

## Letter to the Editor: MLK reached for an end to poverty and nuclear arms

January 17, 2007

Your Jan. 15 Martin Luther King Jr. Day editorial appropriately emphasizes that King fought for "more than civil rights" and that ending poverty was one of his central concerns at the time of his assassination. But what does "poverty" mean? You cite the official US statistic for the poverty rate as 12.6 percent for 2005. Yet this measure is still based on a formula arrived at in 1965: a low-income food basket multiplied by three, without consideration for housing or fuel costs.

Using 2006 data, the official poverty measure translates to \$16,600 for a family of three and \$20,000 for a family of four. When I ask my students how much money they think a Boston-area family of three (mother and two children) needs to escape poverty, they generally agree on a yearly income of at least \$40,000 to \$45,000. But a "**self-sufficiency**" **standard** developed by researchers at the Women's Education and Industrial Union found that, in 2003, a family of one adult and two children would require an income of \$51,284. This standard took into account the costs of child care, housing, healthcare, and transportation, in addition to food. The federal poverty line is an outmoded measure that grossly misleads the public into thinking that only a small percentage of the American population is poor.

MARGUERITE ROSENTHAL  
Jamaica Plain