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Author(s): Ana S. Q. Liberato and John D. Foster

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ARTICLES

Representations and Remembrance: Tracing Civil Rights Meanings in the Narratives of Civil Rights Activists and Hollywood Filmmakers

Ana S. Q. Liberato · John D. Foster

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Abstract In this article, we examine the narratives of the Civil Rights Movement as presented in cinematic narratives and in accounts of civil rights leaders. We conduct a comparative analysis focusing on the comparison of the Civil Rights narratives of the Hollywood films The Long Walk Home (1989) and Driving Miss Daisy (1989), to the 1997 audio series Will the Circle Be Unbroken? In the analysis, we identify a Hollywood and a black consensus narrative, but there are important differences in the representational politics of black activists who participated during the Civil Rights Movement and that of Hollywood filmmakers. In particular, our findings reveal that the two Hollywood films downplay black agency, deploy the white heroin character, privilege sentimental aspects over historical references, limit the historical scope of the movement, and use a language of intimacy and optimism about race relations. These depictions sharply differ from the black consensus narrative in which life under Jim Crow, black activism, unity, struggle, and group resilience are emphasized.

Keywords Civil Rights Movement · Collective memory · Race relations · Symbolic violence · Whiteness · Critical reading · African American history

A. S. Q. Liberato (✉)
Sociology Department, University of Kentucky, 1573 Patterson Office Tower, Lexington, KY 40506, USA
e-mail: aslibe2@uky.edu
e-mail: ana.liberato@uky.edu

J. D. Foster
Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Mail Slot 4988, 1200 N. University Drive, Pine Bluff, AR 71601, USA
e-mail: jdfoster51@hotmail.com

Introduction

The 'interracial black-led'[1] Civil Rights Movement (CRM) marked an era that lasted 16 years (1954–1970; Griffin 2004: 548). While goals for the Movement were numerous, they included the pursuit for racial justice and an end to Jim Crow segregation in the South and informal segregation elsewhere. Furthermore, participants of the Movement worked to expand legal, economic, gender, and labor rights. Anti-discrimination laws in education and housing, and the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 stand as historical evidence of the Movement's success (Isaac 2008). The Movement is part of public memory as it is shown by the numerous museums that pay tribute to the memory of the movement, the hundreds of commemorative official and community events that we celebrate each year, and by the messages associated with the Movement that are created and transmitted in popular culture and public discourse across societal institutions (Romano and Raiford 2006).

The Movement is also a stage for the unfolding of important ideological struggles. Most recently, the clash of Civil Rights narratives on the 47th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech exemplifies the scope of these struggles. On that day, in front of an overwhelmingly conservative white audience, Glenn Beck delivered a Civil Rights narrative imbued with a message of Christian revival. His speech at the "Restoring Honor to America" rally was a religious and nationalist narrative in which he invoked the memories of Dr. King and the CRM, suggesting that these models of moral courage and achievement and sources of moral strength are desperately needed today to renew the American character and create a better future. In lieu of justice, human rights, or social conflict, it was the moral legacy of great Americans like the Founding Fathers and Dr. King that gave form to Beck's CR tale.[2] At a counter rally that day, in front of a mostly black audience of labor leaders, civil rights activists, and other progressives, Al Sharpton delivered a speech in which he linked past anti-racism struggles with the concrete achievements of the Movement, and lingering racial, gender, and class injustices. Sharpton and other speakers produced what we call a *continuity narrative*, marked by a focus on connecting past and present struggles for justice and equality. The contrasting meanings of Beck's *moralizing narrative* and

[1] Julian Bond uses the words "interracial black-led movement" to describe the CRM in the preface he wrote for the Curriculum Guide developed for the oral series *Will the Circle be Unbroken?*

[2] At the rally, Governor Sarah Palin also encouraged the spectators to focus on the value of honor and revere the accomplishments of the American nation. Palin laid claim to the legacy of the Movement and Dr. King as well, concentrating on the personal virtues of King and that of other Americans who have changed the course of history at times when America has needed it. Other conservative personalities have construed meanings of the Movement around themes of American greatness. For instance, Christina Hoff Sommers, Senior Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and political commentator Tammy Bruce minimized black agency and the social justice legacy of the CRM in appearances on C-Span earlier this year. For Sommers and Bruce, the Movement is essentially an American accomplishment and a symbol of America's greatness. They stripped the Movement of its political meanings, creating a narrative free of racial and class struggles. Sommers made comments on the subject in an appearance on C-Span *After Words* on 5/1/2010. Tammy Bruce's comments came in an appearance in C-span coverage of Los Angeles Festival of Books on 4/25/2010.

Sharpton's *continuity narrative* exemplify the political currency of the collective memory of the Movement.

It is our position that the political and historical importance of these struggles between narratives of the Civil Rights Movement will increase as US society moves deeper into color blindness, embrace a more atomistic form in race talk, and experience the dynamics and contradictions of a changing US system of class and racial stratification (Bonilla Silva 2006). The weak economy and the growth of anti-government sentiment invites for a revisionist reading of Civil Rights legislation.[3] These dynamic contexts also generate new opportunities for narrative struggles over the meaning of the CRM in our history even when much time has passed, perhaps easing some of the emotional pain experienced by aging and dying witnesses, particularly older African Americans and white southerners (Griffin 2004:546–549).

