
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

PEOPLE WHO HAVE LIVED TOGETHER for any length of time have a troubled past. Conflict and controversy are a normal part of social life. The ways that a society deals with such crises tell us a great deal about it, and so does the way it remembers those troubled pasts. On September 11, 2001, it seemed as if the whole world had changed. The brief “Pax Americana” that had followed the end of the Cold War in 1989 was shattered by terrorist attacks in the financial and political heart of the United States. Yet during the first national election held in this apparently new era of global terror in which even a superpower’s homeland could not be considered truly safe, an organization calling itself Swift Boat Veterans for Truth resurrected a troubled past from the Cold War era. The group called into question Democratic nominee John Kerry’s military record during the Vietnam War and condemned Kerry for his subsequent anti-Vietnam War activism. The Swift Boat Veterans’ campaign brought the dormant bad feelings of the Vietnam era back into the public sphere, suggesting that in speaking out against the war, Kerry had been not only hypocritical, but also traitorous. With the Cold War now over, the nature of the treason had subtly changed from sympathizing with communists to betraying American troops in harm’s way; yet the accusation had apparently lost none of its

potency, for it garnered more than 100 stories in the *New York Times* during the presidential campaign. Moreover, the issue seemed to resonate with then-current debates over the Patriot Act and internal dissent over the war in Iraq. As novelist William Faulkner once observed, “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.”

Even this brief glimpse of the 2004 campaign reveals that memories of social conflict can be a powerful force in political discourse. They can heal rifts, salt wounds, or provoke social transformations. The distinct memories of a social group can be a source of strength in resisting oppression, but where divisive memories are preserved and nurtured, violent social conflict can erupt again. A group’s identity is sustained in part by its unique memories, but the possibilities for meaningful engagement regarding long-standing problems are greatly reduced among people who understand their pasts in drastically different ways. Memories can also influence the ways future events are understood and managed, but memory is always an imperfect representation of the past despite the fact that we often treat it as the equivalent of the past itself. Socially shared memories are, in many ways, the tip of the iceberg of political culture. This book tells the story of how collective memories of troubled pasts emerge in public discourse and of the impacts these memories have had on the representation of more recent events.

What is collective memory? All memories are reconstructions of the past, and the essential form of collective memory is narrative. As George Herbert Mead (1929) points out, the past is entirely imaginary. Once a moment is gone, its passing must be reconstructed, as anyone who has ever lost a set of car keys can tell you. Physical traces exist, but in order to reassemble those traces into a coherent whole, we must create stories that connect the various complex elements of the past. In 1932, psychologist Frederick Bartlett theorized that when asked to remember something, people reconstruct, with varying degrees of accuracy, the past they have been asked about. They are affected by the circumstances in which they originally encoded the information and the context in which they are asked to retrieve it. Bartlett’s work took the study of psychological memory beyond the realm of “remembering” versus “forgetting” and into the complex interplay between facts and meaning that allow for reconstruction of the past. At about the same time, Maurice Halbwachs (1950/1980)¹ developed the concept of collective memory, or memories

shared by social groups. His theory of collective memory, like Bartlett's, posited that the context of both encoding and recalling information was significant, and he went on to argue that as social relationships, geography, and other aspects of social life changed, memories of the past might be altered or lost.

What qualifies memories as collective? For a study of controversial and divisive pasts, this question is a critical one. Halbwachs's work demonstrates that we should not expect—to use Stuart Hall's (1982) term—perfect “closure.” That is, we should not expect a story of the past that never changes. Nor should we expect everyone in an entire society to remember the past in exactly the same way. As historian Henry Steele Commager (1965) observed, new members are always arriving who must be taught the shared past. Moreover, far less than perfect agreement about the meaning of a past is required for that story of the past to be powerful. Collective memory has more in common with what Bommers and Wright (1982) and the Popular Memory Group (1982) call dominant memories, which are those that are widely available in the public sphere. Collective memories are the stories that everyone knows about the past, even if not everyone believes the story. Such memories become a kind of common cultural currency—the shared language that one must be able to speak if one wishes to communicate with others about a shared past, even if one's goal is to challenge that shared memory.

