**The Somebodies Behind Martin Luther King Jr.**

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**Abstract**

Leaders help cultures see problems and change to new paths. What happens when cultures reject change or think change is not possible? Engrained mindsets come from adopted worldviews formed over time as influenced by people or events that shaped their value system. As a result, the adopted worldview serves as a filter determining future adoptions and rejections of ideas. Leaders will need to engage the worldviews to affect long-term change. This journal article will list the major somebodies in King’s life that shaped his worldview and how he, in turn, used a worldview-leadership style to shape others’ worldviews from a cognitive and emotional manner to create a somebodiness in every person.

**The Somebodies Behind Martin Luther King Jr.**

Some would never guess the great civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “I was determined to hate every white person. As I grew older and older this feeling continued to grow” (Carson 2001, p. 7). How did King’s emotion of hatred shift toward an agape love that confronted the conscience of every American to help shift their thinking? King’s evolution came from how he identified the need to “Develop with ourselves a deep sense of somebodiness. Don’t let anybody make you feel that you are a nobody” (King, 1967). As King grew, he had numerous somebodies in his life that created that somebodiness by challenging his thoughts and actions. If this great leader’s mind can change, he thought he could help others change as well.

Four major early-childhood events shaped King’s view of racism and began to engrain in him a hatred for white people at an early age. The first occurred when as a preschooler, King played daily with his closest friend who was also a preschooler and son of a white storeowner, whose business was across the street from King’s home. When King and his friend entered school, his friend’s father would no longer allow his son to play with King, and King’s awareness of racial tension became very real. Second, when King’s father needed a pair of shoes, Daddy King entered the store and sat in the chairs up front waiting to be helped only to be told by the merchant that he would need to move to the back of the store to be served. The third resentment surfaced when observing how his father was mistreated during a targeted traffic stop when the officer berated his dad. (King, 1958, p. 5; King Sr, 1980, pp. 107-108; Mwita, 2004, p. 197), Oates, 1982, p. 12). The fourth deep-seated impression came when he was fourteen, King participated in a speech contest some 40 minutes outside of Atlanta. He and his teacher were forced to stand for the duration of the bus trip, as white men comfortably sat (King & Carson, 1998, pp. 9-10). Later, when King became a student and bus rider at Booker T. Washington High School, and each day he would have to move to the back of the bus as white people boarded and sat in the front. He formed a determination for what should be when he said, “every time I got on that bus, I left my mind on the front seat. And I said to myself, one of these days I’m gonna put my body up there where my mind is” (King & Carson, 1998, p. 9).

With these four indelible memories, King’s worldview expectedly polarized how he viewed white people. His emotional pain and his sense of rational right did not align, and King began to cultivate anger for the system and white people. King’s parents spoke with King about the history of slavery, Lincoln, the Civil War, and his mother told him that King was always to think of himself as somebody(King, 1958, p. 4; Oates, 1982, p. 10). As he grew older he identified the conflict within his internal worldviews. While his parents stood up against the system, they expected him to love the people who created the system (King & Carson, 1998, pp. 7-10). The realities of Southern culture entrenched in segregation found their way into King’s worldview at an early age.

King’s formative years included his familial, Black church, academic, and personal influences that continued to challenge his identity through how he thought and felt. Each influence formed the fabric of is worldview, one in which he challenged others as well. This journal article will list the major somebodies in King’s life that shaped his worldview and how he in turn used a worldview-leadership style to shape others’ worldview from a cognitive and emotional manner to create a somebodiness in every person.

**Five Categories of Influence in King’s Development**

King’s direction came from five specific categorical sources of influence on his worldview: his formative years, academic mentors, theologians, philosophers, and a broad category labeled as other relationships: mentors, advisors, and close friends. Scholars of King tend to argue for a primary influence on King’s life, but one cannot get to the mountain top speech without acknowledging the lesser influences as well. The influences become part of the ideas, phrases, and principles found in King’s speeches which can easily be traced back to the people, texts, professors, and formative years of his life.

A short review shows notable King scholars who exclusively wrote from one of the five categorical approaches: his formative years, academic mentors, theologians, philosophers, or broad historical perspectives. Some prominent researchers who showed how King developed theologically or philosophically include Zepp (1971), Smith and Zepp (1998), Baker-Fletcher (1990), and Ansbro (1982), all of whom focused on his intellectual quest centered around his higher education. Likewise, King scholars Garrow (2007, p. 50), Lischer (1995, p. 5), and Cone (1986, p. 28) reminded readers that the primary influence on King’s life came from relationships like the Black Church. Garrow (1986) continued in the formative years category along with Carson (King & Carson, 1998), and deemed King’s parents and grandparents, his early childhood experiences, the gospel, Black Church, and Christ the most influential forces on the mental development and behavioral aspects of King. This brief article covers a vast number of influencers on King’s worldview, though there will invariably be omissions. However, the actual inspirations of King went well beyond the exclusivity of any one category.

Scholars continue arguments regarding his primary influence. Lischer (1995) noted that “Perhaps no famous contemporary has amassed so large a troupe of ‘influences’ as King” and went on to say “no one can doubt that they played a significant role in his development” (p. 7). To focus on any one category might diminish the entirety of other influences. Contrary to these and other scholars who narrowed the influence on King to a single dominant category, his worldview developed from the totality of rational and emotional sources discussed in this article.

