Sanctifying the Past

History-making as a process of canonization

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Introduction

Where I'm from, we believe all sorts of things that aren't true.
We call it 'history.'
—The Wizard of Oz, *Wicked*

Did you know that Harriet Tubman masterminded and led a raid along the Combahee River? I certainly didn't—at least not until one of my Political Science professors, Professor Juliet Hooker, screened a segment of an episode of *Drunk History* during class one day (the course was called Gender, Slavery, and Freedom).[1] *Drunk History*, I came to learn, is a television series that re-examines US history with the help of various inebriated storytellers. It is a television series dedicated to challenging the conventionally accepted narratives that populate our historical imaginations. I am interested in picking apart how these conventionally accepted versions of history come to command and monopolize such legitimacy. Or, to use the language I will use throughout this thesis, I am interested in analyzing the formation of historical canons.

In an explicitly religious sense, a "canon" usually refers to a body of works that are accepted as legitimate. "Canonization" has the dual meaning of the formation of such a body of works and, in Catholicism, the process by which an individual becomes a saint. In a non-religious sense, there is a "literary canon," which is a body of works that are considered essential to the study of literature. There is the "philosophical canon," which functions analogously but for works of philosophy. And, in a less academic sense, there is the term as it is passed around followers of a literary franchise, where it refers to which plot points are acknowledged as happening within the franchise's universe (as opposed to fan-created content or, in the case of a franchise that has changed hands a few times, content that is no longer endorsed by the current creators).

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[1] *Drunk History*, season 3 episode 4, "Spies," directed by Derek Waters, aired September 22, 2015, on Comedy Central, Harriet Tubman segment accessible online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpTf1GFjCd8. [Clip title as listed on YouTube contains expletives, but those are censored in the clip itself.]

After reading a novel called *The Fortunes* by Peter Ho Davies, I learned about a real figure named Vincent Chin—and the tragic true story of his death.[2] Vincent Chin was a Chinese-American who lived in Detroit, Michigan and in 1982, he was celebrating his bachelor party when he got into an altercation with some white auto workers. The initial fight was broken up, and Chin and the white men went their separate ways.[3] Then the white men found Chin again, and one of them held him down while the other split his skull open with a baseball bat. They referred to him as "the Chinaman" when they were chasing him down, and at some point during one of their confrontations, the white men accused Chin (and all other Asians) of putting them out of work. This was a time when Japanese automakers were beginning to enter the US market, and these men attributed their unemployment to Japanese competition.[4] Never mind that Vincent Chin was Chinese-American. Never mind that neither a Chinese nor a Japanese person in the United States could have had any control over Japanese automobile companies. To these men, Chin's Asian face was entirely unwelcome. To these men, he was a valid target for their racially and economically motivated anger.

Until reading this novel, I had never heard of Vincent Chin. But I was curious, so I looked him up, and I discovered that his death launched the pan-Asian solidarity movement in the United States.[5] There was a whole Asian-American activist movement that my history books had never taught me about. Vincent Chin was the martyr whose tragic and senseless murder had sparked that movement. He was to Asian-Americans what Emmett Till was to the anti-lynching movement. We learn about Emmett Till. We teach our children about him, about his senseless murder, and about his community rallying together to stand up for themselves and protect their children. We learn about Matthew Shepard, who was brutally

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[2] Peter Ho Davies, *The Fortunes* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).
[3] Frank H. Wu, "Embracing Mistaken Identity: How the Vincent Chin Case Unified Asian Americans," *Harvard Journal of Asian American Policy Review* 19 (2010): 17–18.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 18–19.

murdered because he was gay—then left tied to a wooden fence in Wyoming.[6] Emmett Till and Matthew Shepard shouldn't have been murdered, and it is right that we learn about them. It is right that we pass on their memories and tell their stories. They're important. But Vincent Chin is important, too. Why don't we learn about him?

These moments, where I am surprised by the gaps in my mental map of history, provided the seeds for this thesis project. Emmett Till and Matthew Shepard are part of the American historical canon; Vincent Chin is not. Why? And why not? What is it that determines which people and events make it into the history books and which others are left to fade into obscurity or persist in other, less institutionally endorsed ways? How does the historical landscape as one imagines it affect the way one navigates the present? And how do our various imperfect historical maps differ from history's true terrain?

In the end, it is impossible to fully recreate history, if only because every individual who experiences an event carries with them a personal truth—an individual version of reality—and it is impossible to recover every version of reality that exists and piece them back together to see the full picture. But we can learn a lot about history from the way people have tried to reconstruct it. What gets emphasized and exaggerated speaks volumes about whoever is telling the story.

My aim in this thesis is to use the vocabulary of canonization to better understand the process of history creation, with special attention to what is included and what is excluded from the "canonical" historical narratives. I focus on United States history in particular. This is in part to make the project more manageable and in part because as an American, I am most fluent in the nuances of power dynamics of race, gender, class, and other markers of identity in the American context. These nuances are particular to the American context, so it would be

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[6] Michelle Boorstein, "Matthew Shepard, whose 1998 murder became a symbol for the gay rights movement, will be interred at Washington National Cathedral," *The Washington Post*, October 11, 2018, accessed online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/10/11/matthew-shepard-whose-murder-became-symbol-gay-rights-movement-will-be-interred-washington-national-cathedral/.

inappropriate for me to apply my understanding of them to other regions' history.

This thesis is the result of a collision of many of my various interests. Children's books. History. Representation. Race, gender, identity, and intersectional feminism. Accountability. Post-colonialism. And, of course, the interdisciplinary methods of inquiry that categorize Religious Studies. This thesis was inspired by ideas I encountered in my time in the publishing industry, in the Religious Studies methods class taught by Professor Paul Nahme, in the class Buddhism and Death taught by Professor Jason Protass, in problems I've encountered in the study of history, in nation-wide conversations about pop culture and the importance of representation in film and literature, in conversations with Professor Jae Han during the class From Moses to Muhammad, and in many advising meetings with Professor Daniel Vaca, who helped me come up with this idea and who has generously guided this year-long thesis-writing endeavor.

The creation of a historical canon might appear to be a strange topic for an honors thesis in Religious Studies. It might seem more suited for the History department, and canonization as a framework through which to engage the cultivation of historical narratives might seem like a stretch, but the two processes are in fact quite analogous. History, literature, and religion are alike: they are all modes through which people craft stories about the world, about events past, present and future, and about themselves and others. These modes of storytelling share common elements, such as main and supporting characters, setting, plot, and theme. You can find morals in history, literature, and religion. And you can find heroes and villains in all three, too.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter 1, I set out my main theoretical framework, including three main characteristics of canonization with which I will engage the portrayals of different historical moments. In Chapter 2, I focus on the canonization of one of America's heroes: Rosa Parks. In Chapter 3, I explore what happens when a nation must canonize its own villainous actions through one of the US's many shameful historical

moments: Japanese internment.

Religious Studies is an incredibly interdisciplinary field of study, and the methods and modes of analysis one learns within it are useful and applicable to a wide range of subjects. There is a lot of terrific scholarship out there about traditions that have generally been recognized as “religions.” But there is also a lot of great work that uses Religious Studies work to engage with other forms of meaning-making that are not considered formal “religions.” This thesis aspires to partake in the second vein of scholarship. Scholars from this line of scholarship who particularly inspire me include Kathryn Lofton, Josef Sorett, Courtney Bender, and Kathryn Gin Lum. It might be helpful to read this thesis with their work in mind.

Chapter 1 — Canonization and History

I don't know if you can tell,
but this is me just pretending to know.
—Heidi Hansen, *Dear Evan Hansen*

"In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Countless kids across the United States learn this rhyme, usually around the second Monday in October, when schools across the country are closed to observe Columbus's very own federal holiday. Columbus was immortalized as "the person who discovered America," and I remember being expected to know this the same way I was expected to know that George Washington was the first president of the United States. It was basic. So was innocent, weary Rosa Parks's decision not to give up her bus seat. Or Thomas Jefferson's famous declaration that "all men are created equal."

Only later, in high school, did my educators begin to complicate the story. Christopher Columbus killed large numbers of Native people...and how can a continent with thousands of inhabitants be "discovered," anyway?[7] For all of Thomas Jefferson's talk of equality, he was a wealthy slave holder, and enslaved many people on his Virginia plantation.[8] It wasn't until college that I learned that Rosa Parks's defiance of segregation began far earlier than her famous bus ride.[9] The success of certain historical narratives over others is a curious phenomenon, and I see parallels between the formation of these historical "canons" and the formation of religious canons like the Bible. I am interested in these tacitly accepted canons—and how and why they might (or might not) change.

This chapter seeks to characterize the canonization process and make a case for applying that conceptualization to the process of writing history. In order to introduce and theorize the concept and process of canonization, I examine different understandings of canons

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[7] Tink Tinker and Mark Freeland, "Thief, Slave Trader, Murderer: Christopher Columbus and Caribbean Population Decline," *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 25–50.
[8] Henry Wiencek, "Thomas Jefferson: Slave Master," *American History* 47, no. 4 (October 2012): 26–33.
[9] Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013).

and canonization from experts and scholars, with a particular focus on what people have written about the way the texts that make up the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament came to be authorized. By "authorization," I mean the attribution or acquisition of power, influence, or a designation of trustworthiness—the process by which something is imbued with authority. By "authority," I mean power, influence, or a position of trustworthiness. As political scientist Hannah Arendt writes, authority is not acquired through forceful coercion or by persuasion; it is given without those influences.[10] I am not discounting the influence of force or persuasion, but those avenues to power do not fall within my discussion of given authority, which is what one encounters in enduring narratives like the canons I focus on. In this thesis, I question how and on what basis certain narratives acquire authority in the public imaginary.

What is canonization?

For the purposes of this thesis, a "canon" is a body of text, ideas, information, and facts held to be authoritative or standard. Similarly, "canonization" is the process by which a canon is created, and it can refer to the overall process or the specific addition of a certain thing (as it is used when referring to the canonization of saints). The Greek word from which "canon" is derived can be translated as "norm" or "measure."[11] From here, it can be concluded that a canon is a *normative* structure, and claiming something as canon is a normative (prescriptive) act. If something is part of a canon, then it is authorized to the extent that the canon is credible or important. If something is excluded from a canon, then it is denied the particular forms of authority that come from being included. This is not to say that nothing is authoritative outside of canons, but extra-canonical ideas, practices, and objects do not possess access to the same kinds of power as their canonical counterparts.

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[10] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1961), 93.
[11] Denis Farkasfalvy, *A Theology of the Christian Bible: Revelation – Inspiration – Canon* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 159.

To orient this discussion of canonization, it will be helpful to explore how the concept has been interpreted and applied in different contexts. Two of the places where the idea of canon-making has been discussed meaningfully and at length are in theology and the academic study of religion and the bible. The differences between the way theologians tend to talk about "canonization" and "the canon" and the way other scholars talk about these ideas will be a helpful foundation for my conceptualization of "canonization" for the purposes of this thesis. Despite their differences, the understandings of canon I will consider below all share an emphasis on canonization as a *process*, and this characterization will center the bulk of my theoretical work.

Theologians feature in this discussion because they are people who have explored the idea of a canonization process at length. One viewpoint is, as Catholic theologian Denis Farkasfalvy describes, that the Christian "canon" (the Bible) is the collection of God's words preserved through writing—what they refer to as the inspired writings and truths.[12] Farkasfalvy defines "inspiration" as "a living continuum of God's speech transmitted through writings called 'the Law and the Prophets,' the incarnate Son's words and deeds...which are enlightened by faith in Jesus's resurrection and transmitted by the apostolic preaching."[13] For Farkasfalvy, the process of canonization is divinely guided, not merely a product of happenstance or historical circumstance. He identifies gospel author Luke's characterization of the canonization process as a "chain" consisting of revelation, inspiration, and transmission, citing a line of reasoning visible in verses from Luke and Acts.[14] Farkasfalvy and Luke clearly understand the creation of the Christian canon to follow the following sequence: the Old Testament is preserved in written records; it comes to fulfilment through "Jesus' acts and words;" Jesus's acts and words are channeled into the oral preaching of the apostles; and

[12] Farkasfalvy, 160.
[13] Ibid., 161.
[14] Ibid., 163.

finally, this tradition is "deposited in written form."[15] Inspiration is crucial to their understanding of the canonization process, overseeing and influencing each link of the chain.

Another theologian, Everett R. Kalin, challenges the idea that "inspiration" is limited to the works that end up being canonized. It is important to note that Kalin is a Lutheran theologian, and he and Farkasfalvy were not necessarily in dialogue. I am not including these two to imply that there is an exchange between them; rather, their differing opinions and backgrounds are useful for illustrating the diversity of thought that exists among theologians concerning the process of canonization. Kalin describes and interrogates the attitudes of "the early church's leaders" regarding the works they viewed as "New Testament Scriptures," probing into what set the scriptures apart for them.[16] He writes that the New Testament was "collected and set apart from all other writings produced by the Christian community."[17]

"Inspiration" does not mean the same thing to Kalin as it does to Farkasfalvy. While Farkasfalvy's definition of "inspiration" narrows it to refer only to "God's speech" (transmitted in the number of ways listed above), Kalin uses "inspiration" to describe something that is "inspired by the Holy Spirit," which is a much broader use of the word.[18] Kalin challenges the belief that Christians viewed only the scriptures as "inspired" and everything else as "noninspired," although he notes that "the fathers [early church leaders]...agreed...Scripture is inspired." They would not, he argues, have agreed that non-scriptural texts are necessarily, definitionally noninspired.[19] As evidence for this claim, Kalin asserts that influential figures thought the Holy Spirit inspired authors of scripture and other Christian figures, attributing inspiration to "bishops, monks, martyrs, councils, interpreters of Scripture, various prophetic gifts, and to many other aspects of the church's life."[20] But if "inspiration" is not limited to

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[15] Farkasfalvy, 162.
[16] Everett R. Kalin, "Inspired Community: A Glance at Canon History," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42, no. 8 (September 1971): 541.
[17] Ibid., 545.
[18] Ibid., 541.
[19] Kalin, 542.
[20] Farkasfalvy, 546–547.

scriptures that were ultimately canonized, then what features distinguished the scriptures from the other inspired writings?

Kalin writes that "apostolic authorship" (whether a text's author was in close proximity to or *was* one of the twelve Apostles) was a key quality that made the gospels different from other books, at least in the eyes of church leaders. Other popular criteria were whether a text was widely used among the earliest Christians and whether it was "true teaching."[21] Notice that Kalin's understanding of canonization emphasizes the process of discernment on the part of human church leaders. Farkasfalvy's also recognizes human involvement, but he stresses the importance of the Holy Spirit (inspiration) where Kalin acknowledges the importance of inspiration but does not position it as the ultimate factor that determined whether or not something made it into the canon. It is clear that Kalin and Farkasfalvy have different understandings of "inspiration" and "canonization." But regardless of *how* each theologian characterizes canonization, each refers to the Bible or the process by which something became part of the Bible.

For these theologians, canonization is undoubtedly a religious process—and is guided by divine involvement through the Holy Spirit. But these two thinkers also acknowledge the historical realities of canonization *as a process*, rather than insisting that the Bible or the New Testament came along wholly formed. This acknowledgement of process is crucial to the understanding of canonization that centers this thesis. Although scholars in the fields of Religious Studies and Biblical Studies may not necessarily write from the same position of faith that theologians do, they also recognize the importance of process in the formation of canons.

There is a long history of studying canon and the canonization process in the fields of religious studies and biblical studies. Biblical scholar Luc Zaman notes that although "canon

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[21] Kalin, 541.

studies" returned to scholarly prominence in the 1970s, historical study of the canonization of the Bible grew out of a longer tradition of "canonical criticism," which sought to validate the "dogmatic canon."[22] There is, however, work from before the 1970s that sought to investigate the historical circumstances of canon-making. Back in 1911, William Frederick Bade argued that the "final act of canonization, if there was one, must have taken place after the final compilation and redaction" of the scriptural texts.[23] Bade claims that there is a certain "inviolable sacredness" that "we associate with the…idea of canonicity."[24] He seems to imagine canonization itself as an intentional and quick process. For him, the process by which texts survive through history and are carried on is not part of the process of canonization. But more recent scholarship has seen the rise of a gradualist model of canonization, as opposed to Bade's more moment-driven model.

