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Legacies and Liabilities of an Insurgent Past

Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr., on the House and Senate Floor

At a ceremony held in 1986 to install a bust of Martin Luther King, Jr., alongside those of other national heroes in the U.S. Capitol, former King associate Vincent Harding reminded the audience that King himself probably would have joined the demonstrators outside the Capitol protesting American policy in Central America (Thelen 1987: 436). Harding's comment captures the tension between commemoration and dissent, or, better, between state-sponsored remembrance and state-targeted opposition that is the subject of this essay.

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Certainly, states have good reason to commemorate social protest. Nations reforge the bonds of citizenship by celebrating their revolutionary origins. Current political regimes may warrant themselves as veterans or legatees of earlier opposition to an unjust regime (Kertzer 1988). Commemoration may underscore and reinforce the *pastness* of dissent, since, as David Lowenthal (1985: 323) observes, "the memorial act implies termination," thus minimizing dissent's political import for the present and reestablishing a narrative of harmony and stability. Protest may be commemorated to celebrate its failure, a threat to the nation averted (Greenblatt 1983).

But this enterprise also carries risks. Publicizing the injustices against which insurgents once struggled may suggest continuities with the present state of things. Commemoration may make immediate rather than remote, may remind and inspire rather than distance. Celebrating victory over internal enemies may lead to a subversive identification with the vanquished. There are other risks. Government officials who are self-proclaimed bearers of an insurgent legacy may open themselves to charges of hypocrisy for their current moderation. Since movements rarely fulfill their aims before they fade into obscurity, putative legatees can legitimately be asked what they have done lately with respect to those goals. And commemorants not tarred by allies with the brush of accommodation may be charged by opponents with the opposite transgression, that of undermining political authority by supporting ("celebrating") extra-institutional protest.

States are not monolithic entities; rather, they comprise numerous actors with overlapping, competing, and changing constituencies. For that reason alone, the political stakes in the commemoration of protest are rarely transparent. Indeed, the process of establishing memorials is often marked by strange alliances, surprising reversals, and unwitting ironies. For example, it was Ronald Reagan, rather than Jimmy Carter, who in 1983 signed the legislation making the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., a federal holiday. The signing came less than three weeks after Reagan had assured an opponent of the legislation that sentiment for the holiday was "based on an image not a reality"; in the interim he decided that "the symbolism of that day is important enough" to sign the legislation. (He also apologized to Coretta Scott King for publicly questioning King's patriotism. Having smoothed ruffled feathers, he left for a golfing weekend at an all-white country club). If Reagan saw King as "symbolic of what was a very real crisis

in our history," Howard Baker, a key Republican supporter of the bill, saw it as symbolic of unity—or symbolic of symbolic unity ("I have seldom approached a moment in this chamber when I thought the action we are about to take has greater potential for good and a greater symbolism for unity)."[1] In an earlier, unsuccessful attempt to forestall the legislation, Jesse Helms began a filibuster, the technique made famous by fellow southerners to block civil rights legislation in the 1950s; Bill Bradley, speaking for the importance of commemorating the civil rights past, accused Helms of "speak[ing] for a past that the vast majority of Americans have overcome."[2] Members of the Black Congressional Caucus, meanwhile, lobbied vigorously for the legislation but at the same time opposed plans for a reenactment of the 1963 March on Washington, the occasion of King's famous "I have a dream" speech (Reed 1986).

Of course, one can read each of these political moves, countermoves, and turnarounds as bids for black and white votes at a time when electoral campaigns were getting under way. However, the consequences of positioning oneself vis-à-vis the past are difficult to anticipate. Jesse Helms's staff, for example, admitted that they didn't know whether Helms's intemperate remarks about King's alleged communist sympathies and sexual promiscuity had served to drum up disaffected whites' votes or alienate moderates. And as I will show in this essay, for black legislators, there has been much more at stake in their representations of Dr. King and the movement than a straightforward appeal to constituents. As simultaneously insiders and outsiders, members of the political establishment and yet minority members, they must negotiate complex and competitive relations not only with white political elites but also with black *protest* elites (Reed 1986; Marable 1995; Smith 1996; Swain 1993; Lusane 1994). Collective memory has become a critical terrain for these relations: successfully "representing" King and the movement has become a way to warrant their status as authentic representatives of African American interests. Black elected officials thus have a different relationship to, and stake in preserving, an oppositional past than do white officials, on one hand, and extra-institutional black activists, on the other.

At minimum, then, an instrumentalist approach to collective memory, with memory deployed and molded to further current interests, must be expanded to take into account the conflicting and changing interests among

groups often characterized as unitary: "officials" (Bodnar 1992), "subordinates" (Merelman 1992: 248), or "African Americans" (Zerubavel 1996). But even a variegated instrumentalist approach may miss the ways in which representations of the past shape and, indeed, *constitute* interests and identities (Olick 1993; Olick and Levy 1997; Schwartz 1991). If accepted modes of public remembering generate political resources, they also impose real constraints on how the past can be used. To return to my example: When, in debate about passage of the King holiday, Senator Helms complained about the likely revenue loss from giving federal employees a day off, his sentiments were echoed by Democratic and Republican colleagues. When Helms cited King's "action-oriented Marxism" to argue his inappropriateness for national veneration, many senators were forced to change sides, one acknowledging that "the symbolism has just become too heavy." And when Helms argued that since John and Robert Kennedy had authorized wiretaps on King, Edward Kennedy's argument with Helms was really "with his dead brother[s]," he lost almost all his allies. Explained one Republican consultant, "You don't talk about J.F.K. yet here in dirty terms."[3] By the time the King holiday next spurred Senate debate, one didn't talk about King in dirty terms either: Helms's arguments against continued government funding for the federal commission established to promote the holiday were limited to the commission's excessive cost to taxpayers (at $500,000 per year, one of the smaller congressional appropriations).[4]

Identifying *what cannot be said* is a way to get at the constraints imposed by a given representation or representational structure—a collective memory or a way of remembering. The King holiday debate shows in rather stark fashion the contours of the sayable. But collective memories are enacted in more frequently occurring, less overtly conflictual contexts, and in smaller-scale ritual forms than a monument or holiday. Speeches by political leaders are also public rituals—stylized, regularized, performed in "sacred" spaces thought to be separate both from the trivial concerns of civilian life and from the backroom politics of purely sectional interests. They, too, are prime ground for constructing, using, and contesting collective memories. Through a content analysis of the *Congressional Record* (the official transcript of House and Senate floor activity) between 1 January 1993 and 31 May 1997, I parse the structure of representatives' invocations of Dr. King. I identify patterns in who invokes King, when and how they do so, in relation to what

issues and people, and with what effect.[5] In the following, I'll sketch brief answers to those questions, but my main interest is in how, when, and why African American legislators refer to King. How, and how successfully, do they use the past to overcome difficulties posed by their congressional role as at once insiders and outsiders?

