

Yazdiha, Hajar. *Struggles for the People's King: How Politics Transforms the Memory of the Civil Rights Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023, Xvi + 270 pages. Hardcover, \$95.00.

In *Struggles for the People's King: How Politics Transforms the Memory of the Civil Rights Movement*, sociologist Hajar Yazdiha has written a timely and powerful book that provides a look at the consequences to minoritized groups when the majority group distorts elements of the collective memories of the civil rights movement. She has written a dynamic book that helps in understanding the history of America that led to the rise of Trumpism in the twenty-first century.

Utilizing a mixed methods analysis of archival data, focus groups, primary and secondary sources, narrative analysis, and the methods of comparative-historical sociology, Yazdiha explores three basic questions: How did the collective memory of the civil rights movement, of Dr. King, become a ready-made political strategy for mobilization by groups with divergent, even antithetical aims? What are the consequences of these (mis)uses of collective memory? How does remembering the past matter for contemporary politics, and how does it shape the direction of our collective future?

Yazdiha examines three close-case studies of oppositional social movements and two groups that are more parallel than oppositional, to meet three clear goals: 1) to explore the trajectories of the collective memory of the civil rights movement as a political strategy over time; 2) to compare how groups with a range of collective identities across the political spectrum reshape the memory of the civil rights movement to make and contest political claims; and 3) to analyze the multilevel consequences of these (mis)uses of memory for political culture and the societal future.

One of the strengths of the book is its use of racial and social movement history across all six chapters. This is particularly true in Chapter One, where she demonstrates through the contentious politics of the debates in Congress between political parties regarding commemorating Dr. King's birthday as a holiday. It is a necessary addition, for it allows the reader to comprehend where and when the distortions of the messages and statements of Dr. King originated. She illustrates the processes in which the collective memories of the civil rights movement were made and then coopted by powerful groups that Yazdiha refers to as Kingmakers, including the white elite class, media conglomerates, and state institutions.

Another strength of the book is her critical theory of memory in contentious politics. She does an excellent job of defining the three attributes of her theory: relationality, temporalities, and perceptions. Using many figures across the book, she deftly shows how the three attributes interact to produce what she refers to as the "gnarled branches of collective memory." She argues that the interaction between "linked sets of meanings generate branches of memory that, over four decades, have shaped the collective memory of the civil right movement and, by extension, the dynamics of contemporary politics" (p. 46). She names the different branches of the civil rights memory, revealing how collective memory can become weaponized by powerful groups across time and result in revisionist memories that defy reality.

One other strength of the book is the connections made to previous racial and ethnic research, evident in the copious notes in each chapter. She presents an update to the research of giants in race and ethnic studies, such as Omi and Winant, Feagin, and Bonilla-Silva. In referencing these researchers who defined many of the terms she uses, Yazdiha adds the voice of a new generation of racial scholars examining systems of power and the new ways that color-blind racism occurs in America.

One issue of the book is the addition of Chapter Six, in which she presents the “Queenmakers,” Black feminists and womanists whom she asserts are remaking and restoring the “intersectional legacies of the civil right movement” (p. 157) of a King by centering the Queens” (p. 180). The notion that Black women are the remedy for the consequences of the historical distortions of the collective memories of the civil rights movement and of Dr. King, including the White rage and putative White victimhood, places a heavy burden on Black women. The chapter does not fit with the rest of the arguments of the book.

Yet, despite the misgivings regarding Chapter 6, this is a valuable book on race and ethnicity, social movements, and the power of rhetoric. It is written in a style that makes it accessible to laypersons and academics. It is a great book to assign in undergraduate and graduate classes in Race and Ethnic Relations, Whiteness Studies, Social Movements, Communications, and Rhetoric. You can feel Yazdiha’s heart for restoring the collective memory of Dr. King and of the civil rights movement. It is a book that should be read by everyone interested in understanding the divisiveness and contentiousness of contemporary American politics.

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