

EXCELLENCE IN PRODUCTION DESIGN PERIOD FEATURE FILM

Production Designer
JOHN COLLINS

Set Decorator LYNNE MITCHELL

Art Director's Guild Excellence in Production Design Awards

Based on a true story, The Banker centers on revolutionary businessmen Bernard Garrett (Anthony Mackie) and Joe Morris (Samuel L. Jackson), who devise an audacious and risky plan to take on the racist establishment of the 1960s by helping other African Americans pursue the American dream. Along with Garret's wife Eunice (Nia Long), they train a working class white man, Matt Steiner (Nicholas Hoult), to pose as the rich and privileged face of their burgeoning real estate and banking empire – while Garrett and Morris pose as a janitor and a chauffeur. Their success ultimately draws the attention of the federal government, which threatens everything the four have built.



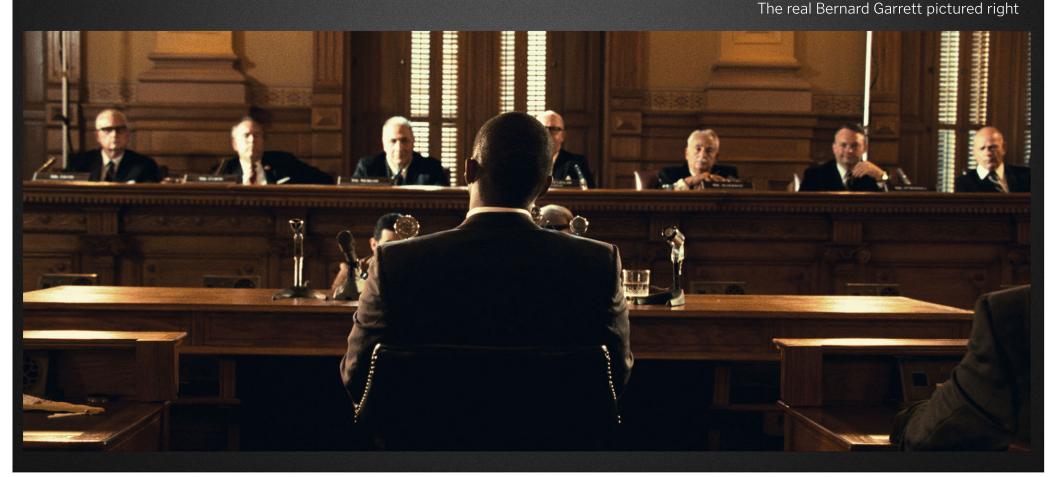
HOW TWO 'JANITORS' BOUGHT WHITE BANK IN TEXAS

ligh finance trips up Negro business By LOUIE ROBI



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Ebony Article from June 1965 The real Joseph Morris pictured left

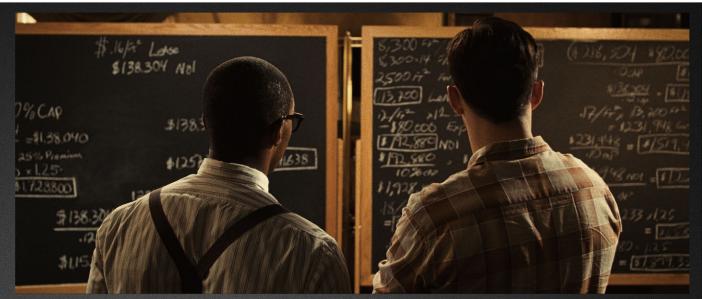


I received the script from my producer friend Will Greenfield without much historical background on the story behind the screenplay. He told me it was great and to "just read it". With a title of "The Banker" I didn't have high hopes for an exciting read, but was pleasantly surprised to find that this is actually a movie about superheroes. Not the superheroes that rush in and save a schoolbus full of children before it falls into the Hudson, but heroes that fight adversity over decades, and at great personal sacrifice.

My initial conversations with director George Nolfi revolved around defining a visual a journey that starts in rural Texas in the 1930's, into Los Angeles in the 50's and eventually reaches the United States Senate Chambers in Washinton D.C. in the 60's. As I started research for the project I gravitated towards Gordon Parks' beautiful still photography from the 1950's, specifically a collection called "A Segregation Story" which seemed to not only capture the spirit of the struggle that our characters were facing, but also proved a valuable documentation of color and texture of the Jim Crow south.

I brought a stack of the photographs into a meeting with George and he pulled the exact same images up on his laptop that he had gravitated towards while doing his own research. Using this as a springboard for discussion, I started to define the look and feel for the project.

With a preliminary (tight) shooting schedule and a set list of close to 90 sets I started to pull together my art team with a healthy mix of excitement and terror.





Gordon Parks Photograph from "A Segregation Story"





Bernard's childhood home in the small town of Willis, Texas conveys his humble roots. It was necessary for Set Decorator Lynne Mitchell to source two complete sets of furnishings for the home due to a shooting schedule requirement which precluded a major paint and construction changeover. We first see the home when Bernard is a child in the 1930's and he returns twenty years later with his own son after he has established a successful business in Los Angeles. It is during this trip that his interest in helping the black community of Willis is piqued.



