The Moral Leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Abstract

Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the most important and influential leaders of the 20th century (Mattson, 1999). King’s leadership was extremely effective because of his morality, which was developed in his life through his parents, church, and actual life experiences. Kohlberg's moral development theory is utilized in this paper as a framework to examine the moral development of King. Several of King’s writings and personal experiences are presented to illustrate his growth through the three moral stages of Kohlberg’s theory. The moral development of leaders is not something that occurs quickly, and a Christian’s moral development does not occur as a result of their own power but God’s power working in them (Ryan, 2012). King’s life illustrates an important point of moral leadership: a moral leader’s words are powerful because of the example that they provide in their own life (Scott, 2006). This study furthers the research on moral leadership by profiling one of the greatest moral leaders of all time.
The Moral Leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.

There has been an increased interest in morality and ethics as a result of the persistent threats of terrorism and the recent economic crisis (Koh, 2012). Additionally, the corporate scandals that have taken place over the past decade have resulted in questions that need to examine the meaning of leadership and its moral dimensions (Saft, 2003). The purpose of this paper is to profile the moral leadership development of Martin Luther King, Jr. in an attempt to learn about his motivation, how he was able to impact the lives of others, and to explore some of the dimensions of moral leadership.

Paris (2008) explains, “Out of the segregated crucible of Atlanta’s black ghetto, a young man emerged with national and international visibility who was destined to lead his people and nation out of the bitter experience of racial oppression into a new era of freedom” (p. 17). As a moral leader in the civil rights movement, one of King’s main purposes was to bring America to the place in which it would be able to recognize its own evil (Selig, 2009). King’s leadership led to many changes and he had a great influence on the United States, which included Presidents Kennedy and Johnson (Erskine, 1991). King’s morality was founded on strong moral ethics, which sustained him through some difficult years of leadership.

Morality

Morality and ethics refer to rules or ideas that one refers to when solving a moral dilemma (Ryan, 2012). Morality is deeply imbedded in people and culture, and its importance has risen as a result of so many leaders failing on ethical and moral issues (Ryan, 2012). Chong (2011) explains that morality may be understood as a disposition or attitude that does not tolerate corruption, but promotes integrity, honesty, and impartiality. Liddell and Cooper (2012) explain
that the term moral development is an interchangeable term with ethical development as they both focus on similar issues.

From a Christian perspective, morality is best understood as being incorporated in the process of spiritual formation because morality is grounded in God (Ryan, 2012). The spiritual component ensures that there is a underlying source for morality and that it should be represented in daily relationships with others (Ryan, 2012). The process of spiritual formation and moral development is more God’s work than a person’s work as the Holy Spirit must work in the lives of Christians to help them grow in their morality (Ryan, 2012). Long (2013) explains that the “Christian moral life is widely and correctly understood to be not merely the life of natural virtue, much less of disordered nature consequent upon original sin” (p. 357). As God transforms a Christian’s life, the person will lose their immoral and unethical habits and replace them with God’s qualities.

The church needs to address the issue of morality as well. Greggo (2010) posits that Christian theology must address contemporary moral and ethical issues so that people may make informed decisions that honor God. Christian leaders who address contemporary moral and ethical issues may be ostracized, but it is their responsibility to lead and teach in a world that is failing from a moral standpoint. Du Toit (2012) explains that the exemplary conduct of Christians will silence their critics. 1 Peter 2:15 states, “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.” Christians who exhibit a moral lifestyle provide a defense for their position related to moral beliefs.

There are seven positions related to moral beliefs: (a) nihilistic, (b) monistic, (c) pluralist, (d) scepticist, (e) syncretist, (f) relativist, and (g) contextualist (Driesen et al., 2010). The nihilistic position assumes that when there are cases of moral uncertainty, there is no possible
response (Driesen et al., 2010). The monistic position assumes that there is only one possible choice that can be accepted, while the pluralist position assumes that there are several perspectives on a choice and some of the choices are not necessarily better than the other options (Driesen et al., 2010). The scepticist position assumes that one cannot be sure of which moral decision is actually right or wrong. The syncretist position is willing to accept and combine all moral stances. The relativist position thinks about all moral choices, but only one is accepted as correct in one’s mind. The contextualist examines culture and tradition to make a moral decision that merits acceptance (Driesen et al., 2010). Christian leaders often take a monistic position in regards to moral beliefs but that is very difficult for leaders in a world and culture that is based on relativism.

