

Collective Forgetting And The Symbolic Power Of Oneness: The Strange Apotheosis Of Rosa Parks

BARRY SCHWARTZ
University of Georgia

Oneness refers to the convention of recognizing a single individual's performance and ignoring others, including those who may have performed as well. Although oneness is an adaptation to cognitive deficits, it cannot be explained by them. If long-term and working memory were more capacious, society's need for ideals to establish realm-specific standards and meanings would tend to limit recognition and renown to one individual. The apotheosis of Rosa Parks is a case in point. Her celebrity and the obscurity of others who risked and accomplished more than she are two aspects of the same social process. Revealing oneness to be a social imperative, this case study leads to a broader understanding of collective forgetting.

Collective forgetting refers to what is unregistered in the imagination of individuals, unchronicled in research monographs and textbooks, and/or uncommemorated by monuments, relics, statues, and ritual observances. A metaphor for failure to transmit information about the past, collective forgetting refers not only to people's forgetting events they once knew but also to having never known them in the first place. Joining the adjective "collective" to forgetting does not imply an emergent "social mind" or that every member of a society forgets the same thing; it means that remembering and forgetting, knowledge and ignorance, are distributed unevenly among different communities, groups, and individuals. Events and people of comparable significance are also remembered differently *within* these same communities, groups, and individuals. Therefore, two new questions arise, the first of which concerns America's most prominent civil rights heroine: Rosa Parks. Why is her renown as great as it is? In this essay I make many statements about what different people think of Rosa Parks, how they feel about her, and judge her. Like Clifford Geertz (1983), I do so not by trying to

get into people's minds, as I might through a massive interview project, but by searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms—words, images, objects—by which people represent her to themselves. The second question is why have so many men and women whose conduct was more consequential than Mrs. Parks's been uncommemorated and thereby forgotten? What does society gain from their oblivion?

The significance of this question inheres in its premises. William Goode (1978) observed many years ago that "winners in various kinds of competition, even when they are marked off from the losers by minute differences in performance, or, (as in science) by narrow differences in the time of discovery or achievement, seem to be given far greater amounts of prestige than those differences would appear to justify" (66). Exchange theory convinces Goode that the "market" for exceptional people is limited. Given a wide array of stellar performers whose differences are barely noticeable, people have no incentive to learn about and admire all of them. In Goode's words: "The gap between the most highly ranked and the somewhat less esteemed is partly created by the commonsensical unwillingness of most people to buy any worse commodity, to admire any less competent person, than the one they rate the highest, *if the choice is without cost*" (73–4, emphasis in original). Because it usually costs less (in terms of attention) to admire a field's best (a single task)

I would like to thank James M. Balkwell, Bernice Barnett, James Dowd, Michael Feige, Mark Jacobs, and Abraham Tesser for useful suggestions on earlier drafts. Direct correspondence to Department of Sociology, University of Georgia, 113 Baldwin Hall, Athens, GA 30602; cmsbarry@uga.edu.

than to admire its first and second best (a multiple task), Goode's explanation of why the magnitude of reward is often out of proportion to achievement is persuasive; however, his argument skirts the related questions of (1) whether people are *unwilling* or *unable* to admire slightly less adept performers, and (2) why these performers not only fail to receive due credit but are often forgotten altogether.

COGNITION AND MEMORY: CAPACITY LIMITS

Acclaim results from attention, and the understanding of attention requires a theory of mind. George Herbert Mead (1934:25, emphasis added) explained:

Our whole intelligent process seems to lie in the attention, which is selective, of certain types of stimuli. *Other stimuli which are bombarding the system are in some fashion shunted off. We give our attention to one particular thing. Not only do we open the door to certain stimuli and close it to others, but our attention is an organizing process as well as a selective process. . . . Here we have the organism as acting and determining its environment.*"

Mead brings to the problem of attention a conception of mind that transcends Goode's calculus of cost, reward, and profit. But what is to be said of attention itself? Because attention, in Mead's time, could not be located in any one part of the brain, he had to take on faith the "parallelist" assumption that "What takes place in consciousness runs parallel to what takes place in the central nervous system" (Mead 1934:19). Today, however, we can better explain how attention limits the range of objects which individuals can attend and remember.

Two premises frame our present understanding. First, the central nervous system's capacity to organize, store, and retrieve information is severely limited. Although human long-term memory is almost infinite (during an average lifetime it will have accumulated more than five times the information contained in all the printed material in the world [Marois 2005]), much of this material fades from disuse, is "overwritten" by more recently acquired knowledge, or coded in a way to

make it irretrievable by working memory (Vockell 2006).

However, working (short-term) memory is beset by limits of its own. It can attend to no more than several objects at once and can perform efficiently one task at a time. George Miller (1956) was the first psychologist to investigate these limits. As a sender transmits more information, the receiver's knowledge increases at first but soon levels off. This plateau, according to Miller, represents the receiver's *channel capacity*—the largest amount of information (sounds, tastes, dots, discrete letters, and numbers) he or she can differentiate. For cognitive discrimination problems, human channel capacity averages seven units of information; however, Miller never generalized this number to all tasks. Moreover, his "magic number 7" might well be composed of two smaller "chunks" of three and four units (Cowan 2005:23–5).

Direct demonstration provides the most accurate measure of cognitive limits. The parietal cortex, according to recent magnetic resonance image (MRI) studies, becomes more active as more objects (visual images, concepts, plans, people, and other chunks of information) are added to working memory, but once its limit of four objects (on average) is reached, the adding of more objects to the task causes no further increase in cortex activity (Marois 2005; see also Ricoeur 2004).¹ Working memory's limit also causes the most recently received information to be best remembered (Cowan 1995:9) and the forgetting of irrelevant memories to enhance the remembering of relevant target memories (Kuhl, et al.).

This essay's second premise is that individuals adapt to the limits of their long- and

¹ Structural as opposed to cognitive limits are described by Randall Collins (1998). Collins observes that the number of philosophical schools involved in conflict at any given time generally varies between three and six. The lower limit is set by the existence of conflicting groups whose claims are resolved by a third group taking a mediating position; the upper limit is set by audiences' "attention space." For more than six schools to compete against one another is to overload the outsider's capacity to follow the arguments.

short-term memory by “heuristic” strategies, enabling them to ignore most of the information to which they are exposed. History buffs, therefore, can name all American presidents, but few vice-presidents. The typical baseball fan can identify last year’s division winners in both American and National leagues, but he probably knows few if any of the respective second-place winners. Olympic (first place) gold medal recipients are far more likely to be remembered than (second and third place) recipients of silver and bronze medals. The typical Miss America enthusiast will remember last year’s winner but not the runner-up. Political and academic scenes are similar: despite extensive training in understanding the structural context of events, American social scientists seem inclined vastly to exaggerate the role of one person, the president, in causing national successes and failures. In science, literature, and artistic award ceremonies, all nominees are known but winners alone are remembered. However, this tendency toward “oneness” cannot result exclusively from cognitive limits.

Preview

Forgetting results not only from efforts to suppress painful, dissonant, or ignoble experience, as constructionists (Bodnar 1992; Zerubavel 2003; Connerton 2008) assert, but also from the consignment to oblivion of worthy and noble actions. To forget reflects not only virtuous actors’ failure to find sponsors to institutionalize their memory, as agency-oriented investigators (Fine and McDonnell 2007) would claim, but also from the necessity of excluding virtuous actions from memory. To find advantage in the forgetting of virtue seems absurd, but our capacity to remember and comprehend the *most* virtuous, the *ideal*, depends on our doing so.

The analysis proceeds in five steps. First, cognition’s limits are related to the tendency to simplify complex historical information into one event or the achievement of one person. Second, the story of the rise of Rosa Parks is summarized, but it includes those forgotten protestors who contributed as much as she to the Montgomery bus boycott and shows how

this forgetting contributes to understanding of the boycott itself. In the third and fourth sections of this paper, Rosa Parks’s case clarifies the determinants and functions of oneness, including condensation, the Matthew Effect, representation of cultural ideals, schematic distortion, and resentment among the forgotten. Rosa Parks is the perfect specimen for this study, for few other people is the ratio of renown to achievement so high. In the conclusion, this finding is generalized to other problems of collective forgetting.

