

THE CORNER

A Limited Series

OVERVIEW: This non-fiction account of life within the urban drug culture will be presented in ten consecutive one-hour segments, each of which will contribute to a continuing dramatic arc, while at the same time standing alone as single episodes. Each segment will feature all of the main characters, but each will allow one of those characters to dominate, subtly shifting POV and focus to emphasize the different facets of the story.

CHARACTERS: The main characters are DeAndre McCullough, Fran Boyd, Gary McCullough, Fat Curt (coupled with Blue and the other Old Heads in the shooting gallery), and Ella Thompson (coupled with the CMB Crew that forms the nucleus of her basketball team).

Character arcs are as follows:

- 1) DeAndre McCullough begins with one foot in the normative world of school, girls and teenage play, and one foot in the world of the drug corner. He struggles with his choice, particularly as he approaches the birth of his child, but ultimately, his inability to see any other world than Fayette Street leaves him to the corner game as a small-time dealer and addict.
- 2) His mother, Fran Boyd, lost in her own addiction, watches the process helpless to intervene, her credibility shattered by her own prolonged descent. But watching DeAndre struggle, she resolves to break free of the drugs, succeeds, then backslides again before finally overcoming her addiction and leaving the corner world.
- 3) DeAndre's father, Gary McCullough, tries desperately to hold to his carefully nurtured humanity amid the degradation of the corner. He manages moments of love and epiphany amid the despair, refusing to give all of himself to the drugs. He attempts time and again to recover the life lost, ultimately succumbing to a fatal overdose.
- 4) Ella Thompson, still grieving from the five-year-old murder of her young daughter, commits her life to the children of Fayette Street, refusing to give up on their possibilities. She watches as the older graduates of her recreation center -- DeAndre, R.C., Tae, etc. -- drift inexorably toward the corner. Ultimately, as the drug world encroaches on her own family, she must leave the neighborhood itself, though her resolution to continue the fight remains.
- 5) Fat Curt comes to the end of a long life in service of the corner, trying to keep his own moral code in an amoral world. He is the centerpiece of that strange family of the shooting gallery, and his passing comes to represent the end of an era in which the drug game still had some rules. What Curt lived was hardened enough; what follows him is sad and terrifying. As Curt dies out, so do his companions, one by one.

Each segment will begin with a swirl of activity on the same drug corner, a back-and-forth that captures ordinary life within the confines of West Baltimore street culture. Then, we follow the central character in each segment off or into the corner, signifying that it will be this character's POV and story that will shape and dominate the episode.

USE OF FLASHBACKS: To further emphasize the main character in each segment, a series of flashback sequences will be included in each segment. These flashbacks will be triggered by the real-time story, but they will constitute an interior narrative as well, gently suggesting the forces that formed the character and brought him or her to the present condition. Each segment will contain two flashback sequences, one of three to four beats, and a secondary sequence of two beats. One sequence will be framed in the period of the 1980s, when cocaine hit Fayette Street and the community began to crumble. The other will be framed a decade earlier, when the heroin trade, while substantial, was more self-contained and hope still existed along Fayette Street.

CINEMATIC CHOICES: To help differentiate between these three sequences, we suggest some cinematic distinctions be employed, the most notable and challenging being the use of black-and-white photography. Specifically, we are interested in filming the present-tense narrative entirely in black-and-white, emphasizing the documentarian feel of the material. Scenes in the 1980s would allow for a washed or faded color. The earliest scenes, when our characters are young and ripe with future promise, would be filmed in full color. The effect, we think, will be startling and will make the essential point, by virtue of a sharp cinematic metaphor, that the rise of the urban drug culture has not only paralleled, but helped to create the nightmare of the American inner city.

MUSIC: Music will be utilized as an additional subtheme, with each character wedded to a specific sound. Specifically:

Fat Curt: 1950s doo-wop and jump blues, jazz standards, reflecting a man out of his time, as Curt clearly is. Music for a man who misses all that's been lost.

Ella Thompson: Gospel and sacred music. Music utterly in opposition to the world around her.

DeAndre McCullough: Hip-hop, gangster rap. Music of the moment, angry and spare and coarse.

Gary McCullough: Sixties and seventies soul, with an emphasis on socially conscious material (heavy on the Curtis Mayfield). Music for a man seeking enlightenment.

Fran Boyd: Seventies and eighties party music. Dance tunes, from P-Funk to James Brown to the Ohio Players, War and the Commodores. Music for a woman in search of an easy beat.

In keeping with the documentarian logic, no moment -- save, perhaps, for the last montage of the last segment -- will be scored in any way that is external to the story. Rather, the music will exist within the story itself -- coming from a car radio, from a transistor or boom box, from the television or, perhaps, being offered up casually by someone on the street. In short, the music exists only when it might in actually be present in these people's lives, and as such, it always has the echo of a stereo turned loud in a bedroom, or the tinny sound of a car radio, or the rasp of a corner tout singing some long-forgotten ballad. Sound as well as sight exists to further the documentarian logic.

STAND-ALONE PIECES: Each segment will contain one stand-alone theme that will dovetail with the main-character's arc. For example, when Fran is undergoing 28-day detox, the essential theme of the episode -- treatment and recovery -- will be emphasized with a stand-alone piece aimed at that topic. This will be judiciously integrated into the plot without the use of voice-over, montage or any other dramatic device. For example, the essential truths and realities of treatment will be revealed in the context of a NA meeting, at which the speaker creates the existing landscape for Fran. Similarly, it will be DeAndre who explains to viewers how the corner itself works, the device in that instance being an effort to school the less adept Boo at breaking a package down. These stand-alone pieces will build resonance to each episode and will make the drug world more accessible to viewers.

DOCUMENTARIAN DRAMA: This appeal to the actuality of streetcorner life is central and essential to the success of the series. Anything that too overtly suggests the dramatic form argues against the essential truth of these lives and the fact that what is being presented is as close to everyday life in the urban drug culture as has ever been suggested by any media. In short, we are trying to convince viewers that these are real lives, being lived in the moment in West Baltimore. Even the flashbacks must argue for the moment itself; there should be absolutely no use of voice-over or scoring to suggest melodrama. The flashbacks serve the essential purpose of establishing the characters within the greater arc of their lives, so that viewers are made aware that the present-tense state of these characters is poignant because of the opportunities and hopes already lost. But nonetheless, the flashbacks either exist in the moment or they don't exist at all.

It is a natural result of this approach that this series, unlike the Apollo or Patriots project, must live or die with small, quiet moments. There is no grand and obvious dramatic arc, such as the journey to the moon or the founding of a nation that can provide ready-made plot points, pivots and peaks. Instead, the series requires a subtle faith in those moments of quiet desperation, in which characters are made whole and important and rare through a palpable and unlikely humanity. For that reason, we have used ten hours, rather than six or eight. There is no way to abbreviate these quiet journeys, to tell them in shorthand or to cheat the natural moments without damaging the essential credibility or the argument we're trying to present. These characters, for the most part, are drug-involved. Many are doomed. All are on the fringe of society, barely surviving. If we cheat them out of the time necessary to make their humanity real and complete, the project risks stumbling into a "Boyz-in-the-hood" stereotype. We are after something very different, and it requires time enough for viewers to realize that what they are seeing are people like themselves, living a nightmare -- some of them even escaping that nightmare -- that many in this country have long since ceased to think about in human terms. With melodrama, the plot moves quickly or the project is at risk. But this is in many ways a drama hidden within the premise of fly-on-the-wall documentary. And documentary is, at its best, an argument for the power of anti-drama. We need to convince viewers that they are living moment-to-moment in a culture utterly alien and remarkable, and, with that accomplished, the quiet drama of these characters is entirely credible and reaps the maximum benefit from the fact that these stories are decidedly true.

Attached are detailed Bibles for the ten segments. Completed scripts for segments #1 and #2 to follow beginning of next week. We apologize for the extra weeks of work, but both of us are intent at getting our first written drafts as close to right as we possibly can. We feel, I suppose, that we have this one opportunity to make HBO feel as we do about this project and to that end, we've put every effort into those first scripts.

David Simon & David Mills

THE CORNER

RECURRING OR SIGNIFICANT SERIES CHARACTERS

(Main characters are capitalized)

DEANDRE MCCULLOUGH, 15 -- An adolescent drug dealer

GARY MCCULLOUGH, 38 -- His addicted father

FRAN BOYD, 36 -- His addicted mother

TYREEKA FREAMON, 13-14 -- DeAndre's girlfriend

The McCullough family

Roberta McCullough, 62 -- Gary's mother

William "W.M." McCullough, 65 -- Gary's father

June Bey McCullough, 41 -- Gary's addicted brother

Kwame McCullough, 20 -- Gary's youngest brother

Carty McCullough, 35 -- Another brother

(Others among the fifteen McCullough siblings may
on rare occasion appear in flashback sequences)

The Boyd family

Scoogie Boyd, 44 -- Fran's oldest brother, a working man

Stevie Boyd, 40 -- Fran's addicted brother

Bunchie Boyd, 38 -- Fran's addicted sister

Sherry Boyd, 34 -- Fran's alcoholic sister

DeRodd Hearn, 8 -- Fran's son, DeAndre's half-brother

Little Stevie Boyd, 9 -- Stevie Boyd's son, DeRodd's playmate

Crenshaw Mafia Brothers (CMB)

RICHARD "R.C." CARTER, 15 -- DeAndre's oldest friend

Stanley "Dinky" Johnson, 15 -- DeAndre's second cousin

Tae Bennett, 15 -- leader of the crew

Boo Senett, 15 -- a follower

Manny Man Walker, 15 -- a follower

(Others in gang may occasionally appear)

The MLK recreation center & community types

ELLA THOMPSON, 41 -- A Fayette Street resident and rec director

Kiti Perry, 18 -- Ella's oldest son, not of the corner

Marzell Myers, 38 -- Ella's assistant at the rec

Larry "House" Canada, 43 -- A recovering addict and briefly,
a coach of Ella's basketball team

"Pumpkin" Watkins, 25 -- The later coach of the team, addicted
Joe Laney, 46 -- A recovering addict, now in college
Brother Low, 43 -- A recovering addict, now dying of AIDS

Old Heads (The shooting gallery regulars)

FAT CURT DAVIS, 46 -- The wisest of the corner touts
GEORGE "BLUE" EPPS, 40 -- Operator of the shooting gallery
Rita Hale, 33 -- The "doctor" who wields the best syringe
Terry "Eggy Daddy" Hamlin, 49 -- Another corner veteran
Scalio, 37 -- The sarcastic comic relief
Robert "Bread" Corbett, 47 -- The sweethearted comic relief

The Police

Bob Brown -- A uniform, white
Collins -- A uniform, black
Peanuthead -- A plainclothes drug cop, black
Huffham -- A young white uniform
Jenerette -- A young black female uniform
Pitbull -- A brutal black uniform
Shields -- An even more brutal black uniform

THE CORNER

Part One: DeAndre's Blues

Main character: DeAndre McCullough

Season: Winter

1. Beginning corner mix: Panoramic shots of Baltimore -- the Baltimore that the rest of the world knows -- Ft. McHenry, the Inner Harbor, Camden Yards. Endless streets and boulevards of rowhomes, gentrified, working class, middle-class -- but all rowhouses. We move west from the downtown in a long tracking shot, gliding up the long hill that is West Fayette Street. Monied property gives way to drug corners, Korean liquor stores, boarded homes. Until we hover above and land at Monroe and Fayette where hardened Ronnie Boice punks a New York Dealer out of some free vials by boldly threatening to snitch on him and Gary McCullough, Ronnie's boyfriend and DeAndre McCullough's father, watches this dangerous play work. We are here introduced to Ronnie and Gary. Passing them is Fat Curt, on his corner post as an aging tout. We are, in turn, introduced to Curt, who frowns to see DeAndre, all of fifteen, serving up coke to some White Users. Boo, another fifteen-year-old, is working with him. DeAndre makes the sale and then spends a moment with Buggy, his New York supplier, negotiating a re-up of vials. Tyreeka Freamon, 13, DeAndre's love interest, rolls through with some girls and DeAndre and Buggy fall into talking about that, with Buggy schooling DeAndre on the more subtle points of women. A Lookout warns of a police jump-out and everyone bustles away. DeAndre foolishly hands off his stash to Ty Boice, Ronnie's brother, who is willing to risk arrest for a chance to rip DeAndre off. Ty escapes the dragnet with DeAndre's stash and when DeAndre is cut loose by Officer Bob Brown; Ty and his stash are nowhere to be found. Curt, watching, is almost amused. DeAndre is still too young to play the game with sense. We follow DeAndre off the corner as he gets some of his crew, the Crenshaw Mafia Brothers (CMB) together, hoping to find Ty Boice and kick his ass. But it is a half-hearted effort, and when Ty is nowhere around, the group of adolescents falls into a pickup game of basketball on the alley court. They are half drug-dealers, half children.