**Theologians**

King’s professors provided a religious liberal tutelage, the texts and subjects also included a number of other iconic and seminal theologians. The theologians’ concepts formed foundational content for King’s rhetoric. Reading speeches delivered by King, one can easily spot the theological influence of Augustine, Thomas of Aquinas, Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, Tillich, Ramsey, Barth, DeWolf, Brightman, and Muelder.

King wrestled with the ethics of disobeying government laws and found the theological solution in **Augustine’s** explanation of unjust laws (Baker-Fletcher, 1993, pp. 130-131). Augustine (A.D. 395) argued in *De libero arbitrio* that any law that is unjust is no law at all (Augustine & Brepols, 2010, pp. I, 5). Augustine did allow for civil disobedience when a natural law opposed God’s ordinances (Ansbro, 1982, p. 116; Deane, 1963, p. 147).

King appealed to **Thomas of Aquinas’** (1225-1274) natural law for legitimacy in his acts of civil disobedience (Marino, 2010, p. 121). Aptly stated by Marino (2010), “A harbinger of the Enlightenment, Aquinas taught that since we are God’s creation and God gave us reason, reason alone can discern right from wrong in the form of what Aquinas called ‘the natural law’” (p. 121). Aquinas explained God’s “*eternal law* is nothing else than the exemplar of divine wisdom, as directing all actions and movements” (Thomas, 1912, pp. Ia, IIae, Q.93, a). He further explained how “the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law” (Thomas, 1912, I-II, Q. 91, a. 2) and expressed how humanity would often use natural law to favor self-serving interests.

King identified certain cities’ ordinances and injunctions, like Selma and Birmingham, as natural laws used to preserve white power and suppress voices for morality (Branch, 2006, p. 38). Refusing to consent to natural laws, King violated the court injunction against a protest in Birmingham and was arrested on Good Friday April 12, 1963 and placed into solitary confinement. King began to pen the now famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail*,*” a response to his white-fellow clergy who insisted King and the other demonstrators cease and conform to the laws (Branch, 1988, pp. 730-739). In this letter, King referred to Aquinas’ doctrine “that an unjust law is a human law that is not based on the eternal law*”* (Ansbro, 1982, p. 117; King, 1964b, p. 85). King contrasted his explanation when that same letter said, “A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God” (Dyer, 2012, p. 2; King & Washington, 1992, p. 90). King was following Aquinas’s eternal law and rejecting unjust laws. Both Augustine and Aquinas served King’s ethical foundations for justifying arrests in the face of unjust laws that ignored all humanity bearing the image of God (Dyer, 2012, pp. 2-4).

Professor George W. Davis introduced King to the writings (Garrow, 2007, pp. 42-43) of **Rauschenbusch** (1861-1918), a theologian, who fifty years prior to King’s studies at Crozier, merged rational socialism and the fervency of evangelism to launch the Social Gospel movement (Lischer, 1995, p. 54). The contribution from Rauschenbusch included three major concepts for King: advocating the prophetic role of religion, suggesting the church should take on an active social change role, and adopting the ideal that the Kingdom of God is attainable on earth (Garrow, 2007, p. 43; Smith & Zepp, 1998, pp. 31-41).

**Reinhold Niebuhr** and King were contemporaries, and as such influenced each other as Niebuhr’s views challenged King’s adoption of personalism and religious liberalism (Blakely, 2001, p. 2; Lischer, 1995, pp. 61-62). Niebuhr acknowledged appreciation for how King had taken a non-violent approach to his view on balance of power and tension (Kirby, 1999, p. 11; R. Niebuhr, 1961, p. 118). While Niebuhr spoke about power and the power of *agape* love, King used tension when not getting resolution:

The very essence of politics is the achievement of justice through equilibria of power. A balance of power is not conflict, but a tension between opposing forces underlies it. Where there is tension, there is potential conflict, and where there is conflict, there is potential violence. (R. Niebuhr, 1935, p. 189)

King rejected Niebuhr’s dismissal of the power of *agape* to engage tension, but wrapped Niebuhr’s view of tension into the personalism found in other theologians like **DeWolf, Brightman, and Muelder** (Ansbro, 1982, p. 158). King may have found Niebuhr’s tension similar to Hegel’s argumentation tension with the obvious parallel to bring a stronger solution or outcome (Lischer, 1995, pp. 61-62). Kirby (1999) argued that “King’s study of Reinhold Niebuhr’s doctrine of human nature shook the foundations of his liberal social gospel theology” (p. 10) which contributed to bringing King back toward his conservative roots.

King earned his Ph.D. after defending his thesis on Paul **Tillich**. German born, Tillich would become a Lutheran pastor. He came to America and taught with Niebuhr at Union University in New York, later at Harvard, and then the University of Chicago (Tillich, 1952, pp. xi-xiii). Tillich (1954) wrote *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* from which King drew his strategy of how love provides one “power to achieve justice” (Ansbro, 1982, p. 7).