Much of the floor activity is transcribed for and directed to constituents. One can therefore interpret floor speeches as not only justifying a position on a particular issue but reinforcing the speaker's own credibility and the legislative institution generally. Analysis of floor discourse reveals that legitimation at work: I argue that congressional representations of King assimilate him into a pluralist framework by representing community service and institutional politics as the proper legacy of his activism. Elected officials and community volunteers, not extra-institutional activists, in this scenario, are the bearers of King's dream. So far, my argument is an instrumentalist one. African American officials commemorate King in a way that legitimates their own role as advocates for black interests. But a second feature of their invocations of King points up the limitations of an instrumentalist analysis. It shows black legislators rhetorically *struggling* to represent the purpose of memorializing King and the movement, to retell the past in a way that neither deprecates the movement's accomplishments nor claims that its aims have been fulfilled. The awkwardness of legislators' attempts to do this, in contrast to their customary eloquence, suggests the power of the progress and unity narratives that are built into American commemorative discourse. It also suggests the *genre problem* that black legislators face. Epideictic rhetoric, considered appropriate to commemorative occasions, invokes the past, but to affirm rather than change the present; it is traditionally distinguished from the deliberative, pragmatic, and policy-oriented argument seen as characteristic of legislative decision making. In the context of a widespread public perception that floor debate has become window dressing for backroom politics on one hand and constituent popularity contests on the other, there may be strong institutional pressures on congressional representatives to keep the two genres separate. But acceptance of that separation surrenders a valuable critical tool: King is used to challenge the present state of things, but mainly on commemorative occasions that are seen as without impact on the legislative process.

If we define protest as organized, extra-institutional efforts to change

society (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982), then a paradox of contemporary commemoration becomes clear: memorializing protest reinforces the current political system by legitimating institutional political actors as protest's proper heirs and by vouching for the substantive character of formal political debate in its very absence from such debate.

Martin Luther King, Jr., on the United States House and Senate Floor

The *Congressional Record* is the official record of floor activity in the House and Senate and is published daily.[6] It includes not only proposals for and debate about new legislation but also "one-minute speeches" on topics of national or district concern delivered by House members at the start of the day's business, and "special orders": five-minute speeches in the Senate and prearranged, 60-minute sessions in the House, usually at the end of the day's business (Tiefer 1989). The *Record* is not a verbatim record of legislators' speech. Speakers may edit their remarks, insert longer statements from which they draw only selectively in their floor speeches, and, with permission, insert previously published reports, articles, and op-ed pieces. For my purposes, this means that speakers have had an opportunity to cast their remarks in what they see as a coherent form. When I refer to awkward formulations, therefore, it is less likely that these are a function simply of the messiness of spoken speech than of the problems generated by the content and context of the utterance.

For each congressional session, I scanned all documents that referred at least once to "Martin Luther King" or "Dr. King"—in total, 843. For the purposes of this analysis, however, I discarded speeches in which the King reference was to an institution, place, or event named after him and those in which King's name appeared only in the title of proposed legislation, as well as *Record* documents that consisted solely of the text of a proposed resolution or bill, a list of sponsors, or other purely procedural material. I also eliminated any statement citing or quoting King that was not made by the legislator who introduced it (for example, newspaper editorials inserted in the *Record*). This left a total of 305 entries over the four-and-a-half-year period in which King was referred to at least once, and a total of 420 speeches.[7]

Are 420 speeches mentioning King over a four-and-a-half-year period a lot? There are a total of 612 entries in which "Abraham Lincoln" or "President Lincoln" is invoked at least once during the same period, less than the 843 for King (but presumably there are fewer events, awards, and places named *Abraham* Lincoln, rather than say, "Lincoln High School"). The comparison with King's civil rights contemporaries is more striking. Roy Wilkins, head of the NAACP; Whitney Young, head of the National Urban League; and James Farmer, head of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)—who, together with King and John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC (now Congressman John Lewis), led the major movement organizations of the 1960s—are barely mentioned. Wilkins appears nine times in four and a half years, Young four times, and Farmer five times. A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and organizer of the 1963 March on Washington (and its threatened 1941 predecessor), is mentioned 12 times.

Who invokes King? Overwhelmingly, Democrats. One hundred and twenty-two Democrats, that is, 33% of the 370 Democrats who have served in both chambers between 1993 and 1997, made speeches referring to King; Democrats accounted for 344 of the 420 King speeches, or 84%. By contrast, only 34 Republicans, or 10% of the 333 Republican representatives, made King speeches (as did both Independents). Thirty-five or 71% of the 49 African American representatives made speeches invoking King,[8] as did 8 or 42% of the 18 Hispanic representatives and 3 of the 7 Asians and Pacific Islanders. By contrast, only 17% of the 641 white representatives referred to King in their speeches. African Americans made 182 of the 420 King speeches, or 43%. Georgia Congressman John Lewis invoked King most frequently—in 24 speeches over the four-and-a-half-year period. Nine other congresspeople, all but one of whom were African American, made seven or more references to King.[9]

In what discursive contexts are references to King made? The largest group comprises tributes to other people, 151 in total, 112 of which note the individual's relationship to King (others simply quote or paraphrase him). Recipients of such tributes are former civil rights activists from the legislator's district (a lawyer who represented activists, a local minister who marched with King), or nationally known former activists (Rosa Parks, James Farmer, Thurgood Marshall, Cesar Chavez, the archbishop of the

Table 1 Context of references to Martin Luther King, Jr., by race and party

	White Dems.		White Repubs.		White Ind.	Black Dems.		Black Repubs.	Other*	Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	No.	%
Tribute	64	43	17	23	2	62	34	0	6	151	36
Anniversary	34	23	11	15	0	42	23	1	5	93	22
King law	7	5	3	4	0	21	12	0	0	31	7
Commentary	9	6	14	19	0	27	15	0	1	51	12
Legislation	36	24	28	38	0	28	16	1	1	94	22
Total	150	101	73	99	2	180	100	2	13	420	99

Source: Thomas at www.thomas.loc.gov.

*Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Virgin Islander representatives are all Democrats except Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republican congressman from Florida, and Victor Frazer, Independent delegate from the Virgin Islands.

Greek Orthodox Church). They are also often people little known outside the legislator's district who were "inspired by Dr. King," "shared Dr. King's goals," or worked "in the spirit of Martin Luther King." References in the second largest group—93—come in speeches honoring historical events: Freedom Summer, the Selma to Montgomery March, King's birthday and assassination, and Black History Month. Fifty-one speeches citing King are commentaries delivered by a representative on a topic of interest but not pending legislation. Thirty-one speeches are about legislation proposed to extend the federal King Holiday Commission or to commemorate King or the civil rights movement in other ways, for example, memorials, commemorative coins, or congressional resolutions.

The remaining references come in 94 speeches that are part of debates about specific pieces of legislation. Since representatives speak to issues of policy concern in extensions of remarks, one-minute speeches, special orders, and resolutions that are not part of debate over specific legislation, I have combined "commentary" speeches with "legislative" ones when the commentary spoke to a politically salient issue (see Table 2). Multiple references to King were made in calls for federal legislation to assist in prosecution of church arsonists in the South (17 King speeches), in debates over legislation to toughen penalties against pro-life protests at abortion clinics (11 King speeches, both pro and con), in support of affirmative action policies (11 King speeches), and in opposition to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Haiti (6 King speeches).

Table 2 References to King made in speeches on legislative and policy issues, by party and race of speaker

	White Dems.	White Rpubs.	Black Dems.	Black Rpubs.	Total
Legislative issue					
Church arson federal response	6	3	7	1	17
Budget cuts					
For (Balanced Budget Amendment)	0	1	0	0	1
Against (9 domestic, 1 international)	2	0	8	0	10
Abortion Clinic Access Bill					
For	4	0	0	0	4
Against	0	7	0	0	7
Affirmative Action					
For	3	3	5	0	11
Withdrawal of U.S. troops from Haiti					
For	0	1	0	0	1
Against	1	0	5	0	6
Gun control					
For	4	1	0	0	5
Electoral redistricting					
For	0	0	5	0	5
D.C. statehood					
For	0	0	5	0	5
Resolution against Nation of Islam speaker					
For	0	2	0	0	2
Against	1	0	1	0	2
Campaign and lobby reform					
For	3	1	0	0	4
Ban on gays in the military					
For	0	1	0	0	1
Against	2	0	0	0	2
Other*	14	13	8	0	35
Total	40	33	44	1	118

Source: Thomas at www.thomas.loc.gov.