Döring (2006) states that morality and ethics form a foundation from which trust may be built. Trust is an important relational component by which leaders connect with their followers. Therefore, morality is a critical component of leadership that must be examined.

**Moral Leadership**

Leadership is irrevocably tied to morality because as it is “measured by its results, leadership in whatever field should be the vision-driven achievements of those people who are able to transform their environment, morally elevate their followers, and chart new paths of progress and human development” (Safty, 2003, p. 84). Human development cannot go forward if it is lacking in morality. In regards to leadership, a leader must provide good examples of how to live and operate; because that example gives their words power (Scott, 2006). Moral leadership begins with the life and rhetoric of a leader, but it can impact many other areas of an organization.
Collective moral leadership may spread within an organization as the ethical example of a leader is duplicated and people begin to look out for each other and help the community (Evans & Shirley, 2008). This results in a community or organization that raises its level of morality. Therefore, one outcome of moral leadership from an organizational perspective is that individuals will increase their motivation because they feel like their needs for relatedness are being met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moral leaders are able to use their ethical lifestyle to encourage their followers to work harder and follow their example. “When moral values are integrated in the self, they become an important part of an individual’s self-definition or identity” (Krettenauer, 2011, p. 310).

Leaders are required to make many decisions, and their moral insights are very important in their decision making process (Wang, 1998). Without a firm moral foundation, a leader may be tempted to make an unethical decision that might impact their status as a leader or the organization in a negative manner. Cherry (2008) explains that:

Western culture routinely confronts a fundamental fragmentation of moral visions regarding the basic human goods and central characteristics of human flourishing. Contemporary western society, much like the ancient world, discloses a polytheism of moral visions, of often radically divergent moral intuitions and affections. It is the seeming irreducibility of this empirical reality that is frequently characterized as post-modernity. (p. 286)

In modern society, there is a moral pluralism in which “people have diverse, conflicting moral preferences, both within and between religions” (Driesen, Hermans, & De Jong, 2010, p. 134). One way that a person might explain morality in a pluralistic setting would be to focus on moral sensibility. Sherblom (2012) explains:
Moral sensibility is proposed as the best concept to embody stated aims, but the content of this concept must be more finely articulated and conceptualized as a dynamic system. Moral sensibility is defined here as a developing dynamic interaction of (1) a host of developing capacities for morally relevant knowing (e.g. moral reasoning, self-awareness and means to other-awareness—compassionate caring, empathy, perspective taking); (2) one’s socio-cultural moral assumptions and expressions; (3) one’s idiodynamic ideology (the developing set of consciously chosen values and value-laden understandings gleaned from experiencing one’s unique life history); (4) one’s morally relevant identities and self-understandings; (5) all embodied in one’s moral being in-the-moment, the ability to enact one’s moral sensibility in each new instance of moral engagement.” (p. 117)

Moral sensibility may then be utilized to explain and develop one’s level of morality.

In response to the lack of literature on morality, Mathieson (2003) developed the following seven elements of moral maturity: (a) moral agency, (b) harnessing cognitive ability, (c) harnessing emotional resources, (d) using social skill, (e) using principles, (f) respecting others, and (g) developing a sense of meaning. Moral formation is not something that occurs automatically in the life of a person, as it is something that is hard to develop (Carneli, 2013). Therefore, Mathieson’s elements are useful for those studying moral leadership as they present an ideal example of a morally mature person to which others may be compared in order to examine their own morality.

Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development is the most popular theory of moral reasoning as it presents a clear framework for understanding one’s moral development (Nather, 2013). In the development of this theory, Kohlberg focused on the cognitive foundation of moral judgment
that is developed through cultural and parental factors and how it results in a certain level of moral action in the individual (Nather, 2013). In essence, Kohlberg posits that one’s morality is developed through one’s life experiences, but not everybody reaches the highest level of moral development.