King combined Niebuhr with Tillich to implement the triad of justice, power, and love when he noted that love does not replace justice but complements it (Franklin, 1990, p. 70). King called for cultural change through Tillich’s use of love and not power:

What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. (Yes) Power at its best [applause], power at its best is love (Yes) implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. (King, 1967)

It was Tillich’s influence of *agape* love that allows forgiveness among suffering compared to the transactional approach of *phileo* or *eros* where contingencies create the love (Carson, 1993, p. 311). *Eros* and *phileo* result in transactional exchanges dependent upon both parties providing some action or exchange, but *agape* does not rely on a transaction but offers love even in an unfair swap (Kirby, 1999, p. 6). Franklin (1990) described King’s pursuit of a just society by stating how *agape* “Love is the only force capable of empowering ordinary people to take life-threatening risks on behalf of eradicating the causes of injustice rather than merely treating its symptoms” (p. 70). King understood and leveraged the power of sacrificial *agape* love.

King’s thread of *agape* love runs through numerous sources of influence to include Richard Paul **Ramsey**, who served as professor of religion at Princeton and was a noted ethicist for nearly forty years until his death in 1988 (Miller, 1990, pp. 71, 74-75). He wrote *Basic Christian Ethics* (1950), and showed King how the Good Samaritan defines one neighbor even as an enemy-neighbor and how such love is required of all men (pp. 94-98). King’s sermons and speeches addressed the love expected toward one’s neighbor to include friends and enemies just as Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount and the command “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Ramsey, 1950, pp. 99-100). Ramsey’s (1950) view of love in Scripture taught Christians to possess a “disinterested love for neighbors” (p. 92), meaning the concern for others does not require one to identify enemies or friends (Ansbro, 2000, pp. 26-27).

During graduate school, “King navigated between theological liberalism’s optimism for personal and social change on the one hand, and neo-orthodoxy’s emphasis on a more ‘realistic’ assessment of human potentialities on the other” (Kines, 2014, p. 7), and in his dissertation, King argued, through Tillich, both support and criticism for **Barth** (King, 1955, pp. 15-17, 26, 41, 112). Despite his reservations about Barth, King drew from him the theology to clarify the Black church struggle (Cone, 1984, p. 6). Barth explicated the book of Revelation with the language that explained how humanity interacts through seeing the “new creation as a city, and not a church. The fullness of and redemption of creation ‘is not an eternal Church but in the *polis* built by God’ (Barth, 1954, p. 19)” (Guth, 2011, p. 146). The idea and expectation that God was building the *polis* gave hope that God’s fairness, justice, and the absence of oppression may be in Heaven rather than earth. Later in life, King would meet Barth, who admired King’s leadership and cause. Others would note parallels between the two men: both were flawed religious leaders who worked from a theological perspective in the midst of a social crisis; Barth’s in the rise of National Socialism in Hitler’s Germany and King’s in the discrimination and injustice in Montgomery, both thought theology was the basis to changing people’s worldview, and both fought injustice (Anderson, 2015, p. 10)

**Philosophers**

A pragmatic King accumulated arguments from each of the following philosophers, but the current study limits the scope to only the germane ideas often seen in King’s speeches. King cited philosophers to connect to a broader audience (Lischer, 1995, pp. 142-162). When speaking to larger, especially white audiences, King referred to Western thinkers hoping to show his academic intellect and critical thinking (Cone, 1986, p. 411). He deployed **Hegel’s** dialectic model and argumentational tension (Ansbro, 182, p. 119-121, 123-125 & Lischer, 1995, pp. 61-62). King used Hegel to suggest the opportune time for action or *Zeitgeist* (Kirby, 1999, p. 9)*.* He constructed logical arguments using Hegel’s opposite poles of tension designed to find a middle ground solution. King used **Marx’** idea of capitalism by classes as depicted within American culture in the 1950s (Garrow, 2004, pp. 117, 195). Like in Plato’s *Republic*, Marx envisioned a classless society where justice reigns in the bourgeoisie (King et al., 2005, p. 411; Marx & Engels, 1959, p. 29).

*Time Magazine* named King man of the year for 1963 and pictured King’s shadow casting a silhouette of **Gandhi** because of his methodological influence on King (America's Gandhi: Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., 1964). Gandhi had read **Thoreau’s** *On Civil Disobedience,* and King studied Gandhi’s direct nonviolent resistance containing “concepts of *satyagraha* (soul force) and *ahimsa* (non-injury)” (Kirby, 1999, p. 11). King read *On Civil Disobedience* (Thoreau, 1849)several times while at Morehouse College and was intrigued with the possibilities that resistance would offer in protest (McElrath, 2007, p. 40). Gandhi may have given King a model for resistance that was nonviolent and peaceful, but it was Christ who provided the motivating spirit (King, 1958, p. 67; Kirby, 1999, p. 13). Gandhi modeled nonviolent protest and love in Satyagraha, but King acknowledged how on the cross Christ demonstrated the ultimate example of *agape* love instead of hating his violent oppressors (Oates, 1981, p. 310).

William Edward Burghardt **Du Bois** started influencing the King family 23 years prior to Martin’s birth when Martin’s maternal grandfather followed Du Bois’ call to join the Georgia Equal Rights League (Carson, 2003, p. 699). The influence passed from one generation to the next as African American parents taught their kids how to find their identity in a white world. The parent, regrettably, had to show children the realities of the white worldview even though they knew justifying an injustice posed a contradictory paradigm that stretched the trust between parent and child; this was Du Bois’ double-consciousness. The profuseness of King’s recitation from incarceration helped the reader identity the unjust double-conscious paradigms and in *Where Do We Go From Here,* King (1968) wrote “the American Negro is neither totally African nor totally Western” (p. 53). While the argument was Hegelian, the content was Du Bois.

