



VENICE of AMERICA

BY MICHAEL GRAF & BRYAN GRILL



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Introduction

VENICE of AMERICA is a 14-hour noir anthology series that chronicles the early years of Venice Beach, CA.

Set in the first two decades of the 20th Century, we'll explore the crossroads of American idealism and corruption by scratching at the lives of Abbot Kinney and his inner circle responsible for the birth and death of the most unique and extraordinary place ever conceived—Venice of America.

The stories are character-centric plot-driven noir about the men and women empire builders that create an audacious city of canals out of swampy beach, but succumb to the swamp of their desires and shortcomings.

Similar in narrative structure to the Netflix Original series *Black Mirror* and the BBC hit series *Sherlock*, each “episode” is stand-alone and feature-length. And similar to the AMC hit *Fargo*, we'll chronicle real crimes of the era, exploring the clash between the American Dream and the nightmare of a greedy and lustful soul corrupted.

The characters will cross over into different episodes, each being featured with their own stories while cross populating other episodes to various degrees.

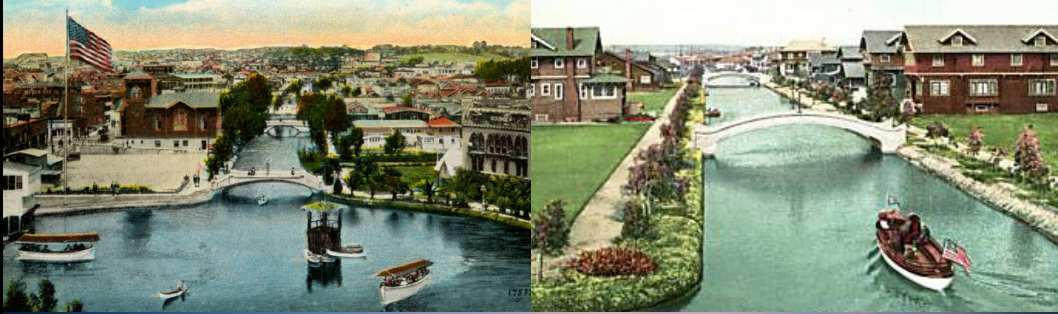
The stories are not linear, but when viewed as a whole will weave the tragic and dark story of Abbot Kinney's broken American dream.

Emotional, stylishly dark and moody, cinematic, **VENICE of AMERICA** is a love letter to the film noir genre of the first half of the 20th Century while also celebrating the pioneering golden age of Hollywood.

These are stories of the American Dream gone sour. They're the marriage of unbridled optimism and lustful desires—an odd couple destined to only meet on the enchanting sun drenched boardwalks of Venice of America...



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The Playground By The Sea

In 1920's Los Angeles the height of prohibition and the golden age of Hollywood clash in the whimsical seaside resort of Venice of America, the "fantasy by the sea" built by Abbot Kinney where the rich and famous come to frolic.

What is now Venice Beach, one of the most-visited destinations in Southern California, came to be in the most uniquely American way: it was willed into being by one visionary man, Abbot Kinney. The worthless and desolate swampy marshlands were literally won with the flip of a coin to settle a land dispute.

Kinney wanted to build the ideal American city: one that could rival the best cities in Europe and tame the western frontier spirit with high culture. So he copied the great cultural jewel of Italy—Venice—and built an American replica, canals, gondolas and all, overlooking the mighty Pacific.

But one man's dream is another's nightmare.

And it's the job of private detective Jake "Spanky" Vargas to keep those nightmares in check.

Abbot Kinney raised Jake when his father was killed building the Kinney's first Venice pier in 1905. Rather than send him back to Mexico as an orphan, Kinney takes young Jake in, as one of his own children and much to the ire of his oldest son, Thornton.

Jake grows up within the Kinney clan working for the Venice of America police department. While nearby Los Angeles struggles with corruption and rampant racism, Jake rises in the ranks to Chief of Police.

After Kinney's death, Thornton annexes Venice to the city of LA; Vargas is fired and shut out of the LA police department. He becomes a private detective, determined to try and preserve Kinney's legacy as best he can—even if it means becoming a fixer for Hollywood's rich, famous and outrageous.



