

At the River I Stand

Film transcript

Narrator: Memphis, TN, a local labor dispute escalates into a major battle for economic and civil rights. It draws MLK into the final confrontation of his life and marks the end of an era in the civil rights movement.

Title: At the River I Stand

Choir: “one more river to cross, before I lay my burden down, one more river to cross, till I’m free, free from fear”

N: 100 years after the freeing of the slaves their descendants were still relegated to the lowest rungs of the economic ladder, the Mississippi delta in the 1960’s was the poorest region of the United States, with most of its black population living in abject poverty. Migration to the city did little to change this. In Memphis movements that inspired black workers to organize for decent wages and working conditions were brutally suppressed. With the underpaid black workers were still forming the basis of the region's economy the values of the old south remained essentially unchanged.

Choir: “One more river to cross”

N: During the 1960’s Memphis spared itself the uprisings which drew national attention to Little Rock, Birmingham and Selma by integrating facilities in a relatively peaceful manner. Blacks were finally admitted to movies, libraries and lunch counters but economically they continued to occupy the most menial jobs for the lowest of wages. Nowhere was this more evident than in the department of public works.

Coby Smith (community organizer): This was a job a white man could not have, it was beneath the level of a white man it was a social caste, this is a job reserved for blacks it was not a clean job. They had to wear filthy clothes, they had to work in filth, they had to drag garbage cans, I mean tubs of garbage.

Taylor Rogers (sanitation worker): And those tubs had holes in them, garbage leaking all over ya' when you got home in the evening you had to stop at the door to pull off your shoes, pull off those real dirty clothes because maggots had fallen all on ya'.

N: the men worked long hours for no overtime pay, there were no grievance procedures, no paid vacations no sick leave, if a man got injured on the job he could be fired. Wages were so low that a full-time worker could still qualify for welfare.

Clinton Burrows: Memphis residents thought that we were satisfied because most of those people would give you handouts, but we just got tired of those handouts. You almost could tell a worker when you saw him in the streets, he either had a hat on to large or his shoes was too big or his coat was too long, from handouts you know we worked every day and none of us had the money so that we could buy and pick as other people do.

N: in 1963 T.O. Jones led 32 fellow workers off the job, the city responded by firing them. Most were eventually re-hired, but the point had been made union activities would not be tolerated. Jones refused to go back and continued his efforts to organize the men.

Jesse Jones (Son of T.O. Jones): you know he used to tell me, because I would see all this paperwork and stuff, he used to tell me that these people don't realize that they don't have to live like this. That if they come together, they can overcome these little things, you know, although they think they can't win, but they can you know it was like he was telling me, convincing me that he was right.

N: Jones succeeded in getting an affiliation with an American federation of state county and municipal employees, but few men were willing to risk their jobs by joining. Despite this Jones persisted.

J Jones: in the first part of '68 you had more and more people, they started meeting they were called wild cat meetings, but there were more people coming every time, that let him know that it was close at hand.

N: February 1968, after years of unheeded complaints about faulty equipment the inevitable finally happened, on a rainy day an electrical short activates one truck's garbage compressor. Two men are crushed to death. There is no workmen's compensation, no insurance for their families, feeling they have nothing left to lose 1300 sanitation workers walk off their jobs.

News Footage: We tried to get to the union officials, Mr. T.O. Jones who seems to be the spokesman for the union and a former sanitation employee worker he said he had no comments at this time.

N: Jones leads the men to the office of his friend Bill Ross head of the Memphis Labor council. Ross calls Washington and informs Union official P.J. Ciamba of the strike.

Bill Ross: he says "Bill, you go out there and you tell those people to get back to work. And I'll come down there and I'll see what I can do", I said buddy I'm the only white man in this building with 1300 black souls out there I'm not about to tell those people to go back to work, now if you want to tell them you can come down here and do it yourself.

Rev. Harold Middlebrook: Labor was not used to having 1300 black men out on strike that the labor did not call and when they striked there was no contract, there was no recognition of the union. You know you're in a kind of nebulous position nobody knew who was what, where when or why.

