

Generations, Identities, and the Collective Memory of Che Guevara¹

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Has the image of Che Guevara lost its power to evoke radical politics in the face of pervasive commodification? The commercialization of this Sixties political icon has called into question the power of the market to shape collective memories. Meanwhile, antisystemic movements of the Left continue to erect his image at protest events. In light of this contest over how Che Guevara is remembered, we investigate who is most likely to recall him using data from a survey of Spanish citizens. We find qualified support for the theory of generational imprinting—Che is more often recalled by those generations who saw him rise to prominence during their formative years, although prominent as a collective symbol rather than as a living person. Our results also corroborate the claim that historical figures or events are more salient for, and therefore more likely to be remembered by, some sub-generational units than others. Thus, although the younger generations are in general more likely than their elders to recall Che, he is most frequently remembered by the highly educated leftists who espouse post-materialist and post-traditionalist values and identify more with their local regions than with the nation of Spain. These patterns suggest that, in contrast to the dire predictions of mass culture theorists, the memory of Che Guevara has become increasingly tied from markers of social, ethnic-regional, and political identity.

KEY WORDS: collective memory, Che Guevara, generations, social movements, Mannheim, identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Che Guevara, in stark contrast to most other major twentieth century revolutionary figures of the left (e.g. Mao, Lenin, Trotsky) continues to be a vibrant symbol and galvanizing figure for contemporary antisystemic movements, from the Zapatista rebels in Mexico and Basque separatists in Spain to Palestinian nationalists in the Middle East. At the same time, as the image of Che Guevara continues to appear in various mundane items of consumer culture (T-shirts, coffee mugs, etc.), a variety of commentators have begun to decry—or sardonically point to the irony of—the popularization through mass consumption and subsequent commodification of a figure that stood until his death at the hands of the CIA against the hegemony of American-style consumer capitalism. In the eyes of many analysts, the image of Che Guevara plastered on T-shirts, coffee mugs and posters throughout the world has become the latest example of the commodification and trivialization of an initially radical, revolutionary figure. As the image of Che has come to be incorporated into the market logic of the culture industry, it has lost most of its power as a political symbol:

Che Guevara, who did so much in order to destroy capitalism, is today the quintessential brand of capitalism. His image graces cups, lighters, key chains, wallets, caps, jeans...and of course, those omnipresent T-shirts...the image...continues to be the logo of revolutionary chic...The metamorphosis of Che Guevara into a capitalist brand is not new, but the brand has been the object of a revival operation in recent times, and this is an especially notable revival since it has been years since the political and ideological collapse of everything that Guevara represented (Vargas Llosa 2005).

At the same time, and in spite of this popularization and apparent trivialization, his memory appears to function as a powerful mnemonic symbol and powerful galvanizing force in various contemporary radical movements, especially those associated with issues of global economic justice and globalization. Speaking of the first World Social Forum anti-Neoliberal demonstrations that took place in January 2001 at Porto Alegre, Brazil, (made to coincide with the World Economic Forum meetings in Davos, Switzerland) Lechner and Boli (2005: 153) note that “While Davos celebrities included figures such as Bill Gates of Microsoft, in Porto Alegre the image of Che Guevara was everywhere....” Thus even as he has become part of the capitalist

commodity production machinery, Che Guevara is simultaneously being used by groups intent on disrupting and/or radically opposing that system.

As researchers have increasingly come to recognize the importance of social conflict over how to define the past, debates have arisen about who “controls” what gets remembered and how. The contested memory of Che Guevara makes him a unique case to address fundamental issues associated with the study of collective memory, here defined as the aggregated patterns of recall of ordinary individuals (Schwartz and Schuman 2005). Some scholars argue that the collective memory of groups is shaped and manipulated by elites in order to establish dominant, hegemonic meanings and interpretations of the past, while others argue that groups can reconstruct and recover memories in order to imbue them with new counter-hegemonic interpretations (Bromberg and Fine 2002; Fine 2003). The memory of Che Guevara, insofar as it has become tied to the interests and purviews of both dominant groups (e.g. large corporations intent on commodifying his image) and dominated groups (e.g. antisystemic social movements), offers a unique opportunity to investigate the validity of these competing accounts.

There is a structural component to collective memories that may limit their plasticity in the hands of these groups. Memories appear to be imprinted at an early age such that generations are likely to remember the significant people and events of their youth even as they age (Schuman and Scott 1989). They may be shaped by one’s (or one’s group’s) social proximity to an important event or person, as African Americans and Southern whites were to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Griffin 2004). Such structural conditions may delimit the field of contested collective memories, its relevant players, and rules of engagement. Commodification of a political icon like Che is commonly believed to undermine such structural divisions – e.g., between generations or racial groups – by bringing it to a broader range of groups not necessarily defined by shared political ideologies, values, or identities. That is, commodification implies massification, the breaking down of group boundaries. As the image of Che Guevara has reached a broader audience, has it lost its power to signify a political or ideological group? Do the T-shirt wearers know who Che was and what he claimed to represent? Have the dominant groups won this contest of hearts and memories?

CHE GUEVARA: MNEMONIC SYMBOL

Few knew Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967) before he became a leader in Fidel Castro’s guerrilla army in the Sierra Maestra Mountains of Cuba. In 1959, after three years of bloody warfare that claimed many lives on both side, the guerrillas took Havana. In his first official post, commander of a military prison, Che oversaw the trial and execution of hundreds of sympathizers of the old regime. Within two years his image was being paraded as a hero alongside Karl Marx (New York Times 1961). That same year his military acumen took literary form in his handbook, *Guerrilla Warfare* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press). As Minister of Industries and chief negotiator for the new government, Che’s international notoriety grew concomitant with his popularity. Midway through 1965 he quietly disappeared from public life and, as became clear later, from Cuba as well. Under cloak of a tight-lipped Cuban government he made his way to the Congo to lead a nationalist insurgency there. Following an unremarkable performance in the Congo he assumed a similar position in the Bolivian armed insurrection until the Bolivian army with assistance from the U.S. captured and executed the 39 year-old Che late in 1967. His popularity soared.

1968 was a watershed for popular protest around the world and Che Guevara, now a martyr, became a condensing symbol (Jasper 1997: 159-162) for a geographically diverse array of leftist social movements. Riding the global wave of protest, Che’s visibility in the international media peaked in the late 1960s. At the height of this wave the New York Times repeatedly connected Che to Marxist social movements in Europe and the Americas (see Table I). The dramatic rise and fall of this visibility is depicted in Figure 1. The pattern is similar in the U.S. and Europe. Che’s visibility peaked during the protests of 1968 and again on the thirtieth anniversary of his death in 1997. Spain’s largest newspaper, *El Pais*, displays a more recent surge of interest in Che since 2003.