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Structure & Story

Each of our “episodes” is intended to be a self-contained feature length crime story. They all will be told from Jake Vargas’ point of view, but each story will be about different characters in Abbot Kinney’s sphere of influence that helped shape the history of Venice Beach and Southern California.

Some characters may carry over from story to story. Some may only appear incidentally in one episode, but have major roles in another. They are all part of our “Venice Of America universe”

Each episode explores a unique aspect of the rise and fall of Venice, from utopian planned community to adult playground by the sea to the wastelands of industrial oil fields.

We’ll offer the audience glimpses into Jake’s childhood in 1905, when Abbot Kinney first sets out to conquer the swampy marshes south of Santa Monica. (Similar in the story timeline technique used in Better Call Saul.)

While Jake Vargas is a fictional homage to great noir detectives, Abbot and Thornton Kinney, Irving Tabor, Tony “the Hat” Cornero, and Arthur Reese are all based on actual people of the era that helped shape Venice.

Sarah Bernhardt, Aimee McPherson, Fatty Arbuckle, Charlie Chaplin, Thomas Ince, and his Royal Highness, Duke Kahanamoku are all real people too; famous and just passing through, but part of the allure of the playground by the sea.

The stories we tell are all based on true events, but as the history grows more distant it’s often only the big milestones that remain clear to us, with the details hazy and left to us to unearth.



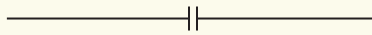
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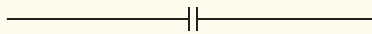
Episodes

In our first episode, “**Venice Of America,**” we tell the story of how the most famous radio personality in America is murdered in Venice but shows up alive the day after her funeral.

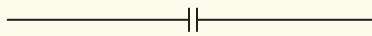
We’re introduced to most of our main characters here and this episode sets the groundwork for all the others.



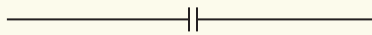
In “**Fatty Arbuckle Throws An Orgy At The Cadillac,**” we’ll explore how gangster Tony “The Hat” Cornero rises to power (and setting the groundwork for future gangster, Bugsy Siegel), keeping the booze flowing to Hollywood’s rich and powerful at the height of prohibition.



Likewise, we’ll explore the ugly racism of LA redlining in the story of Irving Tabor, Abbot Kinney’s trusted friend and confidant. Titled, “**Drawing The Line,**” this story chronicles the gifting of Abbot Kinney’s mansion after his death to his longtime friend, confidant and former chauffeur and the lengths some “good white folk” go to keep him out of the house—and the lengths Irving goes to keep it.



In “**Burning Bridges By Burning Piers**” we’ll tell Arthur Reese’s story about how he made a fortune after the horrific pandemic of 1918 and the famous Venice Beach Pier and Grand Pavilion burned to the surf; an event that forever changing the makeup of Venice Beach and southern California.



“**Sarah Bernhardt Breaks A Leg**” tells the story of how surfing came to Southern California when the greatest actress of her era was lured to Venice by Kinney, has an affair with a member of the Royal Hawaiian family, breaks his heart and her leg learning to drive a car—all while literally stealing the show.



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Episodes (CONTINUED)

Another episode, “**The Skies The Limit,**” chronicles the unsolved death of “the father of Westerns,” Thomas Ince, a Hollywood producer that partners with Kinney to start an Aviation company, but is shot to death on William Randolph Hearst’s private yacht, the Oneida.



And in “**The Circus Comes To Town,**” we’ll tell the story behind the troubled production, “The Circus” that was filmed on the Venice Boardwalk by the biggest name in show business, Charlie Chaplin. We’ll delve into the “mysterious fire” that burned down Chaplin’s studio and the love triangle between Chaplin, his 18-year-old and soon-to be-ex-wife, Lita Grey, and the film’s fresh faced leading lady and ingénue, Merna Kennedy, whom Grey introduced to Chaplin.



Future seasons can explore later timelines—from the bleak toxic oil field era of the 1940s to the birth of the counter culture beatnik era of the 1950s.





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Tone & Style

The visual style will be energetic and classic cinematic noir eye candy. The framing will be audaciously delicious. The cinematography will be dark and full of contrast—constantly on the move, prowling with a hungry, lustful eye.