2. We meet Ella Thompson, 41, who runs the rec center and her youngest son, Kiti, as they dress for the funeral of a young Marine killed in a training accident. The serviceman is a friend of Kiti's older brother, who is now in the Navy, and Ella and Kiti are to attend the services on his behalf. This is a journey into the viable black community of Baltimore -- a funeral unlike so many others for young men in this neighborhood. On the way to the church, Ella encounters Blue, who runs the shooting gallery in her block and has been addicted for fifteen years. Ella urges Blue, a fallen artist, to come by the rec and offer an art class for her children. Blue tries to play her off, but Ella, in Christian flower, is insistent about the idea. Ella and Kiti go all the way to Arlington Cemetery -- an ethereal, otherworldly journey -- before returning to the known hell of Fayette Street.

3. ELLA goes to the rec center, opens up and the CMB crew -- DeAndre, R.C., Tae, Boo, Manny Man, DeAndre's cousin, Dinky -- show and start a playful bull session. DeAndre is charming with the little kids at the rec, but at the same time tells a harrowing story about burning live cats. Again, that strange manchild dichotomy. We get a sense of the rec and what it and Ella mean to the children of this forgotten place.

4. Curt goes into Blue's shooting gallery to shoot his afternoon blast and we meet the Old Heads who populate this world -- Curt, Blue, Scilio, Pimp, Eggy, Shardene and Rita, the house doctor, who has some nursing experience and can find veins in any flesh. Curt sees Gary McCullough arguing outside the back window with a New Yorker who burned him on a weak vial of coke. Gary loses the argument and walks off sheepish. Triggering:

A. FLASHBACK (1968) -- An eight-year-old Gary washing Curt's Cadillac Brougham when Curt still had it going on, when he was a player in Nathaniel Johnson's heroin operation.

BACK TO PRESENT: And a sense of how everything -- Curt, Gary, the neighborhood itself has fallen.

5. Nighttime: DeAndre is arrested by Officer Ira Weiner for selling coke as a juvenile. He goes to the Western and we get to know the cop club -- Officer Brown, Officer Weiner, Officer Huffman, Pitbull, etc. -- and get a sense of how many of these guys already know DeAndre or at least know him by looks. His dreds are too distinguishable and they tease him that they can tell his look three blocks away. DeAndre, too, is playful. It's a game for him still. Pitbull relates the story of DeAndre's earlier arrest for having been in a boosted car. DeAndre laughs. The cops almost like him for the flex in his soul, the realness in his laugh. A sense of how sharp this fifteen-year-old is. Fran Boyd, DeAndre's addicted mother, comes to bail him out after an hour or two and he's back on the street.

6. Fran threatens to toss DeAndre out on the street if he doesn't stop slinging. But more than that, she explains that the arrest means he can tell Bugsy that the cops got all his coke. Then they can revial Bugsy's product and sell it on the sly, make all the profit. Fran schooling him even as she disapproves. A sense of Fran as a woman in the game so long that she knows every angle.

A. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Fran and Gary, living large, with Gary working two jobs and planning his investments and making dreams come true. As Gary sticks a \$100 bill in his son's pocket and gets in a playful argument about it with Fran.

7. Boo fucks up the money on DeAndre's revialed coke. DeAndre, trying to get business back on track, explains how a package works. Triggering:

8. SET PIECE: The package. How it works. How a drug corner operates, told against a precise montage of Fayette Street.

9. Fran, true to her word, throws DeAndre out when she sees him back on the corner, taking another package from Bugsy. It wasn't enough for him to sell the revials for pocket money, no, he had to go in on another package. They argue. She breaks a broomstick over his hard head, but at fifteen, DeAndre is now past the point of physical intimidation. He pushes her back against a wall, then laughs and leaves.

10. Gary goes to shoot his dope at Fran's house, the Dew Drop, which is closest thing to a shooting gallery east of Blue's. Fran's brother, Stevie, waters him, ripping him off by switching syringes. Fran berates Gary for this, telling him that he's too weak for the game, that he ain't street.

A. FLASHBACK (1968) – Eight-year-old Gary, a stock boy at Lemler's pharmacy and liquor store, is sent by Abe Lemler to confront the older Curt and Curt's brother Dennis after they have walked out of the store with a fifth of rye. Gary is berated, told to get back inside the store with them Jews. "Who the hell you think you is, boy? Get off the damn corner..."

BACK TO PRESENT: Fran tells Gary she threw their son out, that he's likely going to wash up at 1717 Fayette, where the family once lived, now a vacant house used by Gary, who spends colder nights in his mother's basement and warmer days prowling around 1717.

11. Sure enough, DeAndre sets up home in 1717, in a room down the hall from where his addicted father lays his head. A scene that establishes the fractured father-son relationship. Triggering:

A. FLASHBACK (1980) -- Fran and Gary and three-year-old DeAndre moving into 1717. Gary describing the house as it will become in his vision of the perfect future.

BACK TO PRESENT: DeAndre gets Tyreeka upstairs in 1717. Seduces her there and Tyreeka, lonely, the child of missing parents, responds with unreasonable hope.

12. Gary leaves the metal scales after selling \$9 in used copper, walks to Korean joint, buys a single cigarette for a quarter, the transaction coming through scarred plexiglass, triggering:

A. FLASHBACK (1968) -- Lemler's burns during the riots. Gary watches as older men and boys drag the register from the burning store and beat the cash drawer open, snatching the money.

BACK TO PRESENT: Gary goes back inside 1717, finds DeAndre's stash, cops a vial or two and then puts the rest back. A gentle little thieving.

13. DeAndre and Tyreeka at Mondawmin Mall, shopping for brand-name wear. The allure of the small roll of drug money keeping Tyreeka in thrall. At Footlocker, two fifteen-year-olds know more than the salesmen.

A. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Fran on a shopping binge with little DeAndre in tow, moving through a fresher Mondawmin Mall, buying more stuff than she'll ever bother to wear.

14. CMB partying at 1717. Weed, beer, girls. DeAndre has a club house, happy that his mother threw him out.

15. DeAndre wakes with money missing from his pocket. Checks his stash, vials missing. He looks around, wondering? His boys? Tyreeka? Someone's stealing. He creeps down the hall, sees Gary and Ronnie in bed, firing speedballs and talking softly. He backs away from the scene awkwardly, wounded at the sight though hardly surprised. DeAndre goes back and counts every vial left. He's going to be sure before he confronts anyone.

16. DeAndre and his boys on the corner. Establishing their relationship and history through the banter of a moment. Cops roll past, one of them laughing to DeAndre to get his hair cut if he's gonna sling. DeAndre: "I don't sell drugs." Cops laugh, roll off.

17. Gary again pilfers from DeAndre. But he makes the mistake of trying to hold out on Ronnie. She argues with him, then calls the police to report that Gary assaulted her. It's bullshit, but he takes a domestic violence charge. It's Ronnie's revenge. He's arrested...

A. FLASHBACK (1985) -- Fran, lost in the excess of it all, partying, getting coked up and high. Gary coming home from a second shift, wanting it to end. An argument. Gary, striking Fran. A shock to both of them. Gary leaving...

18. DeAndre still on the corner. Police jump out on him, narrowly missing him. He's too hot. He's got to lay low for a while, Bugsy tells him. DeAndre's money is low. Tyreeka rolls up, asks about going to the movies. Damn girl, all you do is spend my money. Tyreeka insistent. DeAndre goes back home, counts the vials, realizes his father has been stealing him blind.

19. DeAndre moves back in with Fran, promising to stop dealing. Promising to get readmitted to high school for spring semester. Fran asks if he's got anything left. DeAndre admits he's run through just about all of it. Fran: You still a little boy about this thing. You need to get your ass off those corners. DeAndre not quite convinced...

20. Christmas Eve. Fran is flat-ass broke and needs to get DeAndre's little brother DeRodd his presents. She frets about it in front of DeAndre, then goes out to the malls to boost. But she ends up getting chased by the security guards and barely making it home after dark empty-handed. DeAndre greets her with everything purchased -- he spent what was left of his roll on his brother's gifts, saving only a little for himself. Fran asks if he went out slinging again. DeAndre denies it, but she can't be sure. Still, it's a moment for them. We leave mother and son on this uneasy peace...

THE CORNER

Part Two: Gary's Blues

Main character: Gary McCullough

Season: Winter

1. Beginning corner mix: New Year's Eve. Curt steers Gary away from Bryan the burn artist. Gary and Tony Boice cop, to establish their friendship and camaraderie. Curt chides Bryan for the burn bags. Curt and Blue retreat to the shooting gallery to avoid the midnight cannonade of a West Baltimore New Year's. Gary heads for his mother's house on Vine Street.

2. Follow Gary into parents' home, past his mom, past young nieces and nephews, as Gary settles in his basement lair and shoots up amid the relics of his shattered life.

A. FLASHBACK (1975) -- The McCulloughs as a still-functioning nuclear family -- weddings, graduations, etc. Gary as a hard-working teenager, though we learn that his older brother, June Bey, has already fallen into heroin.

3. Days later. DeAndre goes to the high school to beg his way back into Rose Davis' good graces. As vice principal, Rose has heard it all before. But she grants yet another chance.

4. Gary and Tony do their daylight caper in the crackhouse, stealing copper from right underneath the residents even as they continue to smoke rock. They head to the metal scales.

Triggering:

5. SET PIECE: The caper, with metaling as an exemplar. Gary McCullough waxing philosophical on the difference between crime and caper.

6. DeAndre discovers Fran took his stash and gun from his jacket. He has a confrontation with Fran, telling her that the stuff belongs to Bugsy, his supplier, but Fran isn't easily bluffed. DeAndre leaves angry.

7. Follow Gary and Tony to 1717 Fayette Street, where Gary once hoped to make his castle. Gary lectures Tony on wood fixtures, etc. Gary finds box of old LPs, sings, which triggers:

A. FLASHBACK (1975) -- June Bey singing, high as shit. The McCulloughs in denial about the family's first drug addict.

BACK TO PRESENT: From the second floor of 1717, Gary and Tony hear a commotion outside the window. Gary and Tony watch as cops roust two innocent kids and their sandwich. Outside, Ronnie, Gary's girl and Tony's cousin, looks Gary in the eye, catches on to the fact that he didn't share her blast. He's in trouble with Ronnie.

8. Ella appeals again to Blue again to stop by the rec, teach art. Blue is still non-committal.

9. Bugsy confronts Fran over the stolen stash, and Fran has to give in enough to spare DeAndre real trouble. But she's furious that her own son put her in. He's more drug dealer to her now than flesh and blood.

10. Gary misses a tester line for a free heroin sample. His disappointment with his fellow man ("Back when I had it, I shared") triggers:

- A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- GARY is hit upon for money by a series of friends. Montage of new Girlfriend, Fran, Muslims, etc. Gary writes checks like mad, or peels off cash, hoping to be liked.

BACK TO PRESENT: An ill Gary is offered to join in a shoplifting caper. He promises to cut Ronnie in on the proceeds. We then see the successful caper. Gary thinks it's the best game ever.

11. A recovering addict recruited by Ella, Larry "House" Canada tries to coach her newly formed rec basketball team. Blue shows up at the rec; Ella is elated -- she makes use of everyone she can.