Note: Speeches citing King occurred in debates about bills, concurrent resolutions, and joint resolutions, in one-minute and five-minute speeches, and in special orders. Includes some speeches labeled Commentary in Table 1.

*One or two references to Employment Nondiscrimination Act; Bosnian arms embargo; release of Chinese dissident; human rights enforcement in India; Religious Freedom Restoration Act; constitutional amendment protecting flag; armed forces appropriations; congressional civility pledge; Defense of Marriage Act; army spying; funding for the preservation of historically black colleges and universities; U.S. involvement in multinational military forces; Working Families Flexibility Act; release of records on FBI surveillance of King; school voucher program; NAFTA; National Service Bill; support for Nelson Mandela; teenage pregnancy; Workplace Fairness Act; hate crimes; habeas corpus reform; Educate America Act; Violent Crime and Control Act; nomination of NEH head; Republican filibustering.

What is the substance of the references to King? How is King viewed in these speeches? Congressional speakers style him as orator and moral leader, not shrewd political strategist. He is remembered for his rhetorical eloquence, for his "dream" of racial harmony, and for his "message," "lesson," "principle," "spirit" of nonviolence. The dream is rarely specified and is sometimes conflated with an American dream of individual success ("One of Dr. King's philosophies revolves around the promise that every individual can achieve his or her dream in America" [McCarthy, House, 11 January 1995]).[10] Neither the movement's protagonists nor its antagonists—those with whom and against whom King fought—are clearly identified in congressional speeches. Instead, King is represented as bringing about change by "inspiring" and by "raising the consciousness" of the nation. Usually it is "America" that changes, and it does so through public acclamation. The only references to the illegality of King's actions come in Republican representatives' opposition to a bill that toughened penalties for harassment at abortion clinics; opponents of the bill maintained that it violated pro-life demonstrators' freedom of speech and that it would quash the kind of civil disobedience on which King and his supporters had relied.

It is overwhelmingly the "early King" who appears on the House and Senate floor, the King who called for "a society where people will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character"—an excerpt from his 1963 "I have a dream" speech. This is by far the most often quoted of King's speeches and writings. The excerpt alone is quoted 30 times, the speech 48 times.[11] King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," written the same year, is also prominent in congresspeople's speeches, quoted 24 times, and his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, delivered in 1964, is quoted 3 times. Only 5 (or 4%) of the 119 quoted excerpts whose source I was able to identify come from speeches delivered between 1965 and King's death in 1968; 3 of those come from his last speech (and are introduced that way). The Dr. King who appears in congressional speeches is not the one who opposed U.S. militarism, who called for a massive federal financial commitment to the poor, and who questioned a capitalist society's capacity to make that commitment.

Yet he is not so obviously the "harmless black icon" that Vincent Harding (1996) found in official and popular memory, either. He is not an unambiguous symbol of progress and unity or the raceless "American"

hero that observers have seen in children's textbooks (Kohl 1995), public oratory about the King holiday (Naveh 1990; Harding 1996; Sandage 1993), and television coverage of the holiday (Campbell 1995). In congressional discourse, King is more likely to be grouped with *black* "heroes," "firsts," "greats," or "leaders" than with white ones: Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W. E. B. DuBois, Harriet Tubman, civil rights activists Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer, baseball player Jackie Robinson, and former congresswomen Shirley Chisolm and Barbara Jordan. Current or recent congressional representatives and federal officials are often included: Representatives Maxine Waters and John Lewis, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary.[12] This suggests not an assimilationist, melting-pot model of ethnic politics, in which American heroes are stripped of positional identities, honored rather for their individual talents and claimed universally, but rather an ethnic group, pluralist model, in which leaders represent the aspirations and accomplishments of their respective groups (King for African Americans, Cesar Chavez for Mexican Americans, etc.; on the two models, see Omi and Winant 1986).

With respect to the unity and progress frames that observers have seen in public representations of King, analysis of congressional discourse shows interesting differences between black and white speakers. White speakers tend to imply Americans' universal appreciation for King's message, using "we" and "us" to refer to Americans black and white. "We marvel at the courage of Martin Luther King. We are humbled by the eloquence of Barbara Jordan" (Boyd, House, 11 February 1997). They also sometimes suggest universal appreciation for King *during his lifetime*: "Let us recommit to the goals with which Martin Luther King, Jr., inspired us all over a quarter century ago" (Gilman, Extension of Remarks, 7 January 1997); "It really was not until the late 1950s that we began to rally in support of the work of Martin Luther King, by businessmen, by laborers, by church leaders, *by all Americans*, and said 'let's finally get serious and free ourselves from discrimination' " (Kennedy, Senate, 10 September 1996; my emphasis). The last statement, in addition, represents white Americans as the ones doing the liberating (of themselves). At least one speaker implied that racial unity preceded the movement, describing the "great dream of King's that blacks and whites *can once again* walk together in this country blessed by God in a land of freedom" (McIntosh, House, 104th; my emphasis).[13] White speakers occa-

sionally indicate that King's dream has been realized, his battle won. Thus, one described recent church burnings as "hearken[ing] back to a time when, to paraphrase Dr. King, people were judged not on the content of their character but on the color of their skin," implying that this is no longer the case (Biden, Senate, 26 June 1996). Another described King's struggle and concluded that "in the end, the American ideal of equality won, and hate lost" (Reed, House, 18 June 1996). More often, however, white speakers rely on a "there are still problems, but we've made great progress" frame. "Progress, not enough, has been made" (Kopetski, House, 24 February 1993); "we have a long way to go in making our Constitutional principles realities for everyone, but we have accomplished very significant progress" (Frank, House, 21 June 1994). The formulaic quality of the statement undercuts its force. Since the comments preceding it emphasize the accomplishments of the movement, and the comments following it rarely give equal emphasis to the problems remaining, the message is one of measured success and of continuing advance.

Black speakers also tend to rely on the "we've made progress but . . ." formulation, while emphasizing the "but . . ." clause. One speaker's comment that King had "moved to correct the evil, to shed not only light but to bring those evils to the forefront and to terminate them and eradicate them for our society" but that "during his lifetime he [King] was only partially successful in doing this" (Hilliard, House, 15 March 1994) is one of two quasi-failure formulations that I found. Most formulations claim success but with qualifications: "Martin would want us to raise our sights to the work yet to be done" (the focus on what King would have wanted, or on the responsibility incurred by his legacy); "Dr. King would find it a scandal that so many young people are still born into poverty, still receive an inadequate education, and still have no chance of achieving the American dream" (Moseley-Braun, Senate, 23 May 1994). The American "dream" of individual success is invoked here to remind listeners of its continued elusiveness for young black people. One speaker asked rhetorically, "If we stop and reflect on where we have gone since the marches and the sit-ins and boycotts of the 1960s, have we really gone far?" (Jackson-Lee, House, 11 February 1997). And another insisted that although "times have changed, we have not reached the promised land" (Clay, House, 23 February 1994).

