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**Collective Memories in the  
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Although most research on autobiographical memory has been on individual memory for events of everyday life, some attention has been paid to memories of public events, both political and nonpolitical. In research on memory for public events, two links between individual memory and the larger social group have been suggested and are much debated. One is the "now print" mechanism posited for the recording of surprising and important information, which connects the individual's memory to the social group by the biological necessity "to survive and leave progeny" (R. Brown & Kulik, 1982, p. 38). The other is the "reconstructive" approach, which links the individual's memory to the social group through the meanings that individuals assign to memories of historical events, especially through the "alignment" of the narrative of one's private life with the narrative of public history (Neisser, 1982b). Largely missing from the studies of memory for public events is consideration of how the social and historical locations of individuals contribute to the formation of memory for public events.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, research on collective memory emphasizes the importance of these locations. *Collective memories* are memories of their own historical past that are shared by groups of people. When individuals live through public events, their autobiographical memories may be linked with collective memories (N. R. Brown, Shovel, & Rips, 1986), whether the events are directly experienced or learned through secondhand reports (Larsen, 1988). However, when individuals learn of public events that took place before their birth, they neces-

<sup>1</sup> There are some qualified exceptions to this statement. R. Brown and Kulik (1982) note the higher frequency of reports by blacks of events concerning leaders importantly related to the cause of black advancement. Neisser (1986) refers to the importance of his own social and historical location—an immigrant desiring a secure American identity—in the symbolic meaning of his memory of hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Aside from these comments, however, social and historical location have been of little interest to psychologists working on these issues.

sarily receive such "memories" secondhand and symbolically—by cultural artifacts (Schwartz, 1991), social practices and daily routines (Connerton, 1989), or an oral tradition (Petrov, 1989). We argue that regardless of how an individual comes to learn of a public event of the recent past, social variables—mainly age, but also education, sex, and group identification—as well as the sequence of historical events in which individual lives are embedded, strongly affect individual and group memories.

In this chapter, we use findings from surveys in the United States and Lithuania to illustrate connections among social variables, historical location, and collective memories. First, we review briefly some basic findings on collective memory in the United States. Next, we describe in more detail our results from a replication in Lithuania. In the conclusion, we compare the findings from the two countries and speculate on the functions of collective memory. Throughout our emphasis is on the meaning that individuals find in events, rather than on the validity of their reports.

## The Basic Survey Question

The initial hypothesis on collective memory, drawn from Karl Mannheim's (1928/1952) classic essay on "The Problem of Generations," suggested a life-course approach to understanding the nature of collective memory. The first assumption is that people tend not to remember events or changes that preceded their own consciousness of the larger political and social world; hence, events that occurred before birth, or indeed before adolescence, tend to be less meaningful to people than do events that they themselves lived through (Gallatin, 1980; Sigel & Hoskin, 1977). Furthermore, it seems plausible that the first event that people experience as important—as "personally gained in real situations," as Mannheim (1928/1952, p. 296) put it—benefits from a kind of primacy effect, so that later events are usually given less weight in memory. Thus, this hypothesis would predict that people who grew to adulthood during World War II would be less apt to recall the Vietnam War as important than would those who grew to adulthood during the Vietnam era.

The national survey that provided the test of the initial hypothesis was conducted in 1985 using this wording:

The next questions concern how people think about the past. There have been a lot of national and world events and changes over the past 50 years—say, from about 1930 right up until today. Would you mention one or two such events or changes that seem to you to have been especially important?

There aren't any right or wrong answers to the question—just whatever national or world events or changes that come to mind as especially important to you.

If only one event or change was mentioned spontaneously, respondents were probed for a second event. In addition, a follow-up question asked why the event was important:

What was it about [the event] that makes it seem especially important to you?

The questions were open-ended, so that the respondent supplied his or her own frame of reference.

Four findings of interest here emerged from the 1985 study, the results of which are reported in detail in Schuman and Scott (1989). The main finding supports the initial hypothesis and thus a generational interpretation of American memories: There is a strong tendency for people to recall as important those events and changes that occurred during their own adolescence and early adulthood. Two examples are found in the relation of age to mentions of World War II and the Vietnam War. In each case, it is especially people who were between the ages of about 15 and 25 at the time of the particular war who mention it as an important event from the past half century. A number of other events and changes show similar relations to adolescence and young adulthood.<sup>2</sup> These results are consistent with life-course perspectives on political socialization (Braungart, 1984) and are also consistent with the findings of Fitzgerald (1988) and Rubin, Wetzel, and Nebes (1986) on the large proportion of autobiographical memories from the period of young adulthood.

Second, people tended to think about public events in quite personal terms. This was brought out clearly when respondents were asked to explain why they thought an event was important. In the case of World War II, for example, older respondents often spoke not of the larger meaning of the war but of their own particular involvement in it—for example, injuries sustained in combat or the hardships of rationing on the homefront.

Third, when reporting an event that occurred before or after their late adolescence and young adulthood, people sometimes saw that event in terms that seem to have been affected indirectly by the experiences of their own youth. In particular, those who were in their formative years during the war in Vietnam but who nevertheless mentioned World War II described it as a "good war" significantly more often than did those who had been young adults in the early 1940s when World War II was occurring. Furthermore, the answers of respondents from the pre-Sputnik era conveyed more emotional awe at space exploration than did the answers of younger respondents, for whom astronauts and satellites were part of the natural world of their own childhood.

Finally, there was some evidence of the importance of social group identification for the events that individuals reported. Virtually all of the mentions of changes in the role of women were made by women. Similarly, about 44% of the blacks who were interviewed mentioned civil rights, whereas only 5% of the whites did so.

<sup>2</sup>Three puzzling results were also identified: the absence of relations of age to mentions of space explorations, the development of the computer, or civil rights (the last category lacked an age relation for whites, although there was a relation for blacks). However, a later experiment showed mentions of the computer to be related inversely to age when a closed, rather than an open-ended, question was used (Schuman & Scott, 1987).

## Evidence from Lithuania

In several ways, then, the results of the original study indicate that people tend to recall and define the "importance" of recent historical events in personal terms that are a function of experience in the formative years, and there was some demonstration of the importance of group membership in the selection of important events. However, there are several aspects of collective memory that are best explored in cross-national comparisons.