Scholars have already identified "the consensus narrative" as the most prevalent feature of popular and official recollections of the CRM (Isaac 2008). The "consensus narrative" can be defined as a socially constructed historical script in which the Movement appears in its less politically threatening and revolutionary form. The consensus narrative consistently stresses the achieved collective harmony in society after the Movement, produce a less radical political version of Martin Luther King's leadership by deemphasizing his critique of US foreign policy and the capitalist system, deemphasizes women's participation and community, and poses narrative limits to the activism of women like Rosa Parks (Isaac 2008:50–52; Romano and Raiford 2006). The consensus narrative limits the time frame (1954–1968) and the scope and legacy of the Movement (Isaac 2008).

It has been pointed out that the consensus narrative produces "occlusion" or "blockage" of mnemonic opportunities for "critically examining and complicating collective memory and privileged traditions of remembering" (Nasstrom 1999: 128). The "occlusion" also impairs our ability to understand the complexity of "the forgotten culture of the civil rights movement story" (54) and "to examine the complex relationship of women to an evolving discourse on African American leadership" (Nasstrom 1999: 135). In addition, Wills (2005:126–128) questions the portrayal of Dr. King's non-violent approach as a feel-good tale in the consensus narrative, which he believes is a way of downplaying the episodes of victimization suffered by non-violent blacks in the hands of segregationist whites. In a related study of remembering the CRM, Rubeck (2006) found evidence of the aforementioned "occlusion" in mainstream news media. She identified not only conservative co-optation of King symbolism in *Newsweek*, but also the containment of the radicalism of the Movement on the *CBS Evening News*.

In this article, we examine the narratives of the CRM as presented in cinematic narratives and in accounts of civil rights leaders. We analyze how the films *A Long Walk Home* (1990) and *Oscar Award winner Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), produced and

[3] Newt Gingrich had to clarify comments he made back in March of 2010 in regard to Civil Rights legislation and the Democratic Party. Gingrich said that Civil Rights legislation shattered the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson and the Democratic Party, insisting that President Obama's comprehensive health care legislation would have the same negative effects for Democrats. Gingrich clarified that he was not suggesting that the signing of Civil Rights legislation was wrong, but that the federal government had "overreached." Within Gingrich's conservative-libertarian framework, the CRM and its legacy are reduced to policy and political calculations.

directed by white filmmakers, represent and talk about the CRM and reproduce the "consensus narrative." We compare these two cinematic narratives to those of black activists in the 1997 Peabody Award-winning oral history series *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* By examining both texts, we intend to uncover the extent to which they differ from each other and on how civil rights activists and Hollywood filmmakers frame and legitimize their accounts. We pay attention to the ideological and representational frames they utilize in the creation of meaning about the Movement.

Film, Oral History, and Collective Memory

Unlike the definition of history, in which the remembered past no longer has any impact on our lives, collective memory refers to "the active past that forms our identities" (Olick 1999:335). Collective memory refers to shared representations of the past (Kansteiner 2002) and to "the process by which people come to recall, lay claim to, interpret, narrate, and represent the past in a collectively agreed upon fashion." (Isaac 2008:50). Films and the oral histories are artifacts of memory and as such are important sources of information for understanding common and contradictory societal values, processes of social change, power struggles, and perceptions of identity and history in society (Wertsch and Roediger 2008).

As "sites of memory," films and oral histories embody the dynamism that permeates the relationship between the past and the present and between people's perceptions and social change (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Schwartz 1991). They are two platforms for the formation of rhetorical and ideological messages (Wertsch and Roediger 2008). They contain cultural expressions that are essential for the promotion of dominant political practices and official forms of historical identity (Connerton 1989; Billig 1990). They do so by supplying references of legitimized ideals, values, obligations, and notions of the right and wrong and group membership (Nora 1984; Billig 1990).

Collective memory plays a role in social conflict and in struggles over the legitimization of social institutions, policies, values, ideas, and rhetorical forms (McLaurin 2000; Uchida 1999; Wood 1999). An example is the challenge posed by the collective memory of the CRM to white supremacist institutions and ideologies, including that of American exceptionalism. For instance, by invoking the collective memory of black oppression, civil rights leaders achieved a poignant critique of the narratives of our (white) founding fathers, regarded by major social institutions and political and social agents as the creators of the greatest society in human history (Connerton 1989).

After the CRM, many white Americans continue to struggle dealing with the contradictory evidence of the continuing significance of race in US society (Bonilla Silva 2006). Older and younger generations of black Americans feel and think differently about the Movement, with younger and middle-class blacks being more ambivalent about the significance of the Movement and of the continuation of its legacy (Turner-Lee 2002). Today, new ideological resources are available for guiding race talk: posing as "color-blind," de-emphasizing the collective memory of black oppression, and insisting that race is not longer significant. This pattern of race talk constitutes a new discursive action, which is characterized by white ambivalence

towards the ever-continuing significance of race limiting opportunities for black Americans and other minorities (Bonilla Silva 2006; Foster 2009). This new discursive action is a manifestation of both the "New Racism" (Bonilla Silva 2006) and distorted communication (Habermas 2003). Elite whites and the social institutions they dominate may distort communication by effectively excluding black representations from public discourse and subsequently from collective memory. Cultural products such as films help to reproduce values and beliefs associated with hegemonic racial ideologies, such as color blindness.

Hence, many elite white Americans, through their institutional power, are in the position to monopolize the social representation of race and infuse the race talk with their own experience and perspectives. This institutional power is exercised through influence over what, how, when, and why we remember as a society. Through official commemorations, ceremonies, and monuments, specific forms of collective remembering are created, many reflecting an ideology based on whiteness.