N: Standing firmly against the union is newly elected Mayor Henry Loeb.

News footage of Henry Loeb: it has been that all employees of this municipality may not strike for any purpose, this of course includes the employees of the public work department.

Lewis Donelson (City Council): Henry typifies, oh I don't know many blacks would say that I do too, the plantation psychology. That is that the blacks are the white man's responsibility that we have to look out for them, we own the plantation they work on the plantation we've got to look out for them.

N: PJ Ciamba arrives in Memphis to talk to the mayor about getting the men back to work but Loeb refuses to recognize either him or the union as a legitimate bargaining agent for the workers

Footage of Ciamba speaking to the black workers: I was advised that you out of work in violation of the law. I don't know of any law in TN that you have to subject yourself to indentured servitude and I don't think that I'm breaking the law one iota because as a free American citizen I'm going to express myself, as a free American citizen you are expressing yourself by saying I am not working for those stinking wages and conditions. It's certainly right that if you should come to me and bring up anything you want you can ask me any question just as you used to ask me and this is what I suggest.

Taylor Rodgers: it was nothing but a joke, just a big joke he was talking about his open door, there was no way you could have gotten close to his office, not a worker and everything was just a big joke, that's why everyone was laughing.

Footage of Loeb: public employees cannot strike against their employer and this you cannot do I suggested to these men today that they go back to work.

Jerred Blanchard (city Council): Henry knew that he was going to convince those men to go back to work. he knew that they trusted him he knew they believed him, he knew they would do what he said and I don't know this but I'll bet he was the most surprised man in the world when they said no, no, no were not going back to work, were going to have a union.

Footage of Loeb: as long as you continue to break the law and continue to break the law there will be no talks at any level of government.

News of a reporter interviewing citizens: do you agree with the stand that the mayor has taken in the sanitation dispute? (A white man is interviewed) Yes sir. Why? Mainly because the fact is that they are breaking the law. (A black woman is interviewed) No I do not. What do you think he should do? He should ah, go and give the people a ... just like everybody else (a white woman) I do definitely. Why? I have come to the conclusion that the more you pet somebody the more you have to pet 'em.

Footage of Maxine Smith (executive secretary Memphis NAACP): the community is very worked up about this, I can't really predicting what might happen. But there is very high feeling in the community.

Rev. James Lawson: when a public official orders a group of men to get back to work and then we'll talk and treats them as though they are not men, that is a racist point of view. And no matter how you dress it up in terms of whether or not a union can organize it's still racist and the heart of racism is that a man is not a man, a person is not a person.

N: when the men refuse to return Loeb hirers replacement workers while the strikers picket the depot the trucks heavily guarded by Memphis police begin their routs with. The mayor refusing to talk to union representatives. AFSCME president Jerry Worth arrives in Memphis, he knows that a loss here would be a major blow to his plans to organize the municipal workers throughout the South but he's not ready to back a major confrontation between a powerful mayor and workers who have not been prepared for the hardships of a drawn out strike. Hoping for enough of a concession to get the men back to work he takes the case to the newly formed city council which included three black members.

Jerry Worth: I want you to resolve that subject to the inhibition s in law that these men may collectively deal with you through a chosen representative.

N: When the council refuses to get involved worth is outraged their inaction pushes him further than he had intended to go:

Worth: this strike can only go on as long as these men these residents and workers of the city of Memphis want it to go on, and I assure you one thing on behalf of the 375,000 members of our international union that so long as they want help and the want help and support by god they are going to get that help and that support.

News footage: nearly 700 Memphis sanitation workers staged a 4 hour sit in demonstration at city hall today on this 11th day of the city garbage crisis the workers vowed would not leave until the city council produced a resolution recommending union recognition and the dues check off.

Bill Lucy (AFSCME official): We decided to sit in, there was no damage or anything like that we were just not going to leave and force the city to do something, either arrest all of us or address these issues so we set out to get food for 7-800 people.

N: While sandwiches are made the council's public works committee meets behind closed doors by evening, they return with a resolution to recognize the union and promise to present it to the whole council the next day.

