Community Power

The Paradox of Community Power: Cultural Processes and Elite Authority in Participatory Governance

Jeremy R. Levine, *University of Michigan*

From town halls to public forums, disadvantaged neighborhoods appear more "participatory" than ever. Yet increased *participation* has not necessarily resulted in increased *influence*. This article, drawing on a four-year ethnographic study of redevelopment politics in Boston, presents an explanation for the decoupling of participation from the promise of democratic decision-making. I find that poor urban residents gain the appearance of power and status by invoking and policing membership in "the community"—a boundary sometimes, though not always, implicitly defined by race. But this appearance of power is largely an illusion. In public meetings, government officials can reinforce their authority and disempower residents by exploiting the fact that the boundary demarcating "the community" lacks a standardized definition. When officials laud "the community" as an abstract ideal rather than a specific group of people, they reduce "the community process" to a bureaucratic procedure. Residents appear empowered, while officials retain ultimate decision-making authority. I use the tools of cultural sociology to make sense of these findings and conclude with implications for the study of participatory governance and urban inequality.

Introduction

From boisterous town hall meetings to public visioning sessions, disadvantaged neighborhoods appear more "participatory" than ever. Redevelopment projects, in particular, are open to extensive public engagement processes—be they "stakeholder task forces" or public meetings where residents debate government's plans for their neighborhoods. This form of participatory governance is a promise from government to entrust local communities with greater decision-making power. Recent research, however, presents an empirical puzzle: increased *participation* has

not necessarily resulted in increased *influence* (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015; McQuarrie 2013; Walker 2009).

Drawing on fieldwork over the course of four years in Boston, this study presents an explanation for the simultaneous rise in public participation and continued marginalization of the urban poor. I find that residents' membership in "the community" affords them legitimacy and recognition in redevelopment decision-making. Residents can also challenge government officials and other elites by categorizing them as outside "the community"—a boundary sometimes, though not always, implicitly defined by race. On the surface, participation can fulfill its promise of democratic empowerment.

But the appearance of decision-making power is largely an illusion. When resident participation conflicts with government officials' predetermined plans, officials can disempower residents through empty deference to "the community." By going through the motions of a "community engagement process" or publicly praising "the community" in the abstract, officials reduce "the community" to a bureaucratic procedure. In these instances, residents *appear* empowered as members of "the community," but in effect have little influence.

I use the tools of cultural sociology to make sense of these findings—specifically, drawing on theories of symbolic boundaries (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont and Molnar 2002), floating signifiers (Levi-Strauss 1950), and notions of the common good (Moody and Thévenot 2000). In redevelopment politics, "the community" represents more than a place or a group of people; it signifies the common good, a valued entity. In participatory governance, residents gain power, in part, from their membership in the valued space of "the community." However, the boundary demarcating "the community" lacks a standardized definition; residents and government officials both accept the positive value of "the community" but implicitly rely on different definitions when they interact. As such, when officials laud the *abstract moral significance* of "the community," they can circumvent participating community *members* without appearing to do so.

This study advances two areas of research. For scholars of participatory democracy, I present an explanation for the decoupling of local participation from the promise of democratic decision-making. Governments and scholars alike tout public participation as a source of local empowerment, but this study reveals the subtle, routine cultural processes that can undermine residents' power in participatory governance. I also add to the study of urban inequality by uncovering the paradoxical power of "community" talk. Membership in "the community" is one of the few privileges available to the urban poor—providing the semblance of power in participatory governance—but redevelopment officials' use of the concept can, ironically, undermine residents' influence and silence dissent.

Culture and Participation in Urban America

Participation has been at the heart of American political development since the colonial era, often romanticized in the form of the New England town meeting (Morone 1998; Schudson 1998). In the 1960s, social movements and government

reforms institutionalized participation in poor neighborhoods—a logic of governance that persists today (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015; McQuarrie 2013). In theory, local participation enables democracy and empowers citizens by incorporating their unique knowledge into public decision-making. Advocates of participatory democracy in urban settings expect neighborhood conditions to improve when the voices of local residents are taken into account (Fung 2006; Fung and Wright 2003; Guttman and Thompson 2004). Consequently, much of the research on participation focuses on the strategies and structures affecting the democratic outcomes of deliberation, such as robust civic networks (Baiocchi 2003), informal communication (Lee 2007), or institutional design (Fung 2006).