Zaman writes that modern historical criticism of the Bible "bit by bit" had "bitingly brought to light the heterogeneous composition and human character of the biblical writings."[25] This perspective is clearly in opposition to claims that the Bible is one work of divine authorship, emphasizing instead that the Bible as a collection of works by various human authors, and it is the predominant view among scholars of Biblical and Religious Studies. Michael Satlow describes the Bible as "an anthology of diverse writings that have been patched, stitched, and strung together over the course of about a millennium."[26] Satlow's book, *How the Bible Became Holy*, is an exhaustive historical account of the creation of the Bible in its entirety, from the origins of the various books that make up the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament to the selection of the texts that would make up the New Testament. For Satlow, there isn't the same kind of intentionality in the creation of the canon as there is for Bade—he notes that many of the earliest Hebrew Bible texts were "produced by and for scribes, mainly

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[22] Luc Zaman, *Bible and Canon: A Modern Historical Inquiry* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), 1–3.
[23] William Frederick Bade, "The Canonization of the Old Testament," *The Biblical World* 3, no. 3 (March 1911): 151.
[24] Ibid., 155.
[25] Zaman, 1.
[26] Michael L. Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 1.

as academic exercises"—and the shift (in Judaism) from a temple-centric oral tradition to one where the physical scripture was an object of deep reverence was one that was rife with the politics, situation, and context of the era in which the shift occurred.[27]

Both theologians and Religious Studies scholars see canonization as a process (gradual or not), so that is clearly not where the contrast lies. The key difference between theological discussions of canonization and academic discussions of the same process is who or what is steering this process. Theologians like Farkasfalvy and Kalin stress the influence of the divine, while Zaman, Bade, and Satlow are more concerned with the way human and historical conditions guide canonization. Although I interact with theologians' ideas, I am not looking to support or refute the belief that the creation of the Bible was influenced by God or godly forces. I will instead engage with the idea that narratives are profoundly shaped by the people who perpetuate and receive them.

Aside from the comparisons I am drawing between canonization and history-making, there are other instances of the concept of canons appearing outside of a religious and/or religious studies context. In fact, popular uses of the word "canon" such as the idea of a "literary canon" or a "philosophical canon" are what led me to connect the idea of canonization to history and the history-making process. Wading even further into the popular, the domain of pop culture also has its uses of the word "canon," notably the way "geek" communities (defined by psychologists Jessica McCain, Brittany Gentile, and W. Keith Campbell as "especially devoted fans"[28]) and "fandoms" (people who rally around a specific literary work or franchise) debate whether or not certain accounts or stories are *canon*—accepted as truthful within the franchise's universe—or *not* (such as fan fiction). Notice that in each of its different uses, "canon" is a way of designating something as important or

[27] Satlow, 5–6.
[28] Jessica McCain, Brittany Gentile, & W. Keith Campbell, "A Psychological Exploration of Engagement in Geek Culture," *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 11 (November 2015): 1.

recognizing its authority. This is closer to what I mean when I refer to canon as a concept that can be applied in multiple contexts, religious or otherwise.

My aim is not to create a historical account of Biblical canonization. Instead, I look to characterize the process of canonization based on what Religious Studies and Biblical scholars have said. I identify these characteristics of canonization in order to investigate how those qualities compare to the process of compiling and re-telling history through differing, competing, and opposing narratives. For my purposes, the gradualist model is more compelling, more reflective of the true nature of the process, and more applicable to the broader applications I'm looking to make, but that's not to say that deliberate decisions aren't also part of the canon-making process. Canonization as a whole is a gradual process, but deliberate acts to precipitate the canonization of a certain thing, text, or idea are included in this process.

In this section, I have explored some of what people have thought about, written about, and talked about when discussing canonization. Although they differ in thoughts of who or what has guided the process of canonization, theologians, Religious Studies scholars, and Biblical scholars have all thought about canon creation *as* a process. Ideas of canon and canonization have not been limited to theological discussions or academic discussions of religion—they have been applied to subjects as diverse as literature, philosophy, and pop culture. The next section will focus on characterizing the process of canonization (What does it look like? How might it work?) in a way that describes both canonization as applied to the Bible and canonization as applied to writing and telling history.

Characterizing canonization

For the purposes of this thesis, canonization has three main characteristics. These will be important for the remaining body chapters, where I interrogate different historical canons created around two moments in US history: the Civil Rights Movement and the experiences of nineteenth century Chinese-American immigrants in the period surrounding the 1849 gold

rush and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. The first characteristic of canonization is that there are choices of translation and interpretive decisions (conscious and subconscious) that happen when people tell and retell stories. This is partly due to the instability inherent in taking something off a metaphorical mental shelf and passing it around; such instability is also present in the act of receiving that which is being transmitted. The second characteristic is that people focus on things they see as consistent with their own values and ignore or condemn those they view as opposed to their values. A great example of this (which I will explore below) is the Lilith myth, the way it has stuck around for so long, and its reclamation by Jewish feminists.[29] The third characteristic of canonization I will explore is the way power comes into play during the canonization process—those with power are represented and over-represented, while those without are mis-represented and under-represented. Below, I will explain each of these characteristics in further depth.

When people pass a story or narrative between generations, communities, cultures, or even other individuals, there are changes that occur in choices of translation and interpretive decisions, both intentional and unintentional. A schoolyard example would be the game "Telephone," in which everyone lines up and the person on one end whispers a message to the person next to them, who repeats it to the person next to them, who does the same, and so on until finally it reaches the person on the other end. Players are not usually allowed to ask the person in front of them to repeat the message. The final recipient repeats what they've heard out loud, and any mutations that may have occurred become apparent. There is almost always a disconnect between the original message and the one that is revealed at the end of the game, whether due to an intentional rupture by a mischievous classmate or due to miscommunications or variations in phrasing. This is what I am attempting to capture with my first characterization of canonization.

[29] Jocelyn Hellig, "Lilith as a Focus of Judaism's Gender Construction," *Dialogue and Alliance* 12, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 1998): 35–49.

Such changes in transmission are not limited to the game Telephone, and are in fact crucial when considering the canonization process. The Bible is a good example for the significance of translation. The texts that make up the Bible were originally written in various languages—Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. When translating texts from language to language, there are moments where one word can have multiple translations. It is at that point up to the translator to choose which one she believes best fits the situation at hand; the connection to the Telephone example is apparent. While this may not create intentional ruptures, choices of translation can greatly influence the meaning of a text. The social-scientific study of the Bible's translation has revealed and challenged issues of translating gendered words, cultural identity, gender-based bias embedded in language, and the politics involved in transmission and translation.[30] The act of translation intends to make the target text accessible, but the transition from source to translated product is hardly without inflicting change, especially when attempting to make the past accessible for the present, transposing the idiosyncrasies and governing structures and norms of one society onto another. And there is also the issue of which texts end up being translated and which ones remain inaccessible to the new audience.[31]

Expanding the concept of translation to include the act of re-telling or explaining a story for different cultural contexts (such as when framing or explaining Biblical stories to individuals in the present) I argue that these acts of translation also occur when teaching about history. Scholar of Islam Wilfred Cantwell Smith recognized this when he wrote "Just as the world of nature is a reality to which scientific knowledge approximates, so too the reality of history is something to which our historiography only approximates, less or more closely."[32] Smith also wrote about the instability inherent in taking up a tradition. The following excerpt adeptly explains this idea.

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[30] Dietmar Neufeld, "Introduction," in *The Social Sciences and Biblical Translation* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008): 2.
[31] Neufeld, 2–3.
[32] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Islamic History as a Concept," *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (New York, NY: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 4.

> Muslim men and women across the centuries have found themselves born into and surrounded by a world inherited by earlier generations of Muslims…In every case…not only did they inherit this environment, willy-nilly; but in turn they also contributed to it…They rejoiced to be Muslims; and the miniscule or large addendum that their living contributed to the on-going structure, and that they in turn bequeathed to generations following them, was not merely a mechanical reaction to that context but, they being human, was a small or large creative modification of it, fashioned in part by their choice, their will, their freedom.[33]

This instability is present in both the sending and the receiving. This is because people do not receive a static thing; they internalize these complex narratives, and the parts they remember or don't and emphasize or don't are affected by their own subjectivity and positionality.

The second characteristic of canonization is the fact that people focus on things they see as consistent with their own values while ignoring or condemning those they view as opposed to their own values. This leads me to the example of Lilith. Lilith is, for the most part, a non-canonical figure whose story did not make it into the finalized Hebrew Bible, although it should be noted that her name does appear in some versions of Isaiah 34:14 (often translated to read "the night creatures" or "the screech owl," among other iterations along those lines).[34] Note the importance of translation in this instance—translators can write Lilith out of the Bible entirely by substituting a description for her proper name, leaving readers totally unaware of her presence in Jewish and Christian consciousness through the years.

Generally speaking, Lilith has not been viewed as a "good," virtuous, or favorable character. Jocelyn Hellig, scholar of religion who specialized in Judaism and anti-Semitism, describes Lilith as "the most potent and upwardly mobile of Judaism's demons."[35] Hellig writes that there is evidence to support Lilith's existence as a character as early as 2400 BCE Sumeria, and lists among Lilith's various personas a night demon, a beautiful maiden, a harlot, a sterile vampire, and "a slender, beautiful nude woman with wings and owl feet."[36]

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[33] Smith, 17.
[34] Isaiah 34:14—"Lilith" can be found in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the Lexham English Bible (LEB), and The Message (MSG); "the night creatures" can be found in the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT); "the screech owl" can be found in the King James Version (KJV).
[35] Hellig, 35.
[36] Ibid., 40.

She also appears as a demonic creature in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[37] Although there are many different versions of the more detailed accounts of Lilith's story, the common thread is that she was Adam's first wife (before Eve) who rebelled against him and ran away to become a "demonic seducer and child-stealer."[38]

Lilith is incorporated into the Jewish mythological milieu through one of the discrepancies between the two different accounts of creation found in Genesis (Genesis 1 and Genesis 2): Genesis 1 implies the simultaneous creation of man and woman (Gen 1:27), while Genesis 2 clearly states that Adam is created first and Eve is made from his bone.[39] Hellig writes that in order to create consistency between the two creation stories, rabbis read the first story as if it referred to Lilith and the second as if it referred to a second wife (Eve).[40] The most detailed account of the Lilith myth is in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, which dates to the eleventh century. It describes Adam and Lilith's contentious relationship, in part because she insisted they were equals in every way and refused to let him dominate her in any way, including in their sexual relationship.[41] At some point, the fighting (and perhaps Adam's refusal to acquiesce to her demands for recognition of equality) becomes too much, and Lilith pronounces the ineffable / unspeakable name of God and flies away.[42] Despite Adam's complaints and God's commands, Lilith refuses to return to Adam, marking her transformation into a demon and spurring God's creation of Eve, a replacement wife for Adam.[43]

Lilith—who excites men in their sleep to steal their sperm and create demon children, births hundreds of demons, preys upon newborn babies, and allows God to kill one hundred of

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[37] Wojciech Kosior, "A Tale of Two Sisters: The Image of Eve in Early Rabbinic Literature and its Influence on the Portrayal of Lilith in the Alphabet of Ben Sira," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 32, (Spring 2018): 113.
[38] Kosior, 112.
[39] Hellig, 42.
[40] Ibid., 42.
[41] Hellig, 43; Kosior, 115.
[42] Hellig, 43–44; Kosior, 115.
[43] Kosior, 115–116.

her demon offspring a day—comes to represent female sexuality. In the early rabbinic context, Hellig argues, Lilith's story is appealing because of the importance of procreation for the survival of the Jewish people while in exile: it frames female sexuality as dangerous when it is not being controlled by men.[44] She is held up as a negative role model and a cautionary figure, which explains why she stuck around so long in the Jewish mythical context. She warns of the dangers of female temptation, female sexuality, and female knowledge, contrasting sharply with the docile and selfless Biblical figures of Eve and Esther.[45]

Contrastingly, Jewish feminists have taken Lilith as a symbol of female empowerment and the prototypical feminist.[46] She knows she is equal to Adam and refuses to be convinced otherwise. She demonstrates knowledge of the divine through her pronunciation of the unspeakable name of God. And, in rabbis' demonization of Lilith, she represents the plight of women at the hands of men and patriarchy. The feminist reclamation of Lilith contrasts sharply with traditional views of Lilith as dangerous, demonic, and to be reviled. Why do these two groups of people see such different things when confronted with the same myth? Because the pre-existing values and beliefs of each shaped their encounters with the Lilith story. Of course, I am not suggesting a one-way interaction. It is also important to question how the things people see as authoritative in turn shape their values.

The third characteristic of canonization involves the role of power: those with power are able to ensure that they are represented correctly (or even too sympathetically) and represented often, while those without aren't frequently represented, and when they *do* appear, it is unsurprising to see that they have been portrayed inaccurately. Given any narrative, it is important to keep in mind *who* is telling the story, what subconscious biases the speaker might have, and what their motivations are for perpetuating this narrative. Historian and scholar of

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[44] Hellig, 46.
[45] Hellig, 47.
[46] Hellig, 48–49.

Religious Studies Kathryn Gin-Lum has recognized this tendency, as well. She writes, "Who gets to be included in this [historical] narrative has depended on who has claimed the power to write and publish: disproportionately, Europeans and Euro-Americans."[47] Gin-Lum takes particular note of the way certain groups of people were labeled "heathens" in nineteenth century America, notably Chinese people and Hawai'ians.[48]

Laurie Maffly-Kipp also details the way white Americans consistently portrayed nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants in dehumanizing, exaggerated, and grossly inaccurate ways. She describes the way missionaries often sought to describe Chinese people in the most sympathetic, analogous-to-Christians way possible because their goals were not to *understand* them, but to convert them to Christianity. Meanwhile, popular discourse preferred to represent Chinese people and their religious lives as "mysterious, saturated by alien objects, smells, sights, and sounds."[49] Keep in mind that when I refer to "who" is telling a history, I am not simply pointing to the whiteness, the maleness, or the elite status of the person in question, although of course those markers of identity are important because they impart privilege. Instead, I am inviting the consideration of all aspects of positionality, including that person's training, profession, and experiences.

In this section, I have set forth three characteristics of canonization that will be helpful for interrogating the creation of a historical canon (or multiple historical canons). These characteristics include: (1) translation and interpretation involve decisions that affect how people tell and retell stories; (2) the values a person has determine whether they perpetuate or ignore and celebrate or condemn; and (3) societal power structures affect the quality and abundance of historical representation. These qualities will guide the interrogation of historical narratives in subsequent chapters.

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[47] Kathryn Gin-Lum, "The Historyless Heathen and the Stagnating Pagan: History as Non-Native Category?," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 53.
[48] Gin-Lum, 53.
[49] Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "Engaging Habits and Besotted Idolatry," *Race, Religion, Region: Landscapes of Encounter in the American West*, ed. Fay Botham and Sara M. Patterson (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2006), 61–62.

How is canonization relevant to history and the history-making process?

I have already begun to gesture toward this question, but in this section I will further build the bridge between canonization and history-making. "History," as I've written above, is not an objective discipline, and history-making is not an objective process. Historians are people, too, and they carry their own positionalities. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said also discusses the subjectivity of history as a discipline, writing that "We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made."[50] This echoes my third characteristic of canonization. Further connections lie in the mechanisms for authorization—authorization of historical narratives and authorization of religious and scriptural texts both depend on the determination that the source is credible (be it a biographer or a priest) and the recognition of some value in the content of the argument in question.