[Table I about here]

[Figure 1 about here]

The first peak coincides with the year a soon-to-be-familiar image of Che (Figure 2) was first mass produced as a poster. The stark image of Che in a starred beret looking into the distance has since become iconic. As Storey (2001: 88) notes, “in the 1960s, a bedsit [sic]

without a poster of Che Guevara was hardly furnished at all. Was the poster a sign of a commitment to revolutionary politics or a commitment to the latest fashion (or was it a complicated mixture of both)?” The second peak in 1997 corresponds with the discovery of his body and those of his fallen Bolivian comrades. Accompanied by much fanfare and international curiosity, his remains were returned to Cuba where he received a hero’s funeral. But something about Che had changed, succinctly captured in a New York Times headline: “From Rebel to Pop Icon” (1997a). This meteoric rise in popularity, unlike the previous surge in 1968, had a distinctly commercial quality. His image now graced T-shirts, wrist watches, ashtrays, and album covers. His story appeared in several new films and biographies. In Spain, heavy metal band Boikot released the first album of its musical trilogy *El Ruta del Che*. That year he was also commemorated on a postage stamp in his native Argentina. A representative of a U.S. ski manufacturer explained why it was reproducing Che’s image on its latest product even while dissociating itself from his politics: “We felt that the Che image—just the icon and not the man’s doings—represented what we wanted: revolution, extreme change” (quoted in New York Times 1997a). In light of this mountain of damning evidence the New York Times concluded, “*Che’s politics remain entombed. Armed, leftist revolution is today found only in Cuba, and in a few violent but tiny bands in Columbia, Peru and now Mexico. In Europe and the United States, Che’s image owes its commercial appeal to the absence of political content*” (1997b; emphasis added).

Yet, it is by no means clear that Che Guevara has been depoliticized in the face of unbridled commercialism. The Zapatistas in Mexico have flaunted images of Che on their clothes, banners, flags, and posters since 1994. French protestors carried Che Guevara flags in 2000 at the trial of French farmer and anti-Neoliberalism activist, José Bove, who destroyed a McDonald’s restaurant in protest. Che’s image appeared at social movement events of landless workers in Brazil (1997), striking university students in Mexico City (1999), and peace activists in Italy (2002). Late in 2005 Che’s image was prominently displayed at an anti-Neoliberal globalization rally in Argentina accompanied by speeches from Bolivia’s socialist presidential candidate (and later president) Evo Morales and Venezuela’s razor-tongued Hugo Chavez. In Kazakhstan, Che’s image was worn by supporters of that country’s Communist Party candidate and Colombian revolutionaries wore Che T-shirts as they ceremoniously laid down their weapons.

As we attempt to disentangle these competing claims to the meaning of Che Guevara we turn to the literatures on collective memories, culture consumption, and New Social Movements. From them we derive hypotheses and test them against data from a nationally representative survey of Spanish residents. Instead of his memory falling victim to trivialization by commodification, we find that remembering Che Guevara in fact appears to have become a highly structured collective act of distinction.

THE GENERATIONAL LOCATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

Collective memories are traces of the past remembered and reenacted in the present, periodically reinvigorated in commemorations, celebrations, poetry, images, and other symbolic displays. According to Halbwachs (1992: 38), “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.” Like Durkheim, Halbwachs sees in these symbolic systems an important marker of group solidarity, but it is in the spaces in between, in the absence of manifest symbols, that collective memory circumscribes group membership and group meaning. Because they must be created and recreated, collective memories of the past are subject to the social forces of the present. Because they empower collective identities and animate action, they themselves are social forces of the present.

We begin with Karl Mannheim’s (1952) concept of generations, or age cohorts that experience the same major events in their lives and subsequently develop similar dispositions and world views. Mannheim argued that people are most susceptible to influence by an event or person if they came of age (usually interpreted to be around age seventeen) when the event or person was in the public eye. This thesis has been extended to the study of collective memory by Schuman and Scott (1989) who show that memories of historical events too may be culturally imprinted at a relatively young age (also see Schuman and Rieger 1992; Schuman and Corning 1999). If we extend Schuman and Scott’s (1989) insight from historical events to famous figures, then we should expect the memory of famous figures to follow a generational pattern. Figures who achieved historical prominence during an individual’s formative years (mid-teens to young adulthood) should then be more likely to be remembered than historical figures that either predated or postdated this period. In considering Che Guevara as a living historical individual,

the relevant time-span covers the 9-year period extending from 1959 (when the rebel armies led by Castro and Guevara entered Havana) to 1967 (when Guevara was executed by members of the Bolivian army). Thus we should expect that *Che Guevara will be more likely to be remembered for those cohorts that saw him rise to historical prominence during their formative years.*

In the case of Che Guevara, however, it is widely understood that he became a generalized worldwide symbol of radical rebellion *after* his death in 1967, as indicated by the spike in international visibility that came with the 1968 wave of protest. Likewise, most commentators agree that his popularity, as both a capitalist brand and a political symbol, shot up after this period and continues unabated to this day (Dosal 2003: 22; Sandison 1998; Taibo 1997). It appears that Che's legend (and his literal image) has grown more powerful—i.e., more culturally salient—posthumously. It may be the case that the mechanisms of generational imprinting are correct while the assumption of contemporaneity, that generations are influenced by *living* persons or *current* events, is not.

This leads us to a different empirical expectation regarding the generational location of the memory of Che Guevara. Rather than his memory residing among those who experienced him as a living historical individual, as the pure Mannheimian account suggests, we have reason to believe that the relevant generational period came after his death. If visibility and popularity increase the likelihood that an event or person is salient for a generation, and if we are right that Che's visibility and popularity have grown since his death, then our second hypothesis contradicts the first. That is, we should expect that *Che Guevara will be more likely to be remembered by those cohorts that came of age in more recent decades.*

Mannheim (1928/1972:120) maintained that “those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation-units.” Subsequent research has sought to deepen this theoretical insight by acknowledging that some events or figures are more salient to some subsets of an age cohort than others. For example, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement is more likely to be recalled as one of the most important twentieth-century events by African-Americans and Southern whites than by other Americans (Schuman and Scott 1989; Griffin 2004). This is evidence that the concept of generational effects of the memory of events and figures goes beyond birth cohort as narrowly conceived and may come to include overlapping markers of social and group identity.

Griffin (2004: 556) concludes, “Region, along with race, gender, age, and other social factors, matters in the construction of collective memories, and the real question is not whether it...or something else has causal primacy, but how, conjoined, they produce...what is remembered and thought to be historically important.” In our attempt to answer this question for the case of Che Guevara we find helpful insights in the literatures on the New Social Movements and culture consumption.

GENERATIONAL VALUES AND THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

While most commentators agree that Che has become a general symbol of various causes and political movements, there exists wide disagreement and confusion in the literature as to what exactly his image has become a symbol of. Scholarly research has shown that as early as the student movements of 1968, the image of Che Guevara had already acquired a measure of status as symbol for the student movement (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 90; Jasper 1997; Zolov 1999). Furthermore, given the continued presence of posters and T-shirts at contemporary global justice rallies bearing his image (Lechner and Boli 2005: 153), it appears that Che Guevara continues to stand for the same complex of values and causes usually associated with the “New Social Movements” (NSMs) that emerged in the 1960s.

