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Malleable National Collective Memories Among Black and White Americans

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How do groups remember their shared past? Are there individual differences within a group? How easy is it to change collective memories? The present article addresses these questions by focusing on differences within national subgroups, exploring how national collective memories might differ for Black and White Americans, how individual differences and external influences might moderate or alter any differences, and the temporal extent of any changes that might occur due to external influences. Across four studies, participants were asked to identify the five "most important" events in U.S. history and then asked about their political ideology and racial and national identification, though not in every study. Although individual differences emerged, Black and White participants differed in the types of events they identified as important in U.S. history, with Black participants identifying more race-relevant events than White participants and White participants identifying more traditional founding events than Black participants. As to changes in collective memory, in response to a minimal identity salience manipulation, the murder of George Floyd, and July 4th celebrations, national collective memories evidenced malleability only after the murder of George Floyd. In this instance, the mention of race-relevant events increased, even as the frequency of mention of traditional founding events remained stable. The observed increase in race-relevant events was temporary, however. Findings are discussed in relation to contemporary discussions on collective memory, especially with respect to group differences, individual differences within groups, and mnemonic inertia.

Public Significance Statement

Public discourse about the way U.S. history should be told, especially how it should incorporate the Black experience, often pays little attention to the collective memory Black and White Americans actually hold. The present study underscores differences in the ways Black and White participants remember U.S. history but also explores how these differences depend not just on race but also on how Black and White participants navigate what are often competing identities of being Black, White, or simply American. Whatever their content, presently held collective memories proved relatively resistant to change. In the present study, we found that emotionally charged events such as the murder of George Floyd elicited change, but the change proved temporary. The way American history is presently remembered and the stability of these representations needs to be acknowledged as the public considers what might be a better reckoning of the U.S. past.

Keywords: collective memory, racial identity, charter events, mnemonic malleability, mnemonic inertia

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Psychologists are increasingly interested in collective memories, often treating them as individual memories shared across a community that bear on that community's collective identity (see, for instance, Hirst et al., 2018; Hirst & Manier, 2008; Hirst & Merck, 2024; Liu, 2022; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Merck et al., 2020; Rajaram, 2022; Wertsch, 2021; Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Much of the extant research focuses on national collective memories, for which the concern is largely the way citizens of a country remember their nation's history, that is, to use terminology suggested by Liu and Hilton (2005; see also Moscovici, 1988), the *social representation* of

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their nation's history. We will use the terms *collective memory* and *social representation* interchangeably in this article. Investigations of national collective memories garner interest, in part, because the way a nation remembers its past shapes its future actions and thoughts about the future, as well as its present identity (Szpunar & Szpunar, 2016; Topçu & Hirst, 2022). The research is generally not concerned with documenting how professional historians tell a nation's history, but rather the way citizens, acting as lay historians, remember a nation's history (Klein, 2013).

One commonly used methodology is to ask participants to indicate the "most important" events in their nation's history (e.g., Corning & Schuman, 2015; Hacıbektaşoğlu et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2005; Schuman & Scott, 1989). The technique does not probe for what people know about specific events but for the relative importance they assign to events. Although there is substantial overlap in the identified "most important" events across countries, differences exist. For instance, Abel et al. (2019) asked participants from either former Allies or Axis countries to name the "most important" events from War World II. Regardless of the country they were from, their participants largely placed D-Day at or near the top of the list, with one exception: Russians infrequently mentioned D-Day but frequently mentioned the Battle of Stalingrad, a battle not featured in the American Top 10, for instance. This result cannot be accounted for by assuming that Russians have limited knowledge about the war. They no doubt know about D-Day. Moreover, in Abel et al.'s probe for general knowledge of the war, Russians performed better than any of the other assessed countries. Russian's choice of the Battle of Stalingrad as "most important" reflects the way different events are represented in the collective memory they have of the war.

The present article shifts focus from differences across nations to differences within a nation. In particular, it examines which events from American history Black and White Americans deem as "most important." We chose these two groups because (a) they are two of the larger racial/ethnic groups in the United States; (b) they are often viewed as having different status in the United States (see, for instance, Hochschild, 1996), and (c) there has long been vigorous debate about how to incorporate the distinctive experiences of Black Americans into accounts of U.S. history (see, for instance, Eyerman, 2001, as well as the debate around the 1619 Project, e.g., Wilentz, 2020).

The present study is concerned with three issues. First, are there differences between the way Black and White Americans remember American history, specifically, in the events that they deem as "most important"? Second, within these groups, are there individual differences and if so, what might they be? Third, how stable are these collective memories? Can, for instance, external influences shift assessments about what is deemed "most important"? And if so, how long lasting is this shift?

Social Representational Differences

With respect to the first issue, scholars often distinguish "official" collective memories from "vernacular" ones, with minority or oppressed groups potentially adopting a "vernacular" narrative rather than the official one (Bodnar, 1994). Official memories are propagated by elites "by promoting interpretations of past and present reality that reduce the power of competing interests that threaten the realization of their goals" (p. 13). Vernacular memories, on the other hand, "represent an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole. They are diverse and changing and can be reformulated from time to time by the creation of new social units" (p. 14). Whereas the vernacular collective memory may feature events not included in the official narrative, even when the same event is featured in official and vernacular renderings, their relative importance may differ across the two. Schuman et al. (1994) offered a telling example of this contrast in their studies of Lithuanians' collective memories. When examining the generation that lived through Soviet occupation, they found that Lithuanians of Russian descent repeated what they had learned in school, which mainly emphasized unity within the Soviet Union, whereas Lithuanians of Lithuanian descent went beyond what they had learned in school. Critically, they not only recalled unstudied events historically important to Lithuanian but not Soviet history, they also did not view the Soviet-oriented events they learned about in school as "most important."

The same situation may also hold when comparing Black and White Americans' rendering of American history. An "official" version of American history no doubt exists (Au et al., 2016; Blight, 2001; Bodnar, 1994; Takaki, 1987). Consider the textbooks used in school. American history textbooks are selected by State Boards of Education in 20 states (Thornton, 2008). Moreover, two publishing firms (Pearson and Scholastic) dominate the textbook market, with 66% of the share (Wordsrated, 2023). Although these publishers will modify their textbooks to accommodate state standards, the general narrative across different versions remains the same (Goodman, 2020; see also FitzGerald, 1979).

The narrative contained in these textbooks, and the narratives captured in many national collective memories, include, indeed, are often built around, what Liu and Hilton (2005) called charter events (Carretero & van Alphen, 2014, 2018). As they define them, charter events are "an account of [a nation's] origin and historical mission" (p. 528). Moreover, they are "constitutional," in that "they serve the function of foundational myth for a society, defining rights and obligations and legitimizing its social and political arrangements" (p. 529). One might expect, then, that people might treat charter events as among the "most important" events in their nation's history. Lithuanians of Lithuanian descent, for instance, may not have treated many of the Soviet-oriented historical events they learned about in school as "most important" in part because, as far as they were concerned, they did not "legitimize" the "social and political arrangements" in the now independent Lithuania—nor in the Soviet-era one.

One class of charter events are founding events, as Liu and Hilton's (2005) discussion of the concept indicates. For official, or our preferred term here, *traditional* renderings of U.S. history, these would include events such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. One might not want to limit charter events to founding events, however. Events other than founding events might be viewed as charter events, or at least amendments to original charter events, in the sense that they further articulate the "historical mission" of the country. They do so by helping clarify and advance what Wertsch (2021) has called national narrative projects. These are "a kind of overall biography or life history of a national community that is directed towards an aspiration or ideal that guides a national community's understanding of itself" (p. 184). Many would include in this American "biography" events involving the suppression and the struggles of Black Americans for their rights. A good example would be the Civil Rights Movement. It fits well into at least one rendering of the U.S. Narrative Project, in that it broke the hold of Jim Crow laws and in doing so made substantial

progress in articulating the "civil rights" of all Americans, and in particular, Black Americans. As stated above, it could even be viewed as at least an amendment to original charter events, in that it defined "rights" and "responsibilities" and advanced the United States's aspiration that "all men are created equal," traditionally part of the United States's historical mission.

With these considerations in mind, we distinguish in this article between what we call *traditional founding events* and *race-relevant events*. We identify *race-relevant events* as historical events that involve the suppression of Black Americans or the struggles to obtain their civil rights and to establish equity. Most U.S. history textbooks will mention such events, including, for example, the slave trade, the Civil War, Jim Crow, or the Civil Rights Movement (Garcia & Tanner, 1985). Although the term *race-relevant* could be used more broadly, it is confined it here to historical events that impact positively or negatively on Black Americans.

As to traditional founding events, as employed in the collective memory literature, *founding events* are those that in some capacity demarcate the beginning of a nation and, at the same time, inform the identity of this nation (Hilton & Liu, 2017; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Yamashiro et al., 2022; E. Zerubavel, 2003). We focus on *traditional founding events*. These events include the establishment of the colonies and the subsequent formation of the United States as a separate entity from Britain. We use the modifier *traditional* because alternative founding events exist, as forcefully articulated by Hannah-Jones and Elliott (2019) in their *1619 Project*. Our interest here is not to engage in the debate about what *should* be viewed as a founding event in the United States but to examine the extent to which traditional founding events, as defined herein, are listed as "most important." In contrasting traditional founding events with race-relevant events, we recognize that one could legitimately identify many traditional founding events as race-relevant, given their role in cementing the place of slavery in the United States. However, most Americans, including those who argue for alternative founding events, would no doubt agree that there are a set of events that would fall under our label *traditional founding events*.

Of course, many important historical events are neither traditional founding nor race-relevant. With that in mind, we add a third category—*other*. War World II would be an example of an "other" event. Our interest is mainly with traditional founding and race-relevant events.

We focus on traditional founding and race-relevant events because they could potentially tap into differences in the collective memory Black and White Americans have of U.S. history. Liu and Hilton (2005) identified several functions and explanations for differences in social representations. Among them is the role of social identity. Russians have a different collective memory of War World II from, for instance, Americans because, in part, they have different social identities. Similarly, the collective memory of Lithuanians of Russian descent differs from the collective memory of Lithuanians of Lithuanian descent, in part, because of their distinctive social identity. Depending on their identity, people may attend to different material, assign different levels of salience and importance to the same material, and interpret the same material in different ways. Moreover, they may seek out alternative renderings to the "official" narrative and associate with others who may supply such renderings.

The evidence is that most learning about "vernacular" collective memory occurs outside the classroom. In one survey, for instance, 51% of Black Americans reported that they were extremely or very informed about U.S. Black history and another 37% indicated that they were somewhat informed. However, despite this encouraging self-assessment, among those Black Americans who report knowing at least a little about U.S. Black history (98% of the sample), only 23% reported that they acquired at least some of what they knew in K–12 schooling (Cox, 2022). The main sources of information appeared to originate from family and friends (43%) and from the internet and social media (57%).

Because they possess different social identities, which in turn may lead them to attend to or be exposed to different material, as well as interpret the same material differently, it is quite possible that Black and White Americans may hold different collective memories. But caution is in order. People align themselves with multiple groups, a state of affairs referred to as *social identity complexity* (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; see also Batiashvili, 2017; Wertsch, 2021). Such complexity is particularly relevant when considering how Black Americans might judge the importance of different events in American history. Black Americans must navigate what Du Bois and Marable (1903/2015) evocatively described as their "double consciousness," reconciling dual membership in the American community and in the African American community. When it comes to their understanding of American history, they might strike a balance between these two identities, for instance, possibly judging slavery to be among the "most important" to American history more so than would White Americans but also judging the signing of the Declaration of Independence as among the "most important." Such a result is consistent with findings that an increase in the salience of a common ingroup identity can alter cognitive representations of the aggregate group (Gaertner et al., 2016, for a review). It is also consistent with the finding that Black Americans report possessing flashbulb memories of the assassination of John F. Kennedy as well as flashbulb memories of the assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (Brown & Kulik, 1977), whereas White Americans only report flashbulb memories for the assassination of Kennedy (and to a lesser degree, King). It is possible, then, that the historical events White Americans and at least some Black Americans view as "most important" may overlap, though there may still be differences.

