“Generations and Collective Memory” Revisited: Race, Region, and Memory of Civil Rights

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Using the spontaneous memories of a national sample of Americans in 1985, Schuman and Scott (1989) largely confirmed Mannheim’s theory of generational identity by demonstrating that respondents’ age structured their recall of important national and world events over the past 50 years. But they did not find the predicted age patterns for whites’ recollections of civil rights. I argue that their failure was the consequence of ignoring regional differences in the impact of the Civil Rights movement on whites. Because the South was the target of and the battlefield for civil rights, “civil rights memory” should be greater for southern whites who experienced the movement as mature teenagers or young adults than for their equal-aged peers elsewhere or for southern whites in different age groups. I also hypothesize that this cohort of southern whites should attribute more historical importance to civil rights than do others. Both hypotheses are supported by analysis of the 1993 General Social Survey and Schuman’s and Scott’s original 1985 data. The theoretical import of the study is that where highly charged events happen shapes consciousness and memory, suggesting that Mannheim’s idea of the “social location” of generational identity formation is place-specific, as well as age-dependent.

Three premises guide research on social, or collective, memory. The first, of course, is that the past is not past at all—that it, instead, persists into the present and thus presages the future. The second is that memory is elicited by and organized in social contexts. Zerubavel (1996), in fact, argues that remembering is as much social as personal and that memory itself is a “social, intersubjective phenomenon” (p. 297). The third is that collective memories perform some form of culture work for those in the present. “Memory is not knowledge of the past,” writes Margalit (2002:14, emphasis in original) “it is knowledge from the past,” and, as such, it is thought to advance and validate identities, fuel grievances (and thus define enemies), and give meaning and narrative coherence to individuals and collectivities (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Schwartz 1996; Zelizer 1995).

Before we can understand how people deploy memory, however, we must know what people remember and why they remember the particular events they do. Schuman and Scott (1989) pioneered a fruitful approach to the study of collective memory that directly elicits recollections of the past from respondents, concretely situates them in their social contexts, and explicitly theorizes their “intersubjectivity.” Using a 1985 probability sample of over 1400 Americans to test Mannheim’s (1952) theory of the formation of generations, Schuman and Scott found that “the generational character created by the events a cohort experiences during
its youth” (p. 359) exerts a decisive influence on what each generation remembers, and thus presumably influences its later values and behaviors. Subsequent work by Schuman and others has replicated cohort influences on memory (Schuman, Akiyama, and Knäuper 1998; Schuman and Rodgers 2004; Scott and Zac 1993). “Youth” is understood by both Mannheim and Schuman and Scott as the period in a person’s life stretching from adolescence to early adulthood, roughly from the mid-teens to the mid-twenties. These years are so important because they are constitutive of world views and political perspectives that, though not inflexible, tend to be carried forward as individuals age. Formative historical events are those recalled as especially meaningful later in life because they are associated with crystallization of both personal identity and knowledge of social realities outside of the self. Thus, one’s sense of self is theorized to be stamped by the historically significant events and changes occurring during this critical time in the development of an individual’s identity. Conway (1997), in fact, suggests that “the original generation-specific self remains the self with which all later selves must be negotiated” (p. 43).

Events occurring before and after these formative years are thought to be of less personal and generational salience. They are less likely to be remembered as “key” happenings because they do not coincide with the period in individuals’ lives in which “the taken-for-granted natural world of childhood” (Schuman and Scott 1989:361) is disrupted. Even recent events (despite well-documented “recency” effects) are less likely to be spontaneously remembered, at least as “primary” national or world changes, because of the prior imprinting of formative events on the world views and sense of self of those who experienced them during adolescence or early adulthood. Because members of a particular generation experience powerful, self- and collectivity-defining national and international events at the same formative time in their lives (e.g., the Great Depression and the 1960s generations), however diverse those experiences, finally, the memory of those events is shared by many, if not all, in that generation, making it a “collective memory” of a particular sort. (See Olick 1999 and Kansteiner 2002 for approaches to the study of collective memory and distinctions among types of collective or social memories.)

Schuman and Scott (1989) ascertained memories of historically significant happenings (rather than purely personal ones) by asking Americans an open-ended question about their spontaneous recall of one or, if possible, two “national and world events and changes over the past 50 years—say, from about 1930 right up until today” (“p. 363). They classified the specific memory responses (of Pearl Harbor, the 1969 moon walk, etc.) into over 30 categories, ranging from John Kennedy’s assassination to the Women’s movement to farm problems. For the most part, they validated their theory: More Americans 55 to 69 years of age in 1985—making them 10 to 24 years old in 1940—for example, mentioned the Second World War as important than did other age cohorts; those aged 35 to 44, making them 13 to 22 years old in 1963, more frequently mentioned JFK’s assassination; and respondents more than 70 years old, making them at least 15 years of age in 1930, were more likely to mention the Great Depression of the 1930s. Other social conditioning influences were also present: Virtually only women, for example, mentioned the Women’s movement. One event, however, did not conform fully to Schuman and Scott’s predictions about recall—the Civil Rights movement. Although African Americans (49 percent) mentioned civil rights much more frequently than did whites (6 percent), and also loosely exhibited the sort of cohort-specificity suggested by Mannheim (1952), whites did not: For them, age seemed not at all to condition memories of civil rights. Schuman and Scott were unusually candid about the failure of the theory here, noting that “It is difficult to explain the null age relationship for whites. . . . We have no satisfactory interpretation of the puzzling absence of an age trend in this case “ (p.368).