Kohlberg’s moral development theory is based on the following three levels: (a) pre-conventional, (b) conventional, and (c) post-conventional (Koh, 2012). This three level theory is frequently referred to in textbooks as one of the main frameworks used to understand an individual’s moral development (Çam, Çavdar, Seydoogullar, & Çok, 2012).

The pre-conventional stage is most apparent in children. “With its focus on self-centered morality, the learner makes judgments based on the direct consequences to themselves” (Liddell & Cooper, 2012, p. 9). This results in decisions being made on the basis of self-interest and from a selfish perspective (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Essentially, a person in this stage is very self-centered and makes decisions that affect themselves, or at a minimum they believe that they will get something out if it because of reciprocity of interests (Koh, 2012). People in this stage are not morally developed, but they do have certain experiences in life from which they will most likely draw as their morality develops and they progress to the conventional stage.

The conventional stage is most often observed in adolescents and adults who consider moral issues as they try to conform to society’s conventional expectations (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Therefore, one’s moral reasoning in this stage is focused on doing what benefits other people and may be approved by them (Koh, 2012). This level of morality is based on conformity, not necessarily on one’s core beliefs. People on this level have learned what is expected of them from a moral standpoint and they are simply trying to fit in a larger system or culture.
Finally, the post-conventional stage represents the moral reasoning of individuals who are able to stand on their own principles as they separate themselves and their thinking from the society at large (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Koh (2012) explains that this stage “involves the deployment of universal principles in decision-making, regardless of personal sacrifice” (p. 87). All people will not reach this level of moral development. It is important to note that education has been found to be a predictor of a more complex moral reasoning because students in higher education tend to enjoy learning and thinking about multifaceted issues like morality (Nather, 2013). Kohlberg’s theory has been very influential as it has a broad appeal to researchers (Çam, Çavdar, Seydoogullar, & Çok, 2012). This paper utilizes Kohlberg’s moral development theory as the grid to examine the life and moral leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.: Pre-Conventional Stage**

The moral development of Martin Luther King, Jr. has been divided into Kohlberg’s three stages of moral development. Each stage refers to different writings or stories from King’s life to illustrate the way in which his moral development took place. These examples provide many insights into the moral development of one of America’s most important leaders. The first example from King’s life occurred when he was a young child:

> While I was still too young for school… for three or four years, my inseparable playmates had been two white boys whose parents ran a store across the street from our home in Atlanta. Then something began to happen. When I went across the street to get them, their parents would say that they couldn’t play. They weren’t hostile, they just made excuses. Finally, I asked my mother about it. (King, 1958, p. 4)

Events that occur very early in one’s life can have a lasting impact, even when a child is only three or four years old. King remembered this incident as a learning experience when he was
first exposed to segregation (Mwita, 2004). As a young child, King was likely self-absorbed, only caring about playing with his friends and being taken care of. However, even though King did not understand what was occurring, it did leave a lasting impression on him as he began to develop morally.

The second event happened later in King’s life, when he was still a child:

I remember a trip to a downtown shoe store with Father when I was still small. We had sat down in the first empty seats at the front of the store. A young white clerk came up and murmured politely, “I will be happy to wait on you if you will just move to those seats in the rear.” My father answered: “There is nothing wrong with these seats. We’re quite comfortable here.” “Sorry,” said the clerk, “but you will have to move.” “We’ll either buy shoes sitting here,” my father retorted, “or we won’t buy shoes at all,” whereupon he took my hand and walked out of the store. This was the first time I had seen my father so angry, I still remember walking down the street beside him as he muttered: “I don’t care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it.” (King, 1958, p. 5)

King learned from his father that segregation was not something new, but he also learned that he did not have to accept it (Mwita, 2004). Again, this is an example from King’s life when he did not fully understand what was occurring around him due to his preoccupation with his own needs as a child, yet all the while, he was learning about societal and cultural norms.