12. DeAndre and his mother banter over cigarettes on the stoop. Repercussions of the Buggy confrontation are played out.

13. Second shoplifting caper for Gary, but this one goes bad. He's locked up in the county. Transferred to city on an old detainer -- from when Ronnie had him locked up on the domestic charge in Part One. Gary struggles with withdrawal over the weekend in jail, begs his mother to bail him out. Promises to get right if she will. She does.

14. DeAndre tries yet again to school Boo on some other aspect of slinging dope, but Boo is a thick child indeed.

15. Gary gets out of jail; pleads to Mom. Makes his promises, and seems to believe them. Triggering:

- A. FLASHBACK (1975) -- Younger Gary playing at selling weed, but his mother guilting him, forcing him to quit.

16. House has to bow out of coaching; he got a job. Ella understands. But Blue is a go. He shows up and teaches art class at the rec. An amazing moment for the operator of the Fayette Street shooting gallery. But Ella saw something in him.

17. Gary crosses his father; who comes home from driving the cab. Discomfort between them. Gary confronts Ronnie about her trumped-up charge; she's indifferent to his hurt, but offers to get him high instead. Despite all his promises, he goes for it.

18. Gary and Ronnie wake up in the basement the following morning, with his mother calling to him, asking him to go to the store. She gives him \$10 in cash. And Gary needs a jumper to get started on the day. His mother must know what Gary wants to do with that ten-dollar bill. Instead, he makes the hero's journey, returning from the grocery with the taters and Hamburger Helper. It's the least he can do...

THE CORNER

Part Three: Fran's Blues

Main character: Fran Boyd, with Tyreeka Freamon supporting
Season: Late Winter

1. Beginning corner mix: Fran and DeAndre play out the incident with Collins, when the young Western officer wants to beat DeAndre and Fran berates him for challenging a boy. Tyreeka making movie plans with DeAndre for Saturday. Bread does a funny riff to get in on a blast with Blue and Curt and shows all his charm. Bryan is still selling burn bags off the same corner, asking to get shot again. Bread commenting on that, Curt agreeing. Fran hooking up with Ty, running a game to get her blast and off we go with Fran.

2. Fran in her back room with the TV playing, high as a kite. Same room where her sister died in the fire. Stay with Fran as she inventories her worldly possessions, ruining her high. Off the funeral pamphlet for her sister, taped to the wall:

A. FLASHBACK (1981) -- The fire, her sister trapped inside. A younger Fran and her younger siblings realizing, panicked, trying to fight past the firefighters.

BACK TO PRESENT: DeAndre knocks and gently enters, getting his gear to spend a night on the corners. Fran tries giving him the anti-drug lecture, but it plays uselessly against this room and her own state.

3. DeAndre and Tyreeka at the Harbor Park movies. DeAndre talking shit with his Boys in front of Tyreeka. The playfulness with which the group takes in the slasher movie.

4. DeAndre and Tyreeka later at 1717 Fayette. Gentle and fumbling sex, as opposed to the brash talk earlier. A sense of precious adolescence amid the squalor.

5. DeAndre busted selling cocaine on Fairmount Avenue, shouting for someone to tell his mother, as he's loaded into the wagon. But Fran gets the message late and DeAndre figures he'll see the inside of Hickey School. But it's worse than that: Hickey is full and DeAndre goes to Boys Village with all the D.C. Boys. His first time in juvie and he's scared, but trying to carry it.

6. Fran finds out. She's ambivalent. She can't control him and maybe this will slow him down. She goes to see her older brother, Scoogie, talks to him about the arrest and maybe about leaving DeAndre in for a while. Scoogie talks about recovery and getting clean, and Fran does not want to hear that kind of talk. She wants to believe Scoogie is the same as everyone else in the family. This confrontation leading to:

A. FLASHBACK (1978) -- The Happy House. Scoogie, Fran, Bunchie, Sherry and Stevie all fucked up, drinking drugging -- Everything but heroin and cocaine. The parents both alcoholics, a houseful of human beings trying desperately to deaden their pain and for a time, succeeding. Show the sister, Dena, who dies in the fire in the other flashback sequence. Drunk. The doom already on her.

7. Tyreeka fixes herself up and goes early to Fran's house to go with her down to Boys Village. The trip down there, the sense that outside of Baltimore is like sailing off the edge of the world. DeAndre and Fran meeting in the visitor's center, Tyreeka waiting down the hill with the hack, hoping to be seen by DeAndre. DeAndre telling Fran to get his money from Boo.

8. Fran talking with Tyreeka on the way home, feeling out the caper she's about to run on poor Boo. And talking, too, to Tyreeka about her son, about the future, about her fears.

9. Another funeral for Ella. An overdose of a neighbor's son. She leaves the funeral home in time to see the aftermath of the wounding of Bryan Sampson, shot for selling those burn bags earlier. Ricky Cunningham, who leaves the funeral with her, smitten and wanting to make the leap from corner to rec center, from drugs to sobriety, is recruited for a chaperone at the upcoming Valentine's sock hop. Cunningham, though, floats around the shooting scene and learns all there is to know, reveals a bit of this interior world to Ella. Ricky is embarrassed, as if even this much is, in Ella's sight, guilty knowledge.

10. Gary McCullough and Tony Boice burglarize the neighbor, with the complicity of the victim's next-door neighbor. Gary feeling bad afterward, yet unable to stop himself. Tony not feeling anything at all. Wheeling the stolen appliances down Baltimore Street without the police giving a shit, they get paid, then head for the Dew Drop where Gary gets high with Fran, learns of DeAndre's arrest. Your son a gangster, Gary. It's them Boyd genes winning out over the McCullough side of him.

A. FLASHBACK (1978) -- Gary and Fran meeting up. Fran leaves the Happy House and her siblings, walks over to the drug store where Gary is working. Buys a little weed. So different, Gary, trying to deal weed in small doses, but he's so churchgoing and Fran so very street. And Gary enamored of the difference.

BACK TO PRESENT: Fran plays him for ten dollars and Gary leaves, feeling played.

Afterward she sits on the steps and we see the Mount and Fayette games get played from her keen, insider point of view. The mix and her role in it. Fran still street, Gary still naive. And Fran so much better equipped for a world in which everyone has a game.

11. SET PIECE: The drug world, in which everyone on the corners and in the shooting galleries has their place, their role. Use Fran's POV to show the game as it truly is. Use the whole mix of corner characters -- Curt, Blue, Stevie, Fran, Bryan, etc. -- as bona fide examples.

12. The Valentine's Day dance at the rec center. CMB Kids -- albeit excepting DeAndre who is still locked up -- arrive and alternate between gangster and innocence, but ultimately, in the rare magic of Ella's rec, they settle on innocence. Kiti mixes the tunes and Ella is affectionate with her youngest son. Save perhaps for Tyreeka, who in DeAndre's absence, flirts adventurously with Tae. Dinky, DeAndre's cousin, watches with vague concern, as does Ella and others. Tyreeka is a bold thirteen-year-old, though she breaks off from Tae at the last minute -- something that Fran, from the front steps of the Dew Drop, sees.

13. DeAndre's telephone call from Boys Village. Ma, put Tyreeka on. Fran listens to professions of fidelity and love.

A. FLASHBACK (1978) -- Gary at Ohio State, on the phone with Fran, learning that she is pregnant with DeAndre. He professes his fidelity and love. Declares that he'll come home.

14. Ella shows up at the rec with basketball uniforms. The CMB Boys fight over the numbers and parcel out the jerseys. Ella delighted. Tae saves one for DeAndre, who is still locked up, but will be a starting guard when he comes home.

15. Old Heads at the shooting gallery: Bread overdoses at Annie's. Curt is helpless to save him, and when the police and paramedics arrive, they are indifferent to the drugging. At this level, the drug war is over except for the shouting and the paycheck.

16. Fran goes to Boo, shakes him down for the drug money he owes DeAndre on the last package. Boo, dumb as ever, gives it up even though he knows Fran gets high.

17. The Bentalou game -- the first by Ella's new team. The Bentalou rec team -- a well-disciplined, well-coached enterprise -- demolishes the MLK team. In frustration, Dinky pops a kid in the mouth and Herman Jones orders the newcomers out of his gym. Still, it's a start.

18. DeAndre comes back from Boys Village on home detention. He has to be indoors at four in the afternoon at his aunt's house on Etting Street, where he is monitored by random phone calls. He hears a little talk about Tyreeka and Tae and others. He also wants to find Boo and get his money.

19. Sure enough, Tae comes to him asking for permission to make a run at Tyreeka. DeAndre agrees -- on the theory that it will be a test for Tyreeka and that even if he says no, Tae will go creeping anyway, and then a friendship will be lost as well.

20. Snowstorm on the day of Bread's funeral. No one save for the immediate family and Joe Laney, now six years clean and in college, but a comrade from the old days. Joe with Bread's mother at the funeral parlor, then picking up a copy of the homecoming pamphlet.

21. Tyreeka goes up to see DeAndre on Etting Street, but he treats her cold. She can't understand it, goes to be mothered by Fran.

A. FLASHBACK (Early 1970s) -- Fran's nightmare childhood.

22. Joe Laney finds Curt, hands him the pamphlet. Curt on the corner, staring at a young picture of his dead friend, crying. Bob Brown comes up to clear the corner, sees Curt and the pamphlet, lets him be.

23. DeAndre finds Boo and kicks his ass for the money already paid.

24. Cut to Fran, getting high off Boo's naivete in the basement of the Dew Drop. She goes down for a line, comes up and it's:

A. FLASHBACK (1981) -- The morning of her burnt sister's funeral. Fran getting offered heroin for the first time. Going down and snorting it, coming up and it's:

B. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Fran coming up from another line, and being told by her sister, Bunchie, that Gary is up on the corner, copping crack. She doesn't believe it.

BACK TO PRESENT: Fran readies the mirror again and DeAndre is knocking on the basement door. She puts the mirror away, he comes downstairs and tells about Boo. She carries her part of the lie, though it's clear that DeAndre is wondering. DeAndre leaves. Fran pulls out the mirror, gives herself another blast, leans back and it's:

C. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Fran seeing Gary copping ready rock, knowing that he's falling all the way.

BACK TO PRESENT: Fran does the last line.

THE CORNER

Part Four: Shooting Gallery Blues

Main characters: Fat Curt, Blue, with other Old Heads supporting
Season: Spring

1. Beginning corner mix: Convinced that Tyreeka has not been with Tae or anyone else, DeAndre talks to her about coming to visit him on Etting -- his aunt's place, the site of his home detention -- after 6 p.m., "I got hack money, I'll get you home." "I heard you hollered at Chanelle." "Chanelle who?" "Chanelle who. Dena's cousin." "Aww, that wasn't nothing." Meanwhile, Hungry gets chased down and beaten with aluminum bats after ripping off some New York Boys' groundstash. Curt, Scalio and Pimp observe this semi-regular event, with shrewd wit. We follow Curt, Scalio and Pimp off the corner into Blue's.

2. Blue has an argument with Rita about her decaying arms. He throws her out of the house, as a means of forcing her to seek medical help. It's an ugly confrontation, but Blue gets her out the door. Blue to the other Old Heads: "Y'all know I'm not wrong." The Old Heads recall what a stone gorgeous girl Rita Hale once was. Triggering:

A. FLASHBACK (1986) – Curt, the addict, works the street as an Arabber -- a produce peddler with horse and cart -- as Rita approaches in her nursing school uniform, buys a piece of fruit. Curt flirts with her in as gentlemanly a manner as he can.

BACK TO PRESENT: Rita, on the street, is at a loss for where to turn, ashamed of her condition, furious at Blue.

3. At the rec center, Ella opens a letter that seems to be and is jail mail. It's from Ricky Cunningham, who last fled from her after showing up high to chaperone the Valentine's dance. Ella shares the letter with her helper Marzell. Ricky is beseeching Ella to attend his court appearance, as he's been locked up for shoplifting. Ella is somewhat embarrassed when the letter dips into a tone of intimacy and neediness. Marzell tells Ella that Ricky's in love with her; Ella insists that he just needs some kind of friendship and support, but she knows that love is what it is. Marzell: "You gonna go?" On Ella, knowing she will and knowing it will be perceived the wrong way by Ricky.