It's a look we're calling "California Noir."

Since **VENICE of AMERICA** is set in 1920s Los Angeles County, the show will feature period details (The Red Line trolleys, Model T autos, the Venice miniature railroad, flapper dresses and wing tip shoes.)

The dialogue will include vintage slang from the era. The soundtrack will be inspired by the era—but will work as a bridge to our modern era; it must feel period, but be timeless. We'll use an original jazz soundtrack, inspired by Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Bill Evans, but cinematic. (Jazz allows us to bridge the era by using jazz tracks and re-mixing them with a modern hip-hop sensibility.)

The stories are also full of Easter eggs for Film Noir and movie history aficionados. Our main character, Jake "Spanky" Vargas is named in homage to Jake Gittes from *China Town* and Ramon Vargas from *Touch Of Evil*, two noir classics. Spanky is a character in Hal Roach's *Little Rascals* series. Both *Little Rascals* and *Touch Of Evil* filmed in Venice.

These details will add a fun, authentic flavor to the show, but will never overwhelm the story or characters. Their purpose is to always sweeten the ear and eye candy.



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Characters

Some key characters that populate the **VENICE of AMERICA** universe:



Jake “Spanky” Vargas Early 30s, single, former Venice Police Chief hand picked by Abbot Kinney and forced into early retirement by city’s merger with Los Angeles.

His police career stalled by merger and racism in the LAPD, Vargas becomes a Private Detective and fixer to those wealthy enough to pay his price.

Orphaned as a child and raised by Abbot Kinney, Vargas was a precocious kid- a quick learner and very smart, earning the nickname “Spanky”. He’s street smart, not afraid to get his hands dirty—or bloodied—and can easily slide between the worlds of the have’s and have not’s.

He struggles between the optimism, idealism and high moral standards his mentor Abbot Kinney espoused and the reality of life on the street. He’s pensive man.



Abbot Kinney 50s-60s, wealthy, refined and world traveled, Abbot hails from old East Coast money and has been raised at the finest boarding schools of the day. He epitomizes the rugged Yankee idealism of the day.

He is American Manifest Destiny personified, building the American west in his own image; that work hard, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, ethos mixed with the Puritan sense of responsibility and fairness towards one’s fellow man.

Abbot is a man of vision as well as a man of action. While he’s inherited his fortune, he fancies himself a self made man, using that fortune to build a fantastic city by the sea to rival it’s cultural namesake in Europe.



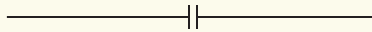


Characters (CONTINUED)

Thornton Kinney Early 30s. Thornton is Abbot's oldest child and boyhood friend of Jake Vargas. Born into a life of privilege and wealth, Thornton has been given everything in life- except the affection of his father.

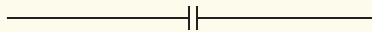
Competitive by nature, Thornton is torn between the bonds of his friendship and family and the responsibilities of running the Kinney Empire.

He doesn't share his father's ideals binding responsibility with privilege. Wealth is a means to an end. What good is running an empire if you can't enjoy its fruits?



Mildred Johnson Early 30s, single, co-founding member of the Temple Of Angels church. While her sister is the "voice" of the church, Mildred is the brains behind the radio ministry's success. She's a savvy businesswoman in an era dominated by men that frown on such things.

She's best defined as pulchritudinous: a difficult, hard word to describe beauty. Uncomfortable with the social norms defining femininity, she's savvy enough to use those norms to her advantage. She's shrewd, calculating and formidable.



Tony "The Hat" Cornero Early 30s, mobster and bootlegger, Tony the Hat is a self made man. Uneducated and street smart, he was orphaned when his father was shot during a card game and his mother died of syphilis. He is a survivor.

He's made a fortune bootlegging Canadian whiskey to upscale hotels and nightclubs and trafficking Chinese laborers and prostitutes.

He is a ruthless and brutal mobster that fancies himself part of the Hollywood elite. He craves legitimacy.

He is a depraved wolf in the finest imported Italian silk money can buy.



