



Memphis Flyer, April 5, 2018 “City Cuts Ribbon on ‘I AM A MAN’ Plaza,” by Maya Smith
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City Cuts Ribbon on ‘I AM A MAN’ Plaza
POSTED BY MAYA SMITH ON THU, APR 5, 2018 AT 1:34 PM

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A once abandoned parking lot rife with weeds next to Clayborn Temple has been transformed into a plaza honoring the 1968 sanitation workers.

Constructed on the corner of Hernando and Pontotoc, the new ‘I AM A MAN’ Plaza officially opened Thursday.

The centerpiece of the plaza is the phrase ‘I AM A MAN’ sculpted in stainless-steel.

Cliff Garten, of Cliff Garten Studios in California who helped design the plaza said as he was contemplating what it should look like, he realized there was “nothing more eloquent than what the sanitation workers simply stated in 1968.”



“The ‘I AM A MAN’ sculpture brings these iconic words into a new moment in our history 50 years later,” he said.


Garten, who was selected from a list of national candidates, said the idea was to create a place that causes people to “feel and respond to” the Clayborn Temple, as a significant landmark in the civil rights movement.

“Let there be no doubt, that the ‘I AM A MAN’ plaza was made for you and belongs to Memphis,” Garten said. “But it also belongs to America.

“It’s a place to teach, a place to gather, a place to feel and to contemplate these significant historic events.”

The city’s UrbanArt Commission, along with local landscape architect John Jackson of JPA, Inc, and poet Steve Fox who wrote the text etched in one of the plaza's stone sculptures, also contributed to the project.

“People will come from all over to hear the story of what happened here,” McGowen said.

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Bordering the plaza is a marble wall with the names of the 1,300 sanitation workers who participated in the 1968 strike. Inside the dedicatory wall, on the pavement are the dates and descriptions of significant events that led up to the strike and took place during it.



Dedicatory wall with the names of all 1,300 sanitation strikers

Doug McGowen, the city's chief operating officer said the space will "surely be iconic for our city and for the world."

"People will come from all over to hear the story of what happened here," he said.

While, Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland said the site will serve as a permanent place to "reflect on Memphians who, quite literally changed the world."