Oneness

Oneness is a confusing term beset by contradictory definitions: in the popular realm it concerns singularity and uniqueness; in many religious belief systems, it is the condition of being at one with fellow believers and transcendent powers. In this essay, *oneness* refers to the recognizing of one exceptional individual and the ignoring of others, many of whom may have performed as well as or better than the one acclaimed. Oneness is loosely related to Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman’s (1973, 1974) concepts of “availability” and “anchoring.” These heuristics rely so heavily on one person or event that they frequently bias assessment and decision-making.

Oneness, as an adaptation to cognition’s limits, is always “realm-specific.” In baseball, for example, separate awards are given for being the “Most Valuable Player,” for the highest batting average, most home runs, most strikeouts, most wins, lowest earned run average, and other offensive and defensive achievements. Beauty pageants produce a general winner (Miss America) and winners in various subcompetitions (talent, bathing suit, evening gown, congeniality). In the academic world, awards are given in different disciplines and subdisciplines for the most distinguished careers, books, and articles. The Pulitzer Prizes, Academy Awards, Tony Awards, and Nobel Prizes are also examples of single awards given within different realms of achievement. These awards not only reflect societies’ need for multiple exemplars to articulate multiple ideals, but also the convention of exemplifying each ideal by one person. The

periodic (usually annual) acclaim of such exemplars enlarges their prestige ritually.

Contingencies

The relationship between nature and convention, between cognitive capacity limits and the practice of limiting recognition to single recipients, requires several qualifications:

First, working memory's limit, according to most investigators, is four (Cowan 2005); therefore, nature alone cannot account for the phenomenon of oneness.

Second, cognitive limits can be transcended at will. Baseball experts, for example, possess vast knowledge of many categories of offensive and defensive performance. This is possible because their working memory encodes every relevant chunk of new information, transfers it to long-term memory, where it is identified meaningfully through typing, classification, and schema, then stored with relevant existing information. The constant interplay between efficient encoding and organizing of information in working and long-term memory distinguishes "experts" from "novices" (Ericsson and Kinch 1995: 239–40).

Third, many individuals are motivated to acquire vast knowledge in one or more realms of activity (usually occupational); this means that oneness is the default option, not the sole option, for human cognition. But individuals mastering one or more bodies of knowledge cannot master all there is to know. They, too, are "cognitive misers" because they oversimplify reality by ignoring its "details;" but they are also "motivated tacticians" because their deliberate ignoring of information allows them to attend to the most relevant and complex tasks. Short cuts, no less than prolonged attention to complex problems, are tactically motivated (Fiske and Taylor 1991:13).

Fourth, the more knowledge one has of the achievement realm within which a person is recognized, the more likely he or she will know of others who have accomplished at least as much or more. Selecting one person for recognition is therefore most likely to promote insider resentment.

Fifth, the singling out of winners reinforces or undermines social structures. Among individualistic communities, "winner-take-all" situations are most common, while egalitarian communities believe the singling out of winners undermines group solidarity and individual esteem.² Differentiation of a field also affects the feasibility of single awards. Between 1902 and 1949, for example, 85 percent of Nobel Prizes in physics were given to single recipients; 2 percent to 3 recipients. Between 1950 and 1999, single recipients received only 26 percent of the awards; 3 recipients received 38 percent. In six of the first seven years of the twenty-first century, three recipients shared the prize. Physics produces more winners as it becomes a more complex and innovative science. It should be noted, however, that the Nobel Committee has never awarded its prize to more than three physicists in any one year—a number well within the working memory's limits.

Sixth, the media through which information is transmitted restricts the amount any individual can possess. A history text can devote only a limited number of pages to a given event; a newspaper or magazine, only so many columns; television and radio stations, only so many minutes (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Media limits add to the effect of cognitive limits.

Finally, when no single representative can be selected to symbolize a field of activity, the pool of "contestants" can be condensed into a single unit and identified by their number. The Little Rock Nine, namely, the three boys and six girls chosen by the NAACP to integrate the Little Rock Central High School in 1957, is a relevant example. Nine individuals are easy to forget, but when condensed into one name they are readily remembered.

Not all events in the collective memory are symbolized by a single person or group. In the sport of baseball, for example, pairs and trios often represent something special about a team or an achievement. The Boston Braves of

² Robert Frank and Philip Cook (1995) believe the United States, more than any other nation, deserves to be called a "winner-take-all" society. For a related but better documented analysis, see Seymour M. Lipset (1996).

the late 1940s depended heavily on two pitchers, Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain—hence the cautious war cry: “Spahn and Sain, and pray for rain.” Likewise, early twentieth-century baseball fans represented the difficult double-play by its supposed virtuosi, “Tinker to Evers to Chance.” In other fields, including entertainment, duos and trios are recognized individually (Sonny and Cher), as are World War II’s best known American leaders, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and MacArthur (although these men represented separate realms of activity [politics and the two theaters of war]). Future work will determine whether duos and trios are exceptions to, or different forms of, oneness.

The concept of oneness describes a nonuniversal but powerful tendency for individuals and groups to simplify complex comparisons by choosing one prominent performer or entity. This tendency is reinforced by memory’s limits, but such a hindrance does not itself limit recognition. Why, then, does a conventional limit—particularly the recognition of one person—exaggerate a natural limit which, although severe, permits the recognition of several people? Why is human convention so stingy, why does it remember so few and forget so many, what social realities does it reinforce, and how does the answer to these questions bear on our general understanding of collective forgetting? Rosa Parks, as noted, is the case in point.

THE RISE OF ROSA PARKS

Forgotten Events and Protesters

Throughout the Jim Crow era, many African Americans rebelled against segregated seating in public transportation, but their number vastly increased after World War II. By the mid-1950s, defiance of bus segregation had become common. A host of unrecognized men and women (“invisible leaders,” as Bernice Barnett [1993] calls them [see also Barnett 1995; Hendrickson 2005]), preceded Rosa Parks. “Invisible leaders” are in fact quite visible to scholars whose business it is to search for them; it is to the general public that they are unknown. The following chronology

includes a sample of the unknowns that marked the final decades of bus segregation.

July 1944. Irene Morgan (Anon 2001) refused to go to the back of a bus traveling from Virginia to Maryland. Her case went to the Supreme Court, which ruled segregation in interstate travel to be unconstitutional (June 3, 1946).

June 1953. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a one-day bus boycott, followed three weeks later by a seven-day boycott, resulted in partial desegregation of city buses.

May 21, 1954. Jo Ann Robinson, president of Montgomery, Alabama’s Womens’ Political Council, complained in a letter to Mayor W.A. “Tacky” Gayle about humiliations endured by black bus passengers (including herself) and warned of a boycott against Montgomery’s bus company.

June 22, 1954–July 14, 1955. Sarah Mae Flemming filed suit against her removal from a Columbia, South Carolina bus. Her case failed, but on appeal the Fourth Federal Circuit Court ordered Columbia’s buses integrated. Bus companies in 16 other Southern cities integrated in compliance with the court ruling. Montgomery maintained its segregated buses, arguing that the Flemming decision applied to Columbia alone and, in any case, did not explicitly deny that the Plessy-Ferguson (separate but equal principle) applied to public transportation.

March 2, 1955. In Montgomery, Alabama, Claudette Colvin refused to move to the back of a segregated bus; she was arrested, convicted, and fined.

April 19, 1955. Aurelia Browder of Montgomery refused to take her legal bus seat; she, too, was arrested, convicted, and fined.

October 21, 1955. Mary Louise Smith of Montgomery was arrested, convicted, and fined for violating the city’s bus segregation code. Several days later, Suzi McDonald was arrested and fined for the same offense.

December 1, 1955. Rosa Parks was arrested, then convicted and fined for refusing to surrender her seat to a white passenger. Next day, the Montgomery bus boycott, planned for a single day, went into effect.

December 3, 1955. Activist leaders of Montgomery's black community formed a new entity, The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), in order to distance themselves from conservative ministers and avoid legal entanglements with the local NAACP branch.³ The Association appointed Martin Luther King, Jr. as its president.

