

## From Rosa Parks's *Quiet Strength* to Memorializing a National Mother

As time has gone by, people have made my place in the history of the civil-rights movement bigger and bigger. They call me the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement and the Patron Saint of the Civil Rights Movement. I have more honorary degrees and plaques and awards than I can count, and I appreciate and cherish every single one of them. Interviewers still only want to talk about that one evening in 1955 when I refused to give up my seat on the bus. Organizations still want to give me awards for that one act more than thirty years ago. I am happy to go wherever I am invited and to accept whatever honors are given me. I understand that I am a symbol. But I have never gotten used to being a “public person.” —ROSA PARKS, *Rosa Parks: My Story*

Almost instantly, Parks became the most famous African American woman in America. —JOYCE HANSON, *Rosa Parks: A Biography*

Rosa Parks's body as famously visualized in the now iconic black and white mug shot photo (figure 2.1), taken as repression escalated against the Montgomery bus boycott and more than eighty of its participants valiantly identified themselves for arrest and photographing at the courthouse in February 1956, is often mistakenly thought to have been taken immediately after her arrest on the bus that fateful evening in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955. Contextualizing Parks's photo as one among those of numerous community activists taken during this mass arrest frames the Montgomery bus boycott as



FIGURE 2.1 Rosa Parks's iconic arrest photo, February 21, 1956.



Riché Richardson, *Rosa Parks, Whose “No” in 1955 Launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Was Heard around the World*, 2006–12. Dedicated to Georgette Norman. Photograph © Mickey Welsh—USA TODAY NETWORK.

a collective movement while resisting the typical narratives that idealize her as a lone heroine who chose to remain seated on the bus. This photo is also instructive and revealing for purposes of reflecting on that evening, in showing her dressed in a suit, hat, and glasses, with a pinned-up braided hairstyle, replete with a flower pin, which bore all the conventional gendered and sexed significations of a “lady,” and highlighted gender and sexuality alongside race as factors that had made her legible on the bus as a public space.

Civil rights supporter Virginia Durr’s account of the evening of the arrest notably emphasizes Parks’s appearance and demeanor: “She was an exceedingly fine-looking woman and very neatly dressed and such a lady in every way—so genteel and so extremely well-mannered and quiet.”<sup>1</sup> Because black women were invisible within the category *lady*, in addition to humiliating Parks based on her race, it was defeminizing that she, along with all other black women targeted by this routine degradation and abuse, was expected by law to give up her seat to a white man on a public bus. Such hostility was steeped in the systematized ungendering of black bodies, a phenomenon Hortense Spillers links to the violence against blackness during antebellum slavery. Within public spaces of the Jim Crow era, codes of respectability as signaled through their fashioning elicited white anger and abuse and made African Americans more vulnerable in some instances.<sup>2</sup> The white male passenger; the bus driver, James Blake; and the two police officers who were called to the scene had no social obligation to respect Parks. As Felicia McGhee has pointed out, “The city gave bus drivers the responsibility to maintain segregation on the buses.”<sup>3</sup> White men most often denied such time-honored social courtesies to black women, who were expected to know their “place” and stay in it. Such courtesies were a residual trace of the romanticized raced, classed, and gendered ideology of the “southern lady” from the antebellum era, who was defined as white in the southern cultural imaginary.

When Parks refused to give up her seat on the Montgomery bus that fateful evening in 1955, she risked life and limb in resisting the authority of at least four white men in a southern public space. In a later interview, Blake obviously remained unrepentant for the actions he took against Parks on the bus that evening: “I wasn’t trying to do anything to that Parks woman except do my job. She was in violation of the city codes, so what was I supposed to do? That damn bus was full and she wouldn’t move back. I had my orders.”<sup>4</sup> His de-subjectifying and dismissive reference to her as “that Parks woman” mirrored the forms of sexed and gendered degradation that shadowed the original encounter and parallels his reference to her that night on the bus as “that one.”<sup>5</sup>

The ways in which Parks confronted racism through her courageous choice to remain seated sometimes obscure the levels on which she also in effect confronted sexism that fateful December evening. According to Parks biographer Douglas Brinkley, who draws on Parks's reflections, Blake directed most of his hostility and verbal tirades at black women with slurs such as "bitch" and "coon."<sup>6</sup> Such epithets are inflected by a host of raced, sexed, and gendered pathologies and stereotypes. Long-standing ideologies of black female sexuality, traceable back to slavery (again, a system that Spillers has notably argued "ungendered" black men and women), inflected the flagrant disregard for Parks on the bus given her status as a black feminine subject and a southern climate in which black women were frequently abused not only verbally but also physically and sexually.<sup>7</sup>

Such sexual abuse was horrifically evident in the case of Recy Taylor, a black woman who was brutally gang raped by a group of six white men, including a serviceman in the U.S. Army, in Abbeville, Alabama, in 1944. Parks had investigated this case as secretary of the NAACP in Montgomery, Alabama. Personal writings discovered in recent years possibly refer to Rosa Parks's own painful memory of nearly being raped in 1931 by a white male neighbor for whom she was working.<sup>8</sup> Alabama State University professor Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, who became the leader of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery and laid the groundwork for the city's famed bus boycott in the wake of Parks's arrest, observed that black women were especial targets for degradation on public buses and acknowledged the irony in Parks being expected to give up her seat to a man.<sup>9</sup>

In the words of Danielle McGuire, who examines the routinized black female abuse of the Jim Crow South, "Only by understanding the long and relatively hidden history of sexualized violence in Montgomery, Alabama, and African Americans' efforts to protect black womanhood, can we see that the Montgomery bus boycott was more than a movement for civil rights. It was also a movement for dignity, respect, and bodily integrity."<sup>10</sup> An approach that considers the interplay of gender and sexuality with race is useful, too, because white masculinity also profoundly shaped the encounter on the bus. The body was writ large, and race, gender, and sexuality were relevant to the situation on the bus, not only because it primarily counterposed Parks with four subjects who were white and male, but also because of what it meant as Parks stood under the gaze of a white man who had routinely made his disparaging estimation of black women evident. A perspective focused on Parks's intersectionality allows us to recognize the implications of Parks's

heroic activism for later second-wave feminism and can help situate her as an important precursor, adding valuably to the understanding of how Rosa Parks sustained a lifetime of political engagement, as Jeanne Theoharis has emphasized in her compelling political biography of Parks.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these issues, Theoharis acknowledges Parks's disappointment and concern about how some black women also used their sexuality, including tactics such as flirting with rude and abusive police officers, to benefit themselves.<sup>12</sup>

The intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality increasingly acknowledged in studies of Parks is a crucial lens through which to analyze her encounter on the bus and the larger political movement that emerged in its wake, in part because black women were its primary architects. Prior to Parks's arrest in Montgomery, the local NAACP had envisioned a woman as being the most ideal plaintiff against the bus system because a woman would evoke more sympathy.<sup>13</sup> Two black teen girls, Claudette Colvin and Mary Louise Williams, had played a central role in confronting the bus system when they were arrested in the months prior to Parks.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, the flier circulated to announce the Montgomery bus boycott in the wake of Parks's arrest, a movement that was primarily driven by the black women who made up the Women's Political Council under the leadership of Robinson, who reproduced 52,500 copies of it with a mimeograph machine, underscored the mistreatment of black women on the buses. Aurelia Browder and Susie MacDonald were other black women who had resisted segregation on the buses in the months before Parks and, alongside Colvin and Williams, served as plaintiffs in the 1956 case, *Browder v. Gayle*, that attorney Fred Gray filed to challenge such laws.

Rosa Parks's vulnerability as a raced *and* gendered subject and sexual being has typically been obscured in light of her universalization as a "mother," and this title's attendant desexualization. As the first epigraph of this chapter reveals, however, Rosa Parks embraced her iconic image as a symbolic mother, despite her reservations about it and the mythologies that inflect it, and used it strategically in her public outreach to inspire others, including children, whom she frequently centered in her writing and activism. We cannot neglect or dismiss the mother motifs related to Parks because they are equally steeped in race, sexuality, and gender and are tacit in all her primary cultural representations invoking children, which are less linked to romanticizing her in relation to past civil rights history than to articulating her in relation to a more visionary future. Because of the contradictions and ambivalences that riddle the mother motif, it remains the most understudied aspect of Parks's identity and public construction as a woman. Her best-known published writings center

youth and link them to possibilities for actualizing a better future. Children are intimately and recurrently connected to Parks not only in her own writing but also in her primary economies of representation in cultural and political contexts.

Black women leaders have strategically and consistently staged the trope of the mother in the nation's public sphere within their speeches and writing discourses, as they have claimed voice, agency, and authority therein, and in the process, they have posed a challenge to white-centered national symbolism, which has alienated black women based on race and gender. Moreover, it would be limiting to simply dismiss such representations as apolitical, or to conflate or confuse them with pathologies of the black maternal body, such as the mammy and the matriarch, while failing to recognize levels on which they are subversive and work to unsettle and confront stereotypes of black womanhood steeped in pathologies of black maternity. Indeed, the representations figuring Parks as a mother within civil rights discourses, though coterminous, were the obverse of the scripts of black women as matriarchs circulated in popular culture and later authorized at the state level by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his infamous treatise on the Negro family.<sup>15</sup>

In Parks's long-standing honored designation as the mother of the civil rights movement, the maternal metaphor shaped this script to the point that she was coined as a Black Madonna in the years after her arrest in 1955. Indeed, a Montgomery city councilman, Luther Oliver, dubbed her Saint Rosa.<sup>16</sup> The metaphor has been foundational in constituting Parks as a "national mother" in the cultural imagination. The first epigraph to this chapter from Parks's autobiography attests to her awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of this maternal narrative and to the ways in which it even virtually enacted a deification of her. Indeed, the metaphor of Parks as the movement's mother in a symbolic and representative sense has complemented the movement's recurrent narratives invoking children, which reached their rhetorical height in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, it is crucial to recognize ways in which tropes of mothers, children, and family obscure the legibility of black queer subjects who have been alien and other within conventional definitions of such categories. While this historic event extended Parks's national visibility, she and other women civil rights activists, with the exception of figures such as famed gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, were absent from its program. This marginality mirrored the silencing on civil rights platforms of figures such as the black gay activist Bayard

Rustin, notwithstanding his advocacy with A. Philip Randolph for a march on Washington in 1941, protesting discrimination against blacks in employment; his role in organizing the Freedom Rides and the aforementioned historic march; and his cofounding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). As the legacy of Pauli Murray reveals, there remains a need for more nuanced and inclusive narratives of civil rights history that throw into relief contributions of black queer and trans women, along with those of leaders such as Rustin, to accord legibility to the queer role in shaping civil rights history. In 1987, Rustin passed away weeks before the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights on the National Mall, at which the AIDS Memorial Quilt was first displayed.