Available theories of collective memory offer some guidance for an examination of the ways societies come to remember social conflicts, but they represent an unwieldy collection of tools, and many of their predictions are contradictory. Many place a strong emphasis on presentism, the idea that the form of the past is largely determined by present needs, interests, and concerns (although what, exactly, the past is used to do remains a matter for lively dispute²). Gary Alan Fine (2001) points to the identity and power of what he calls “reputational entrepreneurs” in propagating various versions of the past. However, the idea that multiple and competing versions of the past might somehow be pulled together and represented as the collective memory—the story that everyone knows—is generally absent from the literature on collective memory.

Like theories of collective memory, existing theories by scholars of politics and public opinion are of limited usefulness in addressing these

questions, mainly because such theories are entirely concerned with the representation of current events. They have nothing to say about how the past is represented in public discourse. Yet some theories of mass political behavior indirectly invoke the idea that political discourse and public attitudes are inflected by collective memories. The theory of issue ownership, for example, posits that some public issues are associated with a particular political party in public thinking because that party has historically handled that social problem “better.”³ Republicans “own” crime; Democrats “own” the environment. Issue ownership is not based upon a party’s current handling of the issue, but rather upon its reputation, its past. As yet, the theory does not speak to how such pasts are created and managed.

What is needed is a framework that identifies how collective memories of troubled pasts are negotiated, the characteristics of these collective memory narratives, how those stories influence and are influenced by more recent events, and whose interests they serve. Of course, it is possible that collective memories of social conflicts, divisions, and controversies do not emerge; that divisions remain to the present time. Michael Schudson (1992) argues that two different versions of the Watergate story survive, and work in sociology has described the problems involved in building memorials to controversial events such as the Kent State shootings (Gregory and Lewis 1988) and the Vietnam War (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). However, the original complexity of the past can never be preserved, and the choices about what to remember, what to leave behind, and how to understand it, remain important regardless of the ultimate outcome of the process.

This study develops such a framework through close analysis of two cases of divisive social conflict from the 1960s. The cases might be called textbook examples of controversial events in that they meet anthropologist Victor Turner’s (1981) definition of a social breach, the first phase of what he calls a social drama. Social dramas occur within groups that share values and interests and have a common history, whether real or alleged. A breach is defined as a violation of a norm, and is perceived as a sign of a deeper division of interests or loyalties. Breaches may be purposely created to demonstrate differences, or they may “emerge from a scene of heated feelings” (146). Unless the breach is quickly sealed or contained to “a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen until it coincides with some

dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the parties in the social conflict belong" (146).

The two breaches examined here, one purposely created and one arising from "heated feelings," exemplified some of the deepest social divisions of the era, divisions that we continue to struggle with today. In 1965, riots broke out in South Central Los Angeles. Sparked by the arrest of an African American man for drunken driving and named for one of the affected neighborhoods, the Watts riots resulted in thirty-four deaths, hundreds of injuries and arrests, and millions of dollars in property damage. In 1968, violence erupted both inside and outside the Chicago Amphitheater during the Democratic National Convention. Unlike the Watts riots, which were often described as unexpected, the Chicago convention violence had been brewing for months. Diverse social movements including poor people's advocates, counterculture Yuppies, and antiwar activists had been planning demonstrations while the party's internal divisions over the Vietnam War and the delegate selection process had deepened.

Where might negotiations over the meaning of the past take place? In a modern mass society, it is the mass media that are primarily responsible for disseminating shared stories to a public that is demographically diverse and geographically scattered. The news media have a special responsibility for creating and disseminating stories of "real" events, and in their role as monitors of the social world, they not only tell their own stories but report on the cultural products and stories created by other individuals and institutions that deal in public memory: from the speeches of public officials, to the reminiscences of eyewitnesses, to the content of movies and museums. This study observes the process of negotiating a meaning for the past as it unfolds in the news, exploring how news practices, relationships between actors who make the news, expectations of news audiences, and the impact of current events affect the development of collective memories in a mass society. It also examines the influence of those collective memories on the representation of more recent events. Over time, controversies are resolved, and the key questions for this study are:

- How are they resolved?
- What forms do the resolutions take?

- What impact does the resulting collective memory have on the representation of more recent events?

Available theories of media and politics are used to identify the actors and processes that influence the development of collective memory in the news, but each of these theories must be revised and extended in order to apply it to the past. Collective memory theories point to the social environment as another important influence on public understanding of the past, but these theories disagree about how the present and the past interact.