While they accept the progress frame less readily than their white

colleagues do, black representatives are nowhere near as critical of the contemporary state of race relations as were the local celebrations of King Day, mainly directed to black audiences, that Richard Merelman studied. The most frequent substantive theme of the celebrations was "the continuing and pervasive practice by whites of discrimination against blacks" (1995: 87). "The ceremonies generally agree that the civil rights revolution remains unfinished, and likely to cause conflict in the future," Merelman continues. "References to the distance blacks still must go are four times more frequent than references to the distance blacks have come. Indeed, the ceremonies devote very little attention at all to past accomplishments. In nine of the ceremonies observed, I noted only four explicit references to past successes. By contrast, in these same ceremonies there were seventeen explicit mentions of how far blacks still had to travel" (ibid.: 89). Celebrants emphasized conflict rather than unity and continued inequality rather than progress in eradicating it.

These contrasts suggest that in order to understand how King is represented on the House and Senate floors, and to understand the dynamics of collective remembering more broadly, we cannot treat "congressional interests" monolithically in particular constructions of the past. In the following, I attribute patterns in how African American legislators invoke King to their distinctive political position. In a majority white Congress, their ability to deliver to constituents depends on persuading conservative and/or centrist forces to approve substantial government intervention (Swain 1993). Yet, from the point of view of black protest elites, they are often too close to the halls of institutional power. They are never invulnerable to activists' claims to better represent African American interests. How black congresspeople represent their relationship to the movement—how they define King's "legacy" and their role in furthering it—is important to their own credibility and that of their agenda. At the same time, however, their efforts to use King's memory to call for broadly redistributive policies are constrained by the institutional context in which they operate. The fact that they memorialize King in *Congress* rather than, say, a King Day celebration in a predominantly black church, limits what they can say and when they can say it.

Protest, Politics, and King's Heirs

The passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 began what Bayard Rustin (1965) celebrated as a shift "from protest to politics." While in many areas of the South, white citizens and authorities kept up a reign of terror and, in the case of Mississippi, legislated a series of vote-dilution measures to minimize black electoral gains (Parker 1990), the number of black officials at local and state levels of government began to grow. There were 1,100 black elected officials nationwide by 1969, 3,600 by 1983, and 8,000 by 1993 (Marable 1995: 145). Championed as evidence of the civil rights movement's success, entry into electoral politics has not fulfilled the highest aspirations of the activists who fought for it. Those who made the shift from protest to politics were quickly disillusioned by their inability to effect substantive change. A member of the first Washington, D.C., city council under home rule remembers some of his colleagues—activists turned officials—"still damning the power structure and the system. I had to remind them that they *were* the power structure and the system."[14] Meanwhile, civil rights movement veterans and protest organizations like the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH found themselves not only relatively powerless against an erosion of civil rights gains under two Republican administrations but increasingly marginalized by the black officialdom they had fought to create. The postmovement era has accordingly been marked by persistent tensions between protest and electoral elites (Reed 1986; Smith 1996; Swain 1993; Lusane 1994; Clay 1992) and by skirmishes over guardianship of the movement past.

Thus, Adolph Reed, Jr., (1986: 8) describes black elected officials' initial coolness to Jesse Jackson's 1984 campaign as reflecting a "turf dispute" between electoral and protest elites. Jackson "should continue to preach," said Detroit mayor Coleman Young bluntly after Jackson threw his hat in the ring. "As a politician, he's out of his league."[15] That most black elected officials came around to supporting Jackson had to do in part with his success in "legitimiz[ing himself] by projecting images of association with King and the civil rights movement" (ibid.: 28)—or, as an envious strategist for Walter Mondale put it, Jackson's ability to "equat[e] this presidential crusade with the civil rights movement."[16] Manning Marable (1995) likewise sees the 1993 March on Washington as an effort by remnants of the civil rights

elite both to publicize Clinton's failures on health care, jobs, and the promotion of black progressives within his administration *and* to regain the mantle of black political leadership from black elected officials. The latter was evidenced in march organizer Joseph Lowery's declaration that the march was intended to "spark a renaissance in social activism and pass the torch so the struggle will continue" (ibid.: 145), and it was underscored by the march planning committee's failure to invite any voting members of Congress to serve among its cochairs.

Congressional invocations of King, like these higher-profile commemorations, reflect the tensions between black aspirations and a centrist political regime *and* between institutional and extra-institutional elites' claims to black leadership. Insofar as black legislators in the 103rd, 104th, and 105th Congresses saw themselves as advancing self-identified "black interests," they represented a constituency 70% of whom favored "more laws to reduce discrimination" (barely a third of whites polled agreed), and 51% of whom believed that "the USA is moving toward two separate and unequal societies—one black, one white" (one-third of whites agreed) (ibid.: 146). As minority representatives, black congressional legislators have a mandate to secure far-reaching change from an often intransigent political establishment, a task made more difficult by their perennial outsider status. Yet in the eyes of black activists, they are consummate *insiders*, always in danger of giving up an agenda of progressive change in favor of personal ambitions and political comfort. Their status as insider outsiders (or outsider insiders) poses tricky, eminently practical problems. They seek legitimacy as bearers of black interests, in potential or actual competition with civil rights activists. At the same time, they seek a program of progressive legislative change, in competition with those representing majoritarian or "white" interests. I argue that African American legislators use King references to further both tasks but that they are more successful in the first than in the second.

Assimilating King

Congressional speakers frequently assert their own relationship to King, whether direct ("I feel privileged to have known King personally" [Payne, House, 15 March 1994]; "I met a man who was a preacher from Montgomery" [Hilliard, House, 15 March 1994]); "I remember Fannie Lou

Hamer, Martin Luther King, and Mary McCloud Bethune" [Meek, House, 28 February 1996]; "I was privileged to be with [King] on that march from Selma to Montgomery" [Rangel, House, 15 September 1993]), or indirect ("My own story is a testament to King's dream" [Moseley-Braun, Senate, 3 April 1993]; "it is doubtful I would be here today in this Congress if many people in this country who were offended in the 1960s by the remarks of Martin Luther King, Jr. had been able to silence him" [Mfume, House, 23 February 1994]). The latter formulations are interesting because they not only vouch for the speaker's commitment to the same goals as King but cast him or her as fruit of the movement. This claim is often explicit: "I along with many of my colleagues am here today as a direct result of the struggles of the sixties" (Thompson, House, 21 June 1994). Congressional representatives are both witness to and evidence of racial advancement: "I have seen progress. . . . I have seen a poor black man, denied the right to vote, become a Member of Congress" (Lewis, House, 11 February 1997); "had Dr. King and many others not made that historic and dangerous walk from Selma to Montgomery, perhaps I would not be standing before this body today" (Collins, House, 14 May 1996).

Speakers are becomingly humble in acknowledging that their own careers were made possible by the travails of an earlier generation of movement activists. But they also style themselves—qua institutional actors—as legitimate heirs to that earlier activism. Their own careers become the next stage in a saga of African American struggle. "I was born, as a matter of African American history," Jesse Jackson, Jr., related, "on March 11, 1965. On March 7, 1965, in our history, it is known as bloody Sunday. It is the Sunday that the gentleman from Georgia [John Lewis], Martin Luther King, and Jesse Jackson and many others in our history walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge for the right to vote. Because of the struggle that they engaged in in 1965, I now stand here as the 91st African American to ever have the privilege of serving in the U.S. Congress" (Jackson, House, 11 February 1997). Another speaker aligned himself with King by appropriating a portion of King's last speech to describe his own situation: "It is a far from perfect situation which exists in Alabama, or in America, but if we realize this fact, and continue to progress and grow, we will reach Dr. King's promised land. And just like Dr. King, I may not be with you when you get there, but if this day comes after my work on earth is done, I assure you that

I will be there in spirit" (Hilliard, House, 10 June 1996). Speakers' frequent grouping of King with recent and current congressional representatives has a similar effect. Thus, one representative described former congresswoman Barbara Jordan "in the tradition of Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, and Thurgood Marshall" (Jackson-Lee, House, 24 January 1996); another praised Congressman Lewis for "making it possible for me to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives" (Jackson, House, 11 February 1997). Representative Sheila Jackson-Lee cited her African American colleague Harold Ford's leadership in investigating the King and Kennedy assassinations (House, 26 September 1996). The message is one of continuity between a movement past and current institutional politics.