The question of historians' positionality is one that many in the discipline are conscious of and attempt to consider while doing their research and sharing their findings. The historian Peter Novick writes about the "noble dream" of historical objectivity. According to him, historians pride themselves on attempting "to completely purge themselves of all values"—that is, they are proud of their capacity to produce unbiased work that is as close to the objective facts as possible.[51] In an account of the history of Americans' relationship with "welfare" both as a concept and a set of social programs, political scientist Ira Katznelson addresses the question of the impact of conceptualizations of American history on Americans' present-day opinions regarding welfare and social policy. He cites Judith Shklar's to say that neglecting racism and racist policies in general historical narratives actually contributes to erasing the impact of racism on our society from the consciousness of most Americans.[52]

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[50] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978), 5.
[51] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity' Question and the American Historical Profession* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2.
[52] Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 51.

Similarly, Martin Gilens discusses the media's racialization of poverty as a driving factor of Americans' general disdain for welfare programs. Gilens surveys several news publications and tracks patterns between whether coverage of poverty and social programs had a positive or negative tone and whether the accompanying image featured a white person or a person of color. Gilens found that before the mid-1960s, portrayals of poverty usually depicted white people; after about 1965, there was a shift to mainly depicting Black people.[53] Although I don't believe it could manageably be argued that the media is where the racialization of poverty *originated*, there is a compelling argument that the media's elevation of this kind of portrayal spread it to a wider audience—and gave it a sense of institutional acceptance—than it otherwise would have had, amplifying its presence in the American consciousness. Why were these negative stereotypes so persistent in coverage by people who were supposedly reporting objective, factual information? Because of human biases and certain positions of privilege journalists have historically occupied. The same argument can be made about historians.

Shifting to the mechanisms of authorization, there are similar dynamics at play in both the authorization of religious and scriptural texts and the authorizing and elevation of certain historical narratives. Kathryn Gin-Lum, mentioned in the previous section, paraphrases historian William Cronon's description of the historian's task as "storytelling" and " 'resurrect[ing]' the past for the present."[54] With this framing in mind, it is not a far stretch to draw parallels between religious leaders and historians as people telling stories about the past so that the present may learn from them. What makes an authoritative historian? What makes an authoritative religious figure? Once again, issues of power and privilege come to the fore. Thinking about which kinds of people have the power, ability, and access to determine what is truthful and what is not—what is orthodox and what is heterodox—is important for

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[53] Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 113.
[54] Gin-Lum, 52.

investigating how and why certain things become imbued with authority and others are cast aside.

Canon creation and history writing share a central function: preserving a certain body of ideas, stories, figures, and themes. The Biblical canon elevates a number of stories and writings to prominence and importance for those who view the Bible as authoritative. Without this elevation, would these stories have persisted over the thousands of years that they have? Historical imagination serves the same function: the things that are consistently taught and re-taught, told and retold, are the ones that survive the passage of time. They survive in the imaginings of the people who think about the world as it once was. These imaginings *resurrect the past for the present.*

Historical imagination sustains the narratives that make up the canons of history. By "historical imagination," I am referring to the imagined history that exists in a people's collective memory. Amos Funkenstein describes "collective memory" to mean:

> A system of clear signs, symbols, and practices: times of memory, names of places, monuments and victory arches, museums and texts, customs and manners, stereotype images (incorporated, for instance, in manners of expression), and even language itself.[55]

From here, it is reasonable to conclude that collective memory refers to the system of meaning shared among a "human collective," such as a family, nation, or state.[56] Religious groups also have collective memories, and if a given religious group has a canon, then that canon is at least partially responsible for forming the content of that group's collective memory. In history and in religion, the canon determines what one studies, similar to the way a curriculum functions in education.

My investigation into the canonization of historical narratives and the coalescence of collective memory is not limited to what is included, but also takes into account what is

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[55] Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History and Memory* 1, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1989): 7.
[56] Funkenstein, 5.

excluded and what is misremembered. Things remembered are, of course, not the whole of the story—as Maria Theresia Starzmann writes, "remembering cannot be decoupled from forgetting."[57] Starzmann also asserts that remembering is a *social* process—and, as such, is influenced by present-day political and cultural context.[58] This assertion is key to my understanding of the creation of historical canons: this process is on-going and informed by the social, political, and cultural conditions of the person who is resurrecting the past through imagination. Every imagining of history carries with it the experiences and assumptions of the imaginer.

"Imagined" does not necessarily mean "not real" or "not grounded in reality." An imagined thing is simply something that is created in the mind. But the imagined thing can impact the way one interacts with the world, and in that way, imagined things have real effects. One of the most famous examples of this, of course, is the construction of identity around the nation state, theorized by political scientist Benedict Anderson as "imagined community."[59] Anderson distinguishes between the acts of imagining and creating and the act of fabricating, asserting very eloquently that nationalism's creation in the mind does not disqualify it from being real.[60] This conceptualization of imagination can be applied to historical imagination. Historical imagination may or may not resemble the true conditions of the past, but it becomes powerful through the authority those doing the imagining grant it.

If historical imaginings are powerful, their specific contents are powerful, too—what appears or doesn't appear in collectively remembered historical imagination, and in what ways? Who is included in the past a collective resurrects for itself? Who is not? These questions are, of course, applicable to both religious canons and historical canons. The real implications of

[57] Maria Theresia Starzmann, *Excavating Memory: Sites of Remembering and Forgetting* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2016), 2.
[58] Starzmann, 2.
[59] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 1983).
[60] Anderson, 6–7.

human imaginings—and the *creation* of those imaginings through canonization processes—lie at the heart of this thesis project. In order to make real changes in combatting false, derogatory, and malevolent imaginings of certain groups of people, we must first understand how these imaginings came into existence and continued to survive.

How can this theory of canonization be applied?

The three characteristics of canonization I have posited can be applied to both biblical and historical canonization. Earlier, I discussed the Lilith story—its background, its longevity, and its different meanings to different people. Other notable examples of non-canonical texts that were authoritative to some people but, for whatever reason, didn't make it into certain iterations of the Bible include the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary Magdala, and the Apocrypha (although it should be noted that the Apocrypha are canonical in certain traditions).[61] It is helpful to use the three characteristics of canonization to think of such texts' places outside of the Biblical canon and the processes that placed them there. What power dynamics were at play? How does the canon reflect the priorities of the privileged? Whose voices does it include? These are all questions that can really only be answered by considering the process.

In terms of historical canon, we can see how choices of translation and interpretation, value-influenced focus, and dynamics of privilege and power guide the process of history-writing. Thinking about American history, there are plenty of examples of dominant narratives that aren't quite as fact-based as they tend to be presented. From this country's celebration of Christopher Columbus to the story of the first Thanksgiving, things are not necessarily as one might have been taught to believe based on the mainstream cultural presentation. The debate around Columbus has been well documented by now, and I do not see the need to go into it further here. As for the first Thanksgiving, one of the simplest and strangest myths

[61] "Canon of Scripture," *Orthodox Church in America*, accessed April 2019, accessed online at https://oca.org/questions/scripture/canon-of-scripture.

surrounding Thanksgiving (aside from the erasure of the genocide of hundreds of Native tribes and peoples) is that the pilgrims ate turkey at the first Thanksgiving feast. This is simply not true.

In his book *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days*, which delves into the history of American federal holidays, historian Matthew Dennis finds that it is highly unlikely that settlers in Plymouth ate turkey at all, let alone in the feast allegedly commemorated by the Thanksgiving holiday. Staffers at Plimouth Plantation, "a living history museum" in Plymouth, Massachusetts, report that archaeological excavations of the settlement found only one turkey bone.[62] Where, then, does the tradition of eating turkey on Thanksgiving come from? Thanksgiving was elevated to national prominence after the efforts of Sarah Josepha Hale, who penned articles about it in numerous November issues of highly circulated nineteenth century magazines.[63] Turkeys had the unfortunate honor of becoming Thanksgiving's central dish after poultry producers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland launched incredibly successful marketing campaigns that convinced the American public that turkeys were the best way to honor America's early settlers, leading illustrators to insert turkeys in their portrayals of the mythic First Thanksgiving.[64]

Perhaps more surprising than the myths surrounding Thanksgiving is the misleading account of Rosa Parks's decision not to give up her seat on the bus to a white man. This is not to say that the event didn't happen—it did—but her decision was not a one-off moment like children are often taught in school. Rosa Parks was a lifelong activist who had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement for ages before she would up the face of the Bus Boycott.[65] I will explore her story more in Chapter 2. There are other examples of competing and

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[62] Matthew Dennis, *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days: An American Calendar* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 100–101.
[63] Anne Blue Wills, "Pilgrims and Progress: How Magazines Made Thanksgiving," *Church History* 72, no. 1 (March 2003): 144.
[64] Dennis, 101.
[65] Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013).

contradictory accounts of history, like the existence of two versions of Sojourner Truth's famous "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech (one "blackened" to sound stereotypically slave-like), but in this thesis, I will mainly focus on Rosa Parks and Japanese internment during the Second World War. For now, I will briefly review what I have covered in this chapter and then I will offer some questions to keep in mind for the rest of this thesis.

This chapter has laid the bulk of the theoretical foundation for the rest of this thesis. I explored what canonization has meant to different people, and I found that there was agreement over canonization *as a process* but disagreement over what steered that process. Then I presented three characteristics of canonization that are useful for understanding why the outcomes look the way they do: there are choices of translation and interpretive decisions; people tend to focus on things they think are resonant with their own values and condemn those that they view as opposed; and power dynamics and imbalances of privilege determine who is included and excluded from the canon and how those who are included are represented. Next, I made the connection between the canonization of religious texts and the formation of a historical canon, before moving to a discussion of how this theory of canonization can be applied.

Moving forward, it will be important to ask certain questions of the examples I bring up. What is "in" and what is "out" regarding the historical memory of the time period in question? Why might one version of the story be more compelling than others? What is being gained (and for whom) by perpetuating and elevating certain narratives over others? Who is in power? What is at stake? These sorts of inquiries will be helpful for ensuring a rigorous evaluation of the given situation, and they will be especially useful when investigating how the characteristics of canonization fit into the story.

Chapter 2 — History's Heroes: Rosa Parks

You have no control who lives, who dies,
who tells your story.
—George Washington, *Hamilton*[66]

The United States is a country that often prides itself on moments of righteousness in the face of oppression. The Civil Rights Movement tends to serve as a key chapter of this national story: everyday Americans, black *and white*, stood up for equality. According to the narrative that is handed to US schoolchildren in the month of February, which has come to be celebrated as "Black History Month," the American people recognized how important equality and freedom were to their country and bravely joined the movement for change. One of the starring figures of Black History Month is none other than Rosa Parks.

Many children first academically encounter the Civil Rights Movement during Black History Month, when schools teach about and celebrate "Black history...slavery, the civil rights movement [capitalization original], music, literature, and film," to quote a pamphlet of "selected introductory references" published by the Congressional Research Service.[67] Black History Month as it exists today was derived from historian Carter G. Woodson's practice of celebrating "Negro History Week," which was meant to "give blacks a sense of pride in their accomplishments and to educate whites on the contributions of blacks to the success of the nation."[68] In 1976, that week was expanded to a month, and the celebration of Black History Month spread across the nation.[69] Putting aside for a moment the valid complaints that Black History Month encourages tokenism and over-commercialization of celebrating Black history and culture, Black History Month also provides an opportunity to observe an informal

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[66] From the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Not a quote from the real George Washington.
[67] Tangela G. Roe, "Black History Month: Selected Introductory References," *Congressional Research Service*, January 28, 1992, 1.
[68] John Hope Franklin, Gerald Horne, Harold W. Curse, Allen B. Ballard, and Reavis L. Mitchell Jr., "Black History Month: Serious Truth-Telling or a Triumph in Tokenization?," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 18 (Winter 1997–1998): 87.
[69] Ibid.

curriculum that is taught even at ages before state and national standards begin to steer the classroom. The Civil Rights Movement is central to that curriculum. Because it is such a widely studied historical moment, analyzing the way people teach about the Civil Rights Movement is a useful way to approach the mechanics of historical canonization.

Studying canonization through the example of the Civil Right Movement can illuminate how and why certain *figures* are remembered in particular ways. As the Wizard of Oz observes in the musical *Wicked*, it is difficult to think of people as complicated, morally ambiguous figures—accordingly, it is often the case that certain parts of an individual's moral character are highlighted while the others are overshadowed.[70] Or, to draw from a more academic source, in her book on Israel and nationhood, Ilana Pardes writes:

> The fashioning of Israel as a character, here as elsewhere, is inseparable from a complementary narrative strategy: the marking of individuals whose histories are paradigmatic. The nation's life story, in other words, is modeled in relation to the biographies of select characters.[71]

Although Pardes is primarily referring to the idea of the nation of Israel (Israel as aspiration and peoplehood rather than Israel the geopolitical nation state), her observation also applies to nations more generally. Nations *do* model their "life stories" (their *histories*) in relation to biographies of some special characters. Taking into account memory's reluctance to embrace moral ambiguity, this character-driven storytelling leaves history populated with heroes and villains. For the United States, Rosa Parks is undoubtedly one of those heroes.

In this chapter, I ask how Rosa Parks was canonized as a particular kind of hero—and why. She is one of the heroes of the Civil Rights story, while other figures (such as Malcolm X) are often cast as somewhat villainous. Throughout my analysis of Rosa Parks, bear in mind the three characteristics of canonization posited in Chapter 1: choices of translation and interpretation occur when people tell and re-tell stories; people focus on and celebrate stories

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[70] See the lyrics to "Wonderful" from *Wicked*; music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz.

[71] Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2000), 17.

and figures they see as consistent with their own values while ignoring or condemning those they view as opposed to their values; and powerful people are represented (perhaps even represented sympathetically) and are over-represented while others are mis-represented and under-represented. Examining exactly which parts of Rosa Parks's story and identity continue to be resurrected for the present—and which parts have sunk into the depths of obscurity—will be helpful in further teasing out how the three characteristics function.

Rosa Parks: Quiet, Strong, Feminine, Heroic

Rosa Parks is paradoxically one of the most familiar figures but also one of those studied with the least depth. Children learn about her through picture books, children's biographies, and movies. But search for academic biographies, and Parks becomes more difficult to find.

The canonical portrayal of Rosa Parks is that she was a tired seamstress from Alabama who spontaneously decided not to give up her bus seat to a white man while she was heading home from work one day. Such a portrait is not limited to the recounting of history—it also permeated news coverage of Parks throughout her life and beyond. After her death, the *New York Times* memorialized Parks as "the accidental matriarch of the civil rights movement."[72] Years later, a retrospective published in honor of Black History Month, titled "The Quiet Courage of Rosa Parks," took up that narrative and repeated it for a new generation of news readers.[73] Is this an accurate description of Rosa Parks and the role she played in the Civil Rights Movement? I venture to say that most people who were raised in the United States would instinctually agree it is.

In this section, I perform a close reading of an example of the canonical portrayal of

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[72] Michael Janofsky, "Thousands Gather at the Capitol to Remember a Hero," *The New York Times*, October 31, 2005, accessed online at https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/31/politics/thousands-gather-at-the-capitol-to-remember-a-hero.html.

[73] Dana Canedy, "The Quiet Courage of Rosa Parks," *The New York Times*. February 2016. Part of a retrospective series in honor of Black History Month called "Unpublished Black History." Accessed March 2019 at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/national/unpublished-black-history/rosa-parks-outside-courthouse-montgomery-alabama.

Rosa Parks. In other sections, I will look at other portrayals—and compare them. Where do they converge? Where do they diverge? The answers to these questions are helpful for identifying the most culturally resonant parts of Parks's story. Along the way, asking *why* certain aspects of the narrative come to the fore will be useful for investigating the canonization process.

I approach the canonical Rosa Parks story through a children's picture book called *Rosa*.[74] It was written by Nikki Giovanni, illustrated by Bryan Collier, and published in 2005 to critical acclaim. It is a Caldecott Honor Book; the Caldecott is one of the most prestigious children's book awards, awarded each year by the American Library Association's Association for Library Service to Children "to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children."[75] This award is a form of institutional endorsement, and after the Caldecott Honor was bestowed on *Rosa*, it was surely purchased by schools and libraries across the country for their collections—and subsequently read by many American schoolchildren.