My engagement of Rosa Parks grounded in methods of literary and cultural studies prioritizes her voice and writings, as well as cultural tributes to her, and considers the complexity with which race, gender, and sexuality are useful for reflecting on her profound influence on national femininity in the United States, through her fashioning as a national mother since the civil rights era against the backdrop of her global iconicity, despite black and feminine subjects' sexual subjection, prevailing exclusion, and illegibility within U.S. femininity's definition. Rosa Parks's national and global iconicity as a civil rights movement heroine began to crystallize in the months after her arrest and further consolidated during the post-civil rights era, as the movement itself was widely studied, memorialized, and celebrated within a range of institutions established in dedication to its history and memory. Her status as a woman who was never a literal birth or adoptive mother to a child has made her imaginable as a mythic and universal mother in civil rights discourses and facilitated her abstraction as a nurturer of an infinite variety of causes in the global context related to freedom and human rights.

Newer scholarly studies of Rosa Parks have rightly redressed the longstanding relegation of discussion about Parks's life and legacy to books designed for young readers and children, along with studies that fail to examine her life with depth and critical rigor. Concomitantly, they critique the ways in which such conventional dialogues have obscured her agency as an activist by propagating the myth of Rosa Parks as a woman who remained seated on the bus because she was tired and describing her as a quiet woman, a staple narrative in the mythic portrait of her as a national heroine and mother. Yet it is important not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We should weigh the emphasis that Rosa Parks placed on her scripts as a national mother and on young people, not only in her legacy of activism and community work, but also



in the body of books she produced collaboratively and published, including *Quiet Strength: The Faith, the Hope, and the Heart of a Woman Who Changed a Nation* (1994), *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue with Today's Youth* (1997), and *Rosa Parks: My Story* (1992), to ponder why she consistently aimed her work at juvenile audiences. The publication of these works extended her public voice, introduced her legacy to newer generations, and built on her mission to make a difference in the lives of youth. In an effort to recenter Parks's voice and remedy her limited representations in children's books, Rosalyn Cooperman, Melina Patterson, and Jess Rigelhaupt underscore the importance of reconsidering Parks's biography, including works by McGuire and Theoharis, but fail to take Parks's *own* words into consideration, as well as the importance and centrality of her platform related to young people within her discourse.<sup>18</sup> Taking a closer look at her written work is also essential because in studying her legacy, too little attention has been paid to how she represented herself and told her own story.

The black feminist critical lens through which I examine her work draws on the black feminist field's embrace of personal testimony as a resource for theorizing and informs my investments in recognizing and prioritizing her voice from my disciplinary standpoint as a literary scholar. It is a voice that in her autobiography *Rosa Parks: My Story*, which she wrote with author and scholar Jim Haskins, chronicles the activism in which she had engaged in the years leading up to the fateful encounter on the bus with James Blake in 1955, a background that was part of the process of her radicalization.<sup>19</sup> These contours of her autobiography reveal her emerging political consciousness and commitment to activism since the 1930s. While the contemporary retellings and elaborations of her story are tremendously valuable from a scholarly standpoint, it is crucial to acknowledge that this narrative was also to some degree evident in her autobiographical self-portrait, so as not to reductively correlate such accounts with newer biographies and histories focused on her life.

As a literary scholar, I find it important to reflect on how Rosa Parks wrote about her own activism to accord more legibility to her distinct voice, because doing so further unsettles the myth of "quiet strength" frequently associated with her leadership, throwing into relief how decisively she challenged it herself.<sup>20</sup> I continue this chapter by examining Rosa Parks's *Quiet Strength*, along with *Dear Mrs. Parks*, which were both written with her lawyer Gregory Reed. Her published books are fascinating because of their status as collaborative writings developed through interviews and strategies of documentation in oral history, and yet they affirm her voice and agency as a woman, which have



been obscured all too frequently. They have been virtually ignored in literary studies. Examining these works comparatively and through a lens that recognizes and prioritizes the voice of Rosa Parks also highlights their implications for discourses of oral history and her autobiography. Furthermore, when thinking of them in relation to scholarly initiatives, such as the SIS Oral History Project at Spelman College, established by Gloria Wade-Gayles, critical work in black feminism designed to focus on the stories and wisdom of black women elders, we can also recognize their value as significant writings produced by a black senior woman in the late twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

I go on to discuss the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine, the central installation at the Rosa Parks Children's Museum at Troy University in Montgomery. Added to the Rosa Parks Museum in 2006, the wing centers children and, in its conception and design, is premised on the mother motif so frequently related to Parks. It challenges white-centered scripts of American identity in casting her as a representative national figure and centers black women's voices and legacies in narratives of black liberation struggle. The futuristic bus installation is relevant for my purposes because it echoes major themes that inflect her writings related to freedom and challenging children to help eliminate injustice and create a better world in the future. It is valuable to draw on for its dialogism with themes in her writings related to freedom and the universality in her message, which counter scripts that consign civil rights legacies to the past. The installation draws a national and global audience of thousands of tourists annually within one of the foremost institutions established as a tribute to her national legacy in civil rights.

I end this chapter by examining the imaging of Parks as a national mother during her mourning on the nation's Capitol Rotunda in 2005, which culminated long-standing representations of Parks as the mother of the civil rights movement and provides the most profoundly salient illustration of her influence in shaping national femininity. At one level, it is important to view such public commemorations of Parks with skepticism and to critique them because the state has routinely appropriated the legacies of radical figures and framed them as national heroes without redressing the political concerns such figures championed, mechanisms that are inherently reactionary and typically designed to mute rather than enable the messages of radical and insurgent leaders and movements. While motifs highlighting Parks as a mother unsettle stereotypical and pathological scripts associated with the black maternal body, they have been limited by their linkages to typical symbolic feminizations within prevailing patriarchal national narratives. As postcolonial insights

reveal, these narratives routinely romanticize women in relation to landscapes and subordinate women's leadership, revealing the role of gender in constituting nationalisms, which, as work in queer studies has illustrated, is intimately linked to sexuality.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, such public honorifics are valuable for redressing the long-standing erasures of blackness in narratives of American identity. In this sense, such tributes should not be devalued, because they have been hard won within the ongoing struggle for black inclusion in American democracy.

### Rosa Parks's Message for the World's Young People

The script of Rosa Parks as a civil rights mother and the recurring framing of Montgomery's NAACP leader E. D. Nixon as its father were symbiotic terms that, when juxtaposed with narratives invoking the movement's children, portrayed the national movement as a family. The influential social science scholarship of the period, most notably Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), had emphasized black otherness.<sup>23</sup> The epistemology of black family within civil rights discourses countered scripts of blackness as pathological and alien to notions of American identity by implying that its ideals related to freedom were quintessential for achieving democracy. The stereotype of black mothers as matriarchs was a primary site on which pathologies of black family as dysfunctional and deviant were propagated in the era after World War II, in contradistinction to normative nuclear families in the white American mainstream.

Lorraine Hansberry's acclaimed play *A Raisin in the Sun*, which opened on Broadway in 1959, confronts and unsettles this ideology's linkages to notions of black family dysfunction at the same time it immortalizes the matriarch's strength through the character Lena Younger. The development of this subversive portrait by a black queer woman has only been clear retrospectively, in the wake of newer research on the author, including Imani Perry's groundbreaking biography.<sup>24</sup> During the period in which the ideology of the matriarch was disseminated and mainstreamed, which was coterminous with the launching of the modern civil rights movement, citations of Parks as a mother figure within civil rights discourses were a script of black womanhood that did not draw symbolic power from the black matriarch. Parks's diminutive body and the quiet demeanor associated with her also unraveled this staple construction of black womanhood that the media popularized and

social science legitimized, premised on the myth of the strong black woman, which reached its height when Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously released *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* in 1965. Yet emerging citations of Parks as a mother within civil rights discourses belied the threats that were made to her and her family after the incident on the bus, her firing from her job as a seamstress at Montgomery Fair, the subsequent challenges she faced in finding work, and the eventual decision to leave Montgomery and resettle in Detroit.

Just as the rhetoric of Parks as a mother, along with the symbolic family evoked within civil rights discourses, provided an alternative script to the pathological narratives about black womanhood in mainstream social science in the postwar era, it stood apart from the popular romanticized narratives of black family within the black nationalist rhetoric of the black liberation movement, which portrayed black men as kings heading a symbolic family premised on a romantic African past, as famously illustrated by Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul on Ice*.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of the black power movement of this period, black women leaders produced autobiographies that confronted the marginalization and devaluation of black women's leadership, along with persisting sexism, within the black liberation movement. For example, the research of Margo V. Perkins primarily focuses on autobiographies by women activists such as Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown and frames their work in relation to autobiographical writing produced throughout the long history of black resistance writing and struggle since Emancipation. Angela Ards has also contributed valuable critical insights on black feminist autobiographies by black women activists produced since *Brown v. Board*. Such work holds critical implications for Parks's writing, shaped by her experiences during the civil rights era.<sup>26</sup> Writings related to Parks's political activism and thought are crucial to situate not only within the black radical tradition alongside such women leaders, but also within epistemologies of Pan-Africanism.<sup>27</sup>

Parks's writings, including her autobiographical books and other materials, provide insights into her political vision and should be valued for the contribution they make to black intellectual history, along with African American literary history. Black feminist scholar Joanne M. Braxton, a pioneering critic in studies of black women's autobiography, who developed one of its earliest critical histories and who has linked this genre of writing by black women in the late twentieth century to the black women's literary renaissance of the era, broadens its definition to include materials such as images, reminiscences, memoirs, diaries, and journals, acknowledging the intertextuality of black

women's autobiographical writings. She provides indispensable critical contexts for examining the epistolary formats in which Parks framed some of her most poignant writings and for examining their linkages to the work of a precursor such as Mary McLeod Bethune.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Braxton's observation that "Black women's autobiography is . . . an occasion for viewing the individual in relation to those others with whom she shares emotional, philosophical, and spiritual affinities, as well as political realities" is also helpful for thinking about how civil rights, faith, values, and a commitment to eliminating racism and injustice bridged the legacies of these black women leaders.<sup>29</sup> A close analysis of Parks's writings reveals how they instate her within a spectrum of civil rights leaders, from Mary McLeod Bethune to Martin Luther King Jr., and establish intertextuality with the most famous messages that these leaders shared with national audiences, while building on, mirroring, and broadening their core themes related to youth, strategies that pay tribute to other iconic black national civil rights leaders while amplifying her message.