Of course, Black Americans, or at least some Black Americans, might reject traditional founding events as "constitutional" to the American project, as Hannah-Jones and Elliott (2019) did. As a result, they may exclude traditional founding events from their list of "most important" and largely identify as "most important" events what we are calling *race-relevant* and *other* events.

The social representations Black Americans adopt, then, may reflect more than their race alone. As the notion of *social identity complexity* underscores, people navigate between often competing identities in complex ways. The course one follows may vary from individual to individual (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). When considering how Black Americans represent American history, their representation could, for instance, depend not just on their race but also on how much they identify with that race. It could also depend on how much they identify as an American. A Black American might identify strongly as Black and less so as an American, strongly as an American and less so as Black, feel weakly connected to both their race and their country, or feel strongly connected to both. These different forms of identity could shape what Black Americans might view as "most important" in American history. For instance, Black Americans may include more traditional founding events if they

identify less with their race and more with the United States. Alternatively, they may exclude traditional founding events if they identify more with their race and less with the United States. That is, it is possible that the distribution of traditional founding and race-relevant events in a list of "most important" events in American history may reflect not just the race of a participant but also how this individual navigates their social identity complexity. *Individual differences* may matter.

The need to consider such individual differences holds for White Americans as well as Black Americans. They may be more likely to identify traditional founding events as among the "most important" events in U.S. history than would Black Americans but might be more likely to do so if they strongly identify with their race and/or with the United States. Political ideology may also play a role with, for instance, liberal White Americans being more likely to identify race-relevant events as "most important" than more conservative White Americans (Mills, 2017). This preference can be seen in a recent survey that asked respondents to fill in the statement "Increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism in America is _____ for society" (Pew Research Center, 2021). Seventy-eight percent of the Democrats in the sample responded "very good" or "somewhat good," whereas 25% of the Republicans did.

The present set of studies, then, examines what we call the *distribution issue*—the extent to which Black and White Americans identify traditional founding events and race-relevant events as most important. Specifically, following a standard paradigm for assessing the content of collective memories pioneered by Schuman and Scott (1989; see also Abel et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2005, for further examples), we ask participants to list the five most important events in U.S. history and then code them as *traditional founding*, *race-relevant*, or *other*. We then contrast the extent to which one of these types of events dominates the lists that Black and White Americans provide to determine the nature of their social representations of U.S. history.

The present set of studies also explores what we call the *individual differences issue*—the extent to which any distributional differences we observed will depend on individual differences rather than simply racial differences. We will specifically examine possible candidates: *racial identification*, *national identification*, and *political ideology*. We chose these three because, as noted, they seemed likely to influence the way Black and White Americans remember U.S. history.

Stability

Are the social representations held by Black and White Americans stable over time, or can circumstances change them? Scholars often underscore the functionality of stability, in that it allows a community to work effectively toward a collective continuity between its past, present, and future (Mutlutürk et al., 2022; Nicholson, 2017). Sani et al. (2007) have argued that communities strive to establish this continuity inasmuch as it can promote the perception of a strong group identity, ground group culture, and incorporate into the community's culture stable norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions.

Despite a general agreement about stability's functionality, there is no consensus as to whether collective memories are indeed stable over time. To the extent that stability has been considered, most claims rest on general observations rather than careful empirical examination. Some scholars have argued for the malleability of collective memories. Rothberg's (2009) notion of multidimensional memory assumes such malleability. As indicated, Bodnar (1994) has argued that vernacular memories will change as the composition of different social groups changes. And, in one of the few empirical studies of the issue, in their examination of Americans' collective memories of Christopher Columbus, Corning and Schuman (2022) found generational shifts in how Americans understand this "charter figure."

In contrast, other scholars have stressed collective memory's stability. According to Liu and Hilton (2005), charter events are "timeless" and "transmitted across generations" (p. 528). Wertsch (2021) similarly viewed narrative schematic templates (frames for recalling a nation's history) as stable over time. He described them as "deep," by which he meant that they are applied without awareness by the public, and critical to our concerns here, any change that does occur unfolds slowly. Finally, Hirst (in press) argued for a "mnemonic inertia" to social representations of history, especially within a generational cohort, but even across generational divides. He noted that despite years of scholarly historical work and major changes in the portrayal of Columbus in history textbooks, about 50% of Corning and Schuman's (2022) youngest sample still endorsed the "traditional" view of Columbus.

Not only is it unclear the degree to which collective memories are stable but the conditions that might "destabilize" a collective memory are also not well understood. Whatever they are, they will probably depend on how easy it is to bring about a change. When it comes to Black and White Americans' collective memory of U.S. history, if change is easy to effect, then a simple "priming" of a person's race might be sufficient. On the other hand, if collective memories of U.S. history are resistant to change, one might need a salient, emotionally charged external event or an accumulation of such events to bring to the fore, for instance, the place of race in American society or, alternatively, the founding of the United States. As noted, the empirical evidence is limited. Moreover, we have no a priori theoretical reason to claim that a simple prime or a salient, emotionally charged event or sequence of events might be needed. We want to test herein the range of possibilities. We will examine whether a change in the distribution of traditional founding events and race-relevant events among Black and White Americans can occur with (a) a minimal salience manipulation—a request to indicate one's race—(b) a salient, emotionally intense, and racially charged public event—the murder of George Floyd—and (c) a commemoration of the founding of the United States—the celebration of the Fourth of July.

Of course, some elements of a collective memory may be easier to alter than others. One way to frame this issue is to examine the cost of any change, the *cost issue*. If participants can list five and only five most important events and, for instance, because of an external event, the number of race-relevant events in their list of five increases, what suffers? Participants might list fewer traditional founding events, fewer other events, or some combination of these two. If some event types are more resistant to change than others, they may, as a result, not be "dropped" from the list of the Top 5 in order to accommodate an increase in race-relevant events. If traditional founding events are resistant to change, for instance, then any increase in the listing of race-relevant events might come from "other" events, according to our classification scheme. If we find that, for instance, the murder of George Floyd increases the number of race-relevant events, we can then examine whether the number of

traditional founding events decreases as a result. If it does not, and the cost of the increase comes solely from other events, then we might conclude that traditional founding events are resistant to change, at least in comparison to other events. Once again, the limited empirical work on this issue makes any firm prediction premature.

Finally, concerns about stability and change raise at least one other issue: *longevity*. We may find that, for instance, the murder of George Floyd leads to a listing of more race-relevant events, but is this change in distribution temporary or long lasting? There are two ways to think about this issue, at least in regard to the relation between the stability of collective memories and collective continuity. Continuity might be maintained by making any change temporary, with a quick return to the social representation held prior to the change. On the other hand, if the change is well motivated, one might want it to be lasting. Again, there is little empirical work to guide one in making firm predictions.

Summary

The present work contrasted the collective memories of Black and White Americans, focusing on the extent to which race-relevant and traditional founding events figured as "most important" in their social representations of American history. We examined five issues. First, does the distribution of race-relevant and traditional founding events differ for Black and White Americans and if so, how? Second, are there individual differences in the distributions of these two event types among Black and White Americans, specifically, will racial identification, national identification, and political ideology mitigate or enhance any distributional differences we find? Third, how stable are these distributional differences? Here, we examined whether a minimal saliency prime and an external, salient emotionally charged event—specifically, the murder of George Floyd—would change the distribution of race-relevant and traditional founding events from what was listed prior to his death. We also examined whether commemorative practices would have an effect. In addressing the issue of stability, we were interested in not simply whether destabilization is possible but also whether some event types are more resistant to destabilization than others. Fourth, what is the cost of this change if there is destabilization? If one event type changes, which other event types will also evidence a change? Finally, how long lasting is any observed change? Given the paucity of research on these topics, we have refrained from making any firm predictions, treating the present research as exploratory.

In the four studies reported here, participants are asked to list the five most important events in U.S. history. In all four studies, we will be interested in the distribution of traditional founding, race-relevant, and other events in these lists of Top 5 as a function of participants' race. That is, each study addresses the *distribution issue*. Study 1 also explores the *stability issue* by providing a minimal salience prime, a demographic form, and then contrasting responses with a control condition in which the prime is absent. Study 2a also addresses the *stability issue* by surveying participants 1 week after the murder of George Floyd, that is, examining the effect of a racially charged external event. If such a salient, emotionally charged event produces an increase in the number of race-relevant events in the Top 5, we can then address the *cost issue*, by investigating the consequence of such an increase in the listings of traditional founding and other events. Study 2b explores whether any observed changes in Study 2a are long lasting by retesting participants from Study 2a 8 months after the murder. This longitudinal analysis addresses the *longevity issue*. Study 3 attempts to manipulate the distribution of traditional founding events by testing participants around the Fourth of July (thereby examining the *distribution and stability issues*, but now as they apply to the impact of external influences on ranking the importance of traditional founding events). Across the studies, we will explore the *individual differences issue* by probing for political ideology and racial and national identification. We did not probe for all three in each study, in that our thinking about the role of individual differences evolved over the course of this multiyear project. We should note that the order of the studies presented here is not the order in which they were conducted. Table 1 lists the time frame of each study.

Transparency and Openness

In this study, and in the others described herein, we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study, and we follow Journal Article Reporting Standards (Kazak, 2018). Data materials and data files have been made publicly available at Open Science Framework and can be accessed at https://osf.io/h4epc.

Study 1

In this study, we explored the distribution, individual differences, and stability issues, that is, (a) whether Black and White Americans differ in the extent to which they rank "traditional founding" or "race-relevant" events as the "most important," (b) what individual differences, outside of race, might determine the shape of this distribution, and (c) whether this distribution remains stable with the presence of an external influence. With respect to stability, we investigated whether, in an *experimental condition*, simply highlighting the race of our participants by having them check a box in a demographic query might have an effect. A *control condition* eliminated this request. Priming the word "black" can have a significant effect on cognition and behavior (Dovidio et al., 1986). Would it also do so for the collective memories of U.S. history? With respect to individual differences, we examine here political ideology and racial identification. The New School institutional review board approved this study, as well as the others in this article.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited online via Amazon Mechanical Turk, using the CloudResearch graphical user interface (formerly known as TurkPrime; Litman et al., 2017). Prescreened Americans who identified as "non-Hispanic" and either "Black/African American" ($n = 300$) or "White/European American" ($n = 300$) were sampled, with members of each group randomly assigned to an experimental or control condition in a manner that led to an even split across condition. The sample size was based on an a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). We assumed a power of 80% power, an effect size of at least $f = .20$, based on other collective memory studies (e.g., Cyr & Hirst, 2019), and an α of .05. This sample size was preregistered. The analytic strategy has evolved

Table 1
Order of the Sequence of Tasks for the Procedures for Studies 1–3

Study 1		Study 2a	Study 2b	Study 3	
Minimal race saliency prime	Control—no prime	Immediately after the death of George Floyd	8 months after the death of George Floyd	Around July 4th	8 months after July 4
		Time frame of study			
May 2018		June 6–14, 2020	March 22 to April 5, 2020	July 4–7, 2019	March 19 to April 2, 2019
Indicate race					
List most important	List most important	List most important	List most important	List most important	List most important
List four more	List four more	List four more	List four more	List four more	List four more
Importance rankings	Importance rankings	Importance rankings	Importance rankings	Importance rankings	Importance rankings
Valence ratings	Valence ratings	Valence ratings	Valence ratings	Valence ratings	Valence ratings
Racial identification	Racial identification	Racial identification	Racial identification		
		National identification	National identification	National identification	National identification
		Centrality task	Centrality task		
				Knowledge of U.S. history	Knowledge of U.S. history
Political ideology	Political ideology	Political ideology	Political ideology	Political ideology	Political ideology
Demographics	Demographics	Demographics	Demographics	Demographics	Demographics
		Attention to news, and so forth	Attention to news, and so forth		

Note. Details of the specific measures and scales can be found in the text.

from a proposed use of chi-square in the preregistration to the employment of analyses of variance to account for interactions. When the power analysis was redone for an analysis of variance with the same assumptions, the desired sample size was 228. Fifty-six participants were excluded due to one of three preregistered reasons for exclusion (i.e., copying and pasting or providing incoherent responses [$n = 29$], failing attention checks [$n = 6$], or identifying as a race not consistent with the filters being used for specific racial groups [$n = 21$]). Additional participants were recruited to replace these exclusions. Demographic characteristics of participants in the different groups did not differ significantly; see Table 2.