December 5, 1955. Several hours after Rosa Parks was fined, thousands gathered for a meeting at a local church under the black community's new (MIA) leadership. King's speech electrified the audience, which voted to extend the boycott indefinitely.

February 1, 1956. Realizing that the boycott had failed to achieve its modest goals of improving courtesy and convenience within a segregated transportation system, attorney Fred Gray convinced his MIA colleagues to bring legal suit against the city. He named Browder, Colvin, Smith, McDonald, and one other woman, Jeanetta Reese, as plaintiffs against Montgomery's mayor, claiming that bus segregation violated their 14th Amendment (equal protection) rights. Jeanetta Reese had also been ejected from a Montgomery bus for refusing to give up her seat,⁴ but she removed her name from the suit after receiving threats on her life.

February 21, 1956. Rosa Parks, among eighty-nine other black resisters, was arrested and fingerprinted for violating the city's anti-boycott law.

June 5, 1956. Six months after the filing of the *Browder v. Gayle* suit, the three-judge Fifth Federal Circuit Court ruled against the city of Montgomery and its mayor. The city immediately appealed to the Supreme Court.

November 13, 1956. The US Supreme Court upheld the district court ruling. Five weeks later (December 20) federal marshals served the enforcement order.

December 21, 1956. The NAACP marked the desegregation order by asking Rosa Parks to pose for a photograph on a city bus. (A UPI reporter, sometimes taken for an irate white passenger, agreed to sit *behind* Mrs. Parks [Figure 1].)

Because pictorial information is more readily remembered than verbal (MacInnis and Price 1987), this photograph reinforced the public's belief in Rosa Parks as the mother of the civil rights movement. It also takes us to the nub of the problem. Why did the NAACP choose Rosa Parks to represent a boycott in which so many played equally important roles? Why did it not include Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Mary Louise Smith, and Suzie McDonald—the successful plaintiffs whose suit ended bus segregation everywhere? These very questions presuppose the presence of agents—“reputational entrepreneurs,” as Gary Fine (1996) calls them, promoting Rosa Parks's reputation and renown (Lang and Lang 1991), but the activities of these admirers cannot explain her fame. Her fame, indeed, makes the success of her promoters a problem rather than an explanation.

Singling Out Rosa Parks

When two or more investigators make an identical discovery within a short time span, Robert Merton (1957) observes, credit is assigned to the person who makes the discovery first. If this priority rule is generalized to social movements, then one must recognize that Rosa Parks was last, not first, to challenge Montgomery's bus segregation practice. After Claudette Colvin was arrested in March 1955, Jo Ann Robinson, president of the Women's Political Council, E.D. Nixon, director of the Montgomery NAACP, and attorney Fred Gray thought the youngster would be a good plaintiff in a lawsuit to end bus segregation and a good symbol to mobilize Montgomery's heretofore compliant (King 1958) black community. But the plan fell through. Although a member of the NAACP youth organization, Miss Colvin was pregnant with a married man's child. In October of 1955, eighteen-year-old Mary Louise Smith refused to give up her bus seat, but her father's alcoholism

³ For detail, see Fred Gray 1995. Gray's advice turned out to be prescient. On June 1, 1956, Alabama's attorney general claimed that the NAACP had not followed proper registration requirements and barred it from conducting business in the state (Glennon 1991).

⁴ Dates of arrest for Reese and MacDonald are unknown.



Figure 1. Rosa Parks contemplates boycott victory. © Bettman/ CORBIS

ruled her out as a plaintiff and symbol. To the extent that Colvin and Smith deviated from what Barnett (2007) calls “the cult of black women’s respectability and womanhood,” their arrests, according to E.D. Nixon, would be less likely to impress a court and arouse the indignation of Montgomery’s African Americans (Raines 1977). Little personal information on Suzie McDonald, who was 78 at the time of her protest and arrest, is available; however, the Montgomery police had also arrested Aurelia Browder, an NAACP member and activist. Browder worked for years as a seamstress, then finished high school, entered college, and graduated with honors with majors in mathematics and science. Not until Rosa Parks was arrested, how-

ever, did Robinson, Nixon, and Gray believe they had found the plaintiff and symbol they sought. At the time, Rosa Parks seemed to have the attributes needed to be an effective plaintiff and symbol: (1) she had no skeletons in her closet and (2) as NAACP secretary, she was better known throughout the black community than any of the other arrested women, including Browder (King 1958; Williams 1987; Parks 1992).

Besides being secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP, which she joined in 1943, Rosa Parks was a counselor in its youth group, a devoted church member, well-known and liked in the black community, acquainted with resistance leaders and attorneys. Because she had occupied a

legal bus seat—to be relinquished only to a standing white passenger—the NAACP could not have known beforehand about Mrs. Parks's decision to make her protest. Nevertheless, they assisted her with legal aid immediately, beginning with bail within hours of her arrest, and assembled considerable numbers to accompany her to court. "When they messed with her, they messed with the WRONG ONE" was often repeated during the days following Rosa Parks's arrest (Durr 2006:108, emphasis added). But this arrest plays a minor part in the boycott's history.

The full story of the Montgomery bus boycott is the story of black representatives confronting Montgomery municipal officials, even as their homes are bombed and their families threatened; of black attorneys countering city and state legal maneuvers; of weekly meetings in churches (also bombing targets) to reinforce the motivation of the protestors; of ordinary people struggling to maintain their livelihood by pooling resources and supporting one another. In these stories Rosa Parks plays no visible role. Reverend Robert Graetz, white minister of Montgomery's black Lutheran congregation and active boycott supporter, reports: "Sadly, Mrs. Parks had very little to do with the boycott. Once it was past the beginning, she faded into the background" (Graetz 1991:113). Between her February arrest and the November Supreme Court decision, Rosa Parks traveled the country on speaking engagements, but she had no part in the front line of battle, as did Graetz. Besides making his own fundraising trips, Graetz served as secretary of the Montgomery Improvement Association, was particularly hated by white segregationists, lived under continual surveillance, suffered nightly telephone threats on his children's lives, and endured an attempted murder and two bombings (Graetz 1991).

Fred Gray, Montgomery Improvement Association's attorney, was also exposed to a wide range of harassment. While threatened with disbarment and summoned for review of his draft status by Montgomery's Selective Service Board, Gray designed and executed the *Browder vs. Gayle* action. His role in the

Supreme Court's bus desegregation decision was indispensable (Gray 1995; Burns 1997).

Nevertheless, Rosa Parks emerged as the symbol of the struggle and the victory.

When Rosa Parks Became a National Celebrity

Two problems must be distinguished: the first is to find the basis for Rosa Parks's renown; the second is to explain why that renown was accorded to no resistor but her. The first problem is easiest to solve because Rosa Parks was an insider. Not only local elites, including E.D. Nixon and Vernon Johns but also Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy, who would soon become national celebrities, knew her and were impressed by her quiet dignity. Fred Gray wanted Rosa Parks to be lead plaintiff in his federal case, but her December 5th conviction was still pending in the Alabama appeals court and could not be heard in a federal court until the state had acted. To wait might postpone the case indefinitely; therefore, Gray moved forward with Aurelia Browder.

Two contingencies made Rosa Park's insidership relevant to her renown. First, and crucially, the city of Montgomery invited the Montgomery Improvement Association, represented by a twelve-person committee, to negotiate a compromise. At the first meeting, three days after the boycott began, protesters presented their demands—more driver courtesy, first-come, first-serve seating for blacks from the back of the bus to the front, and the hiring of black drivers for buses serving mainly African-American communities. None of these demands required the integration of city buses, but the mayor's committee refused to accept them. Negotiations resumed on December 17 and December 19, but the city, again, offered no concessions, and negotiations ended.⁵ If the city had agreed to the protesters' modest demands, modeled after rules in other segregated Alabama cities, the boy-

⁵ Negotiations between the city and the Montgomery Improvement Association are described in detail by Martin Luther King, Jr., the Association's spokesman (King 1958).

cott would have ended, and Rosa Parks would have been forgotten.