I believe Schuman and Scott’s (1989) predictions about the generational character of “movement memory” to be largely correct, but their inability to validate them empirically stems, I hypothesize, from their lack of attention to regional dynamics, specifically with the 1950s and 1960s black liberation struggle’s differential importance to, and impact on, whites in the American South as compared with those in the remainder of the nation. The South, more than any other region in the country, visibly
carries that past conflict on its shoulders. It is a past continually recreated and renewed from within and without in various media, from documentaries such as Eyes on the Prize and films such as Mississippi Burning, to the hundreds of newspaper articles across the nation reflecting on the horrors of racial segregation and the salutary legacy of the Civil Rights movement, to the recent "truth and reconciliation"-type trials of perpetrators of Civil Rights-era assassinations and church bombings in Mississippi and Alabama (Griffin 2000). Indeed, no past "national or world event" bearing directly on the recent history of the region, and on the formation of autobiographical memories of southerners (e.g., see Hobson 1999), more forcefully and poignantly has stamped the modern South than the Civil Rights movement. The South, of course, was the battlefield in the struggle for human freedom in the 1950s and 1960s, and southerners of both races were daily on the frontline. Not only is that past literally memorialized in Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, and elsewhere throughout the region, but the very presence, still, of desegregated public places, integrated schools, and elected black officials is a living, inescapable testimony to that history.

White southerners, to be sure, exhausted every method of resistance to racial justice, from outright (often lethal) violence to the establishment of private "segregation academies," from threats of "nullification" and "interposition" (legal maneuvers designed to evade federal authority) to the wholesale defection from the Democratic Party to the party of Lincoln (Black and Black 1987). Some forms of white counter-mobilization have become institutionalized inside (and outside) the region—the resegregation of the public schools, for example, and the recent and near-complete political dominance in elections for national office of the Republican Party in the South—thereby altering American political culture. But the successes of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s nevertheless spelled the demise of white supremacy in the region, at least as a coercive state-mandated regime of racial control: Simply put, after years of massive resistance, white southerners lost much of the privilege due to their skin color that they had claimed for over three hundred years. Barring the almost conscious repression of the memory of what some southern whites might view as a regional and racial "trauma," a repression resulting in willful social forgetting and collective amnesia (e.g., Irwin-Zarecka 1994:116), the movement and the civil rights era are unlikely to have been forgotten, least of all by those who came of age during that time and who thus, first, witnessed and then, willingly or not, practiced the transformation of the essential meanings of race, region, and rights due to what Woodward (1965) labeled the "Second Southern Reconstruction."

Research has shown that historical events are implicated in the formation and maintenance of collective memories if they represent significant long-term changes to people's lives, make people think about the events at the time of their happening, are emotionally charged, and exert collective psychological impact (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997). Extensive historical and autobiographical evidence suggests that between 1955 and 1970, southerners, black and white alike, experienced the Civil Rights movement in just those ways (Griffin 1995; Hobson 1999; Raines 1977). Those residing elsewhere, especially African Americans, most certainly knew of the movement and its activities in Dixie (many following the story closely, others supporting or actively participating in it), but all southerners lived those years, and for some, especially those in their formative period at the time, the movement remains seared into their consciousness as autobiographic memory (see Conway 1997). Thus, white southerners, when compared with non-southern whites, should exhibit the cohort-specific memories predicted, but not found, by Schuman and Scott (1989) for the entire sample of whites. Following the same reasoning, the "civil rights" generation of southern whites should attribute greater historical significance to the Civil Rights move-

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1 One of the more recent examples comes from an editorial published on March 22, 2004 in The New York Times, titled "The Ghost of Emmett Till." The Times was calling for an investigation into the 50-year old murder of Emmett Till, a young African American lynched in Mississippi in 1955 allegedly for speaking improperly to a white female. His killers, who, for money, later confessed their guilt to a journalist, were found innocent in what can only be described as a farcical trial.
ment than should whites outside the region or older or younger southern whites.

Using Schuman and Scott's 1985 data and data on 1,606 Americans from the 1993 General Social Survey (GSS), I explore these expectations. I examine the age patterning of regional differences in "civil rights recall" and in judgments of the relative historical importance of events dating back to the 1930s. Both of the surveys I use have unique advantages. Only the 1985 data elicited respondents' reasons for their recollections or asked explicitly about the historical significance of events. The 1993 data, on the other hand, permit more statistical controls and finer geographic breakdowns, and only these data contain information on the region in which respondents lived during their formative years. The latter is crucial: Mannheim's (1952) theory of generation formation and Schuman and Scott's (1989) extension of it to generational memory both predict that historically significant events will be imprinted on generations during their formative years. Given my argument, information on the region in which respondents lived during their adolescence is necessary for a rigorous test of my hypotheses about the spatialization of memory. I begin the analysis with the 1993 GSS.