Procedure

After being recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk, in this study and all other studies in this article, participants were transferred to a Qualtrics site, where they took the survey. They were not permitted to use their smartphone to take the survey. The survey was administered asynchronously. Participants were told that they would be taking part in a study on perceptions of national history. After providing consent, in the *experimental condition*, participants received a racial-identity salience item at the outset. They were asked to indicate if they identified as "American Indian or Alaskan Native," "Asian," "Black or African American," "Hispanic or Latino," "Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander," and "White" or "Other (Please Specify)" by checking off the appropriate box. The list conforms to Federal Standards (Office of Management and Budget Directive, 1997). Participants in the *control condition* did not see this question at the outset.

All participants were then asked to take a moment and to reflect on the history of the United States, in particular, on important national and international events that have occurred in the nation's history. They were then asked to describe, in a few words "what you believe the one most important event in the U.S. history was." Afterward, they were asked to provide four more events that they believed were the most important in the nation's history. After completing this task, each previously identified event was displayed in a random order. Participants were asked to reflect on each event they listed and briefly explain why they selected it. This served as a check on whether participants had reflected seriously when creating their list. We did not analyze these reflections.

Participants then ranked the importance of the events they previously listed, relative to one another. For this importance ranking, participants ordered the events they identified from most important to least important, relative to the other events. They subsequently rated the valence of the events. For the valence rating, participants rated each event on a 1 (*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*) Likert scale. In this article, we do not report results from this scale. In retrospect, the data do not allow us to determine easily whether any differences in averaged valence judgments arise because one group judged a specific event as more positive or negative or because one group mentioned different events than the other groups. Given this difficulty with interpretation, we have treated the analyses concerning the valence judgments as Supplemental Material, both for this study and the other studies reported in this article.

Participants then completed a racial identification measure, with rating on a 1–7 Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; Kenworthy et al., 2011). It includes nine statements such as "Being a member of my race/ethnicity is an important reflection

Table 2
Demographic Information for Black and White Participants

	Study 1		Study 2a		Study 2b				Study 3	
					Black		White			
Characteristic of sample	Black	White	Black	White	New	Returning	New	Returning	Black	White
Sample size	300	300	300	300	150	118	144	84	192	269
Age										
M	36.4	40.1	36.8	36.1	37.8	42.1	42.1	40.9	39.5	44.4
SD	11.04	11.70	13.5	12.9	11.84	15.02	12.4	14.2	12.5	12.3
Gender										
Female	122	119	113	158	94	75	78	44	75	162
Male	175	180	185	139	53	42	65	38	117	106
Other	3	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	0	1
Education										
High school	27	26	23	21	13	5	9	2	11	25
Some college	100	71	86	68	33	29	34	17	51	43
Associate's degree	35	39	40	26	25	22	20	12	25	34
Bachelor's degree	89	100	96	115	47	42	41	28	62	95
Some graduate school	9	13	13	11	4	5	5	9	12	12
Graduate/professional	40	50	41	53	28	13	34	15	31	59
Political ideology										
M	2.71	3.18	2.92	3.11	2.94	2.88	3.44	3.20	3.93	5.61
SD	1.51	1.27	1.23	1.37	1.28	1.22	1.37	1.33	3.22	3.82

Note. Study 2b included both new and returning participants. For political ideology, 1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*.

of who I am" and "I see myself as a member of my race/ethnicity." At the end of the study, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire, which included questions about age, gender, educational history, geographic area of residence, race/ethnicity (following the procedure used in the experimental condition at the onset of the study), and, importantly, political ideology. They indicated their race/ethnicity even if they had previously done so in the beginning of the experiment. For the political ideology query, participants were asked to rate themselves on a 7-point scale ranging from *very liberal* (1) to *very conservative* (7). Participants were debriefed and compensated for their time; see Table 1.

Coding

The primary focus was on the proportion of the listed events that were "traditional founding" or "race-relevant." Operationally, the former are those events that occurred within a 20-year span centered around the American Revolutionary War, as well as events related to the settlement and colonization of the North American landmass. *Race-relevant events* involved Black American racial inequality or struggle for equality in the United States. Events that did not fit these two categories were classified as *other*. We did not combine or interpret what participants wrote beyond this straightforward tripartite classification. Thus, if participants deemed the Gettysburg Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Civil War were each among the Top 5 most important events, we did not try to second guess them, accepted their judgments, and treated them as three separate events. Such putative "redundancies" were rare.

The first author coded all responses and two dual coders, blind to participant race and condition, each coded the same 20% of the sample. In this study and the others in the article, we followed the procedure used in many investigations involving coding and only had the secondary coders code a random sample of all the responses to limit the burden of our secondary, voluntary coders (see Hallgren, 2012, for a discussion of dual coding and the use of a subsample of participants to streamline the coding process). Using a two-way random model intraclass correlation coefficient, agreement among coders was excellent: intraclass correlation coefficient = .950, $p < .001$. Disagreements were resolved in a discussion among the coders.

Results

Throughout this article, we conducted a Levene's test on *t* tests to ensure equal variances across groups, as well as tests for the sphericity assumption of all tests. We focus here and elsewhere in the article on the frequency-of-mention data to streamline the presentation. *Frequency of mention* refers to the proportion of an event type among the list of the Top 5. Throughout the article, we corrected for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni procedure. The results of the importance rankings paralleled those found for frequency of mention and hence do not add substantially to the presentation. Details concerning the importance rankings can be found in the Supplemental Material.

Single Most Important Event

We separately analyzed the first item listed among the "most important" events and then all five listed events as a group. Inasmuch as there were no marked differences in the results, we will briefly present the results for the event listed as the single most important event in U.S. history and then focus on the analyses based on all five listed events. As can be seen in Table 3, the distribution of event types for the single most important event differed for Black and White participants, $\chi^2(2) = 86.0$, $p < .001$. Race-relevant events dominated the responses of Black Americans, with traditional founding events and then "other" events following. For White Americans, it was traditional founding events that

Table 3
Proportion of Different Event Types of Single Most Important Event by Race

Race	Other	Founding	Race-relevant
Black	.17	.22	.61
White	.24	.52	.25

dominated. There was no difference in the proportion of race-relevant and other events listed as the single most important event.

One might wonder what events participants listed? The first author went through each listing and identified what might be thought of as *historical episodes*. Unlike the coding for calculating the proportion of race-relevant and traditional founding events, he combined specific events into larger historical episodes. In most instances, participants did not mention specific events but referred to what we are calling *historical episodes*. However, when specific events were mentioned, they were grouped into these large historical episodes. For instance, one participant mentioned the Battle of Gettysburg, whereas many others listed the Civil War. The first author merged these into a single category—the Civil War. After he identified the historical episodes found in the listing participants provided, he and a second person then coded all the events according to this scheme. They agreed in all instances which events fell into these experimenter-defined historical episodes. We then used this coding to tabulate the frequency with which these episodes were identified as the single most important events and divided these frequency scores across our two racial categories and three event types.

See Table 4 for the results concerning traditional founding events and race-relevant events. By and large, across participants, the same events were mentioned, though the ordering differed across races. For instance, slavery was the least mentioned of the Top 5 "single most important" events among White participants, whereas it was number 3 for Black participants. It is also noteworthy that two of the events in the lists were relatively recent—the Civil Rights Movement and the first Black President. This pattern is consistent with the recency effects found in other studies of collective memory (e.g., Liu et al., 2005; Roediger & DeSoto, 2014). Although not featured in Table 4, the three most frequently mentioned other events also demonstrate a recency effect—War World II, the attack of September 11, 2001, and War World I, in order of frequency of mention. Because similar responses were present in Studies 2a, 2b, and 3 and in an effort to streamline the presentation, we do not report details about specific events in the rest of the article.

All Five Listed Events

Distribution. Table 5 contains a breakdown of the types of historical events listed as "most important" in the listing of the Top 5, focusing on the two event types of interest in this article—traditional founding and race-relevant events. It is noteworthy that all participants supplied the requested five events, suggesting that it is not hard to generate five events from U.S. history. In a mixed-model analysis of variance that treated identification proportion as the within-subject dependent variable and event type (traditional founding and race-relevant), race (Black and White), and condition (experimental and control) as factors, we found significant main effects of event type, $F(1, 596) = 284.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .32$, and participant race, $F(1, 592) = 11.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The main effect of condition was not significant, $F(1, 596) = 0.05$, $p = .819$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. These effects were qualified by interactions between event type and participant race, $F(1, 596) = 144.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. The interactions with condition were not significant ($p > .15$ in all cases). The nonsignificant results for condition indicate that our salience manipulation did not alter what type of events (race-relevant and traditional founding) participants viewed as "most important."

As to the interaction we did find, post hoc tests indicated that Black participants identified significantly more race-relevant events than traditional founding events, $t(299) = 19.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.11$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.33, −.27]. Interestingly, White participants evidenced the same pattern, with a significantly higher proportion of race-relevant events than traditional founding events, $t(299) = 3.67$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.21$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.08, −.02], though the magnitude of the difference between Black and White participants is worth noting. When we examine race-relevant events, Black participants identified a significantly higher proportion than did White participants, $t(598) = 10.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.87$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.12, 0.18]. The reverse was true of traditional founding events, with White participants now identifying a significantly higher proportion than Black participants, $t(598) = 7.48$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.61$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.12, −.07]. The overall higher proportion of race-relevant events may reflect a sampling bias. For traditional founding events, participants selected events chiefly from a time period of approximately 20 years, whereas for race-relevant events, they could select from a period of almost 250 years. On the other hand, it may reflect an increasing focus on race-relevant events in the past few years. As Table 4 indicates, slavery and the Civil War loomed large for both Black and White participants but also the Civil Rights Movement and the election of Obama.

Individual Differences. We conducted separate linear regressions for each of the event types, with event proportion as the

Table 4
Ordered List of Historical Episodes Mentioned as the Single Most Important Event, Across Conditions in Study 1, as Function of Event Type and Race

Traditional founding		Race-relevant	
Black	White	Black	White
Signing of the Declaration of Independence	Signing of the Declaration of Independence	End slavery	Civil War
Revolutionary War	Revolutionary War	Civil War	End slavery
General reference to founding	General reference to founding	Slavery	Civil Rights Movement
Discovery/settlement/colonization	Constitution	First Black President	First Black President
Constitution	Discovery/settlement/colonization	Civil Rights Movement	Slavery

Table 5
Proportion of Mention by Analysis, Event Type, Race, and Condition

Race	Study	Event type	
		Founding	Race-relevant
Black	Study 1—Exp	.12 (.01)	.40 (.01)
	Study 1—Ctrl	.12 (.01)	.43 (.01)
	Study 2a	.12 (.01)	.48 (.02)
	Study 2b	.13 (.01)	.43 (.01)
	Study 3—Exp	.11 (.01)	.43 (.02)
	Study 3—Ctrl	.11 (.01)	.41 (.02)
White	Study 1—Exp	.21 (.01)	.28 (.01)
	Study 1—Ctrl	.22 (.01)	.25 (.01)
	Study 2a	.20 (.01)	.29 (.01)
	Study 2b	.22 (.01)	.26 (.01)
	Study 3—Exp	.25 (.01)	.25 (.01)
	Study 3—Ctrl	.20 (.01)	.24 (.01)

Note. Values in parentheses indicate standard error. The means for Study 2b are based on the overall sample, that is, new and returning participants. Exp = experimental condition in Study 1 and Independence Day condition in Study 3; Ctrl = control condition in Studies 1 and 3.

outcome variable and ideology and racial identification as predictors. Although the general pattern of the individual differences across all four studies can be found in Table 6, we focus here on the results obtained for this study. For traditional founding events, for White participants, there was no significant relation between the proportion of identified founding events and political ideology nor racial identification, ideology: $b = .01$, $t(296) = .95$, $p = .342$; racial identification: $b = -.02$, $t(297) = 1.54$, $p = .125$. The same nonsignificance held for Black participants, ideology: $b = -.01$, $t(296) = .63$, $p = .527$; racial identification: $b = -.02$, $t(296) = 1.71$, $p = .088$. As to race-relevant events, there was a significant negative relation to political ideology for both Black and White participants, such that higher proportions of race-relevant events tended to correspond with more liberal political ideology, Black: $b = -0.03$, $t(297) = 3.75$, $p < .001$; White: $b = -0.02$, $t(296) = 2.88$, $p = .004$. This finding is consistent with the emphasis among liberals and progressives on the need to address race-relevant events when telling U.S. history (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2021). The results for racial identification were not significant, Black: $b = .01$, $t(296) = .76$, $p = .449$; White: $b = -.02$, $t(297) = 1.55$, $p = .123$.