Theorists interested in the distinctiveness of the post-WWII generations and concomitant leftist movements echo Mannheim when they argue that generations are formed by shared experiences. Growing out of a period of renewed security and economic stability (at least in North America and many Western European countries), the so-called New Social Movements—such as those for women, the environment, free speech, peace, gays and lesbians, and animals—arose from the middle classes not to protect their class interests but to declare their autonomy, identities, and individualism (Buechler 1995; Pichardo 1997). The massive wave of protest that swept the globe in 1968 reflects the historic transformation of the global political and economic order that emerged from the war. Among those who have tried to explain this shift are Anthony Giddens and Ronald Inglehart, both of whom identify a widespread and perceptible value shift at this time that they believe helps to explain the rise of the NSMs.

In Giddens’ (1994) view, there has been a shift toward a “post-traditional” society that “involves a breakdown of stable and unitary collective orders...of methodical doubting of all

knowledge and authorities,” and implies a “turn to the individual—rather than collective orders—as necessarily the only agency responsible for itself” (Slater 2005: 179). With this comes a rejection of tradition and a different stance toward the flow of time, whereby looking toward the past is devalued in favor of a constant stance of anticipation of an ever-changing future. According to Barker (2003), with de-traditionalization, a concern with “life-politics” comes to replace traditional political concerns with redistribution and class (Hechter 2004). Life politics is instead focused on the ideals of “self actualization, choice and lifestyle.” However, with a shift to post-traditional values, lifestyles become intrinsically connected to politics. Individuals now become aware, by way of their increasing access to the “expert systems” and expert knowledge, of information that links their local action to more global contexts. Thus, social mobilization around issues of choice and lifestyle become increasingly likely as individuals come to uphold post-traditional values.

Inglehart (1988:11) instead uses the term, “post-materialism,” which he says expresses “above all...a greater emphasis on belonging, self-expression, and the quality of life,” in contrast to “materialist” concerns for “economic and physical security.” Post-materialism emphasizes personal and civic freedoms, self-expression, and sustaining less impersonal and “friendlier” personal relations in society. Inglehart (1988, 1971; Abramson and Inglehart 1995; Inglehart and Abramson 1999) proposes that the shift toward post-materialist values is produced primarily through cohort-specific experiences, such that those who are raised under conditions of relative economic abundance and material and physical security (i.e. relatively protected from major natural disasters, economic depressions and wars) are more likely to hold post-materialist values than those raised in periods that feature large scale material deprivation. For Inglehart, the observed generational shift toward post-materialism across different nations is largely attributable to more recent—especially post-war—generations being more likely to be raised under improving material conditions (such as GNP per capita and economic growth) in comparison to pre-war generations (Abramson and Inglehart 1995).

Both “post-traditionalism” and “post-materialism” have been isolated as important components of the cultural matrix around which the NSMs are built (Barker 2003: 183; Buechler 1995; Inglehart 1988: 373; Opp 1990), and we would add much of the Global Justice Movement as well. These value systems mark a cultural disjuncture that should correspond with different collective memories of the past. In their efforts to build and sustain collective identities,

mobilize sympathizers, and frame their grievances using widely available themes and symbols, social movements appear to play an important role in shaping collective memories (Armstrong & Cragge 2006). Precisely because the memory of Che Guevara appears to have become a mnemonic symbol often used by these movements and pointing to an important set of changes in values across generations, we suggest that *for individuals born in more recent cohorts, the memory of Che Guevara will be positively associated with holding post-traditional and/or post-materialist values.*

MNEMONIC CONSUMPTION

Following Weber's (1947) original insight that the everyday consumption choices of members of the same class stratum come to be patterned as a specific "style of life," sociologists of culture find that patterns of culture consumption are connected to sociodemographic factors such as age, gender and education (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Bourdieu 1984). Many of these same identity-signifying objects are themselves historical representations and are likely to be consumed in predictable ways. Recollections of historical figures, insofar as they emerge from certain selective patterns of consumption—whether of literary materials, posters, novels, or popular culture products—should also be affected by markers of collective identity and status such as education, ethnicity, class, nationality and gender. By focusing primarily on generational location many collective memory studies have exploited only one particular—albeit important—social division and have by and large ignored others of arguably equal importance. We focus here on education and geographic identification.

Education

Previous studies of the role of education in structuring collective memory (e.g. Schuman et al. 2005) have only concentrated on the possible informational advantage or the increased cognitive availability of specific historical events and figures that education provides. We follow Meyer (1977) and Bourdieu (1984) in viewing the educated not simply as a functional group within society—endowed with specific skills and abilities acquired during the educational process—but as a contemporary status group with particular commonalities in dispositions, habits and cognitive styles. Net of its "informational resources" effect, education also functions

as a form of intra-generational status cleavage, drawing members of the educated strata toward the memory of certain historical figures and away from the memory of others. The reputational career of a figure such as Che Guevara, for instance, went from real-life revolutionary leader to symbol of a whole constellation of values, especially those associated with rebellion and resistance, particularly during the student uprisings of the 1960s. To this day he is a symbol of third-world rebellion against globalization in the global justice movement. Throughout, Che Guevara became a popular culture icon, with his now recognizable profile grazing the surface of a variety of mass culture objects.

There are various reasons for which we should expect education to be positively associated with the memory of Che Guevara. In addition to providing the cognitive and informational resources that enhance the capacity to remember specific types of historical figures, we should expect education to function as an index of both attained and inherited cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), which creates intra- and inter-generational cleavages around the collective consumption of certain mnemonic objects. This connection between Che as mnemonic symbol and non-traditional values and ideals, as well as his embeddedness in consumer culture, should lead us to expect the educated to be especially attracted to the memory of Che, since both of these domains—non-traditional values (Duch and Taylor 1993: 755), and assiduous rates of culture consumption (DiMaggio 1987)—continue to be the province of class fractions endowed with relatively high rates of cultural capital in contemporary post-industrial societies (Bourdieu 1984: 438-441). Thus, in the case of Che Guevara, we should expect that *Che Guevara will be more likely to be remembered by individuals with higher levels of education.*

Geographic Identification

Within generations, other sources of cleavage are also important beyond those provided by class and status. Contemporary research on the sources of collective identity has identified a whole series of “post-Fordist” sources of collective identity formation that cross-cut and supplement those produced by class and status factors (Amin, 1994; Castells 2004). More specifically, we refer here to here to what Castells (2004: 9) has called the “identities of resistance” which underlie the recent (post-1968) emergence of collectivities defined not by attachment to traditional ideas associated with the nation (e.g. Anderson 1991: 3), but with sub-national groups centered around locality, community and other post-national forms of ethnic

attachment and identity formation. Precisely because members of oppositional communities centered on more local attachments see themselves as battling against more dominant definitions of citizenship and community (i.e. those centered in identification with the national state and not the local linguistic or ethnic community) we should expect collective memories to be deeply shaped by identification with local regions and communities. In particular, we should expect oppositional sources of cleavage within generations around the national-local axis of “imagined community” formation (Anderson 1991).