First, data gathered in Lithuania in 1989 provide a test of the generational hypothesis under historical conditions strikingly different from those surrounding the United States in 1985, which was generally a time of internal stability and even complacency. In contrast, the Lithuanian survey was conducted during a period of rapid movement toward rejection of Soviet rule and increasingly explicit claims of Lithuanian independence. For example, in August 1989 (a month before the survey), there had been widespread observances of the 50th anniversary of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact that consigned the Baltic countries to the Soviet Union, and in December (3 months after the survey reported here) the Lithuanian Communist Party defined itself as distinct from the Communist Party of the USSR. The movement culminated on March 11, 1990, when a newly elected Lithuanian legislature declared Lithuania to be independent of the USSR. Figure 20.1 provides a time line of important events in Lithuanian history over the past 60 years.<sup>3</sup> Data gathered in such a period of highly charged political conflict allow us to test whether recent events, such as the momentum of the Sajudis independence movement, will replace memories of earlier events even in older individuals.

Second, American responses to the basic history question almost inevitably confound what is significant to the United States with what is important to the larger world. For example, mentions of World War II, the most frequently given event, refer to both an American and a world event. Likewise, man's first landing on the moon, the third most frequently mentioned event, was a triumph for the United States as well as a "giant step for mankind." Only by considering evidence from a population outside the United States, and perhaps less directly involved in world events, can we separate the national or even more local levels from the world level at which events are remembered and judged important.

Lithuania provides a particularly interesting case, since it is not only outside the United States but has been at once part of another great nation on the world stage and yet has strong claims to having a separate identity that rejects such a larger association. As a result, collective memories in Lithuania could include events at several levels:

1. Lithuanians may think of events of obvious importance to the world as a

<sup>3</sup>For an account of major events over the past half century in Lithuania and the other Baltic Republics, see Nahaylo and Swoboda (1989). Events leading up to the declaration of independence by Lithuania are described in Olcott (1990) and Senn (1990).

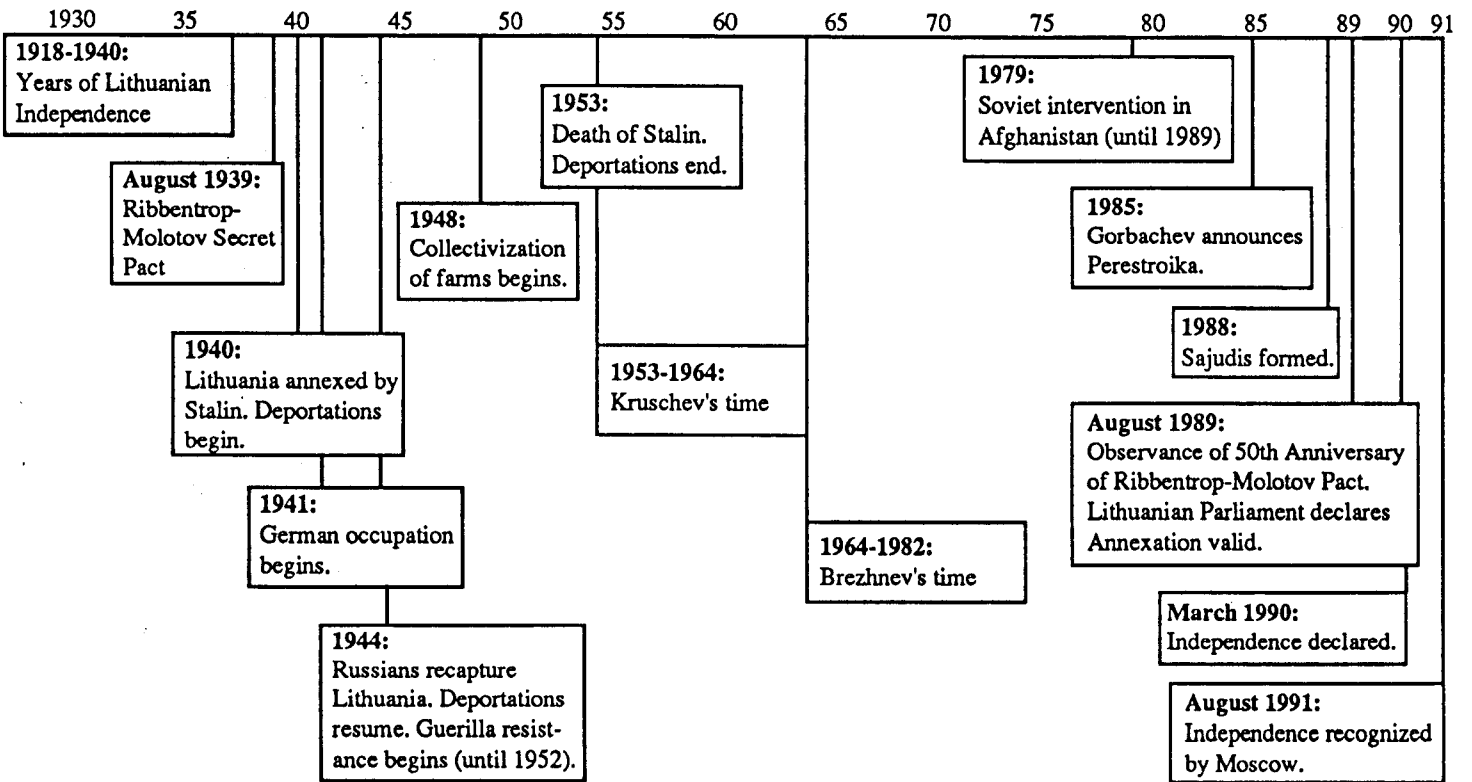


FIGURE 20.1. Time Line of Relevant Events in Lithuania

whole and therefore may provide answers similar to many of those given by Americans; or

2. As a part of the Soviet Union and subject to the news as it came out of Moscow for most of the last 50 years, many Lithuanians may substitute for events mentioned by Americans some parallel events important to the recent history of the USSR; or
3. Lithuanians may focus on events that were formative in recent Lithuanian history: the occupation and annexation of Lithuania by Stalin at the time of World War II, or the move toward independence over the past several years.

Thus, data from Lithuania provide a way to identify the political and social level most crucial for collective memories that was blurred in the data from the United States.

Finally, evidence from Lithuania allows us to look more closely at a social variable hypothesized to be important for collective memories—group identification. Specifically, we can examine ethnic differences in collective memories, since Lithuania includes a sizable proportion of Russians—about 9% of the population—as well as the majority population (80%) of ethnic Lithuanians. In the United States, aside from the difference between blacks and whites in the importance given to the civil rights movement, there are few apparent racial differences in the content of collective memories (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Lithuania provides another setting in which the effects of highly politicized group differences can be explored.

