



### **Unique identifier**

*Who Killed the LA River?*

### **Singing**

They say you gotta to learn, but there's no-one to teach me, they can't preach jungle to survive on the streets.

### **Girl**

God, I know about the ocean, I know there's a Pacific Ocean, I know there's a Lake Hollywood.

### **Girl**

I can honestly say I have never even heard of the LA River.

Background singing

### **Voice Over**

Hard to imagine living in a city and not knowing that it has a river, but it's just as hard to imagine that this is a real river.

### **Woman**

It was man-made, not well, well yeah, I guess it's a real river, but it's man-made.

Background singing

### **Woman**

The river is the reason we're here and we've got no recognition of that in this culture.

Background singing

### **Voice Over**

Some residents believe that a misunderstood and abused river deserves some justice.

### **Patt Morrison, LA Times**

I came here from the mid-West; when you say 'a river' in the mid-West you mean a large, flowing body of water that seems to do its thing year round. And here I was in Los Angeles at the age of sixteen, bravely criss-crossing in a car this concrete ditch, and one day I looked to my right and there was a sign that said 'Los Angeles River', and I looked down and saw this vast wasteland, this yawning gulch of concrete, and I thought this can't be, this cannot be a river. What I wanted to find out was what had existed before this concrete ditch. Surely there was something there. To use a movie term – what was the back story of the Los Angeles River, and why had it been put out of existence? Who killed the Los Angeles River – and why?

### **Clip**

A record rainfall causes the worst flood in the Golden State's history.

### **Voice Over**

In 1938 thousands of acres were flooded and over a hundred people killed.

### **Clip**

Wreaking havoc on the threshold of movie-land but what isolates studios and stars in this drama of destruction?

**Voice Over**

The Los Angeles River made some powerful enemies.

**Clip**

Even steel bows the nature's bows; this is the Southern Pacific mainline bridge into Los Angeles, mangled by an irresistible force.

**Voice Over**

Long considered an unpredictable river, its days of running free were numbered.

**Clip**

The spirit of Los Angeles proves equal to the occasion. California courage laughs at disaster.

**Voice Over**

For thirty years Carl Blum was the engineer in charge of keeping LA from being washed away.

**Carl Blum, LA County Dept of Public Works**

I understand the force of the river and the destructive power that could be there. The LA River which is the backbone of the whole drainage system here in Southern California is probably the most sophisticated urban flood control system in the world. It's protecting ten million people and it does it very efficiently. The Los Angeles River, if you go back a century prior, had a tendency to move back and forth throughout the flood plain in Southern Los Angeles County, and I mean that's where probably five million people live right now, so they're basically saying you can't let it wander around, you've got to do something with it, and keep it in place.

**Clip**

Was it the engineers who killed the river? Were they the brains behind this massive operation? Seventeen thousand men pouring a billion pounds of cement on a river fifty miles long was no accident.

**Patt Morrison, LA Times**

The unofficial religion of Los Angeles is real estate equity, buying real estate, holding on to it, turning it over for a great profit. Anything that interferes with that, of course, is sacrilege. The Los Angeles River took off the market every year hundreds and hundreds of acres of real estate when it flooded, so they had to have a river that they could contain, that they could say this far and no further, and sell land right up to the edges of it, which is what they did for decades.

**Voice Over**

With an ancient river dead, and its historic flood plain declared safe to inhabit, the stage was set for a massive wave of development that would cover LA in a sea of even more cement and asphalt.

**Richard Riordan, LA Mayor 1993-2001**

I think there were good arguments saying that Los Angeles should still have a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand people, and should be able to live with the flash floods and should be able to live with the Los Angeles River that's still flowing and in its natural state. But that's not the fact. The fact of the matter is that it was put, cement was put in that river and other, other streams that are a part of the flood control, and man's ten, some, about ten million people live in this area, and we can't turn that around.

**Voice Over**

But there's been a dramatic and almost unbelievable twist to the story of who killed the LA River. An improbable movement is growing to bring a dead river back to life. It's a movement that wants to see justice for a river and justice for those communities living near the river, long deprived of open green space.