Discussion

The results address what we referred to in the Introduction as the *distribution*, *individual differences*, and *stability* issues. They clearly show that our Black and White participants represent their shared national past in distinct manners, in that they tend to identify different types of events as being important to their shared national history. White participants tended to list more traditional founding events than Black participants. The reverse pattern was found with Black participants, who listed more race-relevant events.

As to individual differences, political ideology had a bearing on these results, in that a more liberal identification yielded a higher probability of identifying race-relevant events. This was true for both Black and White participants. Interestingly, Yamashiro et al. (2022) also found differences across the political ideological spectrum. They asked participants to list five historical events "important to the foundation of America." Although all participants demonstrated a positivity bias, conservative participants more frequently omitted foundational atrocities. It is difficult to compare this finding with our results, however, in that we did not explicitly ask for foundational events.

Finally, with respect to the issue of stability, our minimal identification salience manipulation (indicating race in a demographic question at the beginning of the experiment) did not have an effect when compared to a control condition, in which there was no prime. Would more salient, emotionally charged events that bring race more into the fore produce a change?

Study 2a

In this study, we again examine the issues of distribution, individual differences, and stability. Moreover, we explore how a historical tragedy—in this case, the death of George Floyd—may impact the stability of collective memories (Taylor, 2020). In doing so, we also investigate the cost of any representational change that might occur. If the frequency of mention of race-relevant events increases, will it limit the mention in the Top 5 of traditional founding events? Of other events?

George Floyd, a Black American male, was murdered by a White policeman on May 25, 2020. Video footage of the incident led to demonstrations and increased interest in and discourse about contemporary and past racism in the United States. Would such a salient, emotionally and racially charged event lead to changes in the collective memory Black and White Americans have of U.S. history? The present data collection was launched 12 days after Floyd's death, June 6, 2020, and continued to June 14, 2020. There were protests and substantial news coverage throughout this time period. How would George Floyd's murder affect the extent to which Black and White Americans included traditional founding and race-relevant events in their list of the five "most important" events in U.S. history?

As a basis for comparison, we will use the results from Study 1. This study occurred approximately 2 years before the present one. In laboratory studies, researchers can manipulate a variable and then, on the basis of this manipulation, identify the variable as the source of any observed changes, usually within the same experimental session. Similar logic motivated the use of the saliency prime in Study 1. However, when studying "real-world" phenomena, one often cannot manipulate variables. For instance, we cannot have a "control" condition in which George Floyd was not killed. Nor would it be possible to anticipate an event like the murder of George Floyd and test participants, for instance, a few days or weeks before news of the murder broke. Rather, in studies such as the present one, researchers must rely on naturally occurring events and compare across different time periods, acknowledging that multiple events and different forms of discussion unfolding between the two testing points may play a role.

Although we are focusing on the role the death of George Floyd played in highlighting the place of race in the United States, it was not an isolated instance. Many similar events occurred between Study 1 and Study 2. A Wikipedia site listing unarmed African Americans killed by police contains 62 names between the time Study 1 took place and George Floyd's death, including the highly publicized killing of Breonna Taylor (Unarmed African Americans

Table 6
Effect of Political Ideology and Racial and National Identification on the Listing of Traditional Founding and Race-Relevant Events, by Race and Study

	Political ideology		Racial identification		National identification	
Study	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
1	More liberal, more race-relevant events	More liberal, more race-relevant events			N/A	N/A
2a		More liberal, more race-relevant events, fewer traditional founding events	Stronger identification, more race-relevant events, fewer traditional founding events	Stronger identification, fewer race-relevant events	Stronger identification, more traditional founding events, fewer race-relevant events	
2b		More liberal, more race-relevant events	Stronger identification, more race-relevant events, fewer traditional founding events		Stronger identification, fewer race-relevant events	
3		More liberal, more traditional founding events, fewer race-relevant events	N/A	N/A		

Note. Empty cells indicate that no significant effects were found. N/A = The scale was not given.

Killed by Law Enforcement Officers in the United States, 2024). None of these events led to the level of social disruption that followed George Floyd's murder. Discussion of violence against Black Americans also played a critical role in public discourse even prior to Study 1. One might single out the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013 and the acquittal of his killer George Zimmerman as major catalysts. They led to intense social media discussions under headings such as "We Are All Trayvon Martin" and "We Are Not Trayvon Martin," as well as the formation of the Black Lives Matter movement during the same period (Rothberg, 2019). Moreover, as to police violence in particular, according to the Wikipedia site discussed above, there were 157 murders between the Trayvon Martin killing and Study 1, including the high-profile deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown (which led to the Ferguson riots), and Freddie Grey.

Clearly, when Study 1 took place, police killings and racial violence were already salient parts of public discourse. It is not surprising, then, that race-relevant events were frequently mentioned in Study 1. As a result, Study 1 should not be viewed as a baseline in which police violence had no bearing on the judgments individuals made when asked to list important American historical events. Rather, in comparing the results of Studies 1 and 2, we are choosing one point (Study 1) in which race is already salient and another point in which a highly emotionally charged killing could be viewed not as an isolated event but as a culmination of public discourse. In choosing Study 1 as a comparison point, we are, if anything, making it difficult to observe an increase, given the multitude of publicly discussed police killings that transpired from Trayvon Martin on. Moreover, even if the comparison point was closer to the time Study 2a took place, we would still need to view the Floyd murder as the culmination of the public discourse, albeit discourse taking place over a shorter period of time than the 2 years between Studies 1 and 2a.

Although these observations suggest that we cannot treat the killing of George Floyd as the sole cause of any change we might observe, it is still reasonable to expect that it might contribute, for several reasons. First, as indicated, at the time of Study 2a, it was the culmination of or turning point in an extensive public discussion about race in America, from the murder of Trayvon Martin forward. (Of course, discussions of race have always been part of American public discourse. The murder of Trayvon Martin focused the debate, to a degree, around the issue of violence, particularly police violence, Woodly, 2022.) Second, public discussion about how to tell U.S. history increased substantially after George Floyd's murder, as evidenced by the spontaneous destruction of confederate monuments that followed his murder (Owley & Phelps, 2020).

Finally, the George Floyd murder garnered a great deal of media attention and substantial social action. Here, widespread exposure to the video taken while George Floyd slowly died of asphyxiation underscored the horror and injustice of the killing. Its critical role in galvanizing sentiment has been widely acknowledged (e.g., Reny & Newman, 2021). In an effort to pinpoint the role this media coverage and related activities played in any change in the collective memories we might observe, we planned on examining the extent to which observable changes correlate with both media attention and political activism. A strong correlation would support the claim that George Floyd's murder contributed to any observable change.

As to individual differences, we expanded on Study 1 and examined an additional scale, one assessing national identification. We also assessed judgments of centrality (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). We did not, however, find that the centrality rating we obtained in Study 2 differed from the importance rankings we obtained. As a result, they did not add to the present findings. We report the results concerning centrality in the Supplemental Material.

Method

Participants

Demographic information is reported in Table 2. Participants were recruited in the same manner as in Study 1. In the preregistration for this study, a power analysis for two-tailed one-sample *t* test, assuming a minimum effect size of $d = .25$, an α of .05, and a power of .80, recommended a sample of 199 participants. During the review process, it was suggested that independent *t* test would be more appropriate. We decided to follow this advice. A sensitivity analysis using the same assumptions, for an independent *t* test, recommended a similar sample size. In anticipation of follow-up work with participants in this sample, we oversampled, collecting data from 300 individuals per racial group. Preregistered reasons for exclusion and resampling included unresponsiveness to provided prompts in open-ended questions and copying responses from identifiable external sources. In total, 62 participants were resampled because they provided answers unresponsive to the prompt, 23 participants were resampled because they copied responses from identifiable external sources, many of which also included events not applicable to the prompt. Thirty-two participants were also resampled due to identifying as a race other than White or Black, despite employing filters provided by CloudResearch to include only White or Black identifying individuals. Per the preregistered data collection plan, all excluded participants were resampled.

Procedure

Participants were introduced to the task and told that they would be taking part in a study on perceptions of history. They were asked to read an informed consent form and, should they agree to the specified conditions, to continue with the study. The method that followed was identical to the procedure reported in Study 1 for the control condition, up to and including the racial identification scale; see Table 1. We then added a measure of identification with the American ingroup, which employed a 1–7 Likert scale (Lyons et al., 2010). Examples of questions in the scale are "I see myself as an American," "Overall, being an American has very little to do with how I feel about myself," and "Being an American is central to my sense of who I am."

Our assessment of centrality followed (see Supplemental Material). We then solicited demographic information. Finally, participants indicated, using a 5-point scale, the extent to which they followed the news of the protests following George Floyd's murder and talked about the protests, as well as the level of their belief in whether the protests were justified. Participants then answered, on a dichotomous "yes/no" measure, whether they had participated in the protests. Depending on their response, participants were branched to separate questions. For those who reported participating, they were asked to rate, on a 5-point scale, ranging from *very little* to *a great deal*, the extent of their participation. Those who reported that they had not participated were asked to rate, on a 5-point scale ranging from *definitely yes* to *definitely not*, whether they intended to participate in future protesting. On the same rating scale, participants were asked a separate question whether they would participate in protests if not for external circumstances beyond their control. Finally, participants were asked to rate their belief that the particular moment in history would leave a lasting impact on racial equity in the United States.

Coding

Twenty percent of the sample responses were dual-coded according to the general coding scheme (founding, race-relevant, and other). The first author served as the primary coder. Coders were blind to participant race. Agreement was high ($k = .960$, $p < .001$). Disagreements were resolved in a discussion between the two coders.

Results

We first examined the results from Study 2a, which allowed us to once again explore the distribution and individual differences issues. We then contrasted the results from Study 2a with those in Study 1. This comparison allowed us to determine whether the results of Study 2a represented a change in collective memories of Black and White Americans, what aspect of the collective memory changed (traditional founding, race-relevant, or other) and if there was a change in one event type, did it come at the cost of other event types and, if so, which one(s). That is, we could explore both the stability and cost issues.

Between Racial Group Comparisons

In Study 1, the results for the single "most important" event and the five "most important" events did not differ. Following the lead of Study 1, we focused here on the list of five most important events. See Supplemental Material for analysis examining the data when a single event was listed as "most important."

Distribution. As in Study 1, we used a mixed-model analysis of variance to analyze whether the proportion of race-relevant and founding events differed as a function of participant race; see Table 5. There was a significant main effect of event type, $F(1, 598) = 411.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .41$, and of participant race, $F(1, 598) = 37.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. These effects were qualified by a significant interaction between event type and participant race, $F(1, 598) = 142.00$, $p < .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$.