Lucy: So, the meeting ended that day on a very high note the committee promised to present its recommendation to the council. The council would adopt it and that would be that.

N: but the morning papers express outrage at this perceived attack on the orderly life of the city strike supporters arrived at the auditorium to hear the vote at the same time the full council meets and decided that the previous day's resolution to be introduced. When the council finally appears, they vote to support the mayor and immediately adjourn.

Lawson: there was great anger outrage not only that they went back on their word to sizable numbers of us, many people from the black community, clergymen and the like but then that they abruptly adjured their meeting and that they would not even at least have some kind of a hearing to talk about what happened and why they changed their position.

N: hoping to cool off the crowd's anger union leaders get permission to lead a march to a nearby church.

NF: every one will fall in line in the street and march down in an orderly fashion.

When the marchers get a few blocks down the street police cars appear and begin pushing against them the crowd protests, but the police continued finally the men push back.

NF: police used riot control gas and night sticks this afternoon to break up a disturbance among a group of striking garbage men part of a group of about 1000 marchers began rocking the police car and police waded in.

Robert Beasley (local union officer): They just came in and started throwing mace on people. And I didn't think that was right. Then they recognized who I was. And they just got right in my face and starts blowing all in my face. Some of the guys picked me up and carried me on down, [INAUDIBLE] getting away from them.

Loeb: the events of today demonstrate that Memphis will not tolerate civil disorder and with continuing help and support of all the people of this city to whom I am most grateful for their many expressions of confidence, order will be maintained.

N: across town outraged strikers and community members gathered at union headquarters

Footage of the meeting: those people yesterday when they told me there would be an honest council meeting today and you and I would have a chance to talk to this council I regret I believed them, they lied to me and they lied to you.

N: as racial tensions mounted in the wake of the macing the black community organizes itself under the leadership of James Lawson, a major strategist of nonviolence in the civil rights movement

Lawson: the way these men have been treated thus far has galvanized Negroes and people of good will to their support we are declaring the slogan “No new clothes for Easter keep your money in your pockets.” In other words, we are insisting that we will discriminate in our right not to buy.

Footage of Rev. Ralph Jackson: We need some folks to march we need some folks to answer the phone and do clerical work we need people who can serve on pickets downtown. On the bottom of this page there is a place for you to sign your name what day of the week and what hours you are available to work.

James Lawson: to pass the offering plates we used buckets we had the standing room only people, people standing in the isles and every seat full in-between and these buckets went like clockwork right straight across the thing we didn’t need ushers, people did it themselves it was really a beautiful expression of common purpose and unity.

Beasly: the community backed us up 100% And we were so proud, said today we couldn't have made if it had not been for the community. We couldn't have made it.

Rev. Jackson: we will not stop until every black man gets a chance to lift himself up and begin to rise. We are on the march. And we will stay there. And nothing will stop us!

N: one day a new sign appears on the picket line

Rev. Billy Kyles and that sign just said so much the impact of it went around the world, and it didn’t say I want freedom it didn’t say I want a raise it didn’t say I want better health care, all it said was “I am a man”

N: As the community joins in daily marches and nightly marches the movement continues to press its demands on the city council.

Footage of a council meeting: the union organizers are being dismissed by the city council.

These men have fought for this country these men have died for this country. It’s been moved to adjourn the meeting well be back in the morning.

Bob James (city council): there was very little conciliatory talk there wasn't, nobody you couldn't negotiate with him any more than you could negotiate with the devil.

N: in response to the council's inaction the movement escalates its tactics; by refusing to leave the council chambers they forced the city to arrest hundreds of strike supporters

Rev. Lawson: and our power has always been in ourselves and in our people and in our unity in the courage that we have to say no to racism and injustice so this is about our unity our togetherness our standing our ability to face macing marching and anything else in order that out of that unity we will have victory

N: Meanwhile the white community rallies around the mayor

Lewis Donaldson (city Council): anywhere he, Loeb, went they would give him a standing ovation, and he'd ignore the black community. Man, I can remember going to the rotary club and all those places and everyone would just be clapping their hands shakin' his hands and it's mighty hard to back down when you're getting that kind of apparent support.