4. DeAndre and the CMB Boys try to get their shit together on the basketball court. They appoint Tae as their coach, and all agree on the central issue: "We gotta play together." Yet it's a disappointing, half-hearted practice... With DeAndre mindful of the time, as he needs to get to Etting Street for his home detention.

5. Walking home, R.C. and Boo differ on their recollections of a glorious CMB confrontation with the police. R.C. underscores his point by casually cold-cocking Boo. The other Boys crack up.

6. Fran is grooving to funky oldies in Scoogie's parked car when DeAndre steps up to remind her about his court date tomorrow. She insists she'll be there, and DeAndre also reveals that Miss Ella has said she will try to help him find a job.

7. Rita, angry and hurt, uses a payphone to call 911. She claims to the dispatcher that a police officer is injured inside a vacant house. She gives Blue's address.

8. Quick pop of DeAndre and Tyreeka up on Etting Street. DeAndre explaining that he thought Tyreeka had been with Tae, that she wasn't going to be true now that DeAndre isn't earning corner money. Tyreeka professes love. Ending with a groping on the sofa as DeAndre gets to her again.

9. The shooting gallery. The Old Heads and other addicts try to make do without Rita -- with Blue forced to serve as doctor -- Curt goes into his old complaint about how there "Ain't been no real dope out here for ten years." Which triggers:

A. FLASHBACK (1972) -- Curt, with Bread along for the ride, makes a trip to New York City in his Caddy. Going to pick up a package of heroin to bring back and deal. Curt takes the occasion to school a young wannabe dealer, Jolly, on the then-established rules of the Game: Never deal to children; sell the shit, but don't use it yourself; check a buyer's arms for track marks before selling to him, etc. We are jolted out of this flashback by:

BACK TO PRESENT: The cops raid Blue's, looking for the injured officer. Blue "goes rabbit", gets arrested for running away, three others taken in the wagon. But the shooting gallery is left up and running, with Curt as the nominal leader.

10. Next morning: Gary and Tony Boice discover a box of bagels in the street, obviously fallen off a delivery truck. (Tony doesn't even know what they are; Gary, harkening back to his former straight existence, does.) They begin selling bags of bagels to passing motorists.

11. DeAndre, in his first experience in court, pleads guilty to an old stolen-car beef and is sentenced to a year's supervised probation.

12. Ella, in a different court, watches as Ricky Cunningham's plea agreement to stealing vitamins is detailed before a district judge. As if oblivious to the business at hand, Ricky keeps turning to Ella. He waves his manacled hands at her; he mouths the words "Thank you"; he turns just to smile at her. Then he is led away to finish a 30-day sentence. Ella, with her mantra: It doesn't make sense.

13. At Blue's: The Old Heads speculate as to whether Rita ratted on Blue. Even as they bemoan the absence of Rita's hypodermic skills. Just then, Rita returns, settling into her old seat as if nothing were the matter. She begins tending to Curt and her other "patients".

A. FLASHBACK (1974) -- Curt, with a good blast in him: In the "Little Baltimore" section of New York, Curt (along with Bread and Jolly) is told that his boss, Junior Bunk, is now locked up. Some federal raid. Curt gets over his disbelief, then decides he might as well take back the package as planned. If he ain't dealing for Junior Bunk, he'll be dealing it for somebody. Jolly suggests they just skip with the cash, but once again Curt explains: There are rules.

14. Gary and Tony, coming out of the corner store, cross Hungry, whose head and arm are bandaged. Gary asks how he's doing; Hungry, ridiculously casual, says everything's cool. Then Gary crosses DeAndre, who's got a metal basketball rim. He complains that it won't fit right on the backboard. Gary says it needs to be fastened with washers. Despite DeAndre's chilly attitude, he allows Gary to take the rim and head in the direction of a hardware store.

15. At Blue's: Curt hears a noise upstairs. He moves to investigate; it's a young fiend ripping an aluminum window casing out of the wall, taking full advantage of Blue's absence. Curt appeals to the fiend's sense of propriety, and gets whacked across the face with an aluminum strip for his trouble. Curt pursues this villain, and end up nearly dropping a brick on his head from the roof. Such does an Old Head defend his friend's honor.

16. Gary puts up the rim on the outdoor backboard behind the Rec; fits great. Just as Gary and DeAndre are about to get into a little one-on-one, Gary is beckoned away by Ronnie Boice. She tells him about some furniture for the taking; a woman's been evicted, and Scalio's guarding the sofa as they speak. Gary moves up the street, and sees Scalio lounging on the couch, which is half in the street, blocking traffic. "This," says Scalio, puffing on a cigar, "is why they hate us."

17. The Old Heads are gathering at Annie's to shoot up; Blue's ain't the same without Blue. Word spreads through the neighborhood that Bob Brown's on a tear, clearing the corners; "Bob Brown's got the wagon today." As Old Heads swap opinions on street cops past and present, it triggers:

18. SET PIECE: The Jack-Up. Over the Old Heads' dialogue, we see a montage of cops rousting corner dwellers -- Bob Brown, Pitbull, Peanuthead, etc. The point is made that some of these police nowadays don't give a fuck. In essence: The difference between new-breed and old-school street police, from the cornerman's eye view, as another example of how crack cocaine changed the world. As Bob Brown makes his way to a corner and takes possession for the ten thousandth time, we hear Curt talking about how coke changed the world.

A. FLASHBACK (1986) -- Curt, as a down-and-out Arabber, is approached by Jolly, who is now a bona fide player. Jolly is just back from New York, and he's talking about how crack is the new shit, and it's gonna change everything. It's gonna bring women to the corner, etc. It is, in effect, the future of the drug game.

BACK TO PRESENT: Curt and the others in Annie's watching a younger fiend hit the pipe. The old heroin heads talking down about how crack is past addiction. How it's ruined everything, how heroin should have been enough paradise for every last motherfucker.

B. FLASHBACK (1974) -- Curt, the gangster, is back in Baltimore, negotiating with another Baltimore dealer to sell off the now-imprisoned Junior Bunk's dope. They pause to watch on TV as the Feds claim to have broken the back of the Baltimore drug trade with Junior Bunk's arrest. Curt knows better: "Uh-uh. This shit's forever."

BACK TO PRESENT: Curt hobbles up to a present-day murder scene on the corner. As he approaches to see what's up, uniform cops and detectives catch sight of him, teasing him mercilessly for his grotesque shape, laughing at his "Popeye" arms, having the crime scene photographer take pictures of him. Curt hobbles away, angry and humiliated.

C. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Curt on the corner, slinging Jolly's package. Gary comes up to cop that rock, as does the beautiful Rita Hale... Which breaks Curt's heart a little bit. But not enough to keep him from calling out, "Got that rock," as he watches Rita's sweet, round ass drift down the street.

THE CORNER
Part Five: Ella's Blues

Main character: Ella Thompson
Season: Spring

1. Opening corner mix: Spring cleaning by the police. June Bey cleaning out the garages, Gary doing the basement for his mother. Landlords putting people out on the street. Ella Thompson sees the White Girl on the ten-speed, idling, looking as if she's just out enjoying the weather, and her mind focuses on this one bright image. Ella walks past the tout on her way to the church, and the tout, raising up on her, ruins the moment. Ella into her church.

2. Church scene, Ella in her island-sanctuary, yet even with the choir rocking in the background, Ella closes her eyes and it's:

A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Ella learning from her daughter that Pooh, or Andrea, her 12-year-old, hasn't come home.

BACK TO PRESENT: Closing remarks from the pastor. Ella leaving, heading back to the rec center, encountering R.C. beating his "cousin". She challenges him and R.C. gives her some respect, lets the kid go. Ella goes into the rec center, sets the volume up on the TV soaps to obliterate the silence. Marzell Myers, her assistant, sets it down, but then realizes that Ella needs the noise. Ella acknowledges as much and Marzell turns it up. Ella sets about to get a game between her new basketball team and the older neighborhood boys, Kiti and his old crew. DeAndre enters, looking for a job, needing money.

B. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Ella encountering DeAndre, 11 years old, in her search of the neighborhood for Pooh. This is young DeAndre, who had a crush on her daughter.

BACK TO PRESENT: Ella promising to try to find something for DeAndre.

3. Gary out metaling with Tony Boice, but there's nothing left to steal. He thinks up the car caper and the neighborhood's rolling stock is suddenly at risk.

4. Basketball practice with CMB Kids. The Hilltop Boys show and a beef gets dealt with. Combined, the two crews are a better ball team. Ella comes in the gym, takes pride in what the idea of this team might mean to the neighborhood boys.

5. Tyreeka seems to be gaining weight. Pregnant? She denies this to DeAndre. Fran approaches Tyreeka, but the girl is cautious and oblique. Fran tells her: If you think getting pregnant is gonna keep him indoors with you this summer, you fooling yourself. Tyreeka says she knows that, but does she?

6. DeAndre hovering around Chanelle and other girls, bragging about his new job; the one Ella got him.

7. DeAndre angry. He didn't get paid. Goes back to Ella, who now has this on her plate. She tries to get his money, fails, pays DeAndre out of her own pocket without telling him. And DeAndre still needs a job.

8. Gary, with car caper in full effect. He cops, goes to Fran's basement, hears about DeAndre, on home detention, not running the streets, looking for work. He's trying. If he's gonna try, we got to try.

9. Ella with the little Kids at the rec. It's art class without Blue, who is still locked up. Kids asking about Mr. Blue, when he might be back. From there we follow her to a meeting with the neighborhood association and the police commander for the area. Commander saying they're doing what they can do.

A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Ella to Missing Persons. Cop: We're doing what we can.

10. Ella leaves the rec, walks up Fayette to her apartment as a street sweep is underway. Cops jacking Crews, but it's only herding pigeons. Ella, her mantra: It doesn't make sense.

A. FLASHBACK (1973) -- Ella searching her home for missing items. It doesn't make sense. Who would take a toaster?

BACK TO PRESENT: She sees the White Girl on the bike again, watching. Another soul thinking the same thing as Ella, perhaps. Ella smiles, shakes her head. The White Girl smiles back.

11. Tyreeka at the clinic, amid the other teenage pregnancies washing up. She finds out amid the other girls, and we settle on the banter in the waiting area.

12. SET PIECE: Relationships, sex, babies. Using the talk among the teenage girls as our entree.

13. DeAndre at school, explaining to Rose Davis that he wants to stay in class, but he needs a job first. Needs money if he's not going to sling anymore. Work-study, maybe. Rose agrees. DeAndre goes back to class, volunteers for the MLK speech.

14. Rec Center encounter between Tyreeka and Ella, with Tyreeka relating some of her loneliness.

A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Ella seeing news report of body in a Baltimore Street alley on TV. Knowing it's her daughter. Going to crime scene, but cops denying access.

BACK TO PRESENT: Tyreeka going to find DeAndre, seeing he's not going to be true. He's bragging to Chanelle about some speech he's making when she walks up. Tyreeka walks away, hurt.

15. Gary, remorseful about a car or two. DeAndre encounters him, asking about work. Gary tells him to try Carty, his brother, at Seapride crabhouse. Gary gives him \$10 of car money.

16. Fran hears DeAndre got hired at the crabhouse on the spot. She walks down, sees him struggling amid the stench of the crabpots, his seafood allergy killing him. He's really trying. Fran tells him Tyreeka might be pregnant. DeAndre feels bad about earlier encounter. Fran: This is no job for you. DeAndre: I need the money, especially if Tyreeka gonna have my child.

17. Fat Curt goes rabbit in a cocaine panic, jumps out the window. Busts his ankle, gets hauled to Bon Secours E.R. The street sweeps are continuing, the casualties mounting -- and to what purpose?

18. DeAndre gives the speech at school and shines. His teachers are amazed.

19. Knocking at Ella's apartment door.

A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- The detectives, telling her Andrea is dead.

BACK TO PRESENT: Still knocking. Ella learns that Ricky Cunningham, who she last saw trying to find himself a straight life as a chaperone at the Valentine's dance, is dead. Killed in a drug robbery down in the projects. It doesn't make sense: Her mantra again.

