

The setting is Hell's Path, Oklahoma Territory, the year, 1877. Hell's Path, an all-Black town and outgrowth of the city of Herberton, on the Oklahoma/Indian Territory--(Creek Nation)-- border, is home to 15 year-old Cleve Masters who is the youngest son of Pete Masters, owner of the Circle M ranch and patriarch of the Masters clan. He and his brothers, Josephus and Tobe, all former Buffalo Soldiers, own 500 adjoining acres in Okfuskee County, where they herd cattle and raise horses. The county has a population that is 85% Black, but it is controlled by a white man, Herbert Guidry, the local banker and the territory's largest single landowner. Guidry's town of Herberton, is the town that Hell's Path sprung from. Cleve is "in love", with Alexandra Guidry, Herbert's daughter. With Guidry getting most of his revenue from blacks and since Pete Masters is the most well respected and wealthiest man, black or white, in the territory, and with the money that the Masters clan brings to his bank and other businesses , Guidry allows the relationship between Cleve and Alexandra to flourish. But when Alexandra becomes pregnant, Guidry vows he'll have, " no little black bastard for a grandson", and has Cleve arrested for the rape of his 15 year-old daughter. Everyone from the local judges to the U.S. Marshal for the territory implore Guidry to reconsider, asking him to consider the reputation and integrity of the Masters'. Pete Masters and his brothers and their families, had lent assistance, either emotionally, financially or by helping them fight rustlers, to dozens of families in and around both Herberton and Hell's Path. Pete Masters never turned down a neighbor in need, ever. On the eve of Cleve's sentencing, Guidry relents, and agrees to Cleve serving one year, hard labor. But while Guidry is finalizing the agreement with the judge, Alexandra, on the verge of nervous breakdown, commits suicide. When Guidry becomes aware of the circumstances, he orders the judge to sentence Cleve to 10 years hard labor.

INT. -HERBERTON JAIL/COURTHOUSE

JUDGE MC CAWLEY

It is with a heavy heart and
against my better judgment that I
hereby sentence Cleve Masters, to
10 years, hard labor, at the
penitentiary at Ft. Smith Arkansas.
Son, I hope you know that I had
to do this. Your's has always
been one of the most law-abidin'
and God-fearin' family's around
here for years and nobody feels
worse about this than me.

CLEVE

Yes, sir. I know that you can't stand for yourself, sir. I have no quarrel with you for it. You have to live under him.

Him, referred to Herbert Guidry. If he didn't get his way, who or whatever stood in his way paid dearly.

CLEVE

Mr. Guidry, you know I loved your little girl and you know that no one holds more blame for her being gon' from us than you do, sir.

GUIDRY

How dare you speak to me that way, boy. For that, I will have you hung!!

Herbert Guidry was screaming at the top of his lungs. No one, especially a darkie, would speak to him that way. At last, the judge showed some moxie.

JUDGE MC CAWLEY

All right, Herbert this has gone far enough. No one is going to be hung.

The judge had now become enraged. It was bad enough that Cleve was serving any time at all, and now Guidry ranted about hanging. Everyone knew that Cleve never raped Alexandra Guidry. Herbert Guidry had only let these kids carry on because of all the money that the Masters family brought in from all of their business concerns.

JUDGE MC CAWLEY

(to court bailiff)

Please take the prisoner to the jail to await the train to Ft. Smith. I want him under constant watch and he is to see no one but his family. And if Mr. Guidry or any of his men attempt to get into the jail, your orders are to shoot to kill.

THE SHOT CUTS BETWEEN ALEXANDRA'S FUNERAL, CLEVE'S TRAIN RIDE AND ENTRANCE INTO THE PENITENTIARY.

As the years pass Cleve grows in body and mind. Whenever he was not digging fence posts, bailing cotton, or constructing new prison buildings, he was reading anything he could get his hands on. He was developing friendships and making enemies. Sanford Thornton, a black bandit and horse thief from Wyoming, had taken an instant dislike to Cleve, for reasons still unknown to Cleve. Cleve had been in prison about a week when Thornton approached him and made his one and only threat.

EXT.-FT.SMITH PRISON, YARD

THORNTON

Look boy, I don't like you or anybody who looks like you and the next time I see you I plan on stompin' yo' ass out.

Thornton was a loudmouth who had drawn attention and a crowd. Cleve didn't want to fight him, but he knew that if push came to shove, he'd have to let Thornton, and the rest of the prison know, never to bother him.