Representatives do not claim exclusive guardianship of the movement's legacy. They share it, they say, with people who are working in "the tradition of King," who are "shining examples of his legacy," the "unsung heroes" of the movement. Who are these co-legatees? Rarely activists, if the term is used to describe organized actors using extra-institutional means to bid for a redistribution of power (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982). Rather, they are teachers, ministers, the founder of a homeless shelter, two leaders of a boys' club, the president of a city growth association, the director of a family care center, a local high school coach. "Great African American local leaders" are "teachers, parents, elected officials, the caring neighbor" (Velazquez, House, 24 February 1993). King's legacy is service rather than insurgency. This is striking in speeches made as part of special orders commemorating Black History Month in 1994 and 1997, under the rubrics of "Empowering Afro-American Organizations: Present and Future" and "Civil Rights Organizations in History: A Reappraisal," respectively. The organizations honored by legislators both years—many of them citing or quoting King in their remarks—were civil rights organizations of the 1960s (the NAACP, SCLC, and Urban League) and *civic* organizations today: after-school facilities, rehabilitation centers, a police officers' league, a historical preservationist group. Describing black America as "under siege," and quoting from A. Philip Randolph as well as King, Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson called for "work at the grassroots level to protect the hard fought gains of the civil rights movement." She went on to describe a sorority, a fund-raising group for civic causes, and Jack and Jill (a group promoting education and self-esteem among black students) (House, 23 Feb-

ruary 1994). Grassroots "mobilizing" thus referred to community service rather than extra-institutional challenge through petitions, boycotts, strikes, or demonstrations.

The association of an earlier era of protest with volunteer efforts today is also evident in speeches urging continued funding for the federal King Holiday Commission. Although the commission established in 1984 to promote the holiday was intended to be privately funded, difficulties in raising adequate sums led to congressional annual appropriations of $300,000 after 1990. In 1994, Harris Wofford and Carol Moseley-Braun in the Senate and Ralph Regula and John Lewis in the House proposed legislation to extend appropriations for five years. In hearings and Senate debate, Wofford gave numerous versions of the following rationale:

> Nothing would have ticked Martin off more than people supposedly honoring him by sitting on their duffs watching the tube or sleeping late. The King holiday should be a day on not a day off. A day of action, not apathy. A day of responding to community needs, not a day of rest and recreation. So my old civil rights colleague of the Selma march, Congressman John Lewis, and I have introduced legislation designed to remember Martin the way he would have liked: a day that reflects his proposition that "everybody can be great because everybody can serve." . . . Fixing parks, tutoring children, rebuilding schools, feeding the hungry, immunizing children, housing the homeless. (Wofford, Senate, 3 April 1993)

What King "would have liked" is "action," meaning "service." Senator Carol Moseley-Braun noted that "the day could be used to donate blood or volunteer at a hospital, to clean up a park or plant flowers in an inner-city neighborhood, to volunteer for the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts or the Special Olympics, to tutor children or to work with those who have AIDS" (Senate, 23 May 1994). Wofford's and Moseley-Braun's brief for the legislation is echoed in remarks by other bill supporters. Certainly service is a worthy endeavor with potential for far-reaching change. However, its assimilation to King's extra-institutional activism is a rhetorical accomplishment rather than an obvious historical fact.

In some of these statements, King's commitment to nonviolence is restyled as a commitment to ending violence, especially among youth. Thus, one representative stated: "One needs only listen to the daily news and

read the headlines to know that we need this Commission, now more than ever. Our young people are dying in great numbers on the streets, in their classrooms, and in their homes, Mr. Speaker. That is a fact. And the most frightening thing about that fact is—our children are killing each other. The King Holiday Commission is dedicated to teaching the tenets of nonviolence, and the value of community service to our young people" (Clayton, House, 15 March 1994). "If there is no other reason for this Commission, it is that we can provide to young people precisely that kind of epiphany that says to them that nonviolence is important because it is predicated on a respect for the humanity of another person" (Moseley-Braun, Senate, 23 May 1994). When Coretta Scott King, who had tirelessly lobbied Congress for the holiday and the commission, appeared before a congressional hearing on the bill, she was quizzed on strategies to end teenage crime.[17] Certainly, for a commission under attack, piggybacking on the Clinton administration's volunteerism initiative made strategic sense—even if it meant playing to a belief that the black community's preeminent problem was teen violence. That no one objected to that characterization or offered an alternative one, and that it appears in the *Record* before and after the debate, suggests its general acceptance among congressional representatives.[18]

In congressional discourse, then, the movement with which King was associated has been effectively recast in terms of conventional pluralism. Change, in the pluralist scheme, is effected incrementally through electoral political channels and intermediate organizations, for example civic associations, social clubs, self-help groups, not through extra-institutional, disruptive, collective action, which is unnecessary given the existence of multiple avenues for reform (Gamson 1990; McAdam 1982). Congressional black representatives never denigrate extra-institutional activism and activists—they are, as they repeatedly acknowledge, the beneficiaries of past insurgency. However, by representing King's activism as part of an earlier phase of struggle, as *past*, they represent their own careers as its proper successor. References to King thus warrant black legislators' claim to represent black interests better than contemporary protest elites can.

King as Challenge

Yet black congresspeople aim to do more than justify their own existence, and for that reason, they have a real stake in *not* representing the past as past.

This is what makes their role, and how they commemorate King, tricky. As representatives of a constituency whose aspirations were voiced but not realized by the 1960s civil rights movement, they must convince their congressional colleagues that there is much more to be done. They must warrant a vision of change, not as unfolding inevitably but as federally enacted and as urgent. If, as Michael Kammen (1991) suggests, collective remembering in the United States is bound to powerful narratives of unity and progress, then African American legislators face peculiar dilemmas in commemorating extra-institutional activism. How to convey not the accomplishments, the steps taken, the threat averted, but the promises not made good on, the unresolved, the incomplete? How to celebrate change achieved through conflict? And how to tie remembering to change *now*? These dilemmas are evident in how congressional speakers represent representation—how they explain commemoration's purpose.

Black congressional speakers repeatedly assert that retelling the African American past—collective struggle, individual accomplishments, and national benefits—is essential to changing the present. But other, and sometimes conflicting, rationales for remembering are also offered.[19] On one, King's contributions are obvious and unforgettable—"Dr. King's stamp upon American history is profound and indelible" (Dixon, House, 7 April 1993); "his perseverance and leadership is indelibly etched in the minds of all Americans" (Stokes, House, 24 February 1993). Commemoration celebrates rather than preserves his memory. On another, it is natural forgetfulness that threatens King's legacy—"the moment of civil rights triumph may be a distant memory to some" (Lewis, House, 24 April 1997)—or African Americans' forgetfulness: "Too many black Americans don't realize the importance and significance of recalling past struggles and achievements and relating those efforts to present day conditions" (Clay, House, 3 February 1994). On still another rationale, it is young people, for whom the movement "has become ancient history" (Moseley-Braun, Senate, 23 May 1994), who are most in need of commemorative efforts; they must be shown that "they have a responsibility . . . to not just glorify Dr. King as a hero but learn and practice his teachings and beliefs" (Collins, 24 February 1993).