Montgomery's "Get Tough Policy" was the second contingency affecting Rosa Parks's place in history. After eight days of investigation, a grand jury found that 90 protesters had violated an "anti-boycott" law adopted decades earlier to prevent labor collusion against local business establishments. The indictments named many prominent black citizens, including attorneys, political leaders, 24 clergymen, and Rosa Parks. Each defendant chose to exercise his or her right to be tried by a judge. Not until March 21 did the state begin its first prosecution, that of Martin Luther King. Defense attorneys brought in witnesses to describe the bus company's treatment of African Americans, and national press services broadcast their testimony. King was convicted, but 89 cases remained.

Meanwhile, membership in the segregationist White Citizens Council doubled; Montgomery's mayor and police commissioner added themselves to the number while other segregationists began a program of intimidation and violence against the city's black citizens (Walker 2007). The government withdrew licenses from taxi drivers who lowered rates for boycotters, ticketed automobiles carrying them to work, forbade carpools to pick up passengers on public property, and tried unsuccessfully to disrupt the boycott by broadcasting false information about its resolution.

As Rosa Parks faced more charges, more Americans watched her. She refused to pay the \$14 fine imposed for her December 1, 1955 violation and on February 22, 1956 was sentenced to 14 days in jail. Appealing to the State Supreme Court, she was released on bond. She was also arrested on the antiboycott charge, fingerprinted under the eyes and cameras of the press, and indicted. At this time, when the state's mass prosecutions dominated national attention, Rosa Parks's name appeared most frequently in the media. In one newspaper source, *Newspaperarchive.com*, a large but imperfectly representative collection of small town and medium-size city newspapers, 21 articles mentioned Rosa Parks between December 1 and December 31,

1955—the first 4 weeks of the boycott. For the entire year of 1955, there was no mention of other bus resisters. In January 1956, the second month of the boycott, Rosa Parks's name appeared three times. During the February enactment of the "Get Tough" policy, the number of Rosa Parks mentions rose to 46, then fell to 21 in March and 6 in April.⁶ February's peak followed the filing in federal district court of the *Browder vs. Gayle* suit to end segregation of Montgomery's buses.

Apotheosis

In early 1956, no one knew or could have known how brilliantly the light of the mass media would soon shine on Rosa Parks and how much more intensely it would shine as decades passed. Indeed, when Rosa Parks died in her Detroit home in October 2005, fifty years after the boycott, state and local establishments reacted with unprecedented deference. Following the pattern of a "royal progress," the ceremonial form by which kings and queens take possession of their realm (Geertz 1983), the NAACP moved her body to Montgomery's St. Paul A.M.E. church, where she had been a member. Many officials, including the U.S. Secretary of State, participated in the service. Throughout the city, the first row of seats on all buses remained empty in her memory. From Montgomery, her body was flown to the Baltimore-Washington International Airport, named after Thurgood Marshall, with whom Fred Gray consulted during the legal battle. The motorcade, accompanied by a symbolic 1955-era bus, carried her remains to the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, where they were placed in state. Emergency legislation, initiated by the Michigan House delegation led by John Conyers and signed by the president, provided for this honor, previously reserved for presidents, statesmen, and military heroes. After signing a bill authorizing a statue of Rosa Parks to be erected in the U.S. Capitol Building, the President of the United States

⁶ These counts were made in September 2006. Since then, *Newspaperarchive.com* has added additional newspapers and issues to its existing holdings.

ordered all flags to be flown at half-staff; he and other federal officials visited the Rotunda privately to pay their respects. Then the great Rotunda doors were opened and tens of thousands wound their way around the military guard and coffin.

Mrs. Parks's remains were next moved to Detroit's Greater Grace Temple for a seven-hour service. Entertainers, including Aretha Franklin, civil rights leaders, and political and business leaders attended, as did Michigan's two senators and many House members, black politicians from many states, and prominent white figures including Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Nancy Pelosi, and Bill Ford, CEO of Ford Motor Company. Her body was finally placed on a gold-trimmed horse-drawn carriage for the seven-mile procession to the cemetery. The release of scores of doves coincided with her arrival and entombment.

Commemoration: Primary Vehicle of Oneness

The affirmation of Rosa Parks's renown is far more evident in commemorative forms than in historical statements. History involves the recording of events over time; commemoration is the lifting from the historical record of events that best symbolize society's ideals. The source materials of history are written, printed, oral, and visual documents; commemoration employs icons, statues, monuments, shrines, place names, eulogies, and ritual observances. History informs; commemoration inspires and motivates (Schwartz 2001).

History and commemoration, each performing its own function, constitute collective memory. In 2006, for example, there was only one Nobel Prize chemistry winner, but the history of chemistry preserves the accomplishments of all its researchers. In the field of race relations, history texts tell more about Claudette Colvin, Mary Smith, and Aurelia Browder than do commemorative media, which barely recognize them at all. As noted, "invisible leaders" (Barnett 1993) are quite visible: anyone writing a term paper or essay on any one of them can find plenty of published information. But such information is available only to those who have reason to look. For most people, commemoration alone

tells who is worth remembering and why. Collective forgetting, then, is relative to one's reference frame. Neither history nor commemoration is a privileged site for knowing the past because each represents the past differently: the former chronicles it; the latter publicly celebrates it. History, in its pure form, is inclusive of every significant facet of an event; commemoration, in its pure form, is selective, highlighting an event's most significant moral feature.

That commemoration, not history, preserves Rosa Parks's *oneness* was never more evident than when she lay in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. She was honored so spectacularly, according to CNN's announcer Gary Nurenberg (2005), because the remarkable gains of the civil rights movement resulted from the will of "one woman on one bus in Montgomery fifty years ago." Joseph Lowery (2005) agreed: "Yes, she sat down so we could stand up . . . She was the one woman whom God chose to do extraordinary things."

These quotations are eulogistic, not historical, statements, and their distinctive feature is redundancy. The list would be tedious were it not produced by such a wide array of people—black and white, liberal and conservative, Southern and non-Southern. "Rosa Parks proved one person can make a difference. . . Her single act of defiance changed America for the better," said businessman and author Paul Lawrence Vann (2005). In Reverend Al Sharpton's (2005) view, "she singularly on December 1, 1955, tore down the walls of American segregation and apartheid." Rosa Parks also "single-handedly changed the landscape of the South. . . She showed that one individual can move a community to action." U.S. Representative Arthur Davis (2005) of Alabama, at least, believed as much. U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan (2005), likewise, declared that "With a single act, she changed the course of history." The list is long and the point unchangeable: "She taught us all that one person. . . could spark a world of change." "In one single day, Rosa Parks made the world face the cause of equality, civil rights and justice." "Her lonely act of defiance sparked a movement that ended legal segregation in America." Thus spake

Michigan Republican Party Chairman Saul Anuzis (2005), California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (2005), and U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein of California (2005).

Some observers insist that Rosa Parks was not the only person, not even the central person, in the civil rights movement (Loeb 2005); but they list none of the others and offer no explanation for why they have been forgotten. They ignore the main problem: what is there in the nature of commemoration that prevents all significant activists from sharing the renown bestowed on one?

Because commemoration could not perform its function if it were not selective, the outpouring of attention on Rosa Parks would have been impossible if she had to share the spotlight with other women, including those who risked as much, enjoyed less protection, and displayed as much courage. What if the federal government had to organize spectacular funerals for the entire cast of resisters? CNN announcer Carol Lin, present at the Capitol Rotunda when Mrs. Parks laid in state, raised this question simply and clearly: “Really, I think people are grasping *what it must have been like* for this woman back in 1955 to be so brave” (italics added). Many women back in 1955 were brave, but if all these women received their due, grasping “what it must have been like” would be difficult. Multiple commemoration rites—the making of the calendar into something resembling a sequence of funeral and award announcements—would make incoherent the very ideal these rites were meant to affirm.

DETERMINANTS OF ONENESS

Condensation

The sole figure of a black woman who refused to give up her seat to a white passenger is more easily representable than all the Montgomery women who worked on behalf of civil rights. Foreshadowing a fundamental premise of cognitive psychology, Emile Durkheim ([1915] 1965) declared: “we are unable to consider an abstract entity, which we can represent only laboriously and confusedly, the source of the strong sentiments which we feel. We cannot explain them to ourselves

except by connecting them to some concrete object of whose reality we are vividly aware” (251). This “concrete [singular] object,” Rosa Parks, helps represent morally and emotionally what the civil rights movement meant to its beneficiaries. Promoting attachment rather than enlightenment, the image of Rosa Parks encouraged commitment to the civil rights movement as an undifferentiated whole. She was, as Sherry Ortner (1973) would define her, the civil rights movement’s “summarizing symbol.”