Follow-up post hoc tests on the event type by participant race interaction revealed that, as in Study 1, both Black and White participants identified significantly more race-relevant events than founding events, Black: $t(299) = 20.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.17$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.39, −.32]; White: $t(299) = 8.88$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.74$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.11, −.07]. Also, as in Study 1, the difference was larger for Black than for White participants, with Black participants reporting significantly more race-relevant events than White participants, $t(594) = 11.73$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.96$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.15, 0.21]. In contrast, White participants reported significantly more traditional founding events than Black participants, $t(594) = 6.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.53$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.06, 0.10]. In sum, we

find a similar distribution of traditional founding and race-relevant events across race to what was observed in Study 1.

Individual Differences. We conducted separate linear regressions by event type, with political ideology, racial identification, and national identification as predictors. We first present the statistical results and then provide a summary. Again, a summary of all studies can be found in the General Discussion section, Table 6.

For traditional founding events, for White participants, political ideology was a significant positive predictor of the identification of traditional founding events, $b = .02$, $t(295) = 2.14$, $p = .033$. Neither racial nor national identification produced significant results, $b = -.01$, $t(295) = .93$, $p = .351$ and $b = .01$, $t(295) = .72$, $p = .475$. As for Black participants and traditional founding events, political ideology did not matter, $b = -.01$, $t(295) = .58$, $p = .561$, whereas both racial and national identification did, $b = -.03$, $t(295) = 3.29$, $p = .001$ and $b = .02$, $t(295) = 3.45$, $p < .001$, respectively.

As to race-relevant events, for White participants, both political ideology and racial identification predicted the proportion of race-relevant events listed, $b = -.02$, $t(295) = 3.08$, $p = .002$ and $b = -.02$, $t(295) = 2.07$, $p = .039$, respectively. National identification was not a significant predictor, $b = .01$, $t(295) = .76$, $p = .454$. As for Black participants, paralleling the results for traditional founding events, but in the opposite direction, we found significant effects for racial and national identification, $b = -.04$, $t(295) = 2.72$, $p = .007$ and $b = -.03$, $t(295) = 2.86$, $p = .005$, respectively. Political ideology did not matter, $b = .01$, $t(295) = .20$, $p = .842$.

That is, the more conservative the White participants, the more likely they were to list traditional founding events and less likely to list race-relevant events, whereas the more liberal they were, the more likely they were to mention race-relevant events. Racial identification also played a role, with White participants who identified with their race less likely to mention race-relevant events. In contrast, Black participants were less likely to mention traditional founding events and more likely to mention race-relevant events, the stronger their identification with their race and the weaker their identification with the United States.

Effects of Attention, Attitudes, and Participation. See Table 7 for correlations between the proportion of traditional founding and race-relevant events, and several measures of attention and attitudes toward the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests. Without exception, these measures were negatively correlated with the proportion of listed founding events and positively correlated with the proportion of listed race-relevant events. We split these correlations by participant race. Fisher's z comparisons indicated that there was one instance where these correlations significantly differed across race: The correlation between the proportion of race-relevant events and ratings of justification of protests was significantly stronger among Black participants ($r = .198$) than among White participants ($r = .022$, $z = 2.18$, $p = .018$; Diedenhofen & Musch, 2015). Overall, the results suggest that attention to the media immediately after the death of George Floyd shaped what participants viewed as "most important." We caution against arriving at any causal explanation of the relation, however, given that the results are correlational. There may be a mediating variable affecting both the proportion of race-relevant and traditional founding events and media attention.

Comparing Event Reports Across Studies

We now turn to the issue of stability and cost—that is, whether there was a change in collective memory from Study 1 to Study 2a and whether, for instance, any increase in race-relevant events came at the cost of traditional founding events. Inasmuch as we failed to find a significant difference between the experimental and control conditions in Study 1, we combined the participants into a single group representing performance in Study 1. We undertook a 2 (event type) × 2 (race) × 2 (Study 2a vs. Study 1) mixed-model analysis of variance, with the proportion of an event type in the list of Top 5 as the dependent variable; see Table 5. We limit our discussion here to results concerning the study factor (i.e., a comparison between Studies 1 and 2a). This factor reflects the effect on collective memories of the events and public discourse between Study 1 and 2a, which culminated with George Floyd's murder. We found main effects for study, $F(1, 1196) = 11.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and an interaction between event type and study, $F(1, 1196) = 12.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. The results indicate that race was not a factor when considering the change between Study 1 and Study 2a, though it should be noted that the difference was smaller for White participants than Black participants. Specifically, there was a 17.1% increase in the extent to which race-relevant events were listed in the Top 5 after the death of George Floyd for Black participants and a 13.7% increase for White participants.

For Black participants, post hoc tests revealed that the proportion of race-relevant events increased between Study 1 and Study 2a, $t(598) = 3.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.30$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.03, 0.10]. No such significant increase or decrease was observed for traditional founding events, $t(598) = .01$, $p = .98$, $d = 0.00$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−0.02, 0.02]. For White participants, again, the proportion of race-relevant events increased between Study 1 and Study 2a, $t(598) = 3.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.30$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.03, 0.10]. Moreover, the proportion of traditional founding events did not increase or decrease significantly, $t(598) = .92$, $p = .98$, $d = 0.08$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$

Table 7
Correlations Between Measures of Proportion of Event Types, Attention, Perception of Protests, and Event Identification, Study 2a

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Proportion of founding events	—					
2. Proportion of race-relevant events	−.357***	—				
3. Justified	−.087*	.175***	—			
4. Lasting impact	−.111**	.138***	.344***	—		
5. News attention	−.159***	.235***	.242***	.317***	—	
6. Talked about	−.103*	.216***	.229***	.292***	.717***	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

[−0.04, 0.20]. These results suggest that the number of race-relevant events listed by participants increased between Study 1 and Study 2a, but not at the cost of listing traditional founding events.

Discussion

What transpired between Study 1 and Study 2a, including the murder of George Floyd, influenced the representations of U.S. history among disparate racial groups. Participant responses listed race-relevant events significantly more often than had been observed in Study 1. This effect was present in Black and White participants. Critically, also for both Black and White participants, there were no changes observed in the frequency with which traditional founding events were listed. That is, the increase in race-relevant events observed here occurred at the expense of other events, not traditional founding events. This result suggests that traditional founding events might hold a privileged status, for both Black and White participants.

We cannot isolate the influence of the murder of George Floyd as solely motivating this pattern of results, though the correlations between, on the one hand, media attention to the murder and involvement in protests, and, on the other hand, the type of event types listed suggest that the murder of George Floyd played a role above and beyond the racial discourse that preceded it. Whatever the perhaps multiple causes for the changes we observed, it is clear that a change occurred between Study 1 and Study 2. We underscore the importance of George Floyd's murder, in part, because of the relation between the increase in listing race-relevant events as important and attention to the media coverage of the murder and the subsequent protest.

These claims about stability and change need to be qualified, however. The findings also suggest that the extent to which participants viewed either race-relevant or traditional founding events as "most important" depended on, for White participants, (a) how liberal they were and (b) how strongly they identified with the United States. For Black participants, it depended on both racial identification and national identification. Race was not the sole determining factor.

Study 2b

How long lasting were the effects on collective memory observed in Study 2a? To answer this longevity question, as well as the issues of distribution, individual differences, stability, and cost, we recruited participants from Study 2a in a follow-up study that took place 8 months later, between March 22, 2021, and April 5, 2021. We also solicited a new sample of Black and White participants to serve as a comparison group and to assess whether the "retesting" of the returning participants affected our results. To the extent that George Floyd's murder is critical to the increase in race-relevant events in Study 2a, it is worth noting that data collection in Study 2b overlapped with the first criminal trial for Floyd's murder, with the trial beginning on March 8, 2021, and a guilty verdict being returned on April 20, 2021. During the data collection period, Google Trends indicated an uptick in the use of "George Floyd" as a search term corresponding to the week of the trial beginning (March 28 to April 3, 2021), but the uptick constituted roughly one tenth of the use of "George Floyd" as a search term relative to the week of May 31, 2020, to June 6, 2020, which was the peak search interest following Floyd's death on May 25, 2020. Thus, although there was renewed interest in the death of George Floyd at the time of Study 2b, the extent of public discussion appears limited compared to the extensive coverage at the time of his murder.

Method

Participants

The sample included rerecruited participants from Study 2a, as well as a group of new participants. Returning participants were sent an email through CloudResearch, which both notified them that they qualified to participate in the study and ensured their anonymity. We preregistered a data collection plan stipulating that collection would occur over a period of 14 days for the returning participants. For new participants, we preregistered[1] a sample size of 300 new participants (150 Black and 150 White). This sample size was based on the results of a power analysis estimating that we needed 199 participants needed to achieve roughly 80% power to detect an effect size of at least $f = .20$ with an α of .05 for a 2 (event type) × 2 (race) interaction effect. We chose to oversample because we hoped for a 50% return rate for prior participants, which would be 150 participants per racial group. We implemented the same 14-day stopping rule for new participants. A chi-square indicated that the two racial groups evidenced different levels of educational attainment, $\chi^2(6, N = 496) = 6.76$, $p = .344$, $\phi_c = .12$. This education difference did not affect the pattern of results across races. To test this claim, for instance, we first divided participants into those with a high school or some undergraduate education and those with a bachelor's degree or more. We then undertook an analysis of variance with event type as a within-subject variable and race and education as the between-subject variables. Whereas we found a main effect for education, $F(1, 492) = 4.83$, $p = .028$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$, the interaction between event type and education was not significant, $F(1, 492) = .14$, $p = .705$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, nor was the three-way interaction between event type, race, and education, $F(1, 492) = .79$, $p = .376$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$. The level of education did not affect distributional differences in event type across race.

Due to the stopping rule, the new group of White participants consisted of 144 rather than 150 participants. Before the stopping rule was imposed, 16 participants in the new White group were excluded, seven for identifying as something other than White despite CloudResearch filters being employed and nine participants for failing to provide responsive answers to open-ended prompts. Forty-two new Black participants were also excluded and recollected, two for not completing the study, five for identifying as something other than Black, and 35 for failing to provide responsive answers to open-ended prompts. These were replaced, as indicated, before the stopping rule was imposed.

As to returning participants, two White returning participants were excluded inasmuch as they left a number of open-ended response questions blank. They were not replaced. See Table 2 for details. Our return rate was 33.7% rather than the hoped for 50%. A sensitivity analysis indicated that the sample size was sufficient to

[1] Due to a submission error, the preregistration was not submitted until April 4, 2021. Although data collection had commenced at that point, data collection was not complete at that time, and no analyses had been conducted.

detect a 2 (study) × (event type) × 2 (race) interaction, assuming 80% power, an effect size of at least $f = .20$, and an α of .05.

Procedure

The procedure for this study was identical to the procedure in Study 2a except for a slight modification. Participants were asked to rate their attention to the news and the extent they talked about and thought about the death of George Floyd and the surrounding protests at the time of taking the survey. They were also asked to estimate those same ratings in the weeks that followed Floyd's death; see Table 1.

Coding

Twenty percent of the sample responses were dual-coded according to the general coding scheme (founding, race-relevant, and other). The first author served as the primary coder. The coders were blind to participant race and status as a returning or new participant. Agreement was high ($k = .903$, $p < .001$). Disagreements were resolved in a discussion between the two coders.

Results

In what follows, we first assess racial group comparisons for the data collected in this study, that is, Study 2b, and then turn our attention to comparing the results on Study 2b to those for Study 2a and Study 1. When comparing the results to Study 2a, we examine whether there was a decline in the frequency with which an event type was mentioned in the list of Top 5 (in proportions) from Study 2a to Study 2b. A comparison with Study 1 allows us to investigate as well how the results in Study 2b align with those obtained 2 years before George Floyd's murder.

Between Racial Group Comparisons

Distribution. We begin by undertaking a mixed-model analysis of variance on the full sample, that is, the combination of new and returning participants. We treated returning status (new vs. returning) as a between-subject factor in the analyses. See Table 5 for the frequency scores and Table 8 for statistical analyses. To streamline the discussion, as in Study 2a, we limited our discussion to the proportions of traditional founding and race-relevant events in the list of Top 5. See Supplemental Material for a discussion of the results of the "single most important" event. There was no significant effect or interactions involving return status. We therefore turn our attention to the other main effects and interactions in Table 8.