In sum, the Lithuanian data allow us to investigate more fully the formation of collective memories but to do so with an entirely different population that experienced a quite different series of events locally and nationally.

## Method

Our data were gathered in Lithuania in the fall of 1989, using translations of the two open-ended questions previously used in the United States in 1985. In addition, demographic data on ethnic identity, age, education, and gender were obtained. The questions were asked between September 30 and October 6, 1989, as part of a larger survey carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center of the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology, and Law, Academy of Sciences of Lithuania. The population was defined as all registered voters, 18 years and older, living in Lithuania, with the exception of those in hospitals or on military bases. Respondents whose mother tongue was Lithuanian were given the questionnaire in the Lithuanian language; others (mainly Russians) were given the questionnaire in Russian. The final sample size was 1,454; we have confined our analysis to Lithuanians ( $n = 1,172$ ) and Russians ( $n = 130$ ), omitting the smaller number of Poles ( $n = 91$ ) and the scattering of other nationalities ( $n = 61$ ).<sup>4</sup> Answers to the

collective memory questions were coded by a Lithuanian historian, with help from the survey director and other workers at the Public Opinion Research Center. No measure of coding reliability is available, but the codes that form the main basis for this chapter are relatively straightforward.<sup>5</sup> We were able to use the follow-up "why" question to clarify certain points, but the answers were not extensive enough to allow the kind of detailed analysis carried out with the 1985 American data (Schuman & Scott, 1989).

## Results

### *Events Mentioned as Important*

The events mentioned most often in response to the collective memory question—by at least 4% of either the Lithuanian or the Russian respondents—are presented in Table 20.1.6 The figures show the percentage by nationality of those giving each response as one of their two mentions. For example, 57.7% of the Lithuanians who mentioned at least one event gave a response coded under the heading of "the rebirth of Lithuania" as either their first or second answer to the event/change question.<sup>7</sup> Table 20.1 shows percentages based on the combined first and second mentions because the combination correlates .99 with percentages of first mentions only and therefore can be considered essentially identical to them; for later analytic purposes, it is desirable to use the larger percentages based on both mentions.

Overall, there were striking differences between the responses of the Lithuanian and Russian samples. More than half of the Lithuanian sample mentioned

questions, which were on separate sheets from the main questionnaire. Frequently the interviewer left the questionnaire for a brief period (an hour or less) and then returned to pick it up, placing it within a sealed envelope to demonstrate its confidentiality. However, if a respondent desired, the interviewer read the questions.

<sup>5</sup>In the 1985 study in the United States, the coding reliability for events and changes averaged 95% agreement between coders (Schuman & Scott, 1989).

<sup>6</sup>Although the 4% threshold is arbitrary, it provides a fairly natural breaking point for the large Lithuanian sample and is already small for the timer Russian sample. Omitted from the table entirely are the 14% of the total Lithuanian sample and 16% of the total Russian sample who were unable, or conceivably unwilling, to mention any event or change from the past 60 years. The figures are only slightly higher than was true in 1985 for Americans, where 11% of the total sample could not mention any event or change (Schuman & Scott, 1989). As in the United States, education is the major determinant of giving or not giving a response, ranging for the total sample from 18% "no answer" for those with only primary education to 6% of those with a university education. Younger age is also an independent predictor of not giving any mentions, whereas gender is not; the opposite occurred in the United States.

<sup>7</sup>Most of the responses coded here actually used words very close to the name of the category. Others referred to Sajudis (the independence movement) or to the return of national culture and were therefore coded into the "rebirth" category.

<sup>4</sup>Following a common procedure in surveys in the Soviet Union, most respondents filled out the questionnaire themselves, including writing their responses to the open-ended

TABLE 20.1. Highly Mentioned Events by Lithuanians and Russians (% and Ranking)

Event	Mentions		<i>t</i> <sup>b</sup>
	by Lithuanians <sup>a</sup>	by Russians <sup>a</sup>	
Rebirth of Lithuania	57.7 (1)	15.0 (3)	-7.41***
Annexation/occupation	17.9 (2)	1.9 (8.5)	-3.76***
World War II	16.5 (3)	39.3 (2)	5.67***
Deportations to Siberia	15.7 (4)	3.7 (6.5)	-2.95**
Pereestroika	14.9 (5)	51.4 (1)	8.11***
Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact	9.7 (6)	1.9 (8.5)	-2.52*
Collectivization of private farming	4.9 (7)	0.0 (10)	-1.12
Postwar guerilla resistance	4.2 (8)	0.9 (9)	-1.24
Afghanstan war	2.4 (9)	4.7 (5)	1.36
Kruschev's time	0.8 (10)	7.3 (4)	3.59***
Man in space	0.2 (11)	3.7 (6.5)	3.42***
<i>N</i>	(1,011)	(109)	

<sup>a</sup>Within columns, each row represents a dichotomy of those mentioning the event at all divided by the total (1,011 for Lithuanians, 109 for Russians) mentioning any event.

<sup>b</sup>These are *t* ratios for Lithuanians versus Russians, based on logistic regressions of each event on nationality, education, age, and gender, with \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

the "rebirth" of Lithuania, whereas only 15% of the Russian sample gave such a response. Almost exactly the opposite occurred for responses centering on pereestroika: This was the single most popular answer for Russians (51%), whereas only 15% of the Lithuanians gave such an answer. In much the same vein, the second most frequent response given by Lithuanians, the annexation of Lithuania in 1940, was barely present in the list of events mentioned by Russians.<sup>8</sup>

These differences of upwards of 35% point to the gulf between the two nationally groups in how the past half century is remembered. Although many of the Russians (unfortunately not identifiable in the sample) moved to Lithuania after World War II and thus did not directly experience such early events as annexation, respondents of all ages and both nationalities experienced more recent events. Yet, pereestroika was mentioned much less often by Lithuanians, who nominated the "rebirth" of Lithuania as often as Russians mentioned pereestroika. Individuals in the two ethnic groups were then experiencing the same stream of events but were selecting different events as important according to the perspectives of their ethnic groups.