There are, however, tensions in participatory projects. Classic studies by Alford (1969) and Selznick (1949) identified the fraught relationship between participation and bureaucratic reforms, questioning the democratic potential of participation when coopted by bureaucratic agencies. Recent research offers even sharper critiques. An entire industry of participation experts has emerged, professionalizing participation in ways that can decouple deliberation from authentic grassroots mobilization (Lee 2015; Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015; McQuarrie 2013; Walker 2009). In fact, elite actors often use lay participation to counter social movements and protests. "Rather than serve as a challenge to elite and expert authority," McQuarrie (2013, 148) argues, "participation is now deployed as a tool of that authority."

The rise of participation is, additionally, a cultural realignment, elevating a particular set of practices, rituals, and scripts in neighborhood politics. Research on participatory democracy typically relegates cultural analysis to descriptions of *differences* between social groups (Fung 2006; Mansbridge 1980; Rao and Sanyal 2010; Young 2000). Young (2000, 6), for example, argues that participatory practices "implicitly value certain styles of expression" at the expense of marginalized groups with different values, norms, or styles. The "exclusionary implications" are that certain social groups' voices—the middle class, educated, and otherwise privileged with cultural or social capital—are valued above others in participatory processes (see also Pattillo [2007]).

This article departs from the existing literature on participatory democracy by viewing culture as shared scripts of intersubjective meaning-making. Cultural processes reproduce inequality in routine, ongoing interaction "through the mobilization of shared categories and classification systems" (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014, 574). I therefore shift the focus from cultural differences between social groups to an emphasis on *shared* classification systems that structure public interactions. In fact, it was a commonly held belief—that "the community" is a valued entity and membership affords certain privileges—that ironically reinforced inequality during the deliberations I observed. Below, I describe the simultaneously vague yet commonly invoked boundary surrounding "the community."

Theorizing "The Community"

Inspired by Tönnies, Durkheim, and others, sociologists have long been interested in the concept of community—so interested, in fact, that Hillery (1955)

famously identified 94 distinct definitions in sociological research. This is not a phenomenon limited to abstract academic debates; various understandings of the concept animate institutions and professions across the United States and beyond (Sampson 1999).

References to "the community" are also omnipresent in redevelopment discourse. So institutionalized is the word "community" that redevelopment is more commonly referred to as "community development" in US cities. The word can be found in organizational labels, such as nonprofits called community-based organizations (CBOs) or community development corporations (CDCs). It is included in official positions and titles, such as Community Relations Liaison, Director of Community Planning, and the more generic "community organizer." It is codified in government legislation, like the Community Investment Tax Credit Program in Massachusetts and Article 80 of Boston's Zoning Code, which stipulates "opportunities for community involvement in development review activities that affect the quality of life in the City."

"Community" can qualify actions and characterize groups of people, like when government officials conduct community outreach to spark participation from the community. Nonprofits and government agencies host structured events in the community they call community meetings, community charettes, or community forums. The entire sequence of events is generally referred to as "the community process."

The ubiquity of "community" in redevelopment discourse underscores its definitional ambiguity. "Community" can signify feelings of solidarity and cohesion (e.g., "sense of community"), a racial group (e.g., "the black community"), a specific group of people (e.g., people attending a meeting), a spatial territory (e.g., a neighborhood), or a particular people in a particular place (e.g., residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods). Individuals relied on these and other definitions during my fieldwork in Boston. As shown in table 1, residents, nonprofit leaders, and redevelopment officials mentioned "community" over 1,500 times in the 76 public meetings I attended, drawing on 15 different definitional categories.[1]

"The Community" as a Floating Signifier of the Common Good

Community has no single definition, but few would debate the favorable evaluative connotations of the concept. It is widely accepted as "a valued and valuable achievement or social state" and "plays a major legitimating role in our talk about institutions," driven not by its descriptive meaning but by its normative undertones and positive intimations (Plant 1978, 79–81). "The community" is something positive and valued, a goal to be achieved and a state to aspire to.