Rosa characterizes Rosa McCauley Parks as "the best seamstress," dedicated and hard-working, a caring daughter, a loving wife, considerate, quiet and strong, and brave. Unlike other books I consider, *Rosa* is not a biography, and as such, it does not begin at the beginning of Rosa Parks's life. Instead, it introduces readers to Rosa Parks on the morning of her fateful bus ride. Giovanni takes care to inform readers that "Mrs. Parks was having a good day," writing about Rosa's recently ill mother and Rosa's husband Raymond, an esteemed barber with a great work ethic. And it's almost Christmas.[76] These details ensure that readers find

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[74] Nikki Giovanni, *Rosa*, illustrated by Bryan Collier (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2005). Note: this picture book does not have page numbers, so when I cite specific quotes, I will locate material by which two-page "spread" it falls on, where the first two-page spread with story content is the "first spread," the following two pages are referred to as the "second spread," and so on.

[75] "Rosa, 2006 Caldecott Honor Book," *Association for Library Service to Children*, accessed on March 6, 2019 at http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecotthonors/2006honorrosa.
"Caldecott Medal," *Association for Library Service to Children*, accessed on March 6, 2019 at http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottmedal.

[76] Giovanni, 1st spread. Note: I refer to Parks as "Rosa" when discussing the book's content because that is how Giovanni refers to her in the book. This helps distinguish my discussion of Rosa the character from Rosa Parks the person.

Rosa sympathetic. Giovanni continues to emphasize how admirable a person Rosa was on the next spread, writing about her skill as a seamstress and her dedication to hard work. "Some days she would skip lunch to be finished on time," Giovanni intones.[77]

According to Giovanni, not only is Rosa a hard worker, but she is also a caring daughter and loving wife. The book shows Rosa heading home early to take care of her mother and "surprise [Raymond] with a meat loaf, his favorite." All of this serves to endear Rosa in the eyes of readers—and to set up a striking contrast between gentle, considerate Rosa and the harshness of the white police officer who demands that Rosa "give [him] those seats!"[78] Collier's illustrations amplify Giovanni's characterization of Rosa, depicting her with a serene facial expression in each of these spreads. He also draws her so she appears to radiate light, which could signify that she radiates goodness and integrity in a way or to an extent that others around her do not—even in the face of injustice.

These small details come together to shape the reader's impression of Rosa Parks. Years after reading this picture book as children, people might not remember the details of Rosa planning a meatloaf for her husband or gathering her parcels close to her body to avoid disturbing the other passengers on the bus; after all, memory is a tricky thing, formed as much by remembering as by forgetting. It is easy for the details to slip away. But they *will* remember the impressions they have of Rosa: how kind, how gentle, how quiet, and how determined she was. Her fundamental goodness.

These impressions are important, and the editorial choices Giovanni and Collier made when creating this children's book are closely tied to the characteristics of canonization I have identified. Most likely, Giovanni did not arrive at these characterizations of Rosa Parks on her own; she has probably reproduced the image of Rosa that she recalled. She retold the story the way she remembered it, bolstered by some research to anchor the emotional narrative in

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[77] Giovanni, 2nd spread.
[78] Ibid., 3rd spread, 4th spread, and 5th spread.

factual truths. But in the time between Giovanni and Collier's respective first encounters with the figure of Rosa Parks and their creation of this book, writer and illustrator allowed their own subjectivities to influence their understandings of the story.

The creation of this children's book is itself an act of canonization: it is canonizing Giovanni's and Collier's conceptualizations of Rosa Parks's stand on the bus and the ensuing bus boycott, adding those accounts to the larger historical narrative. Their contribution's selection for institutional recognition with the Caldecott Honor award further cements its place in the historical canon. This canonization process began long before Giovanni wrote the book's first word or Collier made the first sketch. It began when Collier and Giovanni heard and remembered the story of Rosa Parks. Why do they emphasize Rosa's quiet resolve, her dedication to her mother and husband, and her exceptional work ethic? These editorial decisions speak volumes about the book's creators and readers alike. Perhaps Parks truly did have these characteristics to a certain extent. But the prominence Giovanni and Collier give Rosa's serenity makes even more sense in the context of the second characteristic of canonization: the tendency to focus on narrative threads that resonate with one's existing values while ignoring or condemning the threads that contradict those values.

Quiet resolve, integrity, and determination are values that the book's creators see as worthy in a heroic figure. These characteristics rise to the narrative forefront because they have been deemed worthy; conversely, Rosa Parks may also have become a heroic figure because she is thought to demonstrate those values. Aspects of her person that clash with this conceptualization do not make it into the book. Instead, Parks is simplified into the book's character Rosa, who is brave and principled—and quiet, even in her resistance.

The book shows Rosa calmly resisting the aggressive white bus driver who orders her to give up her seat, even telling him to "do what [he] must" when he threatens to call the police

on her.[79] Throughout the text, Rosa is a stand-in for the more general characterization of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. She is calm, dignified, and principled. She is tired of being mistreated. Parks's ascension to mythic "accidental matriarch of the civil rights movement" is due to the way she mirrors people's expectations of the "right" way to resist injustice. She is never violent, never volatile. She is not militant. She is measured and unaggressive, a loving wife and dutiful daughter. People held her up because she was a credible, palatable figure.

Honoring Mrs. Parks: Obituaries as Moments of Canonization

Moving on from the *Rosa* book, I examine the way Rosa Parks was discussed in some of the obituaries the world's newspapers published about her, because those, too, were moments of canonization. Obituaries attempt to sum up a person's life in the wake of her death. After a person dies, her life is in the past, and as obituaries attempt to say goodbye to her, they *resurrect* her past life for mourners in the present. History is the past resurrected for the present. An obituary is, essentially, a history of that person's life. And, as a piece of journalistic writing, it is part of the "first rough draft of history" more broadly, as journalists have liked to say. What do people choose to say about the deceased in this first draft of history? Which interpretive decisions do they make, conscious and subconscious? What do they accentuate? What do they dismiss?

Across different publications announcing Rosa Parks's death in 2005 and memorializing her life, the most commonly used phrase is "mother of the civil rights movement" and its various iterations. One article from *The New York Times*, covering the various speeches and statements given to honor Parks as her body lay in the Capitol Rotunda, repeatedly cites people praising Parks's strength, courage, and the "personal action" or "single act of defiance" that is "generally recognized as the start of the American civil rights movement."[80] That article calls her the "accidental matriarch of the civil rights movement,"

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[79] Giovanni, 6th spread.
[80] Janofsky.

characterizing her role in a way that minimizes the intentional activism Parks participated in over the course of her life. The "accidental" condition does not always precede Parks's title of mother of the civil rights movement, but she is more often than not presented as someone who did not foresee the chain of events that unfolded after her defiance on the bus and subsequent arrest.

Other papers, such as *The Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*, also uphold the canonical narrative of Rosa Parks as an individual of strong personal courage who "couldn't have known" her actions would "secure her a place in American history."[81] The article the *Los Angeles Times* published announcing her death writes of Parks's "simple act of defiance." It also nods to the honorary "mother of the civil rights movement" title.[82] *The Chicago Tribune*'s article (which was actually an Associated Press article published in multiple newspapers) touches on Parks's early life and describes some comments Parks made later in life, as well as some incidents from her later years (such as a lawsuit against musical group OutKast for their song "Rosa Parks").

Even so, the article maintains the status-quo narrative and emphasizes the unplanned nature of Parks's stand, as with the following quote from Rosa Parks: "At the time I was arrested I had no idea it would turn into this. It was just a day like any other day. The only thing that made it significant was that the masses of the people joined in."[83] Although this quote attributes success to "the masses of the people" who participated in the bus boycott and took a stand against systemic racial discrimination, the reporter presents Parks's comments in a way that minimizes the tremendous organizational feat of the Montgomery bus boycott to fit the popular and romanticized memory of a Civil Rights Movement sustained by the morality

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[81] Bree Fowler, "Civil Rights Pioneer Rosa Parks, 92, Dies," *The Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 2005, accessed online at https://www.chicagotribune.com/sns-ap-obit-rosa-parks-story.html.
Elaine Woo, "Rosa Parks, dies at 92; civil rights icon set wheels of justice in motion," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 2005, accessed online at https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-rosa-parks-20051025-story.html.
[82] Woo.
[83] Fowler.

and integrity of impassioned individuals.

Aside from calling Parks "the mother of the civil rights movement," another common thread I found in posthumous coverage of Parks is the tendency to link her to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Associated Press article I found in *The Chicago Tribune*, the piece from the *Los Angeles Times*, and an article by E.R. Shipp published in *The New York Times* all connect Parks and Kings in their discussion of her activism.[84] This in itself is not necessarily a problem or point of interest, since King and Parks *were* actually connected—they knew each other through their activism. But the way these reporters have framed this connection invites a closer look. In *The New York Times*, Shipp writes:

> The events that began on that bus in the winter of 1955 captivated the nation and transformed a 26-year-old preacher named Martin Luther King Jr. into a major civil rights leader. It was Dr. King, the new pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, who was drafted to head the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization formed to direct the nascent civil rights struggle.[85]

By "events," Shipp of course means the Montgomery bus boycott and the ensuing Civil Rights Movement; by "on that bus in the winter of 1955," he means Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat and the arrest that followed. Shipp's discussion of Dr. King spans two paragraphs, one of which includes some of King's later comments regarding Rosa Parks's arrest.[86] But the writing leads readers to see Parks's activism as nothing more than a stepping stone for Dr. King on his way to national civil rights leadership. She is the opening act; he is the headliner. She is significant only because she launched Dr. King's career, not because of her own work.

The same attitude can be found in other articles about Parks's death. In the opening line of the article from the *Los Angeles Times*, reporter Elaine Woo writes that Rosa Parks's "simple act of defiance...stirred the nonviolent protests of the modern civil rights movement and catapulted an unknown minister named Martin Luther King Jr. to international

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[84] Fowler; Woo; E.R. Shipp, "Rosa Parks, 92, Founding Member of Civil Rights Movement, Dies," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2005, accessed online at https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/25/us/25parks.html.
[85] Shipp.
[86] Ibid.

prominence."[87] Even in the opening paragraph of an article about Parks's death, Woo introduces Parks by placing her in the context of King's rise to "international prominence." King also appears in Bree Fowler's Associated Press article about Parks's death, with a brief mention in the second paragraph ("[Parks's] one small act of defiance galvanized a generation of activists, including a young Rev. Martin Luther King Jr."), an appearance in the fifth paragraph in a quote from a lifelong resident of Alabama, and a starring role in the fifteenth paragraph, which consists of only the following sentence: "Her arrest triggered a 381-day boycott of the bus system organized by a then little-known Baptist minister, the Rev. King, who later earned the Nobel Peace Prize for his work."[88]

Rosa Parks's story and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s story are obviously entwined, but the way these articles were written goes a step beyond simply acknowledging their real-life association. Rather than noting a relevant connection between two important activists and historical figures, the writing turns Rosa Parks into a stepping stone for Dr. King—she essentially becomes a supporting character in her own obituary. In order to imbue her with a sense of authority, she must be in proximity to—that is, associated with the power and charisma of—an authoritative Black man. This connects to the importance of gender that I began to hint at in the previous section. What must a woman look like, sound like, and behave like in order to be taken seriously? What types of roles may a woman perform in the theater of history? Add Parks's race to the mix, and these questions take on another dimension. What must a *Black* woman do in order to be taken seriously?

Scholar of African American Studies Marla Frederick addresses some of these questions in her book *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith.* Frederick discusses how Black people have historically been excluded from the general "public sphere" and have consequently created their own Black public spheres in churches, women's clubs, and other

[87] Woo.
[88] Fowler.

member organizations. Of these, churches were particularly prominent.[89] Within these churches, Black women have often been expected to submit to the male figures around them, such as their pastors and husbands.[90] Such expected deference to men could help explain why people are so quick to link Parks and King Jr.

Rosa Parks as history remembers (read: imagines) her is quiet, gentle, dignified, and strong. She is courageous. Everyone knows that she said no, but does anyone remember any of her actual words? Mention Martin Luther King Jr. to someone who grew up in the United States, and they'll immediately think of his "I Have a Dream" speech, even if they don't recall more of it than the words "I have a dream" (if you're lucky, they might even remember "not by the color of their skin but the content of their character"). What did Rosa Parks say?

We remember men as great thinkers, great writers, and great doers. They are intellectuals, they are artists, they are warriors, and they are leaders. But women? Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Betty Freidan, and Harriet Beecher Stowe are women who are remembered as influential, but their actual words are not often remembered. Some might say this is because these women did not give speeches or write. But Harriet Beecher Stowe and Betty Friedan were the authors of incredibly influential works (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Feminine Mystique*, respectively); Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony each gave speeches throughout their activism. If I walked into a room and said "Four score and seven years ago," I doubt there would be many Americans who did not recognize the opening to Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." If I said "Hark! What light through yonder window breaks?" or "To be or not to be?" there would assuredly be someone in the room who knew it was Shakespeare. But I honestly cannot think of quotes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Feminine Mystique*. I can recall a culturally embedded Lincoln quote *about* Stowe's novel ("So you're the little lady who

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[89] Marla F. Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 8–9.
[90] Ibid., 8.

started this big war"), but not a quote from the novel itself.

Returning to Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., why does it matter that these obituaries emphasize Parks as the catalyst for King's leadership as much as they call her a leader herself? What does it mean? This phenomenon is a great example of the characteristics of canonization at play, as is the fact that women's words aren't integrated into the lexicon of cultural memory the way men's words are. The choices of interpretation and translation that occur when telling and re-telling stories are influenced by the cultural value structures the storyteller has internalized. If the storyteller exists in a patriarchal society and has internalized its patriarchal values, then those values affect the way she receives a story. If she has grown up learning that men's words are more important than women's words, then she will receive information through that lens. When she goes to pass on the information, whose words does she remember? Similarly, if she has grown up conditioned to see women as sidekicks and supporting characters to men, that may affect how she internalizes and repeats the story.

Although many of these obituaries are longform articles that touch on other parts of Parks's life, such as her early life and her life within the past thirty years, those details are lost to the overwhelming power of the canonical narrative. Rosa Parks as brave individual. Rosa Parks as harmless old lady on a bus. Rosa Parks sitting down so that others will stand up. Rosa Parks as mother of the Civil Rights Movement.

Rosa Parks: My Story

Another key part of the canonization process is how the subjects in question represent themselves. When compiling the story of someone's life, historians and biographers will often try to piece it together using evidence and testimony from people who encountered the subject. But it is also important to consider how the subject acted toward the rest of the world—and how she hoped the world would receive her. Accordingly, in this section, I will take a look at Rosa Parks's autobiography, titled *Rosa Parks: My Story*. How are the characteristics of canonization different when the author of the material at hand is also the person whose story

is being told (as opposed to when the author is some observer or historian trying to piece the narrative together)? How much of Parks's own telling made it into the obituaries, tributes, and biographies that were written about her?

Rosa Parks's autobiography was published in 1992, with co-author Jim Haskins (it is unclear exactly how much of the book's voice has been shaped by Haskins; it is written entirely from a first-person perspective).[91] This means the book had been available for over ten years before the Giovanni picture book *Rosa* (discussed earlier) was published, and *could* have been a resource for that book's creators, although some contradictions between the two suggest that perhaps they did not consult Parks's autobiography to any great extent. This also means that the autobiography was readily available to reporters writing her obituaries. Since it is clear that access to Parks's own account wasn't a problem, the characteristics of canonization determine the extent to which certain elements enter other retellings of the Rosa Parks story.