B. FLASHBACK (1973) --Ella finding her husband's works. Syringes and cookers. She dresses, heads for work. On this day, she goes out to the drug corners, asking the Crews to respect her and her children when they come through the corners every day during the coming summer camp. I'm asking for your help. Strange, otherworldly stares from the Slingers and Fiends.

C. FLASHBACK (1973) -- Ella telling her husband to get out. Strange-otherworldly stare.

BACK TO PRESENT: The Crews go back to the game.

20. Fran resolving herself to try. She calls the BRC detox center for the first time.

21. Ella at Ricky Cunningham's funeral.

A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Andrea's funeral. Little DeAndre past the casket. Dinky, R.C., too.

BACK TO PRESENT: She walks out of church, sees Dinky, slinging on the corner.

22. Ella's game between Kiti and the Older Kids and her CMB-led team. CMB gets beat bad, but it's a healthy contest. Afterwards, they show their camaraderie by chasing a stray Terrace Boy, a rival gang member, into traffic on Saratoga Street. Kid escapes though. Ella berates them and they look sheepish, deny ill intent.

23. Ella goes down to Kiti's graduation. Talks over his plan to get out, join his brother in California. He looks so fine, mature.

A. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Ella and her family in the homicide unit, being debriefed.

Kiti shutting down, crushed to his soul, as detectives hover over him.

BACK TO PRESENT: Leaving graduation. Kiti to Ella: I have to get away from her. Ella understanding.

24. Ella on her stoop with Kiti. Iced tea. Trying to feel the coming summer. A beautiful moment. The White Girl rides her bike past. Quiet talk, Ella expounding on her belief in this place, this neighborhood. She was raised here. After her parents died, this place became home and people from these houses helped raise her. Kiti listening. Suddenly, the White Girl is racing away from an angry Crew, having stolen a ground stash of heroin. The Crew catches, beats her down. Kiti looks at Ella, goes inside to call 911. Ella watching the ambo roll up.

23. Ella on her stoop. White Girl gets beat.

THE CORNER

Part Six: Summertime Blues

Main character: Gary McCullough, with DeAndre supporting.
Season: Early Summer.

1. Beginning corner mix: Scalio, the sage idiot on the corner, giving fucked-up medical advice about taters and egg skins to a nervous, naive fiend with fresh abscesses. The corners heat up amid summer madness. Beatings, with Bob Brown taking a bat from an angry dealer as if he's practicing parenting skills on a flustered ten-year-old. Bryan robs Eggy when he isn't paid for touting properly. Cheap box fans in the windows. Snowball stands. Heat rising from the asphalt. DeAndre hollers at Tyreeka, but now she ignores him. Shooting on Mount. Eddie Bland's the victim, bleeding but breathing. DeAndre heads over to signify, sees Little Stevie, who goes in and plays the moment with Fran. Fran: "What happened?" Stevie, all of nine-years-old: "Man came up and shot Mr. Eddie." Fran: "Get yer ass inside." Leaving Fran and DeAndre on the steps. DeAndre: "Why you mad at him." Fran shakes her head. A little boy got no business seeing things like that. DeAndre, cold: "It happened, didn't it?" DeAndre rolls upstairs.

2. Fran on the steps, talking with Stevie as the ambo rolls up for Eddie Bland. Fran talking about how it's summer and summer is so damn stupid. All the violence, all the fighting. Why can't they just sell the shit and use the shit and be cool with it. Why they got to be so damn stupid. Mike Ellerbee rolls up, tells her about his impending change. He's gonna get a U.S. Coast Guard certification and join the merchant marine. Gonna go to sea. Fran, doubtful: You a sailor. Mike insistent, friendly, determined. He rolls out. Gary rolls up as DeAndre comes down the stairs. DeAndre glances at him and fades away.

A. FLASHBACK (1979) -- Gary coming in after a double shift, watching two-year-old DeAndre sleep. Putting new toys on his pillow for the morning.

BACK TO PRESENT: Fran tells Gary about Mike thinking he's a sailor. Who? Mike Ellerbee. Gary is surprised. Mike is a true gangster on these corners, a guy who seemed to be in the game for good. Recollection of when Mike shot Joe Laney in the back. Fran: He been a thug his whole life. But Gary recalls that Joe Laney was a corner regular too. Now Joe is in college, been clean for years. If Mike say he gonna be a sailor, maybe he gonna be a sailor. Gary, willing to believe in anyone still. Then Gary cops, goes upstairs to get right, saying he has to go to court today with his mother.

3. Gary is courtside with Ronnie Boice on the old charge that he struck her in a domestic argument, but Ronnie skillfully subverts her testimony to get Gary off, as she said she would. The prosecutor, trying this as a domestic violence, is a frustrated liberal, not realizing that it was at best, an argument over a blast. But Ronnie gets her revenge when her mother abuses Miss Roberta in the court hallway. Gary, leaving with his wounded mother, swears he'll not mess with Ronnie anymore.

4. Ella at the rec center, which has been burglarized overnight. CMB kids wondering who did it and suspecting Eric, Lamar and some of the others with CMB credentials. Some talk about confronting them, but of course that won't happen. Investigating officer is Huffham, who locked up DeAndre on Fairmount. He sees DeAndre's name on the basketball team sign-up sheet, tells Ella that's a smart kid. I know him well. Locked him up a few months back. As Ella starts to clean up, the CMB crew is begging for the team to be entered in the citywide Cloverdale tournament.

5. Blue comes home from jail on home monitoring at his brother's house, and when he visits Fayette Street, almost nothing is left of his house. Curt did his best, but the other fiends picked it clean. Blue again making promises to stay clean, but his brother has already tossed him out, so he's wearing the monitoring bracelet, but even as he talks he's not near the phone he's supposed to be using, so he's violating probation. He says fuck it and goes to cop.

6. Gary goes to cop from Curt, and we have a weary moment on the steps for Curt, where he bemoans his fallen state. "Every mother's son got to have love. How anyone gonna love me when I look like this?" The moment passes. Gary cops, complains, goes around the corner with Eggy, looking for better. The corner scene is punctuated by the senseless beating of an Arabber's horse when the animal pisses on a groundstash. Curt: "Why beat the horse? Horse don't know." Eggy tells the story to anyone who will listen. Blue: "Summertime... Stupid shit comes down with the heat."

7. SET PIECE: Summer in the ghetto. Our old heads talk about what it means, how it changes the corner world. Bad craziness, with a montage ending with Hungry's sudden murder by a young slinger. Witnessed by Blue and five dozen others. Why? Murmurs from behind the yellow tape, because, hey, everyone knew what Hungry was about and what the expected punishment was for him when he fucked up a package. You beat the man, you don't stab him to death. But it's summer, and here we riff on violence and bodies and scenes. Ending with Bryan coming back from the hospital, having mostly recovered from the latest time he was shot for selling burn bags. Down at the hospital, he's learned he has the AIDS bug, but he'll carry that like a soldier, too.

8. CMB down bottom on the McHenry Street strip, which they have staked out for their summertime run at selling cocaine. Dinky re-enacting the murder of Hungry for listeners. DeAndre rolls up looking for Chanelle, talking shit about Tyreeka. She ain't my number one, no more, DeAndre tells him. Tyreeka rolls through, hoping to make DeAndre jealous with another boy, but DeAndre now tells them that he doesn't want anyone touching Tyreeka but him, and the other boys, with less heart, leave her be. So Tyreeka is pregnant, alone and humiliated. The boys proceed to get drunk and blunted on weed, giggling stupidly. Manny Man and R.C. roll up, talking about having been robbed by a stickup crew an hour earlier. DeAndre creeps home late, all fucked up. Fran, angry, demands better, threatens to toss him out if he doesn't obey a midnight curfew. "I thought you were trying to do good," she says. "I am. I ain't sellin' drugs. I'm looking for work. I been looking ever since the crabhouse gig."

9. Gary and Tony Boice on the Baker Street caper, where they break into a junkyard, steal the metal, then resell it at another junkyard. It works beautifully and they perform as capering commandos.

A. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Gary working his second job as a security guard, convincing a coworker not to steal from an empty office at SSA.

BACK TO PRESENT: Mike Ellerbee getting in his car to leave the neighborhood, having got his Coast Guard certification. He looks around, sees death and despair and hopelessness and drives away with his merchant marine contact for a new life. As Gary, Tony and Lump cross him on the way to the scales to sell the Baker Street haul.

10. Fran watching a bat beating, disgusted, losing patience with the game itself. Stevie is then locked up for selling and the family has no money to bail him out. Everyone too busy getting high. Fran with an angry thought about the whole situation. She goes down to the phone at the Korean joint to call Scoogie and learns that Mike Ellerbee is really gone. "Where?" "Poland or some shit like that. He gettin' on a ship... Little Mike a sailor now." Damn. She makes another call to the detox facility, now more determined.

11. Gary shooting dope with Ronnie at Pops, the lowest-of-the-low shooting galleries. Gary runs a game, switching cookers. Even Ronnie is impressed. They head for a hack to drive them to Towson and the County Public Defender's Office as Gary's earlier boosting charge comes for trial in the county, Leave-It-To-Beaverland as Gary calls it. To county defenders, though, he's a stone city nigger. He missed the ten-day deadline and they tell him he's fucked. On the way back, Ronnie burns him right back for what's left in the cooker.

12. First Cloverdale tournament game. Team falls apart. Dinky and Manny lose playing time to the Hilltop crew and walk. DeAndre is fined fifty cents for cursing the refs and walks rather than pay. Ella's team is blown out.

13. Homicide detectives pull up everyone at Blue's, looking for Blue as a witness in Hungry's killing. Curt is in there, pulling off his cast, looking like he's going down for the count.

14. DeAndre manages to pull up Tyreeka and learn definitively of the pregnancy. She tries to play him for abortion money, even though she has every intention of having the child. He tries to convince her that he's done with Chanelle and others, but she is now strong enough to hold him at bay.

15. DeAndre goes to Fran, complaining that he needs money. He threatens to go back to the corner. But Fran tells him that she's going inside to detox. She needs him. For DeRodd. He has to be strong, stay straight. DeAndre's trying to believe. We could get it all back.

A. FLASHBACK (1984) -- DeAndre with everything he needs in a house full of new shit. Gary, almost spoiling him. Clothes getting changed every day. Food in the refrigerator. Idealized in memory.

BACK TO PRESENT: Fran telling him that she and Gary won't be together. That his father is as much at fault as her. He as much a dope fiend as I am, Dre. DeAndre, angrily: "Why you always tear him down like that?" But he promises to stay off the corner if Fran is going to try to detox.

16. Fran getting ready to go into detox. She hooks up with Gary, tells him to help his son. I'm going to do it. Gary wants to believe, but is suspicious. He gives DeAndre a hard-won \$10 bill.

17. DeAndre goes out on a few more job tries in a quick montage. He struggles with the managers, with the process. Nothing available for him.

18. Gary goes back to Baker Street with Tony and Lump, but this time they get caught by the redneck junkyard owner and nearly beaten to death. Pleading for their lives in the middle of Bentalou Street. Gary coming to the reluctant conclusion that he is not the commando he pretends to be. Dag, he tells himself, I need a job.

A. FLASHBACK (1980) -- Gary on the Sparrows Point job, one of the first black supervisors at Beth Steel but disliked for his competence and authority.

19. Fran goes to detox on the wrong day. Breaks down and cries when told she has no bed. She must return to the corner, humiliated. DeAndre sees her, looks at her as if the promise has been broken again.

20. DeAndre goes to see Dinky. The two of them contemplating a quiet return to selling drugs on the corner.

THE CORNER

Part Seven: Corner Boy Blues

Main characters: The Crenshaw Mafia Brothers (CMB)

Season: Late Summer.

