A More Beautiful and Terrible History

THE USES AND MISUSES OF CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

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The Political Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History and Memorialization in the Present

Now that he is safely dead,
Let us Praise him,
Build monuments to his glory,
Sing Hosannas to his name.
Dead men make such convenient Heroes.
They cannot rise to challenge the images
We would fashion from their Lives.
And besides, it is easier to build monuments
Than to build a better world.

—Carl Wendell Hines Jr., "A Dead Man's Dream"

HOW THE HISTORY of the civil rights movement became a national fable begins with the struggle for a federal holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr. Four days after King's assassination in 1968, Representative John Conyers introduced the first bill for a federal holiday in his honor. Three years later, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) delivered a petition with three million signatures calling for a holiday, but no action from Congress was forthcoming. Relentlessly carried forward by Coretta Scott King and a host of civil rights comrades over the next fifteen years, the proposed holiday garnered significant opposition. King had been deeply unpopular at his death. A 1966 Gallup poll found 72 percent of white Americans had an unfavorable opinion of the civil rights leader.[1] Major newspapers, including the *New York Times*, had editorialized against him, particularly when he publicly condemned US involvement in Vietnam. Many political leaders did not believe King's work rivaled that of Christopher Columbus and George Washington. Others

admired King but did not feel like his legacy had been put to the test of time. Still others saw King as un-American and dangerous, and surely not someone to be honored.

Activists kept pressing through the 1970s, but the resistance continued. When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, he opposed the holiday, worried about the "cost" and fearing the United States would be "overrun with holidays." Jesse Helms and other conservatives raised concerns about whether King was a Communist—a belief Reagan was not willing to rule out. To secure the holiday, supporters highlighted King's transcendent value to America. In 1979, Stevie Wonder wrote a song, "Happy Birthday," in honor of King, focusing on "love and unity to all God's children." SCLC president Joseph Lowery argued that "the designation of Dr. King's birthday as a national holiday would transcend the issue of race and color. . . . If Washington established the Nation, Martin led the Nation to understand that there can be no nationhood without brotherhood."[2] The King holiday would be a way to celebrate America, Senator Ted Kennedy explained, "because Martin Luther King's dream is the American dream."[3]

Faced with growing public support for the holiday, opposition gave way to recognition of the holiday's political utility. Seeking reelection, President Reagan faced a "sensitivity gap" on racial issues. With the bill poised to pass Congress, signing it became a way to assuage moderate white voters, who now saw a holiday in their interest, as a way to show how open-minded they were. Reagan wrote New Hampshire's governor apologizing for not vetoing the bill: "On the national holiday you mentioned, I have the reservations you have, but here the perception of too many people is based on an image, not reality [of who King was]. Indeed to them, the perception is reality."[4] Symbolic acts, Reagan realized, could be used to defer more substantive action. Marking this history two decades after King's death could be a way to demonstrate racial sensitivity, pay tribute to the movement's successful and now completed battle against racism (in the process altering who King was), and thwart ongoing calls for racial justice.

And so, on November 2, 1983, Reagan signed the bill into law, explaining,

> Now our nation has decided to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by setting aside a day each year to remember him and the just cause he stood for. We've made historic strides since Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus. As a democratic people, we can take pride in the knowledge that we Americans recognized a grave injustice and took action to correct it. And we should remember that in far too many countries, people like Dr. King never have the opportunity to speak out at all.[5]

Reagan's remarks zeroed in on what would soon become key elements of the national fable of the civil rights movement: that there *had been* an injustice, but once these *courageous individuals freely* pointed it out, it was corrected, and so proved the *greatness of American democracy*. In the years following the signing, as historian Justin Gomer notes, Reagan "routinely position[ed] himself thereafter as the inheritor of King's color-blind 'dream'—a society in which 'all men are created equal' and should be judged 'not . . . by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character'—in order to attack civil rights."[6]

The holiday took on important national utility. As religion scholar Eddie Glaude observed, "For some the holiday effectively washed our national hands clean. The ritual act of disremembering became a ritual of expiation: the sins of our racial past gave way to an emphasis on individual merit and responsibility."[7] There would be outliers—Arizona for a while, and some states such as Arkansas, Alabama, and Mississippi combined the King holiday with Robert E. Lee Day—but these largely contrasted with the national celebration of progress.[8] As president after president celebrated King's "dream," the "domestication of Martin Luther King," as scholars Lewis Baldwin and Rufus Burrow have termed it, was cemented.[9] Americans, according to Baldwin and Burrow, had grown "comfortable with a domesticated King or one who is harmless, gentle, and a symbol of our own confused sense of what it means to be American."[10]

That narrative would be strengthened by the ways the country came to celebrate Black History Month. The idea of Black History Month began a half century earlier in 1926, when African American historian Carter G. Woodson, who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915, designated a week in February for its observance. Its national consecration began when President Gerald Ford issued a "Message on the Observance of Black History Week" in 1975, calling on all Americans to "recognize the important contribution made to our nation's life and culture by black citizens." The next year, Ford officially recognized Black History Month, calling it a moment for the public to "seize the

opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history." Since 1976, the month of February has been recognized by every president as Black History Month.[11]

Increasingly, Black History Month was observed in a celebratory, commercialized fashion. Schools rolled out the contributions of a largely preselected group of great Black individuals, while the greater arc of American history—of progress, time-honored democratic values, and American exceptionalism—remained intact. The focus on individual Black accomplishment, as needed as it was, narrowed the scope of what the month could mean for the country. By forgoing the uncomfortable reckoning an immersion in the nation's unvarnished past would entail, the ritual celebration of Black History Month—"the shortest month of the year and also the coldest," as comedian Chris Rock has put it—narrowed the history to one of inclusion and tolerance. Black History Month placed this history at a great distance from its young pupils, where long-ago heroes battled distant villains over faraway realities. Writer Christopher Emdin called it the "killing of Black history month," for "tell[ing] the same stories in the same way and the same time each year. . . . Connections that need to be made between the ancestors and the present generation cannot be made when history is told without context."[12]

Increasingly, movement memorializations became national events. In 1997, on the fortieth anniversary of the desegregation of Central High School, President Bill Clinton journeyed back to Arkansas to honor the Little Rock Nine, explaining, "They purchased more freedom for me, too, and for all white people." Marking his racial bona fides and personal journey as a Southerner who'd attended segregated schools, Clinton affirmed the work ahead. But then he claimed the "question of race is, in the end, still an affair of the heart." Increasingly racism would be defined as personal, matters of the heart rather than enduring matters of legislation and structure.

In the years before the trip back to Little Rock, Clinton had signed three landmark pieces of legislation—the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, better known as the Crime Bill (which enshrined "three strikes" as federal policy and provided more money for building more prisons); the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (which "ended welfare as we know it" and gutted the nation's social safety net); and the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective

Death Penalty Act (which expanded federal power in law enforcement and cut off avenues by which people could challenge their convictions). All three traded on rampant stereotypes of people of color as dependent, debauched, and dangerous—"superpredators" and "deadbeats," in Clinton's words—to amplify criminalization, limit public assistance, foreclose avenues of due process and redress, and make good on Clinton's appeals to white voters.