Parks opens her autobiography with a brief telling of her resistance and arrest on a segregated Montgomery bus in December 1955, which is "how it all started," as she titles her first chapter.[92] She writes in simple language with a calm, deliberate tone…which makes sense, considering her autobiography is actually a children's book. She tells readers that she was "tired of giving in to white people" before declaring "I had no idea when I refused to give up my seat on that Montgomery bus that my small action would help put an end to segregation laws in the South."[93] Already, there are echoes of the canonical version of Parks's story. It is hard to read the opening of Parks's autobiography without also hearing her obituaries declaring that she "couldn't have known" and "had no idea" that her refusal would inaugurate the mass direct-action demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement. She does repeatedly say she "had no idea" what would happen due to her resistance, but she means it in the sense that

[91] Rosa Parks and Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York, NY: Puffin Books, 1992).
[92] Parks and Haskins, 1.
[93] Parks and Haskins, 1–2.

her past experiences in activism and organizing had led her to doubt whether the masses would truly rally against bus segregation.[94]

It is telling that Parks chose to begin her autobiography with the incident on the bus that made her into a national figure. It is not surprising that she meets readers where they are, but it does demonstrate a certain awareness. In the autobiography's concluding chapter, "The Years Since," Parks writes "I understand that I am a symbol." This statement is part of a longer reflection on her mythic status in the eyes of Americans everywhere:

> 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 accept whatever honors are given to me. I understand that I am a symbol.[95]

Parks is clearly aware of the way she is being canonized into the collective memory and historical imagination of the American people—of the world, even. But in the very next sentence, it becomes evident that although Parks has made peace with the role she will play in the retelling of the struggle for racial justice and of the American experiment in democracy, she is also resistant to giving away all of herself, writing "But I have never gotten used to being a 'public person.' "[96]

In her academic biography *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa* Parks, historian Jeanne Theoharis laments the fact that other historical figures get taken more seriously while Parks is relegated to the position of "a hero for children."[97] For Theoharis, broader American society celebrates Parks in a particular (and limiting) way. She points out the "fable"-like nature of the canonical Parks myth (an analysis that I agree with):

> The public memorial promoted an inspirational fable: a long-suffering, gentle heroine challenged backward Southern villainy with the help of a faceless chorus of black

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[94] Parks and Haskins, 132.
[95] Ibid., 185.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), xi.

> boycotters and catapulted a courageous new leader, Martin Luther King Jr. into national leadership…Parks's memorialization promoted an improbable children's story of social change…that erased the long history of collective action against racial injustice and the widespread opposition to the black freedom movement….[98]

It is true that Parks is gendered and racialized in very particular ways—and that if Parks had behaved in ways other than as Theoharis describes, it is likely she would not have been held up as a model. As Theoharis astutely observes, focusing on Parks's "demure" temperament also "castigates" other Black women "for being too poor or loud or angry and therefore not appropriate for national recognition."[99] In this sense, Theoharis makes valid points and has a good grasp of how to read canonical discussions of Parks while considering the race, gender, and class politics that are partially responsible for her continued celebrated status.

I do disagree with Theoharis in one major way, though. Theoharis is indignant that Rosa Parks is not more widely celebrated outside of the grade school context; she decries that tellings and re-tellings of Parks's story are limited to the simplistic register accessible to children, writing that "This fable [the canonical myth]…has made Rosa Parks a household name but trapped her in the elementary school curriculum."[100] While I agree with Theoharis's assertions that the canonical representation of Parks's stand and the ensuing Montgomery bus boycott is "an improbable children's story of social change" (and not a viable roadmap for future social movements), I disagree with her reading of Parks's role as "a hero for children." I do not think that Parks has been relegated to this position per se; in part, it is by Parks's own design that she is prominent in children's historical educations.

Rosa McCauley Parks is not a children's hero by mistake. And there is no shame in being a figure that children learn about and admire. Parks *chose* to write her autobiography as a children's book. During her lifetime, she was thoroughly dedicated to using her almost mythic status to empower and uplift children—arguably more than she was concerned with

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[98] Theoharis, x–xi.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Theoharis, xi.

what adults thought of her. In addition to her autobiography, Parks also wrote another book for children, *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth*, "a collection of letters from children and her answers to them."[101] She established the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development to empower youths and instill in them "the same sense of hope, dignity, and pride that was instilled in [her] by [her] family and teachers."[102] This mission is also evident in the way Parks crafts *Rosa Parks: My Story*. Her editorial decisions in constructing the autobiography result in a wide-ranging book that goes beyond biographical history and into discussion of important issues and realistic depictions of the difficulties of achieving social change.

Parks' autobiography is not only an account of her life, but also a thoughtful collection of her opinions regarding race, racism, relationships between people of different races, humanity, young people, and the hope for change in the future. She writes about law enforcement's unfair, unequal treatment of Black people, such as the way officials treat cases of Black women who've been raped by white men compared to the way those same officials deal with instances of white women accusing Black men of rape.[103] She ponders willing interracial relationships.[104] She explains *Brown v. Board of Education*.[105] Rosa Parks seeks not only to tell her own story, but to educate a new generations to understand how we got where we are and how to continue to move forward. She makes her book into a tool for empowering young people to shape the world and combat injustice—the same mission that drives the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. With these facts in mind, it is clear that during her lifetime, Rosa Parks *chose* to direct most of her efforts toward children. Theoharis's argument that Parks has been "trapped in the elementary school curriculum" strips Parks of agency in the way that Theoharis herself is accusing the canonical narrative of doing by

[101] Yona Zeldis McDonough, *Who Was Rosa Parks?* (New York, NY: Penguin Workshop, 2010), 99.
[102] Parks and Haskins, 182.
[103] Parks and Haskins, 84–85.
[104] Ibid., 87.
[105] Ibid., 99–100.

oversimplifying Parks's story. In order to do justice to Parks's lifetime of activism and many accomplishments, those of us who are studying her must respect her intentions. We must acknowledge the deliberate choices Parks made that managed to affect the way she has been canonized.

Aside from giving young people a general education on civil rights and activism, Parks's autobiogrpahy does also tell the story of her life, including her childhood, young adult life, the years leading up to the boycott, the boycott itself, the years after the boycott, and even some family genealogy. She describes events that validate Theoharis's designation of Parks's life as "rebellious," and she certainly is not the passive, helpless old lady that some retellings of the bus boycott mythology misunderstand her to be. Parks recounts an episode where she threatened to hit a white child who was harassing her little brother (for which she was later scolded by her parents, who feared she'd be lynched). She recounts nights in her childhood when she accompanied her grandfather on guard at the front door, hoping to watch if he managed to shoot any invading members of the Ku Klux Klan. And she also recalls an unpleasant run-in she had with a bus driver years before her arrest (the bus driver turns out to be the very same one who has her arrested in 1955).[106]

Rosa McCauley Parks led a robust political life that went far beyond her 1955 arrest—and began far earlier. Well-educated and dedicated to protecting her rights, Parks details the extraordinary effort she had to expend before she was finally permitted to register to vote.[107] She also writes about her various activist work, from serving as fellow activist-organizer E.D. Nixon's right-hand in a number of his organizations to becoming the secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP.[108] Parks and her husband Raymond were both very active in organizations that fought for the rights of Black people well before the events of the direct-

[106] Parks and Haskins, 22; 31–32; 76–79.
[107] Ibid., 73–75.
[108] Ibid., 81.

action Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s—a movement which arguably wouldn't have been possible if not for the scaffolding brave and dedicated folks like the Parks and E.D. Nixon had built in the years prior.

It is also interesting to compare the *Rosa* picture book's portrayal of the bus boycott and Parks's own depiction of it. Parks takes care to go beyond the sort of simplistic storytelling that leaves people with the impression it was smooth sailing for the over a year that the boycott lasted. Her storytelling is complex where the *Rosa* picture book is not. Her account is richer and more textured than the more simplistic echoes of this story that populate canonical conceptualizations of "Rosa Parks." She did not set out to become the test case against bus segregation; nor did she set out to be arrested. She describes the confrontation she had with the bus driver and some exchanges she had with the police officers who arrested her.[109] She makes no mention of planning a special dinner for Raymond, nor does she talk about her sick mother. And she also does not write about moving her bags so her male seatmate, who takes up more room, would be more comfortable. These were all apparently added into the *Rosa* book by its creators, whether by original fabrication or in reference to some other account of Rosa Parks's story. And she sets the record straight about whether she was a tired old woman whose feet hurt:

> People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.[110]

Parks wants to make sure people know that her act of defiance was intentional, even if she did not purposely become the NAACP test case against segregation on the buses in Montgomery.

She also details the negative repercussions of the bus boycott, both for her personally and for the boycott more broadly. Aside from the logistical difficulties that come along with

[109] Parks and Haskins, 113–117.
[110] Ibid., 116.

forgoing your primary method of transportation, there were the added complications of harassment and intimidation on both the individual and institutional levels. Police officers began to go after groups of boycotters who were carpooling or taking Black-owned cabs instead of taking the bus; when this didn't stop the boycott, they then threatened to arrest cab drivers who charged the bus fare instead of the market-rate cab fare. When they arrested the cab drivers, boycott participants came up with a sophisticated system of volunteer cabs. According to Parks's account, many people lost their jobs because they supported the boycott.[111] When the boycott persisted despite all of these hardships, white lawyers dug up an old law that prohibited boycotting, and arrested many of the organizers, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.[112] Parks's retelling of the whole affair stresses the difficulties that those brave enough to strive for social change encounter, be it the bus boycott or any other struggle.

These complications and challenges are not often included in retellings of the Montgomery bus boycott. *Rosa*, the Giovanni picture book that won a Caldecott honor, does not mention the harassment, the abuse, or the concentrated backlash on the part of the municipal government and private citizens of Montgomery. Challenges, threats, and intimidation are the hard truth of the fight for social justice on all fronts, but they do not end up in the myths that grow out of these movements. Where Rosa Parks's encounter on the bus is the striking silhouette of a brand new car and the successful integration of the Montgomery buses through the Supreme Court of the United States is the thrill of driving that new car down an empty country road, the real difficulties of engineering and sustaining a movement like the Montgomery bus boycott or the Civil Rights Movement as a whole are like the nitty-gritty workings under the hood. These realities are not the stuff of myths and legends; Parks on the bus is. "I Have a Dream" is.

Points of divergence between Parks's autobiography, Giovanni's award-winning picture

[111] Parks and Haskins, 142–145.
[112] Ibid., 148.

book, and obituaries about Rosa Parks demonstrate how the elements of canonization process affect different iterations of the same story. Parks's autobiography provides a richer, fuller picture than the picture book, and the obituaries do draw on some of the material Parks puts forth in the autobiography. But at the same time, there are key differences in the way Parks portrayed certain events and things compared to the way the picture book or the obituaries did. One important point of divergence was the way all three handled the bus boycott. Both the picture book and the obituaries failed to address the true struggles boycotters faced—and overcame. Parks provides readers a better understanding of how difficult it truly was for the people in Montgomery striving for change. Another important point of divergence is the way the picture book, the obituaries, and the autobiography handled the role of Martin Luther King, Jr.

I've already pointed out the way Parks's obituaries seem to center King to an inappropriate extent (considering they *are* obituaries to honor Parks, not King). The picture book also favors the figure of MLK. These storytelling decisions prioritize the authority of a straight male religious leader, authorizing Rosa Parks as the catalyst for King's rise to national prominence rather than authorizing her on the basis of her own work to organize and support activism in the black freedom struggle. So I was indeed curious to see how Parks herself chose to frame her relationship with Dr. King.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. does not actually make an appearance in Parks's telling of the story until after: Parks has already agreed to E.D. Nixon's request that she serve as the NAACP's test case against segregation; the Women's Political Council has called for the bus boycott with flyers made through unauthorized use of Alabama State's equipment; Black churches have helped get the word out and ministers draft their own version of the Women's Political Council pamphlet supporting Parks; and Parks has gone to trial.[113] Although she does

[113] Parks and Haskins, 125–135.

acknowledge King's great leadership qualities and dedication to nonviolence, Parks does not cast him as the orchestrator of the boycott. She makes sure to credit the Women's Political Council, E.D. Nixon, and a community of Black ministers as a whole, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and process in social movements. She does not fall into the trap of writing an overly romanticized version of the boycott, instead attributing the movement's success to the teamwork of a community-wide Black coalition.

In the case of an autobiography, the author may choose what to reveal about herself and when she'd prefer to be more reserved. To discuss using the language of "characteristics of canonization" I set forth in the first chapter: a self-produced narrative might not have the issue of choices of interpretation that occur when receiving the text (since the author experienced it directly), but there are still interpretive decisions that occur. Parks's decision to tell her story on a register accessible to children is one such decision. As for focusing on things she sees as consistent with her own values (and condemning or ignoring those she does not), Parks tells her story in a way that feels pretty even-keeled, although she is certainly upfront about what she agrees and disagrees with. And as for power dynamics and representation, she is representing herself, so at the very least there aren't outside actors minimizing her role. Parks's account contains details that appear in the obituaries, and it contradicts moments in the *Rosa* picture book.

Closing Statements

People are complicated—more complicated than canonical versions of history like to recognize. In this chapter, I have explored the figure of Rosa Parks as she exists in public memory and as she existed according to her own words. In many ways, Rosa Parks satisfied Americans' expectations of what a Black woman should look like in the face of injustice: feminine, gentle, dignified, quiet, and strong. Never angry, never violent. This is Parks as she was enshrined in public memory, from the eulogies given as she lay in honor in the Capitol Rotunda to the way she is represented in statues, memorials, and picture books.

But Rosa Parks was also a lifelong and dedicated activist. And although she supported the nonviolent strategy promoted by Dr. King's segment of the Civil Rights Movement, she was not a pacifist by principle, as shown by her childhood memories of threatening boys who picked on her and waiting up with her grandfather hoping to watch him shoot members of the KKK (in self-defense, of course). She expands on her feelings regarding non-violence in her autobiography:

> To this day, I am not an absolute supporter of nonviolence in all situations. But I strongly believe that the civil-rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s could never have been so successful without Dr. King and his firm belief in non-violence.[114]

> Dr. King used to say that black people should receive brutality with love, and I believed this was a goal to work for. But I couldn't reach that point in my mind at all, even though I knew that the strategy Dr. King used probably was the better one for the masses of people in Montgomery than trying to retaliate without any weapons or ammunition.[115]

It is not uncommon to see people group Rosa Parks and MLK on one side of the Civil Rights Movement (the "good" nonviolent side) and Malcolm X and the Black Panthers on the other (the "militant" and violent side). But as I've demonstrated with Rosa Parks, things are almost never that clear-cut.

Rosa Parks is a children's hero in part because she cared the most about young people. She wanted to inspire them to take hold of their world and reshape it in a more just image. Writing your own autobiography as a *children's book* is a conscious choice. The values Parks held shaped her contribution to her own canonization. Beyond Parks, the values of society more broadly also shaped the way her story was added to the American historical canon. She is canonized *heroically* because she represents the qualities that many Americans want to recreate in future generations—in the generations who learn her story.

Even with the availability of a complex, detailed, first-person account (*Rosa Parks: My Story*), the characteristics of canonization determine which aspects are incorporated into

[114] Parks and Haskins, 175.
[115] Ibid., 178.

general consciousness. The canonization process and the nature of memory come together to make the most familiar beats of Parks's story the easiest to remember. To an extent, the Rosa Parks myth is self-perpetuating: that particular version of the story is the first version many people learn, and because of that, all subsequent encounters with the figure of Rosa Parks build on the myth's scaffolding. The first version (the myth) becomes the standard against which all others are compared—things that contradict it might be met with skepticism; things that confirm it are primed for acceptance. There is also the fact that familiarity breeds longevity of memory—the more familiar something is, the easier it is to remember it. Following from this, unfamiliar things are easier to forget.

Long-form articles about Parks, like the obituaries I analyze above, include many of the same details that Parks's autobiography includes. They take care to generate an image of Rosa Parks as a full, multi-faceted person. She was a Civil Rights legend, but she also had a life outside of that moment on the bus. These obituaries walk the line between feeding the public comfortable, familiar storylines and reporting new information—but ultimately, they give too much space to Martin Luther King Jr., choosing to tell the story people want to hear. They tell the story people know and love. We are not confronted with stories of a Rosa Parks who stayed up at night hoping to watch her grandfather shoot members of the KKK. We are not forced to reckon with the ways Rosa Parks must conform to our own values before we decide she is worth remembering. We are not faced with an angry Rosa Parks. We are not faced with an aggressive or militant Rosa Parks. We do not have to imagine what she sounded like when she had every right to be frustrated and was. We do not have to see her in ways that expose our own preferences. In her book about Orientalism, scholar of Religious Studies and American Studies Jane Iwamura observes that "Rather than offering perspicuous insight into its Oriental object, this system of representation [Orientalism] reveals much about the Occidental

subjectivity from which it emerges."[116] A similar line of thought can be applied to canonical versions of history: they reveal what is important to the people who hold them as authoritative.