**MEMORABLE EVENTS**

Whites' spontaneously mentioned memories (in the 1993 GSS) of historical events are presented in Table 1 by (census-defined) region of residence at age 16. The census South includes the 11 states of the former Confederacy, plus Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Generally, whites share the same set of memories of national and world events, regardless of the region in which they lived at age 16. Such differences that do exist are best understood as quantitative variations on event recall, rather than as qualitatively

The 1993 GSS event-recall question is worded almost identically to Schuman and Scott's (1989) question, and up to four events or changes were ascertained. From the GSS cumulative codebook, I count as civil rights recall code numbers 32 ("Civil Rights/Racial Issues; Desegregation/Affirmative Action"), 34 ("Civil Rights [Negative Mentions Only]"), and 43 ("Leadership or Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King"). I follow the same measurement protocol when later analyzing Schuman's and Scott's 1985 data. Following Schuman and Scott, the percentage of respondents recalling specific events is calculated using as the base those recalling any event (including personal ones).

### Table 1. Percentage of Whites Recalling Historical Events and Changes by Region of Residence at Age 16 in 1993 (GSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event or Change</th>
<th>Foreign (%)</th>
<th>West (%)</th>
<th>North Central (%)</th>
<th>Northeast (%)</th>
<th>South (%)</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>Φ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of communism</td>
<td>39.5 (15)</td>
<td>34.7 (74)</td>
<td>34.3 (143)</td>
<td>38.0 (95)</td>
<td>32.4 (113)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>31.6 (12)</td>
<td>28.6 (61)</td>
<td>22.5 (94)</td>
<td>21.2 (53)</td>
<td>21.8 (76)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam War</td>
<td>5.3 (2)</td>
<td>16.0 (34)</td>
<td>14.4 (60)</td>
<td>10.4 (26)</td>
<td>9.7 (34)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space exploration</td>
<td>15.8 (6)</td>
<td>20.2 (43)</td>
<td>18.0 (75)</td>
<td>16.0 (40)</td>
<td>16.0 (56)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFK assassination</td>
<td>10.5 (4)</td>
<td>11.7 (25)</td>
<td>12.5 (52)</td>
<td>17.2 (43)</td>
<td>10.9 (38)</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear war</td>
<td>2.6 (1)</td>
<td>1.9 (4)</td>
<td>1.9 (8)</td>
<td>1.6 (4)</td>
<td>1.7 (6)</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/communication</td>
<td>5.3 (2)</td>
<td>5.6 (12)</td>
<td>5.3 (22)</td>
<td>8.0 (20)</td>
<td>7.2 (25)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Depression</td>
<td>5.3 (2)</td>
<td>6.1 (13)</td>
<td>5.8 (24)</td>
<td>3.2 (8)</td>
<td>3.4 (12)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights movement</td>
<td>5.3 (2)</td>
<td>10.8 (23)</td>
<td>10.3 (43)</td>
<td>12.8 (32)</td>
<td>12.3 (43)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>7.9 (3)</td>
<td>5.2 (11)</td>
<td>3.4 (14)</td>
<td>2.8 (7)</td>
<td>5.2 (18)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>2.6 (1)</td>
<td>.5 (1)</td>
<td>1.0 (4)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>.6 (2)</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral decline</td>
<td>2.6 (1)</td>
<td>2.8 (6)</td>
<td>6.0 (25)</td>
<td>4.8 (12)</td>
<td>8.3 (29)</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's movement</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>8.5 (18)</td>
<td>6.5 (27)</td>
<td>7.2 (18)</td>
<td>6.3 (22)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N in Region</td>
<td>(38) (213)</td>
<td>(213)</td>
<td>(417)</td>
<td>(250)</td>
<td>(349)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages sum to greater than 100 (and Ns sum to greater than the N for each region) because up to four choices were permitted per respondent; event recall thus is not mutually exclusive. Regional differences are not statistically significant (p < .05; two-tailed test). JFK = John F. Kennedy*
different memories. On the whole, then, southern whites share the memories of most white Americans, recalling specific events with about the same frequency. (This is true as well for other events or changes not listed in Table 1—e.g., Nixon/Watergate, the Korean War, etc.) At least as assessed in the GSS data (and in Schuman and Scott's [1989] 1985 data as well), there are no differing regional memories among whites (see also, Rosenzweig and Thelen [1998:117] for a similar inference with different data). Black-white dissimilarities, on the other hand, are persistent and profound in both the 1993 GSS and 1985 Schuman and Scott data, indicating yet again a racially cleaved nation: 54 percent of African Americans recalled the Civil Rights movement in 1993, while only 4 percent of black respondents spontaneously mentioned World War II, and fewer than 5 percent recalled Vietnam. Moreover, because the question permitted respondents to choose as many as four important events, there is no necessary trade-off between (say) World War II and civil rights.

That so few whites in either survey spontaneously recalled the Civil Rights movement might suggest that gradually unfolding, decadelong social change that is difficult to date precisely, such as civil rights (Schuman and Rodgers 2004), might be less memorable than sudden, dramatic events which are encapsulated in (and more clearly defined by) a shorter time frame, such as World War II or John Kennedy's assassination. In its simplest form, this reasoning, offered by several reviewers, is plausible but nonetheless inconsistent with the remarkably large percentage of blacks who regarded civil rights as a highly memorable issue. I suspect that groups who fought for, or otherwise instigated, the change in question (e.g., African Americans for civil rights), or are its direct beneficiaries, recall it with greater frequency than do those for whom gradual change has less, if still considerable, structural and psychological impact (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997).3