Walter Bagehot ([1872] 1978), however, was the first to discuss oneness as a summarizing symbol. Writing in the early 1870s, Bagehot, a Briton, assessed the role of the monarch in the English constitution (37):

[W]e have whole classes unable to comprehend the ideas of a constitution—unable to feel the least attachment to impersonal laws. Most do indeed vaguely know that there are some other institutions besides the Queen, and some rules by which she governs. But a vast number. . . dwell more upon her than upon anything else, and therefore she is inestimable. Such is the mentality of the “vacant many” who “have but hazy notions as to obeying laws without a queen” (39).

Bagehot’s condescension toward the ordinary people of Great Britain, his belief that the Queen is necessary as “a visible symbol of unity to those still so imperfectly educated as to need a symbol” (45) should not blind us to the similarity between the single monarch and single civil rights heroine. If reverence for the Queen is a substitute for political understanding, then admiration for Rosa Parks may reflect the “vacant many’s” understanding of the long story of the Montgomery bus boycott—and, beyond that, the civil rights movement. To grasp these events, the people must revere the one person they can envision, not the many they cannot envision. To grasp events in this way, however, is to find them meaningful, not necessarily true.

Matthew Effect

In the first phase of her public career, Rosa Parks symbolized a local resistance campaign, but as her renown grew she became dis-

sociated from local protest and situated on the national scene. The mother of a bus boycott became the "mother of the civil rights movement." As the media broadcast the image of Rosa Parks, it grew, as Edward Sapir (1930) would have said, "deeper and deeper roots in the unconscious and diffused its emotional quality to types of behavior or situations apparently far removed from [its] original meaning" (493).

Robert Merton's (1968) "Matthew Effect" describes the process which broadened Rosa Parks's symbolic power. The Gospel of Matthew (25:29) is Merton's source: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." The Matthew Effect is actually a variant of what general systems scholars call "postive feedback," a process that creates new meanings by converting initial responses into virtuous cycles (Buckley 1967). Observers react toward the beneficiaries of recognition in ways that exaggerate their initial prestige and cause competitors to be forgotten. The beneficiary is invited to events, seated next to leaders, and asked to judge the merit of others' traits and achievements. (For a listing of awards and symbols of academic recognition, see Boring 1959) The Matthew Effect thus vindicates earlier reward decisions, regardless of whether or not they were the wisest.

The fate of Rosa Parks exemplifies the power of the Matthew Effect. Merton's Nobel Prize winners, however worthy of their recognition, accomplished real things; Rosa Parks's recognition was based on ascribed, not achieved, status. Nevertheless, her initial recognition set off a virtuous cycle: she accompanied Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, E.D. Nixon, and other leaders on trips around the country to raise funds for the Montgomery Improvement Association. Invited to national NAACP meetings, she met for the first time such celebrities as A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Highlander School in Tennessee, where she once studied nonviolent resistance, recruited her to teach a course on reform tactics, as if she were the boycott's tactician. Her

rewards accumulated while other resisters watched.

However, as Rosa Parks's renown grew, she and her husband lost their jobs. Why no one was willing or able to help them is a question rarely raised, let alone answered. She had always wanted to live outside Montgomery, but no one can say why she moved to Detroit when she did. Rosa Parks's friend and supporter Virginia Durr (2006) simply notes: "Poor woman, she finally had to go to Detroit, she could not make it here after she got sick." Mrs. Parks's sickness is undefined, and she found work after leaving Montgomery. Mrs. Durr also makes a peculiar comment about her old friend's character: "she was such a fine and firm person, not exactly concrete but at least mighty firm asphalt" (152). All that can be said for certain, then, is that Rosa Parks was unable to convert her renown into financial benefit. Even after moving to Detroit, where part of the Parks family resided, she found no suitable employment and had to accept a guesthouse supervisor job at Hampton (Virginia) College. She returned to Detroit when the college administration refused to provide living quarters for both her and her husband. She eventually found a seamstress job at a small shop in Detroit, and for seven years, 1958 to 1965, worked while accepting invitations to speak around the country and receiving awards, including honorary membership in the recently formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Her extraordinary renown remained independent of her precarious personal life, which shows that the Matthew principle is not a general reward machine.

Rosa Parks's rewards were largely symbolic, but by early 1964 her influence had grown to the point where she convinced Martin Luther King to renounce his political neutrality and campaign on behalf of African-American Democrat John Conyers for the House of Representatives. King's support led Conyers to victory, and Parks worked for him as a secretary and receptionist, even while maintaining her busy travel schedule, until she retired at age 75 in September 1988 (Brinkley 2000). Her renown continued to grow even after retirement: she was invited to appear

around the country and the world, met with heads of state, including Pope John Paul, and she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and Congressional Gold Medal. She found places named for her: 21 streets in 14 states; 32 public and commercial establishments in 13 states. Not one comparable site is named for the other bus segregation resisters.⁷

FUNCTIONS OF ONENESS

Up to now, we have described the rise of Rosa Parks's singular prestige and placed it in the context of the resistance movement from which it arose. Rosa Parks personified a specific realm of activity—active resistance against the everyday agents of bus segregation. She stood with and for the black community's ordinary men and women. Martin Luther King, Jr. also achieved renown, but he did no walking or carpooling; he boycotted no buses. King dominated the realm of boycott leadership. While Rosa Parks's apotheosis sent Claudette Colvin, Aurelia Browder, and other women into obscurity, King overshadowed Ralph Abernathy and left in darkness E.D. Nixon, Fred Gray, Robert Graetz, and other indispensable leaders.

The problem, however, remains: why is remembering the one and forgetting the many so necessary to collective memory? To explore this problem Rosa Parks's state funeral, again, provides the best example. When someone dies, according to Emile Durkheim ([1915] 1965), the group feels a loss and reacts by ritual assemblage. Sentiments are intensified when affirmed collectively; sorrow becomes exalted and amplified as it migrates from mind to mind. Each person "is carried along by the others; a veritable panic of sorrow results" (Durkheim [1915] 1965:446). But Rosa Parks's ritual was more than a matter of crowd contagion.

Rosa Parks's renown reflects mainly on the illusions of achievement about which collective memory constructionists, including John Bodnar (1992), John Gillis (1994), and

Eviatar Zerubavel (2003) have so much to say. That she was the mother of the Civil Rights Movement is false. That she was first to challenge bus segregation in Alabama is false. That she spearheaded the struggle against Montgomery's white establishment is false. That hers was a "test case" against segregation is false. It was Martin Luther King, Jr., E.D. Nixon, and Ralph Abernathy, not Rosa Parks, who mobilized the black community to resist bus segregation. It was Fred Gray who devised the law suit that ended bus segregation. It was Aurelia Browder whom Gray chose for his test case.

Given the limits of human cognition, however, complete information confuses. If we saw all there was to be seen of the 13-month boycott, if we experienced the long walk to work by everyone unable to find a ride, if we heard and read what every participant said about the boycott and how it affected them, if we could grasp every aspect of it, the result would be not understanding but perplexity. The action of a single individual, on the other hand, is easy to grasp and remember. Nothing makes this clearer than the way human nature and society protect us from remembering too much.

Oneness: Font of Idealism

Nature limits the power of cognition, but society alone can press these limits to the service of oneness. If a single person, by dint of unusual achievement, separates himself from others, then he is symbolizing, within a given realm of action, a transcendent ideal. "Singling out" and "setting examples," therefore, do more than reward individuals; they perform moral functions;⁸ they provide the community with concrete exemplars of its standards, virtues, and powers. Society is

⁷ Information is drawn from www.melissadata.com and www.referenceusa.com.

⁸ That morality and sentiment are constituents of cognition and oneness, including the oneness of Rosa Parks, is a classical insight originating in antiquity (*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*). In more recent times, this trichotomy has been developed by Parson's (1951) analysis of cognitive, cathectic, and evaluative modes of orientation, and expanded by Norbert Schwartz's (1998) discussion of the "warmer" and "more social" aspects of cognition.

indifferent as to who stands for its defining ideals, as long as these are represented.