Then, in 1999, Clinton presented Rosa Parks with a Congressional Gold Medal, asserting with a straight face that "Rosa Parks brought America home to our founders' dream." What the president also said, in so many words, was that the dream was complete—that it was so finite that the racial inequality in Clinton's own policies could be decisively separated from what civil rights activists like Parks had fought for. The "split screen" in action, Clinton celebrated the civil rights movement in the past, then claimed that the racial imagery at the heart of his legislative agenda (and its disproportionately damaging and targeted effects on Black people) were not racist but necessary for the Black community—and America—to progress.

Rosa Parks passed away on October 24, 2005, less than two months after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Amidst growing public outcry over federal negligence during the storm, and with racial fissures laid bare ("George Bush doesn't care about black people," Kanye West declared on national TV), Congress and President George W. Bush rushed to pay tribute to "the mother of the civil rights movement."[13] Parks became the first civilian, first woman, and second African American to lie in honor in the US Capitol.

A national funeral for the "mother of the civil rights movement" provided a way to sidestep questions on the enduring racial and social inequity that Katrina had exposed. Forty thousand Americans came to pay tribute, and President Bush laid a wreath at Parks's coffin. Six weeks later, Bush signed a bill ordering the placement of a permanent statue of Parks in the Capitol, the first ever of an African American there, explaining:

> Rosa Parks showed that one candle can light the darkness. . . . Like so many institutionalized evils, once the ugliness of these laws was held up to the light, they could not stand. Like so many institutionalized evils, these laws proved no match for the power of an awakened

> conscience—and as a result, the cruelty and humiliation of the Jim Crow laws are now a thing of the past . . . By refusing to give in, Rosa Parks called America back to its founding promise of equality and justice for everyone.[14]

According to President Bush, Rosa Parks's dream was the founders' dream. And all it required was simply to shine a light on injustice and people were moved to change it. In 2006, Bush, in an address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), sealed this national redemption narrative with the idea of a second founding—America reborn from its former racism. "Nearly 200 years into our history as a nation, America experienced a second founding, the civil rights movement," he said. ". . . These second founders, led by the likes of Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King Jr., believed in the constitutional guarantees of liberty and equality."[15]

The election of Barack Obama took these national civil rights narratives to new heights. As *Time* magazine trumpeted in its cover story after Obama's victory, King's dream "is being fulfilled sooner than anyone imagined."[16] On numerous occasions during the campaign, candidate Obama located himself within this noble genealogy, referring to the civil rights movement activists as the "Moses generation" and to himself as the "Joshua generation." Throughout his campaign, Obama used the civil rights movement as a key signal of progress and the power of American democracy—as did many supporters, placing him within the long line of Black freedom fighters.[17] The journey of the movement was highlighted at Obama's first inauguration. "Our work is not yet finished," Senator Dianne Feinstein extolled, "but future generations will mark this morning . . . when the dream that once echoed across history from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial finally reached the halls of the White House."[18] The national praise at the heart of the fable had reached its zenith in the pride many Americans took in the historic election of the country's first African American president.

The civil rights movement also became one of the central ways, until Black Lives Matter changed this, that President Obama talked about racial injustice throughout his presidency—as a key part of America's history but also largely framed *in the past*. While he talked about the civil rights movement much more extensively than previous presidents, his framings had echoes of his predecessors'. From Reagan to Clinton to Bush to Obama, the civil rights movement now embodied America's greatness, the noble sacrifice toward "a more perfect union."

MEMORIALS, ANNIVERSARIES, AND NATIONAL SELF-CONGRATULATION

The dedication of the memorial to Martin Luther King Jr. on the National Mall in Washington, DC, finally occurred on October 16, 2011. Affirming the progress of the past fifty years, President Obama capped off the dedication by extolling King's Americanism: "That is why Dr. King was so quintessentially American—because for all the hardships we've endured, for all our sometimes tragic history, ours is a story of optimism and achievement and constant striving that is unique upon this Earth."[19] The story of a movement created by thousands of people and of a man who had been surveilled relentlessly by the FBI was rendered as a Horatio Alger story of personal scrappiness and American exceptionalism.

The solitary stone statue of King towers above visitors. It bears little resemblance to the civil rights leader himself, or to the collective spirit of dissenting witness he embodied. The sculpture was modeled from a picture in which King was holding a pen, which was scrapped for a rolled-up "Dream" speech. The original plans for the monument had called for alcoves honoring other civil rights activists and martyrs, but they were not included because of insufficient funds. The sculpture is flanked by a granite wall. In no particular order, fourteen quotes are inscribed on it. Not one of them uses the words "racism" or ""segregation" or "racial inequality." Not one.

King's searing description of the experience of racism from "Letter from Birmingham Jail," for instance, is missing. His moving, closing words from the first night of the Montgomery bus boycott, hailing a "race of people, a black people . . . who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights . . . inject[ing] a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization" are missing. His indictment of America as "defaulting on this promissory note and . . . [having] given the Negro people a bad check"—which opened his speech at the 1963 March on Washington—is missing. Originally, this quote was selected to appear at the memorial, but it ultimately was deemed too "controversial."[20]

A man who risked his life and went to jail thirty times to challenge the scourge of American racism; who was quick to point out the racism

of the North along with that of the South; who wrote from jail in 1963 that the biggest problem was not the KKK but the "white moderate" who "preferred order to justice"; who criticized the "giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism"; whose sermon the Sunday after he was assassinated was going to be "Why America Is Going to Hell"—that man of God and courage is now honored with a memorial that refuses to speak the problem of racism. The quotes are arranged out of order (1955, 1964, 1963, 1967), and the context of the movements and mobilizations in which King was a part are invisible. The wall could have included a short sentence under each quote to explain where and in what context he spoke the words. But that sense of the history—of a movement unfolding in time and place, of a courageous person who was part of a collective movement of courageous people—was deemed unimportant.

President Obama himself consecrated the memorial as a celebration of the nation. While he noted that the work was "not complete" and spoke of the need for "world class" schools for all, a "fair" economic system for all, and "accessible" health care for all, he never once directly addressed the ongoing problem of racial inequality in schools, jobs, health care, or the criminal justice system. If there was a place and time where President Obama should have spoken forthrightly about the contemporary scourge of racial inequality and injustice, should it not have been at the dedication of the King memorial?

The year 2013 began with President Obama's second inauguration—where he took the oath of office on two Bibles, one of which was Martin Luther King Jr.'s traveling Bible. Calling it a "privilege" to use King's Bible, the president, as well as Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, inscribed the Bible at the King family's request. Inscribing King's Bible marked the inauguration as a culmination of King's work. Traditionally, one of the few ways Bibles are written in is to record family events and milestones. Roberts's and Obama's inscriptions on the Bible figuratively made the inauguration a King family affair, and Roberts and Obama—and by extension Americans today—descendants of the civil rights leader.