Moreover, even where the events mentioned sounded similar, there may have been sizable differences in how the events were conceptualized. A telling

<sup>8</sup>Lithuanians and Russians do not differ significantly in gender or age, but Russians are significantly more educated than Lithuanians. However, educational differences do not account for the differences discussed here, since the *t* ratios in Table 20.1 are based on logistic regressions with controls for education, age, and gender.

example is "World War II," which is almost the only event in Table 20.1 that seems on its face to transcend the issue of Lithuanian independence, providing a common bond between Lithuanians and Russians. In their nominations of war-related events, both Russians and Lithuanians referred to "the years of war" or the German occupation, but Russians were significantly more likely (*p* < .001) than Lithuanians to refer to the "Great Patriotic War," whereas Lithuanians were more likely (*p* < .01) to refer to the event as "the Second World War." In addition, once we consider the further elaboration provided by the follow-up question on *why* the event was mentioned, there are also large differences in the way World War II was remembered by the two nationalities. As Table 20.2 shows, Russians were quite likely to think about the war in terms of "Soviet patriotism" (29%), whereas hardly any Lithuanians offered such a reason, noting instead either a personal experience during the war or the larger effect of the war on the division of Europe and the imposition of the Soviet system. There were some similarities to be sure (e.g., mention of "lives lost, cruelty, fear"), but if the Russian subsample had been somewhat larger, even such relatively small differences between Lithuanians and Russians might well have reached statistical significance rather than turning out to be due simply to sampling error.

In sum, Lithuanians and Russians in Lithuania tend to live within different psychological worlds. Moreover, it is also clear that for Lithuanians today memories of the past overwhelmingly concern not world events or events of the Soviet Union (except insofar as they have involved Lithuania), nor at the other extreme events at the regional or city level, but events that concern Lithuanian nationality.<sup>9</sup> Lithuanian identity provided the matrix within which events were remembered as important in answer to a question about world and national history over the past 60 years.

#### *Generational Differences in What Is Remembered*

The major theoretical hypothesis of this research has been that people will tend to remember events and changes from the period in which they themselves grew up, that is, their adolescence and early adulthood. For Americans, much of the history of the past half century has been subdivided into a set of separate and seemingly unrelated events, such as World War II, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, man's first landing on the moon, and Watergate. Cohorts can also be subdivided according to their relation to such specific events. However, almost all of the events mentioned by Lithuanians came from two widely separated periods of time, yet in an important sense they all focused on the same subject: Lithuanian independence. The years 1939 to 1953 saw the annexation of Lithuania, occupation by the Germans during World War II, Stalin's deportations of

<sup>9</sup>We cannot be as certain of this latter point as we would like, since the questionnaire in which the memory questions were embedded included other questions focused on the national level and we were unable to control for possible context effects.

TABLE 20.2. Reasons for Mentioning World War II<sup>a</sup>

Reason	Lithuanians	Russians	<i>b</i>
Lives lost, cruelty, fear	37.7	45.2	1.27
Personal experience during the war	26.1	12.9	-1.07
Divided Europe, created "socialist system," system," created fate of Lithuania	20.3	6.5	-2.14*
Destroyed economy	6.5	0.0	-0.72
Soviet patriotism	0.7	29.0	3.40**
Other	9.4	6.4	
Total	100.0	100.0	
N	(138)	(31)	

<sup>a</sup>Based on respondents mentioning World War II as 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> event who also gave a reason.

<sup>b</sup>These are *t* ratios for nationality (Lithuanians vs. Russians) based on logistic regressions of each reason on nationality, education, age, and gender.

\* *p* < .05.

\*\* *p* < .001.

thousands of Lithuanians to Siberia, the forced collectivization of the country, side, and finally an unsuccessful guerilla struggle against Soviet control. At the other end of the time line, Gorbachev's perestroika and the "rebirth" of Lithuania were from the several years preceding the survey, five at the very most. There is one seemingly ambiguous event: the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact occurred in the earlier period, but it first became a focus of public attention only late in 1987.

Thus, there appear to be in the collective memory of Lithuanians just two time periods that are of importance: the 1940s' and early 1950s' loss of independence and the late 1980s' renewed spirit of independence. The one exception is the occasional mention of the war in Afghanistan, closer to the present than to the past, yet distinct in both time and type from the other events in Table 20.1.

This bifurcation of history shows up quite clearly in Figures 20.2-20.4 and in Tables 20.3 and 20.4, which portray the relation of age to collective memories, although there are also interesting deviations from an entirely simple pattern. The three figures present the bivariate relations of age to mentions of the nine most highly mentioned events. The nine rows in Table 20.3 provide the exact percentages that are graphed in these figures. Finally, Table 20.4 uses logistic regression to test the age relations to the nine events statistically, controlling for both education and gender, and with an additional test for curvilinearity.

Age shows a significant linear relation to each of the nine events, with the relation being positive (older Lithuanians more likely to have high mentions) for the five events that occurred between 1940 and the early 1950s and negative for the four events that occurred much more recently. Thus, those who are young now are the ones more likely to mention Lithuania's rebirth or other events of

