casts a warm glow on Ben's face.

The sound of the CAMP STIRRING grows louder below as Horace and Dennis rise.

The three men stand side by side on the rooftop.

Ben Freeman raises his hands high, throws back his head, and WHOOPS.