Empirical evidence indicates a link between references to "community" and moral notions of the common good in American politics. In a study of an anti-expressway movement in Kansas City, Gotham (1999, 346) argues that the concept contains "a powerful symbolic meaning … in motivating action and constructing a collective identity." Respondents in Madsen's (1991, 451) study of land-use debates in California considered community a "very special word" that describes individuals "brought together by some genuine … moral aspirations."

Table 1. Frequency and Distribution of Meanings of "Community" in the Data

		Number of instances	Number of meetings	Percent of meetings
Noun	A spatial territory	374	56	73.7
	A group of people	64	28	36.8
	A particular people in a place	372	56	73.7
	A racial group	23	15	19.7
	Social cohesion/solidarity	41	16	21
	The general public	123	41	53.9
	Organizational title	22	13	17.1
Adjective	People in place (e.g., "community outreach")	94	30	39.5
	The public (e.g., "community meetings")	136	35	46
	People (e.g., "community participation")	65	33	43.4
	A bureaucratic process (e.g., "community process")	95	37	48.7
	Place (e.g., "community stakeholder")	123	34	44.7
	Social solidarity (e.g., "community-based")	14	9	11.8
TOTAL		1,546		

Bennett et al. (2013, 523) find that leaders of civic groups in Rhode Island equate community with "an aspirational space" of "commonly held democratic ideals." For Williams (1995, 139), it is "almost axiomatic" that the concept represents a political symbol of the common good:

> In much discussion of contemporary society, both activists and analysts picture the good society as one that embodies "community." Indeed, this is appealing: it seems almost axiomatic that a society operating on developed ideas of the common good would embody "community."

Similar to the way Eliasoph (2011, x) describes "empowerment," "community" is "morally magnetic"; it is "simply and almost irresistibly good, for reasons that we assume don't need much further explanation."

The meaning of "the community" is therefore valued yet vague. In this sense, "the community" represents a floating signifier, a term Levi-Strauss (1950) uses to describe concepts overloaded with meanings and no single agreed-upon definition. They perform "a semantic function whose role it is to allow symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in [them]" (Levi-Strauss 1950, 63). Floating signifiers are symbols whose specific content is not fixed. Indeed, symbolic power comes from their lack of standardization. "Manna

from heaven," for example, has no concrete definition; any object can be referred to as "manna." Yet to reference "manna" is to draw on a widely acknowledged symbolic value beyond any concrete description. Similarly, the polyvalent definitions of "community" are consistent with respect to the normative belief that "community" represents the common good, that collectivity and communal benefits are superior to individual interests or elite domination. "The community" is *significant* without signifying a singular group or place, *meaningful* without a stable meaning.

"The Community" as a Symbolic Boundary and a Political Tool

Floating signifiers like "the community" are important not just for their semantic meaning (or meanings), but for what they *do* in political discussion. "Words are tools, often weapons," Rodgers (1998, 11) argues. "[T]he vocabulary of politics is contested terrain and always has been." Notions of the common good are especially endemic to political discourse, providing cultural legitimacy for political claims. Indeed, the ambiguity surrounding "the common good" invites political conflict (Berrey 2005; Moody and Thévenot 2000). Drawing on Gallie's (1956) description of "essentially contested concepts," scholars conceptualize "community" as a "contestable moral notion" (Madsen 1991, 450) and a "cultural weapon in political conflict" (Williams 1995, 139).

The concept is powerful in politics because membership in "the community" confers value and status. As such, we can think of "the community" as a symbolic boundary, a cultural process of categorization that reinforces the unequal distribution of resources (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Yet the varying definitions of "the community" mean that the boundary is more than a distinction in people's minds; it can shift depending on who is speaking, who is listening, and for what purpose the word is used.