If Che Guevara continues to be a symbol of resistance and rebellion against what are perceived to be dominant definitions of citizenship, community and collective belonging, we should expect his memory to be more salient among those who identify most closely with contested local traditions and ethnicities. Following Griffin (2004), we argue for the geographic and spatial constitution of collective memory, but rather than looking at patterns of geographic residence, we argue that it is the subjective sense of identification with a particular community as this is enacted in specific regions and locales that serves to constitute and shape shared patterns of collective remembrance. Thus, we argue that as individuals’ identities move away from the dominant (national) “imagined community” and closer to those of subnational communities and regions, they should be more likely to remember oppositional historical figures such as Che Guevara. That is, we expect that *Che Guevara will be more likely to be remembered by those individuals who strongly identify with their local community or region and not with the nation-state.*

The “Massification” Effect

Having assembled the theoretical tools to help us locate the collective memory of Che Guevara, we return now to the question with which we began. How has the collective memory of Che been affected by decades of intensive iconographic commercialization and its use as a political symbol of post-1968 leftist rebellion? We have found many reasons to doubt popular perceptions which hold that commodification has defused this symbol’s power as a mnemonic device to demarcate group membership and shared identity. On the contrary, theories of collective memory, culture consumption, and New Social Movements all seem to point in the opposite direction – the memory of Che is likely to be strongly patterned by group membership. We expect that remembering Che has become a highly structured act of distinction for a highly

educated segment of the younger generations who espouse a regional identity and post-materialist/post-traditionalist values. Rather than diminishing the importance of group boundaries, as massification theories predict, we expect that the posthumous visibility of Che Guevara, thriving as it has on both its commercial and political uses, has instead served to foster such boundaries.

Still, the question remains, has the collective memory of Che lost its *political* meaning? If massification theorists are right and commodification carries symbols beyond their politically identified groups, then political identification should not be relevant for remembering Che. For that reason we should expect conservatives and liberals to be equally as likely to recall Che. However, as suggested above, we suspect that this is not the case. In the political environment of the 1960s and 1970s, few would disagree that at that time Che was an icon of political movements associated with the Left. The question is has this changed?

Olick and Robbins (1998), in their review of the collective memory literature, identify three types of social processes that may limit the malleability of recollections of the past any or all of which may be operating here. 1) Actors may actively seek to retain some elements of the past for instrumental purposes as, for example, antisystemic social movements have actively promoted the memory of Che Guevara as a symbol of their struggles. 2) When a memory becomes canonical and the basis for other cultural formations, its malleability decreases. We can see this in the transposition of Che's image from the Cuban Revolution to collective struggles the world over which have found affinity with that event. 3) Memories are subject to the stabilizing forces of habit, routine, and custom such as we might find in the mundane consumer goods that keep Che Guevara's image visible in the wardrobes, living rooms, and dormitories of his sympathizers. In light of these processes, it is reasonable to expect that figures whose renown was unequivocally political during their lifetime will bequeath a memory that too is political. If this is correct, we should expect that *Che Guevara will be more likely to be remembered among those who identify with the left across all generations.*

DATA AND METHODS

Schuman and Scott (1989) pioneered a new technique that allows us to interpret present understandings of the past by studying patterns of individual remembrance in the general

population. Like them we draw on survey data in which individuals are asked to recall famous phenomena from the past. From this we infer qualities of collective memories from the social positions of those who hold them. Our case is the memory of Che Guevara and our units of analysis are individual recollections among a nationally representative sample of Spanish citizens between 1991 and 1993.

The survey was conducted in three consecutive years by the Center for Research on Social Reality (CIRES 1991-93) and administered to a stratified (according to the size of autonomous regions and municipalities) random sample of all non-institutionalized Spanish citizens aged 18 and over. We pooled the samples from the three waves, yielding a final sample of 3,600 respondents. Respondents were asked to recall two famous Latin American people (three for the 1991 wave). 52.4% of respondents gave at least one name, 37.9% gave up to two names, 9.6% gave up to three, and 37.7% did not respond to the question. We disregard missing values on this item, which, as one might expect, are more common among respondents who are significantly older, less educated, and more likely to live in non-urban areas.

Our analysis begins by examining the generational patterns of recall for those who name Che Guevara. Here we ask does the collective memory of Che follow a generational pattern? If it does, which generations are most likely to recall him? For this we examine the raw counts of our survey respondents, by age cohort, who name Che Guevara. Next we ask which characteristics of individuals, above and beyond age, are associated with remembering Che? For this we use logistic regression analysis to estimate the probability that one will name Che Guevara. Because our unit of analysis is the person-choice (McFadden 1974) and because choices are clustered within individuals (i.e., not entirely independent of one another), we use robust standard errors clustered on the respondent. We discuss the independent variables used in the logit models throughout the discussion of the findings below.

Latin American Figures Mentioned

All told, respondents recalled 95 different names, the most common of which are reported in Table II. Spaniards recall a broad range of famous Latin Americans from the fields of sports, politics, and the arts, but they tend to name people who lived and were prominent during the thirty years preceding the survey. Topping the list is Che Guevara's Cuban comrade in

arms, Fidel Castro, with nearly fifteen percent of the total responses—nearly two-thirds more mentions than the next name, Carlos Menem. Che clearly occupies a prominent place in the memories of these respondents as the sixth most commonly mentioned name. The ten most frequently mentioned figures, in addition to Castro and Guevara, include Argentine presidents Menem (9.31%), Alfonsín (4.39%), and Perón (4.49%), Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet (9.08%), writers Gabriel García Márquez (6.0%) and Mario Vargas Llosa (4.97%), nineteenth century revolutionary Simón Bolívar (4.39%), and Argentine soccer star Diego Maradona (3.19%). The preponderance of Argentines in the list, including all major presidents since the early 1970s (excluding a few interim figures), is striking, occupying as they do half of the top ten and one-third of the top thirty spots. Also striking is the predominance of political and revolutionary figures which occupy seven of the top ten and ten of the top fifteen positions.

[Table II about here]

Some of these famous names were in the news around the time of the survey (early 1990s) which might explain their high rates of recall. Carlos Menem, for instance, succeeded Raúl Alfonsín to the Argentine presidency in 1989, and both figures are frequently recalled here. Augusto Pinochet's long military rule in Chile came to an end in 1990 and Panamanian president Manuel Noriega was deposed and brought to the U.S. on drug trafficking charges in 1989. Soccer great Diego Maradona was already a legend by the early 1990s but in 1992 he left Argentina to join the team in Seville, Spain. Violeta Chamorro rose to the presidency of Nicaragua in 1990, and Javier Pérez de Cuellar stepped down from his top post at the UN in 1991.