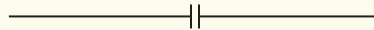


Characters (CONTINUED)

Irving Tabor Early 30s, married, Irving is a decent, hardworking and caring family man. He was a trusted confidant and friend of Abbot Kinney's.

Disillusioned and frustrated by racism and double standards, he is angry and saddened by a world that is far from Kinney's ideals. He helped Kinney build Venice, but can't enjoy the fruits of his labors and is forced to literally live on the other side of the tracks, just outside of Venice in Oakwood.

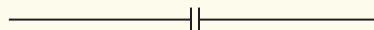
He is pragmatic, entrepreneurial and down-to-earth. He is also a cautious and cynical realist.



Arthur Reese 50s, flamboyant and a bit of a rascal, Arthur is a proud Cajun, with the map of New Orleans seared in his soul. He talked his cousin, Irving Tabor, into going into many of his business ventures.

From a shoeshine and towel concession stand to a major power broker, this "Wizard of Venice" is a natural showman; he's breezed through life and managed to make himself a fortune along the way.

His morals are dubious, his credentials impeccable, and his charm irresistible.



Aimee McPherson 20s, divorced, she's "the most famous voice in America." She's the co-founder of the Temple of Angels Church. She's traveled the world, been seduced and abandoned one time too many.

Aimee is a passionate, charismatic woman, easily enticed by the allure of fame, power and wealth. She is brash and heedless, an impetuous creature of the moment.

There was a time she fervently believed the gospels. But fighting the injustice of the world has taken its toll.

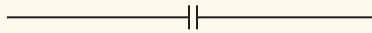




Characters (CONTINUED)

Fatty Arbuckle 30s, flamboyant, gregarious and deeply insecure, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle is at the height of his career. One of the biggest comedic actors of the silent film era, he’s just landed the biggest contract in Hollywood, an unprecedented \$3 million.

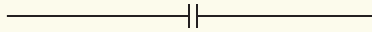
Fatty likes being the center of attention, top shelf booze and teenage girls—and not necessarily in that order. No party is big enough, no whiskey bottle deep enough and no girl willing enough to satisfy Fatty’s larger than life appetites.



Sarah Bernhardt 60s, Ms. Bernhardt is the crown jewel of the European theater. She’s on her third and final “Farewell Tour” of America.

Used to a lifetime in the spotlight and an opulent lifestyle, she fights the ravages of time like a caged wild cat and will do anything to stay in the public’s affection.

She keeps a coffin in her bedroom at all times, and on occasion has been known to sleep or make love in it.



Charlie Chaplin “The most recognized face in the world” was raised in brothels and music halls by a single, schizophrenic mother and is the biggest, brightest, and most powerful star filmmaker in the history of Hollywood.

Known as the life of the party, Chaplin careens from one scandal to the next, impervious to any social constraints. Nothing is too perverted, degenerate or indecent if it feeds his incredible appetite to be loved and adored.





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Why Tell This Story Now?

We live in an age of uncertainty, in a world being rapidly changed by coronavirus, climate change, new technologies, and economic uncertainty. And much like similar times in the past, audiences crave and demand escapist entertainment.

Audiences yearn for stories of simpler times with iconic—and relatable—everyman and everywoman characters that can transport us from the daily slog of a world grinding us down to a place and time more exotic, more thrilling, more sophisticated; a place that's relatable, but escapist.

1920s Venice Beach is just such a place. It's a world where new technologies like the automobile and radio were rapidly changing society's idea of how to communicate and move around. It's a world recently ravaged by the pandemic of 1918, the First World War, and the culture war of prohibition.

Today, we question what makes America great and want to celebrate the rugged individualism that propelled us through the 20th Century. The story of the early years of Venice Beach is a perfect metaphor for today's trying times. It's a story about idealism, passion, greed, corruption, hypocrisy, and love; even a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

Like the early years of the 20th Century when Film Noir first flourished, we live in an age where the average Joe feels under attack, where the common woman and man are left on the sidelines of the great American rat race. And no matter how hard s/he tries, it's never enough to make it.

To paraphrase the great Preston Sturges, **VENICE of AMERICA** is a commentary on the modern condition: with stark realism, the struggles of the common man... and with a little sex.



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