We examine this ideology in our critical reading of the two films and the audio series. We accept the notion that memory is locally produced and treat the narratives of Civil Rights leaders and Hollywood films as "sites of memory." We view these narratives as products of social experiences linked to identity and regard the social and political conditions in which they were produced (Antze and Lambek 1996). We focus on the ideological messages and explore the implications of these messages. We interrogate the larger structures of power that support the narrative work of Hollywood filmmakers and examine the ways in which Civil Rights leaders' narratives challenge the hegemonic discourses being produced by Hollywood filmmakers.

Research Design

After listening to the audio histories and watching the films, we isolated and analyzed themes and meanings in the specified set of texts. We identify categories of meanings and discourses ("ways of looking at and seeing things") emphasized in the narratives of Civil Rights activists and of Hollywood filmmakers, which evidence forms of knowledge, thought, and interaction which are relevant to our critical analysis. We identify, quantify, and analyze themes, symbols, visual discourses, and meanings, and analyzed the relationships between themes and make inferences about the messages within the texts. This approach most adequately provides sustained access to the observations, descriptions, associations, and subjective experiences embedded in the films and oral histories and to the processes through which these are formed and legitimized, which is crucial for developing critical readings of cultural products. This approach provided data for exploring how cultural products carry meanings of temporality, identity, and emotions.

The Texts

A Long Walk Home and *Driving Miss Daisy* are widely recognized and highly regarded films among critics. As a theme-focused Civil Rights tale, *The Long Walk*

Home gives us the opportunity to examine representational politics of one landmark event of the Movement, namely the Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama while *Driving Miss Daisy* gives us access to a more general story of interracial friendship and personal transformation in the Deep South of the 1950s and 1960s. The culture of the time, the CRM and the changes it brought about, are the backdrop of the *Daisy* story. The oral ("and aural") series by the Southern Regional Council is a powerful audio testimony of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1960s comparable to the documentary series *Eyes on the Price* (Levy and Peter 2000). The audio series feature the narratives of 250 Civil Rights activists (Spears 1999) distributed in 13 h of recording divided into 26 parts (Levy and Peter 2000). For the purpose of this article, we focus on disks three (The Cradle of the Confederacy episode), four (Walk and Pray and The Bus Boycott episodes), and five (Montgomery and Rocking the Cradle episodes) of the series that focuses on the 1956 bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.[4]

We recognize that film and oral history are two different sets of texts. One is a documentary and the other is the work of fiction, although both do require the intervention of a team of writers, editors, consultants, researchers, and other actors to be produced and disseminated locally or elsewhere. The Southern Regional Council sees the oral series as a genuine and truthful recollection of the events of that Era.[5] The Council sees public radio audiences, history teachers, schools, and civic groups as the key audiences of the series.[6] In contrast, for the Hollywood producers involved, the two films are fictional tales of the CRM that are representative of some of the lived experiences of black and white Americans at the time. And unlike the Council, a social justice organization committed to social change, human rights, and the enhancement of democracy, education, and race relations in the South,[7] Hollywood filmmakers tend to have a diverse, mutable, and often contradictory set of motives for creating a particular piece of work. Therefore, while the SRC sees the oral series as an instrument for the enrichment of democracy through the increased collective awareness of our unequal past, for Hollywood filmmakers,[8] entertainment, artistic expression, education, and monetary and symbolic capital gain may significantly mediate what they create and the relationship they have with what they create.

[4] The arrest of Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955 sparked the organization of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The rapidly formed Montgomery Improvement Association led the campaign that started on December 5th along with the Women's Political Council which spread the word of the Boycott among black citizens throughout the city. At the time, nearly 75% of passengers were black and all bus drivers were white. The Black population of Montgomery was around 40,000. The Boycott ended on December 20, 1956. Today, the Boycott is a landmark site of memory of the Civil Rights Movement (Davis 1998). History had registered successful acts of resistance to segregation in public transportation by African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama. In the year 1902, transportation segregation was modified after a 2 years boycott, but segregation was reinstated in 1906 (Hampton and Fayer 1990).

[5] The Council acknowledges the tendency of storytellers to exaggerate, downplay, or underline particular events according to present psychological, political, or cultural needs. The Council recognizes the limitations of not incorporating the narratives of those who opposed the Movement, and not being exhaustive in the number of narrators they included in the series (See Oral History Curriculum pages vi and vii).

[6] See The Oral History Curriculum, Southern Regional Council 1997.

[7] See the Oral History Curriculum. Southern Regional Council 1997.

[8] Stated in the Oral History Curriculum.

That said, we do not see this difference in authorship, form, and target audience as a problem for developing our critical analysis of the texts since the purpose of this study is not to determine whether one narrative is more historically truthful or more political than the other. We are rather concerned with the differences in the frames of remembrance utilized by black and white storytellers. We are interested neither on how whites are depicted in the narratives of civil rights activists nor on how other non-Hollywood memory makers remember or represent the Civil Rights Era. Our focus is to explore the texts as distinct sites of memory of the Movement in order to establish narrative comparisons and identify the narrative practices of different memory makers.