Recent work on Parks, such as Sheila McCauley Keys and Eddie B. Allen Jr.'s *Our Auntie Rosa: The Family of Rosa Parks Remembers Her Life and Lessons*, reveals that Parks's closest family, including her nieces and nephews, were among the young people whom she most profoundly influenced and who saw her up close in a way that the public rarely experienced.<sup>30</sup> The book provides a pastiche of testimonies from them about her influence in their lives and lessons they learned from her. Mary Frances Whitt, who was mentored by Parks in the NAACP's Youth Council and became a university professor at Alabama State University, has discussed Parks's indelible influence on her life in interviews and essays. She was a friend and federated club sister of my mother's, and this influence was always clear in the reflections she shared with me in several conversations we had about her relationship with Parks, along with her writings related to Parks's mentoring in her life.<sup>31</sup> Parks's loving and generous influence as a mentor of children as documented in testimonies by those whom she knew best and loved most are indispensable for the personal and dynamic portrait of her life that they offer, along with another perspective on her voice.

Parks's writings are primarily scripted for a young audience and extend her concern and mentoring to children everywhere. Just as the experiences of black children have been increasingly centered in studies of slavery, it will also be increasingly important to recognize their role in shaping civil rights history. Such insights are all the more vital when considering that the tragic deaths of youth such as Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi, in 1955 and Addie

Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair in the bombing at 16th Street Baptist Church mobilized the movement at key junctures. Such tragic histories informed Parks's continuing investments in prioritizing children in her political and cultural agendas. Parks also recurrently engaged them as a primary audience for her books and incorporated their voices into the written narratives she developed, which are an indispensable resource because they are a primary site on which she articulated and circulated her political message. The backdrop of black children's historical stereotyping within American material and popular culture also throws into relief the revolutionary implications in Parks's centering of children within her early activism and her continuing prioritization of them in her public work and writing.

The biography of Parks that frames *Quiet Strength*, written in collaboration with Gregory J. Reed and edited by Elaine Steele, notes that Parks is "nationally recognized as the mother of the modern-day civil rights movement in America," and that her refusal to give up her seat "changed America and redirected the course of history."<sup>32</sup> It is explicit in acknowledging her as a symbol of freedom for the world. This signals Parks's personal investments in her public image as a mother figure in civil rights history and as a national symbol. That it frames her book also underscores her agency in helping to shape this image and compellingly illustrates her strategic use of it as an activist.

In representing herself as a mother figure in the nation, highlighting children, tying them to the future, and acknowledging them as a primary audience for this book, aspects of Parks's message recall that of Mary McLeod Bethune's "My Last Will and Testament." Such continuities make these texts useful to compare on some levels. Like the "Last Will," *Quiet Strength* similarly singles out terms and uses anecdotes from Parks's life to reflect on them, terms that include *fear, defiance, injustice, pain, character, role models, faith, values, quiet strength, determination, youth, and the future*. Parks frames each of the book's short chapters with a biblical scripture, which similarly grounds it in the black sermonic tradition while also invoking call-and-response narrative techniques. Like Bethune, she positions children at the center, stresses their agency as activists, posits them as the hope for the future, and challenges them to carry on the civil rights struggle.

The cover art for the book features a photograph of Parks against the backdrop of two little girls and a little boy, visually signaling its thematic investments. Significantly, the first phrase of the volume, "As a child," foregrounds Parks's reflections on her own childhood, when she learned early on to live

by faith in God and to not be afraid of racial terrorists. The latter lesson she learned from her grandfather, whom she often sat beside on the porch at night as he vigilantly watched out for Ku Klux Klan members, shotgun on hand in case his family was ever threatened. Parks foregrounds this experience early in life as one that taught her not to be fearful of white racism and that prepared her for the encounter with Blake on the bus that fateful December evening. The themes that unfold across the book intersect with those that run across the paragraphs of Bethune's famous letter, despite the difference in genres. Parks traces her beliefs in Christian faith to the Bible instruction she received in her family as a child and describes her investments in freedom as God ordained. She links the title chapter of the book, "Quiet Strength," scripturally to Isaiah 30:15—"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength"—to helping children in need, and to the impetus for her continuing work.

Similarly, Parks begins the second chapter, "Defiance," by discussing the optimism that change would come in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, describing the apprehensive expression of "a little child" whom she saw with his mother being taken to an integrated school, a child who was reluctant to go, as an illustration of the hostility that some whites continued to show blacks in schools despite this landmark ruling by the nation's highest court. *Brown v. Board of Education*, which aimed to integrate public schools, established the import and centrality of children within the modern civil rights movement, a movement that this monumental case heralded.

For Parks, the children at the vanguard of the movement who integrated predominantly white schools demonstrated the resolve that was critical for all blacks to embody in the face of a segregationist mindset. She suggests that it also affected her resistance on the bus that night. Notably, in her reflections, she mentions the "police powers" of bus drivers and acknowledges how unsettling it felt for her as a woman to be asked to give up her seat for a man, which also registers the role of gender, and her subject positioning as a black woman in particular, in shaping her response during this encounter: "It did not seem proper, particularly for a woman to give up her seat to a man."<sup>33</sup> In sharing this reflection, Parks speaks to how gender and sexuality shaped the encounter and critiques the exclusion of black women from the social respect accorded white women in the South.

The third chapter, "Injustice," reinforces her narrative thread related to children by incorporating dialogue about a program Parks initiated called Pathways to Freedom, designed to teach history to young people under the

auspices of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, which she established with Elaine Steele, who serves as the organization's executive director, in 1987 in Detroit, Michigan, as a community organization to design programs for young people. Indeed, like Whitt, Parks began to mentor Steele as a youth when they met in 1965 while working as seamstresses at a factory; they remained close thereafter, and Steele ultimately became her caretaker. Pathways to Freedom operated for five weeks during the summer, and focused on teaching lessons related to the Underground Railroad and the civil rights movement. It also taught students lessons about life. Five years earlier, Parks had also offered reflections on the organization in her autobiography, which mentions the organization's mission of helping to educate young people and teach skills that will help them in life.<sup>34</sup> This work reflects and builds on Parks's life history in Montgomery working with and mentoring students in the NAACP Youth Council, including Whitt, who had famously stood outside the courthouse after the hearing that followed Parks's arrest and chanted, "They've messed with the wrong one now," and who found inspiration in Parks's example throughout her life.<sup>35</sup>

Parks's chapter titled "Pain" further foregrounds the youth-related themes that suffuse the book through her reflections on a young black man named Joseph Skipper, who broke into her home in 1994 and robbed her when she was eighty-one, hitting her violently several times and bruising her in the process, an attack on her as a senior woman that led to her move to a high-rise apartment and that underscored the crisis of crime and violence perpetrated by youth in black communities. For her, the incident was symptomatic of a lack of respect for elders among some contemporary young people. Her response to the incident emblemizes her continued commitment to principles of non-violent resistance and Christian love and forgiveness, including the gospel principle of turning the other cheek.

She draws on the incident to emphasize the importance of persevering and remaining hopeful in the face of suffering, evoking the freedom song "We Shall Overcome," the main anthem of the civil rights movement: "I pray for this young man and the conditions in our country that have made him this way. I urge people not to read too much into the attack. I regret that some people, regardless of race, are in such a mental state that they would want to harm an older person. Young people need to be taught to respect and care for their elders. Despite the violence and crime in our society, we should not let fear overwhelm us. We must remain strong. We must not give up hope; we



can overcome.”<sup>36</sup> It was also unsettling because it subjected her to a form of violence she had never experienced in her life, even while coming of age and living in the violent Jim Crow South. As she put it, “I had never been hit in that manner in my life.”<sup>37</sup> Such abuse was all the more hurtful to experience at the hands of a black youth, a group for whom she had primarily advocated throughout her lifetime in her community work as a leader and an activist.

Parks’s two final chapters of the book, which are framed by the Joel 1:3 scripture “Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation,” fully synthesize her message, focused on young people and looking toward a future to which they pave the way. “I am motivated and inspired by young people and children. My eyes light up whenever children come around. They are our future. If the changes we began in the civil rights movement are going to continue, they will be the ones who have to do it.”<sup>38</sup> Here the resonance of Parks’s message to youth at the end of the twentieth century with Bethune’s from nearly half a century earlier is even more evident. Like Bethune’s “Last Will and Testament,” it relates children to the future and poses a challenge to them to help bring about change and continue the effort to eradicate racism. Like Bethune, Parks stresses how important it is for young people to remember the struggles of their ancestors. She is very precise in outlining seven key areas on which to focus in supporting them.

Her message, aimed at empowering young people in black communities, suggests that good, effective, and engaged mentorship and leadership are vital in their lives. She suggests that adults set the example by being positive role models. She stresses the importance of encouraging young people to cultivate love and respect for their elders and for one another. In her estimation, teaching youth lessons in core subjects, as well as providing them with a biblical foundation, is another channel through which to instill values. She suggests that adults have a responsibility not only to work hard but also to teach youth the values of hard work and working together. She stresses the importance of teaching youth how to do collective work and to do so in peace, along with the importance of encouraging and supporting them to give back to their communities by doing service. Parks pitches this core section of her message to African American youth, a group whom she suggests most urgently needs the sage wisdom and guidance she offers. She culminates her chapter, however, with a message to young people “of any race,” stressing the importance of hard work and encouraging them to make the country a better place.<sup>39</sup> Her urge to young people to avoid drugs and alcohol notably relates such substances to bondage and the loss of freedom in a sense that transcends definitions estab-

lished within black liberation struggle from the eras of slavery and Jim Crow, emphasizing their relation to all humans achieving well-being. What she wishes for them she suggests would improve the lives of youth everywhere.

If Bethune's famous letter anticipated the "I Have a Dream" speech of Martin Luther King, then *Quiet Strength* ends by building on it in outlining Parks's vision for children everywhere:

My message to the world is that we must come together and live as one. There is only one world; and yet we, as a people, have treated the world as if it were divided. We cannot allow the gains we have made to erode. Although we have a long way to go, I do believe that we can achieve Dr. King's dream of a better world.

From time to time I catch glimpses of that world. I can see a world where children do not learn hatred in their homes. I can see a world where mothers and fathers have the last and most important word.