A few of the famous names are more prominent in history books than in contemporary events. Simón Bolívar fought against the Spanish crown for Latin American independence in the early nineteenth century alongside San Martín and General Bernadino Rivadavia, the first president of Argentina. Pancho Villa is remembered from the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Others are clearly out of place. Robert Redford is not a Latin American, and Martín Fierro is not even a real person! The latter is the protagonist in an epic poem of the same name written in the 1870s by Argentine poet José Hernández.

RESULTS

Does the memory of Che Guevara follow a generational pattern? Figure 3 shows that clearly the answer is yes (for each cohort, odds above one indicate a higher than expected probability of mentioning Guevara). The plot shows a positive and almost linear relationship (after the 1940s cohort) between age cohort and the odds of recollection of Che. Rather than being remembered by those who came of age during Che's heyday as a historical figure in the 1960s, as the Mannheimian tradition suggests, generational imprinting seems to have occurred after his death when his image was more visible and his import more salient. That is, younger generations – those more often exposed to the T-shirts, books, and political banners than news reports about the man – are disproportionately more likely to remember Che Guevara than their elders. The unqualified Mannheimian generational imprinting hypothesis is not supported. Instead, and in accordance with our second hypothesis, we find that Che Guevara is most likely to be remembered by members of the youngest cohorts who experienced him as a posthumous collective symbol.

[Figure 3 about here]

Which characteristics are associated with remembering Che? We begin by estimating a baseline logistic regression model predicting the odds of mentioning Che Guevara for each respondent-choice unit of observation (see Table III). The baseline model includes a single linear cohort term and control variables for the number of choices given and the year that the survey was conducted (to hold constant any period effects). The linear cohort trend, as shown above, is positive and clearly statistically distinguishable from zero ($t=4.63$). Neither the survey year nor the number of choices are statistically significant, suggesting that there is no period effect applicable to the memory of Che Guevara and that he is no more likely to be mentioned by those respondents who chose to give, or were capable of giving, multiple nominations. This latter effect, it should be noted, has important implications for interpreting the education effect as we will discuss further below.

[Table III about here]

Changing Generational Values

Is the increasing cohort trend in the memory of Che Guevara due to changing generational values toward post-traditionalism and post-materialism? To answer this question we develop indices for each that are introduced in Model 2. The “post-traditionalism” scale comes from a factor analysis of five survey items that concern individual attitudes toward religious ideology, the desirability of looking toward the past versus the future, and the cultural authority of experts. For all five items, disagreeing with the statement indicates increasing post-traditionalism. We binarized all of the items into agree or disagree responses. We then subjected the tetrachoric correlation matrix of the binary items to a principal components factor analysis. We use the predicted factor score from the first principal factor (eigenvalue=2.40; proportion of variance explained=0.40) as our measure of postraditionalism, normalized to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1.⁴ The “post-materialism” scale is obtained from questions that asked respondents to choose the three most important problems and social issues in Spain for a total of three choices. Respondents receive a point on the post-materialism scale whenever they choose either a) the reduction of social inequalities, b) guaranteeing civil liberties, c) the protection of the environment, or d) the fight against immorality and corruption. “Materialist” options include such things as guaranteeing economic growth, fighting terrorism, crime, drugs, and preventing price increases (Inglehardt and Abramson 1999). The scale ranges from zero to three and has a mean of 0.92 and a standard deviation of 0.81.

⁴ Each of the items read as follows: (1) “of all religions in the world, probably only one is true” (factor loading=0.70); (2) “a group that tolerates differences of opinion among its members won’t last very long” (0.64); (3) “in a complicated world such as the current one, it is better to go by what authorities and experts say, since we can trust them” (0.68). (4) “the most important thing is not success in this world, but what will happen in the afterlife” (0.65); (5) “everything changes so quickly in today’s world that it is difficult to tell what is bad from what is good anymore” (0.54) and (6) “only looking toward the past will we find solutions to our current problems” (0.57). For each question the responses allowed are: 1) Strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, and 4) Strongly disagree. We code the respondent as disagreeing if either of the last two options is chosen.

Model 2 presents the results of this analysis. In accordance with the New Social Movements framework, we find that post-traditional and post-materialist values are both positively associated with the memory of Che Guevara. This supports our hypothesis that the memory of Che Guevara has come to stand as a mnemonic symbol for these new values. Furthermore, holding constant these factors reduces the cohort effect by about a 26% from its original value, suggesting that the memory of Che Guevara is more salient for those younger respondents who are more likely to espouse these sets of values.

Education

We hypothesized that education should have a positive effect on the memory of Che Guevara, not only because it increases one's ability to recall past events, but because education creates status divisions between the more and less educated. Because we eliminated those respondents from our analysis who did not recall at least one name, and because we include a variable here for the number of names that respondents recalled, we believe that we have already measured, to some degree, *capacity* to recall famous Latin Americans.⁵ We believe the education variable, for that reason, taps into something more than just this cognitive processing capacity, but also a status effect. That is, net of one's ability to recall one or two famous Latin American figures, what effect does education have on the probability that one will recall this *particular* Latin American figure? Indeed, given Che's international visibility and popularization and as the sixth most commonly named figure by these respondents, one might assume that the relatively less educated will be at least as familiar with his name as a more obscure figure.

The results shown in Model 3 confirm our expectation: education has a strong and significant positive effect on the odds of remembering Che Guevara.⁶ This provides support for our claim that like age, gender, race, and so many other socio-demographic factors, education

⁵ Even after removing those respondents who could not recall any names, education, measured as having obtained the equivalent of a high school degree or higher, is positively associated with the number of persons named ($\gamma=0.15$, $p<0.01$).

⁶ We modified the education variable using a non-linear transformation that specified a positive effect of education that increased at a decreasing rate as this provided a better fit to the model.

distinguishes a status group with particular commonalities in dispositions, habits *and memories*. Remarkably, we also find that the inclusion of the education variable further diminishes the cohort effect by 47% from its initial level, suggesting that changing patterns of generational values and increasing educational attainment across these cohorts account for almost half of the increasing tendency of younger respondents to remember Che Guevara. Education clearly serves to structure the collective memory of individuals both within and across generational groups.

Geographic and Political Identity

To measure regional identity, we exploit a survey item in which respondents were presented with a scale and asked to indicate with which geographic location on the scale they feel most closely identified. Choices ranged from Spain at one end to their local region at the other. We aggregated these responses by region and created a matrix of regions by geographic identities which we then subjected to the correspondence analysis routine included in version 9.1 of the Stata package (Statacorp 2005). The procedure produces interval scores for each region that are proportional to the percentage of respondents that identify either with their local region at the expense of Spain. Negative scores are assigned to regions with a preponderance of Spanish-identifying respondents and positive scores are assigned to regions where a majority of the population identifies with the local community. is standardized to have a mean of zero, and ranges from a low of -1.66 for respondents who live in regions in which non one has a local identity, to a high of 0.82 for respondents who reside in regions in which the majority (60% or more) do.