The following is another example from King’s childhood that impacted his moral development:

I remember riding with him (father) another day when he accidentally drove past a stop sign. A policeman pulled up to the car and said: “All right boy, pull over and let me see
your license.” My father replied indignantly, “I’m no boy.” Then pointing to me, “This is a boy. I’m a man, and until you call me one, I will not listen to you.” The policeman was so shocked that he wrote the ticket up nervously, and left the scene as quickly as possible. (King, 1958, p. 5-6)

King learned that people do not deserve to be disrespected even if they do something wrong and that people should stand up for their rights (Mwita, 2004). A final example from King’s pre-conventional moral development occurred when he was older and traveling with his teacher in a bus:

That night Mrs. Bradley (my dear teacher) and I were in a bus returning to Atlanta. Along the way, some white passengers boarded the bus and the white driver ordered us to get up and give the whites our seats. We didn’t move quickly enough to suit him, so he began cursing us. I intended to stay right in that seat, but Mrs. Bradley urged me up, saying we had to obey the law. We stood up in the aisle for ninety miles to Atlanta. That night will never leave my memory. It is the angriest I have ever been in my life. (Carson, 1998, p. 10)

This situation demonstrates the way in which King was maturing from a helpless child who was learning about race and morality from his parents into an adult who was beginning to emulate his father’s position on his own (Mwita, 2004). King experienced many moral and social injustices that greatly impacted his development as a leader, but he also learned many things from his family and his church.

King once said the following: “I am many things to many people, but in the quiet recesses of my heart, I am fundamentally a clergyman, a Baptist preacher. This is my being and my heritage for I am also the son of a Baptist preacher, the grandson of a Baptist preacher and
the great-grandson of a Baptist preacher” (Carson, 1997, p. 358). King learned many things about God in church and from his family as his Baptist heritage dated back to the slave era (Randall, 2008). As a child, King learned in the church that “God was omnipotent, moral, loving, personal, and active in history” (Mikelson, 1990, p. 2). His beliefs about God became very important to him as he came to have a real relationship with God.

King kept his childhood beliefs about God throughout his life, but he expanded them in his own thinking as they became the tools with which he analyzed the culture of America and the true meaning of social injustices (Mikelson, 1990). These childhood beliefs were further developed in King’s life as he progressed to the conventional stage of moral development.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.: Conventional Stage**

The African American church taught King that God is love. This belief was instrumental during the time of slavery to encourage slaves to love all people, even their owners, making love the way to overcome problems of race as God’s love is universal (Mikelson, 1990). This came as a result of the fact that King’s spirituality was rooted in the black church tradition that reflects a multidimensional and inclusive spirituality that is both private and public (Lee, 2008). King firmly believed that one’s beliefs should be evident in one’s actions.

King’s beliefs were built upon the firm foundation of the rock of God (Matt 7:25; Richie, 2010), and his concept of God was the foundation for his moral reasoning. This moral reasoning was shaped by his African American religious heritage and further developed through his formal studies which continued to the doctoral level (Mikelson, 1990). In 1948, when King was in seminary in Pennsylvania, he read Walter Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, which helped him utilize his theological thoughts as the foundation for his social beliefs.
(Randall, 2008). This helped King form his belief that social issues, morality, and faith are all tied together.

The black church has been used as a launching pad for black leaders who desire to become involved in the social and political arenas (Douglas & Hopson, 2001). A sermon that King preached when he was 25 indicated that he was in the conventional level of morality. King used the story about the adulteress who was going to be stoned for her sins until Jesus told them that the person who has no sin should be the first person to throw the stone (John 8). King taught that people commit the gravest sin when they believe that they reach the point that they do not have the capacity to sin (Selig, 2009). In a very similar way, King understood that his first responsibility in the civil rights movement was to bring white people to the place where they could identify their guilt and re-examine their foundational beliefs as they relate to race. King’s oratorical giftedness, along with his commitment to non-violence and Christian principles, are the pillars that elevated his status (West, 2008). He was not necessarily seeking to serve in politics, but a series of events let him to a public service career.