King’s study of **Plato** revealed how fourth century Greece’s elite viewed with disdain the working class and slaves similarly to the 1950s American segregated schools and housing developments allowing King to recount history’s classism development and how one class suppressed or ruled others (Carson, Shepard, & Young, 2001, pp. 201-223). The harm of such classism would not be eliminated with emancipation, because slavery’s juxtaposition was a Jim Crow system (King & Washington, 1991, p. 213). Much like Plato, King developed a mind for presenting truth as he ventured into the dark cave of southern segregation to free the prisoners of Jim Crow.

King disagreed with **Nietzsche’s** restriction of Christian love as only an emotional element when Nietzsche suggested that love caused one to give up power and that likewise power lacked love (Kirby, 1999, pp. 5-6). King (1968) countered Nietzsche saying that power and love are not polar opposites when King argued:

Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice. (p. 37)

**Kant’s** work *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* offered King a foundational argument for how every human is a rational being. Rather than considering African Americans as a *means* to an end, American culture should value every person as an *end* (Baker-Fletcher, 1993, pp. 79-80; Kant, 1964, pp. 61-73, 95-107; Kirby, 1999, p. 7) and position African Americans, like Caucasians, as rational beings within the categorical imperative and as such on equal footing (Kirby, 1999, p. 7).

The concept of the **social contract theory** naturally hypothesizes the agreement between two parties, the people and their rulers or government. Over time the social contract becomes a codified worldview; people simply accept what they surrender in exchange for a citizen’s rights and benefits. The social contract of man comes from a minimum of four philosophers who also influenced King’s thoughts and speeches: Thomas **Hobbes**, John **Locke**, Jean-Jacques **Rousseau**, and John Stuart **Mill** (Honderich, 2005, pp. 174-175). King argued from this moral position of social contract theory that represented all people and yet African American’s freedoms had been suppressed (King & Carson, 1998, pp. 17, 21).

**Other Relationships**

King intellectually connected people of diverse thought for his mutual goal, the dignity and justice for all people (Oates, 1982, p. xiii). A number of people worked tirelessly alongside King and at times advised him on his messaging. Some of his relationships included mentors, advisors, and close friends. Focusing entirely on the sources of King’s speeches necessarily excludes advisors in other areas. Some notable omissions include key relationships like Wyatt **Walker**, James **Bevel**, Hosea **Williams**, Jesse **Jackson**, and Roy **Williams**, but one cannot ignore one of King’s closest friends and colleagues, **Abernathy** (King et al., 1997, p. 12).

As King realized that he was destined to ministry, he watched, listened, and learned from many pastors and preachers who would shape how he articulated the previously noted influential sources. His sermons and speeches reflect the style and rhetoric of those he admired. Some of the most notable included **Buttrick, Fosdick, Brooks, Taylor, Ray, and Borders** (Lischer, 1995, pp. 48-52, 64-66).

**Formative Years**

The earliest adopted presuppositions by King came from his formative years. The diligence of his parents to guide him along with his experiences growing up in the church as a pastor’s child had a profound affect on King’s worldview and development (King et al., 1992, p. 363). Parents, grandparents, the Black church, and his Southern Baptist formed life-long values, some of which he left for a season, only to return.

Garrow (1986), Carson (1998), and others deem King’s parents and grandparents, his early childhood experiences, the gospel, Black Church, and Christ the most influential forces on the mental development and behavioral aspects of King. It was in King’s childhood home that the dinner table became a place to shape how he interpreted the world through discussions with **parents and grandparents**. King’s Southern black heritage, parents, and grandparents played a significant part in King’s trajectory. His parents talked with their children about history, society, events of their day and regularly engaged their children about the race problem (Oates, 1981, p. 302). Without his father, known as Daddy King the single greatest influence on him becoming a preacher (King et al., 1992, p. 363), King might not have delivered the Holt Street address.

King grew up in the **Black church** subculture reading his Bible that neither separated nor made distinctions in races (Lincoln, 1989 pp. 616-619). The Black church provided an escape from the injustices of life, and as Myrdal (1996) explained, “it must never be forgotten that the Negro church fundamentally is an expression of the Negro community,” and it was there “the downtrodden common Negroes have craved religious escape from poverty and other tribulations” (p. 877). According to Cone (1984), the most significant impact “that shaped King’s theology, in my judgment, was the oppression of black people and the liberating message of the black church” (p. 412). The Black church offered solitude from the suffering, encouragement of values within the suffering, and anticipation of the future as evidenced in how King’s speech content modeled what he heard growing up in the Black church (Baldwin, 2010, p. 6).

**Liberal and Conservative Views of Christianity**

Due to World War II taking many men from the colleges, Morehouse’s President Mays and other college presidents experimented with recruiting promising young men below typical college age (Mays, 2003, p. xi). Priding himself on his critical outlook, King said, “I had always been the questioning and precocious type” (King et al., 1992, p. 35). King enrolled at Morehouse and started college at age 15. Through his professors and texts, King’s journey from Ebenezer to Morehouse College changed his idea of what the church does and its potential influence on society (Lischer, 1995, pp. 52-53). King’s drift toward liberalism and views not fitting within the neo-orthodoxy of his roots became evident in papers written at Crozier (King et al., 1992, pp. 225-230).