The political identity variable comes from a question that asks respondents where on a 7-point scale from extreme right to extreme left they situate themselves. From this we have constructed three dummy variables with “left” as the omitted category. The first two and the last two categories are considered left and right respectively and the three middle categories are considered moderate. Respondents who chose not to locate themselves in the scale are coded as having “no opinion.” Following this partition, oidentify with the right, 30% say that they are moderate and another 31% have “no opinion.”

Model 4 shows the results of introducing these variables into the analysis. The regional identity indicator has a strong positive effect on the memory of Che Guevara ($t=2.36$), suggesting that his memory is more salient for those groups who identify more with their local linguistic and

ethnic communities than with the Spanish nation. This supports our contention that the memory of Che Guevara corresponds with the recent advance of so-called “identities of resistance” (Castells 2004) that oppose dominant definitions of citizenship and community in favor of sub-national identities. It also furthers our claim that collective memories may be shaped by social divisions at the national-local axis of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991).

Do politics matter? In this case it seems that they do. As the negative and significant coefficients for all three political identity dummies indicates, those who identify as leftist are more likely to recall Che Guevara than others, including those who decline to place themselves in the left-right continuum. Thus, we find that despite popular claims to the contrary the memory of Che appears to be a highly politicized mnemonic symbol in this sample of respondents.

Finally, note that inclusion of the geographic and political identity variables further reduces the cohort effect to less than half its original value and diminishes its statistical significance to the 0.10 level. What we found to be a significant trend for younger generations to recall Che Guevara more often than older generations appears to be in large part a function of the other factors we have discussed here – changing values, increasing education, and changing patterns of regional and political identification across generations. Much to our surprise, generational imprinting is reduced to secondary importance in this sample of Spanish respondents.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We began this paper with a question new to the study of collective identities. How does the commercialization of a famous figure, particularly a politically evocative one, affect how he or she is remembered? Many presume that Che Guevara, once a defiantly anti-capitalist leader, has become little more than a fashionable accoutrement adorning T-shirts and coffee cups, an iconic revolutionary sapped of his political meaning. Framing this problem in light of collective memory research helps us to recognize that the culture industry that sells his image and the antisystemic movements that revere him are emblematic of a contest over his memory. Collective memory studies have sought to understand who in these struggles—if anyone—in effect “controls” what gets remembered. Still, this literature reveals little consensus about how malleable memories can be. As Olick and Robbins (1998) demonstrate, some theories, such as

Karl Mannheim's (1952) theory of generation formation, lay heavy emphasis on the inertial processes that resist change. Others, such as the post-WWII value shift thesis suggested here, recognize that entrepreneurs play an ongoing role in the struggle to define the past.

We do not claim to resolve these issues here. Rather, we have tried to untangle the complicated relationships between some of these social processes for one particular case, the memory of Che Guevara. The contested nature of Che's memory presents us with an opportunity to consider not only the commercialization of cultural mnemonics but also the many ways that memories, like collective representations, can demarcate group identity. Collective memories may distinguish members from non-members of an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991), high-status from low-status groups (Meyer 1977; Bourdieu 1984), or holders of a particular value orientation or political identity from their detractors (Inglehart 1988; Giddens 1994; Castells 2004). Recognizing the relationship between identities and collective memories is nothing new (Olick and Robbins 1998), but what we hope to underscore is that the axes of group differentiation that can coincide with contests over memory can be many and diverse.

The memory of Che Guevara has been shaped by shifting values, identities, and political orientations that crosscut generational divisions and is tied to a variety of social cleavages, themselves independent of generations. These social cleavages are the backdrop against which stakeholders actively vie to define collective symbols, like Che Guevara, and thus impact what and who gets remembered and how. In the case of Che, the contest is being visibly carried out between the culture industry and anti-systemic movements. For the latter, Che is a highly charged political symbol whose meaning runs counter to the process and effects of commodification being carried out in the market. Has this political symbol lost its political content when subjected to the market logic of the culture industry?

To answer this question we have examined the patterns of recall among a nationally representative sample of Spanish citizens. We are interested in who, when asked to recall a famous Latin American figure, names Che Guevara and consequently what this reveals about this 1960s revolutionary icon today. Our results show that people who identify with the political left are significantly more likely to recall Che than are others. This provides some evidence that commodification has not sapped this symbol of all political content, but as we investigated the implications of theories of collective memories, culture consumption, and New Social Movements, we were able to shed further light on this problem in unanticipated ways. After

briefly reviewing the results of that investigation we will return to this question of commodification and the political character of Che Guevara.

The theory of generational imprinting (Schuman and Scott 1989), that memories are more likely to be formed during one's youth (roughly 17-25 years old), finds some support here. However, collective memory studies have usually assumed that events or figures must be contemporaries of a cohort in order to impress a memory upon them. Instead, we find that the figure of Che Guevara left that impression long after his death; although recollections of Che follow a generational pattern, the youngest generations are significantly more likely to remember him than are their elders who came of age during his much publicized participation in the Cuban revolution of the early-1960s. Unfortunately, we do not have the data necessary to draw firm conclusions about what might be causing this positive linear trend, but it does correspond with a widely perceived increase in Che's popularity, both in the culture industry and the leftwing social movements, since his death forty years ago. This might explain the parallel proliferation of Che's memory, but if it does not, then we would have to conclude that the theory of generational imprinting does not apply to this case.

Yet, not all members of the generation that witnessed Che's growth in popularity are more likely to remember him. Mannheim himself suggested that within generations there are "generational units [who] work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways" (p. 304). Griffin (2004: 546) builds on this idea by arguing that an event or person may be more salient for some sub-generational units than for others, that is, they "represent significant long-term changes to people's lives, make people think about the events at the time of their happening, are emotionally charged, and exert collective psychological impact." In this spirit we agree that the generational effects of memory go beyond birth cohort as narrowly conceived to include markers of group identity.

As mentioned above, we do find sub-generational groups for which the memory of Che Guevara is more salient and cognitively available. Spaniards who name Che Guevara are not only young, but also highly educated, left-leaning, espouse post-materialist and post-traditionalist values, and identify more with their local regions than with the nation of Spain. The memory of Che is located among a relatively distinctive group of people, even in the face of intensive commodification of his image. That it is located among an increasingly narrow sub-generational group leads us to believe that the popularization of his image, both on T-shirts and

at protest rallies, has indeed had some influence on how he is remembered. These results are in stark contrast to what we would expect if the commodification of the memory of Che Guevara had resulted in a decrease in its power to signify and stand for the political struggles of oppositional groups. Thus, we explain the upward, linear trend in the recall of Che Guevara by generation, not by an increasing disconnection from social position and identity, but instead by an apparent *increasing* connection to markers of social, political, and ethnic regional identity in Spain.