The lack of significant regional effects on the civil rights memory of whites in Table 1 is irrelevant to a generational argument. What matters is how age structures memory among whites, not the general frequency of recollections, and if I am correct in my reasoning, civil rights—era white southerners of formative age should spontaneously mention the Civil Rights movement more often than whites reared elsewhere or older or younger southern whites. Determining the "correct" age at which civil rights imprinted itself on youth is difficult, as Schuman and Scott (1989:363) noted, because the civil rights era is ambiguously dated: There was no single event that decisively defined the years of legal and extra-legal activities by the movement and its (mostly southern) white opponents. Schuman and Scott use two legal landmarks as the beginning and endpoints of the movement: the 1954 Supreme Court Brown school desegregation decision, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which encapsulate the most dramatic events of the movement. But such a strategy, though reasonable, likely underestimates the persistence and longevity of the movement, particularly so in the South. Civil rights demonstrations continued in the region after the Voting Rights Act; the Open Housing Act (barring racial discrimination in housing) was not enacted into law until 1968, the year Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis in a struggle that was as much about civil rights as labor's rights; and massive school desegregation of southern schools occurred only after Richard Nixon threatened to withhold federal education funds in 1970–1971. The "civil rights era," in fact, lasted at least a decade and a half (Graham 1990). A more plausible dating of the period, as it was actually experienced in the region, is roughly 1954 to 1970.4

3 In their survey of Americans in 1994, Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998:151) found similar racial divisions in memory. They asked respondents to identify the "event or period in the past [that] has most affected" them. Less than 7 percent of whites named, cumula-

4 In a revision of Schuman and Scott (1989), Schuman and Rodgers (2004:20) argue that civil rights recall is not susceptible to age effects because the referent ("civil rights") lacks clear beginning and ending dates. With more precise information, how-

ibly, civil rights, slavery, or Martin Luther King's assassination; more than 38 percent of African Americans did so (again, cumulatively). Conversely, almost 30 percent of whites cumulatively mentioned World War II, Vietnam, or the First Gulf War; fewer than 13 percent of blacks did so.
Assuming that Mannheim's (1952) estimate is roughly accurate—that the most impressionable age group is approximately 17 to 25 years old—southern whites who were somewhere between their early forties and their mid-sixties in 1993 were in their formative years between 1954 and 1970, and their autobiographical memories of that time should be the sharpest. The oldest individuals in this group would have experienced the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement—the Supreme Court's Brown decision, and the Montgomery bus boycott—in their early-to-mid-twenties, and the youngest would have lived through the tail end of the Second Reconstruction as mature teenagers, especially school desegregation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. So I expect southern whites aged 42 to 64 in 1993 to mention civil rights more often than other-aged whites from the region and more often than whites of the same age from other regions.

Relatively few whites from any region recall civil rights (Table 1), but the age structuring of memory in the South is entirely consistent with Schuman and Scott's (1989) expectations (Table 2).\(^5\) Recall differs significantly by region for two of the three age cohorts, but most important, of course, are the memories of the theoretically relevant cohort, ages 42 to 64. Only white southerners living in the region at age 16 exhibit the curvilinear memory pattern predicted by Schuman and Scott, with those 42 to 64 years of age mentioning the movement more (17.7 percent) than either their same-aged peers who lived elsewhere during their formative years (5.5 percent to 14 percent) or younger or older whites in the region (8.8 percent to 9.7 percent).\(^6\)

The civil-rights cohort of southern whites ranks civil rights the second most memorable historical event among those in Table 1 (behind only the end of Communism); the same cohort of non-southern whites, on the other hand, ranks civil rights sixth (data on request). Curvilinear cohort effects also characterize whites' civil rights recollections in each of the three major sub-regions in the South (Table 3), indicating the geographical pervasiveness of civil rights memory. (Given the small number of cases in each sub-region, the age patterning is not statistically significant; aggregated for the South as a whole, they are [see Table 2].) Finally, recall of other events by this group of southern whites is quite similar to that of non-southern whites for virtually all other highly mentioned events (Kennedy's assassination is the sole exception; data available on request), indicating that there is nothing peculiar about these middle-aged white southerners. The only event for which we see regional differences of the sort predicted is for civil rights.

Regional differences in cohort recall persist, and are often significant, when I control for education and gender in logistic regression equations. (The simple college/non-college dichotomy outperforms alternative linear and non-linear specifications of education.) Most cohorts in both regions spontaneously recall the movement significantly less frequently than

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\(^5\) An anonymous reviewer suggested that African Americans might exhibit the same region-cohort interaction observed for whites. They do not. Among blacks residing in the South at age 16, recall of civil rights is most frequent for the youngest cohort (55 percent) and the percentage decreases with the age of the cohort (e.g., 41 percent of the oldest cohort mention civil rights). Blacks from the Midwest (but from no other non-southern region), on the other hand, approximate the generational specificity predicted by Schuman and Scott (1989). None of the regional or age effects for blacks are statistically significant. Clearly, the generational and regional conditioning of African Americans' recollections deserves serious study, not as an ancillary question but as a motivating one. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998:147–76) offer valuable empirical insights on this and similar issues.

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\(^6\) The statistics in the last two rows of Table 2 assess the significance of age within region; those in the last two columns assess the significance of region within age category. The significant age patterns for respondents who, during their formative years, lived in the Western and North Central states are inconsistent with the "generations and memory" theory because recall is highest among the youngest cohort, a group too young to have experienced the movement in their formative years.
do white southerners aged 42 to 64 (Table 4, Equation 1).

