

BLOW OUT THE LIGHT

Written by

Robert N. Ruffin and Jim Robinson

Based on Joseph Ellis's *The Silence*

FADE IN:

1 INT. JAMES MADISON'S ROOMS IN NEW YORK CITY - MIDDAY, MARCH 1  
1790

JAMES MADISON (39), a brilliant but diminutively frail man, is sitting at a desk surrounded by books and papers in his cramped room. He is writing furiously. From the window behind him, the bright sun is glaring in.

BEGIN MONTAGE

THE SOUND OF SLAVES CHOPPING IN THE FIELD GROWS INCREASINGLY LOUD AND FRANTIC THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING.

3 EXT. A PLANTATION FIELD - ROASTING MIDSUMMER - MADISON'S SEIZURE VISION 3

SLAVES in the field with hoes, chopping.

4 INT. JAMES MADISON'S ROOMS IN NEW YORK CITY - CONTINUED 4

Madison feverishly writing. The sun is intensely glaring in on him. He is more agitated. He begins to sweat.

5 EXT. A PLANTATION FIELD - CONTINUED 5

Slaves in the field with hoes. Their chopping is more violent. The sun is glaring down on them. Sweat is running rivers down their faces.

6 INT. JAMES MADISON'S ROOMS IN NEW YORK CITY - CONTINUED 6

Madison writing furiously. He is paler, sweating copiously. Sweat drips onto his document causing the ink to run.

7 EXT. A PLANTATION FIELD - CONTINUED 7

Slaves in the field chopping. Each time they chop, their faces are splashed with blood.

THE SOUND OF CHOPPING BEGINS TO MORPH INTO THE SOUND OF POUNDING.

9 INT. JAMES MADISON'S ROOMS IN NEW YORK CITY - CONTINUED 9

Madison is frozen, his face contorted in an unnatural state. His nose is spontaneously bleeding. The blood drips onto his document.

10 EXT. A PLANTATION FIELD - CONTINUED 10

Slaves in the field chopping. Their hoes have become axes. Blood splashes up on them as they chop a huge, gaping wound in the earth which is now filling with blood.

END MONTAGE

11 INT. JAMES MADISON'S ROOMS IN NEW YORK CITY - CONTINUED 11

Madison faints, his head slamming onto the desk. His blood is running onto his paper, which is revealed to be the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution. The sun streams in on his inert body.

The pounding morphs into the SOUND OF SOMEONE POUNDING at the door into Madison's chambers.

The door flies open.

TITLE: JAMES MADISON, NEW YORK CITY, 1790. THE FIRST CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES.

WILLIAM (BILLEY) GARDNER - an enterprising black man in his early 20's- and MRS. ELSWORTH, the earthy landlady, rush into Madison's room. The landlady is taken aback as Billey hurries to Madison and attempts to rouse him.

BILLEY

Mr. Madison? Sir? Can you hear me?

(to Mrs. Elsworth)

Have you water? Cool water. And a cloth. Please.

MRS. ELSWORTH

Is he dead?

BILLEY

No ma'am. The water?

Mrs. Elsworth leaves as Madison begins to revive. Billey checks Madison's eyes to see if there is any consciousness.

BILLEY (CONT'D)  
 Mr. Madison, it's Billey. Billey.  
 (Madison is in a post-  
 seizure stupor.)  
 Here, now. Let's get the blood  
 flowing.

Billey puts Madison's feet up on the desk and removes Madison's shoes and stockings as Madison feebly protests. Billey rubs Madison's legs briskly.

Mrs. Elsworth returns with the bucket of water and cloth. As Billey mops Madison's nose and brow and washes Madison's legs and feet...

BILLEY (CONT'D)  
 He'll be fine in a while. I know  
 how to tend him. Maybe you'd best  
 leaves us.

Mrs. Elsworth hesitates, uncomfortable leaving Madison with a strange negro.

BILLEY (CONT'D)  
 For Mr. Madison's privacy, Ma'am.

Mrs. Elsworth reluctantly exits but leaves the door ajar a crack. She puts her eye to the crack and stares in.

Madison, slowly emerging from his stupor.

MADISON  
 Billey? Billey?

Billey easily lifts the diminutive Madison into his arms. Madison is still limp.

BILLEY  
 We'd best get you to bed, Suh.

13 INT. MADISON'S ROOMS - NEXT MORNING.

13

BILLEY sits at Madison's desk copying the work Madison bled all over onto a new sheet of paper. He is in deep concentration. MADISON lies sleeping in bed.