Theories of news discourse indicate that the main actors influencing the content of the news are journalists and political officials, although the party with the most power in this relationship is sometimes debated. Official sources dominate the news (Sigal 1973), and can limit the range of legitimate perspectives in news (Bennett 1990). Political elites appear to have enormous power to frame stories in ways that suit their policies and purposes.⁴ In part, this is because they have extraordinary resources for supplying journalists with information (Gandy 1982). It also occurs because the actions of political elites are defined as “newsworthy,” so the work routines of journalism monitor what they do and say (Tuchman 1978; Galtung and Ruge 1965). In contrast, most scholarship shows that average citizens have difficulty gaining access to the news, and the efforts of citizens’ groups to raise issues or publicize their perspectives typically fail.

Theorists who emphasize elite power as an explanation for media portrayals of current events recognize social conflict and division as a special case. Social conflicts that erupt in riots, demonstrations, or the like take on many of the characteristics of accidental events, and research has shown that political elites have more difficulty controlling the representation of accidental events than they do controlling more routine kinds of “news” (Molotch and Lester 1974; Lawrence 2000). Riots and demonstrations do not typically enable social movements or citizens’ groups to present their points of view, but social conflict can produce divisions between political elites that go beyond the bounds of everyday, ritualized political conflict. This may open the news discourse to a genuine airing of disagreement that no one social actor or group controls (Gitlin 1980; Bennett 1990). For example, during both the Watts riots and the Chicago convention, key conflicts emerged

between local and federal officials who promoted different interpretations of events. However, focused as they are on media depictions of current events, theories describing political elites' influence on the news do not directly speak to how officials and elites might influence mediated remembering of social conflict.

Theories of news discourse also reveal that despite their professional norm of objectivity, journalists affect the news they report in a number of ways. Their own professional practices and routines limit both their perceptions of news and their search for information. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the news has become more interpretive over the last half century (Barnhurst and Mutz 1997; Hallin 1994), suggesting that reporters have more influence on the news than they did at midcentury when they took a more stenographic approach to the coverage of political leaders. American journalism is also a commercial enterprise, and some scholars suggest that this, too, influences the content of news. Scholars adopting a political economy perspective have pointed out that as capitalist businesses, media organizations benefit from the status quo and that news therefore presents audiences with fundamentally conservative points of view that support existing power relationships.⁵ Research on the entertainment media's depiction of history would seem to bear out this observation. Scholars have found that fictional presentations of the past focus on the elite elements of society, the rich and powerful (Cohn 1976; Nimmo and Combs 1983). These fictions depict history as the responsibility of individuals rather than social forces (Parenti 1992) and support conservative interpretations of pasts, downplaying revolutionary aspects even of the American Revolution.⁶

While available scholarship on media and politics offers many useful insights about how events are covered as they happen, it says nothing about the impact of time upon the relationships between the major actors as the news of the present becomes the news of the past. Thus, it can offer little insight into how collective memory evolves in news. Yet the passage of time has a profound influence on the relationships between all major actors that produce the news. For journalists, time changes expectations about both the form and content of reporting. Hard news, with its short deadlines and elite focus, is replaced by feature stories with flexible deadlines and an emphasis on human interest. Once an event is past, reporters' dependence on officials for timely information drops

sharply, changing the relationships between these actors. Reporters further enhance their authority to interpret past events by privileging meaning over fact in the stories they tell, and they are able to do this in part because the past often appears to play a minor role in the news of current events. For political officials, time reveals the distinctions between individuals and institutions. Political officials' ability to manage the news typically hinges on occupying public office, and once out of office their power to shape the news may end. Subsequent officeholders may or may not have the same goals, especially if a controversial past is or can be connected with an individual leader's reputation rather than with the institution's. At the same time, the increasing rarity—and therefore value—of eyewitness testimony can give citizens new authority to define their past. Thus, over time, the power of reporters and average citizens to narrate the past begins to increase even as the power of individual public officials begins to fade. If the actors involved in creating collective memories in news discourse are familiar to scholars of media and politics, the relationships between them are not.

A great deal of scholarship on media and politics has focused on the phenomenon of “framing” in media discourse. Various described as an aspect of the text and as a media effect, theories of media framing generally agree that frames function to confer perspective on events, issues, and people; that is, to make them meaningful.⁷ Developing collective memory of a troubled past involves a struggle over how to frame something that has many potential and divergent meanings, so the concept of framing is a useful analytical tool. However, collective memory has unique qualities that are not addressed by the burgeoning scholarly literature on framing.