Exploring further memory’s “intersubjectivity”, and what Schwartz (1996) calls its “social frames,” I also control (in Equation 2, Table 4) for the possible effects on civil rights memory of the political liberalism and ethnicity of whites (European versus non-European) in the 1993 GSS. Both factors likely connote the politics of civil rights memory—that is, how memory is “made and remade to serve changing societal interests and needs” in the present (Schwartz 1996:909). I expect political liberals to recall civil rights more frequently than moderates or conservatives because liberals have often joined African Americans to institutionalize public memory of the movement (Polletta 1998) and because the southern black freedom struggle itself has become iconic in progressive circles, both as a spur to other collective actions (McAdam 1988) and as the standard against which other social movements are judged in terms of the righteousness of the cause, the efficacy and purity of the strategies, and the success of the struggle (e.g., see King 1992). Thus, as they grapple with racial and other political issues in the present, white liberals, more than moderates or conservatives, should deploy civil rights memory as an important interpretive, meaning-making social frame (see Schwartz 1996:911). Likewise, I suspect that whites (as judged by GSS interviewers) who express identification with a non-European ancestry or nationality—such as Native Americans or Latinas/Latinos—to be more likely than those of European ancestry to see the parallels between their own present-day circumstances and the hardships and successful actions of southern blacks (e.g., see Waters 1990). In drawing on the movement to frame their current plight and possibilities, then, they should also remember it more frequently.

Both of these expectations are confirmed by the results of the logistic regression analysis in Equation 2 of Table 4. More important for my purposes, though, is that the regional specificity of the age-patterning of civil rights recall is again observed. Even when factors tapping the

Table 2. Percentage of Whites Recalling Civil Rights by Residence at Age 16 in 1993 (GSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (yr)</th>
<th>West % (n)</th>
<th>North Central % (n)</th>
<th>Northeast % (n)</th>
<th>Non-South (total) % (n)</th>
<th>South % (n)</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>Φ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 41</td>
<td>15.5 (18)</td>
<td>14.7 (28)</td>
<td>16.5 (17)</td>
<td>15.4 (63)</td>
<td>9.7 (15)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 to 64</td>
<td>5.5 (4)</td>
<td>10.1 (14)</td>
<td>14.0 (13)</td>
<td>10.2 (31)</td>
<td>17.7 (20)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>4.2 (1)</td>
<td>1.2 (1)</td>
<td>3.8 (2)</td>
<td>2.5 (4)</td>
<td>8.8 (7)</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ²</td>
<td>5.9*</td>
<td>11.7*</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>20.1*</td>
<td>5.0*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Φ</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† South/non-South difference is significant (p < .05; two-tailed test).
* Age pattern is statistically significant (p < .05; one-tailed test for South).

Table 3. Percentage of Southern Whites Recalling Civil Rights by Sub-Region of Residence at Age 16 in 1993 (GSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (yr)</th>
<th>South Atlantic % (n)</th>
<th>East South Central % (n)</th>
<th>West South Central % (n)</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>Φ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 41</td>
<td>11.9 (8)</td>
<td>2.8 (1)</td>
<td>11.5 (6)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 to 64</td>
<td>17.5 (10)</td>
<td>12.5 (3)</td>
<td>21.9 (7)</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>6.3 (2)</td>
<td>5.0 (1)</td>
<td>14.3 (4)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ²</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Φ</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Delaware; Florida; Georgia; Maryland; North Carolina; South Carolina; Virginia; Washington, DC; West Virginia.

b Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee.

c Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas.
Table 4. Logistic Regression Results for Whites' Civil Rights Recall in 1993 (GSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Equation 1</th>
<th>Equation 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>Exp (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any college</td>
<td>.67*</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liberal</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European ethnicity</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-South region by age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 42</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 to 64</td>
<td>-.71*</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>-2.11*</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South region by age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 42</td>
<td>-.69*</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 to 64</td>
<td>Ommitted category</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>-.75</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R²</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents (N)</td>
<td>1,261</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 (cohort differences tested with one-tailed test).

Politics, social framing, and cognition (i.e., education) of memory are controlled, no other cohort of whites, North or South, mentions the movement as an important national or world event as often as does the southern "civil rights" generation.7 (The small number of positive cases renders the effects of the oldest cohorts in both regions significant at p < .1 rather than p < .05.)

Using the regression estimates in Equation 2, I calculated the adjusted regionally specific predicted probabilities of recalling civil rights for two groups of whites: politically conservative females of European ancestry with no college education, and politically liberal females of European ancestry with at least some college education. (Given the null effect of gender in Table 4, the patterns for males should be virtually indistinguishable from those for women.) From the first set of predicted probabilities (which, given the values of the covariates, yield generally low probabilities [Table 4]), we see not only that white southerners aged 42 to 64 are appreciably more likely than other whites to recall the Civil Rights movement, but that only white southerners exhibit the curvilinear age pattern predicted by Schuman and Scott (1989); white northerners clearly do not (Figure 1). The second set of predicted probabilities, which are higher owing to the recall-enhancing values of the covariates, are more dramatic still (Figure 2). The predicted probability for the civil rights generation of southern whites in Figure 2 is .32, substantially higher than any other cohort of whites from either region.8 The recollections captured by this statistic reduces the racial gap in civil rights memory (55 percent of equal-aged blacks mentioned the movement) and demonstrates that, controlling for a number of confounding influences, civil rights recall is greatest for those who resided in the South during young adulthood.