Loeb: Memphis has been known for a better way of doing business.

Blanchard: Almost everybody stood rock solid that we Whites knew what was best for those black people and on that rock, we stood for a couple of weeks not much longer though not much longer.

March 14th-

Bayard Rustin: If you can't get a decent salary for men who are working in the name of God how are you going to get rid of poverty.

N: The movement begins to attract the attention of national civil rights leaders.

Rustin: There has been so much tension between some of the trade unions and some of the civil rights groups that all over the country people are telling me that you can't depend on the unions they're anti negro they won't stand with you. Well, I think the record here shows that in Memphis that this fight is going to be won because the black people in this community and the trade unions stand together.

N: to maintain the momentum of the movement James Lawson invites his old friend Martin Luther King to Memphis as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference King is long seen the struggles for economic and civil rights as inseparable.

MLK: that is why Negro support labors demands and fight laws that cub labor that is why the labor hater and labor baiter is virtually always a twin headed creature spewing anti Negro epithets from one mouth and anti-labor propaganda from the other mouth.

N: To dramatize the connection between economic and civil rights has planned the poor people's campaign, a massive demonstration held in Washington that spring.

MLK: this will be no mere one-day march to Washington but a trek to the nation's capital by suffering and outraged citizens who will go and stay until some definite and positive action is taken to provide jobs and income to the poor.

Rev Joseph Lowery: The Poor Peoples Campaign was, was being discussed before the strike broke out in Memphis. It just so happened that that's where we've always maintained and the guard was in plan that the Memphis of the garbage workers, the sanitation workers provided a near ideal scenario to talk about eliminating poverty.

N: Members of King's staff thought he should devote himself to the new campaign and that Memphis would be a costly detour on the road to Washington after listening to arguments on both sides King makes his decision.

Burrows: it was just like Jesus was coming into my life I was full of light, and I was full of joy and determination, wherever dr. King was I wanted to be there.

MLK: All labor has dignity, but you are doing another thing you are reminding not only Memphis, but you are reminding the nation that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages. We built titanic buildings to kiss the skies, we built gargantuan bridges to span the seas, through spaceships we were able to carve our ways through the stratosphere, through our airplanes we were able to cross distance, through our submarines we were able to penetrate oceanic depths. it seems that I can hear the god of the human race saying even though you've done all of that I was hungry and you fed me.

Rev Middlebrook: It was just tremendous and he was quite thrilled and he'd mentioned it. It had been a long time since you had gathered that many people together at least 6000 and they were all in harmony, it wasn't somebody was shouting black power or something else we were in harmony and he'd noticed that he was impressed y that and he felt really good about that and it told him that the non-violent era was not over.

N: The atmosphere also moves him to increase his involvement in the striker's cause.

MLK: I'll tell you what you all can do here together in a few days you ought to get together and have a work stopping in the middle of the city of Memphis.

N: King promises to return in ten days to lead a mass demonstration in support of the workers.

Lawson: now the entire negro community is behind this struggle, and we are concerned not only what will happen with these sanitation workers but were serving notice on the city

of Memphis that the time for moving systematically, creatively, but hastily towards genuine change is at hand.

Rev. Frank McRay (friend of Harry Loeb): I tried over and over again to get Henry to realize what was happening. Because I would spend time with the sanitation workers in the basement of the old second Presbyterian Church downtown, and I saw them it was like a war zone people were bringing in supplies I mean like sacks of flour and sugar and groceries, basic survival kind of experience. I kept saying to Henry this thing is gonna blow up, this city is going to blow up.

N: As the date for the march approaches anti King sentiment grows in the white community.

Rev James Netters (city council): it was thick against him the threats were openly that so and so we don't need him here and whites would come to the council and say that openly and the council men would agree with him and you had to sit there and listen and hear exactly what they felt about him.

N: voices are also raised against King by young militant groups like the Invaders who were seeking a greater role in the movement,

Coby Smith (invaders): if you said black power, you were an immediate threat and we were saying it. Which was not necessarily welcome by the elements of the black power structure, they were very suspicious they did not want young militants telling people how to organize.