Consistent with the results of Study 2a, there was a significant main effect of event type and race, as well as a significant interaction between event type and race. Follow-up post hoc tests revealed several significant effects. As in Studies 1 and 2a, Black participants reported a significantly greater proportion of race-relevant events than traditional founding events, $t(267) = 15.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.94$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.33, −.35], as did White participants, $t(227) = 2.95$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.20$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.07, −.01]. Comparing across race, White participants listed a significantly greater proportion of traditional founding events than did Black participants, $t(494) = 6.23$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.05, 0.11], whereas Black participants listed a significantly greater proportion of race-relevant events than did White participants, $t(494) = 9.63$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.87$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−.20, −.14].

Individual Differences. To explore what characteristics of the participants affected their event listings, we ran separate linear regressions, splitting the analyses by event type and focusing on the contributions of political ideology, racial identification, and national identification. The outcome variable was the proportion of an event type appearing in a list. As previously, we will first present the statistical results and then summarize them; see Table 6. For Black participants, the greater the racial identification with their race, the smaller the proportion of traditional founding events, $b = -.02$, $t(264) = 2.79$, $p = .006$. Political ideology and national identification did not significantly contribute to the regressions when traditional founding events was the outcome, $b = .006$, $t(264) = .76$, $p = .444$ and $b = .006$, $t(264) = .70$, $p = .487$, respectively. As to race-relevant events, the greater the racial identification, the more race-relevant events mentioned, $b = .05$, $t(264) = 3.72$, $p < .001$, and in contrast, the greater the national identification, the fewer race-relevant events mentioned, $b = -.03$, $t(264) = 2.75$, $p = .006$. Political ideology did not contribute, $b = .001$, $t(224) = .01$, $p = .991$.

Turning now to the White participants, as we observed in the prior studies, with greater identification as politically liberal came higher proportion of race-relevant events, $b = -.02$, $t(224) = 3.14$, $p = .002$. The other results were not significant, traditional founding: ideology, $b = -.002$, $t(264) = .35$, $p = .719$ and national identification: $b = -.02$, $t(264) = 1.09$, $p = .227$; race-relevant: racial identification, $b = -.01$, $t(264) = 1.07$, $p = .287$, and national identification: $b = -.01$, $t(264) = 1.04$, $p = .299$.

In other words, as their racial identification grew stronger, Black participants listed fewer traditional founding events and more

Table 8
Mixed Analysis of Variance With Proportion of Race-Relevant Events as Outcome Variable, Study 2b

Effect	Term	Sum of square	*df*	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Within-subject	Event type	6.70	1	6.70	182.18	<.001	0.270
	Event Type × Study	0.01	1	0.01	0.327	.568	0.001
	Event Type × Participant Race	3.86	1	3.86	105.08	<.001	0.176
	Event Type × Study × Participant Race	0.02	1	0.02	0.59	.441	0.001
	Residual	18.92	492	0.04			
Between-subject	Study	0.005	1	0.005	0.02	.883	<0.001
	Participant race	0.51	1	0.51	21.54	<.001	0.042
	Return Status × Participant Race	0.08	1	0.08	3.36	.067	0.007
	Residual	11.73	492	0.02			

Note. Type 3 sums of squares.

race-relevant events. Race-relevant events were, in turn, less frequent as Black participants' national identification grew. Political ideology did not matter. As to White participants, all that mattered was political ideology. The more liberal they were, the more likely they were to mention race-relevant events.

Effects of Attention, Attitudes, and Participation. As with Study 2a, we conducted a series of correlations, examining the correspondence between proportions of founding events, race-relevant events, and our measures of attention and attitudes toward the death of George Floyd and the subsequent protest. The analysis here utilizes all participants who took part in Study 2b. As Table 9 indicates, the results of these correlational analyses are consistent with those from Study 2a, where the proportion of identified founding events tended to be negatively related to the various measures of attention. The reverse was generally true of the proportion of race-relevant events, though ratings of present news attention and talking about the events in the present were exceptions. In a series of Fisher's z tests (Diedenhofen & Musch, 2015) comparing the sizes across racial groups, Black participants evidenced a significantly stronger negative correlation between the proportion of race-relevant events and founding events ($r = -.35$) than did White participants ($r = -.02$, $z = 3.66$, $p < .001$). Black participants also yielded a stronger negative correlation between the proportion of founding events and the extent to which they thought about the death of George Floyd and the ensuing protests and riots in the present ($r = -.19$) than did White participants ($r = .04$, $z = 2.49$, $p = .013$). In terms of different mean levels of attention and related measures, for every assessment, Black participants uniformly reported significantly higher levels of attention (both past and present), as well as ratings of justification and lasting impact, in all instances, $t > 4.67$, $p < .001$, $d > .38$.

These results suggest that attention to the media about a racially charged event can affect the extent to which one views traditional founding or race-relevant events as "most important."

Comparisons Between Studies 2a and 2b

Observed Changes. When comparing the performance of the returning participants in Study 2a with their performance in Study 2b, we limited the analyses to the returning participants. We compared performance in these two studies in a mixed-model analysis of variance, with event type and study as repeated measures and participant race as a between-subject factor. We focus here on the main effects and interactions involving study. There was only one significant result of relevance: an interaction between study and event type, $F(1, 200) = 5.19$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .025$. Post hoc tests revealed that the average proportion of traditional founding events listed in Study 2a ($M = 0.16$, $SE = 0.01$) did not significantly differ from the average proportion identified in Study 2b ($M = 0.17$, $SE = 0.01$); $t(200) = -0.79$, $p = .858$, $d = 0.06$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−0.04, 0.02]. Race-relevant events, on the other hand, constituted a significantly greater proportion of event identifications at Study 2a ($M = 0.39$, $SE = 0.01$) than at Study 2b ($M = 0.34$, $SE = 0.01$); $t(200) = 2.68$, $p = .016$, $d = 0.19$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.01, 0.07]. In other words, over the 8 months since the murder of George Floyd, there was, on average, a 12.8% decline in the mention of race-relevant events. The three-way interaction, which included participant race, was not significant, $F(1, 200) = .68$, $p = .41$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. That is, the decline in mention of race-relevant events between Study 2a and Study 2b held for both Black and White participants.

Individual Differences. We examined whether the participants' political views, racial identification, and national identification affected the extent of the change between Study 2a and Study 2b. To do so, we calculated the difference in the frequency with which an event type was mentioned between Study 2a and Study 2b and used this difference score as the dependent variable in regression analyses. None of these variables had a significant effect on this difference score for traditional founding events or race-relevant events, for both Black and White participants (in all instances, $p > .350$). See Supplemental Material for specifics.

Comparisons Between Study 2b and Study 1

As the above analyses indicate, the frequency with which race-relevant events were mentioned in the Top 5 declined from a time shortly after the murder of George Floyd to a time period 8 months later. In contrast, the importance of traditional founding events remained the same. Did participants return to how they viewed the importance of race-relevant and traditional founding events some 2 years before the murder of George Floyd, that is, Did they look like the participants in Study 1? In this comparison, we utilized the combined sample in Study 1 (experimental and control) and

Table 9
Correlation of Measures of Attention and Perception of Protests With Event Identification, Study 2b

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Founding events	—										
2. Race-relevant events	−.301***	—									
3. Justified	−.213***	.278***	—								
4. Lasting impact	−.123**	.128**	.295***	—							
5. News attention (present)	−.105*	.084	.310***	.256***	—						
6. News attention (past)	−.128**	.181***	.341***	.232***	.733***	—					
7. Talked about (present)	−.107*	.069	.225***	.251***	.767***	.559***	—				
8. Talked about (past)	−.079	.162***	.257***	.272***	.619***	.719***	.740***	—			
9. Thought about (present)	−.146**	.138**	.285***	.264***	.810***	.597***	.812***	.597***	—		
10. Thought about (past)	−.154***	.211***	.336***	.243***	.665***	.741***	.625***	.734***	.696***	—	
11. Criminal trial attention	−.156***	.089	.236***	.247***	.551***	.532***	.514***	.473***	.518***	.485***	—

Note. Parenthetical references to "past" and "present" refer to whether participants were providing ratings in the present or retrospectively estimating attention in the few weeks after the death of George Floyd and during the ensuing riots and protests.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

the combined sample in Study 2b (new and returning). We did not examine individual differences inasmuch as the comparison across studies was between subjects.

We undertook a 2 × 2 × 2 mixed-model analysis of variance, with event type (traditional founding and race-relevant) as a within-subject factor, race (Black and White) and study (Study 1 and Study 2b) as between-subject factors, and the frequency of mention as the dependent variable. As in Study 2a, we report only results concerning the study factor. We failed to find any significant main effects or interactions, main effect of study: $F(1, 1092) = .58$, $p = .45$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$; interactions between event type and study: $F(1, 1092) = .06$, $p = .80$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$; between event type, race, and study: $F(1, 1092) = .07$, $p = .80$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. These results suggest that after an 8-month delay, the relative prominence of traditional founding events and race-relevant events in the collective memory of our Black and White participants had returned to the levels observed prior to the murder of George Floyd.

Discussion

The results once again underscored differences among our Black and White participants in the distribution of traditional founding and race-relevant events when asked to list the five most important events in U.S. history. With respect to race-relevant events, they also show that the proportion of these events participants identified significantly declined from the initial measure found in Study 2a, which was undertaken shortly after the murder of George Floyd, to the present measure in Study 2b, which was undertaken about 8 months later. The observed decrease did not differ among Black and White participants. Moreover, the measurements 8 months later did not differ significantly from the data obtained in Study 1, which took place before the death of George Floyd.

To what extent was this pattern of results due to the murder of George Floyd? As stated earlier, public discussion of racial violence, especially from the police, was prevalent across the time period covered by all three studies. What distinguished the public discourse at the time of Study 2a from the discussions at the time of Study 1 was the intensity of concern about the death of George Floyd. And what distinguished the discourse at the time of Study 2b from that of Study 2a was a waning level of attention—particularly media attention—to George Floyd's murder, as indicated by Google searches. As we indicated, in real-world studies, it is often difficult to single out a particular factor to account for changes in behavior. However, the parallel between the pattern of public discourse about George Floyd across all three studies and the increases and decreases in the listing of race-relevant events across these studies suggests a role for George Floyd's murder in reshaping the way participants judged the importance of race-relevant events. This role is underscored by the finding that the extent to which race-relevant events were mentioned in Studies 2a and 2b was a function of both participants' media attention to the Floyd murder and their related political activism.

Interestingly, in contrast to the ups and downs of race-relevant events, the proportion of traditional founding events remained fairly stable across studies. Moreover, any shift in the extent to which participants listed race-relevant events did not reflect any significant change in the extent to which participants listed traditional founding events. Rather, changes in the listing of race-relevant events largely came at the cost of other events, again across studies. This is true for both Black and White participants. These findings suggest that the race-relevant and traditional founding events might function differently in the collective memories Americans hold of U.S. history.

Study 3

So far, we have examined the effect on collective memory of a minimal identity salience manipulation and public discourse about race, as elicited by events such as the death of George Floyd. We have mainly found an effect on the listing of race-relevant events. We turn here to the effects of commemorating a critical traditional founding event to explore whether we can observe an effect on the listing of traditional founding events. Commemorative events are thought to bolster a preferred historical narrative (Etzioni, 2004; Saito, 2010; E. Zerubavel, 2003), especially if they involve historical charters (Hilton & Liu, 2017; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; see also Ben-Yehuda, 1996; Y. Zerubavel, 1995). Will such commemorative practices affect the collective memory of Black and White Americans?

Past empirical work on the impact of such practices has yielded mixed results. In some instances, scholars have found that there is limited correspondence between participation in commemorative national holidays and feelings of nationalism and identification (Ariely, 2019; de Regt, 2018). In other instances, researchers have failed to find identity effects (Ariely, 2017; de Regt & van der Lippe, 2017). Such differences could be the result of variations in outcome measures. Existing work tends to focus on feelings of nationalism and ingroup identification in national commemorative contexts. The present work extends this line of inquiry to examine whether national commemorative events influence national collective memories. We examine here the effect of July 4th, the day Americans celebrate their independence from Britain.