First, examining the framing of controversial events contributes to the literature on event framing by demonstrating that not only can the news media frame similar events in divergent ways,⁸ but that media stories can frame the *same* event in various, contradictory ways. However, the presence of multiple competing frames in news discourse raises important issues that current framing theory cannot resolve. Recent experimental studies that have tried to mimic framing as it naturally occurs in media discourse have shown that framing effects cancel each other out when audiences are exposed to contradictory frames for policy issues, as one might expect them to be in an environment of partisan

debate (Druckman 2004; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Applied to the study of collective memory, these findings raise the question of how the public controversies that produced multiple divergent frames are resolved in memory, particularly when the underlying social divisions that fed the controversy are still present in public life.

Of course, one answer may lie in the power relationships that influence how the media represent social reality. Recent research on how issue frames work contains other clues. Several scholars have offered evidence that frames influence what is variously called goal priority (Nelson 2004; Nelson and Oxley 1999) or the weight assigned to various values (Chong 1996). Collective memories of controversial events may, like the issue frames previously studied, preserve contradictory meanings but establish one meaning as predominant. Nelson also argues that frames work by influencing issue categorization, a function that is similar to what other scholars have referred to as “problem definition.”⁹ Creating collective memory might involve establishing what sort of event occurred and recalling specific events that fit that problem definition. Still, the question remains of how one meaning or problem definition might come to dominate the others as collective memory evolves.

Another part of the answer may lie in a body of theory that while apparently relevant to the framing perspective is rarely used in scholarship on media and politics: the study of narrative. Scholars in a variety of disciplines have described the human impulse to create narrative accounts of real events, an impulse common to both journalists (Fulford 1999) and historians (White 1981, 1987). While various theories of narrative define the concept differently, each contains the idea that narrative imposes order and coherence on real-world experiences (Fulford 1999, Martin 1986; White 1987; Fisher 1985). Walter Fisher’s theory of narrative says that audiences judge the quality of narrative based upon expectations of “coherence” and “fidelity,” that is, that stories should hang together and ring true, and these audience expectations may influence which stories of the past evolve into collective memories.

Hayden White’s (1981, 1987) ideas about narrative are especially useful for thinking about collective memory as it emerges in news. Not only does he consider the role of narrative in historical writing, but his ideas parallel—and in many ways enrich—political scientists’ and media scholars’ concept of framing. According to White, historians consider narrative the appropriate means of conveying history, and he contrasts

the form with alternatives such as annals, which are simple lists of events. Narration and narrativity are “instruments by which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse” (1987, 4). Because conflicting claims need to be negotiated, there is always more than one way to tell the story, and in fact, the idea that narrators have choices about which elements of reality to include and which to leave out is one of the essential characteristics of narrative. White defines a narrative as a story in which the facts appear to “speak for themselves,” but argues that all narrative is essentially moralizing. Although historians (like journalists) argue that their narratives are objective and the events narrativized appear to speak for themselves, the form of narrative is a response to the desire to endow events with moral meaning. Thus, according to White, authority is an essential element in any narrative.

White’s theory about how narratives of the past function has many parallels to theories of framing used in the fields of media and politics¹⁰ in their common emphases on authority, on the appearance of transparency and objectivity, on the management of salience, and on moral judgment as essential qualities of stories. However, scholars of media and politics may have been reluctant to embrace this body of theory for at least two reasons. First, narrative theories do not typically address themselves to the effects of narratives on audiences and therefore may not appeal to a field of scholarship that has always been centrally concerned with media effects (Gamson 2001). Second, Fisher’s (1985) ideas about stories requiring coherence and fidelity suggest that actual events exert some influence over stories. This kind of limited social constructionism may not have been appealing to early scholars of media and politics who needed to demonstrate to more traditional political scientists that the media did more than hold a mirror up to public affairs, that media effects occurred independently of the objectively “real” circumstances of social life.