King began his public service career when he was chosen to serve as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which was formed to protest the bus boycott that was started by Mrs. Rosa Park’s first arrest. King quickly found the mass leadership position to be tiring and regularly unpleasant (Garrow, 1987). He not only found leadership to be draining, but as Coretta King (1969), King’s wife wrote, he also struggled with guilt:

His conscience was a formidable thing that kept him on the path he thought was right. If he ever did something a little wrong, or committed a selfish act, his conscience fairly devoured him. He felt that having been born into what was a middle-class African
American family was a privilege he had not earned, just as he felt the many honors heaped on him in the later years were not his alone. (p. 59)

This struggle with guilt is not surprising due to King’s beliefs about evil and sin (Selig, 2009).

This struggle with guilt and the pressures of leadership led King to an evening in his life that thrust his moral development into the post-conventional stage.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.: Post-Conventional Stage**

King’s tenure as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association was very difficult and he faced many threats as a result of his work there. King explained that one night around midnight a threatening caller rattled him. King wrote:

I sat there and thought about a beautiful little daughter who had been just born… She was the darling of my life. I’d come in night after night and see that little gentle smile. And I sat at that table thinking about that little girl and thinking about the fact that she could be taken from me any minute. And I started thinking about a dedicated, devoted and loyal wife, who was over there asleep. And she could be taken from me, or I could be taken from her. And I got to the point that I couldn’t take it any longer. I was weak.

Something said to me, you can’t call on Daddy now, he’s up in Atlanta a hundred and seventy-five miles away. You can’t even call on Mama now. You’ve got to call on that something in that person that your Daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way. And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee. I never will forget it… I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, ‘Lord, I’m down here trying to do what’s right. I think I’m right. I think the cause that we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now. I’m faltering. I’m losing
my courage. And I can’t let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and
losing my courage, they will begin to get weak.’ Then it happened. And it seemed at
that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, ‘Martin Luther, stand up for
righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even
until the end of the world.’ I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He
promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No, never alone. No, never alone.
He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone (King, 1967, p. 11-14).
The commitment from God that King felt that night provided him the strength and courage that
he would need to make it through the next chapters of his life (Garrow, 1987). This was the time
that King reached the post-conventional level and began to really believe in the principles and
morals for which he stood as he was willing to endure many hardships to lead others. King “felt
it morally and spiritually necessary to devote his full energy and complete being to the
movement’s cause” (Garrow, 1987, p. 6). This was a turning point in his life and his influence as
a moral leader really grew from this point.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Beliefs**

King’s beliefs served as the foundation for his moral leadership. King devoted a great
amount of thought to the problem of evil and the ways in which structures of evil are used to
oppress people (Erskine, 1991). Richardson (1968) explains that:

King’s perception of the human problem today as rooted in a certain structure of social
evil led him to emphasize again and again that his struggle was directed against the
forces, or structure, of evil itself rather than against the person or group who is doing the
evil. Christian faith sees neither particular men nor particular groups as evil, but sees
them trapped within a structure of ideological separation which makes ritual conflict
inevitable. In order to overcome this kind of evil, faith does not attack the men who do evil, but the structure of evil which makes men act violently. (p. 201)

Faith was much more than a simple creed, song, or tradition for King, as it represented a struggle against all types of oppression and injustice (Erskine, 1991). King believed that leaders have the moral responsibility to proclaim the Kingdom of God and work with people to overcome the injustices on earth (Erskine, 1991). Therefore, King believed that a moral leader’s faith should result in deeds on earth that bring about earthly conditions that are similar to the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is built upon reconciliation, and his faith enabled him to develop a thorough theology of reconciliation (Erskine, 1991).