Bitter congressional fighting had a brief respite at the end of February 2013, as leaders of both parties joined President Obama to dedicate the first full-size statue of a Black person in the Capitol's Statuary Hall.[21] The bronze statue of Rosa Parks—seated demurely, clutching her purse, and looking decades older than the forty-two she was on that December evening—is a meek and redemptive figure, and one of only a very few in Statuary Hall of a person sitting.[22] Nothing in how Parks is rendered suggests action or refusal; her posture is modest with slightly rounded shoulders and her purse is at the center of the pose. Because the bronze of the figure is lighter than that of other statues, the work stands apart from the other bronze and marble statues in the room—and tours gravitate to it, in part, according to guides, because it is one of the few that people immediately recognize. But the design of the statue turned Parks's fierce and dangerous refusal into a passive, ladylike affair.

Republican House Speaker John Boehner began the ceremony, noting how the statue's placement in the hall embodied "the vision of a more perfect union." "What a story, what a legacy, what a country," extolled Senator Mitch McConnell. "She did what was natural," Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said, quoting baseball star Willie Mays in her remarks. "She was tired, so she sat down." President Obama closed, proclaiming, "It is because of these men and women that I stand here today." He heralded Parks's "singular act of courage," obscuring her lifetime of courageous acts and the other stands that had preceded hers. Warning of the "fog [of] accepting injustice, rationalizing inequity, tolerating the intolerable," he nonetheless offered no program for change that day.

Across town the very same day of the statue dedication, the Supreme Court was hearing arguments in *Shelby County v. Holder*. The case brought by Shelby County, Alabama, amidst other voter suppression maneuvers throughout the country, challenged two portions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA)—Section 4(b) and Section 5—as no longer relevant, and sought a permanent injunction against their enforcement. These sections from the original act, which was ratified again in 2006, laid out a formula requiring certain states and municipalities with histories of voter discrimination to clear any changes in their voting procedures with the Department of Justice to ensure they did not repress the vote. The VRA largely, but not exclusively, targeted Southern states; the law had been expanded to address discrimination against various minority groups and remove language barriers, and to require action in areas of low-voter registration and turnout levels in other parts of the country.[23] In its June 2013 decision in *Shelby*, the Supreme Court struck down Section 4(b) of the act (the portion that determined which municipalities would face

preclearance—federal preapproval to make changes to voting rules) as "based on 40-year-old facts having no logical relation to the present day," thus declaring that section unconstitutional.[24]

Rosa Parks was given a remarkable tribute, yet many public statements framed her action in ways at odds with the context of her bus stand and her lifelong political commitments, and offered no plan for addressing contemporary inequality. And the distinction was bestowed on a day when the Supreme Court was taking yet another step toward unraveling one of the accomplishments Parks and her comrades had struggled for decades to achieve. A memorial statue of the civil rights movement was deemed relevant to the present day, while the movement's goals of enforced voting rights protection were not. In many ways, the statue dedication embodied an increasingly familiar use of civil rights history as a national redemption story and Horatio Alger tale of American courage. In this way, the intersection of the Parks statue dedication and the Supreme Court hearing was not merely ironic but emblematic of a larger politics of historical memory at work for a nation that wanted to place this history firmly in the past and diminish the vision of its heroes now put on pedestals.

August 2013 saw a replay of such pageantry and shape-shifting history, as two fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of the March on Washington drew crowds—along with controversy about who got to speak, and how long. Attorney General Eric Holder spoke for thirty minutes; Julian Bond, cofounder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), two minutes. President Obama spoke, but young activists from the Dream Defenders and DREAMer movement were cut from the program due to time constraints. The original organizers of the March on Washington had made a series of compromises in 1963, eliminating civil disobedience from the day's plan and narrowing the scope of the demands. But as writer Gary Younge reminds, the one thing they did *not* compromise on was their plan that no politician was to speak; it would be the people speaking.[25] Fifty years later, the politicians dominated.

Huge celebrations commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery march in 2015. President Obama; First Lady Michelle Obama; their daughters, Sasha and Malia; and Michelle's mother, Marian Robinson, journeyed to Alabama to lead the march. With soaring speeches, moving commemorations, and a host of other festivities, from funnel cakes to a Black Entertainment Television (BET) concert, the civil rights movement was honored in epic fashion. The president gave a moving speech heralding the momentous change the civil rights struggle had wrought but fell into some familiar tropes of the civil rights fable. He reminded the crowd of how demonized these rebels had been: "Back then, they were called Communists, or half-breeds, or outside agitators, sexual and moral degenerates, and worse—they were called everything but the name their parents gave them. Their faith was questioned. Their lives were threatened. Their patriotism challenged." "Back then," President Obama explained—as if the experience bore no resemblance to the disparagement and dismissal of activists today. The history of the movement could provide a cautionary tale for how we treat today's rebels, but instead, the problem was framed in the past.[26]

Referencing Ferguson and the police killing of Mike Brown, the president made clear that the nation's work was not over. But in the speech's most troubling moment, he explicitly asserted that racial injustice was no longer systemic: "What happened in Ferguson may not be unique, but it's no longer endemic. It's no longer sanctioned by law or by custom." Just weeks before, the Department of Justice had issued its own report on the Ferguson police department, showing "African Americans experience disparate impact in nearly every aspect of Ferguson's law enforcement system"—but the president asserted that racial injustice was neither endemic nor legally or socially sanctioned.[27]

THE ENDLESS MISUSES OF ROSA PARKS

The popular history of the civil rights movement fixes it in time and place—a museum piece to be exalted from afar and a touchstone for all Americans. Rosa Parks's courageous bus stand had become America's stand. As 2012 drew to a close, President Obama tweeted a photo of himself in the classic Rosa Parks pose (seated in profile looking out the bus window) taken on the Rosa Parks bus. The picture had been taken months earlier by a White House photographer at a fund-raiser at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, which now displays the original bus. On the anniversary of her bus arrest, the president tweeted that photograph with the message "In a single moment 58 years ago today, Rosa Parks helped change this country."[28] Thus the day's honor included the president himself—her stance morphing into his.

Key to the Parks fable is the happy ending. On December 1, 2013, the fifty-eighth anniversary of Rosa Parks's bus arrest, the Republican National Committee made that message plain, tweeting: "Today we remember Rosa Parks' bold stand and her role in ending racism." The RNC's tweet—which was rapidly mocked and vilified—spoke more starkly what has been at the heart of many of the national tributes of Rosa Parks: honoring her is regularly accompanied by a celebration of American progress. This self-congratulation was on display at the second Republican presidential debate in 2015. When candidates were asked which woman they thought should be put on the ten-dollar bill, many seemed to flounder for a woman they wanted to honor: Jeb Bush picked foreign leader Margaret Thatcher, and John Kasich picked Mother Teresa. But three contenders—Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and Donald Trump—named Rosa Parks. Rubio, Cruz, and Trump picked a woman who spent her life doing things they disparaged in the present—galvanizing and helping sustain a disruptive yearlong consumer boycott against segregation, challenging the racial injustices of the criminal justice system and systemic police abuse, and fighting for voting rights, a robust social safety net, and reparations. These three men appeared to see political gain and little irony in honoring Rosa Parks, a woman who spent her life fighting for the racial and economic justice they oppose.