Still, available theories of collective memory do not suggest that memory is bound by the circumstances of the actual past but rather than the events and the stories are mutually influential. Because real events never precisely correspond to the requirements of a good story, narrative can affect the content of collective memory in addition to serving as its form. In his work on collective memory, Halbwachs (1950/1980) describes how changes in the social environment can alter

memories. In their work on the role of narrative in memory, James Fentress and Chris Wickham describe how narrative can serve as a substitute for these social environments, or what they call external contexts:

[I]t is convenient to distinguish between an external or social context, which is regularly lost during transmission, and an internal context, which tends to be preserved....Information that is context-dependent...will tend to be lost whenever that context changes....In narrative memory, stories themselves can serve as internal contexts, fixing the memory of images and links in a properly consequential order....In this sense, a plot functions as a complex memory image, and learning a repertoire of plots is equivalent to learning a large scale mnemo-technique that permits the ordering, retention, and subsequent transmission of a vast amount of information. (1992, 72)

Thus, even as the story must fit the facts in order to meet the criteria of a good narrative, the facts must fit the story, and those that don't are likely to be forgotten. Paul Fussell describes the interaction between the past and stories about it as a "simultaneous and reciprocal process by which life feeds materials to literature while literature returns the favor by conferring forms upon life" (1975/2000, ix).

Good stories acquire their own brand of authority, independent of that of their advocates, as Robert Manoff explains in this description of an authoritative journalistic account:

Narrative fragments...are signs of the eruption of another story through the text of an existing one. They are pieces of a shadow text that force their way into the nominal one, fugitive presences that testify to unresolved tensions between the event reported and the narrative that is doing so. But when event and narrative form coincide, when narrative fit is good, such tension resolves itself in the flow of the story, the news account takes on its particular authority. (1986, 225)

Such stories also enhance the authority of the news more generally because that institution's authority relies largely on a claim of objectivity. Objectivity implies that there is only one story to be told. In an

objectively real world of objectively real events, how could it be otherwise? Repeated airing of conflicting narratives casts doubt upon this ultimate truism of news, while narratives that disguise or paper over conflicting elements restore faith in a real world that can be accurately reported.

Stories that attempt to account for social conflict have difficulty acquiring authority both because they contradict each other and because the fit between the story and the event is often poor. The stories lack both coherence and fidelity. Stories that acquire credence, as collective memories should, on the other hand, exhibit better narrative qualities. We might, then, expect the competing news frames of a controversial event to be resolved not only by power struggles between social actors but also by negotiations between reporters and social actors that produce better stories than the initial frames supplied.

Collective memory studies contribute to framing scholarship in at least one more way. Themselves the product of framing dynamics, collective memories can also serve as frames for subsequent events. This study explores how the past is used as a source of meaning for more recent public events. When applied to current events, stories of the past can fulfill all of the functions of a frame described by Robert Entman (1993). They can specify problems, identify responsible agents, establish criteria for moral evaluations, and suggest solutions. Moreover, they do not necessarily require elite sponsorship but can be used by anyone with access to the news discourse, including journalists. In fact, sometimes a connection to the past becomes the credential that gives a speaker access to the news.

The struggle to supply meaning for a controversial past that goes on in the news media takes place before an audience of citizens, and a central concern of scholars of media and politics is whether that public holds any decision-making power of its own. Critical scholars often point out that powerful and determined actors, particularly the state and big businesses, regularly overwhelm the power of citizens to resist their interpretations of present events. One might then argue that powerful social institutions retain the power to unilaterally alter public memory despite the passage of time and the changing relationships between social actors. Yet available research suggests that political leaders are at their most powerful when they are unified, when they are motivated to influence public opinion, or when the

public is disinterested—and none of these conditions are met when it comes to collective memory of controversial events. The very existence of controversy suggests substantive disagreement between political leaders (Bennett 1990; Gitlin 1980). Moreover, it is not at all clear that leaders are willing to expend the often-considerable resources needed to overthrow alternative perceptions of reality. Power is a limited resource, and the evidence of this study suggests that political leaders are typically focused on supplying meaning for current events, expending little energy in trying to redefine the past in ways more congenial to their current objectives. Indeed, the development of collective memory can often be a by-product of social actors coping with more immediate concerns. Finally, political officials, reporters, and eyewitnesses who are telling and retelling the stories of a well-known public past are not writing upon a blank slate. Members of the audience will have personal memories of the past being described.

Thus, public acceptance of stories about the past is likely to have an influence on the development of collective memory. Schudson (1992) argues that personal memories are an important check against wholesale historical revisionism by political and social elites, and studies of individual memories of public events show that people with personal memories of those events have stronger and more diverse attitudes about those pasts than people who cannot remember living through the event (Lang and Lang 1989; Johnson 1995).

There are several possible mechanisms by which the living memories of audiences can affect the ways collective memories develop in news. Journalists' authority is in part dependent on "the integrity of their relationship with their audience" (Hallin 1994, 32). Stories and values cannot simply be imposed on an audience that actively resists them, and personal memories of social conflict create favorable conditions for such resistance. Even narratives with powerful advocates may not prevail if audiences reject them as implausible or too divergent from their own memories of the event. Because journalists must maintain their credibility with audiences as well as their relationships with political officials, collective memories of social conflict are more likely negotiated than imposed.