It appears that the memory of revolutionary figures can retain their antisystemic appeal even in the face of pervasive commodification. Moreover, these results point to the fact that in the contemporary context it is possible to have both processes of commodification and radicalization of the memory of historical figures at the same time. In fact, the collective consumption of material culture objects might in fact be associated with a renewed radicalization of political struggles and a strengthening of collective identities and ideological commitments. Speaking of the nationalist struggle in the Basque country in Spain, Linstroth (2004) notes that for the “Basque Patriots” (*abertzaleak*), “political discourse is an unambiguous instrument for maintaining nationalist sentiments, but so too is the consumption of material images and objects that represent nationalist ideals.” Among these objects and images, those connected to wider struggles for liberation and which symbolize other cognate antisystemic struggles are most favored:

To *abertzale* Basques global representations such as images of Che Guevara or the Communist hammer and sickle are important for those supporting the armed struggle. They are often worn on T-shirts or displayed in popular bars. Representations of the PLO and the IRA are favoured, while the Cuban flag is given equal prominence in many *Batasuna* establishments (210).

Thus, the habitual equation of commodification and depoliticization should be tempered. The material consumption of Che Guevara’s image apparently can coexist with a commitment to political resistance. In contrast to the dire predictions of mass culture theorists, commodification does not result in the irrevocable termination of the power of political images and symbols.

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Table I. Excerpts from the *New York Times*, 1968-1969.

Spain

[T]he tightly organized leftist groups have been attempting, with some success, to build a following through the sponsorship of demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and in memory of Che Guevara. "Spanish Protestors Turning to Politics," 1/12/68.

France

The most ardent New Leftists classify themselves as Marxist revolutionaries. But some follow Mao Tse-tung and some Ernesto Che Guevara; other are Trotskyites and still others are anarchists. "DeGaulle Issues Warning As 20,000 Students March," 5/8/68.

Brazil

The student activists are frankly of the socialist left. When asked about influences in their thinking, they invariably mention Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Jean-Paul Sartre. "Brazil's Students Kick up a Storm," 6/30/68.

Germany

About "the revolution" itself, however, the communards are vague. They sometimes describe themselves as 'Marxist-anarchists,' as contemptuous of the bourgeois society in East Germany or the Soviet Union as they are of that in West Germany or the United States....And they admire such revolutionary activists as Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-tung, Malcolm X and current American black-power leaders. "A Berlin Commune Is a Big Happy Family (Sometimes)," 12/1/68.

United States

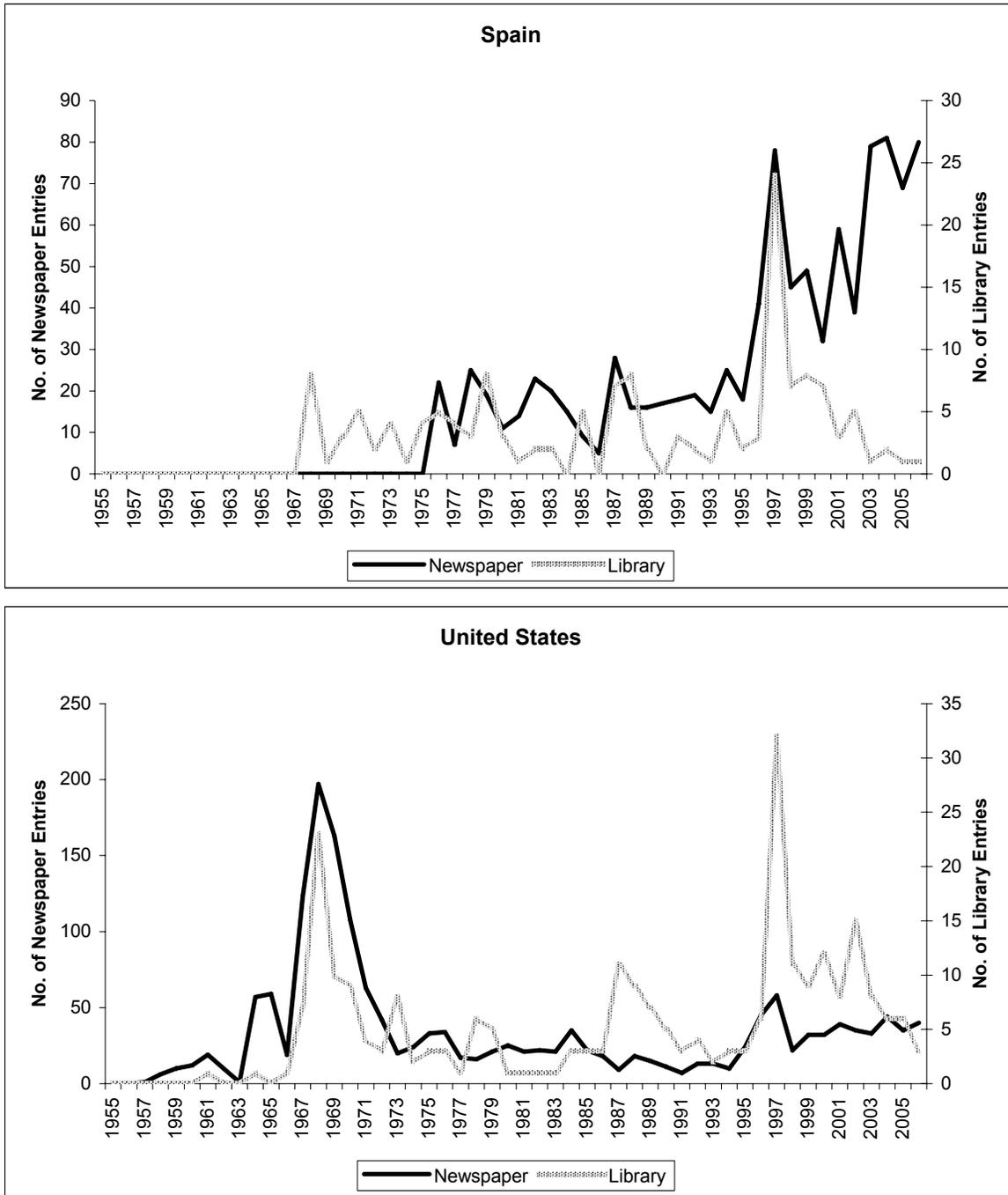
Last fall, in Ramparts magazine, national spokesmen for the Students for a Democratic Society, borrowing from Che Guevara's slogan calling for "many Vietnams," asked for "many Columbias." "Widening Rebellion: College Uprisings Over U.S. Found to Transcend Traditional Boundaries," 3/14/69.

Table II. Latin American figures mentioned by Spanish respondents, CIRES surveys 1991-1993.