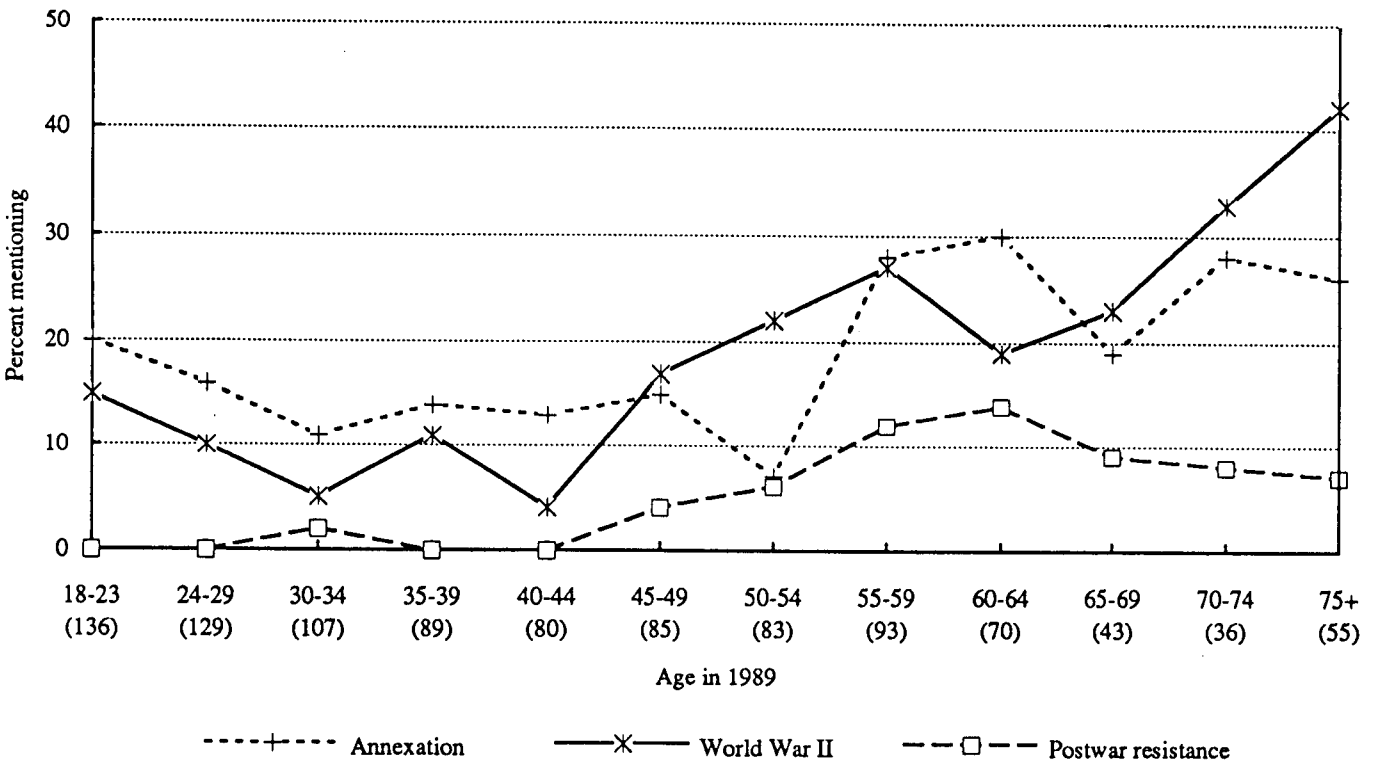


FIGURE 20.2. Datable Events by Age: Annexation, World War II, and Postwar Resistance (Lithuanians only)

Figures in parentheses are base Ns.

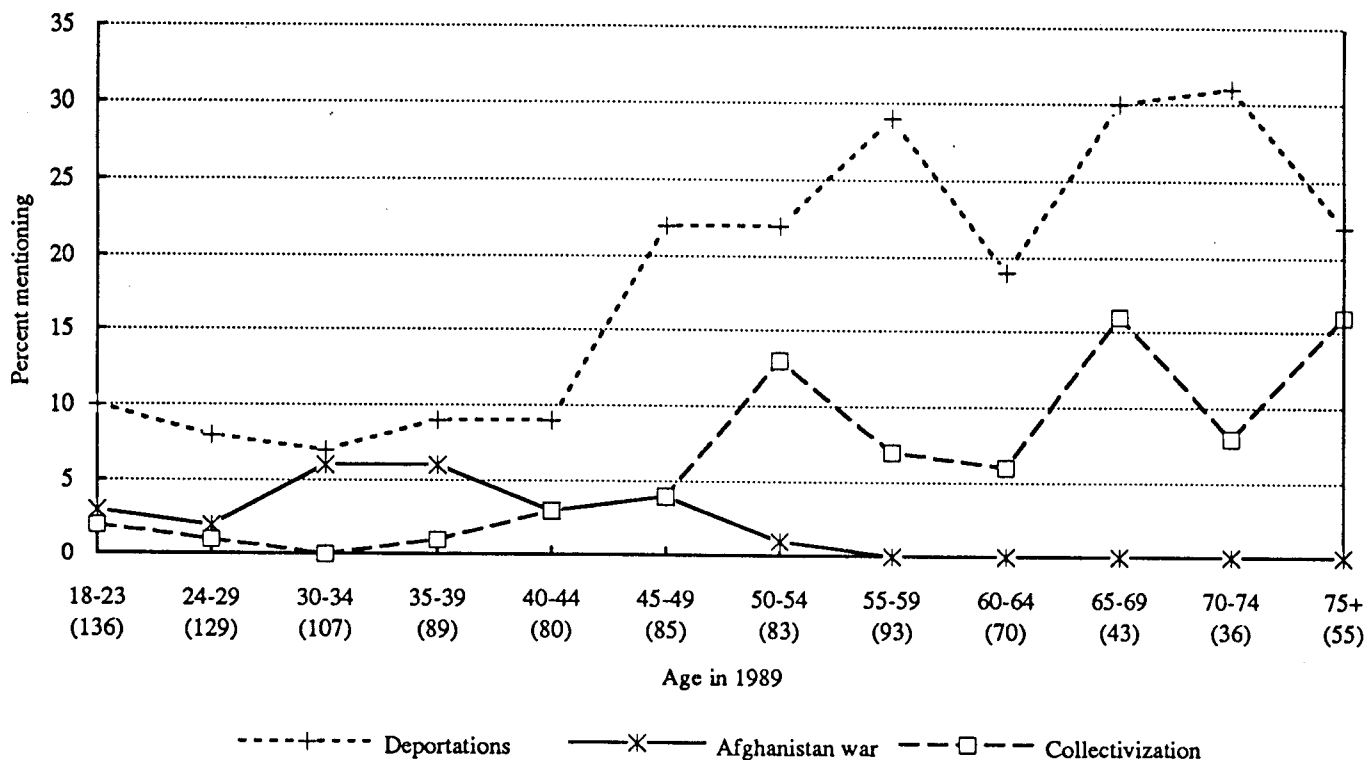


FIGURE 20.3. Datable Events by Age: Deportations, Afghanistan War, and Collectivization (Lithuanians only)