BERNARD'S CHILDHOOD HOME



BERNARD'S CHILDHOOD HOME





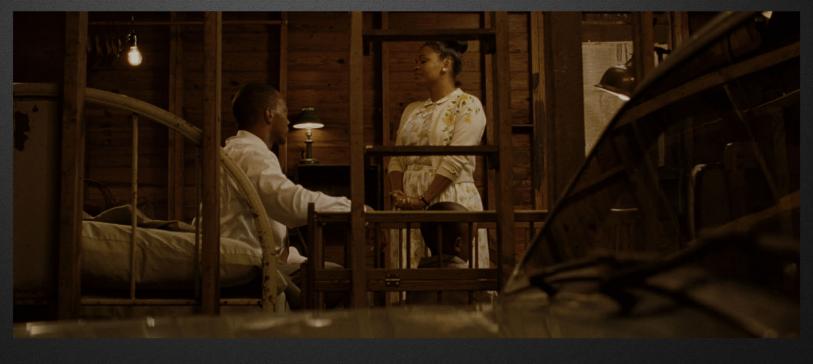


LIFE IN THE GARAGE

Bernard moves to Los Angeles to make his fortune in real estate, and although the oppression is marginally better than rural Texas he is constantly reminded that he is an outsider in the white business world. As he tries to get his feet under him he moves with his wife and child into a relative's house. To push the narrative of his early struggles, we decided to stage this "room" inside one half of an unfinished garage (with one side still occupied by the homeowner's automobile). Our construction team, headed by coordinator Marlow Sanchez and Scenic Charge Justin **Allmet** transformed an existing garage on location into a richly detailed aged structure that housed the burgeoning Garrett family during some lean times.

Similar to Bernard's childhood home, we chose to keep all the sets in the early years in tight spaces to allow for the expansion of Joe's world as he gained success.





THE PLANTATION CLUB



Joe Morris owned numerous properties in Los Angeles prior to meeting Bernard, including an establishment called The Plantation Club. It was decided early on that the club would provide our backdrop for many of the scenes in which Joe and Bernard are getting to know each other.

We were fortunate to be able to shoot a portion of Joe's club on location at the beautiful and period appropriate Fox Theater in Atlanta. Joe's personal office is nested into the back of the club in our story, so Art Director **Andi Crumbley** meticulously surveyed the Fox Theater to ensure that the period details were translated properly into the set on stage.



THE PLANTATION CLUB







JOE'S OFFICE







BANKER'S BUILDING





As Bernard starts his ascent into the upper echelon of the wealthy white financial world he is suddenly a small figure in a big, austere world. At this point we are in an environment that's the polar opposite of the rural Texas town of his birth. Cold polished surfaces confront him at every turn as he tries to break through the institutional barriers. Bernard and Joe managed to buy one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in Los Angeles known as The Banker's Building which still exists on Hill Street in the modern day Jewelry District.











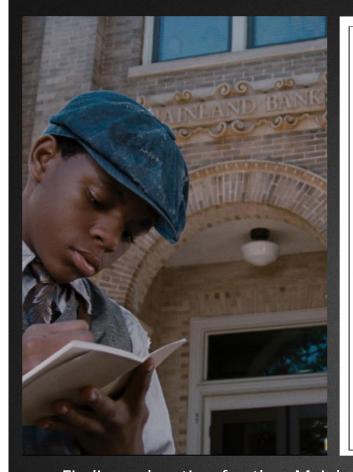
MAINLAND BANK

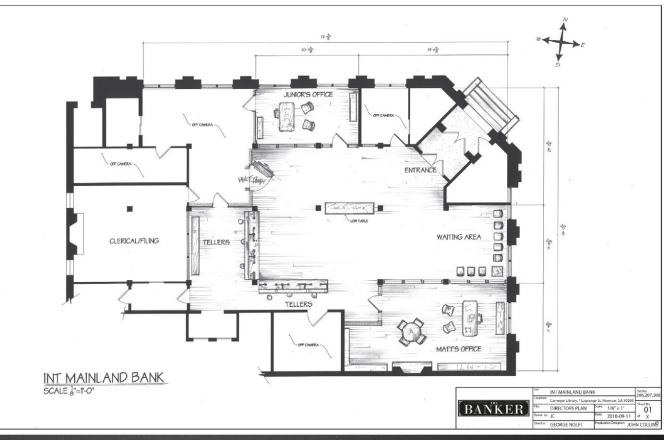






MAINLAND BANK





Finding a location for the Mainland Bank exterior that was period appropriate and had a direct connection to a historic town square proved to be a challenge. We honed in on the Carnegie Library in Newnan, GA after an exhaustive search for a decent match to a rural Texas town. The Carnegie is the town's working library, but through some deft maneuvering from our locations department we were able to take it over for our shoot. The set dec crew moved thousands of books out of the first floor and we built our set into the location which allowed us to practically connect the interior and exterior. Newnan became a hub for many of our montage pieces for 1930's and 1950's Texas.





The First National Bank Of Marlin is the second bank in Texas that Bernard and Joe bought to aid in their outreach to the black community. To contrast the older bank in Willis, we decided to embrace a 50's aesthetic in the Marlin branch. The large glass in the offices and panels conference room were designed for scenes which required private conversations that excluded Bernard who poses as the janitor.

Clean architectural lines in an uncluttered environment provided a perfect backdrop as tension rises as the federal government begins to investigate.

Propmaster **Mike Scherschel** painstakingly created hundreds of period appropriate banking and real estate documents to flesh out the numerous scenes centered around paperwork.









SENATE HEARINGS

MAPPING INEQUALITY

Bernard and Joe eventually owned 177 buildings in Los Angeles. The buildings they purchased in "White Only" areas made them instrumental in the fight against housing segregation not only in California, but throughout the country.







Barker's House



Matt's House















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