However, several years after graduate work, King grew disillusioned with liberalism and returned to a Barthian theology and neo-orthodoxy that reflected his roots. Later sermons reaffirmed the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and the Scripture as the foundation to his messages (Cone, 1984, pp. 409-420; 1986, pp. 21-39; Garrow, 1986, pp. 5-20). Upon leaving Boston University, King superimposed religious liberalism and conservatism within his messages and speeches, but as he grew older, his liberalism faded away as he returned to his Baptist roots (Lischer, 1995, p. 57).

**Worldview Leadership**

King’s uncommon oratorical skills were surpassed only by his content and passion from which he argued for the dignity and value of African Americans. The education he received from each institution provided and shaped a framework for King’s worldview that permeated his many speeches (Lischer, 1995, pp. 6-9). The audiences who heard King’s speeches were comprised of people with racial traditions, segregated beliefs, and prejudiced biblical convictions. Each of these views formed the culture that became part of the fabric of the nation for nearly 200 years, which created a cultural worldview composed of many individual worldviews (Emblem, 2013, pp. 24-26). King understood the origins of people’s beliefs and frequently used ideas of love, human value, nonviolence, moral order within the universe, a rationale for peaceful civil disobedience, and a theology that he structured intellectually within his speeches to withstand accusations of perspective, opinion, and emotion rooted in the racially codified cultural worldview (Lischer, 1995, pp. 44, 51-52, & 58-62).

He modeled leadership that challenged a diverse and divided culture to shift their thinking and their actions. From Montgomery to Memphis, he framed his childhood Christian roots, philosophical learning, and theological tenets in maxims and aphorisms everyone understood. Because King engaged a culture, not seeking change, his worldview-leadership style helped others develop a different mindset and is worthy of examination. Worldview changed King, and as a result that worldview was communicated to audiences in order to change their worldview (Carson, 2001, pp. 7-9).

**Leadership**

By definition, leadership cannot operate in isolation and relies on a relationship between the leader and follower. Ciulla (2004) emphasized the moral aspect and an ethical approach of leadership as she defined the quality of interaction between leaders and followers in this way: “Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good” (p. xv). Bass and Riggio (2006) said transformational leaders “are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacities” (p. 3). Leadership is the ability to influence people to passionately pursue goals that morally benefit the culture. King brought a transformational rhetoric and demonstrations within his leadership that would ethically change hearts and minds.

**Culture**

The debate continues over whether leaders or context creates opportunities for historical change. Carlyle (1842) argues for leaders being the catalyst, while Tolstoy (1869) argued for the context and will of the people to change history, rather than the leader. Tolstoy contended, “Whatever happens and whoever may stand at the head of affairs, the theory can always say that such and such a person took the lead because the collective will was transferred to him” (Tolstoy, Maude, Maude, & Mandelker, 2010, p. 1285). Wren’s (2011) wraps both leader and context within his five Cs of interpreting history: change, context, causation, characters, and connections (pp. 71-74).

The nexus of the two words context and characters, as Wren (2011) described, have cultural bearing that connects an individual to the setting. One might further ask if there is one culture in a given context or multiple cultures forming a context. Barna (2005) suggested that the majority view of all people form the culture, singular (p. 8). While Colson (1999) allowed latitude for more than one culture through tribes, states, and organizations, he believed worldviews, plural, form values that create action points used within a single culture but explained that one culture exists from the predominate view (pp. 5, 131, 308). King was a gifted leader who found himself at the Zeitgeist, right context, to affect change.

From the arrest of Rosa Parks to the march on Washington, King encountered multiple cultures, some larger than others. Through hundreds of speeches delivered, King addressed the overarching culture of a racist nation filled with policies and actions from a dominant group negatively treating a dominated group (Miller, 1990, pp. 75-79). King attempted to shape meaning, influence beliefs, and establish new norms. He was changing worldviews, which in turn would change subcultures and the overall racial culture of America (Wills, 2005, pp. 194-198).

**Worldview**

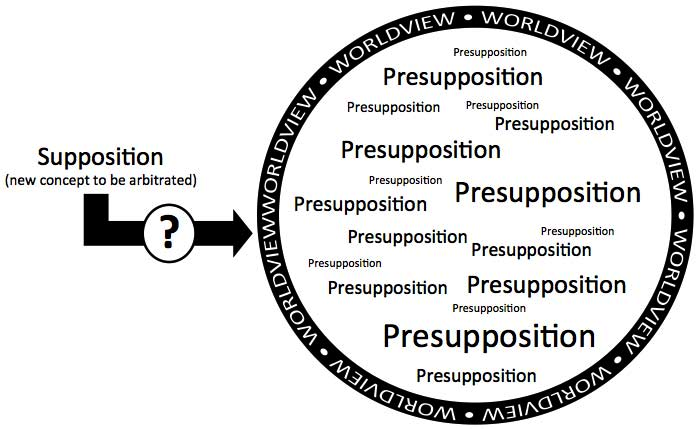
The German word *Weltanschauung* translated into English produced the word *worldview*. The term *Weltanschauung* or worldview literally means “view of the world.” Orr (2002) specified the nuances of the German interpretation of worldview to go beyond the predominant English emphasis solely on physical nature and also required the cognitive aspects of both a philosophical and theological framework (p. 3). Worldview is a byproduct of the development of one’s intellect where norms cultivate over time as a set of oughts and ethics for interacting with the world (Moreland & Craig, 2003, p. 395). King’s worldview developed intellectually and emotionally throughout his life but especially accumulating philosophy and theology when in the academic arena.