We designed the present study so that we could not only look at the effect of Independence Day on the distribution of traditional founding and race-relevant events but whether any change we observed was based on how participants responded in a previous survey. Specifically, we were interested to see if individuals who had previously viewed traditional founding events as important would be more sensitive to Independence Day as a prime than those who had not previously viewed them as important. This might be thought of as a probe of individual differences. To accomplish this, we solicited participants from prior studies we had done and asked them to fill out a new survey on the topic of important national events.

Method

Two groups of participants were solicited to participate in a study on important public events at two distinct time points: between July 4, 2019, and July 7, 2019, and between March 19, 2020, and April 2, 2020, in both instances before the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. The first time window was selected to coincide with the annual national holiday in the United States commemorated the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. We refer to this group as the *Independence Day condition*. The second time window was selected to be sufficiently distant in time from the July 4th holiday but also to avoid other notable dates in American history. This is the *control condition*.

Participants

To allow a comparison with prior performance, we solicited respondents approximately 1–2 years after they had successfully completed the survey described in Study 1 of this article or another survey similar to the one administered in Study 1, but not reported herein (but see the Supplemental Material). Together they will be identified as T1 surveys. There were methodological differences between the survey reported here as Study 1 and the unreported survey available in the Supplemental Material. The survey in Study 1 of this article asked first for the "most important" events, then for four other "most important" events. The survey reported in the Supplemental Material only asked for the single "most important" event.

CloudResearch was used to recontact the respondents to T1 surveys (Litman et al., 2017). Participants were randomly assigned to be eligible for either the Independence Day or control condition. Both participant race and participant condition (experimental or control) from the prior studies were balanced across the randomization. At the time of solicitation, 1,100 participants were eligible, 550 of whom had been randomly assigned to be eligible for the Independence Day condition and 550 for the control condition.

In total, 461 participants returned for this study, 237 in the Independence Day condition and 224 in the control condition. The return rates were 43% and 41%, respectively. Participant rate of return did not differ by race, $\chi^2(1, N = 461) = 0.26$, $p = .609$, $\phi = .02$, nor were there demographic differences (other than race) between participants who had previously been assigned to control or experimental conditions in Studies 1 or 2, $\chi^2(1, N = 461) = 0.07$, $p = .787$, $\phi = .01$. Returning participants did differ as a function of which of the two T1 surveys they had taken, with participants from the more recent study (Study 1 reported in this article) more likely to return, $\chi^2(1, N = 461) = 13.18$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .17$. A sensitivity analysis indicated that with the present sample, this work was powered (.80) to detect an effect size of $f = 0.15$ and an α of .05 for an interaction with four groups (Race × Condition) with a two-level repeated measure (event type). Participants' demographic information is reported in Table 2.

Procedure

The procedure was generally similar to Study 2a, except that we did not include the racial identification scale or the event centrality scales. We had not yet undertaken Studies 2a or 2b, which highlighted the possibility that racial identification might serve as a relevant individual difference when considering the telling of U.S. history, nor had we yet considered event centrality an interesting measure to include in our studies.

Coding

Twenty percent of the open-ended event identifications were dual-coded according to the general coding scheme (founding, race-relevant, and other). The first author served as the primary coder. The second coder was blind to condition and race. Agreement between coders was high ($k = .910$, $p < .001$). Disagreements were resolved through discussions between coders.

Results and Discussion

We will first examine the results from T2 separately, comparing the Independence Day and control conditions. We will then turn our attention to contrasting the performance at T2 with the performance at T1. Inasmuch as one of the T1 surveys only asked for the single most important event from U.S. history, we will only compare the single "most important" event listed at T1 with the one listed at T2.

T2 Survey Results

Distribution. Here, we examine the responses collected at T2 and consider the proportion of events from the list of five "most important" events that were coded as either race-relevant or traditional founding. We conducted 2 (event type) × 2 (participant race) × 2 (condition) mixed-model analysis of variance with proportion of mention as the dependent variable; see Table 10. There were significant main effects of event type and participant race, as well as a significant interaction between these two factors. There was also a main effect for the condition, with participants in the control producing fewer traditional founding and race-relevant events combined than participants in the experimental condition. Critically, the interactions between event type and condition and race and condition were not significant. That is, the pattern of traditional founding and race-relevant events did not change as a result of the July 4th Commemoration of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence. This similarity was found regardless of the race of the participant.

Post hoc tests revealed that White participants identified a significantly higher proportion of traditional founding events ($M = 0.22$, $SE = 0.01$) than did Black participants ($M = 0.11$, $SE = 0.01$), $t(453) = 7.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.37$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$

Table 10
Mixed Analysis of Variance With Proportion of Founding Events as Outcome Variable, Study 3

Effect	Term	Sum of square	*df*	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Within-subject	Event type	6.37	1	6.37	205.22	<.001	0.310
	Event Type × Condition	0.002	1	0.002	0.07	.788	0.001
	Event Type × Participant Race	4.71	1	4.71	154.05	<.001	0.25
	Event Type × Condition × Participant Race	0.04	1	0.04	1.35	.247	0.003
	Residual	13.75	457	0.03			
Between-subject	Condition	0.11	1	0.11	4.57	.030	0.010
	Participant race	0.23	1	0.23	9.97	.002	0.021
	Condition × Participant Race	0.01	1	0.01	0.58	.446	0.003
	Residual	10.60	457	0.02			

Note. Type 3 sums of squares.

[0.08, 0.14]. Black participants identified a significantly higher proportion of race-relevant events ($M = 0.42$, $SE = 0.01$) than did White participants ($M = 0.25$, $SE = 0.01$), $t(453) = 9.68$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [0.13, 0.20]. The proportion of traditional founding and race-relevant events did not differ for White participants, $t(453) = -1.88$, $p = .244$, $d = 0.09$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−0.06, 0.003], but did for Black participants, $t(453) = -16.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.78$, 95% $CI_{MeanDiff}$ [−0.34, −0.27].

Individual Differences. As in the other studies in this article, we conducted separate linear regressions for each of the event types, with event proportion as the dependent variable and political ideology and national identification as predictors. Inasmuch as there was no significant effect for condition, we combined the Independence Day and control conditions. For White participants, there was a significant relation between the proportion of identified founding events and political ideology, $b = .02$, $t(264) = 2.01$, $p = .045$. The relation for national identification was not significant, $b = -.01$, $t(264) = 1.52$, $p = .130$. For Black participants, no significant relations were found, ideology: $b = -.01$, $t(188) = 1.51$, $p = .133$, and national identification: $b = .01$, $t(188) = 1.69$, $p = .093$. As to race-relevant events, for White participants, we again find a significant result for political ideology, $b = .-02$, $t(264) = 2.40$, $p = .017$, but not for national identification, $b = .-001$, $t(264) = .028$, $p = .983$. For Black participants, neither political ideology nor national identification was significant, $b = -.01$, $t(188) = 1.04$, $p = .300$ and $b = .-001$, $t(188) = 1.07$, $p = .285$. In sum, for the White sample, political ideology mattered again: the more conservative the White participants, the more likely they were to mention traditional founding events; the more liberal they were, the more likely they were to mention race-relevant events.

Comparing T1 Performance With T2 Performance

Although the evidence thus far indicates negligible effects of temporal proximity to a national commemoration on the types of events that participants identified as important, the design of the present study allowed us to compare event identifications for the present round of data collection with participants' prior responses. When these "prior responses" were collected, no nationwide commemoration was taking place. As noted above, we focus here on the event participants identified as the single most important event. In a binomial logistic regression, the dependent variable, "most important event" identified at T2, was dichotomously coded as either "founding" or "not founding." Predictors included participant race, condition, and the dichotomously coded "most important event" (founding or not) from each participant's initial response in the T1 surveys. We also included in this regression both political ideology and national identification. We limited the interactions to those involving T1 responses, given our main interest here was the extent to which a traditional founding response in a T1 survey yielded a similar response in the T2 survey. The results of this model were significant, $\chi^2(23, N = 461) = 150.00$, $p < .001$, $R^2_N = .243$; see Table 11. None of the predictors or interactions reached significance, though T1 responses were marginally predictive of T2 responses. The results suggest that the July 4th commemoration did not have a marked effect on the extent to which participants listed a traditional founding event as the single most important event.

Table 11
Binomial Logistic Regression Identifying Predictors of the Identification of Founding Events, Study 3

Predictor	Estimate	*SE*	*z*	*p*
Intercept	−1.73	1.27	−1.36	1.73
T1 response	4.20	2.15	1.95	.051
T1 Response × Race	−2.19	3.85	−0.57	.570
T1 Response × Condition	−2.99	2.73	−1.09	.274
T1 Response × Political Ideology	0.69	0.37	1.87	.061
T1 Response × NI	−0.75	0.41	−1.85	.065
T1 Response × Race × Condition	1.35	3.92	0.35	.729
T1 Response × Race × Ideology	−0.34	0.61	−0.56	.577
T1 Response × Race × NI	0.65	0.61	1.25	.212
T1 Response × Condition × Ideology	−0.52	0.37	−1.38	.168
T1 Response × Condition × NI	0.48	0.42	1.16	.247
T1 Response × Condition × Race × Ideology	0.52	0.71	0.73	.464
T1 Response × Condition × Race × NI	−0.21	0.65	−0.28	.635

Note. *SE* = standard error; NI = national identification.

General Discussion

There has been an increasing interest in what different collectivities remember about their collective past. We explored this issue by contrasting the collective memories of Black and White Americans. We did so by asking participants to list important events in U.S. history and then coded them with respect to whether they were race-relevant, traditional founding, or other. The research examined whether there were *distributional differences* in these event types across these two groups. But it did not rest with examining such differences. It also asked whether there were *individual differences* within each group, focusing on three possible factors: identification with race, identification with the nation, and political ideology. The aim here was to emphasize that when discussing collective memory, one needs to be cautious in specifying what constitutes a collectivity. The present research also explored issues of *stability*. Collective memories change over time, but how easy is it to change a collective memory? And what might elicit a change? Here, we focused on three sources of change: (a) a minimal salience prime; (b) the increased concerns about police and racial violence that culminated in the death of George Floyd; and (c) the commemoration of a traditional founding event, specifically, the signing of the Declaration of Independence. We were interested not only in whether instability could be observed but also in what had changed and what remained constant. Would some aspects of a collective memory remain relatively stable even as others evidenced instability, a question we labeled the *cost issue*? And would any change be long lasting, the *longevity* issue?

Distribution

Across the four studies in this article, and independent of manipulations, Black and White Americans differed in their national memories. Black Americans identified more race-relevant events as "most important" than did White Americans, who, in turn, tended to identify as "most important" traditional founding events to a greater degree than Black Americans. Interestingly, although the trend was more marked for Black Americans, as the above

pattern suggests, both Black and White Americans mentioned in most instances more race-relevant events than traditional founding events. This may reflect a sampling bias, in that the race-relevant events could be drawn from the almost 250-year history of the United States, whereas traditional founding events were largely limited to a 20-year period. It may also reflect the emphasis in the past 20 years on policing and racial violence, particularly toward the Black community, which was often accompanied by concerns about the need to come to terms with the place of Black Americans in U.S. history. Of course, it is possible that participants' responses may not reflect what they "truly feel" but how they understand they are expected to "tell" history. This explanation, however, does not account for the racial differences we observed for race-relevant events. Moreover, the probes we used asked participants to indicate what they believe is important, not what they are taught is important.