I can see a world in which one respects the rights of one's neighbors. I can see a world in which all adults protect the innocence of children. I can see a world in which people do not call each other names based on skin color. I can see a world in which people of all races and all religions work together to improve the quality of life for everyone.

I can see this world because it exists today in small pockets of this country and in a small pocket of every person's heart. If we look to God and work together—not only here but everywhere—then others will see this world too and help to make it a reality.<sup>40</sup>

Parks explicitly draws on King's dream in outlining her vision here. King's "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington, which drew more than 250,000 people from across the country to the nation's capital on August 28, 1963, was grounded in a list of ten demands designed to achieve civil rights legislation that would ensure equal access to public facilities, jobs, education, and voting; establish a national minimum wage; expand job training opportunities; desegregate schools, jobs, and housing; and promote fair labor practices. King's charismatic speech, which followed up a selection by the famed gospel singer Mahalia Jackson and remarks from the president of the American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, was the climax of the march.

Parks, like other black women leaders, had been excluded from the male-centered program for the March on Washington; she was not given the prerogative to speak to its agenda and was asked to participate by walking alongside the wives of civil rights leaders. Even more troublingly, her autobiography

describes her removal from the front row of the Selma-to-Montgomery march of 1965 multiple times.<sup>41</sup> It is important to relate Parks's comments in her book to this historic speech, which is the most famous oration of the modern civil rights movement, which was catalyzed by her choice to remain seated. She links her own voice, which is often reductively related to the myth of "quiet strength," to the booming charisma and authority associated with King, while challenging the logic of a movement that had typically prioritized the voices of black male leaders. As Cooperman, Patterson, and Rigelhaupt point out, "The traditional narrative presents a biased picture of the Civil Rights Movement. It marginalizes the contributions of women, reflects a broader pattern of pedagogy that relegates women's participation to the sidelines of politics and history, and offers an overly narrow view of how substantive social and political change occurs."<sup>42</sup>

Parks claims authority as a woman and affirms her status as a leader to address youth in a collective sense in this book, which centralizes her own voice as a black woman leader within civil rights discourses, which have conventionally marginalized black women's contributions and prioritized masculine leadership. The *I* that she recurrently invokes places her voice front and center in this narrative and helps to establish intimacy with her audience. That she directs her message to a global audience rests on her symbolic capital as a leader and is grounded in the transnational achievements of the freedom movement she catalyzed. Her repeated use of the phrase "I can see" lends poetic resonance to the vision she describes and, like the speech it builds on, links it to the conventionally masculinist black sermonic tradition. Each point she mentions is grounded in her renown and in her vision as a national leader with political capital who has made an international impact. Parks's riff on the final portion of the "I Have a Dream" speech is significant, too, because it, like her own, advocates for change to help better the lives of children.

*Dear Mrs. Parks* shares common ground with *Quiet Strength* in framing Parks as the mother of the movement and as a national symbol. More broadly, both books primarily direct Parks's message toward a young audience, which they frame as universal and global. Furthermore, both books mention the goals of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development to promote peace and justice globally. In voicing their message to children, the books draw on Parks's role and voice as a national leader to send a message to children around the world. In keeping with the collaborative strategies of developing her books, Parks's lawyer Gregory Reed collaborated with her on *Dear Mrs. Parks*, which was published when she was eighty-three and, like

*Quiet Strength*, is pitched primarily to address a young audience and shares themes with this precursor. A preface, a foreword by Reed, and a commentary by Steele frame the book.

Like Reed's reference to Parks as Mother Rosa, the preface highlights Parks's status as a symbol and the view of her as a mother: "In the years since her arrest, Rosa Parks has been recognized throughout America as the mother of the modern-day Civil Rights movement. For children and adults, Mrs. Parks is a role model for courage, an example of dignity and determination. She is a symbol of freedom for the world."<sup>43</sup> These dimensions of the book acknowledge that Parks embraced her role as a mother. Steele's commentary similarly speaks to Parks's symbolic influence by acknowledging her kind treatment of all people, and the impression of her love for "all humanity" left on everyone whom she encounters, framing Parks's book as "a gift to the young people of the world," which points to the universality of her message and inclusive vision that embraces all youth. Parks reinforces this message in her response to the second letter, when asked whether she has children: "No, I don't have any children born from me, but I consider all children as mine," and describes Steele as her closest friend, who is like a daughter.<sup>44</sup>

*Dear Mrs. Parks* ends with an updated version of the remarks that ended Parks's previous book, extending and building on the elements she believes will be essential to help create a better world. In this new version, she explicitly addresses the need to end acts of violence. At one level, this shift likely reflected Parks's long-standing investments in eliminating violence in the world, particularly violence based on the color of one's skin. Even more personally, it may have reflected Parks's experience being robbed by Joseph Skipper. That she ends this book with the same powerful statement that ended the previous one reinforces and iterates her message all the more. Invoking such a ubiquitous speech in African American cultural history reinforces the dialogism of her writing, reflects the intertextuality of these two books, and underscores the value in reading and studying them comparatively.

One of the main public tributes that emerged after her death is premised on the running themes across her writings, invoking Parks as a mother, framing the freedom struggle in which she was an activist as universal, and challenging children to help bring about change in the world in the future. The writings by Parks are valuable to juxtapose with an analysis of the primary cultural institution established in the South in her honor, which as a space builds on core themes related to children and futurity that her books repeatedly mention. Bridget R. Cooks and Susan E. Cohen are among contemporary art historians

who have analyzed the challenges of depicting and exhibiting black images in the post–civil rights/black power era and discussed the racial politics of museums as institutions, while critiquing the persisting Eurocentrism of the art establishment.<sup>45</sup> While they focus on cultural dynamics in New York City in relation to Harlem, their critique holds important implications for southern cultural institutions, suggesting that the extent to which a preeminent museum focused on Rosa Parks in Montgomery was visionary and groundbreaking. Its close proximity to the new Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a project of Bryan Stevenson’s Equal Justice Initiative, bridges dialogues about civil rights and Jim Crow and traumas of slavery and lynching, expanding contexts for exploring her life and legacy.

### The Rosa Parks Children’s Museum and the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine

Two high-profile controversies reflecting contestations over Rosa Parks’s legacy have emerged in African American popular culture in music and film. In 1998, the rap group OutKast, along with its production company LaFace Records, was sued by Rosa Parks for the song “Rosa Parks,” included on the 1998 album *Aquemini*. Parks, who was represented by Reed, argued that the song appropriated her name and also included vulgarity in its lyrics. Similarly, the 2002 comedy film *Barbershop*, directed by Tim Story, garnered controversy because it stages a heated debate about Parks between two of its characters, Calvin Palmer Jr. (Ice Cube) and Eddie (Cedric the Entertainer).

In this scene, Palmer, who is sitting in a barber chair eating, remarks, “You’ve got to give it up to Rosa Parks because they was deep, they was on the front lines in the 1960s.” Eddie responds, “Who the hell is Rosa Parks?” He goes on to assert,

Man, she was tired. That’s what you do when you’re tired. You sit your ass down. Rosa Parks ain’t do nothing but sit her black ass down. . . . I’m gon’ give her her just due because what she did, her act, led to the movement and everything, but she damn sure ain’t special. No. It was a whole lot of black folks sat down on buses and they got thrown in jail. And they did it way before Rosa Parks did. The only difference between them and her was that she was secretary of the NAACP and she knowed Martin Luther King and they got a lot of publicity. That’s all.

This dialogue in the barbershop reflects distinct dynamics that Melissa Harris-Perry relates to black grassroots and community contexts in her study *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought*. She points out, “Ordinary spaces of everyday talk among African Americans serve as forums for dialogue that contribute both to the development of individual ideological dispositions and to the revisions of ideologies across time.” Harris-Perry goes on to note, “Churches, political organizations, news outlets, fraternal clubs, mutual aid societies, barbershops, juke joints, and labor unions that constitute the black counterpublic are internally contested spaces. Identities of gender, class, color, sexuality and privilege crosscut the terrain of a racially homogeneous public sphere.”<sup>46</sup>

If Eddie’s comments attempt to acknowledge Parks’s several precursors, who had been arrested in Montgomery, and to remedy their relative invisibility in narratives of civil rights history, this character’s purposefully iconoclastic and irreverent comments are also grounded in the widespread and misleading myth that being “tired” that evening on the bus was the primary factor that led Parks to remain seated. This portrayal of Parks also seems reductive and suspect in light of the film’s primary investments in endorsing black conservatism through Palmer’s admiration of the entrepreneur Stedman Graham. Furthermore, Eddie’s comments, which are inflected by profanity and the use of the word *black* as an epithet, are ironic as voiced by a young black male at the beginning of the twenty-first century (while costumed on screen portraying a black male senior) in recasting forms of disrespect, devaluation, and humiliation to which Parks was subjected by the white bus driver James Blake in the Jim Crow South, a man known for routinely insulting black women.

This scene also seems ironic given the status of Parks’s husband, Raymond Parks, as a barber. Indeed, director Julie Dash’s 2002 made-for-television movie *The Rosa Parks Story* depicts the character portraying Parks’s husband, Raymond (Peter Francis James), criticizing the NAACP while working in a barbershop because of his disapproval of its strategies for dealing with the case of the Scottsboro Boys. As he works, he asserts, “The NAACP just a bunch of scared old men who blow hot and cold.” While the films were released in the same year, *The Rosa Parks Story* reached a far more limited audience than the blockbuster hit *Barbershop*.

These episodes as witnessed in popular culture in recent years have been shaped by factors such as generational tensions and political sensibilities mediated by hip-hop. Provocatively, Melba Joyce Boyd argues that OutKast’s invocation of Rosa Parks’s name reflected “a huge generation gap looming

between the consciousness of the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s and the onslaught of commercialism and materialism that now impacts and directs the culture of contemporary youth, who see themselves as outcast and believe in ‘getting’ paid.<sup>47</sup> In attempting to resist the prevailing public impulses of revering Parks as enacted in her life as well as posthumously, they obscure the national and global effects of her legacy. At the same time, the scene in *Barbershop* is symptomatic of film’s emergence as a primary site for closely meditating on Rosa Parks at the dawn of the new millennium.