Rev. Middlebrook: if what you are pushing is a violent concept a concept that is so closely aligned to what the perceived concept of what Muslims and other groups were doing, guerilla warfare you know, how can you be brought to be part of the strategy team of a nonviolent movement?

Smith: most of us who were considered to be militant were trained in the nonviolent movement so it's not a question of our not believing in nonviolence it's that we saw nonviolence as a tactic and a tactic alone.

N: Unaware of the rising tensions in Memphis King returns to lead the march.

NF: several thousand negro demonstrators are participating in this largest civil rights demonstration ever in Memphis, TN many of the demonstrators are carrying the sign "I am a man" they stretch out for several blocks. Police are on hand with about 700 officers, almost the entire force is standing by here in case of any fights that may break out here.

N: a mile away at Amilton high school the first sign of trouble appears, the students throw stones at passing vehicles police descend on the school one young woman is seriously injured. And by the time the students join the march downtown, the story of injury becomes a rumor of death at the hands of the police. When Kings arrival is delayed militant voices can be heard in the increasingly restless crowd exhausted from his work on the Poor Peoples Campaign King finally arrives form the airport and the march begins.

Rev Middlebrook: when you looked at martin you saw the tiredness in him it was not a tiredness that a vacation relieves it was a deep tiredness, like a tiredness of the soul.

Lawson: At the head of us Beel street was filled to the sidewalks with people, I didn't quite like that, and we couldn't correct it and when I got about two blocks up the street on Beel I heard what sounded like windows breaking behind us.

The next thing we heard was sirens and police men were coming from every direction with tear gas and they started surging down on the lines. I remember one officer came right up in my face and bean to curse, someone near me was trying to tell him that this man was a city council man, a city official, and he said I don't give a damn who he is I mean get you and yours out of here now or you're going to get the butt of this gun or a bullet out of it.

Lawson: Then I ran back and I said Martin I need for you to leave the march and he protested and l said you see the police up there they're here for us and I refused to accept Martin's protests and I said take martin King down that way and get him out of the area.

N: for the first time King has lost control of a mass demonstration and is forced to retreat.

NF: Chaos has just broken out down town that sound you just heard was the sound of tear gas fired by a police man in an attempt to thwart this unruly demonstration I repeat several negro youths started running down main street smashing windows as they ran police have formed a cordon across main street in an attempt to at least calm the demonstration which has gotten completely out of hand.

Loeb: When the march degenerated into a riot abandoned by its leaders, police with my full sanction took the necessary action to go and to protect the lives and property of the citizens of Memphis.

N: determined that Memphis would not explode like Newark and Detroit Loeb calls in the National Guard before night falls the entire city is under martial law.

NF: they have invoked a curfew that requires all citizens to be off the streets of the city of Memphis by 7 pm tonight and remain off the streets until 5 am persons on the streets during these hours who do not have legitimate business or emergency reasons will be subject to arrest what needs to be done will be done.

Footage of a reporter interviewing a militant leader: The city of Memphis has willfully, and I mean willfully and vagrantly attacked the black community, it's a clear line here. But you have attacked Dr. King though by taking over what was supposed to be a nonviolent march and making it so. I don't know why you keep insisting on saying dr. King this is Memphis the city belongs to people here the black people have to set the temper of the times if dr. King is going to come in here he's going to come in her and ... a situation that and meet the needs of black people here. And if he doesn't? If he doesn't the same thing will happen everywhere he goes that happened here in Memphis.

Sen. Robert Byrd: what happened yesterday in Memphis was totally uncalled for as just as Martin Luther King's supposed march on Washington is uncalled for and unnecessary and I hope that all negro leaders and individuals in the negro community in Washington will now take a new look at this man who gets other people into trouble and then takes off like a scared rabbit.

Rev Middlebrook: and now it becomes a larger issue than just 1300 sanitation workers now the focus was and I think that that was one of the things that dr. King did not want to happen the focus is now moved from 1300 sanitation workers and their right to work and to earn a living and have decent benefits to an issue of is MLK still a creditable leader.