Analysis

The Long Walk Home: Consensus through a Female White Messiah

The Long Walk Home (1990) focuses on the lives of a poor African American and a middle-class white family in the context of the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. The film creates a good vs. evil Civil Rights story in which a middle class white woman saves the white self and contributes to the Movement in an act of self-sacrifice. The most wanted defeat of racist whites in Montgomery gives legitimacy to the story. The film is based on a true story written by Montgomery native John Cork. In this film, housewife Miriam Thompson (Sissy Spacek) develops empathetic feelings towards her maid Odessa Cotter (Whoopie Goldberg) when she watches her walk to work and back home every day in support of the organized bus boycott that is taking place. As it is said in the movie, Miriam wanted to act 'like the rest of the niggers.' The film presents the transformation of Miriam from a home-bounded wife to a conscious and active supporter of the black struggle. Audiences could see Miriam driving Odessa to and from work during the boycott as many white women did during the boycott. Initially, Odessa sits in the back seat, but later Miriam asks her to sit by her side, thereby violating the Southern code of interaction between white women and their maids. Miriam, who indeed becomes the principal character of the film, is transformed by the activism of black Montgomery. Miriam melancholically revisits memories of the black maid who had raised her but with whom she could not develop a closer relationship due to segregation. In the end, Miriam starts to feel estranged from and disgusted by the racist society in which she lives. Miriam struggles and grows, and starts to see Odessa as a human being, not just as the 'colored help'[9]who is there to complete household tasks for her.

This story emphasizes the contradictions that characterized white families in those days. The 'state of mind' of the main characters is carefully and effectively conveyed through dialog, figure behavior, speech, and framing (Villarejo 2007). The audience can appreciate how most characters live in a permanent state of confusion, ambivalence, and hyper-emotionality that translates at times into anger and rebellion and other times into conformity. Miriam challenges racism and patriarchy by helping Odessa in her familial and political struggles even against her husband's wishes.

[9] Expression used by many white southerners to refer to black maids working in their households.

However, the sensitive eye of the critic can see how throughout the film, the filmmaker places Miriam in a position of narrative and visual privilege, vis-à-vis Odessa, thus enhancing her humanity and importance in the story. Odessa is there as if just representing the face of the oppressed, united, and resolute black community that the director portrays in the film.

Norman Thompson (Dwight Schultz), Miriam's husband, is also in a state of emotional turmoil and ambivalence. He is sometimes sensitive towards Odessa, but was extremely concerned with fitting into white supremacist Montgomery society. Although the filmmakers clearly portray him as a sexist and racist, they concomitantly type him as an indirect victim of the racist social structures existing in Montgomery Alabama. He is not held accountable for participating in white racism.

Ambiguity is also a featured characteristic in the representation of the city of Montgomery. The city is portrayed as troubled but strong, prosperous, warm, and in progressive evolution, all at the same time. Neither the social inequalities illustrated in the film nor the needs for a boycott to bring down the unjust social order are presented as signifiers of the city's backwardness. Instead, Montgomery is presented as a place in transformation, a social setting where social progression is germinating as a consequence of the actions of good whites and well-intentioned and culturally and politically unified blacks.

Black characters do not escape this existential ambiguity either. Odessa, for example, was a Rosa Parks in potential. She is a woman of courage and dignity and so are her family and community. She fully supports the bus boycott with certainty of doing the right thing. She admirably walks—at times without shoes—instead of riding the bus from her home to work in support of the bus boycott. But at the same time she shows this integrity, she also is incapable of asserting her humanity in the Thompson household. Her alleged strength is diminished by her submissive behavior throughout the film. She is obedient to the Thompsons, her husband and children, and pastor. She is essentially the antithesis of Miriam Thompson. Her submissiveness and servility makes it very hard for audiences to focus on her strength. The film provides no answers to this question. Neither does the film provide insights about Odessa's submissiveness, which is represented as a personal characteristic rather than as the result of her subordinate position in society and in the Thompson's household. Was Odessa's compliant attitude a mere role performance? Indeed, many black women during the Civil Rights struggle appeared passive and disengaged in the front stage of white households, but they were very active and committed to the Movement in their own communities. They deployed compliant and submissive attitudes as a strategy for everyday resistance and as a means to maintain employment. This complexity is not clearly conveyed in the film.

The frames of remembrance in this film privilege sentimental aspects over historical references and accountability. A heavy ideological burden is conveyed through overplaying feelings and emotions. Characters' interactions and mental structures suggest that segregation was a system beyond human control. Racist and/or progressive ideas were taking control over people's minds and hearts, and this was mediating the state of race relations in Montgomery. In the end, the filmmakers create a historical narrative that excused rather than challenged the foundations of segregation by emphasizing emotionality over social structure and by creating a redeemer white heroin (Vera and Gordon 2003).

Although the story calls attention to the existing inequalities between whites and blacks and between men and women, and to blacks' responses to racism, the film lacks a historical emphasis on the significance of the bus boycott and the rituals and customs that made the movement successful. The South was clearly depicted as a site of oppression, but in the end, the presence of white heroes neutralized the strength of this oppression and diminished the critical edge of the story. Precisely, the credibility of the narration is legitimized by the humanity of a white messiah (Miriam), who engaged in "self-sacrifice" to cooperate with the Boycott (Vera and Gordon 2003).

The Long Walk Home sentimentalizes black/white conflict while relegating black agency. According to the narratives, both black and whites are supposed to be equally oppressed by segregation, which the filmmakers depict as the creation of an unidentified and generalized group of racist white southerners. By creating a dichotomy between the white self—that is, the "nonracist" white versus the "racist" white—the notion of individual racism is reinforced over the reality of systemic racism.