The underlying structure of the ideal is its singularity. According to the *Standard College Dictionary* (1963), an ideal is “1. a thing conceived as an ultimate object of attainment. 2. a person or thing taken as a standard of perfection.” As an “ultimate object of attainment” or “standard of perfection,” the ideal can only be conceived as a single thing and only represented as such. As an adjective, too, an ideal “1. conforms to an absolute standard of excellence; embodying or exemplifying perfection; 2. representing the best of its kind” (665). In these representative statements the ideal is never plural; it is a unique model to which people orient their aspirations and conduct.

It may be said, without twisting the term too much, that there is something “sacred” about ideals and their symbols. In modern societies, the sacred, according to Emile Durkheim, surrounds every individual, and modern societies are sustained by what he calls the “cult of the individual” ([1911] 1974:58–9). The wider the diffusion of sacredness, the more individuals are entitled to ritual displays of respect (Goffman 1967). But if “objects become sacred and judgments attribute value when they reflect a social ideal” (Durkheim [1911]1974: xxv, 92–3), then this ideal must dramatize the gap between ordinary and extraordinary events and beings. To separate these two realms so fiercely, it is true, makes them incommensurable, while in reality the difference between them is often a matter of small degree—or even judgment error. Nevertheless, society cannot do without this difference, this oneness, because it cannot sustain itself without creating ideals in its various spheres (Durkheim [1911] 1974). This is why, “in the present day as in the past, we see society constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones” (Durkheim [1915] 1965:245).

Sacred things cannot be adored, however, if their aura is blurred by competitors. The greater the number of *beaux ideals* within any realm of activity, the more ambiguous their referent becomes. The natural limits of cognition, therefore, reinforce the ideals which

express a culture’s most valued traits and achievements.

Oneness, Schema, and Reality

What is owed to the principle of oneness can be known by imagining the result of our doing without it. Remove Rosa Parks, and the average person will have a much vaguer notion of both the origins of the civil rights movement and the ideals that drove it. Remove Rosa Parks, and the story of a wronged innocent is replaced by tedious details about car-pools, pickup points, fundraising, weekly MIA meetings, petty internal disputes—details which conceal the meaning of the larger struggle.

Rosa Parks’s story is “schematic” (Fiske and Taylor 1991; Bartlett [1932] 1995; DiMaggio 1997) because it simplifies the Montgomery protests and aligns them with classical stories of oppressed people’s struggle for justice. A humble seamstress finishes a day of hard work, boards a bus, pays her fare, takes a seat, is ordered to move to the back of the bus when a white passenger appears, and refuses because she is tired of a lifetime of humiliation. She is arrested, tried, and fined. Montgomery’s long-suffering black community, angered by her arrest, boycotts the city’s buses for a year, forcing the white government to relent and desegregate. Such is the schema abstracted from Rosa Parks’s conduct. People who cannot remember the bus boycott as a whole can retrieve the schema in which its elements are stored. A mild woman’s run-in with an angry bus driver in a Jim Crow city sums it up.⁹

The story makes for a self-flattering as well as concise account: segregation is conquered by the iron will of a tyrannized community, exemplified by a black seamstress, not by a white court and its judges. Indeed, the narrative presumes that federal courts would

⁹ A *schema* is a cognitive framework that simplifies complex events or people and links them to prior experience. Those who lack a schema for football, for example, will understand and remember less about a game than those able to locate each action within the game’s framework of rules and traditions (see, for example, DiMaggio 1997).

have ruled against integration if not pressured by black resistance. “So when you ask why the courts had to come in,” JoAnn Robinson, President of the Women’s Political Council, explains, “they *had* to come in. You get 52,000 people in the streets and nobody’s showing any fear, something had to give. So the Supreme Court had to rule that segregation was not the way of life” (Williams 1987:71, 89). Robinson’s statement has two implications: (1) the boycott broke the back of the segregationists by putting unbearable pressure on the bus company and downtown merchants, and (2) the boycott forced the courts to rule against the city. Both implications underestimate the autonomy of the courts and overestimate the power of public demonstrations.

Long before Montgomery’s boycott began, the Supreme Court had handed down a series of liberal decisions on jury selection, housing, public education, voting rights, professional school integration, and equal access to publicly funded resources, including golf courses, swimming pools, beach houses, and public parks. By the time of the *Brown* decision in 1954, which was not made under the pressure of public protest, little was left of the Plessy-Ferguson principle. Furthermore, the Fifth Circuit Court’s unpressured integration of Columbia, South Carolina’s bus system in January 1956 makes implausible the claim that a boycott forced the Fifth Circuit Court to integrate Montgomery’s bus system in November 1956.

Martin Luther King believed the *Browder* decision was significant because it broke the deadlock between resisters and the city (Williams 1987:89). In fact, there was no deadlock. After eleven months, the black community was far worse off than the white, and the city had no incentive to give in. When an Alabama circuit court was about to prohibit the use of car pools, the boycott was, in fact, on the verge of collapse (Glennon 1991), and it would have collapsed had not the federal district court issued its *Browder* ruling. There was no direct cause and effect relationship, observes legal scholar Robert J. Glennon, “between the boycott and the end of segregated buses in Montgomery.” The *Browder* case “could have proceeded without the attendant

boycott and the Court result would have been identical” (93). Put differently, Montgomery’s buses would have been integrated whether or not Rosa Parks had given up her seat.

On the other hand, court decisions alone could not end public hostility or segregation. During and immediately after the boycott, the homes of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ralph Abernathy, and Robert Graetz were bombed or damaged. Shots were fired at the King home. Four churches were bombed, and many other acts of violence were committed against boycott leaders and followers (Robinson 1987). After Montgomery’s buses were integrated, ten years passed before Montgomery desegregated its schools and other public facilities. In many other cities, buses remained segregated. Local stalling tactics and violence delayed the progress of integration everywhere.

The memory of the Gray/Browder litigation has been, in any case, replaced by the more resonant story of Rosa Parks’s defiance and an oppressed black community arising on its own to overcome white oppression. But if the Rosa Parks story distorts history, its appeal does not reside in its distortion. Rosa Parks’s occupying the fateful bus seat, her arrest, and subsequent apotheosis are real episodes in a historic movement. Her renown, whatever the NAACP’s role in creating it, keeps alive the memory of 381 days of authentic courage, perseverance, and sacrifice.

But to affirm the reality of what Rosa Parks symbolized does not mean she contributed to it as much as is commonly believed. Any federal suit against Montgomery bus segregation by a noncontroversial plaintiff would have probably succeeded. On the other hand, Rosa Parks’s personality was unique; if she had somehow disappeared from Montgomery after her arrest, no one can say for certain whether any of the plaintiffs—*Browder*, Colvin, Franklin, or McDonald—could have assumed her symbolic role. There was nothing inevitable about a single resister symbolizing the boycott, but once a representative symbol was chosen, it had to stand alone.

Was Rosa Parks chosen as the boycott’s symbol because she was somehow better qual-

ified than other women or because she better met MIA's strategic needs? The question is difficult. She was certainly not the first or most courageous in the matter of active resistance or first to be considered a lead plaintiff. Rosa Parks was selected because of a combination of traits: she was not only an NAACP insider but also a quiet, churchgoing woman with no hidden vices. Rosa Parks could be what Colvin or Franklin could not be, and that is a pure celebrity, not in the sense of a person known for being known, but for being the most persuasive representative of her peers. That she could have done so better than Auriela Browder, or for that matter, the less obscure and more active Jo Ann Robinson, is debatable. But the main point is that once she was chosen, her renown would have been diminished if someone else were placed beside her.

The boycott's consequence, then, was real, but not in the way we usually think about it. As a cause of bus segregation's demise its effect was questionable; its true function was (1) to enhance the dignity and solidarity of the black community by demonstrating its members' willingness to go to jail for their beliefs (Valien 1989), which whites were unprepared to do when the courts ruled against them; (2) to impress the legitimacy of black grievances on fair-minded whites; (3) to draw national attention to the cause of racial justice; and (4) to inspire boycotts in other places.