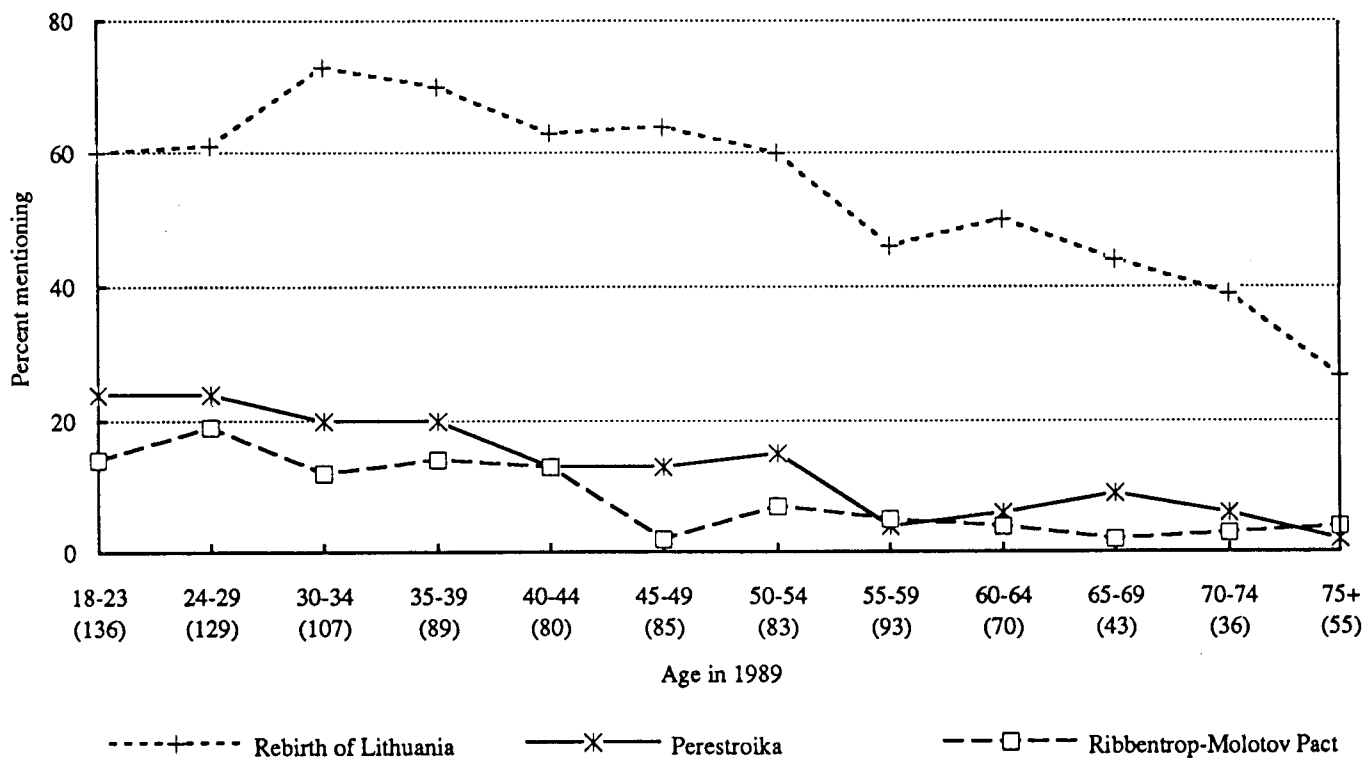


FIGURE 20.4. Datable Events by Age: Rebirth of Lithuania, Perestroika, and Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (Lithuanians only)

TABLE 20.3. Percentage of Lithuanians Nominating Nine Most Mentioned Events, by Age in 1989<sup>a</sup>

Event	18-23	24-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+
Rebirth of Lithuania	60	61	73	70	63	64	60	46	50	44	39	27
Annexation/Occupation	20	16	11	14	13	15	7	28	30	19	28	26
World War II	15	10	5	11	4	17	22	27	19	23	33	42
Deportations to Siberia	10	8	7	9	9	22	22	29	19	30	31	22
Perestroika	24	24	20	20	13	13	15	4	6	9	6	2
Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact	14	19	12	14	13	2	7	5	4	2	3	4
Collectivization of private farming	2	1	0	1	3	4	13	7	6	16	8	16
Postwar guerilla resistance	0	0	2	0	0	4	6	12	14	9	8	7
Afghanistan war	3	2	6	6	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>N</i>	(136)	(129)	(107)	(89)	(80)	(85)	(83)	(93)	(70)	(43)	(36)	(55)

<sup>a</sup>Each row item is the percentage of those in the age group mentioning at least one event (*N*) who nominate the event. Since some of these respondents mentioned two events, the column percentages do not sum to 100.

TABLE 20.4. Relations of Major Event/Change Categories and Age, Education, and Gender<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Annexation of Lithuania (1940)	World War II (1941-45)	Postwar Guerilla Resistance (1944-52)	Deportations (1940, 1944-53)	Collectivization of Farming (1948-53)	Afghanistan War (1979-89)	Perestroika (1985)	Rebirth of Lithuania (1988-89)	Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (1939 & 1989)
Education	4.88	—	—	—	-3.61	—	2.76	—	3.48
Gender	-4.27	—	—	2.16	—	-2.51	(-1.83)	(1.80)	—
Age (linear)	5.02	4.67	3.52	3.94	2.05	-2.39	-3.83	-4.07	-2.61
Age	2.71	2.29	-3.06	—	—	-2.58	—	-2.65	—

<sup>a</sup>Based on logistic analysis of each major event or change using four predictors: age (6 categories), education (5 categories), and gender (1 = Men, 2 = Women). The cell figures are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) *t* ratios (coefficient/standard error), with those in parentheses of borderline significance ( $.10 > p > .05$ ). Each analysis was done with and without an additional term for age squared to test for curvilinearity; if the age-squared term was not significant, results are shown only for the model omitting it. The sample size for these analyses was 989, a number smaller than that shown in Table 20.1 because cases with missing age, education, or sex were omitted from the logistic analyses. Nominal two-tailed statistical significance levels for this table are  $t = 1.64, p < .10$ ;  $t = 1.96, p < .05$ ;  $t = 2.58, p < .01$ ;  $t = 3.29, p < .001$ .



the recent past, whereas those who were in their youth at the time of the forced incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union are particularly likely to remember events from that period.

In mentions of the earlier events, the structure of history becomes important. Rintala (1968) identifies three factors that increase the size of a political generation: the degree of political participation, the length of events, and the spatial limits of events. The events of 1940–1952 were unusual in extent or duration for each of these factors. Virtually all Lithuanians were affected by the changes of this period, which were probably experienced in peoples' lives not as discrete, categorical events (as coded here) but as a stream of interrelated changes that took place over the same time period. As a result, most of the earlier events are highly mentioned by all older cohorts, without a peak in mention associated with a single cohort.

One must also distinguish personal experience from chronology in considering the relation of age to the events mentioned. Particularly interesting in this regard is the emphasis by young people today on the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, which dates from half a century ago but became public knowledge only in the 2 years preceding the survey. The past and the present in this case are really interchanged from the standpoint of personal experience.