Moreover, there is a problematic treatment of segregation and the CRM in this film. There is not an effort in problematizing the linguistic order of the Thompson household (white women are Miss or Mrs. while black women were always called by their first name), neither in raising questions about who created segregation, describing how it was maintained, how it was challenged, and how it represented the centrality of black activism in challenging the system. The displacement of black agency is crucial in making Mrs. Thompson the center of the story and in strengthening themes of redemption, reconciliation, and victimization over themes related to domination and black resistance and struggle. Such a historical narrative reinforces the consensus narrative and the readably available myths about the perpetual goodness and rightness of the white self. The language, the poetics, and the cinematic effects of the film ultimately produced a reductive, palatable, and uncomplicated narrative of the Boycott and the Movement (Villarejo 2007; Ramírez-Berg 2002). That said, *The Long Walk Home* is "more progressive" than *Gone with the Wind and Imitation of Life* (Vera and Gordon 2003:111), presents a more wholesome face of the black family, and calls audience's attention to interracial friendship, racism, and sexism.

Driving Miss Daisy: Consensus through Denial

The film *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) centers on the long "odd" relationship between Daisy Werthan (Jessica Tandy) and Hoke Coleburn (Morgan Freeman). Daisy is a stubborn Jewish woman from Atlanta who struggles to accept that she is losing her sight. Her son Boolie (Dan Ackroyd) decides to hire Hoke as her chauffeur after she has an accident in her car. Hoke worked for Daisy from 1948 until 1963 when he retires. Later in 1973, Daisy is taken to a nursing home where she is expected to spend the rest of her life. The relationship between Daisy and Hoke survives all of those years.

This film resembles *The Long Walk Home* in many ways. Maybe the most common features are conformist behavior of Odessa and Hoke, the simplification of history and the presence of the white heroin. Although categorized as a comedy (a peculiar detail in itself), this film seriously deals with the issue of race relations in the US South in the pre- and post-CRM period. Despite an

opportunity to expose the disastrous effects of racism on its victims, the film all but avoids this, focusing instead on the relationship between Daisy and Hoke.

Like in *The Long Walk Home*, *Driving Miss Daisy* effectively illustrates the existence of social inequality with contrasting images of wealthy whites and black servants. But in *Driving Miss Daisy* inequality is only weakly associated with the racial order in the film narrative. The film denounces racism, but the story does not engage audiences to think about the roots or sources of it nor does it explore its daily manifestations or larger consequences. Racism emerges as an amorphous force with little structure or history. This is the same standpoint on which Miss Daisy's character frame is grounded in the film. Defined by idealism and naiveté, her character learns to befriend Hoke even when she seemed to lack awareness of his struggles and the historical moment shaping their lives. Daisy could not even understand how it was possible that an old man like Hoke could not read or write, or how anyone could bomb a church and hurt others. Despite this naiveté (never marked as ignorance and/or indifference), Daisy expresses her strong support for the CRM and Dr. King (she describes Hoke as "wonderful" in a scene, and even drove the distance to attend one of his events).

The intersection of innocence and senility produces ambiguity in the treatment of racism in this film. For instance, Daisy uses offensive language at times, but her expressions are suggested to be rooted in her senile condition.[10] If she was a racist, she did not know it. She was innocent and nonparticipant, and therefore protected of judgment. The ethnicization of Daisy—she is an old Jewish woman—enhanced this protection by calling attention to existing anti-Jewish prejudice and her status as a senior citizen. Daisy's improbable naiveté, which is the voice of the film, equally protects audiences from the pains of a serious and critical interrogation of racism.

Hoke plays the obedient and caring old black man in the film, fitting nicely into the cinematic tradition of the caricature 'uncle' (Bogle 2001). He is a very quiet supporter of the CRM unlike Odessa was in *A Long Walk Home*. Hoke is a conformist and several times replies to Daisy's questionings with the phrase "that is how things are." He looked down and said "it will always be the same ones Miss Daisy," when Daisy asked him who had bombed the black church. He seemingly wanted to avoid mentioning the KKK for unclear reasons. The allusion to the KKK and the church bombing brought to the front extreme acts of racism that could be juxtaposed to "polite" or even naïve manifestations of racism like those exercised by Daisy in the early stages of the film (Bonilla Silva 2006).

Despite his subservient role, Hoke is Daisy's resource for discovery and transformation, and the embodiment of the long-lived subordination of African Americans in the South. Like Daisy, he is honest and loyal as friend, and is open to love despite of living under the shadows of hate. It is precisely the theme of friendship that allows the filmmakers to create the delicate tale of redemption and southern optimism that Driving *Miss Daisy* is. But the plot exhibits very serious wholes, nonetheless. For example, the story sets Hoke and Daisy to live in a very malign social system, which is the substance of the narrative. But Daisy and Hoke seemed not to have been seriously cognizant much less affected or troubled by this most decadent system all their lives. Daisy never knew in detail the characteristics of life in the

[10] In one occasion, Daisy quickly thought of Hoke as a thief when she could not find a favorite food item in the kitchen Her prejudice along with her senility and "female Jewish stubbornness" reflect the scene.

segregated South, and Hoke apparently took society at face value. Interestingly though, both characters benefited from the social and political changes that the CRM brought to Atlanta. Towards the end of the film, the audience sees Hoke's better off granddaughter driving him around the city; hence suggesting that he no longer needed to be a chauffeur and that his family was certainly having a much better life. Also, Hoke and Daisy were now free to celebrate their friendship in public without fear of retaliation. *Driving Miss Daisy* gives us all this expected happy ending, one in which we do not need to engage history or feel anger, pain, or guilt.