Madison begins to awaken and sees Billey

MADISON  
 Billey? Billey? Is it truly you,  
 Billey?

Billey continues copying without glancing up.

MADISON (CONT'D)

You were in my dreams.

BILLEY

Yes, suh. Although it is only half-right. I am Mr. William Gardner now. A free man. Though I suppose I'll allow you to call me "Billey" as you were the one who sold me into freedom.

There is breakfast on the table if you feel strong enough to eat it.

Madison, who looks barely risen from the dead, wraps a blanket around his naked body and, barefooted, goes to the table to eat.

MADISON

I didn't know you could write.

BILLEY

Mr. Lucien, that old Quaker man you sold me to. He taught me.

MADISON

Your indenture is finished?

Billy sees this as the first step to gaining Madison's trust, so gravely, he takes a chain from around his neck. Attached to it dangles a locked packet which is concealed beneath his shirt. Billey removes his shoe, twists its heel and withdraws a key from the heel's secret compartment. He unlocks the packet and withdraws a brand-new sheet of paper covered in writing. He reverently unfolds it and holds it up for Madison to see. After a moment, he returns the sheet, locks the packet, replaces the key, slides the chain around his neck and the packet to beneath his shirt. He returns, nonchalantly, to copying.

MADISON (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

BILLEY

At the moment, I'm wondering how you could write these words and keep them folk like you do. Just for their color.

Billey holds up Madison's original copy.

BILLEY (CONT'D)

You bled all over it.

While Madison eats, Billey completes the copy. As he sands it...

BILLEY (CONT'D)  
My hand's not as practiced as yours, but this should serve.

MADISON  
How did you come here?

BILLEY  
You mean how or why?

MADISON  
Both, I suppose.

BILLEY  
How is I walked from Philadelphia.  
Why is a business proposition.

MADISON  
What business are you in?

BILLEY  
Philadelphia purchasing agent for rich Virginia plantation folk.

MADISON  
Who are your clients?

BILLEY  
You will be my very first one.  
(They study each other.)

MADISON  
I tell you what. You help me with a bath, and I'll consider your proposal.

BILLEY  
Well... you do smell like the shit house in August, Suh.

They burst into laughter and the mood lightens considerably.

MADISON  
How did you find me?

BILLEY  
Finding things is my particular skill.

MADISON  
Our past comes back to haunt us.

14 EXT. ROAD TO MOUNT VERNON - APRIL 1789 - BEGIN FLASHBACK 14

MADISON, riding on horseback through the wilderness, notices an unnatural rustling in the trees. He senses danger and pulls his horse up as the noise gets closer. Madison begins to slowly draw a pistol from his saddlebag. GEORGE WASHINGTON (an athletic, vigorous 57), on horseback, emerges from the woods.

WASHINGTON  
I wouldn't do that.

Madison eases his pistol back into his bag.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
From this very spot, it is exactly  
one-half mile to the house.

MADISON  
Is that a fact?

WASHINGTON  
How's your mount?

MADISON  
Tired but able.

WASHINGTON  
See you there.

With a "heeyah!", Washington wheels his horse and charges off.

MADISON  
Oh god.

With his own cry, Madison stirs his horse in quick pursuit. As the pair race through sun-swept fields over rolling meadows, leaping hedgerows, and other obstacles..

TITLE: TWO YEARS BEFORE. GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON,  
VIRGINIA, APRIL 1789

16 EXT. MOUNT VERNON - CONTINUED 16

WASHINGTON, in full gallop, pulls his horse up at the stables of Mount Vernon.

WASHINGTON  
Peter!

MADISON can be seen in the distance galloping well behind. Washington leaps off his horse, and shouts back to Madison.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
I'll be in the study!

PETER HARDIMAN, the stablemaster, chases Washington's spirited horse down as Madison pulls his horse up. Madison and horse are both spent. Madison is practically falling out of the saddle. Hardiman takes Washington's horse in hand and helps Madison dismount..

MADISON  
God help us from old men.

HARDIMAN  
(with a grin)  
God help us from General  
Washington, Suh.

17 INT. WASHINGTON'S STUDY - CONTINUED

17

WASHINGTON sits behind his desk expectantly as MADISON enters and flops into a chair, exhausted.

WASHINGTON  
Well. None the worse for wear, I see. I've been making some notes on the inauguration-

MADISON  
Your leg.

WASHINGTON  
And I think - hmmm?

Washington's leg is bleeding from a tiny scratch. A slight trickle of blood runs on his white stockings.

MADISON  
Your leg. It's bleeding, General.

WASHINGTON  
Hm.