In addition to clear linear relations for age, five of the events also show significant nonlinear trends that are captured by adding a quadratic term for age. Two of these relations involve the oldest events in Table 20.3, and in both instances the nonlinear feature seems to be the result of some increase in mentions by the youngest members of our sample, especially those 18 to 25. We interpret the increase in mentions of Lithuania's annexation to be due to the renewed focus today on that event 50 years ago, thus basically similar to an emphasis on the "rebirth" of Lithuania. In fact, we note that the category of "rebirth" itself produces a nonlinearity that is the mirror image of the one for annexation, with 18 to 29 year olds mentioning "rebirth" less than those 10 years older. What seems to happen is that some of the youngest people speak of the issue today more in terms of the original annexation rather than by using phrases referring to "rebirth." It is likely that this is more a matter of intellectual sophistication and a concern for history than a substantive distinction of importance, since there is a significant interaction between age and education such that, among young people, a disproportionate number of highly educated respondents mentioned annexation.

The similar higher mention among the young of World War II is more puzzling, but if the reasons shown in Table 20.2 are considered, the explanation becomes clearer. When the World War II answer was probed, about a quarter of the respondents referred to personal experience during the war, and almost all of these are people now over 50 years of age. However, a second reason offered for mentioning World War II was that it led to the division of Europe and the imposition of a "socialist" system on Lithuania, and this reason was the one given mainly by the youngest age category. Again it appears that this current cohort of people in their early 20s includes some who refer back to the original occupation

of Lithuania as their way of thinking about the events of today involving rebirth. This result provides some qualification to the more general hypothesis about generations and collective memory, but at the same time we should emphasize that the much stronger trend in Table 20.1 and Figure 20.2 is linear.

The nonlinearity for the postwar guerilla struggles is different, for it represents an unexpected lowering of mentions of that event by the oldest respondents. The finding helps support the more exact hypothesis about age, namely, that it is particularly those who were in their adolescence and early adulthood who recall a national event. The annexation of Lithuania and World War II occurred in the early 1940s, and it is the oldest people in our sample (e.g., those in their 70s) who were in the critical age range at that point. For example, someone age 70 when the survey was done was 21 years of age in 1940 when Lithuania was occupied by the Russians and 22 when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. However, the postwar guerilla struggles occurred mainly in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Thus it is people now around 60 (age 21 in 1950) who were adolescents and young adults at that time. Someone 60 in 1989 was 21 in 1950, and therefore this should be the peak age, according to the generational theory developed from Mannheim, for remembering the postwar struggles.

The nonlinearity for the Afghanistan war calls for a still different, but equally meaningful, interpretation. The war is the one event in Table 20.3 that is neither very old nor quite recent: It began in 1979 and continued through much of the 1980s. It was those in their 30s now who were in their 20s at the beginning of this period and who especially mentioned the war; note that nobody age 55 or beyond mentioned Afghanistan. Moreover, the negative relation to gender indicates that mentions of the war came disproportionately from males, who were the ones subject to the military draft.

We can summarize more briefly the findings for education. The annexation of Lithuania, the key historical event in Table 20.3, was most often mentioned by the best educated respondents, as was the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact with which annexation was directly associated. We take these relations to reflect a kind of intellectual sophistication that leads to a concern for political and legal history.

Collectivization of farming, on the other hand, was most often mentioned by the least educated respondents, regardless of age. We do not know the urban–rural origin of these respondents; but in Lithuania, as in almost all countries, education is lowest in rural areas, and the association of low education with mention of the forced collectivization of agriculture quite likely derives from personal connection to the land, perhaps through family members who were directly affected by Stalin's decision to dispossess individual farmers.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>We also added terms for age-by-education interactions to the logistic equations. Four events showed significant ( $p < .05$ ) interactions. These were negative for the annexation of Lithuania and for World War II and positive for the postwar guerilla struggles and the rebirth of Lithuania. However, the positive correlation between age and education in the

## Conclusion

The United States in 1985 and Lithuania in 1989 appeared almost as different as two Western countries could be. The United States was in a particularly stable period in its 200-year history, with no challenges to its identity as a nation in present consciousness or in the memory of its citizens. Lithuania, however, was hurting in a space of a few months from seemingly submissive incorporation within an apparently stable superpower to bolder and bolder steps toward complete independence. The contrast creates striking differences in the content of the collective memories of the two peoples, yet it supports rather than eliminates equally striking similarities in the relation of life course to the temporal nature of what is remembered.

The differences in content are obvious enough by comparing Table 20.1 in this chapter with the parallel Table 1 in Schuman and Scott (1989). Only a single event, World War II, occupies roughly similar positions in the two tables, appearing as the most mentioned event by Americans in 1985 and as the event mentioned third most often by Lithuanians. Some of this difference is doubtless due to time as well as geography, for more recent data gathered for Americans show a strong awareness of the changes in eastern Europe, although not specifically about Lithuania.<sup>11</sup> The importance of national identity is evident for both countries, however, as indeed the contrast between ethnic Lithuanians and Russians within Lithuania already makes clear.

More striking than the differences in content, however, are the similarities between Americans and Lithuanians in the relation of age to events remembered. For both peoples, adolescent and early adulthood experiences play an important role in shaping later collective memory, so that different generations or cohorts are distinctive in what they mention as most important about the past half century. The similarity is brought out well by graphing together the 1985 American and 1989 Lithuanian mentions of the one common event, World War II, by birth cohorts, as shown in Figure 20.5. In both cases, mention of the war has a predominantly monotonic relation to age, although mentions by Lithuanians have a curvilinear component that reflects more mentions of World War II by the youngest respondents than by those slightly older.

The graph also reflects indirectly a dip in the memories of World War II by Lithuanians born in the 1920–1929 period. These respondents reached age 21 between 1941 and 1950, a period that saw not only World War II but also the annexation of Lithuania and Stalin's repression of resistance by means of deportations and in other ways; hence, they mentioned several other events from

sample is strong enough to create very small cells for certain combinations, which makes interpretation difficult, so that only the interaction for mention of annexation lends itself to a clear interpretation.

<sup>11</sup>In data collected in the spring of 1990 from the metropolitan Chicago area, 34% of all respondents who gave at least one event mentioned the reunification of Germany, new freedom in the Soviet Union, or the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe.