1. Beginning corner mix: Scalio is approached by the Clueless Fiend who'd consulted him in Part Six, regarding the matter of an abscess on his arm. Clueless Fiend has tried Scalio's egg remedy, but the hole just got bigger. Scalio tells him nobody said nothing about no eggs, it was potatoes; put potatoes on that hole, it'll close right up. Clueless Fiend can't mount an opposing argument. Attention is drawn to Curt, who is slumped down on the sidewalk, talking incoherently. "Somebody call 911." We follow DeAndre, R.C. and Manny Man as they pass through, indifferent to the drama of the Old Heads.
2. R.C., with a bandaged hand, talks about how his girlfriend Treecee cut him during a fight last night, and that she might be pregnant. R.C. and DeAndre puff out their chests talking about how cool it would be if indeed they did become fathers, although if Tyreeka wants to follow through on that abortion talk, he says, that's fine too. They are then robbed of their meager cash holding by two Stick-up Boys; Manny Man thought he'd palmed his \$20, but he's mistaken. "There go our weed money." DeAndre leads them down to McHenry Street, where Tae is supposed to be slinging. Maybe he can get them all "blunted" this fine evening.
3. But they find Tae's not on his post. He then comes out of an abandoned building with a White Crack Whore. DeAndre berates him for getting a blow job when he should be selling. Tae says the bitch got false teeth; she took them things out, and it felt weird as shit. "I nuttud hard, too." DeAndre, while on the subject of sloppy business, berates R.C. for money owed on a past package. R.C. asks why don't DeAndre get out on the corner and handle his shit hisself. DeAndre says he can't, not with a son getting ready to be born. All arguments cease when Tae offers to take his cash on hand and buy weed for all.
4. Gary is alone in his mom's basement, suffering through the flu-like symptoms of withdrawal, reading Karen Armstrong's "History of God," listening to a conservative talk-radio program. Ronnie comes knocking on the back coal-cellar doors, with a line on a caper. Gary says he's not going out tonight, he's got court tomorrow in the County. Ronnie, as usual, is contemptuous of Gary's effort to do right.
5. The CMB Boys are high as shit on McHenry Street, smoking Phillie blunts. When a passing pick-up blares "Achy Breaky Heart," R.C. lights up -- "There go my song! That shit is the bomb!" -- and he sings a full verse of the song in full twangy mockery, to the delight of his boys. Then Scoogie steps up to DeAndre, asking him why he hasn't called his mother in detox -- the first we learn that Fran has indeed gotten her bed. DeAndre plays it off, says he tried one time but couldn't get through. Scoogie extracts a promise that DeAndre will call her again tomorrow.

6. Bon Secours hospital, morning: Curt, stabilized but looking like hell, is the subject of awed fascination by a group of young interns. The sheer physical damage makes him the highlight of hospital rounds.

7. Gary goes to County court on the shoplifting charge. Without a lawyer, he's hit with a year's supervised probation by the no-nonsense judge, and asks how he can appeal. Even the public defender's office, confronted by the amazing sight of a city dope fiend trying to appeal a probation, treat him with suspicion and condescension. It's a feeling he's familiar with...

A. FLASHBACK (1986) -- Gary, in work clothes, is followed around a department store by a security guard. Degraded, though he intends to pay for every item.

8. Ella's rec center team takes the court for the last of its ten games in the Cloverdale league. They actually are leading by four with thirty seconds to go, yet somehow, through grandstanding and an utter lack of defense, find a way to lose. They finish a perfect 0-10 and R.C. as the kid most dedicated to the team and to the ballplaying, is in a fury.

9. Fran, in rehab, is called to the phone. It's DeAndre calling; she is thrilled. She says she's doing well, but belittles the twelve-step shit she's been hearing so far, then asks DeAndre to come by with chocolates and cigarettes.

10. Carty asks the Boss at Seapride crabhouse if he can hire his brother Gary to help with the summer rush. Boss is hesitant; doesn't want this to turn out like Carty's nephew DeAndre, who washed out after a week. Carty promises that Gary is the hardest-working man he knows.

11. As DeAndre gets some cash from Dink-Dink on the McHenry Street corner, the other CMB Boys pass, fresh from their humiliating basketball defeat. R.C. is taking it especially hard. Then Tae recognizes the stick-up boy who robbed them in Part Six, when he casually asks for the time. The CMB Boys commence to beat the shit out of the robber. This changes R.C.'s whole mood; he begins singing "Achy Breaky Heart" as all his friends get their licks in during the beatdown.

12. In back of the rehab facility, DeAndre tosses the contraband over the fence, Fran secures it in her pants, and they have a sweet conversation. DeAndre then asks Fran for \$400 to pay for Tyreeka's abortion -- \$200 more than Tyreeka asked for. Tyreeka ran a game on him, now he tries to run one on Fran. Where the hell is she supposed to get that kind of money?

13. McHenry Street, night: The CMB Boys, blunted, discuss what little they know about one of their favorite topics -- guns -- when DeAndre gets on a straight-faced lecture about the possibility of knocking an oncoming bullet off its path if you hit it just right with your hand. Dena approaches, pulls R.C. aside. She tells him she might be pregnant with his child too. We get the sense, even if R.C. doesn't, that this may just be a matter of jealousy regarding his relationship with Treecee.

14. Gary at Seapride works hard, hard, hard, but with delight, impressing everybody, including Carty. Even when Gary excuses himself, saying he'll be back in half an hour, no one much minds.

15. Curt, in the hospital, is clean and charming as can be, flirting with the nurses, and nodding along with the Social Worker who encourages him to stay clean, because his liver has just about had it.

16. At Seapride, Gary offers the Boss financial advice, looking over the stocks pages in the newspaper. The Boss says he knows nothing about investments; Gary says it's not that hard to get the hang of.

A. FLASHBACK (1986) -- Gary, taking a Date to an Inner Harbor restaurant, is embarrassed by the slight of being seated by the kitchen, while tables out on the deck remain empty. They are both well-dressed; Gary thinks it's because they're black, even though the Date doesn't want to make a big deal out of it.

17. In rehab, Fran is beckoned to the phone again. It's Gary. He tells her he's working hard at Seapride, even though he's not clean. Fran tells Gary that their son needs \$600 for his girlfriend's abortion, and that she's going to do what she can to raise \$200, and Scoogie's going to kick in another \$200, so the least Gary can do is provide \$200. The scam goes on...

18. Boo leads DeAndre and the other CMB Boys on a beatdown of another supposed Stick-up Boy, only to have second thoughts afterwards that this was truly the guilty party. "Boo, you a asshole."

19. At the end of a long, hard shift at Seapride, Gary negotiates with the Boss to get paid daily. The Boss, without pressing the issue, goes along with it, giving him that day's pay on the spot.

20. Gary steps to his brother June Bey, who's on the corner working a package for one of the New York Boys. But June Bey is distressed to discover his ground stash is missing. Gary moves on to cop someplace else.

21. Curt steps up at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting: "Name's Curt. And I'm a drug addict." The legend has left the corner...

22. The CMB Boys, smoking more dope, make a half-assed plan to sell one last package of the summer so they can all get hooked up with new back-to-school gear. Triggering...

23. SET PIECE: A montage of R.C. and DeAndre and the others shopping for flashy sweatsuits and tennis and jewelry for that first day of school, as we hear them talk about the hippest new brand-name shit. R.C. also buys a new beeper. The foundation of the educational process, as Within a week or two, all of the CMB crew will be kicked out of school, missing in action, or coming so sporadically that their teachers will not know them by name. The montage continues as we see them marginalized in the public school setting.

23. It's Labor Day. Gary, working his ass off, pauses to observe crabs in a barrel, pulling each other down when one tries to escape. Gary makes a point to Carty that this is kind of like the corner.

24. Blue, just walking the street, passes near a beatdown in progress. He asks Pimp and Eggy Daddy what's up, and they tell him it's June Bey. Supposedly he fucked up with a New York Boy's product, and now he's paying the price. We follow as Blue turns the corner, crosses an old uniform cop just standing around. The Old Cop asks Blue his name. Blue answers, "George Epps." Old Cop runs the name, turns up an outstanding warrant. He's almost sorry to have to arrest the guy; "Why'd you give me your real name?"

25. The CMB Boys turn up at Francis Woods in all their finery, picking up where the earlier montage left off. Rose Davis confronts R.C. about his beeper; she tells him he should know this is a strict rule. He is suspended the first day of class. We see him walking away from the school, toward the corner, not bothered in the least by this turn of events.

THE CORNER

Part Eight: Gangster's Blues

Main characters: Fran, DeAndre & Tyreeka
Season: Summer-Fall

This stand-alone episode is unique from the others in that it exists in real-time, at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in the detox center in which Fran Boyd undergoes 28-day recovery. It is framed by the tale of a dying gangster, Brother Low, who has survived years of corner warfare, brutality and addiction, emerging as a recovering addict who now must confront his own impending death from AIDS. Brother Low is giving testimony at his one-year clean anniversary. Fran, DeAndre, Tyreeka, Scoogie and others are in attendance.

Unique to this episode, in which the hopes and aspirations of our characters reach a climax and salvation, seems fleeting yet possible, the cinematic logic is reversed. Real-time scenes in the detox center are color; flashback sequences depicting Brother Low's account of Fayette Street, when cocaine first hits the neighborhood in the mid-1980s (and in which all of our characters make appearances) are shot black-and-white. In addition, when our characters step out of the island that is the detox center, the film goes to black-and-white -- keeping detox as a life-sustaining metaphor.

1. Beginning corner mix (Black-and-White): DeAndre is still trying to get with Tyreeka, who is now more obviously pregnant, and holds him at arm's length. DeAndre keeps trying to pledge renewed fidelity; Tyreeka is keeping only one ear open. Dinky comes up, worrying DeAndre about how things are going with a package that DeAndre has fronted. Dinky wants DeAndre to come down on the corner and help him sell. "These young boys I'm doin' it with keep fuckin' up," says Dinky. But DeAndre resists. He's got a child coming. He can't be locked up when his baby is born. He has to be a father. Scoogie rolls up in his car, orders his nephew inside, saying "We gonna be late." DeAndre gets in, and almost as an afterthought, has Scoogie roll up on Tyreeka, who walked away from him minutes before. We gonna go see my mother, he tells her. She detoxed and we gonna go down there and show her some propers, pick her up and bring her home. Tyreeka gets in the car, too, gets in a fight with little DeRodd in the back seat. As they roll past the drug Crews toward the center...

2. Detox center. (Color photography). Fran greets her family looking like someone very different from the woman who went inside four weeks earlier. A homecoming for everyone, an emotional release for people who had almost ceased to hope. DeAndre can't believe his eyes. Fran has all kinds of plans. "We not gonna go back down to Fayette Street." Fran has her suitcase packed. After this meeting and lunch, she's free. She's coming home clean.

3. Narcotics Anonymous meeting begins. DeAndre sits next to Fran grudgingly. "This for you, too," she tells him. The twelve steps are recounted. The speaker introduced. It's Brother Low. "Damn, I knowed him," says DeAndre. "He a stickup boy." Fran corrects him: Brother Low was the original stickup boy. The original gangster. Brother Low: "I'm the man that shot Officer Reese." Murmurs, soft whistles, a few laughs from those few who know the whole tale. DeAndre: "He kill a police?" Fran tells him to listen.

4. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Fayette Street when crack cocaine first hit and we hear, with Brother Low telling his tale about what cocaine did to this place, about how it surpassed everything that heroin had accomplished in all the years prior. Women and children down on the corners, families imploding. And we glimpse many of our characters in the mix, struggling, falling, collapsing amid the carnage. "Course," says Low, "as bad as it was then, it was only gonna get worse once that coke got good to everyone. But I ain't tellin' you nothin' you don't know, right?" The meeting agrees with him. We see a younger, healthier Brother Low, Dennis, Fat Curt and another corner boy named Wee-Bay are on the steps of a vacant house, talking trash. Gary McCullough rolls by in his Mercedes. Gary is still on top and they marvel at his success, about how all the McCulloughs seem to get their shit together. Two other gangsters, Ferdinand and Poke roll up. Ferdinand asks Low if he wants to go hunting. Low isn't interested. Fat Curt decries the decline in the stickup profession, telling funny tales about great stickup boys of the past, as Ferdinand and Poke roll out.

5. FLASHBACK (1984) -- A black police detective, off-duty, walks out of an after-hours joint, heads for his car on a sidestreet. He's approached by two gunmen. A stick-up. The cop turns, recognizes one of the gunmen, who mutters "shit" and fires shots, killing the off-duty cop. We see the second man, Poke, back off, but the killer, who is now clearly Ferdinand, goes for the wallet and spotting a diamond ring, takes that.

5. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Crime scene. Other cops check body, realize it's a detective. Uh oh. Red ball case. Behind the yellow tape is a seven-year-old DeAndre, along with Dinky and R.C., playfully mocking the detectives, who are having none of it. This isn't any old nigger on the pavement -- this is a police. DeAndre is treated roughly, even for an seven year old. But DeAndre doesn't understand and drifts away, looking for a better time elsewhere.

6. Detox center: DeAndre at the detox meeting. He remembers. He's amazed that he remembers some of this murder story, that he later learned it was a police that got killed. Fran, dryly: "Oh yeah. You were a thick little boy. The rest of us knew it was a cop almost from jump."

7. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Fran, Stevie and Bunchie are on the corner, with Brother Low, Dennis and Curt still on the steps of the vacant house when all hell breaks loose. The police banging everyone on the corner. Straight-up war. One detective recognizes Brother Low, another goes to the corner, announces that a cop has been killed, that until this thing gets right, the corner is shut down.

8. Detox center: Discussion among all the recovering addicts, who remember the day well. The westside went crazy after that police got shot. Playful banter among all these veterans, each of them remembering where he was, what happened...DeAndre hearing it with a boy's ear. War stories. He looks at Brother Low, now emaciated, trying to imagine him when he was running hard...

9. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Marked and unmarked cars pull in front of a large rowhouse divided into apartments. Cops hit the door while others cover the back. Brother Low is in bed as the door crashes in. Detectives and uniforms make the arrest, recover handguns and a bulletproof vest. They administer a sound beating. Low is then dumped in an interrogation room. Lab technician takes photos showing no marks. Interview begins, and Low bucks the detectives, who beat him again. But the first detective, the one who recognized him at the jump-out, comes in after, trying to low-key it. He gets nowhere though.

10. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Brother Low is bloody and beaten. Cops enraged. A uniform comes out of the interrogation room, asks if it's okay to get the guy a drink. "Fuck him." But the first detective breaks from the others, heads for the soda machine. On his way back he looks into a second interrogation room and we see Ferdinand through the two-way mirror. Ferdinand pulls a ring off his finger and swallows it. First detective to the others: What do we know about a ring?

11. Detox center: Ferdinand continues the story in real-time. They whupped me like I was a dog. He shows scars around his eye and cheek, lost hearing in his left ear, vision in left eye blurry. DeAndre is awed. Fran: "What I telling you, boy. You think it all fun and games." Low: "But the motherfuckers weren't satisfied beatin' on me. Naw, they ran a game, too." The meeting is digging it, everyone mad at the police for this story.

12. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Jailhouse meeting with Public Defender. Search warrant is good. With his priors on the gun possession charge, he's looking at twenty. Government is offering four years, with him doing two of that and then out. What's the deal? Lawyer tells him he has to eat the charge quietly, not complain about the beating, not let it be known they had him as wrong suspect in killing the police. They don't need him to be an alternative suspect when they take Ferdinand to trial.

13. Detox center: DeAndre: "They made you testify against your man Ferdinand, right." An angry Low takes in the sight of this fifteen-year-old, lets him know in no uncertain terms that at all times, he was a man. I never gave up anyone. I lived by the street. By the code. I suffered. I'm suffering now. But I played by the street rules until there wasn't nothing left to play. And here Low goes into a soliloquy about what the corner demands. What it requires. What it will take from you and what little it will give. To DeAndre: "You ready to carry that?" DeAndre wondering...

14. FLASHBACK (1984) -- Low goes to the courthouse for arraignment. He's hobbled, injured, bandaged and shackled. Public defender, first detective and prosecutor eye him in the hallway. First detective makes his pitch, leans hard on the small kindness shown to him in the interrogation room. Okay, Low will take the deal and disappear from the murder case. They'll have Ferdinand for killing, but what about my beating. That ain't right. Prosecutor shows the crime lab photos taken in the interrogation room. It'll look like the beating happened in jail later. The first detective explains the ring, how Ferdinand put Low in but then got caught swallowing the dead cop's ring. Sorry, says the detective.

15. Detox center: Low explaining that they told him it would be four years and he'd do only two of that. But he did every damn day of the four. Came out in 1988 and cocaine was in full swing. Neighborhood a war zone. Children with nine millimeters. Old heads dying in the street. "If I had any sense, I'da got out but I was addicted to the game. I came home. I wasn't changed but the world was..."

16. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Low, Fat Curt and Dennis on the same step, looking at the same corner mix -- but now it's even more wrecked than before. Gary comes out of the alley with Tony with a shopping cart full of dirty metal. Low: "What happened to his Benz?" Curt: "Motherfucker traded it in for a shopping cart." They laugh.

17. Detox center. More talk about how coke changed the game. Everyone agrees, puts their own ten cents in on this. Coke even brought the white boys down to ground zero. White recovering addicts at the meeting, agreeing, joking about their fall from grace.

18. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Amid the cocaine corners of the late 1980s, with children and women in the mix and crackheads walking and twitching at 90 skeletal pounds, with the Virus all over, we see Low watching dealers half his age with twice his status. Fuck them.

19. FLASHBACK (1988) -- Low suits up and goes out robbing dealers. Takes a few young ones off. He's stopped in the shadows by a young woman he once knew, a sweet thing now down to wraith-weight and on the pipe. She asks for a dollar and he gives her ten, saddened. Low spots a black 4x4 parked near our corner. In the alley behind Blue's shooting gallery, he checks his sawed-off. Curt sees this and warns him. Chillen these days don't play. But Low is old school and he goes for the robbery. Shotgun comes out, but the children of cocaine are beyond fear. Low hesitates because they are so young. He's blind to the kid behind him with the baseball bat. He's beaten, then shot.

20. Detox center: Low displays a claw of a hand, the bones twisted, a finger missing. Opens his shirt, shows the bullet scars. Sums up: Lost all the battles, going to lose one more to the Virus. Yeah, the bug got me, too. T Cell count down to fifteen. But I won the war. I beat the corner. Got clean. A year ago today. How this resonates with DeAndre, Fran, the others. The NA meeting concludes.

21. Detox center: Lunch. DeAndre and Fran connect, make promises to each other. Embrace. Tyreeka and Fran talk about the baby. There will be no abortion. Everyone acknowledges that was all just talk. They will be a family. Fran promises.

22. Fran says her good-byes at the center. Scoogie carries her bag to the car. Her victory lap happens as she returns to Fayette Street for the first time in years. We switch to Black-and-White as she is immersed once again in the corner. She doesn't even want to go back inside the Dew Drop. She sends DeAndre up there to get clothes so she can stay at Scoogie's until they find a clean place to live. Gotta find me a job, she says.

23. Fran goes to use the pay phone and one of the Mount Street touts, Buster by name, starts screaming that she took his dope and coke from the change slot. She doesn't know what the fuck Buster is talking about. An argument on the steps, with DeAndre proudly interposing between Buster and his mother. Buster's New York suppliers roll up and court is in session, but Fran tells them she wouldn't take shit now. "I just came home. Twenty-eight days clean." New Yorker: "Congratulations." Fran: "I'm serious. I didn't take shit from no one." They look to Buster, who insists. A split verdict. The dealers leave. Fran to DeAndre: "Go upstairs and get our shit. We ain't never coming back down here." DeAndre believes her. As Fran contemplates her escape...

THE CORNER

Part Nine: Fat Curt's Blues

Main Character: Curt, with Blue supporting

Season: Fall

1. Beginning corner mix: Gary cops a morning blast on behalf of a white guy he calls John Boy, and they share the proceeds. Gary sees profit in being a tour guide for white users afraid to get burned, now that the crab season is over and he's losing time at Seapride. DeAndre sharing a blunt with R.C. and Tae, talking shit about the responsibilities of impending fatherhood and not knowing what he's saying. We follow Curt as he passes through, turning down a tout's offer of dope, on his way to --
2. N.A. meeting, where Curt bemoans the fact -- to his N.A. buddy House -- that he filled out the forms for food stamps a month ago, and he doesn't know what the fuck is up. One recovering addict to another, House offers his services to help Curt get straight with the bureaucracy, offers to drive him where he needs to be driven, etc. Curt talks about how he hates dealing with caseworkers.
3. Fran, DeAndre and DeRodd move into an apartment on Boyd Street -- the promise of a new beginning for the family. She talks about enrolling at community college, the first step on the way to a two-year degree in some employable skill. DeAndre is provisionally impressed, promises to find that job that's been eluding him.
4. Pumpkin takes over, as coach of the rec center basketball team -- a necessity as Pumpkin, a street dealer, owes the court some community service work on his last sentence. DeAndre initially bucks at Pumpkin's discipline, goofing around while running laps.
5. Fran, in her college English class, does something encouraging and impressive and begins to believe that she can climb out of the hole.
6. At a St. James N.A. meeting, Marvin Parker offers Fran a cigarette -- an effective first move at courtship. They hit it off; Fran's interest in romance, long deadened by dope, is back.
7. Curt, at the Social Security office, shows off his bloated leg to a caseworker, determined to get some kind of check from somebody. He's turned down for a disability check, but is told he can appeal. Can Curt outlast the bullshit...can anyone?
8. DeAndre applies for a job at Wendy's. I need a job bad. He's impressed with the all-black management. And for once, he's up-front with the manager about his need. She seems to like him.

9. Barely holding on to his crabhouse gig, Gary goes further into tour-guiding white boys for his blast. John Boy comes past his house again, trying to get Gary to come and cop for him and a friend, who Gary naturally calls Dan Boy. All white guys look like Walton kids to Gary. They cop and Dan Boy goes paranoid nuts in Gary's basement, embarrassing Gary with his mother.

10. DeAndre enters Boyd Street to announce proudly he got a job; sees Fran and Marvin together. DeAndre is initially suspicious of Marvin, but Fran is pleased with DeAndre's effort to do right and contribute to the family income. DeAndre models his Wendy's outfit with pride.

11. Ella sees R.C. touting. R.C. feels the need to deny up and down that he's out here dealing drugs. Ella is clearly disappointed that another of her charges seems lost despite her best efforts.

12. Curt, at the orthopedic clinic, is told he needs a vascular compression machine for his legs. Curt, at the medical supply company, is told he needs a medical assistance card to rent the vascular compression machine. The nightmare of social dependency in microcosm...

13. In Gary's basement bedroom, he and John Boy fire some good dope. John Boy goes on and on about what a nice guy Gary is. Just as Gary starts wondering about John Boy's sexual orientation, John Boy overdoses, and Gary has to struggle -- in his mother's presence -- to pull John Boy through it. Gary feels horrible that his mother had to witness this.

14. With Fran out of the house, Marvin bosses around DeRodd and DeAndre, and even has some shit to say to the visiting pregnant Tyreeka, who has come down to talk with Fran about the impending baby. DeAndre interposes between Marvin and Tyreeka, then tries to work into his girl's good graces again.

15. Tyreeka and DeAndre make up. They will be together for the birth and all that follows. So says DeAndre, pledging fidelity once again...

16. Fran is at a job interview with a department store. It turns out this is a store that has banned her for shoplifting. The interview comes to an abrupt end. At the same time, DeAndre's working hard at Wendy's and gets an encouraging word from the assistant manager.

17. Curt gets in line at the Rosemont welfare office. Triggering:

18. SET PIECE: The Check. We see a montage of Curt, Fran and random other supplicants in various offices dealing with various caseworkers, filling out various forms and receiving various checks... Many of these checks, once cashed, then being spent on various drugs.

19. Tyreeka gets a sonogram. DeAndre is delighted that it's a boy. Fran is delighted, period.

19. At the gym, Pumpkin shows up with a couple of older, experienced players for the team. Manny Man and Dinky resent this, but R.C. and Tae say, if it means winning games, they're with it. They're tired of losing. "We ain't never won. Not once." DeAndre beefs with Pumpkin, then stalks out. So does Dinky, Manny Man.

20. Fran crosses Blue on Fayette -- a pleasant, uplifting exchange between old players now clean. We learn Blue is living in a shelter, going to twelve-step meetings. Fran says she's taking college courses -- English is cool, but algebra is a bitch. Their conversation is interrupted several times by touts offering temptation. We follow Fran to the Dew Drop; she hangs out just to observe and to observe more victory-lap kudos.