Three months later, Democratic presidential contender Hillary Clinton used Rosa Parks for her own campaign purposes, tweeting, "History often gets made on ordinary days by seemingly ordinary people—December 1, 1955 was one of them. Thank you, Rosa Parks. H." Her campaign logo had been transformed into a bizarre graphic rendering of Rosa Parks sitting in profile *on the back of* the Hillary Clinton for President logo. Compounding the problem, Clinton, campaigning in Alabama that day, observed: "It's always struck me how, depending on the way you look at it, Rosa Parks either did something tremendous or something rather humble"[29]—a deeply backhanded compliment, sidestepping the dangers Black women faced in being arrested, which Parks herself was well aware of, and the decade-long toll it had on the Parks family's economic well-being.

Adding to the absurdity, in 2015, Mike Huckabee, Ted Cruz, and the Values Voter Summit backing Kentucky clerk Kim Davis's claimed right not to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples compared her stand to Rosa Parks's. Davis, writing from jail, did as well, proclaiming "Rosa Parks had it easy" compared to what she was going through. Then, three weeks before the 2016 presidential election, the Trump campaign, amidst its rampant race-baiting, tried to cash in on its supposed connections to the civil rights movement. Trump's longtime attorney and campaign surrogate Michael Cohen tweeted a 1986 photo of Trump, Rosa Parks, and Muhammad Ali, claiming they were "receiving NAACP medals for helping America's inner cities. A man for ALL people!" The NAACP had given Trump no such honor; the photo was taken when all three won the Ellis Island Award, which Trump business associate William Fugazy had just created to honor "real Americans," after twelve recent immigrants had been awarded US Medals of Liberty.[30] The photo—with the corrected caption noting the Ellis Island Award—continued to circulate on social media, posted relentlessly by Trump supporters as proof that he wasn't racist. And when President-elect Trump's pick of Jeff Sessions for attorney general drew widespread controversy for Sessions's racial history of disturbing comments about Martin Luther King and the SCLC, his record as US attorney in Alabama, and his vociferous opposition to school funding equity, conservatives rolled out his "well-documented support of Rosa Parks," as Fox News put it.[31]

On International Women's History Day 2017, Snapchat featured a filter of Rosa Parks with hat and glasses.[32] Everyone could become Rosa Parks for a day, with a speech bubble appearing out of your mouth—"You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right." (Like all Snapchat, the filter was ephemeral and the picture would disappear in twenty-four hours.) Rosa Parks had, for all intents and purposes, become an empty vessel, to which any and all Americans could lay claim.[33]

THE POLITICAL USES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS FABLE

The attraction of this national civil rights fable was palpable, and political gold in the hands of conservatives and liberals alike. From Reagan to Bush, it provided a shield against criticism of their race-based policies and approaches. A story of individual scrappiness and national progress, this tale of the civil rights movement served the nation well, underlining its ability to move past its problems with race. It held particular appeal for the Obama administration, which liked the historic resonances that framed his presidency—and for the public who elected him, to mark their own accomplishment.

The birth of the Tea Party movement, the relentless questioning of the president's birth certificate and citizenship, the scorched-earth attacks on Obama's economic stimulus plan, and the Affordable Care Act (often referred to as Obamacare) all kept a vicious race politics front and center from the minute President Obama entered the Oval Office, without his administration ever even tackling the ongoing scourge of racial injustice. As pollster Cornell Belcher observed upon Obama's historic 2008 election, "A black man can't be president in America, given the racial aversion and the history that's still out there. However, an extraordinary, gifted, and talented young man who happens to be black can be president."[34] Civil rights memorialization provided a way to approach this seemingly untenable task. Talking about racism through the history of the civil rights movement provided an easier way to speak about inequality, but then largely rendered the fight against it in the past.

This fit with the desire of many Americans to be proud of electing a Black man and to use his election to claim the country's sordid history of racial inequality was now largely over. Many Americans embraced these sorts of historical celebrations because they—and President Obama's presence in the White House—were feel-good moments of America becoming a "more perfect union."[35] But that combination produced a dangerous absolution; admiring the civil rights movement became a way to feel okay about opposing change in the present and to disregard those who insisted that the election of a Black president could go hand-in-hand with systemic racial inequality.

Part of the problem with these renderings of the movement are the ways they are steeped in American exceptionalism—and used to tell a story about the glorious evolution of US democracy and the scrappy Americans who prove its power. They cast civil rights activists in the cloak of sanctified, not-angry nobility, who struggled respectably and were destined to win because American democracy is an inspiration for the world. These tributes tell tales about the power of American values—of the disenfranchised's ability to use the levers of democracy and of the willingness of the powerful to change. The many ways Americans by their actions and inactions enabled, protected, and continue to maintain injustice at home and abroad fade into the background.

Part of what makes it difficult to see the gaps and distortions in these narratives is that these memorials operate on a very powerful set of registers. Because there is so little African American history in our schools and our public square, any bit that makes it in becomes precious. These historical tributes pay well-deserved honor to the courage and dedication of King, Parks, and their comrades, and to the significance of the civil rights movement to American history. They, importantly, encourage young people to identify with those who challenge the status quo to fight for justice, not simply to emulate and celebrate the rich and the powerful. The culmination of years of efforts to ensure the history of the movement and the legacy of these brave individuals are marked in significant public ways; they are inspiring tributes—wrongs exposed, terror defeated by courage, the power of ordinary citizens. By asserting in the most prominent spaces in the land that Black history is American history and Black leaders are American heroes, they help to desegregate the nation's public history. Their inclusion, given how dead and white publicly commemorated US history is, marks such a long-fought victory that sometimes it seems like the best that could be hoped for. All of this, then, makes the distortions embedded in them difficult to see and their dangers harder to recognize.

But these memorials and popular recountings contain perilous silences. They largely function as celebrations of individual courage, missing the collective struggle these victories took and forgoing national accountability by relegating the history of inequality to the past. They frame the issue in the South and only in the South, as these memorials and commemorations pay almost no attention to Northern segregation or the Northern struggles that Parks, King, and many, many others also pushed forward. They celebrate a small handful of individuals rather than a broad cast of characters. They suggest that the apex of the movement was the election of a Black president, rather than the "dismantling of all forms of oppression," as Rosa Parks put it. Memorializing the movement becomes a culminating task in the struggle for racial justice, obscuring the work needed in the present to dismantle various forms of injustice in schools, housing, jobs, policing, and US foreign policy.

By stripping King and Parks of the breadth of their politics—which interwove economic justice, desegregation, criminal justice, educational justice, and global justice—many of these national tributes render Parks and King meek and dreamy, not angry, intrepid, and relentless, and thus not relevant or, even worse, at odds with a new generation of young activists.