NF: Dr. King, you have been criticized for coming in from outside and then abandoning the march when the going got rough, what is your reaction to that? My only reaction is that I did not abandon the march when the going got rough; I have always said that I will not lead a violent demonstration.

Rev Middlebrook: He felt very down I think he was really wrestling with is my ... looming before me, am I really losing it? Has there been a change in the mindset of the people of this country and did I miss it?

Rev James Orange SCLC: it really got him sort of caught up in saying I'm not going to allow violence to take over the civil rights movement of nonviolence he went back to Atlanta and summoned all of us, I was working on the poor people's campaign and he summoned us all to Atlanta, we had seen on the news what had happened but he said that he wanted us to go back to Memphis and he was going to march he was going to have a nonviolent march in Memphis tn.

Rev. Middlebrook: Now events and nature have put it so he has got to come back to Memphis and he has got to organize and lead a peaceful nonviolent march in Memphis because if you can't do it here you get stopped coming out of Marks Mississippi, you get stopped coming out of Birmingham stopped in Georgia stopped in California wherever a leg of the PPC is coming from its stopped now.

N: While the nation is losing faith in King's leadership the strikers continue to be true to the nonviolent philosophy of King and Lawson.

MLK: Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis, we have to see it through. Be concerned about your brother, you may not be on strike but either we go up together or we go down together. the question is not if I stop to help this man in need what will happen to me the question is if I do not stop to help this sanitation worker what will happen to them that's the question.

N: as national involvement in the March increases King's staff arrive in Memphis to assure that this demonstration will not end in violence

Rev. Orange: and there was some dissention amongst some of the staff who didn't want to come back who thought it was a set-up, who thought it was a trick, you know and who thought the whole situation was set up to discredit him and to discredit the SCLC. Because a lot of the stuff that the FBI was doing and other law enforcement agencies were trying to discredit this organization, they saw this as another ploy to do more discrediting Dr. King was determined to come back to Memphis and to have a nonviolent march. If it became accepted that you could no longer have massive demonstrations it would have taken the heart and soul out of the movement, we simply couldn't let that happen.

N: through workshops and meetings the staff makes sure that this time the more militant factions are not excluded from the planning of the march.

Smith: we felt like we could mobilized 10-20 thousand people and that's what we were telling dr. King we can bring the people out if you let your folk know that you support our effort to do so and if you can get them off us we can show you what strength we have, but we have be full partners we cannot second rate citizens in this thing. So, he agreed he was ready to do that.

NF: the city awaits the arrival of MLK he plans to defy a federal court order that bans a second mass march and demonstration in Memphis next Monday it would now appear that if the court order is not amended or dissolved King is awaiting ... in Birmingham which is now another direct conflict with authority

Lawson: it was a gloomy day anyway cloudy it began to rain in one of our Memphis rains which was a persistent downpour. But the magnetism that was in that temple that night was really indescribable especially given that the lightning and the people came out regardless of the weather, it was really something to behold.

MLK: now we are going to march again, and we've got to march again in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be. To allow everyone to see 1300 of god's children here

suffering and now by injunction, we have an injunction we are going into court tomorrow to fight this illegal unconstitutional injunction. All we say to America is be true to what you said on paper, if I lived in China or in Russia or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions maybe, I could understand the denial of some of these basic first amendment privileges because they have gone and committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly, somewhere I read of the freedom of speech, somewhere I read of the freedom of press, somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for rights. And so just as I say we aren't going to let any dogs or water holes turn us around we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around.