In general, the film *Driving Miss Daisy* is the ultimate "consensus story." Black activism, collective struggle, black culture, violence, and a subversive Dr. King are largely deemphasized in the symbolic and material narratives of the film. The essential good nature of human kind, more specifically the goodness of the white Southerner carried the story through a language of intimacy, solidarity, and goodwill. There was not much space in Daisy's ride for raw bigotry, hate, fear, violence, and resistance all of which significantly marked the history of the South since slavery.

Contrasting Voices: Hollywood Narratives Versus *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?*

Will The Circle Be Unbroken? features the oral accounts of black activists of the CRM. The oral series present a consensus narrative based on images of blacks as a unified and organized group in struggle for justice and equality. A distinctive characteristic of the Bus Boycott episode is the emphasis on the recollections of key black activists in Montgomery (e.g., Celia Evans, E.D. Nixon, Ines Baskin, Fred Gray). Another characteristic is the emphasis on group membership and the depiction of a sense of an evolving collective trajectory. The narratives of Civil Rights activists focus on the role of black leadership, black organizations, and the coordination between black groups all over the state of Alabama. The storytellers underline the enthusiasm, commitment, and resilience of African American leaders and community. While the film *The Long Walk Home* emphasizes the emotions of the period during the bus boycott, black narratives tells a story of cooperation and togetherness, and the way in which this cooperation assured the success of the Boycott and the Movement. Their narratives celebrate the effective work of church ministers, the Negro press, black lawyers, black teachers, and other black activists in coordinating and promoting the boycott despite threats of violence and lack of resources:

> The time had come for resistance and we had good leadership. It was something that was contagious.
>
> Everybody helped everybody. Nobody passed anybody walking without stopping and picking them [the boycotters].
>
> Everything was coming together to say this is my time. I can become a living part of history as a black person. I can help change things.
>
> We had…secretaries...ministers who gave themselves to working with the organizations.

This sense of unity and togetherness is depicted as central to the Movement success since it accordingly served as a mechanism to neutralize the actions of Montgomery officials, the police department, the KKK, and the White Citizens Council. In the end, solidarity, empathy, forgiveness, and awareness were defined within the frame of interest of the Movement. Moreover, unlike the two films analyzed, in which the actions and intentions of whites took center stage, the sense of defiance and blacks taking charge of their destiny are the important themes in black narratives:

> We organized the Montgomery Improvement Association of which Martin was the president. It was meticulously organized. We had very good minds to do things. We had a lot of help in organizing.
>
> It was time for a change…I gave it all I had to the best of my ability because growing up here in Montgomery and seeing things and wondering why they had to be like this so far as me being black, I knew it was time.
>
> This was bigger than a boycott would ever be. It was the flame that became the black revolution in America and the world.
>
> You can change a system, a system that controls everything…The power structure was totally White. In order to get along, in order to survive this [the boycott] you have to do.
>
> God picked Montgomery to make it an international image of injustice to black people in America.

In the oral series, black activists make it very clear that blacks foresaw an end to segregation and harsh economic conditions through organized social protest, mobilization, strong community and leadership, and by challenging the legitimacy of Jim Crow laws in court. They did not want to wait "until white folks change their mood" to bring about social change, as the films analyzed may have suggested. Black activists bring to the center the importance of race and the pain caused by racism: "We took a whole lot...We were beaten, we were arrested, our homes were bombed, our churches were bombed, and we took all that."

The oral narratives associated whites with recrimination, aggression, arrests, violence, bombings, and killings. The actions of The White Citizens Council in Montgomery are made visible, especially its role in firing and threatening blacks who supported the bus boycott. The cooperative actions of supportive whites are not ignored, but they are not highly empathized in the recollections. The transcendent black leadership and the struggle of the black community are the story. Initial problems, like "the rift among blacks" and lack of volunteers in Montgomery, are mentioned in tandem with the efforts by the leadership to overcome them and achieve unity and success. In contrast, in *The Long Walk Home*, we saw a landmark scene featuring distressed blacks and supportive whites being coerced by Council members in a simultaneous portrait of black oppression and white solidarity.

Another difference is the representation of the black self as a unified group with a strong sense of history and a firm commitment to the Movement. The black self is

rather passive or half-committed to the Movement in both Hollywood films. One activist had this to say about those who sacrificed for the Movement:

> I think it was the masses, the people who were not teachers and preachers...or, say people who had not had a formal education, who kept the morale going, because their need was the greatest.

This viewpoint contrasts with the portrayal of common folks like Odessa or Hoke in the Hollywood films. As portrayed by black storytellers, the role of liberal whites during the Movement was subordinate to blacks. The activists talked about specific aspects to the success of the Movement, including events, ceremonies, speeches, and activities within the context of struggle against Jim Crow laws. They did not convey notions of ambiguity in the direction and desires of blacks or the Movement. The activists personified and identified social structures in the existence of segregation laws that they insisted needed to be changed.