The choices a person makes comes from his or her value-accumulation of the mind, heart, and imagination (Hunter, 2010, p. 7). Naugle (2002) delineated the nuances of worldview and how one uses *Weltanschauung* with an intellectual unconsciousness (p. 61). If one’s worldview operates in the unconscious, then everyday decisions, opinions, and value judgments all occur without deliberation as this process develops over time. Racism became an unconscious worldview resulting in further deliberation that unleashed immoral oppression of other humans made in the image of God.

**Presuppositions and Suppositions Within Worldview Development**

The norms or established accepted truth upon which one compares or contrasts new information is the basis of a person’s worldview (Jeffner, 1992, p. 138). In Dilthey’s (1957) work, the translation may have been the first to use the term presuppositions. This term describes every assimilated piece of data and experience that a person has considered, positively or negatively coded, and connected through series and patterns to converge into a foundational set of beliefs that determines how one interprets the world. After Dilthey (1957), Dooyeweerd (1984), and Sire (2009) used the term presuppositions in that same cataloguing concept. What then should one call a presupposition, an item considered and catalogued into one’s worldview, before it is adopted? If a presupposition acknowledges previous processing, then a supposition represents a new concept or hypothesis introduced but not yet categorized, proven, or adopted. Simply stated, one has to evaluate the new suppositioncompared to what he or she already has pre-supposed and adopted as correct*.* The arbitration of each supposition combined with a lifetime accumulation of presuppositionscreates a worldview (E. L. Johnson & Watson, 2012, p. 270; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012, pp. 215-216)*.* See Figure 2 Worldview Is a Collection of Presuppositions which forms a filter for determining additions or rejections to one’s values.

**Figure 1 Worldview Forms a Filter of Collection of Presuppositions**



*Note:* To adopt a presupposition, one must arbitrate or give consideration to a new idea or hypothesis called a supposition. A supposition can be a challenge, twist, variation, or nuance to any previously established belief or value. Suppositions might introduce a new idea never previously considered. A person will arbitrate the supposition through the filter of previously adopted suppositions that are now presuppositions through adoption or rejection. If this supposition adds to a previously adopted value, it makes that presupposition stronger or a more engrained belief, which is depicted by the larger presuppositions above. Presuppositions argue from what is accepted, and suppositions pose an argument to what might be accepted. One can easily see why new suppositions have difficulty breaking through a lifetime of adopted bents and values. The question mark in the arbitration process is further developed in detail in Figure 2.

Just as King had numerous somebodies posing suppositions for his consideration, King’s speeches and demonstrations challenge previously adopted presuppositions within a very racially engrained culture. As new suppositions are introduced, the new information may challenge previously adopted information, presuppositions, that are now beliefs. Life creates constant attempts to re-examine new ideas, and worldview by its very nature suggests a “codified way of thinking” (Simons, 1990, p. 11) and a “theoretic axiom” (Dooyeweerd, 1984, p. 115). However, the synthesized axiom does not suggest a belief that is unmovable, but does imply a tendentious or engrained mindset rooted over a long period of endlessly analyzed suppositions forming one’s own set of presuppositions (Schaeffer, 1976, pp. 19-20). A worldview reveals one’s bent, prejudice, fixation, predisposition, partiality, and bias. King (1968) accurately portrayed racism as a poison of “prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry that had been intricately imbedded” (pp. 13-14) in all political, social, and economic institutions of American life especially the South, but also existed in the north and west. For the worldview code or axiom to change, one must introduce conflicting suppositions in a way that causes one to consciously re-appraise what had been a subconscious conclusion (Dooyeweerd, 1984, p. 115). King knew from personal experience that one’s own worldview could change from the introduction of new ideas. King recognized that evil would always exist in this world. He then worked to help people deal with evil by showing love through non-violent reactions (Rathburn, 1968, pp. 38-40).

**Changing Culture Through Changing Worldviews**

Violence was typical in the civil rights era; but violence perpetuated and escalated the racial tension (Litwack, 2009, pp. 3-4). The Gandhian philosophy of non-violent protest appeared counterintuitive but produced a de-escalation in British controlled India (Nojeim, 2004, pp. 5, 7-9, 216-217). King (1968) called what he wished to accomplish in the United States a “counterrevolution” through “an accumulation of many short term encounters” to “usher in a complete order of justice” (p. 13). For cultures to change, leaders must help followers or potential followers examine poorly adopted values in exchange for passionately adopting new ones. King spent his entire adult life trying to change racial culture through introducing new ways to think about races.