Lawson: this was a rare moment with the rain on the outside with the feeling of the tense humanity on the inside we are engaged in something momentous/

MLK: We have difficulties ahead, but it really doesn't matter with me anymore because I have been to the mountain top and I don't mind. like anybody I would like to live a long life longevity has its place, but I'm not going to be concerned about that now, I just want to do God's will and he has allowed me to go up to the mountain allowed me to look over and I have seen the promised land, I may not get there with you. but as a people we will get to the promised land. so, I am happy tonight, I am not worried about anything I am not fearing any man my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Rev. Middlebrook: I think that Dr. King really thought it first that the great possibility that his death was going to come was going to take place somewhere along the road to Washington with the PPC but I think after the violence in Memphis the focus was changed and I think that he really knew that Memphis was the place

I went to 306 and I said it's 5:00 guys it's time to go and he said oh no we called the house and your wife said dinners at six and so we stood together he was here and I was here on that balcony and I said ok we are going lets go and I walked he was leaning over the rail talking to Jesse and Ben Branch was a musician who had the bread basket band.

Rev Middlebrook: and he said to him "I want you to play precious lord I want you to play it real pretty for me" and that was it.

NF: MLK was killed tonight in Memphis, TN, shot in the face as he sat alone in the balcony of his hotel he died in the hospital an hour later, I ask every citizen to reject the blind violence that has struck Dr. King who has lived by non-violence

Choir: "One more mountain to climb till I reach my journey's end, oh one more river to cross till I see my savior's face"

Loeb: we of Memphis are deeply saddened by the tragic event that has just happened here in our city, and we extend our deepest sympathy to dr. Kings' family we call upon all citizens of our community as dr. King would have wished to maintain peace and honor.

In his office he asked me to have a word of prayer, but the fact of the matter is that the mayor whom I was holding accountable for his death was asking me to pray in his office, that to me was the greatest insult of all my life.

N: Memphis clergy marched to city hall to confront the mayor.

Clergy men addressing Loeb: We who are white confess our implication in this tragic event by our failure to speak and to act clearly and specifically with conviction and courage to the attitudes of prejudice and patterns of injustice which produced a society in which this act could occur. We ask all who share this feeling to join us in this confession. Mr. Mayor this is the third time that I have come to you pleading if we had been able to, to get a hearing as ministers of the black community we never would have needed to send for King or anybody else but you would not hear you will not hear now.

N: April 8th, people from across the country join the Memphis black community to keep Dr. Kings promise to stage a nonviolent march in support of the striking workers

We had announced that this was to be a solemn quiet march that day and believe it or not it was hard to hear people talking, all you could really hear was the sounds of leather against pavement, people walking.

Walter Reuther (pres. United Auto Workers): I want to say to the sanitation workers who are manning the picket lines in this struggle that you are not alone we are with you. And I say to Mayor Loeb even though it may be painful before this fight of the sanitation workers is over were going to drag you into the 20th century somehow.

N: under pressure from all sides Henry Loeb allows negotiations to resume and for any settlement to be sent directly for any settlement to be sent directly to the city council for approval. Loeb himself will never budge from the stance that he has held from the first day of the strike.

Footage City council meeting: those in favor of the motion will signify by saying aye...

Worth: as of this morning as of less than a half hour ago your committee reached an agreement with the city.

N: union officials spell out the terms of the agreement, they include salary increase benefits, grievance procedure and most importantly of the union by the city of Memphis.

Footage of union meeting: all in favor say aye, aye! All opposed stand now. There ain't going to be anyone, loud cheering.

Footage of T.O. Jones: I want to say you've been grieved many times, but I presumed that this was all in the making of the ... we've asked many things and we've got the victory.

J Jones: when the strike was settled he cried he had a telegram in his hand and he showed it to me and it was from Hubert H. Humphrey the vice president of the united states at the time and Hubert H. Humphrey was congratulating him on winning the strike and he admired him for that and my father was sitting there in the chair he was just holding it and he was just crying it was just beautiful.

N: against all odds and without consulting the international union these men had confronted the laws of Tennessee and the power structure of the old south. 63 days after walking out they returned to work as heroes in the struggle of people everywhere for civil rights and decent working conditions. Their victory gave Jerry Worth's union the momentum to organize municipal workers throughout the south. Two weeks after the end of the strike MLK's PPC began its march to Washington from the Lorraine motel. But it was the Memphis strike that marked a turning point in the civil rights movement by demanding that people see and hear its working poor.

Burrows: "I am a man" I guess it did mean something didn't it.