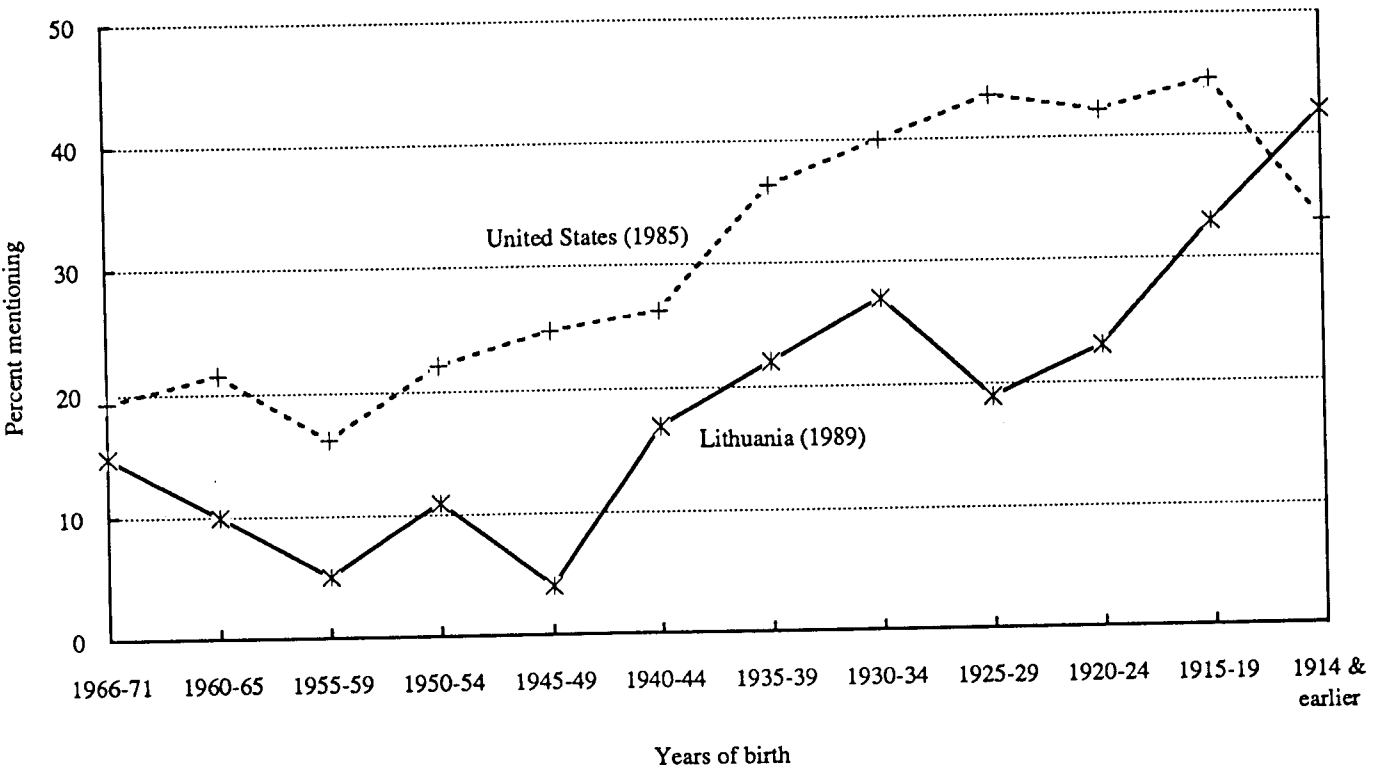


FIGURE 20.5. World War II Mentions by Cohort, United States and Lithuania

that same period, which accounts for the drop in World War II mentions. No such major political and social events competed with World War II for the attention and later memories of Americans during the 1941–1950 years, and thus there is no dip for the U.S. sample. Similarly, prior to 1941 the Great Depression attracted mentions of the oldest U.S. cohorts, whereas the Depression had less of an impact on heavily rural Lithuania during the 1930s.

Differences in historical circumstances between the United States and Lithuania are also reflected in the high level of agreement for the most frequently mentioned group of events in Lithuania: the process of “rebirth.” It may be that the high mention of “rebirth” by Lithuanians of all ages represents a period effect, reflecting the impact of objectively important recent events. However, the recent events included under the category of “rebirth” have made a larger impression on younger respondents than on older ones, even though the “rebirth” movement at the time of the survey had the potential to reverse the effects of earlier events that older respondents experienced in their youth—the annexation and Stalinization of Lithuania.

Overall, then, the relations of age to remembered events in Lithuania substantially replicate the previous findings in the United States and the general hypothesis that explains them. At the same time, the results of this study allow us to extend the theory by identifying the extent to which youths in the same historical and geographical location (such as Lithuanians and Russians in present-day Lithuania) may identify as important *different* events from a commonly experienced flow of history. Moreover, the data presented here indicate that a single objective historical event may be experienced so differently by members of different groups that the subjective events are essentially distinct from each other.

In addition, the Lithuanian data emphasize the part that the structure of history plays in the formation of collective memories. Not only the rate of social or political change but also the length, uniqueness, and objective impact of events are important in creating distinct generational perspectives.

Moreover, the findings from the United States and Lithuania enable us to speculate on the functions of collective memories. Clearly, group identity may contribute to the selection of events seen as important; this may be especially true when group differences are highly politicized or groups see themselves as oppressed. In turn, it is plausible that, as theorists such as Halbwachs (1950/1980) and Strauss (1959) have suggested, a shared understanding of history supports group identity. Thus, Edward Shils (1981, p. 168) writes of a “consensus through time”—that is, “the persistence of the past into the present, through the maintenance of the partial identity of a society between its past and its present”—that provides a group with a stable identity even as its members are continually being replaced. If Hosking (1989) is correct in arguing that unexpurgated memory of the historical past provides necessary guidance for a society’s future course, particularly in totalitarian societies, the preservation of memories that have been repressed from official historical discourse, such as the Lithua-

nian memories of Stalinist deportations and executions, may become especially important when the course that a society is to take is contested.

Our findings indicate ways in which the content of individual memories of public events are shaped by life course, social structures, and patterns of historical events—variables previously neglected in much of the work on autobiographical memory. The complex ways in which these variables contribute to individual recollections of recent history demonstrate links between an individual’s memory and the larger collectivity not adequately captured by either the “now print” mechanism or the “reconstructive” approach. Consideration of these variables in future work on autobiographical memory can assist in a richer understanding of memory and cognition in social contexts.

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