CLEVE

I know I don't know ya, so I hope ya can just stay ya distance. I ain't out for trouble, but if you ever touch me, come prepared.

Thornton charged Cleve and landed a right hand to the nose. The blow staggered Cleve and knocked him momentarily off balance. Before Thornton could follow up, Cleve hit him in the stomach, then sent a vicious forearm to the jaw. They exchanged damaging head and body blows before Cleve administered a succession of right hands to Thornton's face crushing his eye socket. Cleve put an end to the brawl with a thundering body blow and a haymaker to the chin. Bruised and bloodied, Cleve made his way back to his cell and never had another problem with Thornton or any other inmate.

Back in Hell's Path, Pete Masters and his brothers and their "M" brand ranches are surpassing Herbert Guidry and his Flaming "G" ranch for power and respect in the territory and Guidry will have none of it. Though neither Pete, Josephus or Tobe Masters have ever given any indication that they intended to try and usurp Guidry's authority, Herbert Guidry had come to the agonizing realization that the Masters' had to go, while the Masters' only goal was to care for their families and watch their businesses and the community grow.

INT. -HERBERTON BANK OF HELL'S PATH, HERBERT GUIDRY'S OFFICE

Herbert Guidry is talking to his top henchman, Jeb Pike, dealing with what should be done about the growth and expansions of the "M" brand ranches and businesses. Combined, the brothers had almost 7,000 head of cattle and they had acquired an additional 300 acres. As far as cattle, they were doing more business than Guidry, but with Guidry being bank owner and president, he had a hand in all businesses in Herberton or Hell's Path. The Masters' also sold hand carved furniture, buckboards and covered wagons and the endeavors were quite lucrative. The only thing that kept Pete Masters and his clan from running the territory was the fact that they were Black. And while Guidry still ran the area, people all around, black and white, showed Pete the respect and deference that Guidry thought **he** deserved. The Masters' were beginning to become as prominent as he, so Guidry felt he had to do something to take control of the cattle and business interests of the Masters clan. He had to keep control of the region so he could continue to have his men rape, rob and rustle, keeping him in power. He knew that killing them was his only option. But how to do it and keep his name out of it?

JEB PIKE

Mr. Guidry, the way I see this is that we just kill the niggers and take that land and every head of cattle and horses. Who gives a shit about some niggers with more than they deserve. No darkie should own that much land and have that kind of money them boys got.

Guidry wished it could only be that easy.

GUIDRY

That nigger is a personal friend of the territorial governor and is the cousin of Bass Reeves. You do know who Bass Reeves is don't you.

Bass Reeves was a legendary Black U.S deputy who worked for Judge Isaac Parker , out of the Ft. Smith, AK federal court for over 30 years.

JEB PIKE

Yeah, I know Reeves. He put my pa in that Ft. Smith prison about seven years ago. Looks like I got even more reason to get these darkies.

GUIDRY

Now, look Pike. I cannot be connected to this, ever. If you think you can get rid of these people without bringing the federal marshals down on all us, then do it. If not, I'll bring some guns from back East, who will handle it my way.

Guidry knew that the mention of Eastern gunmen would thoroughly agitate Jeb. Jeb was Oklahoma born and bred and thought all men from "back East" were "dudes." He also thought that all the hot-shot gunmen from the East that he had seen were overrated. He'd had to kill 3 of these so-called fast guns.

JEB PIKE

Don't worry Mr. Guidry, no one will ever know it was you.

That night, three groups of hooded men simultaneously attacked all the Masters' homestead. Being cavalry veterans, the Masters brothers valiantly fought their attackers, but they were out-gunned and out-manned. The flaming torches, carbines and six-shooters of the swirling mob proved to be too much. And though the raiders had sustained casualties, all that remained for the Masters' were ruins and charred remains.

INT. SHILOH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH, HELL'S PATH

GUIDRY

Listen everyone, I have sent a telegram to Judge Parker at the Ft. Smith Federal Court, asking for U.S. Marshals to look into this tragedy. And I am personally offering a \$5,000.00 reward for capture, dead or alive, of the killers. We cannot have citizens of Hell's Path or Herberton wantonly slaughtered. Especially a ramrod straight family like the Masters were.

Jeb Pike could only laugh at Guidry's hypocrisy.

Copyright 2005 Calvin H. Neal, Jr. -- All Rights Reserved

For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at
info@filmmakers.com