It is important to ask why certain figures become heroes because this practice allows us to question why other figures do not become heroes. In her autobiography, Parks admits one of the realities of activism: activists must organize their efforts for change around what is palatable to society more broadly. She muses about the Montgomery NAACP's initial search for a test case to challenge the bus segregation laws and recalls that organizers saw her as a "perfect plaintiff" where another potential plaintiff, Colette Colvin, had too much baggage (she was an underage, unwed mother).[117] These conversations are not limited to attempts to desegregate buses. Considering which cases present the most palatable optics is part of most activism, including the campaign to end anti-miscegenation laws, where the preliminary search for a test case focused on couples consisting of a white serviceman and a Japanese or Korean woman he'd met overseas during his service.[118] In activism, there is intentional consideration of the optics and palatability of the test case; this affects who is thrust into the spotlight, who makes it into news reports at the time (the "first draft of history"), and which information is available to be passed on. We know who Rosa Parks is and not who Colette Colvin is because our society at the time found Parks to be more "respectable" than Colvin.

Even as these considerations affect the formation of historical canons, the canonization process is never truly complete. Not only do canonical versions of history form slowly, but they are also constantly in flux—the canon is never "set," but is instead unstable, evolving with every re-telling. Even in the case of Rosa Parks, re-tellings of her myth are growing more complicated. Five years after the publication of *Rosa*, Penguin Workshop's popular *Who Was* series (a series of biographies about notable figures written in a way that helps children learn

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[116] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.
[117] Parks and Haskins, 110–112; 125.
[118] Peggy Pascoe, "Interracial Marriage as Natural Right," *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231–238.

how to use reference books) published a book about Rosa Parks. This book draws from Parks's autobiography and other sources, and it provides a nuanced telling of Parks's life story—including the difficulties boycotters faced during the movement to integrate Montgomery's bus system and the hardships Parks faced after she became a nationally recognizable figure.[119] Its publication signals that people think it important for children to learn fuller, more complex versions of events than the standard Rosa Parks myth. Its entrance into the literature means that educators and children will now be picking from a wider pool of material, and the canonization process will continue; the canon will continue to change.

I've examined how people become canonized as heroes in the eyes of history; I am also interested in exploring how people or institutions are cast as villains—and if not the people and institutions themselves, then their actions. The Civil Rights Movement is a moment that the United States can collectively be proud of. In the next chapter, I question how the United States has canonized moments it ought to be ashamed of. These are moments like the way colonizers interacted with Native and Indigenous populations (from initial contact to violating treaties), the Chinese Exclusion Act and the panic in the face of increased Asian immigration, the internment (i.e.: unlawful and unprovoked *imprisonment*) of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War, and the forced assimilation of Native and Indigenous children through compulsory boarding schools. For the purposes of this thesis, I will only be covering Japanese internment. Even so, it is important to recognize that internment did not exist in a vacuum and was instead part of a larger pattern of behavior on the part of the United States and the American people. Which stories of Japanese internment make it into the historical canon? Which do not?

[119] Yona Zeldis McDonough, *Who Was Rosa Parks?* (New York, NY: Penguin Workshop, 2010), 74–86.

Chapter 3 — "Setting a Standard for the Rest of the World"

Find glory, like a song that rings true.
Truth like a blazing fire, an eternal flame.
—Roger Davis, *Rent*

If people are uncomfortable with moral ambiguity, they are even more uncomfortable facing their own morally dubious choices. This discomfort is also present when nations, seeking to tell their own stories, must confront their past wrongdoing. As cited in the last chapter, nations tell their stories through the biographies of select characters.[120] But in addition to major characters, stories also have major narrative arcs—important plot points—that sketch out the shape of the story as a whole.

The story of the United States of America is no different. When collecting together the players and plot points to write its own historical drama, the US inevitably encounters morally questionable and downright shameful decisions it has made—in both the distant and not-so-distant past. Last chapter, I explored the way a country canonizes a figure it holds in high honor through an interrogation of the myths surrounding Rosa Parks. This chapter, I seek to examine the interactions between a country and the skeletons (real and metaphorical) it has in its closet.

The first impulse might be to deny the existence of these skeletons—the reality of these wrongdoings—or even to ignore them and erase them from the narrative. But when denial and erasure are not feasible, the next course of action might be to take control of the story and shape it in a way that might be more favorable to oneself (in this case, to the nation that committed wrongdoings). In these situations, myths emerge. To gain some insight regarding these myths, it might be helpful to consider the function of national myths more generally. Political scientist David Michael Smith, summarizing what others in his field have written about the production and function of national myths for his own article about the American

[120] Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2000), 17.

"melting pot" myth, writes:

> National myths are distortions of the historical record and the present-day character of the nation. Such myths provide an idealized representation of the nation—its membership, its defining features, its fundamental values and principles…Elites are important actors in the creation and maintenance of national identities because they possess the resources of dictate the national narrative. Sometimes created by explicit falsification of historical fact, sometimes fashioned through more subtle means such as exaggeration, national myths always serve particular interests in the present.[121]

The aspirational nature of national myths was evident in the Rosa Parks story last chapter, as was the function of the Rosa Parks myth for the present. History is a high-gloss affair, and memory is often tinted with rose-hued nostalgia. But how does that play out for events that are not merely romanticized, but are shameful and therefore glossed over and covered up?

In this chapter, I will look at American representations of Japanese internment during the Second World War, one of many dark pieces of United States history. Japanese internment is an interesting case because it is a moment that was clearly intentional on the part of the federal government of the United States (to the extent that "plausible deniability" is impossible). It is also a rich case study for the topic of history making and canon creation because it moves beyond the black-white racial binary that is so often part of the canonical imagining of racial justice and race relations in the United States. In addition, the blatantly racial motivations (since neither Italians nor Germans were interned or alienated but Japanese people were) are impossible to ignore. Studying the way the US talks about its decision to "intern" (read: imprison) its own citizens because they were ethnically Japanese will be reveal both the way canonization functions when institutions are directly at fault and the way the United States aspires to be imagined.

Japanese Internment: Preparing for the AP US History Exam

It is no secret that the United States, which has long promoted itself as a "melting pot,"

[121] David Michael Smith, "The American melting pot: A national myth in public and popular discourse," *National Identities* 14, no. 4 (December 2012): 388.

a "salad bowl," and a "nation of immigrants,"[122] has a long history of race-based problems that reach all the way back to the genocide of Native and Indigenous peoples. This is a country built from the labor of enslaved African and Native people. This is a country rampant with hatred of "the other," and it is a country that determines who that "other" is along racial sightlines.[123] So it probably should not have come as a surprise that the United States used race to determine who was most likely to be a "possible Axis agent" during the World War II. But because of the power of the myth of American "liberty and justice for all," I actually was surprised when I first learned of Japanese internment.

While thinking about how Japanese internment exists in today's historical canon, I consulted a review book for the Advanced Placement United States History examination. Since the AP exams are nationally (and even internationally) administered, they can be considered one way that canons regarding their respective subjects are established. The AP US History exam purports to assess college-level study of the history of the United States of America. The College Board, the private (extremely lucrative) non-profit that designs Advanced Placement courses and writes and administers the SAT exams, describes the AP US History course as "designed to be the equivalent of a two-semester introductory college or university U.S. history course" where students "investigate significant events, individuals, developments, and processes" from across the history of the United States.[124] Thus, it's safe to say that inclusion in the AP US History course indicates a certain level of canonization and recognition of significance.

In the whole of an almost 700-page review book, Japanese internment appears in one paragraph, under the heading "The War's Impact on Society" and subheading "Japanese

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[122] Smith, 388.
[123] Matthew Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 3–13.
[124] College Board, "AP United States History: The Course," *AP Central*, accessed online at https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-united-states-history/course.

Americans."[125] Neither "Japanese internment" nor "internment" appear in the book's index as locatable topics. Already, it is evident that not much space is dedicated to this very serious injustice that the United States government committed against its own people. To be fair, this *is* a review book (not a textbook), so ostensibly it is meant as an abbreviated recapitulation of material students have already learned. But even so, this Readers Digest-like version of US history dedicates notably little time to addressing Japanese internment. It does, however, state that the widespread concerns that Japanese-Americans were "spies and saboteurs" were "irrational fears" and that these fears "as well as racism" were what prompted the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans.[126]

This review book does not shy away from discussing the racism inherent in the belief that Japanese people in the United States were likely to turn against the country and help Japanese war efforts, but it does not do justice to the full realities of internment, either. This is a very sanitized presentation of the material realities victims of internment faced. In reality, the Japanese-Americans who were forced to relocate were not given adequate time to properly store, transport, or sell their property; instead, they were forced to sell, loan, give away, or abandon their property in order to meet the relocation deadline, which was at most ten days after the order was given.[127]

As a way of redeeming the US a little in students' eyes (and in the pursuit of historical accuracy), the book also reports that the federal government "agreed that an injustice had been done and awarded financial compensation to those still alive who had been interned."[128] This happened in 1988, forty-three years after the end of World War II; how many survivors could there have still been by that time? The sentence about financial compensation is the last

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[125] John Newman and John Schmalbach, *United States History: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Examination*, second edition (New York, NY: Amsco Publications, 2010), 531.
[126] Newman and Schmalbach, 531.
[127] Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, "Sold, Damaged, Stolen, Gone: Japanese American Property Loss During WWII," *Densho*, April 4, 2017, accessed online at https://densho.org/sold-damaged-stolen-gone-japanese-american-property-loss-wwii/.
[128] Newman and Schmalbach, 531.

sentence in the book about Japanese internment, as if by giving a little money to survivors over forty years after the initial offense, the United States was able to push Japanese internment into the forgotten corners of historical memory.

This review book's entry on the internment of Japanese-Americans makes more sense when considered in the context of the characteristics of canonization. The interpretive decisions that occurred during the making of the review book are apparent based on the text itself. The US's wrongful internment of lawful non-citizen Japanese residents and Japanese-American citizens is important enough to include (i.e.: they can't *not* include it) but not important enough to get more than one highly reductive paragraph. Yes, there is an acknowledgment of the racist motivations behind Japanese internment, but the true hardships these people experienced is not touched on at all. It is all too brief and all too shallow.

The same cursory treatment is given to Native and Indigenous Americans—their section under the heading "The War's Impact on Society" (i.e.: World War II's impact on US society) is three sentences long. The first sentence states that "Native Americans" "contributed to the war effort;" the second sentence specifies war contributions on the part of Native and Indigenous people as direct participation in the military and ancillary participation by working in defense industries. The third sentence states that "more than half" of the Native people who left the reservations "never returned."[129] The authors decide to focus on Native involvement in the war effort (which makes it seem like this is the only reason the authors deem them relevant), but their discussion of Native war contributions has a glaring absence: not once do they mention the Navajo Code Talkers, who are now widely considered to have been invaluable participants in the US operations in the Pacific theater.[130]

In both the Japanese and Native cases, the decision to spend so little space on them is

[129] Newman and Schmalbach, 531.
[130] Eric Levenson, "The incredible story of the Navajo Code Talkers that got lost in all the politics," *CNN*, November 29, 2017, accessed online at https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/28/us/navajo-code-talkers-trump-who/index.html.

due to another characteristic of canonization: the influence of power dynamics on representation. Japanese-Americans and Native people do not control the creation of review books or the construction of AP courses; that access is mostly reserved for white people. They do not have a say in how important their stories are in the eyes of the curriculum, and therefore are under-represented. The fact that "Native Americans" and "Japanese Americans" are subheadings under "The War's Impact on Society" (along with "African Americans," "Women," and "Propaganda") indicates that they are not considered the default. Notice which segment of the population is not included among the subcategories—white people.

"Possible Axis Agents"

To investigate the way Japanese internment was presented in its own contemporary context, I analyze a short film clip produced by the Office of War Information, titled "Japanese Relocation" and released in 1943. As the clip's own introduction states, it "is an [sic] historical record of the operation [i.e.: Japanese "relocation"], as carried out by the United States Army and the War Relocation Authority."[131] From the very beginning, the clip attempts to seize control of the narrative around Japanese internment. The scrolling introductory text that follows the title card begins "Following the outbreak of the present war, it became necessary to transfer several thousand Japanese residents from the Pacific Coast to points in the American Interior."[132] The claim is that the United States had no choice but to relocate these individuals, but in fact, there was no clear or present danger.

Similar language persists throughout the clip, which is narrated by Milton S. Eisenhower, "director of the War Relocation Authority during the initial period of the transfer."[133] In his opening monologue, Eisenhower sits behind a desk in what is ostensibly his

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[131] Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures, *Japanese Relocation*, 1943, film, accessed online at https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4536559/1943-film-japanese-relocation and at https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/us-government-film-sought-to-justify-japanese-internment-during-world-war-ii/2018/03/30/4b3ad51e-3459-11e8-b6bd-0084a1666987_video.html?utm_term=.190747a0385b
Note: I consulted two sources because there were occasional skips and one version did not contain the entire clip.
[132] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation.*
[133] Ibid.

office at the War Relocation Authority. He wears a suit, sports a cropped haircut and glasses, and looks seriously at the camera. His office is decorated with an American flag directly behind him, a map of California to the right of him (to his left), a bookcase with a globe to the left of him, and portraits on the wall on either side of the American flag. He posits the West coast as vulnerable to Japanese invasion—and the Japanese people living there as a liability:

> When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, our West coast became a potential combat zone. Living in that zone were more than a hundred thousand persons of Japanese ancestry, two thirds of them American citizens; one third, aliens. We knew that some among them were potentially dangerous. Most were loyal. No one knew what would happen among this concentrated population if Japanese forces should try to invade our shores. Military authorities therefore determined that all of them, citizens and aliens alike, would have to move.[134]

Eisenhower plays to the trope of the "inscrutable" Asian foreigner. You can never tell what this foreigner is thinking, and he'd just as soon enlist in the United States Army as engage in "sabotage" against the nation.

Never mind that many of these Japanese-Americans were born here and had never been to Japan. Never mind that none of them had actively done anything to assist Japan or attack the US. It didn't even matter that by Eisenhower's own admission, "most were loyal." Did Eisenhower believe his own words? His next sentence after "most were loyal" begins with "No one knew what would happen." If he and his colleagues in the federal government had truly believed that most Japanese-Americans were loyal, then they wouldn't have felt threatened.

The clip's next move is to declare that the authorities did not "relish" taking people from their homes, their property, and their livelihood…and that accordingly, "the military and civilian agencies alike decided to do the job as a democracy should: with real consideration for the people involved."[135] But of course, "real consideration" would have prevented policymakers from interning ethnically Japanese people in the first place. Framing internment as something

[134] Ibid. Note: transcriptions are my own and based on consulting the two versions of the clip I cite above.
[135] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation.*

authority figures were reluctant to do but felt was necessary is a way of deflecting blame from themselves and shifting it onto the allegedly difficult circumstances that precipitated a "need" for internment.

Throughout the clip, Eisenhower refers to internment victims as "evacuees" and "the Japanese." He talks about how "they gathered in their own churches and schools" prior to the "evacuation" and brightly announces that "the Japanese themselves cheerfully handled the enormous paperwork involved in the migration."[136] There are several things going on here. "Evacuees" is just one of several euphemisms Eisenhower and the producers of this clip employ in order to soften the harsh realities of internment. Others include referring to interned people's immense property losses as "financial sacrifice on the part of the evacuees" and substituting "pioneer communities" for internment/concentration camps. The use of these euphemisms indicates that this film's creators were aware of the power in a name. They used these words to shape the way internment was canonized in the minds of the contemporary viewers. To quote the Wizard of Oz in *Wicked* again: "A rich man's a thief or philanthropist. Is one a crusader, or ruthless invader? It's all in which label is able to persist."[137]

In addition to the use of euphemisms, this clip also speaks *for* Japanese people in the US without giving them an opportunity to speak for themselves. Internment couldn't be bad because "the evacuees cooperated wholeheartedly" and "the many loyal among them felt that this was a sacrifice they could make on behalf of America's war effort."[138] Throughout the clip, there are images of ethnically Japanese people waving and smiling as they are herded about by armed soldiers. Did anyone in the War Relocation Authority or the Office of War Information ask Japanese-American people how they felt about internment before making such assertive statements about the internees' perspectives? No. But this isn't surprising; it is actually quite in

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[136] Ibid.
[137] See the lyrics to "Wonderful" from the Broadway musical *Wicked*; music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz.
[138] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation*.

line with the characteristics of canonization—those with power control the narrative. They can misrepresent others in ways that suit their own agendas. They can shape the canonization process and therefore mold the country's collective historical imagination.