7 Additional statistical controls and sub-sample analyzes did not appreciably alter my results. Whites aged 42 to 64 who were reared in the South but living in the North recalled civil rights appreciably more frequently than did those reared in and living in the South (26 percent to 15 percent). The latter displayed the expected curvilinear age pattern, but the pattern was more pronounced for the former. Southerners, black and white alike, have a rich history of voluntary and involuntary exile from the South, so this finding—though not reaching statistical significance at conventional levels—deserves more attention.

8 Use of different values of the covariates would, of course, change the South/non-South predicted probability differentials, but would neither invert them nor subvert the curvilinear cohort effects for white southerners.
I turn now to an analysis of Schuman and Scott's 1985 data. Region here refers to region of residence in 1985, not to region of residence during the respondents' formative years. (See Schuman and Scott [1989] for specifics of data collection and measurement.) Because these data were collected in 1985, eight years earlier than the 1993 GSS, the theoretically relevant cohort would be aged 34 to 56 (the 1993 cohort was aged 42 to 64). I find the same age patterning (though dampened) in 1985 (Table 5) as I did in 1993: Significantly more white southerners in the theoretically relevant cohort, 34 to 56 years of age (11 percent), mentioned the movement as either their first or second spontaneous recollection than did their same-aged peers residing elsewhere (3 percent to 6.2 percent) or younger or older whites in the region (about 5 percent). Controls for gender, education, and other factors did not affect these inferences (data available on request). Even with an imperfect proxy for region of residence during one's formative years, then, I continue to find

9 In the 1993 GSS, 22 percent of white southerners did not live in the region at age 16, and eleven percent of whites who lived in the South at age 16 lived in the North at the time of the survey. Use of current
Table 5. Percentage of Whites Recalling Civil Rights by Region of Current Residence in 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (yr)</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>North Central</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Non-South (total)</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>Є</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 33</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.5 (10)</td>
<td>2.3 (1)</td>
<td>6.6 (15)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 to 56</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0 (4)</td>
<td>6.2 (5)</td>
<td>4.1 (13)</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57 and older</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.5 (4)</td>
<td>6.3 (4)</td>
<td>5.1 (11)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data source: Schuman and Converse, “Intersection of Personal and National History” (1985).
* South/Non-South difference is significant (p < .05).

the hypothesized pattern only for southern whites who likely experienced the civil rights era as adolescents or young adults. The age pattern for white southerners is, owing to the small number of cases, significant at p < .1 with a one-tailed test.

In addition to asking respondents to recall historical events or changes, Schuman and Scott (1989) asked them, in another open-ended question, to state briefly why they remembered these events or changes. Responses were often surprisingly rich, permitting an interpretation of what the events and their consequences meant to the Americans surveyed. (These data were not used in their 1989 publication.) Reasons ranged from the terse (e.g., “integration”) to the expansive, indicating that some respondents had given real thought to the historical weight of the Civil Rights movement. Most were positive in nature, almost all pertained to the successes and the legacy of the movement rather than to its struggles and hardships, and several acknowledged its personal moral significance. A few examples from southern whites follow.

Everyone has a better chance of bettering themselves, equal jobs, better education. Everyone has an equal opportunity to do what they want to. (Male respondent, age 42)

Made us all realize that we were victimizing certain people who lived in this country. . . . It made me realize it wasn’t a Christian thing to do . . . you should do to others what you want them to do to you. It made me look at myself and repent. (Male respondent, age 30)

I never argued or disagreed with [segregation], it wasn’t right. I wouldn’t want to see anything like that again . . . it all centers on morality . . . (Female respondent, age 62)

[It] was a movement for not just races, but for women and for everyone, whether it was race, age, or sex. (Male respondent, age 42)

Several southern whites remembered the movement quite negatively and forthrightly expressed their displeasure at the changes it brought to region and nation:

The blacks get more than we do now . . . They have more rights because their [sic] black and they get what they want . . . Dad lost his job because of them being minorities. (Female respondent, age 32)

I’m prejudiced, a downhill of country. Blacks asking too much . . . 100% against mixed marriages . . . I get along with blacks fine . . . I don’t like the demanding. That’s the only thing that burns me up. (Male respondent, age 47)

Generally, white southerners were more likely to emphasize the movement’s benefits for blacks or society as a whole (e.g., greater tolerance generally), and northern whites tended to give factual, morally neutral reasons for civil rights recall. I found no interpretable age differences in memory content.

MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS

Schuman and Scott (1989) also asked their respondents in 1985 about their perceptions of the “most significant” event/change: “Which of the following six events or changes from the past do you think is the most important for how the world is today . . .?” A follow-up question asked about the next most important event. (These data too were not used in their 1989 publication.) Six forced-choice alternatives were given for both queries: World War II, the Civil Rights
Movement, the Great Depression, the Women’s Movement, the invention of the computer, and Watergate/resignation of President Nixon. Although forced-choice questions generate more focused responses than do open-ended questions, they have the disadvantage of limiting answers to categories determined by the investigator rather than by the respondent. Often, the two formats generate substantively different data and inferences (Schuman and Rodgers 2004). Historical importance, too, is not equivalent to recollections of past happenings or social changes, nor, in these data, are the two strongly related. Attributions of the significance of events are thus less useful for exploring the generational character of memory. Nonetheless, there may be generational components to perceptions of importance: Having experienced an event or lived through an historic change during one’s formative years may accentuate a sense of the historical weight of the event. Hence, I expect these age-bound attributional processes to be especially prominent among whites in the South for the reasons I have discussed above.