21. With no check money yet, Curt returns to touting, but insists he doesn't want to start hitting himself with the spike. I just got to make some money.

22. Ella gets a call from the police. Bails Kiti out, finds out he was hanging with his friends by the movie theater. Except on Fayette Street. Ella is distressed. Kiti says he can't wait to get to California, get out. You should move too, Ma, he tells her.

Triggering:

A. FLASHBACK (1986) -- The older McCullough children, who have moved out to the suburbs, beseech Roberta and W.M. to move out as well, before more of the family is damaged by the drug culture. Roberta talks about their long journey from the South, and how this is their home.

23. A strange young man explodes through the front door of the McCullough house, then bolts out the back, with police soon following. Roberta, terrified, is confronted by cops, demanding to know who that guy was, where he is, and why he ran in here. Roberta, of course, has no answer. Carty tries to mellow out the situation, but the police take him out front and strip search him... Which is what W.M. sees when he comes home from driving his cab. He is outraged. Roberta gives a passing Curt the leather coat that had been dropped by the fleeing stranger. Curt thanks her politely.

25. Night at the Boyd Street apartment: DeAndre discovers there's cash missing from his pants pocket. He goes to Fran, accusing Marvin. Fran defends Marvin, who hasn't even been around the past few nights, DeAndre points out. Probably out getting high. Fran angrily shuts DeAndre down when he says, "Marvin got to go."

26. The corner, day. Curt, in the new coat, is touting. House passes by, says he's missed Curt at the last few meetings. Curt says he's just touting to put some money in his pocket, he's not using the shit. House, without pressing the issue, encourages him to come to a meeting.

27. Fran backslides with her sister Bunchie, snorting a line of dope in the Dew Drop basement. Fran sees the smug smile of satisfaction on Bunchie's face. Fran flees in disgust, leaving two lines untouched.

28. Fran walks into a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, torn up with shame at her moment of weakness. It's a different meeting, not the folks she's used to. But House steps up to her, welcoming her.

29. W.M. is looking out his window, to a random group of addicts gathering in the alley... We know this to be the makings of a tester line. This quiet man finally reveals the depth of his rage, telling Roberta that if he had his way, the gas chamber would be working overtime 'til all these dope fiends were gone. "Just kill 'em all." Then W.M. sees his son Gary join the tester line. W.M. slumps away in sorrow.

30. Curt stands on his corner, deciding. He flags down a hack and asks the driver to take him up to Ellamont, where he has a room at his sisters. He gets inside, hears cries of a tester line around the corner. He gets out of the hack, cops and walks into Blue's. Rita is there waiting for him. You up? She asks. Curt nods weakly. Thought you was taking a break. I was, Curt tells her. "Breaks over." She hits him with the spike. As Curt closes his eyes, slips back beneath the waves...

THE CORNER

Part Ten: Blues for the World

Main characters: Ensemble

Season: Late Fall-Winter

1. Beginning corner mix: Gary is tour-guiding two White Guys, turns the wrong corner, gets robbed by a Stick-up Crew right along with his Charges -- "You too nigger. Get in the alley and give it up." R.C. and Tae selling drugs for the same dealer who stabbed Hungry in the summer. Boy beat the charge and is now back on the street. Pumpkin comes up to tell them to make practice because Ella is getting the team in the Mayor's Holiday Tournament. Ella's springing for new uniforms, too. The boys tell Pumpkin they've got a good package on the street now. "We makin' money, man." You want to play, you make practice, he tells them. DeAndre rolls past, gives them shit for slinging. He's wearing his Wendy's uniform. "I'm a workin' man." They tease him right back. His nephew, Little Stevie, runs up, tells him that Tyreeka is at the hospital, having her baby. They race...
2. Birth of DeAnte Tyree McCullough on Thanksgiving Day. DeAndre is in the room, with Fran coaxing Tyreeka to push harder. A healthy boy, crying like he knows the whole story.
3. Thanksgiving night at Scoogie's house. A rare celebration as DeAndre and Fran return from the hospital triumphant. The Boyd family as just that -- a family. Even Stevie is cleaned up. A feast and hope for the future.
4. Blue, still clean, goes back to his shooting gallery to confront what he started. Curt, Rita, the Regulars all greet him with discomfort. It's their world now, not his. He tries to shut it down, to get them help, to urge Rita to go to the hospital. It's no use. Frustrated, he actually calls the police, telling them they need to get into his old house and clean it up. For the sake of the people in there. They need help.
5. Basketball practice. In a scrimmage, Pumpkin's new team destroys Kiti and the older Boys, who so badly beat the MLKs earlier in the year. The new team is fast and lethal. R.C. afterward, describing how much life means to him when it's on the court, how little it means outside the lines.
6. Ella at the airport, sends Kiti to California. Her last living child safe. She goes back to her rec center, alone now. The children tell her that they want to start a garden on the vacant lot across the street. Ella is surprised at the notion, but agrees.
7. Gary begs for more hours at Seaprime, but crab season is over. He's back on the street. Reluctantly, he hooks up with Ronnie and she has him selling burn bags on strange corners. She's down to scraping the bottom of the barrel. She's going to get him killed.
8. DeAndre at Wendy's. He messes up and has his hours cut. He bucks on the manager. She tells him not to call back until he apologizes.

9. Fran tries to throw Marvin Parker out, but fails when he promises to clean up. She tells him he has until after the holidays and he goes right out and cops, then has the effrontery to bring it back inside the house, into her bedroom even.

10. DeAndre stays with Tyreeka and the baby at Tyreeka's aunt's house. They are playing house. As if the moment might last forever, but all the while knowing it won't. Tyreeka, now a mother, preaches with him to leave the corners be. But DeAndre is out of work and bitter.

11. The Mayor's Tournament. The MLKs win twice, go all the way to the semifinals, then lose by one. R.C. plays brilliantly. And strangely, he stops bragging, his desperation at an end. It's as if he's had his one moment, now he can give himself over to the corner game.

12. Dedication of the garden to Ella's dead daughter Andrea. The surprise ceremony shocks her. She didn't see it coming. Triggering:

A. FLASHBACK (1989) -- Trial of the man who raped and killed Andrea. Ella testifying, then walking past his stare.

BACK TO PRESENT: Ella unable to make a decent speech. Slipping back inside her bunker of a rec center and giving way to a long cry.

B. FLASHBACK (1989) -- Trial of her daughter's murderer. Guilty, life no parole. And the crying mother of the killer, who has lost her child as well. And Ella, ever Christian, embracing this woman and sharing her grief.

BACK TO PRESENT: The kids who worked on the memorial come into the rec, seek Ella out. Did we do wrong? No, Ella tells them. You did fine.

C. FLASHBACK (1990) -- Ella walking up to rec center, telling the male director that she wants to volunteer, that she has to volunteer. Explaining that it's for Andrea.

13. Curt falls out once again. Taken by ambo to Bon Secours. Told that his liver is all but gone. He's sent to a nursing home amid all the other human carnage of the drug war. A shithole of a care facility, where everyone has the bug and is dying. But Pimp follows him and tells him that everyone is falling out in the winter weather. Montage of Rita, Shardene, Scario, etc. all washing up in the emergency rooms. Dennis is alone at Blue's -- the last lonely soldier.

14. Gary wakes up late, rushes out and goes to see his father who is in the hospital, dying maybe. A strange lack of connection at the hospital and Gary feels more lost than ever. He tries to talk to Ronnie, but she just smirks. She arms him with more burn bags, sends him out to take the risk. Later, he tries to get back to the hospital, fearful about his father. Failing that, he goes to St. Edward's Clinic, asking for clonidine, asking to detox. The doctor isn't in. He goes instead to Tyreeka's house, sees his grandson. Cries. Leaves abruptly, sensing his own doom.

15. Fran discovers that Marvin has stolen the groceries and sold them. She's hit bottom. She tells DeRodd to go to Scoogie's and stay there for a while. She blows off DeAndre, giving him permission to begin his own descent. She counts out her cash on hand. "Ma, that the rent money." "Shut up," she explains. She goes to the corner to cop, starts a binge. But when she goes back later that night, a hardened gangster, Brother Low from the N.A. meeting, is on the corner wraith thin, waiting for a bus. "You ain't up," he tells her. Fran goes back inside, tries to sleep her way through.

16. CMB is down bottom on the lower strip of McHenry Street, slinging big time. D.C. Boys roll through and try to claim the corner. Time for our young men to get their guns out.

17. Call goes up to Tyreeka's house for DeAndre. Beef going on with D.C. niggers. Get ya gun out, he's told. He looks at Tyreeka and the baby. I'ma be here with my baby, he says. If any of my boys get hurt, I'll be there though. He hangs up. Best he can do.

18. Ella leaves her house, realizes that her car is stolen. She is angry for only a moment, after which she walks to work.

19. Blue visits Curt at the nursing home. Old soldiers at the end of the campaign. Curt, wanting more, knowing it will never come.

20. Gunbattle between D.C. Boys and CMB. Adrenaline and lead, but no real casualties. Tae, Dinky, Manny exhilarated. They've held onto their corner, but what in essence does that mean. R.C. realizing that if he stays, he dies. He stays.

21. Gary goes to cop in front of Ella's garden, where the drug crews are ignoring the newly purchased memorial. He gets burned, complains and is beaten to within an inch of his life by children half his age.

22. Fran walks to N.A. meeting, watches the people going indoors, but walks past it, heading for the Dew Drop. As she drifts through the corner mix, trying to find her way.

23. DeAndre argues with Tyreeka. He can't stay in this room with her and the baby forever. Tyreeka: "You quitting. You going back down to those corners." DeAndre: "Where the fuck am I supposed to go?" He slams the door, walks out on Riggs and is soon in the corner swirl. Still fifteen.

A. Yet the scene becomes surreal as DeAndre sees all that he knows and loves -- his mother, father, girlfriends, child, running buddies -- in the mix, moving to corner rhythms. He looks down and he's dressed to the nines, a gangster at last. Semiauto in his dip, gold jewelry, a fat roll in his pocket. He walks over to a Lexus, leans against it. Corner girls give him his due. His boys have his back. All is well.

BACK TO PRESENT: Daytime. DeAndre is sleeping on a couch in a McHenry Street flophouse. R.C. and Dinky are on the floor, vialing up. There's coke on the table. Cash and guns in the open. The Southern District uniforms take the door, catch them all dirty. Cop to DeAndre: "Gotcha."

24. Closing montage of Real People on real drug corners throughout Baltimore, maybe throughout the nation. We see the faces of the damned and the forgotten places of America. The camera refuses to blink. Mixed with these images, we see film of the real survivors of this story, still photographs of those no longer alive. We learn that:

Dinky was shot to death near McHenry Street in 1996. He was seventeen.

Boo was fatally wounded on McHenry Street that same year. He was eighteen.

R.C. and Tae were both wounded in an ambush two days after Boo. R.C. is now living in South Baltimore and trying to stay away from the corners. Tae is still on McHenry Street.

George "Blue" Epps is now five years clean. He performs outreach work to addicts for Bethel A.M.E. Church. Terry "Eggy Daddy" Hamlin is four years clean and working a straight job.

Rita Hale, Pimp, Scalio and Shardene were all dead by 1996.

Fat Curtis Davis died in a nursing home of liver failure the following year.

Ella Thompson finally moved from Fayette Street in 1996, but she continued to work at West Baltimore's recreation centers. She died of a heart attack in 1998 at age 46. Her son, Kiti, is living and working in Baltimore.

W.M. and Roberta McCullough still live on Vine Street.

Gary McCullough attempted to detox from heroin and cocaine and was four months clean when he walked away from a homeless shelter in March 1996, found his way back to Fayette Street and copped one last speedball. He overdosed in his parents' basement and was pronounced dead at Bon Secours Hospital. He was 38.

Fran Boyd has been drug-free for three years. She works as an addiction outreach counselor at a Baltimore hospital.

Her son, DeAndre, is living in Baltimore, struggling with addiction and the lure of the corner. He is now 21.

As the montage fades....

THE END