While constituted from black and masculine subject positions, such dismissive popular representations of Parks risk replaying the sexist and misogynistic narrative of Parks produced by Blake, which insistently misnamed and misread her as a black woman subject and minimized and dismissed the significance of the encounter on the bus. Premised on the script of her as a relic from the past disconnected from newer generations, they obscure Rosa Parks’s ongoing legacy of public service and outreach and continuing commitment to engaging young people within her activist work. This spin on Parks in *Barbershop* shares common ground with narratives in mainstream cinema of the post-civil rights era, such as *Mississippi Burning* (1989) and *A Time to Kill* (1996), that have linked corruption to traditional civil rights leaders while discrediting them. Such assessments of Parks in popular culture are particularly interesting to revisit when examining her dynamic and consistent engagements with youth in her writings, and as a prelude for discussing the Rosa Parks Children’s Museum, an institution that augments and mirrors her investments in young people in her writings and public outreach and links her to black futurity, while challenging narratives of her legacy and the larger civil rights movement struggle as being disengaged from contemporary black struggle. This museum is vital to study in part for how much it reckons with and builds on the themes of futurity that saturate Rosa Parks’s repertoire, to the point of linking her discourse to Afrofuturism. This is a concept frequently related to OutKast by critics, including pioneering OutKast scholars such as Regina Bradley, which helps throw into relief some common ground between them not evident if Parks and the civil rights movement are reduced to the past and Afrofuturism to youth and hip-hop.

In one of my previously published essays on Parks, I examine the time and space motifs that run through *The Rosa Parks Story*, including the recurring flashbacks to Parks’s childhood that ground it.<sup>48</sup> The Cleveland Avenue Time Machine also meditates on Parks’s legacy by prioritizing the subject position of children, the audience for which it is primarily developed. In this installation, a



robot displaces the logic of race and gender premised on a black/white binary, which structured the original encounter with Blake on the bus, by reconstituting and remembering Parks through fantasies of space and time travel. During the Cold War, the space race was catalyzed after the Russian launching of Sputnik into orbit in 1957 and gained salience in the U.S. national imaginary after President John F. Kennedy's announcement several years later of the ambitious plan for Americans to land a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s, a period that coincided with the final phases of the civil rights era and its major legislative hallmarks, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The story of Katherine Johnson's role as one of the black women hired by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) for her mathematical genius as a "human computer" to do computations to help launch the first American, astronaut John Glenn, into orbit, is among those told in the 2016 book *Hidden Figures*, by Margot Lee Shetterly, as well as on screen in the 2017 film by the same name. The book and film pay tribute to the black unsung heroines whose contributions helped to enable space travel. The long-standing invisibility, marginality, and exclusion of blacks within narratives related to the space age, coupled with the national fascination with space travel evident by the civil rights era, make it intriguing that space travel is invoked imaginatively in this public tribute to Parks and that it centers blackness in relation to notions of space-time travel, literally linking race and space, themes I also examine critically through the lens of Afrofuturism.

Just as Parks's writings recurrently invoke her encounter with Blake on the bus, the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine is a landmark museum installation grounded in the literary genre of science fiction, which it draws on to link Parks to the long history of black struggle for freedom from slavery and Jim Crow. The installation draws on narratives of Parks as a mother of the civil rights movement and mobilizes her national iconicity, linking her to national femininity, which had been sutured all the more in the wake of her death in the preceding months, by reconfiguring and reimagining her as an emblem of freedom movements past, present, and future and throughout the vast universe the bus navigates. The first national institution established in the months after Parks's death invoked her long-standing citations as mother of the civil rights movement through its framing for an audience of children. With the driver as the only passenger on the bus, which welcomes its passengers in place of Parks, the installation frames children as the central agents in the imaginative and futuristic space of the bus and challenges them as the bearers of her legacy to help bring about a better future. The installation relates black

subjects historically linked to the experience of slavery and Jim Crow in the past to unlimited movement and possibilities for freedom in the future.

In 2000, Troy University's Rosa Parks Library and Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, emerged as the nation's second major institution designed to honor the life, work, and legacy of Rosa Parks and the history of the Montgomery bus boycott. It opened to the public on December 1, 2000, in a ceremony that featured Parks as the guest of honor. Georgette Norman, who had established and worked for years in the Alabama African American Arts Alliance, was appointed as the founding director. The 55,000-square-foot building, on the site of the former Empire Theater, where Parks's famous arrest occurred, is a landmark institution and national tourist attraction, which now includes a children's wing. On top of its outstanding installations, the Rosa Parks Library and Museum's extensive databases on Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott, and various legal cases that emerged during the civil rights era also make it an unsurpassed institution for researching and learning about the life and legacy of Rosa Parks.<sup>49</sup> Just as we have witnessed a profusion of documentaries, dramatic films, and scholarly studies examining the history of the civil rights movement, the Rosa Parks Library and Museum in Montgomery is one of the primary institutions in the nation that has been established in recent years to explore those legacies. It is an institution established to promote knowledge about Rosa Parks, just as the King Center in Atlanta, Georgia, has been a central site for teaching about the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Significantly, the Rosa Parks Museum is one of the most prominent and elaborate tributes dedicated to a woman of the civil rights movement.

The Rosa Parks Library and Museum's exhibitions stand at the cutting edge in incorporating digital media and technology. Here, temporality and spatiality are the primary lenses for engaging Parks as a persona, along with Montgomery bus boycott history. The tour in the main museum stages a visceral encounter with civil rights history for tourists during its multiple phases. The centrality of video in mediating and facilitating the tour in the main exhibition at the museum is useful to acknowledge here because it establishes foundations for the even more extensive and elaborate uses of technology in the concept and design of the Children's Museum and draws on Parks's national and global iconicity. The location of the museum in the shadow of the state capitol building evokes the memory of this architecture as a symbol of how the state worked to legally disenfranchise the black population, which was routinely targeted by forms of violence and terror to which the state turned a blind eye.

The situation of the museum near the state capitol building frames Parks as an indispensable aspect of cultural memory in Alabama and in the United States more broadly. The mapping of Parks's famous trip down Dexter Avenue at sites marked along the path to the museum is paralleled within the museum by repeated video re-creations of the events, a dialectical, intersecting, and overlaid narrative that encourages engaged and heightened reflections on her encounter in 1955, while demarcating the progress from that fateful evening to the present day. In thinking of what its performativity means, it is crucial here, too, to register the allusion to the crossroads in both the museum's location and the ongoing engagements with histories and futures at this site. That is to say, the physical location of the museum at the scene of her arrest, at the intersection of Lee and Montgomery Streets, borrows and recasts the blues motif of the crossroads, alluding to Robert Johnson's description in the 1936 song "Cross Road Blues," which discusses the struggle to get a ride at the intersection and the desperation to get home before nightfall in a place where lynching was rampant. Legend has also popularly associated the crossroads with the myth of Johnson selling his soul to gain extraordinary musical gifts. While black masculine figures have conventionally been positioned at the center within blues aesthetics, Rosa Parks stood at the center of a similar story in 1955 and changed the world through her belief in Christian love, non-violent forms of resistance, and unremitting faith in God.

The 1999 poetry collection *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*, by Rita Dove, who served as U.S. Poet Laureate from 1993 to 1995, culminates in a section titled "On the Bus with Rosa Parks," which features a series of ten poems dedicated to Parks. Dove's narrative foregrounding of her daughter's voice in the title situates a child's subject position front and center in the poetic tribute to Parks, which centers and prioritizes the citizens whom Parks prioritized within her political agendas. Dove's poems devoted to Parks are inflected by invocations of technologies associated with cinema, including the camera flash, flash-bulbs, and video. This imagery in Dove's tribute anticipates how technology, spatiality, and temporality converge in the space of this museum.<sup>50</sup>

The Cleveland Avenue Time Machine is the centerpiece of the children's wing at the Rosa Parks Library and Museum, which opened in 2006. In March 2009, the installation won a TEA Award for Outstanding Achievement in the category Exhibition on a Limited Budget (from what was once the Themed Entertainment Association) at the fourteenth annual Thea Awards Ceremony, held at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim, California. The installation was a collective design effort by Eisterhold Associates of Kansas City,

Missouri; Jan Bochenek of Virginia; Ben Lawless of Maryland; Peter Vogt of Washington, DC; and Hadley Exhibits of New York, which conceptualized its primary features, including special lighting, a seven-projector video, audio and fog video, and digital dimensions. The large bus installation most viscerally climaxes the museum's emphasis on temporal themes and uses of video and digital media.

The bus is painted green, gold, and beige to resemble the one on which Parks was arrested in 1955. Yet several features accord it a futuristic aura: the larger size and rectangular shape; the larger than average bus seats; the wider aisle; and the robot driver, Mr. Rivets, poised over a dashboard with gadgets resembling those on spaceships in science fiction films. As a space, the bus evokes the past through its color scheme, as its design and features evoke an image of the futuristic.

The bus is framed through its naming and appearance as a time machine. The installation of the giant bus is a space designed to look larger than life from the perspective of a child and to provide a more imaginative tour to engage the history of the Montgomery bus boycott. The bus is "parked" in a large open warehouse-like display space, framed by black metal posts, connected to a host of wires and steam pumps one might see in an industrial factory. It must be boarded by walking down a long L-shaped ramp lined with metal rails that lead up to its entrance. Once a passenger is seated, Mr. Rivets starts the engine, and the bus uses a host of special effects, such as vibrations, flashing lights, steam, and sound, to create the sensation of motion, features that draw in the senses and create the illusion that the bus itself *is* a machine. An overhead video screen on the bus becomes the focal point as a video narrated by actress Tonea Stewart emerges, a parallel to the feature that begins the tour in the main museum.<sup>51</sup> The main exhibition casts its tourists as pedestrians and ushers them on a walk through the exhibit, movement that alludes to the day-to-day material conditions and practices that enabled the Montgomery bus boycott, but alternatively stages an imaginative ride at the Children's Museum.

Time travel in the sense popularized through science fiction surfaces as the central motif in the video, as the tourist goes back in time 150 years, an imaginative journey into the past signaled by the physical vibrations of the bus. The naming of this bus installation invokes the H. G. Wells novel *The Time Machine*, which popularized the concept of time travel and expanded the possibilities for imagining the phenomenon, given this novel's publication in 1895, the year before the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision was issued by the

Supreme Court sanctioning the “separate but equal” doctrine segregating public facilities, including forms of public transportation. Navigating the trip forward in time emerges as the main purpose of Mr. Rivets. On the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine, which conserves original coloration but otherwise fully reimagines and redesigns the No. 2857 GM on which Parks was arrested, the robotic Mr. Rivets manifests qualities associated with the cyborg and anticipates a posthuman subject, even as his status as a male bus driver might seem to conserve the conventional logic of gender. He is also marked as postracial, but in a sense that lays bare rather than attempts to repress the social consequences of racism as is typically the case with this ideology. In effect, Mr. Rivets replaces James Blake in his role as the navigator for a diverse generation of passengers and realigns the significations of race, gender, and sexuality that had been related to Parks in 1955. Rethinking and reimagining the driver of the bus in terms of gender and sexuality would have dislodged all the more the patriarchy that has typically shadowed both white southern racism and civil rights activism. Mr. Rivets facilitates their encounter with the past as he sits poised to transport them to a world of new possibilities in the twenty-first century and beyond. The videos that unfold on screens positioned outside the bus windows create the sense that one is surrounded by and traveling through history as Parks’s story is narrated.