Why do these distributional differences arise? They may reflect differences in the ease with which Black and White Americans access their memories, with a bias toward assigning importance to readily accessible memories (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973; Yamashiro & Roediger, 2021). Such differences in access could reflect differences in exposure. According to this explanation, Black participants would be more likely to be exposed to race-relevant events, whereas White participants are more likely to be exposed to traditional founding events. We suspect that any difference in exposure does not arise, in large part, because of differences in the formal education Black and White Americans receive. As discussed in the Introduction, there is relative uniformity in U.S. history curricula. The observed differences may instead reflect the "informal" education Black Americans receive within the family and their community, as well as their exposure to alternative renderings of American history on social media and other web-based sources. As already indicated, Black Americans report that they learn most of what they know about Black history from friends, relatives, and social media, not from schooling (Cox, 2022). The effects of such informal exposure underscore the growing interest in the role social interactions—and in particular, conversations—can play in shaping collective memories. They do so through mechanisms such as reinforcement, social contagion, and retrieval-induced forgetting (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012; Hirst et al., 2018; Stone et al., 2012), mechanisms that may account for both effects of conversational interactions and social media on collective memory (Greeley et al., 2022; Stone & Wang, 2019).

Moreover, through the distinctive schemata different individuals, as members of a collectivity, bring to any situation (Bartlett, 1932), Black and White Americans may in the end interpret and encode information in different ways (Brigham et al., 2007; Hewstone et al., 2002; Jeon et al., 2021; Van Bavel & Cunningham, 2012). That is, even when they are exposed to the same material, they may not process it in the same manner. There may be attention biases (Moradi et al., 2020) but also interpretation differences (Sahdra & Ross, 2007). Such schemata-driven processing has been used to account for differences in collective memories across nations (László & Wagner, 2003; Wertsch, 2021). They would likely also apply to differences across subgroups within a nation.

Of course, distributional differences may not simply be a matter of accessibility and attentional or interpretative biases. They may also reflect efforts at the time of retrieval. In instances in which race-relevant events are not readily accessible, our Black participants, for instance, might have made an additional effort to recall such events and judge them as "most important," an effort our White participants might not have undertaken. There are no doubt other explanations. Whatever the underlying mechanisms, the present results clearly established a distributional disparity between our Black and White participants. Unraveling the overlapping explanations of these distributional differences will require substantial research in the future.

Individual Differences

Race was not the sole determinant of the observed distributions. People belong to multiple groups and their social identity reflects their relation to these different groups (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In their discussion of social identity complexity, Roccas and Brewer outlined several ways two distinctive social identities might be subjectively represented within an individual: one identity can dominate over the other, the two might intersect, or the two might be compartmentalized. The responses our Black participants gave on the racial and national identification scales we used suggest that, for our Black participants, this subjective representation might include their identity as Black, as captured in their responses to questions about racial identification, and their identity as an American, as captured in their responses to questions about national identification. How they navigated these two social identities—their "double consciousness," to use Du Bois's (1903/2015) term—determined, in part, what they included in their list of Top 5 most important events; see Table 6. For instance, Black participants were much more likely to include traditional founding events the more they identified with the nation, whereas they were more likely to include race-relevant events the more they identified with their race. In other words, there is not a single Black rendering of history but different renderings reflecting different ways Black Americans balanced their identity as a member in the Black American community and their identity as an American.

Our White participants did not face the same need to navigate between their identities as a White American or an American or at least in the same way our Black participants did. National identification and/or racial identification rarely affected what our White participants listed as "most important." Inasmuch as official U.S. history is largely about and told by White Americans (Au et al., 2016; Blight, 2001; Takaki, 1987), our White participants could embrace an official rendering that emphasizes traditional founding events, without considering the extent to which they identified with their race or even the extent to which they strongly identified as an American. The one exception was in Study 2a, which took place right after the murder of George Floyd. Now, the more strongly our White participants identified with their race, the less likely they were to list race-relevant events.

What shaped our White participants' collective memory was their political ideology (see also Yamashiro et al., 2022, for further discussions on political ideology and collective memory in the United States). Across all four studies, the more liberal the White participant, the greater the frequency with which race-relevant events were mentioned. In some instances, traditional founding events were also mentioned less frequently. Black participants' listings were largely unaffected by their political ideology. Political ideology may have played a greater role for White participants because there may not have been the same ideological range among our Black participants as there was for our White participants. When looking at the variance of the ratings of political ideology in Study 1,

for instance, the standard deviation for White participants was 1.51, whereas it was 1.27 for Black participants. As for why political ideology affected our White participants, as we noted in the Introduction, in a recent survey, White liberals in the United States were insistent about the need to consider slavery and racial matters in history courses (Pew Research Center, 2021; see also Mills, 2017).

Finally, whereas these individual differences no doubt influence the formation of collective memories over the long term, their effects on short-term changes are less clear. Whereas we found in the studies reported here that political ideology, racial identification, and national identification could affect what participants deemed as important across each of the studies, they did not, for instance, have a bearing on the decline we observed between Study 2a and Study 2b. More systematic examination is needed about the way people navigate their distinct social identities when making judgments about the importance of historical events.

Stability, Cost, and Longevity

We discuss these three issues together because they are related. The results clearly show it may not be easy to "destabilize" collective memories, in that a minimal salience manipulation and a commemorative practice had no discernible effect on participants' responses. As to the change observed in Studies 2a and 2b, it is a matter of the glass being half empty or half full. Moreover, the increase in race-relevant events we observed in Study 2a was moderate—a 17.1% increase for Black Americans—and the effect sizes were between small to moderate. However, the change was observable and statistically significant. The results of Study 2a indicate that sustained public discourse and large-scale societal disruptions, in this case, around the murder of George Floyd and the protests that followed, can reshape national collective memories. We attribute the change we observed to the death of George Floyd, at least in part, rather than to simply a sustained multiyear discourse about race relations in American in part because of the significant correlations we observed between the mention of race-relevant events and factors such as media attention and political activity around the Floyd murder.

The observed increase in race-relevant events was not long lasting. After 8 months, even though the murder and police violence were still in the news, the extent to which the identified "important" events were race-relevant began to decline to the point that they resembled the responses collected prior to the murder, even among Black participants. Collective memories may be malleable, but they may also be anchored to what might be, for an individual, well-established ways of conceiving the historical past. There is, if you like, a certain "mnemonic inertia" that makes permanent change difficult over the long term, though surely not impossible (Hirst, in press; Liu et al., 2009). We cannot state with any clarity what other circumstances might lead to even a temporary change in collective memory other than the one instance in this study in which we did find a change. Nor can we state with any certainty what circumstances, if any, might lead to a permanent change, though as noted, Corning and Schuman (2015) argued that change is more likely across generations than within a generation. Further research with a wider range of comparison events is needed.

Interestingly, traditional founding events appear to be a more stable feature in the collective memory our participants had of U.S. history than race-relevant or other events. An increase in the number of race-relevant events in the Top 5 listed following George Floyd's murder did not come at the cost of mentioning traditional founding events but rather "other" events. Moreover, across studies, the frequency with which traditional founding events are deemed important remained remarkably stable, even when one of these founding events was commemorated. We do not want to overstate this stability, however. We might have found an increase in the listing of traditional founding events if we had tested participants soon after the attack of September 11, 2001 (Liu et al., 2009; Mutlutürk et al., 2022). However, it is noteworthy that even an external circumstance as salient and emotionally charged as the murder of George Floyd was not sufficient to affect the frequency with which traditional founding events were listed. Social representations may change, but the place of traditional founding events in that representation seems relatively fixed.

As it was with the distribution issue, there are many explanations for why we found this pattern of results concerning stability. For instance, the stability of collective memories of U.S. history more generally and traditional founding events in particular could arise because the events that are treated as "most important" are overlearned. Extensive practice could lead to a well-established and remarkably stable mnemonic representation, a representation one might return to even after a brief change. The overlearned representation could be viewed as a hard-to-break habit, even if, for a brief period of time, one has managed to do so. We cannot, however, rely solely on overlearning as an explanation. Many of the events coded "other," such as World War I and World War II, are also treated as important and clearly are mentioned frequently in school and in cultural artifacts. Yet, it was these "other" events and not traditional founding events that were less likely to be included in the list of "most important" events shortly after the killing of George Floyd.

In addition to overlearning, mnemonic organization also needs to be considered, as it was when discussing distributional issues. As work on organizing and memorizing has shown, it is difficult to reorganize already well-learned and effectively organized material (Tulving & Osler, 1967). This might be especially true if there is not a widely circulating alternative with which to replace it. The claim here with respect to traditional founding events would be that the organization of collective memory established prior to the death of George Floyd was such that essentially the entire house would collapse if one had to reevaluate the importance of traditional founding events. One might be able to alter the organization without too much damage when reconsidering the importance of "other" events, but not when considering such value-laden, charter-defining events as traditional founding events. Clearly, this claim needs to be empirically verified.

And, again, as it was for distributional issues, retrieval strategies may also play a role. People often start at the beginning of a story when trying to recall the story (Teigen et al., 2017). If this strategy is used, then traditional founding events would repeatedly come to mind first and might, as a result, repeatedly be viewed as important. In their study of Americans' memory of the presidents, Roediger and DeSoto (2014) found the same preference for the beginning of the list of presidents—which, of course, coincided with presidents who were active at the founding of the United States. Roediger and DeSoto stressed the similarity in this preferential listing of presidents and the primacy effects often observed in studies of the serial position curve (Madigan, 1980).

As to the changes we did observe in the listing of race-relevant events, the murder of George Floyd and the continued public discourse about racial and police violence may have induced our participants to make a greater effort to overcome overlearned responses, retrieve race-relevant events, and then assign a greater level of importance to them rather than more preestablished events that come to mind.

Moreover, the murder of George Floyd may have "primed" not just the memories participants had of race-relevant events but, for Black participants, that aspect of their social identity complex associated with being Black in America. Roccas and Brewer (2002) specifically argued that factors increasing the saliency of a specific ingroup may give prominence to one of the identities within a social identity complex. This shift in what was important for Black participants' social identity complex may have led to a change in the way participants judged the importance of race-relevant events, though, the results suggest, not necessarily, traditional founding events.

The stability we observed, especially for traditional founding events, may be a mixed blessing. As we noted in the Introduction, it promotes a collective continuity between past and present that a constantly shifting collective memory might make difficult. Sani et al. (2007) have argued that such continuity enhances the perception of a strong group identity and grounds group culture. On the other hand, as many memory activists insist, there are good reasons to break the bonds of an established collective memory and seek long-lasting changes—especially if present collective memories are problematic (Guttman & Wustenberg, 2023).

The present study is, of course, an initial exploration. Given the increasing debate about how to tell U.S. history, it is important to understand not just how this history should be told but the way Black and White Americans actually represent U.S. history, in the present. Such an effort might guide those interested in reconfiguring the way American history is taught, but also might underscore, perhaps to a degree not fully appreciated at present, the diversity among Black and White Americans in their understanding of U.S. history. Moreover, as one explores ways to reframe U.S. history, it is also important to appreciate how stable these representations can be and what might or might not lead to changes in the collective memories Americans have of U.S. history. Debate about the way U.S. history should be told often neglects to consider fully the extent to which and the way in which collective memories might be mnemonically "inert." More research is needed about the way Black and White Americans treat traditional founding events, the circumstances under which collective memories can be "destabilized," and the mnemonic inertia that appears to characterize collective memories over the long term. By examining how people remember U.S. history and how external events influence the way they remember this history, the present study—and future research—should help the public, as well as historians, better understand how Americans conceive of their nation's past in the present and even into the future.

Constraints on Generality

The present study confines itself to U.S. history and to two communities within the United States. The extent to which the conclusions drawn here apply to other countries and other communities within the United States needs to be assessed, though we suspect that the underlying claims generalize. Moreover, we did not employ a representative sample, so conclusions about Black Americans or White Americans need to proceed cautiously. In addition, we need to stress that both Black and White Americans do not constitute a single homogeneous group, as the individual differences results underscore. Follow-up studies could provide a more nuanced discussion. Also, it is unclear whether the murder of George Floyd represents a unique instance or whether other race-relevant external events may produce similar shifts. Finally, we have focused here on national collective memories. But memories "travel" across national boundaries (Erll, 2016). Similar work from a transnational perspective is also needed.

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