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I Am A Man

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Photo by [Joshua J. Cotten](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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“We can disagree and still love each other...unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist”

-James Baldwin

On February 12, 1968, 1,300 black sanitation workers in Memphis went on strike regarding sub-standard working conditions and higher pay. On March 29 of that same year, thousands of people marched in a protest led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, carrying signs which simply read...“I AM A MAN.” Although the context and issue of this strike have been generalized as “union talk,” the placards worn by the countless men of the Memphis sanitation community speak to some deeper foundational inequalities, and disparities that existed then and still exist today.

Since March 29, 2021, I have watched the court proceedings unfold in the trial of Derek Chauvin, the officer charged in the death of George Floyd. I have watched this process reopen a box filled with pain, anger, anxiety, expectation, and frustration which many of us people of color have been burdened with carrying for so long. With each new event, each new death, each un-inclusive act, the weight of that box gets heavier and heavier to carry. Sadly, like most issues of injustice, the burden has been placed unfairly on the backs of the victim to carry.

As I process and reflect on what my eyes have seen, and my ears have heard, I find that same box getting heavier. As the witnesses testify, the jurors listen, the news agencies report, and people debate on technicalities, I am reminded of the black and white picture, which sits on the window sill of my office. It is there as a reminder to look deeper, understand deeper, know deeper, what are the real issues that exist. Just like the man in the photo, taken during that March 29, 1968 sanitation worker’s protest, there are deeper issues here, written in large, plain, clearly legible words...I AM A MAN.

As emotions run high, and communities embrace a verdict, understand that there are deeper issues that are represented in this trial. James Baldwin wrote, “We can disagree and still love each other...unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist.” Regardless of the verdict the deeper issue remains and will continue to exist, as long as people refuse to go deeper. So, I will continue looking at

the picture on my window sill, keeping my reality in check, I would only amend the placard to read...I AM HUMAN.

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