

Our Fight

This is who we are. This is where we come from. This is why our fight matters right now.

1968. Memphis, Tennessee. The heart of the Jim Crow South.

African American sanitation workers were called “boy.” They faced poverty wages, a plantation-style work environment, and degrading, unsafe working conditions. The city refused to recognize their union, or even their basic humanity.

After two sanitation workers were crushed to death on the job, 1,300 of their AFSCME Local 1733 brothers stood together, risked everything, and went on strike. They demanded dignity and respect. They marched in the streets carrying placards with four simple, but powerful words: “I AM A MAN.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. traveled to Memphis to rally the community and express his solidarity because he understood the connection between labor rights, economic rights, human rights, and civil rights. On the evening of April 3 at the historic Mason Temple, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) International Headquarters, Dr. King delivered his famous “Mountaintop” speech. Less than 24 hours later, he was gunned down on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of this watershed moment. On April 2-4, 2018, AFSCME, COGIC, and civil, human and workers’ rights leaders will gather in Memphis for a series of events honoring Dr. King’s legacy and the courage and sacrifice of the sanitation workers.

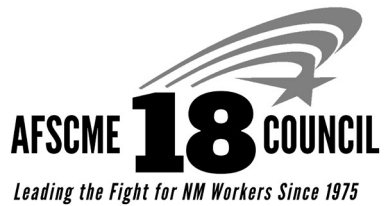
The I AM 2018 initiative is about drawing inspiration from the heroes of Memphis and connecting their struggle to today’s challenges, like improved safety policy and necessary equipment at work.

I AM 2018 isn’t just a reflection on the past; it’s a call to action for the future. An urgent call to fight poverty and prejudice, advance the freedom of all working people, and remind America that there can be no racial justice without economic justice and no economic justice without racial justice.

LEARN MORE about this 2018 series of events: IAM2018.org

Learn more about our New Mexico Union: AFSCME18.org





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We ask you to join us in I AM 2018, as we memorialize the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., struck down in the struggle for justice, our struggle, and your struggle too.

I AM 2018 will be an occasion for reflection, and an opportunity to re-commit to carry forward the causes for which Dr. King fought, and for which the Memphis public works workers—the pioneers of our union, AFSCME Local 1733—marched in 1968.

We particularly wish to remember **Echol Cole** and **Robert Walker**, the sanitation men crushed to death, **February 1, 1968, 4:20 pm**, in the compactor of a malfunctioning, obsolete truck, in which they had sought shelter from a downpour. They were 36 and 30 years old, respectively, trying to raise a family on the minimum wages paid by the city. Their deaths sparked the walkout of 1300 fellow sanitation workers.

We ask you to join us on February 1, 2018, for a national Moment of Silence. That day should not be a “normal” work day. For sanitation workers like us, we ask that every garbage truck in America come to a full stop at a moment of your choosing, so that every worker can reflect—and re-commit. This occasion should be for all public service workers, not only trash collectors. However you can mark this observance (whether a moment of silence, a stopping of work, a rally or a prayer meeting), we will feel your solidarity.

Together, we will resolve that day to wake up America. There is so much to be done, so much business unfinished from 1968. America needs to re-engage with workers’ aspirations: for dignity on the job, for quality public services, for prosperity to be shared among all of us, for human rights for everyone.

About AFSCME

AFSCME’s 1.6 million members provide the vital services that make America happen. With members in hundreds of different occupations — from nurses to corrections officers, child care providers to sanitation workers — AFSCME advocates for fairness in the workplace, excellence in public services, and prosperity and opportunity for all working families.

About COGIC

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) headquartered in Memphis, TN is one of the oldest and largest Pentecostal denominations in the world and the 4th largest Protestant group in the United States, with churches in 87 countries worldwide and a membership of nearly 6.5 million adherents.