Black storytellers constructed the meaningful episodes of the bus boycott around the principle of black solidarity and resistance. There are multiple references of the work of the Women's Political Council and the Montgomery Improvement Association, which helped organized and carry out the boycott. The oral narratives convey a strong sense of pride in the work of the Association, which was able to transform the 1-day boycott into much larger movement against Jim Crow. The activists celebrated the success of the car pool operations during the boycott and portrayed this success as a symbol of black people's ability to challenge segregation and make their own history. The destruction of Jim Crow and the uplifting and liberation of black people shape and legitimize the story.

Overall, the branch of consensus narrative featured in the oral series portrayed the Movement as a well-organized machine with members who lived it—they "knew" it—in sharp contrast with the Hollywood consensus narrative. This narrative is rich in tales of struggle, cultural pride, racial consciousness, and collective strength. Early shortcomings, conflict, or divisions within the Movement or the black population in general are not a significant part of the black consensus story. The oral series stressed black selfhood by positioning black culture in the telling of the story and in the formulation of resistance. The series widely uses black music, proverbs and poetry in the storytelling. The presence of black culture reinforced a sense of group membership and a shared past and present. The consensus narrative of black storytellers places great emphasis on racial struggles and the activism of Dr. King. The non-violent approach by Dr. King is represented as a model for the Movement and society.

Representations of a culturally and politically unified black self are not as meaningful in the Hollywood films analyzed in this paper. These films position the white self at the center of the Civil Rights narrative. This centrality is often achieved through the increase of the number of white messiahs in a particular scene. For example, in the last scene in the film *The Long Walk Home*, we saw how a group of black people united in singing a song on the streets, at the very moment when they were being threatened with violence by racist whites. This scene featured Mrs. Thompson and other whites coming to challenge racist whites and support black people. The black singing conveyed identity and struggle in that scene, but the presence of Mrs. Thompson and the camera focus on the whites involved diminished black agency, and as a result the singing signified victimization rather than resistance

Discussion

The films *Driving Miss Daisy* and *A Long Walk Home* and the oral series *Will the Circle be Unbroken?* give us access to specific operating frames of remembrance utilized by Hollywood filmmakers and Civil Rights leaders. Both Hollywood filmmakers and black activists made the Civil Rights Movement to matter by depicting it as a source of positive social change. The consensus narratives of Hollywood and black storytellers suggest that the Movement was important because it brought about necessary changes and because it transformed the country and made it a better place for all. However, the narratives of the Civil Rights activists and Hollywood filmmakers produced a distinct historical memory of the Movement. For instance, the difference is manifested in the selection of themes and the way in which these themes are deployed and discussed. The order of remembrance of Hollywood films privileges the role of the "white heroin" in promoting and achieving social change in our society. This central role played by the "white heroine," reaffirms notions of the goodness of the white self, as well as our self-identity as a nation of exceptional historical fabric and future (Vera and Gordon 2003). The oral series privilege themes such as life under Jim Crow, black activism, community, leadership, racism, and black culture. The Hollywood consensus narrative too incorporates notions of unchallenged black unity and activism, and celebrates black music as a source of inspiration and community.

The abovementioned black consensus narrative also appears in other works of oral history by non-blacks, like it is the case of the Montgomery Adviser's oral series *Voices of the Boycott (2005).*[11] In this powerful oral documentary, E.D. Nixon, Fred Gray, Lucille Times, and numerous other Civil Rights sympathizers and activists tell a very personal story of the Boycott, with plenty of familial and individual details about segregated Montgomery, the Movement, and the people who made it. Like in the Circle, black actions, resilience, unity, and determination give shape to boycott stories in this oral series. The King-centered documentary King: A Film Record... Montgomery to Memphis (1970) by white Director Sydney Lemet also reproduces the black consensus narrative, particularly notions of togetherness, decisiveness, and cultural pride. Dr. King and the unified black leadership are icons of social change in the documentary.[12] We found unity and resilience to be essential to representations of blackness in memories of segregation by senior black Floridians in interviews carried out in 2000 (Liberato et al. 2008).

Jeffrey Wright reproduces the black consensus narrative in his HBO film *Boycott* (2001), although he more emphatically represents tensions and disagreement taking place among the Movement leaders.[13] For example, the movie calls attention to

[11] The Montgomery Advertiser produced a Boycott Anniversary package in 2005 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Boycott. The package contains a 44-page special section called "Voices of the Boycott," which features interviews with boycott supporters and organizers. The package also features a book, entitled "They Walked to Freedom: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott" by Kenneth Hare, and a website dedicated to the memory of the Boycott.

[12] Similar representations appear in the short documentary and commemorative stamps series 10 Milestones of the Civil Rights Movement (To Form a More Perfect Union; 2004).

[13] Spike Lee's Four Little Girls (1997) draws on themes of struggle, unity, and resistance by black people to tell the story of the 16th Baptist Church bombing on September 15th, 1963.

feelings of resentment among some blacks who questioned the fact that preachers did not normally ride the bus, but were proposing a bus boycott. *Boycott* depicts tensions over the organization of the boycott between the NAACP and the Montgomery Improvement Association, between the old and new leadership, and between those who supported the non-violence approach and those who did not. The film also shows a troubled Dr. King who struggles to balance his work as an activist and as a pastor of a church. The indifference of some members of the black community and the lack of volunteers are also brought up in the narrative of the film. Like in the oral series, these obstacles are overcome and come to represent the strength of the leadership and the Movement. This film perfectly follows the narrative order of Awakenings, the first episode of the documentary film Eyes on the Prize (1987).