Of course, many would point out that it is rare indeed to see audiences rise up to reject the news media's representations of public events. However, both E. E. Schattschneider's (1975) and V. O. Key's

(1961) theories of the role of the public in public affairs demonstrate that they don't have to. They explain that political actors anticipate audience responses and incorporate those projections into their own strategies. Even if the audience never actually responds to media coverage, its anticipated reaction becomes a part of the process that creates media messages and public policy.¹¹ Schattschneider also considers the role of organized groups in political discourse. He argues that political debate is structured and restructured in ways that either encourage or discourage the expansion of political conflict to bystander groups (and audiences). Political actors on the losing side of a struggle seek to expand the conflict to new groups that might aid their cause, while those on the winning side seek to contain the conflict and preserve their advantage. Applying the model to collective memory, we might expect that those who wish to lay a social conflict to rest will craft stories designed not to raise the ire of groups with a stake in the way that past is remembered. Those who reject the legitimacy of the story that is told, on the other hand, would step into the fray and offer alternative accounts of the past, expanding the conflict over how to remember. Thus, elite actors' expectations about audience reaction may shape the development of stories about the past in a variety of ways.

These interactions between various social actors and journalists in the forum of the news media before an audience of citizens occur in a constantly evolving social context that also gives shape to collective memory. Collective memory scholarship defines this changing social context as "presentism," the idea that memory is influenced by current events and circumstances. While scholars agree that the present always has some impact on what is remembered, the size and nature of that impact is debated in the field. At one extreme is what Schudson (1992) refers to as "radical social construction," the idea that what past we believe we have is invented in the present. In the realm of fiction, the ultimate radical social constructionist is George Orwell. In *Nineteen eighty-four*, he describes a nightmarish society in which the past is a complete fabrication managed by a large government bureaucracy. The power of this bureaucracy over the collective memory is so complete that people have little or no faith in their individual memories. In the realm of scholarship, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) demonstrate that a variety of social traditions observed around the world are pure inventions, their basis in the past wholly unsubstantiated.

Less extreme is what Schudson (1992) refers to as “cultural theory.” Here, the past can be remade, but only within the limits of existing social symbols and relationships. The past is somewhat harder to change because these social symbols and relationships are mutually reinforcing. Schudson represents this perspective with the work of Barry Schwartz. For example, Schwartz, Zerubavel, and Barnett (1986) attempt to explain the reasons for the recovery of the Masada story by Palestinian Jews in the 1920s. Rejecting pragmatism, which would suggest that a remembered past always serves some social good, Schwartz and his colleagues argue that the Masada story resonated because it “fit.” The Palestinian Jews of that era felt that their plight was congruent with that of the Jews at Masada. Although they were aware of the unhappy ending of the Masada story, they chose it above other possible memories to symbolize their situation because it expressed their concerns.¹²

Schudson (1992) himself rejects both of these formulations, arguing that they deny historicity by claiming that people are unconstrained by the past. Because the past constitutes people, it cannot be completely constituted by them, and he offers nine impediments to reconstructing the past at will. Among the most important for our purposes are living memory and the presence of multiple versions of the past. He also notes that in some cases, the past is a “scar”: “When the past is visibly, viscerally, or palpably alive in the present, it cannot be reorganized at will” (218). He contends that, “An all-powerful monolithic version of the past will not triumph in a pluralistic society where conflicting views have a good chance of emerging, finding an audience and surviving” (208). This tendency is enhanced by another item on Schudson’s list, the “ambiguity of stories.”

Ultimately, then, the collective memories that emerge in news are the product of political leaders at multiple levels of government, journalists, and citizens who interact under the influence of time and several key environmental constraints. In general, both the power and the desire of elites to control the story of a public event wanes over time, while the power of journalists and average citizens to narrate the past grows. Yet the framework laid out here suggests that no one social actor can control the development of stories about the past. Some stories will exhibit better narrative fidelity and coherence than others, and the perceived degree of fidelity and coherence may be influenced by current events. Citizens with personal memories may be unwilling to accept stories

that do not jibe with those memories, and citizens who have long been exposed to one story of the past may be loathe to embrace an alternative version. The collective memories that result are the product of these tensions and bear the marks of the pressures that created them. However, the pasts we create also become the resources we use to make sense of current events, so though their form is governed by evolutionary processes that are not entirely intentional, they are stories with tangible consequences.