Table 6 presents white respondents’ understandings of the importance of the six events queried by region of current residence. (Again, I combine first and second choices; first–choice responses produce similar results by region.) Regional distinctions are small and nonpatterned. Assuming a “generations” interpretation of historical importance as well as of memory per se, I would not expect southern whites generally to be more sensitive to civil rights than whites elsewhere, and we see that is the case: A third or so of whites from all regions name civil rights as either the first or second most important event. (Again, racial differences are large: More than half of African Americans grant civil rights historical importance, and fewer than 20 percent name World War II. Data not shown.)

As was the case with recollections, however, my interest is in regional differences in cohort effects, and I expect to see white southerners in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties in 1985 more frequently naming civil rights as one of the two most important historical events among the six choices. Disaggregating the non-South into its three constitutive census-defined regions and categorizing age into the three cohorts used in Table 5, we see the 34- to 56-year-old cohort of whites in both the South and the Northeast name civil rights more frequently (see Table 7).10 (Because none of the controls exerted statistically significant effects in the logistic regression analysis, the unadjusted data in Table 7 are sufficient for my purposes.) The former finding, pertaining to southern whites, was expected; the latter, for whites in the Northeast, was not. One possibility for the latter effect centers on the confluence of changes in the goals, strategies, and geographic locus of black insurgency and white counter-mobilization in the late 1960s.

10. Using nine rather than three age cohorts, I found similar regional differences. For southern whites, attributed significance of civil rights peaked at 50 percent for the 35–39 age cohort (with individuals aged 15 to 19 in 1965, perhaps the most decisive age for the retention of memory of public events [Holmes and Conway 1999]), remained high through the 50–54 age cohort, and fell off thereafter. The percentage of southern whites in the 35–39 age cohort naming civil rights (50 percent) exceeded that of African Americans in the same age cohort (47 percent).

Table 6. Most Important Events and Changes: Percentage of Whites by Region of Current Residence in 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event or Change</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>North Central</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Non-South (total)</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>( \Phi )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>47.2 (126)</td>
<td>42.6 (141)</td>
<td>43.3 (87)</td>
<td>44.3 (354)</td>
<td>43.2 (143)</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>36.0 (96)</td>
<td>32.3 (107)</td>
<td>33.3 (67)</td>
<td>33.8 (270)</td>
<td>36.0 (119)</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Depression</td>
<td>21.7 (58)</td>
<td>29.3 (97)</td>
<td>24.9 (50)</td>
<td>25.7 (205)</td>
<td>25.1 (83)</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Movement</td>
<td>20.2 (54)</td>
<td>24.2 (80)</td>
<td>27.4 (55)</td>
<td>23.7 (189)</td>
<td>24.2 (80)</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>53.9 (144)</td>
<td>52.6 (174)</td>
<td>52.7 (106)</td>
<td>53.1 (424)</td>
<td>51.4 (170)</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon/Watergate</td>
<td>16.1 (43)</td>
<td>14.8 (49)</td>
<td>15.4 (31)</td>
<td>15.4 (123)</td>
<td>13.9 (46)</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data source: Schuman and Converse, “Intersection of Personal and National History” (1985). Regional differences are not statistically significant (p < .05; two-tailed test).
and early 1970s. By 1965 civil rights activities
had spread northward: 1967 witnessed massive
urban riots in Newark, New Jersey (as well as
other cities in the North); 1968, the Poor
People's March on Washington and the pro-
longed, racially charged conflict over control of
the public schools in Ocean Hill (Brooklyn,
New York); 1969, the introduction of Nixon's
controversial "Philadelphia Plan" to desegregate
the nation's construction industry; and 1974,
court mandated school busing in Boston, which
spurred enormous white resistance. Whites in
the Northeast certainly would have been aware
of these and similar events, and those who came
of age there and then may have had this region-
al history (as well what happened further south)—a history now possibly of personal
interest and consequence—in mind when
assessing the import of events. For non-southern
whites as a whole, however, age is irrelevant
(Table 7), and the South/non-South gap, as pre-
dicted, is significant only for the 34- to 56-
year-old cohort (Table 7, row 2). Finally, I again
found little systematic evidence that southern
whites in this cohort understood the importance
of the remaining five events any differently than
did their peers residing elsewhere.11

11 White southerners in this age group gave sig-
nificantly less historical weight to Watergate by a mar-
gin equal to that of their heightened appreciation
of the importance of civil rights. Only whites from the
Northeast displayed predictable age patterns for civil
rights as the first most important remembered event.
There is no effect, however, of "non-south" as a
whole on first choice.

