

# U.S. MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN MLK HOLIDAY IS AN INSULT TO PACIFIST LEADER



Ever since the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. was first celebrated as a national holiday in 1986, the U.S. military has attempted to co-opt the commemoration by insinuating itself into local activities around the country, acting as if King's supporters ought to welcome the tacit endorsement. King himself would be horrified to learn of this turn of events.

For example, in San Diego various military contingents march in a MLK parade, military recruiters shadow the parade soliciting young participants and observers, and a JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) color guard participates in a MLK breakfast. Peace activists in other cities report similar instances.

Prior to his assassination, King repeatedly spoke out against the use of violence to resolve conflicts — which is, of course, the hallmark of the military.

In particular, King raised his voice against U.S. military conduct in Vietnam. According to David Garrow in his book **Bearing the Cross**, King resolved to help end the war after he viewed pictures of Vietnamese children maimed by napalm dropped on civilians by the U.S. military. In 1967 King called the U.S. government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today,” according to Garrow.

King also objected to the war because African Americans and other people of color were dying in disproportionate numbers in Vietnam. Moreover, many black GIs were being harassed by officers and were not receiving deserved commendations, reinforcing racial oppression and economic injustice found elsewhere in society. This tradition continues in today's military, where people of color are still more likely to wind up in military prisons and much less likely to be made officers than whites.

King criticized the racist nature of the military and thereby linked the issues of civil rights and militarism, much to the dismay of government officials who henceforth tried to discredit him. But a popular

movement to promote King's ideals succeeded in overcoming the objections and a national holiday in honor of King was established.

In a move to appropriate the MLK holiday every year, the military participates in various events. By doing so, it hopes to obfuscate King's moral outrage at the crimes against humanity committed by the military.

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**I HAVE CONDEMNED ANY ORGANIZER OF WAR, REGARDLESS OF HIS RANK OR NATIONALITY.**

*Martin Luther King Jr., Seeds of Liberation, 1964*

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Let's honor King by challenging the military institution that glorifies violence and sends recruiters to MLK celebrations — and into our high schools. Let's challenge the illegitimate authority of the Selective Service System — and laws that deny college financial aid to draft resisters. Let's call for a federal budget that focuses on education, health, transportation and environmental concerns rather than building weapons of mass destruction and military forces that are more than willing to use them.

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