Commemoration is necessary to "close a chapter" of the past; by remembering, however, we "make sure that the clock is not turned back . . . make sure that we do not repeat that period of our history" (Clyburn,

House, 22 February 1995). For "if we forget the tragic lessons of our history we are doomed to repeat them" (Moseley-Braun, Senate, 23 May 1994). The task is "to revel in our history" and, contrarily, to "draw back from our history . . . to not have some of the unfortunate consequences of our social development repeated" (Tucker, House, 23 February 1994). After one congressman concluded his remarks on the 1960 student sit-ins by urging that "the more we can come to grips with that, the more we can put this, parts of history like the sit-ins, behind us, and we can all become indivisible, under God, with liberty and justice for all," another speaker corrected him: "I thank the gentleman. I hope we will never put the spirit of the sit-ins behind us" (Watt and Owens, House, 11 February 1997). The tensions black commemorants face are evident: commemoration must relive the past without forgetting the present, must honor the movement's leaders without omitting the "unsung heroes," must recognize individual fortitude in the face of adversity without minimizing the oppressiveness of past conditions, and must expose past (and present) suffering without thereby inflaming those who have suffered.

Pervasive in speakers' comments is anxiety, above all, that memory not become nostalgia, that it inspire government action, not substitute for it. *Merely* remembering is as dangerous as forgetting. "We must do more than keep a memory of a great man," Representative Kweisi Mfume insisted. "We must push further ahead past the pain, the hate, and most of all, the complacency that settles when we forget there is more to be done" (House, 7 April 1993). "It is not a day just to remember him but is a day to be joyful that a man of his caliber came along and set the record straight and changed America" (Hilliard, House, 15 March 1994); "we should remember not for memory's sake, or for the sake of nostalgia" (Norton, House, 21 June 1994); "we are not nostalgic about the past but there are some parts of the past that I would like to recall" (Lewis, House, 24 April 1997): these excerpts show speakers trying to make of commemoration something more than, or a special kind of, remembering. One speaker introduced his co-celebrants as those who would "participate in this special order in memory, not just in memory, but in commemoration, I guess, in celebration, of what happened in that little town of Selma" (Lewis, House, 7 March 1995). Another argued that "this is a history that we cannot forget; lest we forget, we will surely allow those enemies of democracy who want to restrict the Ameri-

can people's right to vote to wane" (McKinney, House, 24 May 1995); and another, "let us not ever be so brazen, so commonplace that we forget the struggle" (Watt, House, 7 March 1995). The rhetorical awkwardness of these usually eloquent speakers betrays their struggle to make remembering more than celebration and reveals the limits of the commemorative form with which they must work.

Like their white colleagues, African American representatives are apparently reluctant to specify the protagonists, antagonists, and stakes of the movement in anything but vague terms. They too describe America's conscience stirred, its imagination captured, its commitments honored, and praise King's "message," "teachings," "wisdom." They too assert unity over conflict. "[King's] life was dedicated to fighting for justice and equality not just for African Americans or the poor, but for all Americans" (Moseley-Braun, Senate, 23 May 1994); "the civil rights movement was not a struggle for black Americans alone. It was a struggle to ensure equality of opportunity for all Americans" (Sawyer, House, 26 January 1993); "during his lifetime, Dr. King's faith, perseverance, and determination served as a symbol of the hope for equality for all Americans" (Stokes, House, 11 February 1997). Describing King's impact in terms of his "contributions" and "achievements," common phrases in the speeches, also suggests change through influence rather than struggle.

Commemorative Occasions

Even if the King they invoke is less than radical, black congressional speakers do often forcefully describe a society marked by racial inequality and injustice. But the solution to such conditions is *more* storytelling, more commemoration. I noted earlier the speaker who asked, "If we stop and reflect on where we have gone since the marches and the sit-ins and boycotts of the 1960s, have we really gone far?" Her answer was to call for "daily efforts to correct the history that is taught to our children" (Jackson-Lee, House, 11 February 1997). The speaker who pointed out that although "times have changed, we have not reached the promised land" urged that "[we] constantly remind ourselves and others of the great contributions blacks have made and continue to make to this nation" (Clay, House, 23 February 1994). It is "forgetfulness" about "the lessons [King's] life taught us" that has

"contributed to the widening gap that remains between the salaries of white and African American workers, the increasing gap between the incomes of middle and lower income African Americans, the continuing segregation of our cities' schools and communities, and the violence among our youth which has reached heights unimaginable even a few years ago," Senator Carol Moseley-Braun argued (3 April 1993). If forgetting has had such debilitating consequences, then remembering should have equally transformative effect. Legislation to commemorate the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, one speaker promised, "will mark a turning point in the history of this country's struggle for civil rights" (Jackson-Lee, House, 14 May 1996). Another described movement commemorative activities in a project aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy as essential to building "self-esteem" and, thence, responsible behavior (Waters, House, 12 March 1996).

Since most of these statements come in commemorative contexts (Black History Month, King's birthday, the anniversary of the Voting Rights Act) or in discussions of provisions for official commemoration (for example, the extension of the King Holiday Commission), it is unsurprising that they conclude with calls for commemoration. But *the majority of King references are made in such contexts*. I noted earlier that the largest number of King speeches were delivered as part of tributes and on commemorative occasions; in combination with speeches advocating government sponsorship of commemorative activities, they accounted for 275 or 65% of the 420 speeches. Is this simply because tributes dominate congressional speech making? The *Congressional Record* database does not provide the overall number of tribute entries relative to legislative discussion entries in a congressional session. So I chose a two-day period on which the number of overall entries was close to the average (267 entries for 15 and 16 March 1994) and, after discarding procedural entries of the kind discussed earlier, coded the remaining speeches. Of the 266 speeches, 53 or 20% were tributes, 9 (3%) anniversary speeches, 43 (16%) commentaries, 5 (2%) speeches calling for commemorative legislation, and 156 (59%) speeches about pending legislation. Thus, whereas 65% of the speeches referring to King were delivered on commemorative occasions, only 25% of all speeches were delivered on such occasions. Table 1 shows, moreover, that African American representatives did not invoke King more often in legislative debates than did white Democrats or Republicans during the 1993 to 1997 period and that

a smaller proportion of African American representatives' King speeches were delivered in legislative contexts relative to commemorative ones than were those of white representatives. Table 2 shows that the largest number of King speeches in a legislative context called for federal response to the wave of church burnings in the South, a measure that enjoyed bipartisan support. The second largest number came in debate related to abortion and were more likely to be made by Republicans espousing pro-life positions than by Democrats, white or black. The *Congressional Record* reveals, then, an interesting bifurcation: even as African American congressional representatives assert the importance of remembering in order to bring about tangible change, they do not often invoke the past in substantive legislative discussions.

Why not? Black representatives confront a powerful genre problem, I argue: that of using *epideictic* rhetoric in *deliberative* situations. Epideictic rhetoric "praises or blames on ceremonial occasions, invites the audience to evaluate the speaker's performance, recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present, employs a noble, dignified literary style, and amplifies or rehearses admitted facts" (Campbell and Jamieson 1990: 14). It relies on "*memoria*, or recollection of a shared past" (ibid.: 15) and is primarily contemplative. As Harry Caplan puts it, the speaker tries "to impress his ideas upon them [the audience], without action as a goal" (1954: 173n). Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson argue that such rhetoric is appropriate to commemorative speeches like presidential inaugural addresses, which seek to affirm unity, communal values, the institution of the presidency, and the president's recognition of the obligations of the office. Thus, genre follows institutional function. Epideictic rhetoric can be contrasted with the deliberative argument that is characteristic of policy making. "Deliberative argument pivots on the issue of expediency, specifically, which policy is best able to address identified problems, which policy will produce more beneficial than evil consequences, and which is most practical, given available resources" (Campbell and Jamieson 1990: 29). Classically, deliberative rhetoric was intended "to persuade the assembly to take a definite course of action, such as going to war or not going to war" (O'Malley 1979: 39). Occasionally, speakers have been able to combine elements of the two genres, and Campbell and Jamieson (1990: 29) cite Lincoln's first inaugural address for its "unusual" rhetorical strategy of

using deliberative arguments (against southern secession) for epideictic purposes (unifying the nation and reaffirming communal values). Yet in today's Congress there are strong and distinctive pressures operating to keep the genres separated.

