



**“THE WITNESS: FROM THE BALCONY OF ROOM 306”
RECEIVES 2009 ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATION**

**Film Chronicles the Final Days of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as Seen
Through the Eyes of One of the Last Surviving Witnesses**

Los Angeles (January 22, 2009) – The thought provoking, “The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306,” has been nominated for Best Documentary Short Subject at the 2009 Academy Awards®. The piece chronicles the final days and hours of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as told through the eyes of his contemporary, Reverend Samuel “Billy” Kyles, who stood on the balcony with Dr. King when he was slain that fateful day at the Lorraine Motel in 1968.

Executive produced and produced by Margaret Hyde, and directed by Adam Pertofsky “The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306” emphasizes the ongoing relevance of the Civil Rights Movement as a beacon of hope for all people in struggle the world over. 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.

“The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306” helps us remember and pay tribute to the inspirational leaders of the past while acknowledging how far we have come as a nation having just experienced what is perhaps the most amazing chapter in our presidential history. Kyles, a leader in the Civil Rights Movement himself, recounts conversations with Dr. King that occurred moments before his death and provides insight into the movement that changed history.

Now 74 years old, Kyles has witnessed the power of Dr. King's legacy. As Kyles 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."

Kyles chronicles his time with Dr. King leading up to the fateful shot including Dr. King's efforts to gain community support for the striking sanitation workers in 1968, the famous marches through Memphis and 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, 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 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 just couldn't imagine 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."

“The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306” premiered in the spring of 2008 at a daylong commemoration to Dr. King on the 40th anniversary of his death, which was held by the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. It has been shown at numerous film festivals including the Santa Barbara International Film Festival and was awarded “Best Documentary Short” at the Palm Springs International Film Festival 2008 and the Cinema St. Louis International Film Festival 2008. The 81st Annual Academy Awards® will be presented on Sunday, February 22 at the Kodak Theatre at Hollywood & Highland Center.

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.

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.witnessroom306.com.

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