This short film also has a tendency to imply that Japanese people in the US are not within the "us" that is "America"—they are a "them," a people on the outside. They are foreign. They have "their own" churches and "their own" schools. They are not Americans; they are "alien," even the citizens. They are "possible Axis agents," and they are dangerous. "We" must protect ourselves from "them" and their sabotage and their espionage. These rhetorical moves to distance ethnically Japanese people from the United States serve to justify the federal government's decision to force them into internment camps; they are also racist.

It is notable that the creators of *Japanese Relocation* do not attempt to portray internment as a positive course of action. Instead, they spend the entire film justifying it by vilifying and alienating anyone who might be Japanese, describing the alleged potential harm Japanese people could do to the United States, and positioning the entire operation as a necessity for self-defense. Even while the United States is institutionally defending its actions, it is aware of the shamefulness and the morally dubious nature of the very actions it is defending. This is demonstrated by the noticeable shift the Office of War Information makes when talking about children who have been interned: while most of the film's references to internment victims use either "evacuees" or "the Japanese" (aside from scrolling text in the beginning, which uses "persons of Japanese ancestry"), when discussing children, Eisenhower calls them "American children of Japanese descent."[139] He also claims that "special emphasis was put on [their] health and care." Eisenhower's attempts at reassurance reveal the defensiveness and insecurity the Office of War Information feels about how the "relocation" operation might be canonized in the annals of history.

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[139] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation.*

The process of canonization is closely interlinked with and dependent on the acquisition of authority—and is itself a process of authority making. Religious Studies scholar Pauline Hope Cheong writes that "authority is co-created and maintained in dynamic interactions between leaders and followers that acknowledge and conversationally manifest the authority."[140] Such interactions are negotiations of power where authority is a dynamic *relationship* rather than a static object or unchanging status. Applied to the process of canonization, these negotiations manifest in the jockeying among different narratives and parties seeking the trust of people and institutions. The *Japanese Relocation* short film is one such narrative angling for canonical authority in the eyes of history and the American people.

In his closing monologue, Eisenhower doubles down on the arguments he has employed throughout his account of Japanese internment. He frames internment as a grand pioneering quest for the moment "the raw lands of the desert turn green" and all Japanese adults are laboring for the benefit of America.[141] And again he restates the idea that the ethnically Japanese population living in the United States is hiding dangerous, disloyal Axis agents who must be ejected from the country, reinforcing the framing of Japanese internment as a necessary step for self-defense. Lastly, he trumpets the moral righteousness of the United States and warns viewers of the possible fates of American soldiers who are captured and become prisoners of war:

> The full story...will be fully told only when circumstances permit the loyal American citizens once again to enjoy the freedom we in this country cherish, and when the disloyal, we hope, have left this country for good. In the meantime, we are setting a standard for the rest of the world in the treatment of people who may have loyalties to an enemy nation. We are protecting ourselves without violating the principles of Christian decency. We won't change this fundamental decency no matter what our enemies do, but of course we hope *most earnestly* that our example will influence the Axis powers in their treatment of Americans who fall into their hands.[142]

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[140] Pauline Hope Cheong, "Religious Authority and Social Media Branding in a Culture of Religious Celebrification," *The Media and Religious Authority*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 84.
[141] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation.*
[142] Ibid.

For Eisenhower, being "American" means holding to "the principles of Christian decency." His statement also implies that those who are not Christian do not abide by as pure and morally correct a sense of "decency" as Christians do…and are, additionally, less American than their Christian neighbors. There is a lurking threat in Eisenhower's last sentence, where he links the fates of interned Japanese and Japanese-American people with the fates of American prisoners of war. It is hiding between the lines, like the old "will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?" example. He does not express an outright threat of harm to the imprisoned Japanese people, but he and his colleagues want to make sure Japan knows the United States government has some of "their own" (so to speak) in custody.[143]

The film overall is essentially an iteration of the familiar patriotic music that characterizes the cultural moment of the US during WWII. It hits all the familiar notes, as demonstrated in Eisenhower's closing statement, including patriotism, freedom, "Christian" morals and American moral superiority, and the sacrifices of US servicemen. In executing all of these moves in the context of explaining US-ordered imprisonment of Japanese and Japanese-American people, Eisenhower implies that none of those things rightfully belong to Japanese people in the United States. This film represents the way the federal government hoped Japanese internment would be canonized into historical memory in the period immediately surrounding the enactment of this racist policy.

Looking at American discussion of Japanese internment is an interesting way to approach the way shameful or negative parts of a nation's past are canonized within the cultural memory and historical imagination of that nation because internment is shameful but is not embedded in national recollection the way chattel slavery is. This makes it easier to find instances of people trying to shift the blame or minimize the realities of the situation. But that

[143] In fact, according to Duncan Ryuken Williams's book *American Sutra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), one Congressman actually wrote to Roosevelt suggesting the possibility of using Japanese nationals as hostages "to discourage Japan from mistreating Americans in Japan" as early as August 1941, months before the attack on Pearl Harbor took place [68].

doesn't mean that there aren't still competing historiographies, which allows for plenty of material to dig into.

Narratives at Odds

Both the review book account published nearly sixty years after the conclusion of the Second World War and the film put out by the federal government *during* the war (1943) attribute the decision (in whole or in part) to "relocate" and "intern" Japanese people living in the US to the fear that these ethnically Japanese people would sabotage and spy on the United States. If anything, this demonstrates just how successful the Office of War Information's version of events was—it is evidence that, to some extent, their narrative was canonized, even if the AP exam review book framed fears of sabotage and espionage as "irrational." But there is another competing account of Japanese internment that destabilizes the notion that people at the time were fearful of sabotage and thirsty for revenge against the nation that attacked Pearl Harbor.

This alternative narrative points out the fact that there was a little over two months between the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941) and the day President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, as the article's author Gerald Stanley writes, "trashing the Constitution, interning the innocent, and bringing new meaning to the phrase 'a date that will live in infamy.' "[144] As Stanley points out, it is difficult to claim an urgent military imperative when the proposed measures come over two months after the event that inspired their proposition. This two-month gap is not often included in the re-telling of the Japanese internment story—in fact, the question of how much time may or may not have passed between Pearl Harbor and the issuance of Executive Order 9066 is usually not raised at all. It's a detail that slips through the cracks, and its absence is overlooked in the face of a myth that appears to have a clear and logical progression from one plot point (Pearl Harbor) to

[144] Gerald Stanley, "Justice Deferred: A Fifty Year Perspective on Japanese-Internment Historiography," *Southern California Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 182.

another (Japanese internment).

Stanley lines up a number of quotes from some of the nation's leaders in December 1941, in the immediate wake of the attack. Contrary to the image of indignant, scared, racist, and reactionary policymakers that the traditional internment myth might conjure, these quotes present measured opposition to any institutional actions against Japanese and Japanese-American people in the US. Among those quoted are a general, two congressmen, a governor, and the attorney-general. They say things such as "An American citizen, after all, is an American citizen," "Let us not make a mockery of our Bill of Rights by locking up these folks," "These people are American-born. They cannot be deported. This is their country," and "At no time will the government engage in wholesale condemnation of any alien group."[145]

Those platitudes are well and good, but of course a mere two months after these high-ranking government officials made these statements, they changed course and threw these sentiments out the window. And it must also be noted that their statements, though likely heartfelt and sincere, were not exactly accurate. Before locking up the ethnically Japanese residents of the US West coast, the US engaged in wholesale condemnation of Africans (and, later, African-Americans), who it consigned to slavery. This condemnation spanned centuries. And before that, there was the condemnation of Native and Indigenous people who lived on the land that would become the continental United States. Furthermore, note the last quote's positioning of Japanese people as an "alien group," as if the only people who are not alien are white Americans.

Stanley lays out a chronology of federal officials' shift from opposing Japanese internment to demanding and carrying it out. This chronology shows moderation over the majority of December and January 1941 (two months), indecision and flip-flopping over the course of a couple of weeks, and the shift to demanding internment in a matter of days.[146] In

[145] Stanely, 182.
[146] Stanley, 192–194.

his conclusion, Stanley attributes the ultimate decision to intern Japanese and Japanese-American people to racism, indecision, rumors of Japanese disloyalty spread through various media channels, and "military setbacks in the Pacific."[147] Interestingly, Stanley's account includes a story of one prominent official arguing in favor of "removing" German and Italian "enemy aliens" and "all Japanese who are native-born or foreign-born."[148] Racism is visible in two ways here: (1) ethnically Japanese people are the only group of the three that sees material sanctions enacted and (2) the official is sure to differentiate between native- and foreign-born Germans and Italians, but *not* between native- and foreign-born Japanese people. This version of the story is vastly different than the one presented in *Japanese Relocation* or in the AP US History exam review book, both of which present the decision to intern as a decisive one and fail to mention the possibility of German and Italian "enemy alien removal," whatever that would entail.

The characteristics of canonization can help explain the discrepancies between Stanley's construction of the history of Japanese internment and the more popular story arcs of deeply rooted anti-Japanese racism, the quest for vengeance in the wake of Pearl Harbor, and fear for American national security. Lest it appear that I wholeheartedly endorse Stanley's reading of internment, I should clarify that I encourage an understanding of history that draws from a variety of different sources and perspectives, and I am not trying to argue that Stanley is revealing the hidden truth behind Japanese internment. But his competing narrative, based on a survey of several books on the subject, is interesting because it provides an opportunity to see what did not make it into the canonically imagined sequence of events.

The first characteristic of canonization—that there are choices of interpretation and translation and interpretive decisions that occur when people tell and retell stories—accounts for an editorial focus that does not recognize the two months between Pearl Harbor and

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[147] Ibid., 196–197.
[148] Ibid., 193.

Executive Order 9066. There is a better narrative flow when you omit the lag time between alleged "cause" and "effect," and there is also the tendency to compress events together when looking backward in time. Similarly, indecisive policymakers don't come across well as *leaders*, at least not within the simplistic storytelling involved in myth making. The first characteristic also explains *Japanese Relocation*'s insistence on using euphemisms to translate ugly realities into not-as-ugly-sounding stories. Rather than grapple with the trauma of being uprooted from your home, your community, your livelihood, and your freedom, the Office of War Information reimagines interned Japanese people as "evacuees" and their imprisonment as a new "pioneer" adventure. These are examples of both conscious and subconscious interpretive choices that happen when telling the story of Japanese "relocation." And, as I mention in Chapter 1, much like in the game "Telephone," those changes are passed along the chain of transmission to other people who receive the story.

The second characteristic of canonization—that people focus on things they see as consistent with their own values and condemn or ignore those they see as opposed to their values—accounts for the appeals to patriotism and national security found in both the review book and the film *Japanese Relocation*. It also explains why the film felt the need to assert so forcefully (and so many times) that the United States handled things "as a democracy should" and was "setting a standard for the rest of the world in the treatment of people who may have loyalties to an enemy nation."[149] Moral superiority is key to the self-conception of the United States. Milton Eisenhower emphasized aspects of internment he felt were consistent with his image of what "America" was.

The third characteristic of canonization—that those with power can represent themselves often and favorably while those without are often misrepresented and under-represented—is also clearly at play, as I noted earlier. Even the destabilizing force of Stanley's

[149] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation*.

contradictory account does not itself ask Japanese-Americans about their lived experiences during internment—either directly (through interviews) or indirectly (by consulting their past statements and works regarding this period). Milton Eisenhower and the Office of War Information can choose to present white America as adhering to "Christian decency." They can present the federal government as *generous* for "allowing" interned people to work and contribute to the war effort or for providing them the opportunity to live "a way of life as normal as possible."[150] They can misrepresent Japanese internees as "cheerful" to do vast amounts of paperwork or as "evacuees" who "cooperated wholeheartedly."[151] Or, in the case of the AP US History exam review book, they can choose to limit the inclusion of the topic of Japanese internment to one paragraph and omit the term "internment" from the index.

Their Own Words

The most important voices missing from the mix at the moment are Japanese-American voices. It would be remiss of me not to include their voices here as I discuss the canonization and popular remembering of Japanese internment. If minimizing institutional embarrassment on the part of the US government was at one point the government's goal in guiding the canonization of narratives about Japanese internment in the United States, it would make sense that they would do their best to prevent internment survivors from sharing their experiences and contributing to the canon. But as demonstrated with Rosa Parks's story (and even the reclamation of Lilith as a Jewish feminist icon, which I touched on in Chapter 1), canons are always in flux, always evolving—never static. This instability between and during instances of transmission is key to the first characteristic of canonization, and inherent in the process of resurrecting the past for the present.

One recent scholarly account of Japanese internment is *American Sutra* by biracial Japanese-British scholar of Religious Studies Duncan Ryuken Williams. His book's main focus

[150] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation.*
[151] Ibid.

is on Buddhism in Japanese-American communities, especially in the "internment" (concentration) camps during what he (accurately) refers to as "the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II."[152] He sows direct testimony about internment among his analysis of Buddhism within these interned communities. Williams himself is much too young to have personally experienced internment, so the included testimony is from people he has spoken with recalling their own memories or stories their relatives told of their experiences. These versions are much more personal than the AP exam book or the short film produced by the Office of War Information—they re-humanize a people that has canonically been dehumanized, and they texture imaginations of this period in a way the current canonical narrative does not.

Why was it so easy for America to turn their collective backs on Japanese people living in this country? Had there ever been a true acceptance into the fold for America to turn away from? Not to make this analysis entirely about identity politics, but here I feel it necessary to pause and consider Rosa Parks's characterization as a hero and Japanese people's collective condemnation as inscrutable, disloyal, villainous aliens. Parks was Black. She was a woman. Taken together, these identities are two strikes against her when operating in the white patriarchy that is American social hierarchy. In many ways, she was elevated as a hero not in spite of these identities, but because she performed them the "right" way, as discussed in the previous chapter. But one thing I didn't touch on was Parks's identity as a Christian, which was undeniable. In some ways, that was worth more than the counts against her ("Black" and "woman)—at least in the eyes of the nation's cultural palate. Her Christianity allowed her to access the social capital of being a "morally upright" person, both through her actions and her Christian identity.

The same cannot be said of for the perception of Japanese people in the United States.

[152] Duncan Ryuken Williams, *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 2.

They were not white, so that was a strike against them. But they weren't Black, either—they were something else. They were "foreign." As political scientist Claire Jean Kim argues in her article "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," white supremacist structures in the US context have positioned Asian Americans as "immutably foreign and unassimilable" while also valorizing them as relatively "superior" subordinates in comparison to Black people, who are relatively "inferior" subordinates (but are not considered "immutably foreign").[153] In addition to their status as non-white individuals in a white supremacist society, Japanese people in the US were denied access to the social capital of Christianity in a way Rosa Parks was not.

