

Chair's Message



Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Every January brings the celebration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Although his birthday is January 15, this federal holiday is celebrated on the third Monday of the month, this year January 18. Whereas this holiday was signed into law in 1983, it wasn't until 2000 that all 50 states officially observed this day. I was an 11 year old girl growing up in a small town north of Memphis when Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis. My parents explained that he'd been killed because he was trying to help the abused and underpaid sanitation workers in Memphis fight for a union so they could have better wages and humane working conditions. I asked why that would upset people, and at the time their explanation made no sense: they were underpaid because they were Black. This is the first time I can remember being personally aware of "race" as defining what kind of a life a person lives. 2020 was a year of many painful reminders that race still defines the life a person lives. The murders of Black people by police certainly illustrate in stark terms the impact of white privilege, i.e., the implicit advantages given to people who are White. I think white privilege was on display last week when White demonstrators stormed the Capitol to try and reverse the election outcome and were met with a police force unprepared to "control" a group of White demonstrators compared to police "control" of Black Lives Matter demonstrators. This MLK Jr Day, I recommend you re-familiarize yourself with his most impactful and compelling speeches. [This link to Time magazine](#) includes one of my favorites - it is not a speech but a letter to local clergy from the Birmingham jail in April 1963. This letter is the source of my favorite quote of his: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". As we embark on a new year and celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy and life, let us rededicate ourselves to becoming aware of white privilege and systemic racism, educating ourselves about the harms that result from systemic racism and acting to confront systemic racism directly, especially in health care. After the incredible year we have just experienced, I could not be more grateful for the dedication, resilience, adaptability and courage of all Baystate employees and for the insightful, steadfast, and fearless senior leadership. I wish you a year of health and happiness with less drama and uncertainty and more joy that comes from being a part of this learning community.