To acknowledge the origins of the term Jim Crow, which eventually emerged as a euphemism for segregation, Mr. Rivets goes back to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1828, when stage entertainer Thomas “Daddy” Rice donned the burnt-cork mask of minstrelsy and did the song and dance routine called “Jump Jim Crow.” Stewart explains that minstrelsy propagated an image of blacks as foolish, which reinforced a desire for segregation. The video displays a host of caricatures of blackness that were circulated in U.S. material culture and linked to notions of black inferiority. The year 1857 is the next major time period to which the bus travels. The video’s most compelling feature at this juncture is a skit highlighting local actors portraying the family of Dred Scott, which facilitates its discussion of his famous legal case, protesting the exclusion of blacks from citizenship rights; acknowledges discrimination against blacks in the North; and explains “how Scott became the most famous black person in America” at that time. The video’s next phase of time travel stages an imaginary conversation between Harriet Tubman and Henry “Box” Brown given Tubman’s numerous trips to the South to free black slaves once she escaped to freedom via the Underground Railroad, and the story of how Brown famously boxed and shipped himself to freedom.

The year 1892, in New Orleans, Louisiana, emerges as another signal juncture on the journey, pinpointing an early challenge to Jim Crow on public transportation in the case of Homer Plessy. The time machine's next major stop occurs in 1955, when the narrator raises the question, "How much has changed?" and acknowledges, "Not enough, I'm afraid, by this time." At this point, actors once again dress in period clothes to evoke the period of the Montgomery bus boycott and Parks's heroic choice to remain seated, a story that Stewart punctuates by intoning, "Something happened that changed America on that bus that evening," registering Parks's indelible influence on the nation.<sup>52</sup> The performance and theatricality embedded in these videos mirror the historical reenactments of the bus encounter and Montgomery bus boycott staged in the museum's main exhibits.

If a video is initially mobilized as a medium for thinking about the history related to the Montgomery bus boycott on the main tour, including Rosa Parks's pivotal encounter on the bus, the video highlighted in the Children's Museum is equally invested in launching its young audience on an imaginative journey. It reveals ways in which blacks have challenged and resisted racism in signal moments since the antebellum era and hearkens to the future by drawing on images associated with the space age. Nomenclature for the Children's Museum in Montgomery, by tacitly citing Parks as a symbolic mother, further consolidated the prevailing narratives linking Rosa Parks to national femininity in the United States, narratives that had been increasingly mainstreamed and embraced in the post-civil rights era. If the mother metaphor is tacit in the Children's Museum's naming, however, the museum effectively recasts it by eschewing its typical romanticization within civil rights history, while detaching it from its typical national and global moorings and associating it with notions of futurity as much as with the past. The naming is also significant for alluding to the famous Children's March in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Moreover, the young audiences toward whom the institution pitches this tour can be thought of as an extension of the youth mentored by Parks during her lifetime, a group whom the recurrent maternal metaphors associated with her also played a vital role in constituting.

Forced movements and migration that attended modernity, and that were intricately linked to slavery, are replaced on this time machine by imagining a world with travel as voluntary and the removal of all limitations on time and space. It ruptures the containment and marginalizing negotiations with which black subjects have been associated in the schema of modernity since slavery by creating a futuristic space in which all human subjects are free from

mental and physical constraints, with the entire universe at their disposal, and in which alternative and more inclusive historical narratives of the past flow freely. In this space, the hope and potential looking toward the year 2055 is an indispensable complement for thinking back on the historic events of 1955. While the ship, given its materialist linkages to the African slave trade, has recurrently functioned as a symbol of slavery and the oppression of African diasporic subjects in the Western world, the bus emerges in this installation as the primary symbol that encompasses post-civil rights struggles against Jim Crow and the journey on to new horizons.<sup>53</sup>

While the civil rights movement and the legacies of its most prominent leaders continue to be widely celebrated in the African American context, questions related to its continuing relevance persist, as we see in the aforementioned scene in the film *Barbershop*. The movement has been relegated frequently to the past and viewed as being detached from the urgent political needs of the contemporary African American context. At worst, the movement, with its integrationist goals and nonviolent strategies, and during a time of widespread retrenchment against legislative, political, and social breakthroughs achieved in the civil rights movement, has been imagined as primarily nostalgic and trapped in a bygone era, linked to forms of resistance that have no use or relevance in the present. Moreover, the emergence of the type of iconic and charismatic leadership that sustained it seems less conceivable and desirable in communities where local mobilization at the grassroots level is perceived to be more effective, feasible, and conducive to social and political advancement than mass movements led by a central nationally prominent leader.

The representation of Parks within this dynamic installation is not designed to reaffirm or reinstate this leadership paradigm, as quintessentially embodied by King. Yet the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine challenges narratives of the civil rights era as passé, beginning in its accompanying video, by making Rosa Parks a reigning emblem in the long-standing African American struggles against segregation of public facilities, while signifying her as a harbinger of African American futurity. The bus serves as a symbol of the future as its movement also prompts its tourists and passengers, with Mr. Rivets as navigator, to reflect on the past. The installation registers the axis of temporal nodes from past to present and constitutes a vision that dislodges Parks from romantic and nostalgic narratives of civil rights history, framing her as a prominent revolutionary and as a woman who made a national difference in ending segregation, but whose significance is global and universal.



The trajectory of time travel staged in this installation is primarily backward. The Cleveland Avenue Time Machine creates an interactive and inter-subjective engagement with the past, as signaled by its visual colorization, along with features such as the video and the animated sound and light effects it creates to simulate movement backward in time. Yet the main movement suggested is travel forward. The dynamic installation mobilizes these features to ground the bus boycott in a transcendent narrative of movement and time that signals the future, exceeding earthly dimensions and temporalities by drawing heavily on science fiction, a genre in which black and female subjects have remained largely invisible and marginal as characters and topics of interest, with the exception of writers such as Octavia Butler. Moreover, the accompanying video's narrative emphasizes Rosa Parks as a black feminine subject, along with a range of black female precursors who challenged segregation in public transportation, and unsettles conventional male-focused chronicles of African American history, as well as individual narratives focused on her. Movement simulation, sound effects, and visual aesthetics inscribe Rosa Parks as a figure within a futuristic aesthetics that serves as a paean to the digital era in which this exhibition was constructed. Rosa Parks is simultaneously synonymous with the past, present, and future in this installation.

The installation constructs a broad timeline-based narrative of the civil rights movement as diverse and inclusive and accords it a periodization that exceeds its typical temporal parameters, linked to the 1950s and 1960s, so that it spans the antebellum era up to the twenty-first century. The dynamic installation in effect dislodges civil rights history, including the Montgomery bus boycott, from the notions of stasis to which it has been linked at times in the national imagination, along with aspects of African American and diasporic consciousness. This approach is particularly significant when considering the diverse audience of children and adolescents to whom this aspect of the exhibition is primarily pitched. It is aimed at a new generation of youth born in the postmillennium, who sometimes lack knowledge about civil rights history and internalize the myth of its obsolescence; who will stand at the forefront in rethinking and retelling this history to future generations, growing up in a digital age; and who often learn most effectively through technology and multimedia.

The representations linking Parks to notions of journeying across time showcased in this installation are also classifiable as Afrofuturistic. Moreover, in historicizing and remembering the Montgomery bus boycott and monumentalizing Rosa Parks as a civil rights leader via video, while drawing centrally

on features derived from technology and science fiction, the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine installation poignantly actualizes a visual and aural aesthetics in keeping with Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism is a critical and cultural discourse in areas such as literature and art that draws on areas such as fantasy, magical realism, speculative fiction and science fiction to engage the past and present in relation to the lives of minorities, including people of African descent, while decentering Western-centered frames of reference. Mark Dery, author of the seminal essay “Black to the Future,” introduced the term in 1993. It has been further advanced and developed critically by scholars such as Alondra Nelson, who established an Afrofuturism listserv in 1998 and edited a special 2002 issue of the journal *Social Text* on the topic.<sup>54</sup>

Nelson points out that the listserv emerged in part because dialogues about blacks and technology proved limiting in their vacillation between a focus on the utopian fantasy of technology in eliminating race and an emphasis on the rhetoric of a digital divide, an issue that has been brilliantly theorized by scholars such as Anna Everett.<sup>55</sup> As Nelson argues, “The racialized digital divide narrative that circulates in the public sphere and the bodiless, color-blind mythotopias of cybertheory and commercial advertising have become the unacknowledged frames of reference for understanding race in the digital age. In these frameworks, the technologically enabled future is by its very nature unmoored from the past and from people of color.”<sup>56</sup> Enlightenment philosophy, and most notably the perspectives of G. W. F. Hegel, famously excluded Africans in the schema of world history and posited them as being out of time, a framing that denied their humanity, marked them as inferior, and helped to rationalize their enslavement and subjection. Afrofuturism, along with queer and gay and lesbian studies, has played a primary role in shaping discourses on temporality in African and African diasporic thought, as it provides a counternarrative to conventional narratives that have marginalized and excluded blacks from notions of time in Western thought, in keeping with Hegelian racialist premises, which the Time Machine effectively confronts and unsettles.<sup>57</sup> Yet despite the liberatory narrative portended by the Time Machine, new technologies have limits and are potentially oppressive for minority populations. Ruha Benjamin’s *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* reveals limitations in newer and emerging technologies that perpetuate inequality and sustain long-standing racial hierarchies and divisions.<sup>58</sup>

Birmingham, Alabama, musician Sun Ra, who later migrated to Chicago and founded a band known as the Arkestra in the 1950s, stood at the forefront

in developing an Afrofuturist discourse in music through forms of synthesis that drew saliently on images of Africa, space, and science fiction in costuming, sound, and visual aesthetics. While his groundbreaking innovations in jazz and experiences in cities such as Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia typically link his Afrofuturist musical production to urban contexts, Sun Ra's foundational musical training and performances in clubs in Birmingham during the bitter years of the Jim Crow era shaped the staging strategies and visual aesthetics that emerged later in his career. (Black power discourses are similarly urbanized and routinely delinked from their Black Belt roots in rural Alabama and Mississippi.) Sun Ra and his Arkestra challenged stereotypes of the South as backward and trapped in time. These contours also organically link the origins of Afrofuturism to Alabama and the U.S. South and make it all the more compelling to draw on in thinking about an installation such as the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine in Montgomery and the legacy of Rosa Parks.<sup>59</sup>

The installation frames Parks's choice to remain seated on the bus as the outgrowth of a longer history of movement for freedom that continues to unfold, a movement that her transcendent legacy continues to influence. At the same time, this framing challenges the perception of her choice to remain seated as an individual act of heroism by emphasizing the boycott that it catalyzed as a collective and interdependent community initiative. The installation enacts and stages the messages running through Parks's dialogic books, directed at young readers, affirming their potential to help catalyze change in the world, just as she did, framing them as the hope of the future, staging a visceral, dynamic, and interactive encounter with her legacy.

