



**“THE WITNESS: FROM THE BALCONY OF ROOM 306” CHRONICLES THE
FINAL DAYS OF DR. KING AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF
ONE OF THE LAST SURVIVING WITNESSES**

**Documentary Examines What Happened After Dr. King's Death.
Did the Movement Die in Memphis?**

Los Angeles (January 5, 2009) – More than forty years ago in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was slain on the balcony of the historic Lorraine Motel. This past spring, the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) commemorated the anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination and honored his legacy with a full day of commemoration including the premiere screening of “The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306.” This award winning documentary short captures the last days of Dr. King as seen through the eyes of one of the only surviving witnesses on the balcony, a close friend who spent the last hours with him that fateful day in 1968, Reverend Samuel “Billy” Kyles.

As Kyles, now 74 years, so eloquently states, "Absolutely you can kill the dreamer, but you cannot, I must tell you that you cannot kill the dream. The dream is still alive. The dream is still alive. The dream is still alive." The film emphasizes the ongoing relevance of the Civil Rights Movement, as a beacon of hope for all people in struggle the world over and gives us perspective, in light of our incredibly historic presidential election of how far we have come. It examines the history of the Civil Rights Movement through the lens of Dr. King’s contemporaries, how it inspired non-violent social activism among ordinary people who, as a result, became leaders that affected historic change.

Reverend Kyles, a longtime leader in the Civil Rights Movement, chronicles his time with Dr. King leading up to the fateful shot including his efforts to gain community support for the striking sanitation workers in 1968, the famous marches through Memphis and Dr. King's last days. Kyles reveals stirring details about conversations with Dr. King moments before his passing. The 32-minute documentary short includes exclusive, never before seen commentary and interviews with Reverend Samuel "Billy" Kyles, Dr. Benjamin Hooks, Civil Rights Leader and former Executive director of the NAACP, Mrs. Maxine Smith, Executive Secretary, NAACP Memphis Branch and Taylor Rodgers, one of the original sanitation workers who marched alongside King and Kyles, among others.

As the film's executive producer and producer, Margaret Hyde, says, "Rev. Kyles is such an inspiring presence and so integral to telling this story. Not to have this man's testimony committed to film would be a great loss not only to the Civil Rights Movement but also future generations who need to hear about this."

Although Hyde had dreamt of making this film a reality for many years, the film from inception to the first screening took an astoundingly short seven months. "Everyone, especially Rev. Kyles, participated with the proviso that we didn't seek to personally benefit from the film and that all proceeds would go to the Museum. We know we just couldn't think of making the film any other way.. Everyone interviewed in the film donated his or her time and we were able to screen the film at the NCRM in time for the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination commemoration."

Hyde adds, "Rev. Kyles has been so true to his mission and his message. He has never written a book or tried to capitalize on being a witness, and couldn't speak about it for the first 30 years following Dr. King's death, but he does tell his

story when asked (for free) all over the country. We're honored that we could provide a forum for this great man to add to the Civil Rights legacy and provide a forum for his message encouraging and challenging everyone to keep the dream alive."

About the National Civil Rights Museum

In 1991, the NCRM opened its doors as the nation's first comprehensive exhibit chronicling America's Civil Rights Movement. With vital support from the City of Memphis, Shelby County, and the State of Tennessee, nearly \$9 million dollars were raised to create and construct a civil rights center within the historic Lorraine Motel designed to help visitors better understand the history and lessons of the American Civil Rights Movement. In February 2001, the Museum broke ground for an \$11 million expansion project entitled, *Exploring the Legacy*, adding 12,800 square feet of exhibition space and connecting the main campus of the Museum to the Young and Morrow building and the Main Street Rooming House where James Earl Ray allegedly fired the fatal shot resulting in the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Hyde Family Foundation donated both buildings to the Museum.

The National Civil Rights Museum was the first institution of its kind and size in the country to chronicle key episodes of the American Civil Rights Movement in exhibit form. Other museums covering civil rights history typically cover a specific episode, segment or person involved in the movement. Visitors who experience the Museum see the sights, hear the sounds and feel the emotion of a movement that changed the world. For more information, please visit www.civilrightsmuseum.org.

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