					Figure		Mentions	
Name	Nationality	Occupation	N.	%				
Fidel Castro	Cuba	President (1959-present)	594	14.91				
Carlos Menem	Argentina	President (1989-99)	371	9.31				
Augusto Pinochet	Chile	President (1974-90)	362	9.08				
Gabriel García Márquez	Columbia	Writer	239	6				
Mario Vargas Llosa	Peru	Writer	198	4.97				
Ernesto Che Guevara	Argentina	Revolutionary	195	4.89				
Juan Perón	Argentina	President (1946-55, 1973-74)	179	4.49				
Raúl Alfonsín	Argentina	President (1983-89)	175	4.39				
Simón Bolívar	Venezuela	Revolutionary	175	4.39				
Diego Armando Maradona	Argentina	Soccer player	127	3.19				
Salvador Allende	Chile	President (1970-73)	79	1.98				
Los Panchos	Mex., P.R., US	Musicians	75	1.88				
Eva Perón	Argentina	First Lady	62	1.56				
Daniel Ortega	Nicaragua	President (1985-90)	58	1.46				
Octavio Paz	Mexico	Writer	51	1.28				
Violeta Chamorro	Nicaragua	President (1990-96)	47	1.18				
Pablo Neruda	Chile	Writer	42	1.05				
Palito Ortega	Argentina	Singer	42	1.05				

Pelé	Brazil	Soccer player	41	1.03
Carlos Mata	?	?	41	1.03
El Puma	Venezuela	Singer, actor	36	0.9
Jorge Luis Borges	Argentina	Writer	30	0.75
Roberto Carlos	Brazil	Soccer Player	29	0.73
Martín Fierro	Argentina	Fictional Character	29	0.73
E. Mendoza	?	?	28	0.7
Julio Cortazar	Argentina	Writer	26	0.65
Miguel de la Madrid	Mexico	President (1982-88)	26	0.65
Manuel Noriega	Panama	President (1983-89)	23	0.58
San Martín	Argentina	Revolutionary	20	0.5
Forges	?	?	19	0.48
Jorge Rafeal Videla	Argentina	President (1976-81)	18	0.45
Robert Redford	U.S.	Actor	18	0.45
General Rivadavia	Argentina	President (1826-27)	17	0.43
Cristal/ Janeth Rodríguez	?	?	16	0.4
Jorge Negrete	Mexico	Actor, singer	15	0.38
Carlos Gardel	Argentina	Singer	13	0.33
Pancho Villa	Mexico	Revolutionary	11	0.28

Figure 1. Visibility of Che Guevara in print media in the U.S. and Spain, 1955-2006.*

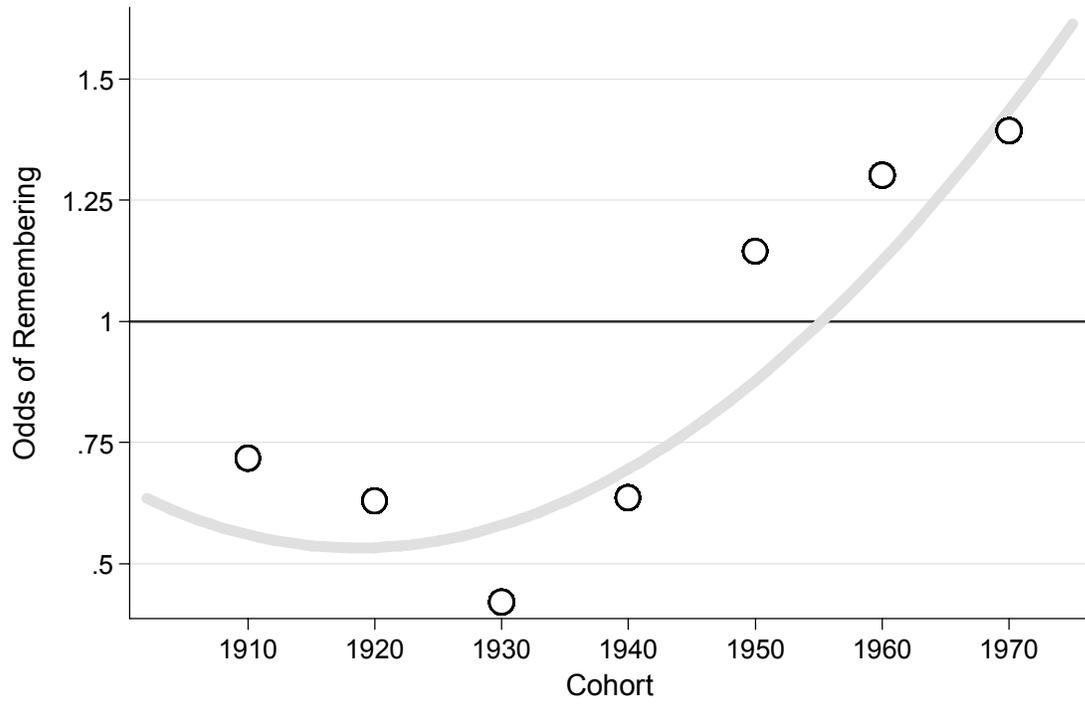


* Spanish sources include the national library, Biblioteca Nacional de Espana, and the country's leading newspaper, *El Pais*. U.S. sources include the Library of Congress and the *New York Times*. Library trend lines represent the number of entries each year with the subject heading "Guevara, Ernesto, 1928-1967." Newspaper data come from Internet searches of the respective archives using the term "Che Guevara."

Figure 2. Popular image of Ernesto “Che” Guevara adapted from a 1960 photograph by Alberto Korda.



Figure 3. Predicted odds of mentioning Che Guevara, by cohort.



Note: Number of observations for each cohort group is as follows: 1902-1919=121; 1920-1929=386; 1930-1939=485; 1940-1949=545; 1950-1959=808; 1960-1969=1,158; 1970-1975=482.

Table III. Logistic regression coefficients for the predictors of remembering Che Guevara.

	1	2	3	4
Cohort (centered)	0.0243** (4.63)	0.0181** (3.13)	0.0133* (2.26)	0.0102+ (1.68)
Survey Year	0.0892 (0.89)	0.0655 (0.67)	0.0637 (0.65)	0.0696 (0.71)
N. of Mentions	-0.0056 (-0.04)	-0.0455 (-0.36)	-0.0597 (-0.47)	-0.0555 (-0.44)
Post-Materialism Scale		0.2638** (3.07)	0.2366** (2.72)	0.2005* (2.29)
Post-Traditionalism Factor Score		0.2737** (3.19)	0.2469** (2.85)	0.2070* (2.37)
Education			1.7457** (2.61)	2.1123** (3.03)
Regional I.D.				0.4656* (2.36)
Political I.D. (Moderate)				-0.6568** (-3.50)
Political I.D. (Right)				-0.8883** (-3.21)
Political I.D. (No Opinion)				-0.4509** (-2.54)
Constant	-3.1114** (-12.52)	-3.8787** (-12.71)	-3.6514** (-11.54)	-3.1201** (-8.94)

Model Chi2	22.88**	49.74**	53.93**	83.04**
N	3772	3772	3772	3772

+ <0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01 (two-tailed tests; *t*-statistics in parentheses)