The boundary's vagueness affects politics and participation in three ways. First, it can *obscure* political conflict. Framing political action as an inclusive commitment to "the community" helps citizens avoid more divisive framings like "being political" (Bennett et al. 2011) or pursuing racial justice (Lichterman 1996, 107). Eliasoph's (1998, 2011) research on American civic life offers additional evidence. In one study of political avoidance, local organizations and public officials "favored an image of 'community' that excluded disagreement" and instead emphasized "strifeless harmony and mutual aid." While this provided a "culturally powerful image of togetherness," it effectively depoliticized public discussion because conflict was seen as impolite (Eliasoph 1998, 244). Similarly, in a more recent study of civic organizations and youth programs, adult organizers left the word "empty and open" because they did not want to pass judgment or offend disadvantaged youth. But by reducing "community" to "a slippery word, a theoretical ideal, a perky abstraction" (Eliasoph 2011, 70–72), organizers were unable to discuss the specific conditions of the community or its problems.

Second, the ostensibly inclusive boundary of "the community" can ironically mask *exclusion*. For example, Lichterman (1996) shows how a predominantly African American environmental organization defined their "community" based

on racial identity and local geography. This introduced blind spots, however, as the group failed to acknowledge other African American residents who held conflicting views about environmental advocacy. Moreover, it impeded alliances with predominantly white environmental organizers who defined their "community" as the field of activists rather than a local neighborhood.

Finally, and most importantly, the vagueness of "the community" means that an indeterminate range of groups can uncontestably represent in-group interests—be they residents, people who show up to public meetings, or some unknown group existing only in the abstract. A meeting participant can refer to her block as "the community." Another can use the term to refer to a neighborhood of 10,000 residents. A nonprofit director who lives in another state but works in an urban neighborhood can claim to represent "the community." And a city official can call the 10 people who show up to a public meeting "the community." Because residents and government officials accept each signification, *complete* membership in "the community" is unachievable; alternative definitions are innumerable and indisputable. A man residing two miles from a potential redevelopment project is a community member if "the community" is an entire neighborhood, but he is not a community member if "the community" signifies a city block. Similarly, a woman residing next door to a potential redevelopment project is undeniably a member of "the community," but at the same time she is not a community member if "the community" refers strictly to participants of a meeting she did not attend. Because "the community" is an inherently vague classification, the ever-shifting boundary of membership can, paradoxically, delegitimize individuals who might otherwise qualify as in-group members under alternative definitions.

This theoretical background—conceptualizing "the community" as a floating signifier of the common good, acknowledging "community" membership as a symbolic boundary, and understanding "community" talk as a political tool in interaction—helps make sense of the empirical evidence that follows. Since "the community" is valued, the boundary of community membership is worth invoking for political gain. But because multiple definitions of "the community" are equally valid, this shared classification system can undermine community members, depending on the definition in use.

Field Site and Methods

This study draws from a larger research project documenting redevelopment politics along the Fairmount Corridor, a 9.2-mile rail corridor in Boston. The Fairmount Corridor owes its name and geography to a heavy rail line running through the neighborhood districts of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, and Hyde Park. In 2005, the state's transportation authority funded the construction of four new stations on the Fairmount Commuter Rail line.[2] When the new stations were announced, redevelopment officials and nonprofits took advantage of the opportunity to produce "transit-oriented development"—a common model of urban planning in disadvantaged neighborhoods that concentrates affordable housing, job opportunities, and public space improvements within walking

distance to public transit. The Corridor, therefore, is the area within walking distance of the rail stations.

The Corridor contains 88,698 residents—approximately 14 percent of Boston's total population and 39 percent of the city's African American population. Ninety-one percent of Corridor residents are nonwhite, with a tract-level income ranging from $29,000 to $67,000, according to the 2010 US Census.

Between January 2010 and May 2014, I observed redevelopment actors as they planned redevelopment projects in the Corridor. My fieldwork included observations of private negotiations as well as public assemblies where residents and other "stakeholders" (e.g., nonprofit directors, community organizers, business owners, etc.) debated redevelopment plans.

I observed 367 meetings: 268 private meetings and conference calls between redevelopment elites, 23 professional conferences and annual events, and 76 public "community meetings." These public meetings represent the rare moments when residents of the Fairmount Corridor engaged in face-to-face interaction with redevelopment officials, and are the primary evidence used in this study. Figure 1 displays a map of the Corridor and the locations of the public meetings I attended.