Looks at his leg.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
Must've been that hedgerow. Now for the speech. I wish to strike the right tone..

Madison goes into a petit mal seizure, frozen while staring at Washington's leg.

MADISON'S SEIZURAL POV: WASHINGTON'S LEG BEGINS BLEEDING



HEAVILY AND A LARGE WOUND APPEARS BENEATH HIS STOCKING.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

James?

Madison does not respond. Washington rises, goes to him and shakes him gently.

Jemie?

MADISON

(coming around)

Hm?

WASHINGTON

You've had a long ride.

(calling to a footman)

Billy Lee?

Washington's personal assistant, WILLIAM "BILLY" LEE, an older slave, enters.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

The Madeira. The one Mr. Jefferson sent.

Washington kneels and removes Madison's shoes.

That will get the blood flowing.

MADISON'S SEIZURAL POV. THE WOUND BEGINS TO TEAR WASHINGTON'S LEG APART AS BLOOD FLOWS ONTO THE FLOOR.

Madison frozen.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Now. How is that? Madison? Jemie?

Jemie, can you hear me?

(to Billy Lee)

Billy Lee. Come here. Mr. Madison is unwell.

BEGIN MONTAGE

MADISON SEIZURE VISION. CONFUSED MIXED IMAGES INCLUDE.

21

INT. AMBROSE MADISON'S HOME, A DINING ROOM, 1732

21

Madison's grandfather, AMBROSE MADISON (36), a rich Virginia Planter, is eating dinner in his candlelit dining room. He begins to cough, choke, then vomits copiously as he reels about the room panic stricken.

22 EXT. A GLADE IN THE WOODS, 1732 - NIGHT 22

TWO SLAVES being horribly whipped.

The slaves' opening wounds under the whip, blood flowing copiously down their backs.

A noose being tied around a male slave's neck.

END MONTAGE

23 INT. MOUNT VERNON'S DINING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING. 23

WASHINGTON is eating his breakfast in his richly furnished dining room. The morning light streams in. BILLY LEE stands by. A sleepy and somewhat disheveled MADISON enters and goes to the buffet filled with silver dishes of food. As Madison helps himself to the breakfast buffet, Washington eyes him closely, evaluating him.

WASHINGTON

Perhaps I should have Hamilton write my speech.

MADISON

Hamilton!

WASHINGTON

That's the spirit.

MADISON

Might I have some breakfast first?

WASHINGTON

You've put an immense pressure upon yourself.

MADISON

But it's been approved.

WASHINGTON

Perhaps you should take a break.

MADISON

There is the Bill of Rights. Rhode Island and North Carolina are yet to ratify.

WASHINGTON

Ratification will happen. Enacting a new constitution will be charging uphill in a mud bog.

MADISON

The Constitution will hold. I can assure you that, General. Or shall I call you Mr. President?

WASHINGTON

If we don't get my speech written, you can call me just plain farmer George.

MADISON

(to Billy Lee)

Billy Lee? May I impose upon you for paper and pen?

WASHINGTON

(to Madison)

Sh. Sh. Break your fast.

MADISON

Have you thought about the debt?

WASHINGTON

Hamilton thinks we must assume it. You?

MADISON

If the federal government assumes the states' war debts the speculators will be very rich men.

WASHINGTON

Damn scoundrels are buying up every soldier's promissory notes at twenty-five cents on the dollar. Still, debt unpaid will leave us on a poor precipice.

MADISON

No matter the decision, south and north will find reasons to resent.

WASHINGTON

Which brings us to the heart of the matter.

MADISON

The slave question. Yes.

WASHINGTON

Special property.

MADISON

But the Constitution settles that.  
At least for the next nineteen  
years.

WASHINGTON

It will be one of the first  
challenges.

MADISON

Article one, section nine, clause  
one. "The importation of such  
persons shall not be prohibited by  
the Congress prior to the Year one  
thousand eight hundred and eight."  
It's ink on paper. Settled law.

WASHINGTON

Dr. Franklin and his Quaker friends  
are rumbling.

MADISON

How do you know this?

WASHINGTON

I have many eyes and many ears.

MADISON

Damn.

WASHINGTON

Don't damn Franklin. He knows his  
center. Franklin is a power.

MADISON

Things are too fragile. He should  
know better.

WASHINGTON

There's a moral repugnance about  
this matter of special property. It  
rots a man. If a bill ended at my  
desk..

MADISON

That won't happen.

Washington looks at him keenly.

MADISON (CONT'D)

It will not happen. It is settled  
law.

WASHINGTON  
Good. See to it.

END FLASHBACK