These memorials purposely forget the decades when these activists were surveilled, harassed, ostracized as troublemakers, and upbraided as "extremists"—how part of the way racial injustice flourished was through the demonization of those who called it out. The movement's heroism is also placed at a distance, rather than as a way to imagine how the young people visiting these monuments will grow up to be our next freedom-fighting heroes and heroines. By holding up a couple of heroic individuals separate from the movements in which they were a part, the ways the era is memorialized implicitly creates a distinction between the people we have today—too loud, too angry, too uncontrolled, too different—and the respectable likes of Parks and King.

These renderings make it seem as if the movement happened naturally or inevitably, missing the staggering resolve and perseverance of small groups of people who actually pressed it forward, and in so doing attracted larger groups of people to their cause. And in the process, these dilutions and distortions render the problems African Americans now face as largely their own doing, and contemporary activism as so very different from this hallowed past.

Invoking the movement has also become a way to maintain and distract from injustice in the present. In the midst of his first month in office, Trump recognized Black History Month, lauding the "museum on the National Mall where people can learn about Reverend King, so many other things." He stumbled on: "Frederick Douglass is an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more, I noticed. Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and millions more black Americans who made America what it is today. Big impact."[36] As horrifying as it was that the president knew so little about Black history that he thought Frederick Douglass was still living (an error compounded by then press secretary Sean Spicer), the comments had eerie echoes of Reagan's idea that the movement was "based on an image."[37] Uttering the names of these heroes was deemed useful to the agenda President Trump was pursuing.

On the eve of Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2017, faced with criticism from Congressman John Lewis, who described him as not a "legitimate president," President-elect Trump hit back at Lewis. The congressman should fix his "crime-infested" district, Trump tweeted. "All talk, talk, talk—no action or results. Sad!" The controversy that ensued was important but predictable—Twitter exploded and Trump's slur of Lewis dominated the news all weekend (including the front page of the *New York Times*). But it was also useful bait amidst a week of exploding revelations on collusion with Russia and during the madcap rush to confirm Trump's nominees (many of whom had made direct racial appeals and supported practices steeped in racial inequality). While some claimed Trump "doesn't care that people think the civil rights movement was important," more likely, Trump, skilled in the politics of distraction—and waiting a day before responding—used its public importance to generate a massive, useful diversion.

Trump's tweet did inspire some congressional representatives to "stand with John Lewis" and sit out the inauguration.[38] But even then, the controversy centered on the heroism of the individual man. It was "standing with Lewis," rather than standing with the voting rights that Lewis had risked his life to try to ensure. Lewis himself had centered his comments not "around" the illegitimacy of Trump's presidency and the role of the Russia during the election—and had not included the significant voter disfranchisement and new voter ID laws that had certainly enabled Trump's victory. None of the members of Congress standing with him highlighted it either. This controversy could have been an opportunity to attack the dismantling of voting rights protections—fourteen states had new voting restrictions in place for the 2016 election—that had led to Trump's "illegitimate" win.[39] But the movement was placed in the past; what was to be defended was the honorable Congressman Lewis, not an enduring commitment to securing voting rights.

The misuse of history often provides distorted instruction on the process of change. In his commencement address at Howard University in 2016, President Obama explained to the graduates how change happens in the United States. He invoked the power of Mississippi freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer's challenge at the 1964 Democratic convention, which contested the racial exclusion embodied in the Mississippi Democratic Party, and her grassroots organizing in Mississippi. But he ended with this admonishment: "And democracy requires compromise, even when you are 100 percent right. This is hard to explain sometimes. . . . If you think that the only way forward is to be as uncompromising as possible, you will feel good about yourself, you will enjoy a certain moral purity, but you're not going to get what you want."[40] What the president did not mention to those Howard graduates was that a similar lecture had been given to Fannie Lou Hamer and other Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party activists

by establishment civil rights leaders and Democratic Party operatives to encourage them to take a meager compromise in 1964, but they had rejected it.[41] It was this willingness not to bend to political expediency, but to insist on full rights, that characterized Fannie Lou Hamer's heroism that we now laud fifty years later.

At the same time, many civil rights memorials refigured civil rights history through a language of personal responsibility—what legal scholar James Forman has called the "politics of responsibility."[42] Increasingly, Black-on-Black crime and the need for the Black community to take responsibility for internal problems were cast as the new civil rights issue. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day 1995, then US attorney Eric Holder announced a massive crime-fighting initiative called Operation Ceasefire: "Did Martin Luther King successfully fight the likes of Bull Connor so that we could ultimately lose the struggle for civil rights to misguided or malicious members of our own race?"[43]

In 2004, Bill Cosby, speaking at an NAACP gala honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, delivered a "blistering" diatribe on the behaviors and actions of Black parents and children to a mix of "astonishment, laughter and applause," according to the *Washington Post*.[44] Namechecking civil rights heroes from Dorothy Height to Julian Bond, Cosby lamented, "These people who marched and were hit in the face with rocks and punched in the face to get an education and now we got these knuckleheads walking around who don't want to learn English."[45] Much criticism of his remarks followed. But Cosby and Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint took the show on the road, underscoring how discipline, values, and personal responsibility were key to Black power today—to move Black people from "victims to victors."

Political scientist Fred Harris has described "the shift in the century-old ideology—the politics of respectability—to a public philosophy directed at policing the black poor" in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in the campaign of Barack Obama.[46] Personal responsibility was also interwoven with his discussion of the movement in speeches candidate Obama made to Black audiences. At Brown Chapel in Selma, Alabama, in 2007, when he talked about the progress made by the movement and what it would take to complete the last 10 percent of the task, Obama pointed partly to individualized personal responsibility. Calling for responsible

Black fatherhood (decrying "daddies not acting like daddies"), he demanded a fictional, unreliable cousin Pookie "get off the couch," register, and go to the polls—locating much of the work in Black people themselves. Months later, at a speech to the NAACP, Obama again reiterated the "need to demand more from ourselves."[47] And as president, when he delivered the commencement address at Morehouse College in 2013, he made clear to Black men graduating that "there's no longer any room for excuses. . . . Nobody cares if you suffered some discrimination. And moreover, you have to remember that whatever you've gone through, it pales in comparison to the hardships previous generations endured. . . . And if they overcame them, you can overcome them, too." His allusion to "we shall overcome" as a message of "toughening up" and "not making excuses of racism" was aimed squarely at young Black men themselves (and was far different from the message he delivered at Barnard College's commencement the year before, in which he did not tell the young women graduates "there's no longer any room for excuses"). As historian Tom Sugrue observed, Obama's vision of the struggle turned on "individual initiative and self-transformation."[48] In many ways, this call was a perversion of the civil rights movement's outward organizing tradition (change "has to start with your action") into an inward self-help tradition ("we have to transform ourselves first").