King believed and taught that the life and teachings of Jesus are not just radical but relevant and redemptive. He was convinced that life at its source and center is personal and that every person has inherent worth, so he dedicated himself to serve the needs of persons, and to do that service in the spirit of trust and love—thus his prolonged and persistent push for needed social change, and for just laws to replace the unjust strictures by which black life had been shackled. He called for integrated living, the practice of agape love, and the reconciliation of the races. (Massey, 1988, p. 215)

King’s “social activism was based on theological convictions about God and people, he gave particular attention to an explication of Christian faith in a situation of oppression” (Erskine, 1991, p. 4). King’s faith was a central part of his leadership and played a significant role on drawing people to him. King wrote:

The Christian ought always to be challenged by any protest against unfair treatment of the poor, for Christianity is itself such a protest, nowhere expressed more eloquently than
in Jesus' words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (King, 1986, p. 93-94)

Many people were inspired by King’s leadership as his actions were very influential. The timing of the movement coincided well with the popularity of television, which allowed the country to see firsthand some of the terrible incidents that were occurring across the country (Selig, 2009). These events created the conditions that brought an end to many aspects of racism in the United States.

In the last chapters of King’s life, he became more outspoken about political and cultural events, even alienated many blacks over his criticism of the Vietnam War. In reality, “King’s essential understanding of God was not changing, but the moral and ethical implications of his understanding of God were becoming more radical” (Mikelson, 1990, p. 2). King came to the conclusion that the issue of race was simply a symptom of much deeper problems at the core of Americans, which affected both white and black people as he tied together the problems of racism, economic exploitation and militarism (Mikelson, 1990). King’s moral vision developed from a reform movement to a revolution in which the country needed to be spiritually reborn (Mikelson, 1990). Americans did not accept this new moral vision of King very well, but “his explanations of his changing moral vision rested on the premises of his understanding of God” (Mikelson, 1990, p. 4). In a sermon against the Vietnam War, King (1967) stated, “I have not lost faith, I am not in despair because I know that there is a moral order. I have not lost faith because the arch (sic) of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice” (p. 17). As King’s moral leadership and development progressed, he realized that there were many injustices
occurring in the world and that as a leader he needed to bring attention to all of the injustices that were occurring on the planet and not simply focus on the racial injustices of America.

Love and Leadership

King’s understanding of leadership was interwoven into his understanding of love. King stated that the highest level of love is one that finds its true meaning in the Cross, which is a symbol of God’s love and work that loves for the sake of others and does not desire anything in return (Mikelson, 1990). In King’s final book, he wrote that agape love is “understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill toward all men. Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart” (King, 1968, p. 73). King attempted to provide a leadership of love as he encouraged his followers to create a community of love.

King’s “democratic dream of beloved community is theologically grounded, committed to non-violence, and is guided by moral norms and an eschatological vision (Heltzel, 2009, p. 295). This community is a place in which all people are respected and interconnected (Inwood, 2009). King worked tirelessly to transform America into this beloved community where all people have equal rights and social injustices are broken.

The Results of King’s Leadership

King succeeded in achieving his main goal of the civil rights movement, which was to create a sense of shame for the white people and challenge their belief that they were superior to blacks with a goal of reconciliation (Mattson, 1999). King’s leadership was important in the 1960s as America saw an official end to racism and sexism, preparing the country for a multicultural society (Kazin, 2009). One of the most important results of King’s leadership was his enduring “I Have a Dream” speech, which is accepted as one of the most significant speeches
in the twentieth century (Duffy & Besel, 2010). When King spoke, people listened and followed him because of his moral leadership.

King is a celebrated hero, but his shortcomings in his personal life, particularly in regards to his extra-marital affairs have caused some people to question his true character (Mattson, 1999). King did not claim to be a leader without any moral shortcomings, but he did provide an overall example for his followers to emulate. The development of Martin Luther King streets all over the country indicate the symbolic impact he had during his life (Alderman, 2008). Martin Luther King, Jr.’s moral development as a leader began as a child as he learned about morality through life experiences, family, and the church. These events were critical to his moral development. As he understood the deeper meanings of God and social injustice, he began to try to live up to society’s expectations for him when he was in the conventional state of moral development. His midnight crisis, in which he developed his morality to the post-conventional state, was an important event in his life as he began to follow his own personal beliefs, worrying less about what others would think of him or his work. King became a moral leader whose actions made his words powerful. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech carried great authority because of the moral leadership that he provided for the civil rights movement.
References