Like in the case of the Long Walk Home and Driving Miss Daisy, the consensus narrative gave shape to Stanley Kramer's Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967) and Alan Parker's Mississippi Burning (1988). These films equally emotionalized conflict, de-centered black subjectivity, deployed white heroines/heroes, and eased feelings of pain and guilt by making extreme bigots the only responsible for racism (Vera and Gordon 2003). These films reproduced a narrative in which white patriarchy, in the case of Kramer's film, and law enforcement institutions in the case of Parker's, are protected and reaffirmed despite of the anti-racist motives that may have influenced the making of such films.

Conclusions

There seems to be a predominance of the consensus narrative in Civil Rights storytelling by Hollywood filmmakers and in the work of oral series. In the case of Hollywood, even when telling painful and compelling Civil Rights stories, their work tends to conform to the Hollywoodesque predilection for feel good storytelling. Hollywood civil rights tales lack notions of historical continuity and suggest consensus and well-being as inevitable outcomes of our trouble past. Black storytellers also deploy a kind of consensus narrative in their Civil Rights stories—we have referred to it as black consensus narrative in this piece. Struggle, unity, and resilience by black Americans are the key components of this narrative. Conflict, sexism, organizational challenges, classism, apathy or indifference are deemphasized in this branch of consensus narrative. Events, biographies, and profiles are depicted as final, without acknowledgement of alternative narratives, or the value of potential untold stories still waiting to be heard.[14]

[14] In general, consensus scripts have been systematically challenged by the work of numerous scholars (Romano and Raiford 2006). For instance, just earlier this year, Danielle McGuire (2010) introduced a sexual framework for interpreting the origin of the Bus Boycott in Montgomery. McGuire places the rape of a 24-year-old black woman in 1944 and the sexual abuse of black women by white men at the center of civil right struggles in Alabama and elsewhere. According to McGuire, it was the generalized rape and assault of black women that sparked protest and activism among blacks throughout the South in the mid 1940s and through the later 1960s. McGuire's work invites to a more gendered memoralization of the movement.

The consensus scripts predominate among numerous texts regardless authorship and form. Oral history more closely reflects the black consensus narrative while films more clearly adhere to the dominant consensus narrative. The documentary genre (e.g., Eyes on the Prize, King: A Film Record...Montgomery to Memphis) reproduces some aspects of the black consensus narrative in its telling of the Boycott and the larger Civil Rights story.

Since films reach a wider audience as compared to oral history, and provoke more reactions from the mainstream, and as the Hollywood industry dominates the "field" of cultural production in the United States (Reynaud 2001), the two films analyzed—and the consensus narrative—are likely to have a stronger influence in the way that many Americans remember the CRM than the black consensus narrative. As we found in the examination of the two films, Hollywood's narratives construct a memory of the Movement that does not significantly challenge white supremacy and as such they become vehicles for the assertion of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Since these narratives are produced from the position of dominant agents in the field of cultural production, they are more prone to be consumed without further interrogation by both white and black audiences.

While Hollywood's narratives reflect the "internalized experiences" of white domination, the narratives of Civil Rights activists offer a different standpoint, one that contest the representations of race relations found in the two films analyzed. The oral series challenged Hollywood's ambivalence towards questioning white supremacy and its commitment to normalize racial conflict by ignoring power struggles, the hardships of life during segregation and by leaving racist institutions off the hook. Moreover, the oral series indicate that civil rights leaders—and many older blacks—derive "cognitive respect," collective esteem, and a sense of individual and group identity from Civil Rights stories (Honneth 1996: 129).

Further, exploring the narratives of civil rights leaders and Hollywood storytellers represents an opportunity for engaging history, reexamining the meaning of the consensus narratives of the Movement, and expanding the interpretations and deliberations of our past, present, and future (Peterson 2001). In particular, the study of the Hollywood CRM narratives yields opportunities to interrogate the cultural and political dominance of elite whites and to communicate experiences of pain, guilt, and survival. If and once we give these accounts of difference and struggle their due attention, they may help raise consciousness of historical experiences that had otherwise been avoided, ignored, or even discredited, boosting the emergence of new collective memories and promoting social closeness among groups. Meanwhile, the study of narratives by black civil rights leaders gives us access to the ideological mechanisms through which they construct specific representational frameworks to challenge white storytelling, influence the discussion of history, and reinforce their authority.

Social critics, as well as old and new Civil Rights activists, must continue with their examination of cultural products and activities that trace, recreate, or produce 'official, collective, or individual' CRM memories (Romano and Raiford 2006). This process allows us to create new narrative domains capable of evidencing and challenging the symbolic violence that is exercised through different forms of storytelling. This process also allows identifying new political meanings of the movement and new ideological struggles and political identities and alliances taking place in our increasingly diverse and complex society. The tracing of the meaning of

the movement is too an instrument of assessment of racial interactions in society as well as the state of "recognition" of black struggles and its importance in shaping American history. This is particularly true in the context of color blindness, or as it is now called, post-racial America. Tracing new and "harder" memories of the Movement can help maintain "the powerful legacy" of the Movement across generations in a post-Barack Obama context (Metress 2008:148). Keeping the contesting aspects of this legacy through a *continuity narrative* is an important way of exposing the ideological underpinnings of a reinvented white supremacy. This legacy should not be lost as the numbers of multi-racial individuals, immigrant blacks, and people of color in general continues to increase along with their practice of resistance, and as the dichotomist American system of racial stratification experiences restructuration (Bonilla Silva 2006; Yancey 2003).

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