The Study

The Watts riots and the 1968 Democratic National Convention were selected for study not merely because this nation still struggles with questions of racial equality, democratic practice, and the efficacy and morality of Third World military interventions. These events both occurred recently enough that much of the process of developing collective memories of them can be effectively observed. Prior to 1970, the *New York Times* was the only American daily news outlet that was indexed in any way, and prior to 1980, full-text, keyword-searchable databases of news content, which are essential for tracing the development of stories about the past, were unavailable. At the same time, each of these events is a little over a generation old, a time frame that is considered important by many scholars working in the tradition of Mannheim's "theory of generations." By now, a substantial proportion of Americans (including the author) has no personal memory of the events and relies instead upon the collective memory that has developed. Finally, each of these events was invoked as a thinking tool for understanding more recent events approximately a quarter century after they occurred. In 1992, riots again broke out in South Central Los Angeles following the trial of four Los Angeles police officers for assaulting an African American motorist. Named for the victim of the beating, the Rodney King riots were more destructive than those of twenty-seven years earlier, but both political leaders and journalists perceived the Watts riots as a relevant past. In 1996, the Democrats returned to Chicago to nominate Bill Clinton for a second term, breaking the longest dry spell in convention hosting in the city's history. Both Democrats and reporters saw this as event as a chance to "put the past

behind them.” These more recent events offer an opportunity for a focused examination of the form collective memories of the Watts riots and the Chicago convention had taken, the stability (or instability) of that form, and the impact of these memories on the representation of recent events.

The study first examines contemporary news coverage of these two events and then traces retrospective coverage of them for the quarter century after they occurred in order to identify the processes involved in the development of collective memory. Contemporary newspaper coverage of both the Watts riots and the Chicago convention was voluminous and has been well documented in previous research. Rather than cover this ground again, the study turns to newsmagazine coverage to get a feel for how these events were covered in their own times. In the 1960s, newsmagazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* offered roundups of the week’s events based not on original reporting but rather upon the coverage of prestige papers, particularly the *New York Times*. Their value to readers thus lay in their tight summaries, their writing style, and their interpretation of events. *Time*, in particular, is well known for its consistent prose style and its authoritative, if selective, presentation of the facts (Nourie and Nourie 1990). Thus, in the context of this study, newsmagazine coverage offers summaries of the daily papers’ content and clearer insight into the interpretive strategies used by journalists and officials to make sense of these events as they occurred. Existing scholarly research on newspaper coverage of the events and an examination of the detailed index of the *New York Times* both show that newspapers and newsmagazines used roughly the same narratives to structure their accounts of events.

To explore retrospective coverage of the Watts riots and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the study turns to newspaper coverage. Although television is no doubt an essential element of citizens’ personal memories of these events and probably has some impact on the evolution of collective memories, it is not adequately archived to be useful in this study. Although contemporary news coverage of the Chicago convention is stored in the Vanderbilt news archives, the *Vanderbilt Indexes and Abstracts* does not catalog content in sufficient detail to illuminate how either the 1968 convention or the Watts riots have been subsequently remembered in national television news. At the time of the Watts riots, nightly television news was not archived.

Instead, for each case, the development of collective memories is traced in a local paper in the affected area (the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, respectively) and the national paper of record, the *New York Times*. Newspapers are chosen both because they provide the most data for analysis and because at every point in time, they are the best archived and catalogued news resources. Looking at both the local and the national newspapers allows for the possibility that local and national memories of these events may not match. It also recognizes that the editorial philosophy of the newspaper may make a difference (the *New York Times* is considered a liberal paper, while both the local papers are described as conservative). Further, it makes it possible to discern whether processes of memory development work differently in local and national contexts.