Horrified by the ways popular histories of the movement have distorted its legacy for contemporary political interests, historians and social justice activists have sounded the alarm for years. SNCC organizer Julian Bond quipped that the narrative of the movement has been reduced to "Rosa sat down, Martin stood up, then the white folks saw the light and saved the day."[49] In 2004, the Organization of American Historians president at the time, Jacqueline Dowd Hall, delivered a powerful address, later turned into an article, warning that popular histories of the movement "prevent one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time." Asserting that the dominant narrative "distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals," she argued for the need "to make civil rights harder. Harder to celebrate as a natural progression of American values. Harder to cast as a satisfying morality tale. Most of all, harder to simplify, appropriate, and contain."[50] And a growing body of movement voices and academic scholarship has

emerged to interrogate the role of the movement in popular memory and culture.[51]

BE LIKE MLK: WEAPONIZING THE FABLES OF THE PAST

> *The loving, nonviolent approach is what wins allies and mollifies enemies. But what we have seen come out of Black Lives Matter is rage and anger—justifiable emotions, but questionable strategy. For months, it seemed that BLM hadn't thought beyond that raw emotion, hadn't questioned where it would all lead.*[52]
>
> —Barbara Reynolds

> *This ain't your grandparents' civil rights movement. . . . Get off your ass and join us!*[53]
>
> —Tef Poe

Distorted renderings of movement history took on heightened danger as a new movement gained national attention. Galvanizing around the issues of police brutality, criminal injustice, and mass incarceration, Black Lives Matter came to national prominence after the killing of Trayvon Martin and subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013, and the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. The vision of Black Lives Matter was articulated by three Black queer women: Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors, and Opal Tometi; its various local incarnations have encompassed a broad palette of issues affecting Black lives, from enduring school inequality to living-wage struggles, and from police accountability to gender justice. Taking to the streets, blocking traffic, disrupting political events and commerce, and launching die-ins on college campuses, this new leader-full movement, organized predominantly by young Black people but joined by a rainbow of others and Black people of all ages, has forced the nation to grapple with issues of racial injustice in law enforcement and the legal system.

The civil rights movement has lurked everywhere in public discussion of Black Lives Matter. While there have been notable connections and moments of camaraderie—for instance, Harry Belafonte's Justice League, as well as by many of the former members of the Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee—an undertone of concern and fear about the protesters and problems with the movement they are building have come from many corners, the criticism laced with problematic allusions to the civil rights movement. Former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee outrageously stated that Martin Luther King Jr. would be "appalled" by BLM's strategy and called on protesters to be more like King.[54] King's niece, Alveda King, referred to BLM's methods as "inappropriate." Oprah Winfrey called for "some kind of leadership to come out of this" and cautioned young activists "to take note of the strategic, peaceful intention if you want real change."[55] CNN's Wolf Blitzer criticized protests in Baltimore as not being "in the tradition of Martin Luther King." And Atlanta mayor Kasim Reed invoked the history of King to celebrate Atlanta's tradition of free speech, but then admonished protesters: "Dr. King would never take a freeway."

Even some former activists have gone this route. Congressman John Lewis, a former SNCC chair, initially spoke out against people critiquing BLM: "Those people should do something. Make their own movement."[56] But when BLM protesters disrupted a Hillary Clinton rally with Lewis in attendance, he cautioned: "Most of the things that we did back in the 1960s was good trouble; it was necessary trouble. . . . But we have to respect the right of everybody to be heard. And you do that in a nonviolent, orderly fashion."[57] Lewis cast these young activists' protests as being far different from the "necessary good" trouble he and his comrades had made. In July 2016, as protests flared again following police killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, Lewis tweeted: "I was beaten bloody by police officers. But I never hated them. I said, 'Thank you for your service.'" And former SCLC organizer Andrew Young, at a pep talk at a police precinct, went a step further in his criticism of the protesters: "Those are some unlovable little brats out there. . . . They're showing off. And not even with a clear message."[58]

Casting the young protesters as reckless and not living up to the legacy of the civil rights movement, a number of prominent voices have measured Black Lives Matter against the movement and found it falling short. Many who claim sympathy with BLM's purpose have used the civil rights movement to decry their tactics—putting aside the fact that King took a highway many times over his life, that the movement was disruptive and unpopular, and that it made many Americans uncomfortable. The

civil rights movement has become museum history, inaccessible for our grubby use today. While the actual civil rights movement was far more disruptive, demanding, contentious, and profound than it's depicted, the mythologies of it get in the way of seeing the continuities between these struggles, the shoulders current movements stand on, and the ways people can learn from past struggles to approach the problems we face as a nation today.

In response to the repeated invocation of the civil rights movement to criticize their work, some activists have challenged a set of older Black leaders, along with scores of white commentators, who disapprove of their approach. As Ferguson activist-musician Tef Poe retorted in his song "War Cry," "This ain't yo mama's civil rights movement," proudly distinguishing BLM from the civil rights movement (or at least from the myth being brandished against them). "Missouri is the new Mississippi," he explained.[59] They wanted to know what these critics were doing today and stressed the importance and distinctiveness of the movement they were building. Activist-writer Rahiel Tesfamariam donated a T-shirt with this slogan to the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture to document "the history being made" from this new movement: "This looks different; it sounds different. It's a comment of anger."[60]

Many saw the invocation of the civil rights movement against BLM as a way for critics to stand on the sidelines. "The burden of the brutalized is not to comfort the bystander," actor-activist Jesse Williams made clear at the 2016 BET awards, in a speech that went viral. "If you have a critique for the resistance, for our resistance, then you better have an established record of critique of our oppression."[61] "What I've learned from the [BLM] activists and what is going on today is, those of us who have lived almost a century, have no right to cynicism," Harry Belafonte joined in. "Mostly, the people who turn away from radical thought are people who don't like to be uncomfortable."[62] Recognizing the need to steep themselves in fuller histories of Black struggle, popular education and study groups have become an important but much less covered aspect of the many Black Lives Matter groups and mobilizations.[63] And many BLM activists have partnered with a set of elders willing to build on those lineages. But that has not caused commentators to stop using the civil rights movement to chastise the work of BLM activists.

Fed up with the prominent misuse of history against Black Lives Matter, sixty-six former SNCC activists published a statement in July 2016 marking the continuities of struggle:

> "Fortunately, today, as in the past, the protesters who have taken to the streets against police violence will not be intimidated by slander or mischaracterization as 'racist' or 'terrorist sympathizers' born of the fear, ignorance and malice of their would-be critics. . . . We, the still-active radicals who were SNCC, salute today's Movement for Black Lives for taking hold of the torch to continue to light this flame of truth for a knowingly forgetful world."[64]

As these SNCC activists made clear, memorializing a civil rights movement without young people in the vanguard, without anger, without its long-standing critique of the criminal justice system, missed what the movement was actually about. Julian Bond, visiting a class at Morehouse College in 2009, critiqued the respectability politics being pushed on this new generation, which many young activists were also rejecting: "A nice suit is a nice suit. Get one. But it won't stop a bullet, son."[65]

Key similarities exist between the civil rights movement and BLM—from the forces they are up against to the criticisms they encounter to the expansive vision of justice they seek. Like the young activists propelling BLM, civil rights activists were regarded as dangerous and reckless by many and as downright seditious by others. The movement was pushed forward by young people, who made many people nervous sixty years ago, just as they do today. Thus, substantively considering new movements for racial justice in the context of the civil rights movement means seeing the ways they are tied to, rather than set apart from, this longer movement history.