**Cognition Informs Worldview**

# Descartes (1644) said, *Cogito ergo sum,* “I think, therefore I am” (Descartes & Reynolds, 1988). While Wolters (2005) does not say how beliefs are formed, his definition and argument of worldview originates from “one’s basic beliefs” (p. 2), or a cognitive framework and very different from feelings, which “do not lay claim to knowledge, nor can they be argued” (p. 3). A number of worldview scholars, such as Wolters (2005), Olthuis (1989), Dooyeweerd (1984), Ryken (2013), and Sire (2009), appear to argue from a cognitive position. Their arguments use theology, ontology, or metaphysics as the fundamental framework upon which beliefs arise.

**Emotion Informs Worldview**

Opposite Descartes (1644), Spinoza (1677) countered with, “I feel therefore, I am” arguing the mind is an extension that perceives what the body feels (Garrett, 1996, pp. 88-100). Spinoza and experiential worldview scholars argue that emotions shape feelings and responses to suppositions forming what one loves and hates with varying degrees of threat-or-friend type assessments. Contrary to cognition forming the source of worldview, the second mode identifies feelings or emotions, which operate in the unconscious and serve as a catalyst to actions or experiences to create the suppositional query causing emotions to feed or inform worldview. In other words, worldview stems from people’s experience, actions either in a participatory or observation mode, as causation for emotions (McGilchrist, 2012, p. 185). The approach described unconscious experiences and emotions occurring nearly simultaneously causing most to suggest that experience and emotion are synonymous. Smith (2013), a leading worldview scholar holding to emotion as the origin of worldview, reasoned that people follow their passions, specifically what they love (pp. 32-33). The premise to Smith’s book *Imagining the Kingdom, How Worship Works,* claimed a variation of Augustine’s “what you love is what you worship and what you worship is what you love” (Neff, 2013, p. 54).

**Cognition or Emotion – Which Steers One’s Worldview and Actions?**

Neuroscience explains subconscious decisions.Beyond what one loves as a motivator toward action is how humans operate in the unconscious through a series of experiences. The classic unconscious action examples are riding a bike or driving a car. The rider of a bicycle makes numerous adjustments and corrections in balance, steering, pedaling, and braking all without having to think about each step (Eagleman, 2015, pp. 76-84). Polanyi (1958) described what happens on the bicycle as “tacit knowledge” and suggested that “we know more than we can tell” (1966, p. 4) suggesting subconscious knowing affecting actions. Likewise, a driver of a car can arrive home and forget about the details of his or her trip to include not being sure if the traffic lights were red or green because of what is known as the “auto-pilot” effect. Experiences create cognitive adoption upon which more actions and reactions are accepted and adopted.

King (2010) noticed how African Americans had come to unconsciously accept the Jim Crow system, “without apparent protest. Not only did they seem resigned to segregation per se; they also accepted the abuses and indignities that came with it” (p. 23). Duhigg (2014), author of *The Power of Habit,* described the engrained culture of 1950s Montgomery as how “Racism was set in its ways” (p. 219).

This all begs the question, “Does emotion or cognition inform worldview?” Which set of scholars is correct? Experience, emotions, and feelings have been proven to prompt mental and physical reactions that bypass the thalamus and visual cortex where rational thoughts occur (Eagleman, 2015, pp. 68-97; Stacey, 2015). Cognition allows the policy making and long-term meaning surrounding boundaries for societies (Dooyeweerd, 1984, pp. 88-89, 115; Olthius, 1989, pp.29; Wolters, 1989, pp. 16, 20-22). Smith (2013) argued for emotion as origination and equated it to experience. One could counter the argument with how it is not the experience that shapes a worldview, but the evaluated experience that categorizes it into a value. Similarly,one can observe how emotions generated by a new supposition are reactionary by comparing how the cognitive evaluation of the emotions creates a proactive response. If both automatically occur, then the mind and emotion work in conjunction much the way two people ride a tandem bike; sometimes cognitive rides up front steering, and other times emotion determines the path. King knew how to steer the bike alternating the drivers from among the vast influencers who took him down intentional paths as well. Leaders know how when certain drivers work best based on the context and audience.

Emotional intelligence (EI) combines leadership theory and psychology. Northouse (2013, p. 27) compared emotional intelligence as an interplay between emotions (affective domain), which shows one’s ability to understand, to thinking (cognitive domain), which describes how one learns information and tasks. Goleman (2012), a major scholar in emotional intelligence, described most people as reacting to emotional moments with a charged energy that needs governing with intelligence (pp. xxii-xxiii). The balance of emotional and cognitive inputs help one sort through and arbitrate values to create healthy and moral responses or actions just as the classic fight or flight response driven from emotional impulses is triggered from the brain’s thalamus and amygdala that overrides the cognitive process to create a quicker reaction (Goleman, 2012, pp. 17-19; LeDoux, 1986, 1992).

Retroactively, Goleman (2012) applied Aristotle’s insight from *The Nichomachean Ethics* when saying EI is “being able, for example, to rein in emotional impulse; to read another’s innermost feelings; to handle relationships smoothly—as Aristotle put it, the rare skill ‘to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way’” (p. xxiii). Understanding that cognition and emotion both inform worldview, then the arbitration process starts by informing the person through mode in either a cognitive or emotional means. The following visual helps one understand how the informing process or mode introduces the new supposition to be weighed against a matrix of assimilation or rejection. Once outcomes are adopted or assimilated, the new supposition becomes a presupposition that affects one’s actions. See Figure 3 The Worldview Arbitration Process.