To represent every protester as dramatically as Rosa Parks and every leader as clearly as Martin Luther King—and this point cannot be overemphasized—would confound, not clarify, the meaning and consequence of their struggle. In 1955, it would have made no difference if one of Mrs. Parks's peers had been chosen to be mother of the Civil Rights Movement, but once a unique presence is established it becomes indispensable. "The bus driver could have been any other driver," observed *Washington Times* commentator Suzanne Fields (2005:A21), "but only Rosa Parks could have been Rosa Parks."¹⁰ In fact,

Rosa Parks symbolizes a revolution of such significance as to make her selection over others a trivial matter. Her aura resides in the social realities she marks.

Resentment

Rosa Parks's case is important because her renown is sustained by forgotten heroes and heroines—people who deserve to be remembered and resent not getting their due. The numerous writers who have interviewed the boycott's participants know intuitively that the "shadow effect" of resentment (McLaughlin and Miller 2004) is a common entailment of oneness.¹¹ "She made something out of what I started," declared Claudette Colvin of Rosa Parks (Kitchen 2005). Attorney Fred Gray echoed Colvin's words when he explained that it was she, Claudette, who inspired Montgomery's black leadership to take action against the city. If a 15-year old child can stand up to segregation, Gray declared, then adults must do the same. Without her example, Montgomery's black citizens would not have defied segregation (McGrew 2005a).

Likewise, Aurelia Browder's son Butler observed that monuments had been built to honor Rosa Parks, but "my mother has been all but forgotten." (Even Martin Luther King Jr. failed to mention her in his [1958] recounting of the decisive action of the federal district court.) Many still believe, in fact, that Rosa Parks was the lead plaintiff in the case against the city of Montgomery, and Butler Browder despairs at his constant need of having to correct them. "It was Aurelia Browder who "changed the laws that applied to segregation" (McGrew 2005b). Boycott leaders were equally resentful. E.D. Nixon was pained to know that his decades of achievements, culminating

declared that if she had recognized Blake to be the man who ejected her from his bus in 1943, she would have waited for the next bus (and probably not have been arrested).

¹¹ See Douglas Brinkley's (2000) discussion of Montgomery leaders' envy of Rosa Parks. Bernice Barnett, who interviewed Claudette Colvin and other boycott workers, was struck by the intensity of their feelings of being unfairly deprived of recognition. Personal communication, February 15, 2007.

¹⁰ The discourtesy of driver James F. Blake was more important than Ms. Field believes. Rosa Parks herself

in the boycott, are ignored. [H]istory," he said, "ought to be written true. Give him [Martin Luther King] all he earned, but don't rob me" (cited in Baldwin and Woodson 1992: 65; see also Garrow 1989). The Matthew Effect, whereby rewards build on themselves, operates transparently in this case. E. D. Nixon was one of the bus boycott's key directors, but when NAACP officials decided to inform their membership about the boycott's details, they called in Rosa Parks. That Nixon took out his resentment on Rosa Parks is therefore no surprise. Once a warm friend, he denounced her as a "lovely, stupid woman" (Brinkley 2000:175).

Like E.D. Nixon, Ralph Abernathy believed his own role to be indispensable. Ambitious men like Jesse Jackson and Andrew Young "didn't realize. . .the degree to which Martin depended on me for counsel when we were alone and how many of his ideas originated with me" (1989: 479). Abernathy never *openly* resented King for overshadowing him, but his biography, published after King's death, exposes King's habit of plagiarizing passages for sermons and speeches and describes his extramarital affairs while on Southern Christian Leadership Conference business.¹² Earlier, Abernathy displaced his resentment from King to Rosa Parks, belittling her as a mere functionary and mocking her husband as a "frightened lush" (Brinkley 2000:175-6).

Resentment is a reaction against unfairness, and many of Rosa Parks's contemporaries believed she had received more than she deserved. What, then, can be said, in a general way, about those whose accomplishments her commemoration obscures?

CONCLUSION

Attention, as noted in this essay's opening pages, refers to the way men and women select the stimuli to which they wish to

respond. Yet, selective attention would be unnecessary if individuals could attend to everything. They select deliberately because their cognitive limitations allow them no alternative.

Man's limited memory is understood better now than ever before, but the question remains as to why a humanly instituted deficit should be added to a natural one. Put differently, if working memory's capacity were independent of culture, then this essay would be about the symbolic power of fourness, not oneness, for human working memory readily manages several chunks of information. The most natural path, then, would be to recognize the several best home-run hitters, strikeout leaders, and golden glove champions. But social conventions are limited by, not hostage to, nature. The limits of nature, on the other hand, depending on their qualities, are more likely to reinforce, if not directly contribute to, the formation of some social conventions than others.

Condensation (a cognitive heuristic) and the Matthew Effect (a social process) work together, transforming fourness into oneness (nature into culture) by deliberately simplifying complexity, distinguishing one contributor to a project and forgetting others, thus symbolizing the ideals these contributors and this project pursue. The power of oneness is in this sense overdetermined: however weak the Matthew Effect in promoting any one reputation, human memory limits recognition—sometimes *to* one person or event, always *toward* one. Even if man's working and long-term memory capacities were greater, the Matthew Effect's positive feedback process would limit recognition—sometimes *to* one person or event, always *toward* one. Cognitive deficit, thus, reinforces rather than creates society's need to represent its ideals with unique symbols.

Oneness exaggerates the qualities of persons above the boundary of recognition and diminishes the qualities of those below, but *how* does oneness affect our understanding? We need to know how condensation and the Matthew Effect, acting together, induce and sustain this result. What does this interaction

¹² Leaders were not King's only critics. In the *Browder vs. Gayle* hearing, Auriela Browder reiterated the oft-stated claim that "Montgomery made King." She testified that the people, not Martin Luther King, conducted the boycott: "We employed him to be our mouthpiece" (Burns 1997:34).

tell us about the fundamental nature of oneness itself?

Psychologist Edwin Boring (1963:5) claims in his essay, "Eponym as Placebo," that there are too many facts for any one mind to have more than a few in stock," and that eponyms reduce information to manageable proportions. An eponym refers to the person after whom some event or achievement is named, while placebo is an inactive agent used to distinguish the objective effect of an active agent, like an experimental treatment of some kind, from the subjective effect it produces. To say that eponym is a placebo is to say that individual names associated with great achievements produce a sense of understanding, just as a placebo produces a sense of well being. However, a *sense* of understanding is not necessarily real understanding. History would be more complex, and certainly more valid, if written without eponyms. Non-eponymic history, Boring claims, would reveal the impersonal, *collective* currents culminating in great events.

The symbolic power of oneness, manifested in the winner, hero, or celebrity, is synonymous with the power of the eponym. Eponym's intended function, however, is not to produce knowledge—not even partial knowledge; it is to recast history and affirm ideals by reducing complex historical events involving thousands of actors into the actions of one. In this sense, Rosa Parks can be celebrated as the "mother" of a moral movement. But few serious historians hang the past on eponymic hooks. "The founding mother" is no historical statement but a commemorative, i.e., heuristic, device enabling posterity to make sense of historical experience. By ranking actors according to symbolic relevance, then forcing the least of them to the margins of consciousness, the commemorative process makes history more memorable. To give credit to all who deserve it, on the other hand, would make history less meaningful and reduce the clarity of the ideal they would represent.