Newspaper indexes are used to locate coverage during the 1960s and '70s. The *New York Times* was indexed throughout this period. Indexes for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* first appeared in 1972. Indexes provide a very limited picture of the process of collective memory development because stories indexed under likely keywords (such as "Watts" or "Democratic National Convention, 1968") tend to be commemorations of the events, and controversial events are unlikely subjects of commemoration. Better data become available when the content of these newspapers was made available in a keyword-searchable database. The *New York Times* was available on Nexis beginning June 1, 1980. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Tribune* became available on January 1, 1985. Keyword searches offer a much richer picture of how the past gives shape to the present, in addition to the ways it is remembered. The searches reveal that both of these pasts play an active role in the cities where they occurred and in the nation as a whole. The *Chicago Tribune* referred to the 1968 convention about three times per month between 1985 and 1995, and the *New York Times* mentioned it about half as often between 1981 and 1995. The *Los Angeles Times*, too, referred to the Watts riots about three times per month on average between 1985 and 1991. The keyword searches also reveal that the negotiation of collective memories of these events was still ongoing in the early and middle 1980s.

The 1996 Democratic National Convention and the 1992 Los Angeles riots serve as an end point for the study. However, in order to ascertain whether and how stories about the past diffuse through the

news media, the study includes a brief look at more recently published stories about these two events that appeared in regional newspapers throughout the country.

Some who read this analysis may find themselves objecting, “But that’s not how I remember it”; particularly those with personal memories of the 1960s. As a student of collective memory, I approach these cases with the advantage (or disadvantage) of having no personal memory of the events I am studying. Indeed, William Parker, chief of the Los Angeles Police Department during the Watts riots, died the day I was born. It is difficult, then, for me to appreciate the gap between personal memory and public memory that those who remember these events may perceive. However, I may be better qualified to describe how future generations are likely to recall the Watts riots and the Chicago convention than I would be if I myself remembered them.

Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 examines the raw materials of which collective memory is made. It uses elements of framing theory to identify the story components that were used to construct meanings for these events when they occurred. Many stories that attempted to make sense of these social conflicts are so incompatible that they shun all efforts to integrate aspects of the events. News stories profiling the 1968 Democratic nominees for president and vice president appear next to reports of running battles in the streets but don’t refer to them. Stories describing looting and arson during the Watts riots often do not describe the poverty of the neighborhoods involved. There are major and minor story threads, but in general, a kind of narrative chaos prevails. Yet the elements of these disparate tales form the foundation for stories that do integrate aspects of the events into a meaningful whole and the ontological “facts” for which later, integrative stories would have to account.

Chapter 3 considers the ongoing role of political elites in shaping collective memories of social conflict and controversy. The first part of the chapter describes political elites’ efforts to supply meaning for events through practices Victor Turner (1981) calls “redressive rituals,” such as investigations, trials, and policy responses. The latter part of the chapter considers what happens when leadership of political institutions

changes and when former leaders pass away and are no longer present to defend their reputations. It also considers the changing roles of various other social actors as news sources in stories about the past.

After describing when and where the news remembers the past, Chapter 4 explores the concrete processes by which “passions cool” and people “move on.” A variety of reporting practices serve to downplay remaining controversies, creating pasts that are safer for public discussion and paving the way for the evolution of shared, rather than competing, stories. Some, like the fragmentary quality of news reporting, are normal journalistic practices. Others, like avoiding descriptions of the events themselves and managing salience through the creation of lists, may be peculiar to collective memory processes.

Chapter 5 describes the ways various stories are integrated and the forms those shared stories take. A theory that explains how individuals simplify and integrate complex images to create memorable stories offers a methodological wedge to examine wider social processes that affect how news stories about the past come together. The ability of relevant social groups to protest their portrayal also drives the search for a narrative acceptable to all parties. Meanwhile, changing social circumstances can transform stories to match current political dogma, even when political elites play no direct role. These stories can be passed between newspapers via a variety of mechanisms and acquire local coloration as they are used to think about local events.

In Chapter 6, the role of collective memory in more recent events is explored. These applications of collective memory illustrate some of the pitfalls of thinking with the past: most fundamentally, of treating the story of the past as if it were the past itself. Where collective memory of the Watts riots was used to think about the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles, it may have interfered with effective government response to the unrest by encouraging reporters and officials to fixate on economic issues rather than police malpractice. The relevance of the 1968 Democratic National Convention to our current public life, meanwhile, was dismissed because by the time the Democrats returned to Chicago in 1996, the convention demonstrations were consistently associated with the Vietnam War, which was by now safely over. The broader critique of democracy contained in the demonstrations, despite its modern-day relevance, had been lost over the years.

Chapter 7 consolidates the findings of the case studies and returns to the original questions posed: Does collective memory emerge from our troubled past? What influences its form and content? Whose interests does it serve? It also considers the implications of the case study findings for the development of collective memory of the terrorist attacks of September 11.