



Wattstax
(Documentary, 1973 USA)
Director: Mel Stuart
Study Guide

Synopsis

Experience the history and the soul of the African-American community in Watts, Los Angeles, 1972. *Wattstax* documents the gathering of over 100,000 at the Los Angeles Coliseum, hosted by a very young Jesse Jackson, for the 7th anniversary of the Watts riots. The music of The Stylistics, The Staples Singers, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Bar-Kays, and the legendary Isaac Hayes held the forefront of the spirit so vigorously displayed here. Interviews with the residents of Watts combined with astounding, sublime monologues by comedian Richard Pryor create an invocation-we are delivered from place and time to become in tune with this politically loaded era and the flame of the soul performing and reflecting it.

Study Questions

- What do you know about the Watts riots of 1965?
- What do you know about the “Black Pride” movement of the 60’s and 70’s?
- Did the movement improve the quality of life for African Americans? If so, what go better? If not, why not?
- How big a role does music play in your life? Do you feel that current recording artists speak to your generation? Which ones and why?

Discussion Questions

- Judging by the reflections of the Watts residents interviewed in the film, what did the Watts riots accomplish? Was there a lasting impact?
- In your opinion, how much has the attitude of the police toward African Americans changed in the past 30 years since the film was made?
- Did the Watts residents interviewed say anything that you feel still applies today? If so, what was it and why?
- What impact does humor have using serious issues such as social injustice and violence (like Richard Pryor’s in the film)?