

Collective Memory and Whiteness in Organizations: How the Fraternal Order of Police Remembers Itself

Pamela A. Popielarz
Department of Sociology
University of Illinois Chicago

Collective memory operates within various sites and communities. The field of organizational memory studies explains the dynamics of collective memory within and across organizations (Coraiola et al. 2023). Among the outcomes of collective memory processes are conceptions of an organization's heritage, tradition, and collective identity. I put the organizational memory studies literature into conversation with the literature on racialized organizations to investigate how collective memory processes might contribute to the hegemonic whiteness of many American organizations (Fritz & Lewis 2026). Relevant social mechanisms include various forms of remembering, representing, and forgetting the organization's past, which may be embedded into its formal structure or its informal culture. Remembrances and representations of the past – and elisions in them – help cement a picture of the organization's objective racial/ethnic demography but also aid in constructing subjective images of the ideal member, of revered leaders, and of people, events, and actions from the past that deserve recognition in the present. These mechanisms can help an organization propagate normative whiteness from the past into the future, thereby legitimating the unequal distribution of resources across racial groups, constraining the agency of people of color, and perpetuating whiteness as a credential (Ray 2019). I investigate these ideas in the context of an ongoing historical project on fraternal orders, focusing here on the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), which was founded in 1915 (Popielarz 2025; 2026). I utilize two sources of information: the *FOP Journal*, accessed through their online archive covering 2011 to the present and including frequent articles by the History Committee, and a history of the FOP, published privately in 1977 and written by a historian linked to the organization. Findings highlight how the FOP congratulates itself for no longer being racially exclusionary, but that its practices of commemorating, preserving, and reminiscing telegraph a heritage of whiteness.

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