More significantly, these mis-histories of the civil rights movement impoverish people fighting for social justice today by separating them from the perspectives and experiences of a long line of courageous freedom fighters. Sixty years ago, Rosa Parks drew solace and sustenance from the long history of Black resistance before her time, placing her action and the Montgomery bus boycott in the continuum of Black protest. Her speech notes during the boycott read: "Reading histories of others—Crispus Attucks through all wars—Richard Allen—Dr. Adam Clayton Powell

Sr. and Jr. Women Phillis Wheatley—Sojourner Truth—Harriet Tubman, Mary McLeod Bethune."[66] For Parks, the ability to keep going, to know that the struggle for justice was possible amidst all the setbacks they encountered, was partly possible through reading and referencing the long Black struggle before her. By denying a new generation their place in that lineage, a key form of sustenance is taken away.

And perhaps most consequentially, the mythologizing of the civil rights movement deprives Americans of honest history that shows us where we are today in this country. The task, as James Baldwin put it, is "to describe us to ourselves as we are now"—to honestly reckon with the way the country feared the civil rights movement and its disruptiveness; to fully grasp the movement's scope and tenacity; to understand the diversity of freedom fighters and what they did and imagined; to grapple with the robust resistance to change, not just in the redneck South but in the liberal North; and to examine what learning from that struggle shows us about the country today.

THE HISTORIES WE NEED

In 2009, President Obama journeyed to Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. In a speech replete with references to Martin Luther King Jr., Obama began by calling his own accomplishments "slight," foregrounding that he was there as a culmination of the efforts of many movement activists: "As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life work, I am living testimony to the moral force of nonviolence. I know there's nothing weak—nothing passive—nothing naïve—in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King." He reminded those gathered of the Americanness of the civil rights movement. But then he made an interesting pivot: "As a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. . . . The nonviolence practiced by men like Gandhi and King may not have been practical or possible in every circumstance, but the love that they preached—their fundamental faith in human progress—that must always be the North Star that guides us on our journey."

President Obama's Nobel speech made explicit that which tends to be more implicit in national tributes to the civil rights movement. As a nation, we honor these courageous men and women, then dismiss them as "impractical" when their example asks things of us that we do not want to provide—rendering the times and issues we confront as very different from those old injustices. In short, we prefer our heroes and heroines in the past and will cast aside the parts of the story that raise questions about our current directions.

The rest of this book focuses directly on these absences—the histories unmarked in popular understandings of the movement—and on what the national fable of the civil rights movement justifies and hides. Identifying nine key distortions in popular renderings of the movement, each chapter examines what a fuller history then shows us. These fuller histories of the modern Black freedom struggle are more uncomfortable histories—unsettling because they show the nation in a much more painful light and point out our current responsibilities more vividly.

The first two chapters show the extensive and diverse movements for desegregation and racial equality outside of the South and the long history of political organizing in Northern cities that preceded the uprisings of the mid-1960s. The next two chapters confront the power of polite racism—the variety of tactics that helped legitimate and obscure racial inequality—and the role the media played in disparaging Black struggle and dismissing racial injustice, segregation, and police brutality, particularly outside of the South. Chapter 5 gets off the bus to show the movement's broader demands regarding desegregation, criminal justice, economic justice, and global justice. Chapters 6 and 7 get beyond the "great man" view of history, examining the central role young people—in particular high school students—played in pushing the movement forward, and the adult discomfort with it, as well as the breadth of women's leadership and the various barriers and gendered assumptions those women encountered. Chapter 8 focuses on the unpopularity of the movement, the toll this chilling climate took on activists, and the immense political repression they faced. Finally, chapter 9 revisits the iconic Montgomery bus boycott to return the story of organizing and the role of disruption, perseverance, and anger to our understanding of the movement.

By illustrating the ways the story of the movement has been stripped and narrowed, these nine chapters offer a much broader vision of what the fight for justice and equality entails and the ways activists imagined and implemented it. By providing a more sobering account of what racism is and how injustice and inequality are maintained, this fuller history gives us the tools to approach the task of racial justice today.

Equality in Brooklyn (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013). On welfare rights and antipoverty organizing: Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

34. As historian Tracy K'Meyer observes, "For a generation historians have been writing a different story of the Black freedom struggle, one that downplays charismatic leadership, illuminates divisions within the Black community and emphasizes the long, hard, mundane work of organizing that actually brought about change. So why hasn't this new story affected not only the broader politics [or] . . . even many historians and scholars' ideas about how to achieve racial justice?" Tracy K'Meyer, "The Stories We Tell," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* (Spring/Summer 2016).

35. "It's not your grandfather's civil rights movement" is also being used by some activists to differentiate the patriarchal notions of leadership at play in some parts of the civil rights movement from the more leader-full BLM movement with Black queer women at the center. See "Not Your Grandfather's Black Freedom Movement: An Interview with BYP100's Charlene Carruthers," *In These Times*, February 8, 2016.

INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICAL USES AND MISUSES OF CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY AND MEMORIALIZATION IN THE PRESENT

1. Appleton, "Martin Luther King in Life . . . and Memory," 12.

2. As quoted in Seay, "A Prophet with Honor?," 242.

3. Ibid., 243–44.

4. Francis X. Clines, "Reagan's Doubts on Dr. King's Legacy Disclosed," *New York Times*, October 22, 1983.

5. As quoted in Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (New York: Crown, 2016), 105.

6. Justin Gomer, "Race and Civil Rights Dramas in Hollywood," *Black Perspectives* (blog), March 24, 2017, http://www.aaihs.org/race-and-civil-rights-dramas-in-hollywood/.

7. Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 109.

8. "Celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Still Faces Pushback," *New York Times*, January 16, 2017.

9. Baldwin and Burrow, *The Domestication of Martin Luther King*, xix–xxi.

10. Ibid., xix.

11. In 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99–244, designating February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month" and noting "the beginning of the sixtieth annual public and private salute to Black History as African American History Month," Law Library of Congress, July 31, 2015. By the 1930s, according to former Association for the Study of African American Life and History president Daryl Michael Scott, Woodson understood the dangers of the ways that the observance could commodify or trivialize Black history, warning of "the intellectual charlatans, black and white, popping up everywhere seeking to take advantage of the public interest in black history," "Origins of Black History Month," Association for the Study of African American Life and History, https://asalh.org/about-us/origins-of-black-history-month/.

12. Christopher Emdin, "For the Folks Who Killed Black History Month . . . and the Rest of Y'all Too," *Beacon Broadside* (blog), February 17, 2016.

13. President Bush in a 2010 interview: "I faced a lot of criticism as president . . . that I lied about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction or cut taxes to benefit the rich. But the suggestion that I was racist because of the response to Katrina represented an all-time low." "'George Bush Doesn't Care about Black People': Reflections on Kanye West's Criticism 10 Years After," *Democracy Now!*, August 28, 2015.

14. Transcript of President Bush's remarks can be found at *CNN Live Today*, CNN.com, December 1, 2005.

15. "Full Text of Bush's NAACP Speech," *Denver Post*, July 20, 2006.

16. Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights*, 211.

17. At his first inauguration, President Obama signed a program to Congressman John Lewis: "Because of you, John. Barack Obama."

18. Dianne Feinstein, "Opening Welcome Remarks at the 2009 Inauguration," January 20, 2009.

19. "Remarks by the President at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Dedication," news release, October 16, 2011.

20. Philip Kennicott, "Revisiting King's Metaphor About a Nation's Debt," *Washington Post*, August 24, 2011.

21. A bust of Martin Luther King Jr., commissioned by Congress in 1982 and unveiled in 1986, appears in the Capitol Rotunda.

22. In contrast, in the Capitol Rotunda, a statue commemorating three suffragists—Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton—known now as "The Portrait Monument"—is rendered unfinished to denote the work ahead in the struggle for women's rights. A gift from the National Women's Party, the statue was commemorated in 1921 and promptly moved out of sight to the Capitol Crypt (and its feminist inscription "Woman, first denied a soul, then called mindless, now arisen, declared herself an entity to be reckoned" scraped off). James Brooke, "3 Suffragists (in Marble) to Move Up to the Capitol," *New York Times*, September 27, 1996.

23. The Justice Department explained: "As enacted in 1965, the first element in the formula was whether, on November 1, 1964, the state or a political subdivision of the state maintained a 'test or device' restricting the opportunity to register and vote . . . includ[ing] such requirements as the applicant being able to pass a literacy test, establish that he or she had good moral character, or have another registered voter vouch for his or her qualifications. The second element . . . [was if] less than 50 percent of persons of voting age were registered to vote on November 1, 1964, or that less than 50 percent of persons of voting age voted in the presidential election of November 1964. This resulted in the following states becoming, in their entirety, 'covered jurisdictions': Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia. In addition, certain political subdivisions (usually counties) in four other states (Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, and North Carolina) were covered. . . . In 1970, Congress . . . referenced November 1968 as the relevant date for the maintenance of a test or device and the levels of voter registration and electoral participation. This addition to the formula resulted in the partial coverage of ten states, including Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Wyoming. Half of these states (Connecticut, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, and Wyoming) filed successful 'bailout' lawsuits. In 1975, the Act's special provisions . . . were broadened to address voting discrimination against members of 'language minority groups,' which were defined as persons who are American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Natives or of Spanish heritage. . . . includ[ing] the practice of providing any election information, including ballots, only in English in states or political subdivisions where members of a single language minority constituted more than five percent of the citizens of voting age. This third prong of the coverage formula had the effect of covering Alaska, Arizona, and Texas in their entirety, and parts of California, Florida, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, and South Dakota." In 1982, and then again in 2006, it was renewed for twenty-five years, but the coverage formula was not changed.

24. Shelby County v. Holder, 570 US, http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12–96_6k47.pdf.

25. Gary Younge, *The Speech: The Story Behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2013).

26. Eddie Glaude observes the speech framed racial matters "as a momentary stumble on our way to a more perfect union." Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 156.

27. Department of Justice, *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*, report, March 4, 2015, 98.

28. The White House also tweeted it, saying, "Today is the 57th Anniversary of the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. Pic: President Obama on Rosa Parks bus"—thus ensuring that everyone knew this was the Rosa Parks bus.

29. Juana Summers, "Hillary Clinton's Logo Accidentally Puts Rosa Parks in the Back of the Bus," *Mashable*, December 1, 2015.

30. Only four of the eighty that year went to Black people, and the vast majority over the years have gone to white people. The photo had been cropped because it also included rabid social conservative Anita Bryant, Joe DiMaggio, and Victor Borge. Christina Wilkie, "No, Donald Trump Did Not Win a Medal from the NAACP," *Huffington Post*, October 23, 2016.

31. Adam Shaw, "Sessions Well-Documented Praise of Rosa Parks Belies Racist Claim," *Fox News Politics*, November 18, 2016. Sessions had called for Parks to be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999 and attached an amendment to an appropriations bill that gave $1 million to Alabama for the Troy University Montgomery Campus Rosa Parks Library and Museum. This, many commentators alleged, demonstrated that Sessions was not a racist.

32. Snapchat also had filters for other women pioneers like Frida Kahlo and Marie Curie. Thanks to Olivia Pearson for alerting me to this.

33. Rosa Parks's actions are regularly compared with present-day acts of opposition. In 2000, country singer Larry Gatlin compared Katherine Harris (Florida's then secretary of state, who helped secure George W. Bush's election) to Rosa Parks. Rancher Cliven Bundy compared himself to Parks when he refused to pay the federal government grazing fees for using federal lands: "I am doing the same thing Rosa Parks did—I am standing up against bad laws which dehumanize us and destroy our freedom."

34. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Fear of a Black President," *Atlantic*, September 2012.

35. Following public outcry upon George Zimmerman's acquittal in killing Trayvon Martin, President Obama weighed in on the understandability of Black anger and the fact of American progress: "It doesn't mean that racism is eliminated. But you know, when I talk to Malia and Sasha and I listen to their friends and I see them interact, they're better than we are . . . on these issues. And that's true in every community that I've visited all across the country."

36. David A. Graham, "Donald Trump's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," *Atlantic*, February 1, 2017.

37. Justin Gomer and Christopher Petrella, "Reagan Used MLK Day to Undermine Racial Justice," *Boston Review*, January 15, 2017.

38. Yamiche Alcindor, "In Trump's Feud with John Lewis, Blacks Perceive a Callous Rival," *New York Times*, January 15, 2017.

39. Ari Berman, "The GOP's Attack on Voting Rights Was the Most Under-Covered Story of 2016," *Nation*, November 9, 2016.

40. White House, "Remarks by the President at Howard University Commencement Ceremony," news release, May 7, 2016, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/07/remarks-president-howard-university-commencement-ceremony.

41. See Lee's *For Freedom's Sake*.

42. James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 44. "Far from ignoring the issue of crime by blacks against other blacks, African American officials and their constituents have been consumed by it" (11).

43. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, "Power and Punishment: Two New Books About Race and Crime," *New York Times*, April 14, 2017.

44. Jabari Asim, "Did Cosby Cross the Line?," *Washington Post*, May 24, 2004.

45. "Dr. Bill Cosby Speaks at the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education Supreme Court Decision," Eightcitiesmap.com, http://www.eightcitiesmap.com/transcript_bc.htm.

46. Harris, *Price of the Ticket*, 100–36.

47. Quoted in ibid., 131.

48. Thomas J. Sugrue, "Stories and Legends," *Nation*, June 7, 2010.

49. Charles Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff Will Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 247.

50. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–35.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE LONG MOVEMENT OUTSIDE THE SOUTH

1. Adina Back was one of my first colleague-friends who sought to integrate Northern struggles into our understanding of the era. Because of her untimely death, she did not complete her book, though her work "Exposing the 'Whole Segregation Myth': The Harlem Nine and New York City's School Desegregation Battles" appears in my coedited collection, *Freedom North*, and another chapter, "'Parent Power': Evelina Antonetty, the United Bronx Parents, and the War on Poverty," in