Established as a paean to her status as a symbolic mother in the nation, the Rosa Parks Children's Museum is designed to help spread the message that mattered to her most, and the Afrofuturistic digital Time Machine to emphasize its timelessness and universality. Like her books, the museum, in its conception and design, primarily addresses a young audience and challenges narratives of the civil rights movement as being passé by linking its message to young people in the twenty-first century, who are charged with carrying forth its work into the future. In it, Parks as a black woman is unfettered by the venomous ideological scripts of black womanhood propagated by James Blake, and the museum embodies the triumph of this subject position into a national ideal as one of its universal emblems of freedom and democracy. If her image failed to dislodge conventional media myths of black mothers as mummies and matriarchs, which were enshrined in the national imaginary by

the time of her arrest, she staged one of the most visible and subversive alternatives to them during the civil rights era and well beyond, literally for the rest of her life, as the iconic mother of the civil rights movement, notwithstanding the inherent limitations in this symbolism. Parks's legibility as a symbolic mother in the nation, however, was immortalized and most saliently evident in the public sphere during the moment of collective mourning for her in the nation's capital in 2005, which profoundly registered her cultural influence.

### Rosa Parks's National Body

Rosa Parks's iconicity as a heroine and symbolic mother figure in the United States was reinforced and more thoroughly nationalized through her prominent public honors during the 1990s, under Clinton's presidential administration, when she received the Medal of Honor (1994) and the Congressional Gold Medal of Freedom (1999). I end this chapter by reflecting on how the memorial commemorations of Rosa Parks in 2005 in the wake of her death articulated her as a reigning emblem of the national body and reinforced her status as a symbolic mother in the national imagination, immortalizing her as a premier emblem of national femininity. Her status as a model of national femininity was further reinforced when she lay in repose in the nation's capital in 2005. How do we understand and analyze the memorial's relationship to valued African American cultural practices? What does it mean that while funeral rituals remain among the most segregated practices in the United States, and African American mourning rituals have remained relatively obscure in the U.S. mainstream, aspects of Rosa Parks's memorials showcased these traditions at a national level and for a racially and culturally diverse citizenry?

Parks's final repose in the Capitol—in a space reserved primarily for U.S. presidents—also culminated a revolutionary life in a way that reinforced her subversive resistance on the bus in 1955. While the verb *sitting* is invoked most frequently as a descriptor for the action in her heroic choice, the verb *lying* notably emerges as the primary signifier to describe her repose at the Capitol Rotunda, in a space not typically linked to black or feminine subjects, and to punctuate the ending of her revolutionary life. If her decision to be arrested on a Montgomery city bus in 1955 catalyzed the Montgomery bus boycott, launched an international movement for civil rights, and became a defining moment in her life, after her death on October 24, 2005, nearly fifty years later, Rosa Parks also made history when her body lay in repose in Washington,

DC, in the Capitol Rotunda, where mainly white men had been honored in U.S. history. In the nation's history, this honor has typically been reserved for military officers, elected officials, and U.S. presidents, among them Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan. Parks's death thus was yet another revolutionary moment in her history: a black woman lying in honor was an unprecedented event. The ritual of her public mourning in effect integrated the space not only by race, given her status as the second African American ever honored there, but also by gender in light of her status as the very first woman so honored.<sup>60</sup> Race and gender were as relevant as they had been on the bus that night in 1955.

U.S. Representative John Conyers of Michigan, for whom she worked as a secretary and receptionist in his congressional office in Detroit from 1965 until her retirement in 1988, spearheaded the effort to secure permission to accord Parks the distinction of lying in honor, which was granted by Senate Concurrent Resolution 61 on October 29, 2005.<sup>61</sup> The two-day public viewing of Parks at the Capitol Rotunda on October 30 and October 31 began with a brief congressional ceremony, during which President George W. Bush placed a wreath at her casket, the Morgan State University Choir sang the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Senate chaplain Barry C. Black remarked that Parks's courage "ignited a movement that aroused our national conscience" and served as an example of the "power of fateful, small acts."<sup>62</sup> The long line to enter the rotunda extended for several blocks.<sup>63</sup> From senior citizens to parents with small children, an estimated thirty thousand people, some of whom were tearful, filed by quietly for hours to view the casket. The casket was flanked by a military honor guard at both ends while on display. Many had traveled long distances to be a part of this historic and unprecedented moment in the nation's capital and to pay tribute to Parks.

The national map traversed by Parks's body in death culminated and heightened the motifs of movement that have long been associated with her through her symbolic significations in relation to the bus as a grounded space. Her mappings in relation to regional, national, and global contexts reached their apex in her memorializing in multiple cities in the wake of her death and demonstrated the centrality of geography in constituting her iconicity from national to local sites. The memorial services and public viewings held for Parks in three cities, including Montgomery, Alabama; Detroit, Michigan; and Washington, DC, spanned five days, yielded an outpouring of public support and magnified the deep respect and adoration for Parks felt throughout the nation and around the world. Her family and friends attended all of them, and

to facilitate the extensive traveling during this period, her casket and family members and friends were transported to the various sites on an airplane that was volunteered by Southwest Airlines.

In death, the traversal of her body across these multiple geographies reflected the national significance of Parks as a leader in the civil rights movement and her personal history as a woman who was born in Pine Level, Alabama, migrated to Detroit, and transformed the nation and world. Reportedly, when initially airborne and transporting Parks's body from the events in Montgomery to the events in the capital, Louis Freeman, the nation's first black chief pilot, and the copilot, also an African American, circled the city and tipped the left wing of the plane while bearing Parks's body away from her hometown, never to return, signaling her final farewell.<sup>64</sup> This moving moment affirmed her historic moorings in the city of Montgomery and the larger state of Alabama, notwithstanding her move to Michigan, which aligned her with the phenomenon of the Great Migration of African Americans from southern states to the urban North, and her final home and resting place in Detroit. At the same time, the multiple memorial ceremonies delink Parks's legacy from just one geographic location and point to her widespread cultural significance. Moreover, all her public tributes mapped Parks's journey from the segregated bus to the Capitol Rotunda and framed it in a continuum with her activist legacy, and within long-standing struggles for attaining African American legibility and recognition in the nation's public sphere.

Through the participation of a singer such as Aretha Franklin, the honor guard that carried her casket, and the black gold-trimmed horse-drawn carriage in a processional to the cemetery, aspects of Parks's Detroit ceremony, the culminating memorial in the monumental multicity homegoing for Rosa Parks, recalled aspects of the regal funeral for Annie Johnson famously featured in the 1959 film version of *Imitation of Life*.<sup>65</sup> This film features gospel singer Mahalia Jackson singing the African American spiritual "Soon I Will Be Done" and a public ceremony and parade replete with bands and a horse-drawn carriage, a glorious homegoing that Johnson had described in detail to her employer Lora Meredith and dreamed of having once passing on. Yet the horse-drawn carriage originally designated as the vehicle for making Parks's final journey to Detroit's Woodlawn Cemetery did not complete it. After the seven-hour service, and with daylight waning, a white antique hearse picked up the processional after just a block, completing the seven-mile journey to the cemetery for Parks's interment in the mausoleum alongside her mother, Leona MacCaulay, and her husband, Raymond Parks.<sup>66</sup>

In Karla FC Holloway's study *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories*, she describes how the "ornate funeral" that the character Annie outlined in *Imitation of Life* "provoked the teary-eyed bonding of a generation of mothers and daughters," acknowledging through a reading of the film audience's reactions the inspiration that these scenes provided for black women. Holloway points out that the film led some, inspired by Annie, to "write out their own funeral instructions" to shape their ceremonies, a practice spanning back to the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Holloway notes the importance of a "symbolically rich display," or a "special" funeral, for people in the African American context who lacked public acclaim. Drawing on the work of C. Eric Lincoln, she notes that by the late twentieth century, the trend toward "cremation and minimalist funerals" had not affected the widespread belief in the African American context that homegoings, regardless of one's status, are important.<sup>68</sup> Rosa Parks's service resonated profoundly with such elaborate African American funerary practices and put aspects of such rituals on display at the national level. It drew a multiracial public into its ceremonial aspects at every level, and critical terrain provided by Sharon Holland in *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* underscores the importance of nuancing these confluences.<sup>69</sup> Parks's Detroit ceremony recollected the visual aesthetics of African American postmortem photography featured in James Van Der Zee's classic *Harlem Book of the Dead*, which capture a diverse range of elaborate African American mourning rituals and funeral practices, including those of celebrities, such as the young actress Florence Mills, that had occurred early in the twentieth century and were largely invisible, unknown, and marginal in the segregated culture of the American mainstream.<sup>70</sup>

Precisely for these reasons, and despite valuing and admiring Theoharis's work to throw into relief the complexity of Rosa Parks's political background in her brilliant and groundbreaking biography, I resist Theoharis's description of Parks's 2005 ceremonies as a "national spectacle" and "public spectacle."<sup>71</sup> Such words belie the significance and dignity of the event, along with its deeper cultural significance. Similarly, in a later chapter, she suggests that the "fanciness" of the funeral for Parks ran counter to her political legacy of activism and investments in grassroots struggles. However, some aspects of the memorial Theoharis describes as excessive or "fancy"—a word that has incidentally also been condescendingly and snidely invoked at times to trivialize African American dress and demeanor, deemed as being too uppity—might be more productively interpreted as a manifestation of long-standing black cultural practices and mourning rituals in African American cultural history



and memory. Drawing on Holloway's analysis, which suggests the value of black feminist epistemologies when scrutinizing African American mourning rituals and burial practices, I want to emphasize the importance of relating the pageantry of Parks's public ceremonies to cultural contexts and practices that reflect long-standing traditions grounded in the African American context, including forms of expressivity and performance distinctly associated with black female subjectivity.<sup>72</sup>