REFERENCES

- Abernathy, Ralph. 1989. *And The Walls Came Tumbling Down*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Anon. 2001. "The Uncelebrated Grandmother of the Modern Civil Rights Movement." *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 31:50.
- Anuzis, Saul. 2005. "Reaction Tuesday to the Death of Rosa Parks." Associated Press, October 25. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Bagehot, Walter. [1872] 1978. *The English Constitution*. New York: Garland.
- Baldwin, Lewis V. and Aprille V. Woodson. 1992. *Freedom is Never Free: A Biographical Portrait of Edgar Daniel Nixon*. Atlanta, GA: Office of Minority Affairs.
- Barnett, Bernice McNair. 1993. "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class." *Gender and Society* 7:162–82.
- . 1995. "Black Women's Collectivist Movement Organizations: Their Struggles during the 'Doldrums.'" Pp.199–219 in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancy Martin. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- . 2007. Personal Communication. Department of Sociology, University of Illinois-Champaign-Urbana. February 15.
- Bartlett, F. C. [1932] 1995. *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bodnar, John. 1992. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boring, Edwin G. 1959. "Rewarding Success." *Contemporary Psychology* 4:171.
- . 1963. "Eponym as Placebo." Pp.5–25 in *History, Psychology, and Science: Selected Papers*, edited by Robert I. Watson and Donald T. Campbell. New York: Wiley.
- Brinkley, Douglas. 2000. *Rosa Parks: A Life*. New York: Penguin.
- Buckley, Walter. 1967. *Sociology and Modern System Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Burns, Stewart, ed. 1997. *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Collins, Randall. 1998. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Connerton, Paul. 2008. "Seven Types of Forgetting." *Memory Studies* 1:59–71.
- Cowan, Nelson. 1995. *Attention and Memory: An Integrated Framework*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2005. *Working Memory Capacity*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Davis, Arthur. 2005. "Reaction to the Death of Rosa

- Parks." Associated Press, October 25. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Dimaggio, Paul. 1997. "Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:263–87.
- Durkheim, Emile. [1915] 1965. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: Free Press.
- . [1911] 1974. "Value Judgments and Judgments of Reality." Pp. 80–97 in *Emile Durkheim: Sociology and Philosophy*, edited by G.G. Peristiany. New York: Free Press.
- Durr, Virginia Foster. 2006. *Freedom Writer: Virginia Foster Durr, Letters from the Civil Rights Years*, edited by Patricia Sullivan. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Ericsson, K. Anders and Walter Kintch. 1995. "Long-Term Memory." *Psychological Review* 102: 211–45.
- Feinstein, Dianne. 2005. "Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein on the Death of Rosa Parks." *Financial Times Information*, November 2. Retrieved October 2007 (www.lexis-nexis.com).
- Fields, Suzanne. 2005. "The History Lesson from Rosa Parks." *Washington Times*, October 31:A21.
- Fine, Gary A. 1996. "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence: Melting Supporters, Partisan Warriors, and Images of President Harding." *American Journal of Sociology* 101:1159–93.
- Fine, Gary A. and Terence McDonnell. 2007. "Erasing the Brown Scare: Referential Afterlife and the Power of Memory Templates." *Social Problems* 54: 170–87.
- Fiske, Susan T. and Shelley E. Taylor. 1991. *Social Cognition*. 2nd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Frank, Robert H. and Philip J. Cook. 1995. *The Winner-Take-All Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Garrow, David J. 1989. *Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955–1956*. New York: Carlson.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1983a. "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding." Pp. 55–70 in *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1983b. "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power." Pp.121–146 in *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gillis, John R., ed. 1994. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Glennon, Robert Jerome. 1991. "The Role of Law in the Civil Rights Movement: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955–1957." *Law and History Review* 9: 59–112.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" in *Interaction Ritual*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goode, William J. 1978. *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Control System*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gray, Fred. 1995. *Bus Ride to Justice: Changing the System by the System*. Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press.
- Graetz, Robert S. 1991. *Montgomery: A White Preacher's Memoir*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Hendrickson, Paul. 2005. "The Ladies Before Rosa: Let Us Now Praise Unfamous Women." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8.2: 287–298.
- Hilgartner, Stephen and Charles L. Bosk. 1988. "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model." *American Journal of Sociology* 94:53–78.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1958. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Kitchen, Sebastian. 2005. "Claudette Colvin." *They Changed the World: 1955–1956: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*, Revised June 7. Retrieved October 2007 (www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/profile_colvin.htm).
- Kuhl, Brice A., Nicole M. Dudukovic, Itamar Kahn, and Anthony D. Wagner. 2007. "Decreased Demands on Cognitive Control Reveal Neural Processes Benefits of Forgetting." *Nature Neuroscience*. Retrieved June 3, 2007 (www.nature.com/natureneuroscience).
- Lang, Gladys and Kurt Lang. 1990. *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Lipset, Seymour M. 1996. *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. New York: Norton.
- Loeb, Paul R. 2005. "Fort Worth Star-Telegram." *LexisNexis*. November 9.
- Lowery, Joseph. 2005. "CNN News." *LexisNexis*. October 21.
- MacInnis, Deborah J. and Linda L. Price. 1987. "Imagery in Information Processing: Review and Extensions." *Journal of Consumer Research* 13:473–91.
- Marois, Rene. 2005. "Capacity Limits of Information Processing in the Brain." *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 85: 30–33.
- Matthew. 2003. "Matthew." Pp.283–93 in *Holy Bible: King James Version*. Tuscaloosa, AL: IGC.
- McLaughlin, William I. and Sylvia L. Miller. 2004. "The Shadow Effect and the Case of Felix Tisserand." *American Scientist* 92:262–7.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Merton, Robert K. 1957. "Priorities in Scientific Discovery: a Chapter in the Sociology of Science." *American Sociological Review* 22: 635–59.
- . 1968. "The Matthew Effect in Science." *Science* 159:56–63.
- Michaelis, Ramona R., ed. 1963. *Standard College*

- Dictionary*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World.
- Miller, George A. 1956. "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information." *Psychological Review* 63:81–97.
- McGrew, Janell. 2005a. "Aurelia Shines Browder Coleman." *They Changed the World: 1955–1956: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott Reviewed*, June 7. (www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/profile_browder.htm).
- . 2005b. "Fred Gray, Sr." *They Changed the World: 1955–1956: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott Reviewed*, June 7. (www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/profile_fgray.htm).
- Mehlman, Ken. 2005. "Reaction Tuesday to the Death of Rosa Parks." *Associated Press*, Retrieved October 25, 2005. (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Nuremberg, Gary. 2005. "CNN News." *LexisNexis*, October 31. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Ortner, Sherry. 1973. "On Key Symbols." *American Anthropologist* 75: 1338–46.
- Parks, Rosa. 1992. *My Story*. New York: Dial Books.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1951. *The Social System*. New York: Free Press.
- Raines, Howell. 1977. *My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Robinson, JoAnn Gibson. 1987. *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 2004. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sapir, Edward. 1930. "Symbolism." Pp.492–5 in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by Edwin R. A. Seligman. New York: Macmillan.
- Schwartz, Norbert. 1998. "Warmer and More Social: Recent Developments in Cognitive Social Psychology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 239–264.
- Schwartz, Barry. 2001. "Commemorative Objects." Pp. 2267–72 in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Neil Smelser and Paul D. Bates. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.
- Schwarzenegger, Arnold. 2005. "Reaction to the Death of Rosa Parks." *Associated Press*. Retrieved October 2007. (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Sharpton, Al. 2005. "Reaction to the Death of Rosa Parks." *Associated Press*, October 25. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Stabenow, Debbie. 2005. "Reaction Tuesday to the Death of Rosa Parks." *Associated Press*, October 25. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Tversky Amos and Daniel Kahneman. 1973. "Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability." *Cognitive Psychology* 5: 207–32.
- . 1974. "Judgement under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases." *Science* 185: 1124–30.
- Valien, Preston. 1989. "The Montgomery Bus Protest as a Social Movement." Pp. 83–98 in *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955–1956*, edited by David J. Garrow. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc.
- Vann, Paul L. 2005. "Proved One Person Can Make a Difference." *Broadcast Interview Source*, November 2. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>).
- Vockell, Edward. 2006. "Memory and Information Processing" in *Educational Psychology: A Practical Approach*. Hammond, IN: Purdue University. Retrieved October 2007 (<http://education.calument.purdue.edu/vockell/EdpsyBook/index.html>).
- Walker, Robert J. 2007. *Let My People Go! The Miracle of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books.
- Williams, Juan. 1987. *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965*. New York: Viking.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2003. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Barry Schwartz is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Georgia. Since 1982, Schwartz has studied the cognitive, emotional, and moral lineaments of collective memory. His two most recent books, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory (2000)* and *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era (2008)* trace and explain beliefs, feelings, and judgments of Lincoln from his assassination to present. He is now working on a series of projects that include Lincoln's changing place in the African-American community.