Whether anything gets done on the floor of Congress has always been the topic of dispute. Charges that floor debate is "mere" talk have sharpened in the context of two developments. One is representatives' increased attentiveness to constituents, partly a result of the media's expanded coverage of congressional activities (Bacon et al. 1995: 400). For example, until 1979, commemorative legislation (naming public buildings, for example, or designating special days) accounted for between 1% and 10% of all legislation. In the 96th Congress, commemorative legislation increased by more than 70% and continued to rise thereafter, accounting for more than one-third of all bills signed into law by 1985. Attacked for its diversion of money and attention from substantive to purely symbolic concerns, this increase has been attributed to representatives' orientation to constituents (ibid.).

A second feature of contemporary congressional decision making is the dominant and, according to some, ever expanding role of congressional committees and subcommittees (ibid.: 412; Denton and Woodward 1990: 301). Already in the early nineteenth century, Josiah Quincy of Boston complained that the House "acts, and reasons, and votes and performs all the operations of an animated being, and yet, judging from my own perceptions, I cannot refrain from concluding that all great political questions are settled elsewhere than on this floor" (quoted in Weatherford 1981: 173). Committee rooms were once seen as the actual site of decision making, but, according to J. McIver Weatherford (ibid.: 185), once they were opened to the public in the late 1970s, "the real process of legislation once again escaped beyond the klieg lights" further into the back rooms of politics. Committee hearings became opportunities for the enactment of ritual dramas, and the congressional floor was reduced to an "empty shell." Weatherford's judgment is especially harsh but not too dissimilar from that of other political observers. "The business of the House is dominated by its committees, and with few exceptions oratory has little discernible impact in the process of proposing drafting, and voting upon legislation," one writer concludes (Bacon et al. 1995: 612). In fact, committees' autonomy has been formally circumscribed in the last two decades, and floor amending activity has increased (ibid.:

420), but "conventional wisdom holds that floor debate does not change minds" (Bessette 1994: 166). Instead, legislation is widely perceived to be made through the vote trading, deal making, and interest-group lobbying that takes place behind closed doors.

An important consequence of these developments may be pressure among congressional representatives to *demarcate* legislative floor debate from both backroom maneuvering and constituent-driven pomp. Establishing symbolic boundaries—spatial, temporal, rhetorical—prevents the "pollution" of legislative functions by activities deemed less legitimate.[20] Limiting the duration of "one-minute speeches," scheduling them in the morning and at the discretion of the Speaker, and relegating special orders to the end of the day, when they will not "interfere" with legislative business, are formal mechanisms for insulating legislative debate from these other forms of talk. But there may also be less explicit pressure to keep epideictic and deliberative rhetorical genres separate, that is, to not memorialize during the "real work" of legislative policy making. Of course, deliberative discourse has always invoked historical precedent, hallowed tradition, and heroic figures. However, the vulnerability of congressional floor discourse to charges that it involves scarce deliberation at all, that it is ritual drama rather than substantive debate, may make representatives anxious to distinguish making history from memorializing it.

I am arguing that the operation of genre boundaries may constrain congressional representatives' ability to use King to criticize rather than to affirm. On legislative occasions, memorializing is at odds with a deliberative rhetorical style, making it difficult to invoke King in debates about substantive policy issues. And on commemorative occasions, memorializing in order not merely to contemplate but to legislate, that is to take action, is at odds with the conventional requirements of epideictic discourse. Thus, if the first set of constraints that I discussed stems from the commemorative form and the narratives of progress and unity embedded in it, the second stems from the commemorative occasion. The context of their speeches—Martin Luther King Day rather than a debate about the budget, say—encourages speakers to call for more commemoration rather than for new legislation, more appropriations, better enforcement of existing laws, or an otherwise interventionist federal stance. And in those discussions of health care, welfare, toxic waste cleanup, campaign and governmental reform, military de-

fense, crime, education, foreign policy, and telecommunications which took place during the 1993–97 period, the movement, King, and his lessons are not prominent.

Paradoxically, then, the conventions surrounding the memory of insurgency strengthen institutional politics in two ways. Memorializing dissent enables politicians to legitimate themselves as heirs of an activist past. And if the ideological work of commemoration is restricted to special occasions—occasions on which anyone can be honored, from Martin Luther King, Jr., to the constituent whose claim to fame is her stamp collection—then what goes on the rest of the time must be driven by national interests rather than partisan ones and must have tangible rather than symbolic consequence. King memorials end up reproducing the legislative institution by their very marginality.

Conclusion

Numerous writers have addressed the difficulties nations face in commemorating "difficult" pasts: for example, the Vietnam War (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991), the Holocaust (Maier 1988; Olick and Levy 1997), and the atomic bombing of Japan (Linenthal and Engelhardt 1996). I argue that social movements are a special kind of difficult past, with distinctive risks. For African American legislators, commemorating the civil rights movement and its martyred leader risks emphasizing their own position within the political establishment, potentially viewed as cozy rather than transformative, and potentially framed that way by civil rights leaders vying for the mantle of black leadership. Accordingly, black congressional speakers commemorate King in a way that casts electoral politics and community service *rather than* extra-institutional activism (the latter remarkable by its absence from their commemorative speeches) as the legitimate heirs of King and his movement. As representatives of an unequal minority, however, black representatives resist commemorating King in a way that accepts the present state of governmental action vis-à-vis black Americans. Their effort to mold King discourse to point up the unfinished work of the movement is less successful than their effort to legitimate themselves as spokespersons. Using collective memory to do more than memorialize is difficult, not only on account of the progress and unity narratives embedded in the commemorative

form but also on account of remembering's restriction to commemorative, rather than legislative, occasions.

What are the implications of this case? For students of social movements, battles over the legacy of protest, the kind of activism it warrants, and the truest spokespeople for its aspirations, point up an important dynamic in the institutionalization of protest. The incorporation of members of an insurgent group into government offices does not signal a definitive shift in leadership from protest to electoral elites. Collective memory and, specifically, the stewardship of an insurgent past can be a crucial terrain for fighting out continuing leadership claims between these two groups. The question is how much winning the battle over memory counts in gaining recognition from governmental elites, potential allies, and constituents as accepted broker of a group's putative interests. And what counts as winning? Comparison with other groups that have ostensibly made the shift "from protest to politics"—Green Party members in European parliaments, African National Congress members in South Africa, and Irish elected officials associated with Sinn Fein come to mind—would be important in answering these questions. The dominance of the Republican and Democratic Parties and the absence of movement parties in the United States (Rucht 1996) might generate more, or potentially more debilitating, battles between protest elites and their electoral counterparts over who best represents the movement's aspirations and accomplishments. On the other hand, these structural features of the American political system may be counterbalanced by cultural ones, for example, what Michael Kammen (1991) sees as an American tendency to depoliticize the past, resulting in a kind of agnostic support for multiple traditions. One mode of depoliticizing the past, I have argued, may be to bring it up only on formally commemorative occasions.