At the same time, I share Theoharis's larger concerns and frustrations about the uses, abuses, and appropriations of Parks's activist legacy in the wake of her death. The discourses related to Rosa Parks have become a salient metaphor at the national level and have been increasingly serviceable in the millennial era for articulating investments in freedom, social justice, and human rights struggles among liberal as well as conservative political leaders, whose policies to enable and protect such values have nevertheless frequently conflicted. In some instances, contemporary invocations of Rosa Parks have tacitly served as a unifying force across political party lines and as a site on which to establish common political ground. At times, invocations of her name have demarcated stark divisions, as witnessed when White House adviser Stephen Moore compared the predominantly white right-wing protesters and supporters of President Donald Trump to Parks after they staged armed demonstrations at state buildings in cities across the United States in defiance of mandatory social distancing guidelines designed to protect public health in the wake of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Such citations of Parks revealed a grossly superficial understanding of black protest movements. Just as Parks faced the threat of state violence at the hands of multiple white men on the night of her arrest, white and masculine figures associated with state authority—public officials such as liberal U.S. president Bill Clinton and conservative U.S. president George W. Bush—have paradoxically played a major role in publicly honoring her legacy even as they have advanced policy agendas inimical to African American community interests. These new narratives as developed in the post-civil rights era thoroughly revise and displace the facade that Parks encountered in the menacing white masculine figures who represented state power on the bus that fateful evening. It is also important to raise questions about what is at stake in invoking Rosa Parks to mediate a redemptive portrait of southern white masculinity through U.S. presidents such as Bush and Clinton and to offset narratives in civil rights history of white masculine villainy and abjection.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, how do we grapple with the misguided appropriations of her legacy in the era of Trump?

Parks's ubiquity in the African American context and broader national imaginary constituted her as a mother figure worthy of respect on par with statesmen, including presidents, in a sense that is not simply reducible to being merely a passive symbol. Indeed, the long-standing struggles to memorialize and monumentalize blacks in the capital and in the Capitol building made Parks's postmortem national honors revolutionary and subversive in those geographic and architectural spaces, in which blacks have been conventionally cast as alien and other, alongside all the major honors accorded to Parks by presidents during her lifetime and her strategic uses of public celebrations to advance political goals. I am intrigued by what can happen with a view of Rosa Parks's multiple memorial services that situates them in relation to the long history of struggles for memorializing and making black subjects legible as citizens and as reflections of the national body, spanning back to Bethune. In this sense, the services, and particularly the one in the nation's capital, become less divorceable from Parks's activist political history and register as being continuous with it, and even as an extension of it.

This brings me to my main points related to Parks's subversive status as a national mother. The period of mourning Parks's body on the Capitol Rotunda in 2005 enshrined her status as a reigning symbol of national femininity and as a symbolic mother in the nation. Her figuring as a symbolic mother momentarily united the nation within a raced, sexed, and gendered discourse, scripting Parks as a maternal figure, and composing a narrative of Americans as a diverse national family. Parks's funeral before the world and the enshrining of her body on the Capitol Rotunda recollected the civil rights movement within national memory and memorialized her before an audience of international proportions. During this time of mourning, Parks was figured as the quintessential emblem of the national body on the Capitol. Parks emerged as a site of mourning and recollection related to the civil rights movement across sites from Montgomery to Detroit, with the nation's capital as the focal point on the map of the national celebration of her life.

In a figurative sense, she became synonymous with notions of national femininity in the United States in the wake of her loss. Her public memorials in recent years have thoroughly reinforced and extended the maternal metaphor that has inflected her long-standing honored designation as the mother of the civil rights movement and further underscored it in the cultural imagination. This raced, sexed, and gendered script of Parks initially emerged in the African American context during the civil rights era, was eventually nationalized and globalized, and accords with narratives of the nation *as* feminine

and scripts that associate it with the feminine body and the maternal, representations that postcolonial scholarship has intimately linked to constructions of national identity. Such formulations linking the nation to notions of the feminine and maternal are problematic and limited to the extent that they romanticize femininity and link it to the earth and land. At the same time, they reveal the depth of her influence on the American consciousness and open the door to possibilities for representing more diverse and representative race, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities within scripts of national selfhood, including black queer and trans women.

The long-standing effort to erect a statue to Bethune in the nation's capital discussed in the previous chapter reminds us of the importance of not devaluing or dismissing memorials and monuments in the national context to African Americans, who have long been illegible, invisible, and marginal in U.S. history. It reminds us that such forms of public recognition have been the outgrowth of intense struggle, have been hard won, and should by no means be taken for granted. The Washington, DC, National Cathedral's 2012 dedication of a stone carving in honor of Parks in its section on human rights, which also includes tributes to figures such as former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and the 2013 postage stamp in honor of Parks's one hundredth birthday, along with the monument in Statuary Hall at the Capitol, the first life-size statue featuring an African American, are achievements and breakthroughs that would have been unthinkable even a generation ago, underscoring her historical significance and reflecting her national iconicity.<sup>74</sup> In 2018, the toy manufacturer Mattel released a Barbie doll in honor of Parks.

In 2005, the national commemoration of Rosa Parks in the wake of her death held profound meaning and significance for many in the African American cultural context, at levels that conceivably ran counter to the reactions of a national mainstream that might easily meet time-honored African American mourning rituals with irreverence, mockery, mystification, and even outright dismissal. In my own research over several years, I have been far more interested in examining how aspects of Rosa Parks's lying in honor on the Capitol Rotunda as the first woman and second African American at some levels punctuates and extends her lifetime of activism, making additional interventions related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. To divorce Parks's public honors from her activism obscures ways in which grassroots activists and politicians advocated for and helped to enable such honors for Parks.

In the weeks after her death, and to acknowledge the fiftieth anniversary of the Montgomery bus boycott on December 1, 2005, President George W. Bush

introduced House Resolution 4145, supporting the placement of a statue of Parks in the national Statuary Hall in Washington, DC.<sup>75</sup> This tribute, which permits the erection of monuments honoring two figures in each state, makes Parks the first African American woman honored in the Capitol's marbled gallery, and the third Alabamian (in addition to the legendary visually and hearing-impaired educator Helen Keller and Confederate general and U.S. congressman Joe Wheeler) to be honored in this fashion. Hence, this moment represents another crucial link in the chain of breakthroughs related to Parks based on race and gender, which becomes all the more significant if we recall the long history of struggle to garner honor and respect for blacks through monuments in the nation's capital. It becomes all the more significant in light of debates related to Confederate monuments since the Charleston tragedy in 2015, which have in some cases led to their removal. In Bush's comments, he invokes Parks as an example for all Americans. He links her to the nation's founding fathers and frames her as a central agent in actualizing the nation's founding ideals. His comments are also significant to the extent that they link the fate of all Americans to African Americans.

Yet such inclusive gestures will be limited as long as there is a failure to recognize, rethink, and fully reform patriarchal and capitalist abuses underlying the nation's founding ideals, which were paradoxically rooted in slavery, along with race, class, gender, and sexual violence and subjection, which sanctioned colonialism and imperialism, and which failed to live up to promises of democracy, freedom, and equality. Just as the postmortem body of Parks broke ground as the first woman to ever lie in state in the nation's capital, the statue depicting her is the first life-size statue of an African American woman ever included in Statuary Hall, which also includes a bust of Martin Luther King Jr., installed in 1986, and a bust of Sojourner Truth, installed in 2009. A statue of Bethune is currently in development.<sup>76</sup> Such honors will become more inclusive when no longer premised on a gender binary and limited to normative sexual identity categories.

Such shifts will yield more inclusive and complex national stories that reflect a more nuanced portrait of black liberation and civil rights histories, while according legibility to a broader spectrum of freedom fighters, from Bayard Rustin to Pauli Murray, whose contributions have gone unsung. They hold the potential to inspire new and emerging leaders in the black queer and trans communities. Still, the reality is that it may be possible to fully empower such othered categories only when the nation-state, which has routinely authorized and reproduced oppressive models of sexuality and carried out

violence against the body based on sexuality to consolidate its power, is fully reimagined or becomes obsolete. Similarly, it is mandatory to broaden notions of national family, while moving beyond narrow policymaking agendas that primarily invest social support systems and benefits in protecting, providing, and advocating for a citizenry whose legibility is narrowly premised on conventional heteronormative models of family, marriage, and childbearing. Such policy agendas undermine the rights of subjects from queer and trans to heterosexual and single, sustaining forms of social and political inequality and alienation, and appropriating or limiting the subversive potential of queer activist movements, as some scholarship in queer studies has pointed out.<sup>77</sup>

In 2009, sculptor and master artist Eugene Daub and his partner, Rob Firmin, serving as project manager and primary historical researcher, joined the competition with 150 other artists for the commission from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Artist of the Capitol to create the Parks monument.<sup>78</sup> The nine-foot bronze statue, which weighs six hundred pounds, depicts Parks with her hands crossed in her lap. It stands on a black granite pedestal that weighs 2,100 pounds. The statue shows Parks on the day she was arrested. She wears a hat, glasses, a coat, and oxford shoes and holds her purse handle with her body positioned to the right, with a straight back and head. It aims to convey dignity and the “quiet strength” that have typically been claimed as a defining characteristic of her philosophy and demeanor.<sup>79</sup> The statue was developed in Daub’s studio in San Pedro, cast in a Hawthorne foundry, and sent to the East Coast for storage in a warehouse until its public unveiling, though no images of it were circulated, and its design was kept secret, along with the names of the artists who created it.<sup>80</sup> According to Daub, the team aimed to portray Parks’s sitting position as heroic and to highlight the agency and national significance in the action that her choice represented. At the same time, they chose not to depict her on a bus seat over concern that such a depiction “would trivialize things” and take the focus from her.<sup>81</sup> The artists also self-consciously aimed to portray Parks’s image emanating from a rock, to underscore solidity. The choice is also compelling, given the trajectory of analysis that I am pursuing, for the levels on which it alludes to the presidential images on Mount Rushmore and further amplifies her status as a national mother and symbol. As the next chapter explains, invoking such national monuments has also been serviceable in moments for critiquing reactionary politics of iconic national leaders such as Condoleezza Rice.