**Figure 2 The Worldview Arbitration Process**

A diagram of a diagram of a funnel

Description automatically generated

*Note:* The question mark from Figure 1 is depicted here as the entire Worldview Arbitration Process. A new supposition informs one’s worldview through either a cognitive or emotional entry point and is filtered through the presuppositional framework of theology, philosophy or ethics, and experiences. Theology operates as *primus inter paras,* Greek for first among equals, where the first among a group of peers who will bear a higher status without actually influencing the prerogative of the others. In this case, theology is first a filter from which philosophy and experience flow. Arbitrated suppositions form presuppositions resulting in a person’s actions. A person then evaluates, both cognitively and emotionally, his or her own actions and the actions of others in an ongoing re-evaluation and reinforcing process solidifying or challenging his or her previously adopted presuppositions. The result is either adoption and action or rejection and continued observation.

**King Utilizing Cognition and Emotion in His Worldview Leadership**

While humans possess the flight or fight instinct generated from the unconscious reactions, the mind also operates as a pre-organized mechanism to classify “good” or “bad” criterion (Damasio, 2005, pp. 114, 117). The 1950s American culture categorized and labeled black and white to match concepts with a previously determined set of unconscious norms such as back of the bus and front of the bus and a host of other segregated presuppositions (Rowe, 1989, pp. 162-165). Interestingly, a young person or child was introduced to the two water fountains and that posed a supposition prompting him or her to ask why are there two fountains? Their parents see the colored drinking fountain as a presupposition, and while they do not like it, have accepted the cultural norm (Oates, 1981, p. 302). King (2001), based upon some early experiences of racial discrimination, began to evaluate the suppositions and try to rationally and experientially change the culturally adopted presuppositions (pp. 6-12).

Regarding experience as an emotional catalyst, King wrote, “the experience in Montgomery did more to clarify my thinking on the question of nonviolence than all of the books I have read” (King & Washington, 1991, p. 38). King did not dismiss the bibliographic cognitive gains nor could he determine the impact of the experience without cognitive preparation. The metaphor of the tandem bicycle appears to answer the conflicting views. Neither cognition nor emotion should ride without the other even though both methods alternate steering or powering the bike.

King recognized the unfair rules and used his intellect and academic acumen to frame sound and logical arguments for a new worldview, ones based on theological, philosophical, and experiential filters (Oates, 1982). The heart and mind work indissolubly the same way as leader and context with worldview affecting people’s minds, feelings, and wills (Hunter, 2010, pp. 44-45). Worldviews of leaders collide with followers’ worldviews as leaders help followers navigate the maze of finding new sets of merged ideals (Heifetz, 1994, p. 15).

King understood how African Americans saw abuses and used emotional experiences to justify violent reactions, but he asked them to consider a new starting point of reacting with an unconditional non-violent loving response (Miller, 1990, pp. 74-75). Just as Christ saw the sin of the woman at the well, His love sought to show her healthy love in order to redeem her soul. King knew that oratory alone would not be enough (Branch, 2006, p. xii), and he used the action of nonviolent protest to change the emotional experience, build an ethical philosophy, and frame it from the basis of theology for both sides: the racist and racially discriminated against, and a third side—the bystanders who held no position nor opposed the injustices of the Civil Rights Movement (King & Washington 1991, pp. 292-298).

Events of Selma, Birmingham, and Chicago engaged America’s conscience with new suppositions that challenged older adopted presuppositions. King’s speeches combined rational arguments with emotional storytelling. The speeches combined with peaceful demonstrations created new suppositions for a racial set of presuppositions to be re-adjudicated. King knew how to align the arguments to help re-shape worldviews emotionally and cognitively in ways that cast a different trajectory for an engrained culture. None of which would have been possible without the somebodies who shaped King’s worldview from both cognitive and emotional perspectives.

**Conclusion**

How did a young man, new to leadership, guide various followers through a seemingly impossible set of obstacles and maze of complex issues? King did so in the most unexpected manner; the somebodies who influenced the rich content of both his sermons and speeches called for a change in culture based upon his own worldview assimilated over his lifetime. His acute mind and eagerness in his formative years paved the way for higher education, the source of the substance that filled his rhetoric. His worldview modeled and taught how to return love for hate and display nonviolence in the face of the opposition’s merciless aggression.

The tangential connection between the person and group cannot be overlooked whether through worldviews, groupthink, or followership. If one knew all the variables that caused King to be a leader of change, then it begs the question, could one create a scope and sequence of training, texts, and teachers that would build a morally integrative mindset into all races? The problem with this suggestion becomes quickly obvious in that not everyone will interact with the cognitive pieces the same way nor have the same emotional experiences. Leadership training could include a pedagogy with a specific scope and sequence of both cognitive and experiential components but only with worldview adoption could like-minded groups of people passionately pursue outcomes.

King used a logical set of arguments from theologians and philosophers to confront people’s presuppositions with new moral suppositions. He also understood the emotional approach as his speeches contained passion in the delivery, but his actions garnered support as caring people witnessed abuse against the peaceful protestors. King, a change agent, used his worldview-leadership to help transform the values of the culture. Leaders today can continue to become the somebodies in others’ lives to challenge how groups think and lift the auto-responses of people to a collective moral set of attitudes and actions.

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