For students of collective memory, the case attests to the multiple and conflicting projects within groups often represented as unitary—officials and African Americans, to name two. Counterpoising the commemorative interests of "political structures and ordinary people" (Bodnar 1992: 18), "dominants and subordinates" (Merelman 1992: 248), or "official" and "popular" memory (Scott 1996: 388), even if the focus is on their interrelations, doesn't do justice to the multiple, competitive, and changing relationships *among* elites inside and outside the government, and within subordinated groups. The broader point, of course, is that instrumental interests

exist only in relationship. One cannot specify a group's stakes in a particular issue without understanding its position vis-à-vis groups defined as allies, antagonists, competitors, and constituents. How people represent and seek to use the past can help us to illuminate those alliances and fissures.

The case also points up the inadequacy of an instrumentalist approach, however, by identifying constraints on speakers' instrumental deployment of representations of the past. It isn't what "actually happened"—the past in some pristine, unreconstructed sense—that limits what speakers can do with it. Rather, cultural conventions of commemoration, that is, accepted ways of publicly remembering, shape *what* one can do with the past (the rhetorical form of commemoration) and *when* one can do it (the occasions on which commemoration is acceptable). Accepted ways of doing things, of course, are neither unchanging nor universal. With respect to the latter, this case contributes to locating culture within the institutions it reflects, shapes, and reproduces. Black legislators *use* King remembrances, but they do so in forms and at times that are generally acceptable to the legislative body. The result, though not their intention, is that the commemoration of dissent reproduces a view of Congress's policy deliberations as substantive rather than "merely" symbolic, since the symbolic work of commemoration takes place on occasions reserved for it, and only on those occasions.

Shortly before King's death, his associate Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel said that "the whole future of America depends upon the impact and influence of Dr. King" (Harding 1996: ix). On the floor of Congress, at least, that impact seems to have been largely confined to the realm of memory.

Notes

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1 Francis X. Clines, "Reagan's doubts on Dr. King disclosed," *New York Times*, 22 October 1983; "King holiday—New law's effect," *U.S. News and World Report*, 31 October 1983; *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1983: 601.

2 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1983: 601.

3 David Alpern, "Behind the King debate," *Newsweek*, 31 October 1983; "Impact of Helms's attacks studied by his constituents," *New York Times*, 26 October 1983.

4 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1994: 157; *Congressional Record*, Senate, 23 May 1994.

5 I study invocations of King rather than of the civil rights movement because the latter are so few in number. This in itself says something important about the status of the movement in official memory. I will say more on that below.

6 An initiative by Representative Newt Gingrich made the last four and a half years of the *Record* (covering the 103rd, 104th, and 105th Congresses) available via an Internet linkage entitled Thomas; this is the source I used, in conjunction with published transcripts of congressional hearings, some text from earlier, printed issues of the *Congressional Record*, and newspaper accounts and analyses.

7 Entries in the *Congressional Record* may consist of a single speech, an extension of remarks by one representative, or an extended debate. By "speech," I mean a statement that is either a single entry or part of one (but I count numerous speaking turns by one representative in the entry as a single speech). When I refer to the number of "references to King," I mean the number of speeches in which King was mentioned at least once.

8 This includes the nonvoting representative from the District of Columbia but not the delegates from the Virgin Islands.

9 J. C. Watts of Oklahoma, one of the two African American Republican representatives, made two speeches referring to King (his term began in 1995); the other, Gary Franks of Connecticut, made no speeches citing King during his two terms of office (although he was one of the members of the King Holiday Commission).

10 Material in brackets refers to the speaker, forum (House, Senate, Extension of Remarks), and date. See White 1997 and Rosenthal and Schram 1997 on presidential, congressional, and popular constructions of the "American dream."

11 Republicans and Democrats use the phrase in different ways: Democrats interpret it as calling for the creation of an egalitarian society, Republicans as an injunction to treat people in the here and now on the basis of the content of their character. For example, a special order commemorating Black History Month contains this statement: "If we are to move forward as the world's most diverse and successful multicultural nation, we must stop defining each other by the color of our skin, and strive to judge one another by the content of our character" (Martini, House, 28 February 1995). The fact that 1993 was the 30th anniversary of the speech may account in part for its high profile in the 103rd congressional session, when it appeared in 26 speeches by congressional representatives. In the next two-year period, it appeared in 13 speeches. However, it appeared in 9 speeches between January and May 1997, which is only one quarter of the 105th Congress. It would be useful to compare usage of the speech in congressional sessions before 1993.

12 King is also grouped with people characterized by their moral and/or spiritual

leadership—Jesus, Moses, Gandhi, Cesar Chavez (although the latter two were political leaders). The only white with whom King is grouped more than three times is Robert Kennedy; all references are to the assassination of both men in 1968. He is linked with Abraham Lincoln three times, George Washington twice, and Thomas Jefferson once. One reference to Lincoln and Washington claimed King's historical importance on the grounds that he was the only other American to have a holiday in his honor; one speech by a white Republican urged that King and Thurgood Marshall be celebrated as *Americans*—as American as Amelia Earhart and George Washington—rather than as African Americans.

13 The importance of the unity narrative for white commemorants may explain why Ronald Reagan, who saw the King holiday as "symbolic of crisis," was reluctant to sign the legislation, while Howard Baker, who saw it as "symbolic for unity," avidly supported it. Alternatively, Reagan's opposition to the legislation may explain why he represented it as "symbolic of crisis"—depending on whether one views representations of the past as shaping policy or legitimating it, that is, as rules or resources.

14 Eric Pianin, "The march and the dream," *Washington Post*, 27 August 1983.

15 Martin Schram and Dan Balz, "Jackson's run poses dilemma for black leaders," *Washington Post*, 27 November 1983, 1.

16 Ibid.

17 See U.S. Senate 1995.

18 Campbell (1995) describes a similar framing in news media's coverage of the King holiday in 1993. The King Holiday Commission's fate is intriguing. After winning authorization for $2 million over five years (*Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1994: 157), the commission voted *itself* out of existence after only two years; its director explained that they could no longer justify the financial burden on taxpayers. However, transcripts of a closed meeting of the commission's executive committee, along with an earlier memo sent by Coretta Scott King to the commission instructing it to cease using King's name or likeness in its fund-raising efforts, suggest that King and her son Dexter (newly installed as director of the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change) saw the commission's fund-raising efforts as competing with those of the King Center. In 1993, the latter was facing a deficit of $600,000. Commission members acknowledged that a prohibition on using King's name or likeness would cripple their fund-raising efforts and decided, accordingly, to disband. "Adjusting the King vision," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 7 February 1995; Robert A. Jordan, "King family feud doesn't deserve Olympic stature," *Boston Globe*, 5 February 1995.

19 In his study of Civil War monuments, Kirk Savage (1994: 129–30) found that movement sponsors offered several rationales for such monuments, "occasionally advancing the argument that people are forgetful and need their social memory bolstered by powerful mnemonic aids; sometimes arguing instead that memory is safe in the present but monuments are needed to transmit it across generations; yet

frequently invoking a startling counterargument—that the memory of heroism is undying and will outlast even monuments, which are therefore built simply as proof of memory's reality and strength." I found the same rationales, and additional ones, in African American legislators' arguments for commemoration.

20 Sociologists and anthropologists since Emile Durkheim have explored the social functions of symbolic boundaries separating the pure from the impure and the sacred from the profane. See especially Douglas 1966 and Alexander and Smith 1993.

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