Williams sums up this predicament well: "Doubly excluded from whiteness and Christendom, Japanese American Buddhists during World War II represent a particularly poignant object lesson about who can claim the rights of being American."[154] I would add that it was not only Japanese Buddhists who suffered this marker of un-American-ness. Regardless of whether or not the Japanese-appearing individual in question had actual ties to Buddhism, it is likely that white America read their religion along racial sightlines—that is, saw an East Asian face and assumed "Buddhist" specifically or "non-Christian" more generally. After all, as Williams himself notes, the United States does have a history of "conflating race, religion, and American belonging."[155]

Where the Office of War Information is distant, general, and impersonal, Japanese-American accounts of internment are close, specific, and personal. The *Japanese Relocation* film mentions that Japanese people "were taken to race tracks and fair grounds where the Army almost overnight had built assembly centers."[156] These were essentially holding sites where incarcerated Japanese-Americans were held until the more permanent camps were completed. In the short film, Eisenhower intones that "Santa Anita Racetrack, for example, suddenly

[153] Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1999): 107.
[154] Williams, 4.
[155] Ibid., 5.
[156] Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation.*

became a community of about seven thousand persons," before he describes a cheerful picture of the Army providing housing and "healthful, nourishing food for all."[157] Rather than acknowledging the realities for victims of internment, Eisenhower and the filmmakers focus on the effort the Army expended to provide for "the evacuees." These assembly centers were built "almost overnight"—what effort! What a feat of engineering ability! Of course, the Army wouldn't have to go to these lengths to care for such "communities" if the federal government hadn't imprisoned them in the first place. But never mind that—look at how impressive the Army is! Where ever can I enlist to support the war effort against the Axis powers?

First-person accounts of these "assembly centers" tell a different story. The fact that centers like at Santa Anita Racetrack had been constructed "almost overnight" was not a positive thing for the people forced to live in them. Williams's book describes one Japanese Buddhist monk's experience at Santa Anita:

> Senzaki, along with roughly eighteen thousand other people of Japanese ancestry, had been sent to the Santa Anita Racetrack, where they were forced to live in hastily converted horse stalls.[158]

Williams also includes a description of another family's experiences at a different assembly center, in Fresno, as well as the property loss they suffered as a result of internment:

> The Kimuras...ended up having to sell their farm to neighbors for less than one-twentieth of its market value, and, after depositing a single suitcase of their most valued remaining possessions at the Fresno Buddhist Temple for safekeeping, they arrived at the center, where they were quartered in a horse stable designated Barrack E-17-2.[159]

These were not the thriving "communities" the Office of War Information might have wished would be canonized into Americans' collective historical imagination. These were stopping points on the way to concentration camps for people who had lost almost everything they owned, been torn from their homes, been ripped from their communities, and whose futures

[157] Ibid.
[158] Williams, 8.
[159] Ibid., 13.

were very, very uncertain.

On the other hand, I must note: the temporary "assembly centers" were not part of the narrative I initially had in my head regarding Japanese internment. Neither the *Japanese Relocation* version nor the *American Sutra* version had made it into the particular canon I was introduced to in all my years of schooling. We simply don't learn about Japanese internment on a granular enough level for these stopover points to make it into the curriculum. This is a facet of the history of Japanese internment so deep, so detailed, so fine-grained, that it does not make it into the Readers Digest version students are taught, just as the two-month gap between Pearl Harbor and Executive Order 9066 doesn't.

That is one thing that the canonization of heroes and villains has in common. If we in the present are glimpsing history through snapshots (both literal and metaphorical, but in this case mainly metaphorical), we are not gazing at 4K HD images fresh off a digital memory card; we are scrunching up our eyes trying to decipher a grainy, grimy sepia-toned or black-and-white image that we found shoved into our grandfather's smelly, moth-eaten sweater pocket. Whether a celebrated folk hero like Rosa Parks or a moment of national shame like Japanese internment, we are piecing together these resurrections of the past from the most incomplete of fragments. This incompleteness is in part shaped by accidents of fate (i.e.: which relics survived a fire untouched, which ones were damaged, and which ones were lost) and in part by the characteristics of canonization. The characteristics of canonization are in turn shaped by who has access to the levers of power—who controls the distribution of cultural, political, and academic forms of authority, among others. Claire Jean Kim refers to the "chief architects" of the field of racial positions as "major opinionmakers."[160]

Williams's book is an important contribution to the study of Japanese internment within academia. But the world is much broader than academia, and there are also other

[160] Kim, 106–107.

actors engaging in the important work of elevating internment survivors' voices, such as the nonprofit organization Densho. Densho was started in 1996 "with the initial goal of documenting oral histories from Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II."[161] The organization's website is something of a digital museum where anyone with internet access can view primary source documents and read first-person testimony from internment survivors. One article, titled "American Concentration Camps," includes commentary from a survivor named Shoji Horikoshi, who offered the following comments regarding the assembly center he was assigned to: "Of course it was smelly there. The floors were wooden but I think they painted the walls with very thin paint, like whitewash, and the odor of the horses was strong."[162] Hopefully, as the canon continues to evolve, more survivor accounts (personal, human testimonies) will be added to the mix. Hopefully they will supersede the prominence of the current collapsed, simplified canonical myth that exists regarding Japanese internment.

Listening to survivors' own stories will give past-seekers a fuller picture of what the past may have looked, sounded, smelled, felt, and tasted like. And it will complicate ideas of what life may have been like in internment camps. Lest I leave the impression that interned Japanese Americans were victims who did nothing but suffer in the camps until they were finally liberated by the very government that imprisoned them, I must emphasize that although conditions were tough and internment was a grave injustice, the Japanese people incarcerated during World War II did their best to persevere. They certainly did not have an easy time of it, as the contemporary federal government would have liked to lead us to believe. But they were resilient, and they found ways to assert their personhood even within the barbed wire camps. Examples of this abound on Densho's website, in *American Sutra*, and in other work

[161] Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, "Densho: Preserving Stories of the Past for Generations of Tomorrow," *Densho*, 2017, accessed April 2019, accessed online at https://densho.org/about-densho/.
[162] Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, "American Concentration Camps," *Densho*, 2017, accessed April 2019, accessed online at https://densho.org/american-concentration-camps/.

about internment that centers survivor voices.

The fact that these first-person stories are not better known can be attributed to the fact that this is a period of history that the United States shies away from. It makes sense—if people ignore things that are not consistent with their own values, it is not a far stretch to say that they might also feel compelled to ignore things that are not consistent with their own self-image or the image they have of their own country. If there are parts of the story that make people uncomfortable, that discomfort may influence the way people tell the story. But it is important to learn about the uncomfortable parts of our own histories. It is important both to honor those who were harmed and to remind ourselves that there will be times in our lives where we must make decisions between what is easy, what is popular, and what is right.

Concluding Remarks

Comparing the prevalence, longevity, and embeddedness of competing narratives about a subject can help illuminate the mechanics of authorization that create historical canons. Doing this with events a particular nation is ashamed of can both reveal the extent to which that nation is willing to take responsibility for its mistakes and shed light on how much influence the country's government has on the creation of its history. It is also a way to investigate how receptive the country's people are to learning about such historical moments.

There are a few sayings I have heard about how to tell a person's character that I think are relevant to the task of analyzing whether nations hold themselves accountable for their actions and choices when telling their own histories. I've heard it said that you can tell a lot about an individual's character not by how they treat those of equal or greater rank but by how they treat those of lesser rank than themselves. There are also sayings about a person being defined by what they do when no one is watching them or in the face of failure. In a way, the sentiments at the heart of these bits of common wisdom is also applicable to collectives, such as organizations, companies, and nations. How does the United States discuss its own failures? In the context of Japanese internment, it seems to be that it doesn't like to discuss it much at

all. And if it does, it will likely point to the financial reparations that were made more than forty years after the fact and claim absolution. Or it will hide behind the excuse of perceived "military necessity."

Japanese internment echoes even into the current decade. The 1944 Supreme Court case *Korematsu v. United States*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that Japanese internment was constitutionally permissible, remained on the books for seventy-four years. This means that technically, until June 2018, there was a legal precedent to permit the racially motivated, prolonged imprisonment of American citizens. *Korematsu v. United States* was finally overturned as part of a Supreme Court ruling on President Donald Trump's anti-Muslim travel ban. In what can only be described as an incredibly hypocritical moment on the part of the Court, the Justices simultaneously overturned *Korematsu* and upheld the permissibility of Trump's travel ban.[163]

It is more than this Court ruling that connects the current moment's suspicion of and hostility toward Muslims with internment's targeting of Japanese people. In 2016, after Trump's election but before his inauguration, Trump's supporters suggested a government program to register and surveille Muslims in the United States, citing Japanese internment as a "precedent" that would make such a plan constitutionally legal (which was technically true, until the Court finally overturned *Korematsu* in 2018).[164] The common thread is prejudice and hostility that are motivated by a combination of racial and religious fears: the "Oriental" who cannot be trusted and will never assimilate and the morally bankrupt non-Christian who is a danger to "Christian decency."

Studying the canonization of Japanese internment tells us about who the United States

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[163] Charlie Savage, "Korematsu, Notorious Supreme Court Ruling on Japanese Internment, Is Finally Tossed Out," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2018, accessed online at https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/26/us/korematsu-supreme-court-ruling.html.

[164] Derek Hawkins, "Japanese American internment is 'precedent' for national Muslim registry, prominent Trump backer says," *The Washington Post*, November 18, 2016, accessed online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/11/17/japanese-internment-is-precedent-for-national-muslim-registry-prominent-trump-backer-says/.

is prepared to accept as truly, rightfully "American," both at the time of internment and now as people looking back at history. The actions Americans and their government undertook during that time period speak volumes, of course. But the characterization of those actions in historical discourse is also highly revelatory. And it begs the question—how do our ideas of history shape the way we navigate the world? And how should we reshape our ideas of history to positively influence ourselves and our interactions with others?

Conclusion

Careful the things you say.
Children will listen.
—The Witch, *Into the Woods*

I have shown that history is hardly an objective discipline—ideas of history are constantly changing, and understandings of the world are always in flux. So what? Is it futile to try to understand what "truly" happened in the past? Is resurrecting the past for the present a hopeless endeavor? Of course not. It is important to understand that historical canons exist in competition with other narratives because this framework can help us think more critically about what we accept as truthful (or likely to be truthful) and what we reject as incorrect. It is important to understand *how* historical canons are created because it can help us determine how and why certain narratives may have been elevated—and if they are worthy of occupying positions of legitimacy.

In Chapter 1, I made the case for why the language of "canon" and "canonization" can and should be applied to the study of history and history-making. I also set forth three major characteristics of canonization, based on things I've observed and theoretical work I've read about how memory functions and how stories are transmitted. I do not, however, believe that these three characteristics are the only factors at play in the creation of canonical readings of history. There is plenty of space for others to continue using this language of canons and canon creation to analyze the construction of historical narratives, incorporating new characteristics and exploring different historical contexts. This thesis would have looked very different, for example, if I had been considering Chinese history and the way China's people and institutions have authorized select portrayals over others. I think the idea of canons is applicable across different historical subjects, but the nuances and mechanics will certainly vary from country to country, society to society, and period to period. I would not presume that my particular model of historical canonization is a one-size-fits-all model.

In Chapter 2, I analyzed the canonization of a country's "hero" figures through the

example of Rosa Parks, "the mother of the civil rights movement." Because of the way the study of history tends to compress information, Rosa Parks the complicated, multi-faceted individual is canonized into a mythic woman who essentially served one purpose in life (to launch Martin Luther King, Jr. to prominence). There is plenty of material about her that presents a more complex story, but often the simplest version is the easiest to remember. And it is interesting, too, to consider why she qualified to be remembered among our nation's most heroic. She fit very gendered, racialized ideas of what a hero should look and act like.

Given more time and space, it would have been interesting to compare the canonization of Rosa Parks to that of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, two other prominent figures of the Civil Rights Movement. There is a tendency to think about the Civil Rights Movement as being made up of two camps: the "good" nonviolent camp, led by Parks and King Jr.; and the "bad" militant radicals, led by Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. As noted in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, history is uncomfortable with moral ambiguity. That sentiment can be expanded to include most ambiguity, which is why these binaries have a tendency to emerge. How did Malcolm X end up on the "bad" side of history? As I've been getting at throughout the thesis, his positioning as a "bad" historical figure says more about those who authorize and accept certain tellings of history than it says about Malcolm X himself.

In Chapter 3, I examined the way a nation tells stories about its own mistakes through the example of United States discourse regarding Japanese internment during World War II. Quite frankly, the United States avoids discussion of internment where it can—and where it does acknowledge this blemish on its record (merely one among many blemishes), it finds a way to deflect the blame for the situation or it mentions financial reparations it paid to survivors over *forty years* after the war ended. The voices of survivors are not often elevated into the canonical narrative of internment, which is passed over in a cursory manner.

Further case studies worth exploring include the "Federal Indian Boarding Schools," which were compulsory boarding schools that attempted to "kill the Indian" but "save the

man,"[165] American "manifest destiny" and Westward expansion (specifically, the wrongs committed against Native peoples), and nineteenth-century Chinese immigration to the United States. These are all moments that the United States might prefer not to dwell on when telling its history. But they happened, and they had real (harmful) impacts on many people. It is important to remember. It is important to seek the truth and honor the people the US oppressed, even if the canonical versions of history do not currently dedicate much time or attention to them.

Even so, as I've noted with both my case studies, canons are not stable. They are not permanent. They are not set in stone. Coverage of Rosa Parks has grown fuller in the years since her death in 2005. There are books and projects that collect the testimonies of internment survivors. People are realizing the importance of representation, which is a growing movement in fiction, and are finally also applying those arguments to the way history is presented.

We must be careful with the way we portray the past because those portrayals affect how we behave in the present—which shapes the future. It is important that children learn how difficult the Montgomery bus boycott really was so they are prepared for the challenges they will face in their own movements for change. History lessons provide a roadmap for how change (for better or worse) is effected, and children begin learning those lessons at an early age. History lessons teach children how the world operates—we can either reproduce existing structures and hierarchies, or we can challenge them. We can challenge all people—children and adults alike—to learn from history and build a better world. A more just world.

Who do we valorize? Who do we vilify? Who do we remember, and who do we forget? These are decisions, and these decisions have consequences. They can shape a person's worldview. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism are learned behaviors. Sure, they are

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[165] See Ward Churchill's book *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Booksellers and Publishers, 2004).

structurally enforced, but at their hearts, they are cultural diseases. We can treat the symptoms, but until we rip out the cultural root causes, we will never be able to fully cure society of these ills. It is our power and our responsibility to decolonize our histories and disrupt the canon. Who ever said that the literary canon can only be populated by long-dead white men? Who ever said that historical canon should be similar?

History and mythology truly aren't that different. In Chapter 3, I introduced political scientist David Michael Smith's commentary about myths, namely that myths are aspirational. This language is useful for talking about history, too. One reason we might blur the details surrounding history's villains and our past missteps is to convince ourselves that such things could never happen again—and certainly would never happen in the world and moment we personally inhabit. Because we manage to convince ourselves that only the most racist, irrational, depraved, *insert-whichever-negative-description here* among us could commit the atrocities that populate our history books, we can shield ourselves from taking responsibility for the atrocities that occur in the present moment. We can minimize the significance of moral ambiguity because history always makes things so clear-cut—surely we'd know if we were doing something equivalent to perpetuating chattel slavery or imprisoning an entire ethnic group based on racial prejudice.

On the other hand, there are also reasons we might distort the way we imagine our heroes to be. If we seek to avoid shouldering the burdens of being morally upright, we exaggerate how extraordinary those heroes are. We put heroes on a moral pedestal so we don't have to confront our own moral fortitude or lack thereof. Conversely, we might exaggerate the ordinary quality of our heroes and past moments of moral righteousness to convince ourselves that we, too, would do the right thing were we put in such a situation. We, too, would boycott the buses in Montgomery. We, too, would march from Selma to Montgomery. We, too, would shelter Jews fleeing the Holocaust, at great risk to ourselves and our families. We want to believe that we are morally righteous. We want to believe that moral rightness is easy and

accessible to the most ordinary among us—and to ourselves.

Myths are aspirational. So is history. We are not only uncomfortable with moral ambiguity in our stories and our histories; we are uncomfortable with it in the world we truly live in. But the fact of the matter is that life is not made up of clearly demarcated forks in the road. It is not always easy to tell which path leads to justice. There might not only be one path that does. In some cases, there might not be any path that leads purely to perfect, unmarred justice. These are the realities of our world, and it is important that we acknowledge such complications when we attempt to resurrect the past for the present. Only after confronting our discomfort with complexity and ambiguity can we learn how best to navigate those realities. Re-evaluating the way we approach history is an important step on that journey.

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