



**DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS CENTER**  
**DEFENSE HUMAN RESOURCES ACTIVITY**  
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MEMORANDUM FOR: SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: 2021 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Observance

On January 18, 2021, the Department of Defense will join the nation in celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King (MLK), Jr. Day. Largely influential in the American Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King was a major advocate of non-violent activism in the struggle for the end of racial discrimination under United States law and equal social opportunities for all.

The 2021 theme, **“Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On, Not A Day Off!”** commemorates, honors and celebrates Dr. King’s legacy and his vision for equality for all. We are encouraged to perform acts of service and to reflect on the principles of our nation – that all people are created equal, regardless of color, gender, or creed, and we are equal members of the human family. We should continue to work together in an effort to achieve our nation’s goal of creating a more perfect union.

As our nation reflects on this MLK Day of Service, it is important to acknowledge how Dr. King’s message reverberated to African American Service members and veterans during the Civil Rights era. African American soldiers experienced inherent racial bias in the draft, discriminatory treatment in the armed forces, and institutional racism in all branches of the Services. It was a slow and painful evolution to a non-segregated and welcoming military environment. Soldiers that returned from World War II and the Korean War lent their expertise to Dr. King and the Civil Rights movement based on their experience.

On June 2, 1964, Dr. King and the world witnessed one of the crowning legislative achievements of the Civil Rights movement, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. Dr. King was instrumental in the signing of the Act which has led to equal opportunities such as women and people of color becoming high ranking officers in the military, members of Congress, business owners, pilots in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration missions, President and Vice-President of the United States.

I encourage all of you to find a worthy cause and make Dr. King’s Day of Observance an opportunity for service. Make it a day on, not a day off. The greatest way to honor Dr. King’s vision for an equal and just nation is to reach out to fellow citizens and serve. For additional information please visit, <https://www.deomi.org/human-relations/special-observances.cfm>.

Clarence A. Johnson  
Director

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