CONCLUSION

The past seems especially salient, as both mem-
ory and as historical significance, to people
whose identities and social awareness were crys-
tallized during and because of sweeping his-
torical events. Where events happen also
influences memory, perhaps as much as when
they occur in a person's life, because place con-
tions the personal relevance of events, such as
the Civil Rights movement, that are intensely
spatialized. That memory is spatialized is fur-
ther validated by Scott and Zac (1993), who
reported that Britons, in 1990, though exhibit-
ing the cohort-specificity predicted by Schuman
and Scott (1989), were generally more likely to
spontaneously remember World War II than
were Americans in Schuman and Scott's data by
a margin of 16 percent. Given that the British
experienced that war much more personally
than did Americans—the bombings of English
cities, evacuations, preparations for a German
landing on British soil, and so on—these dif-
fferences are to be expected. (Schuman,
Akiyama, and Knäuper [1998] provide further
evidence of the spatialization of memory.) Place
matters as a locus of action, consciousness, and
identity (Ayers et al. 1996; Gieryn 2000), and
we see now that it also mediates memory and
understandings of historical import in the United
States. Once historical and geographical context
is factored into Schuman and Scott's exposition
of the generational character of memory by con-
sidering regional differences, their theory
tracks the memories and attributions of whites
who, during their formative years, experienced
daily the Civil Rights movement's impact on the

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Table 7. Civil Rights as First or Second Most Important Event: Percentage of Whites by Region of Current
Residence in 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (yr)</th>
<th>West % (n)</th>
<th>North Central % (n)</th>
<th>Northeast % (n)</th>
<th>Non-South % (n)</th>
<th>South % (n)</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>( \Phi )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 33</td>
<td>36.1 (30)</td>
<td>35.1 (39)</td>
<td>21.3 (10)</td>
<td>32.8 (79)</td>
<td>29.4 (30)</td>
<td>.4 .03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 to 56</td>
<td>33.7 (35)</td>
<td>30.4 (41)</td>
<td>42.4 (36)</td>
<td>34.8 (112)</td>
<td>43.2 (63)</td>
<td>.2 .08†</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57 and older</td>
<td>38.8 (31)</td>
<td>32.9 (27)</td>
<td>31.3 (21)</td>
<td>34.5 (79)</td>
<td>31.3 (26)</td>
<td>.3 .03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data source: Schuman and Converse, "Intersection of Personal and National History" (1985).
† South/non-South difference is significant (\( p < .05; \) one-tailed test).
* Age pattern is statistically significant (\( p < .05; \) two-tailed test).
morally essential transformations of the South's race relations and racial structures.

The small numbers of whites who spontaneously recalled civil rights in 1985 or 1993 reduce the statistical significance of some of the regional differences in cohort effects and render my inferences on memory only suggestive. With higher numbers of whites identifying civil rights as historically significant in 1985, my conclusions here are firmer. Each inference, however, is strengthened by the other: Using two very different indicators (and question formats), I find that a higher percentage of white southerners of formative age spontaneously recalled civil rights than did other whites (in 1993), and whites of critical age likely residing in the South in 1985, again at higher percentages than most other whites, believed civil rights to be one of the two more important events in the country's recent history.

My analysis also suggests the workings of memory processes other than the autobiographical or generational, suggesting that civil rights memory, at any rate, may have become institutionalized in public memory, permitting those who came of age after the dramatic happenings of 1954-1970 to "remember" the movement at surprisingly high rates. The findings reported here hint, too, at the importance of regions other than the American South in structuring the awareness and significance of the past—in the case of civil rights, the Northeast—suggesting that regional dynamics generally deserve more prominence in social research (Ayers et al. 1996; Reed 1982; Zelinsky 1992). But it is the South's past, in particular its racial past, that continues in memory, as well as through the workings of other mechanisms such as representation and racial norms, to stand somewhat apart from the American mainstream (see Griffin 1995, 2000; Schuman et al. 1997). Mannheim's (1952) idea of the "social location" of generational identity formation appears to be place-specific as well as age-dependent, and the primary social location of civil rights battles and successes was the South. Region, along with race, gender, age, and other social factors, matters in the construction of collective memories, and the real question is not whether it (or place, more generally) or something else has causal primacy, but how, conjoined, they produce—as race, region, and age do in these data—what is remembered and thought to be historically important.

What people actually do with these and other memories, however, is largely unknown. Relatively little research in collective memory has delved into how memory, once debated and codified in museums, memorials, films, national holidays, and other memory sites, has been received by those putatively using memory to construct meaning about themselves, their times, and their communities. "Memory consumers" (Kansteiner 2002: 180) thus too often remain unanalyzed, and so how memory actually shapes or does not shape consciousness and action—that is, what people actually do with memory in time present—is left unaddressed. (For an important exception, see Schuman and Rieger's [1992] analysis of the impact of historical analogies on attitudes toward the first Gulf War.) The reasons southern whites gave for remembering civil rights in Schuman and Scott's (1989) data, for example, suggest several different ways that recollections of the past might frame present-day political and cultural understandings of, and struggles about, race: Some point to the politics of racial resentment ("The blacks get more than we do now . . . I don't like the demanding."); others point to a politics of benign neglect because, to some, the region's racial wrongs have now been righted ("Everyone has an equal opportunity to do what they want to."); and still others indicate a politics of racial reconciliation ("It made me look at myself and repent.")

Sociologists have only begun to address the communal significance of collective memories or of the subtleties of memory displacement and resurrection (Schuman and Rodgers 2004) and collective amnesia (Irwin-Zarecka 1994). The next step is to link the social determination of memory to its consumption and use, unraveling how (if at all) recollections, celebrations, and commemorations of the past frame understandings of the present, galvanize action or legitimate inaction, and condition morality and cognition in time present.

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De La Beckwith, Bobby Frank Cherry, and other white perpetrators of Civil Rights-era killings in the South.

REFERENCES


