

## Document Citation

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AN IMPORTANT NEW FILM ON BLACK LABOR

# AT THE RIVER I STAND

"An excellent look at the struggle which drew Martin Luther King to Memphis and his death. Shows how the black and labor movements win by struggling together."

- Julian Bond

"This moving documentary dramatizes the essential role of grassroots leadership in the freedom struggle. A fitting expression of Dr. King's social vision at the time of his death. Excellent for classroom use."

- Clayborne Carson, Stanford University  
editor, Martin Luther King papers

"A fine, well-crafted film which builds on EYES ON THE PRIZE. Bravo to the producers!"

- Henry Hampton, creator, EYES ON THE PRIZE

**AT THE RIVER I STAND** skillfully reconstructs the two eventful months in 1968 which transformed a local strike into the dramatic climax of the Civil Rights Movement. It disentangles the complex historical forces which came together with the inevitability of tragedy in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Memphis' 1300 sanitation workers formed the lowest caste of a deeply racist society, earning so little they qualified for welfare. Retired workers recall that when they went on strike for higher wages and union recognition, Memphis' white power structure united in its refusal to negotiate with them. Stirring newsreel footage shows how the black community and local civil rights leadership mobilized behind the strikers in mass demonstrations and a boycott of downtown businesses. The national leadership of AFSCME put the union's full resources behind the strikers. A placard appeared on the picket lines which in its radical simplicity summed up the meaning of the strike: "I Am a Man."

In March, Martin Luther King came to Memphis as part of his "Poor People's Campaign" to expand the civil rights agenda to the economy. **AT THE RIVER I STAND** recreates the controversies between King's advisors, local leaders and younger militants which led to violent confrontations with Memphis' brutal police. King and the nation realized his leadership and his non-violent strategy had been challenged. He felt obliged to return to organize a non-violent march in a city where racial tensions were at fever pitch. The film recaptures the sense of foreboding as King delivered his final "I have been to the mountain-top" speech. The next day, April 4, 1968, he was assassinated.

Four days later ministers, politicians and ordinary citizens from Memphis and around the country rallied to complete King's non-violent march. The city council crumbled, granting most of the strikers' demands. 1300 sanitation workers had shown they could successfully challenge the economic structure of the South.

The fires of Los Angeles, endemic inner city unemployment and the growing disparity between rich and poor make clear that the issues Martin Luther King raised in his last days have yet to be addressed. **AT THE RIVER I STAND** succeeds in convincing us that the causes and possibly the solutions to our present racial quandary may well be found in what happened in Memphis.

**Directors: David Appleby, Allison Graham, Steven Ross**  
56 minutes, 1993, Video rental: \$75 purchase \$195

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