Figure 1. Boston neighborhoods, the Fairmount Corridor, and field sites
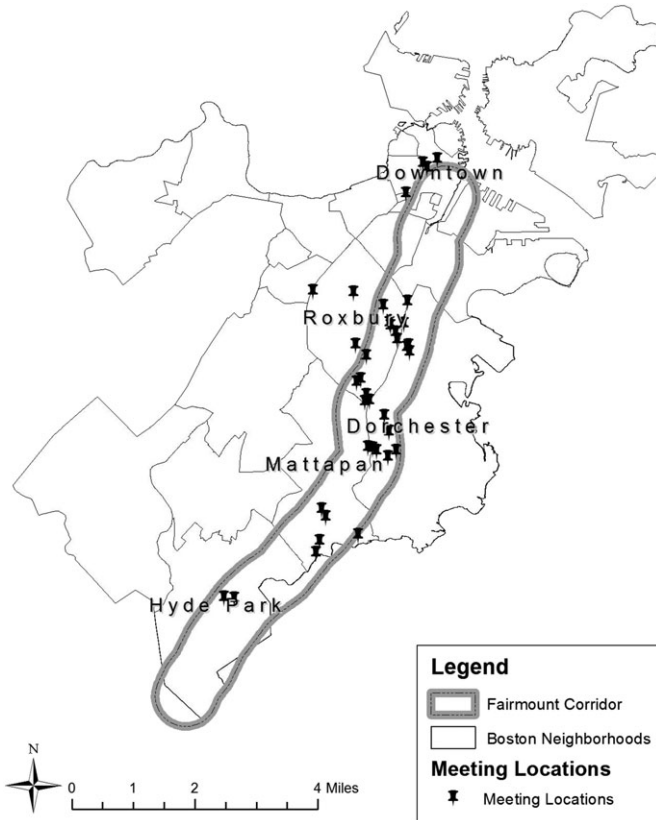
Table 2 describes the characteristics of the 76 public meetings. Meetings lasted between two and five hours. They occurred throughout the Fairmount Corridor, and spanned every issue area of urban redevelopment. "General planning" meetings covered many issues during single sessions, from zoning to housing density to parking regulations. The majority of meetings (54) focused on neighborhood-specific projects, like neighborhood rezoning, but a notable number (22) addressed the concurrent redevelopment of multiple neighborhoods in the Corridor, such as Corridor-wide transit improvements.

By design, I was able to practice "inconvenience sampling" (Duneier 2012). Since the meetings I attended were spread throughout the Corridor and addressed many types of redevelopment projects, I was able to avoid overemphasizing features of particular neighborhoods or projects. As I observed meetings, I deliberately searched for dynamics specific to meetings in Four Corners, for example, and

Table 2. Sample of Public Meetings

	Number of meetings	Percent of total
Neighborhood		
Roxbury	9	11.8
Codman Square[a]	8	10.5
Four Corners[a]	6	7.9
Upham's Corner[a]	25	32.9
Mattapan	18	23.7
Hyde Park	6	7.9
Downtown	4	5.3
Issue area		
Transportation	20	26.3
Housing	6	7.9
Open space	13	17.1
Public realm	4	5.3
General planning[b]	33	43.4
Geographical focus		
Neighborhood based	54	71
Multiple neighborhoods	22	28.9
Facilitator		
Nonprofit	13	17.1
City government	42	55.3
State government	19	25
Other	2	2.6

[a]Sub-neighborhood within larger Dorchester neighborhood district.
[b]General planning meetings covered housing, commercial, transportation, and open space development topics.

absent in Mattapan. Similarly, I looked for discursive performances that may have been specific to particular types of redevelopment, like affordable housing or transportation. I used this analytic strategy as I conducted fieldwork and after my research concluded, as I analyzed my field notes.

I digitally recorded audio, took pictures, and wrote detailed field notes at each meeting. I leveraged my fieldwork from redevelopment elites' private meetings to make sense of the actors interacting in the public settings. This was particularly useful when trying to discern which speakers were actual residents, community organizers, or simply interested parties from other parts of the city. I read and reread thousands of pages of field notes and listened and relistened to hundreds of hours of recordings to discover emergent themes. I systematically coded my field notes after identifying references to "the community" as a notable occurrence, moving dialectically between my field notes and existing theory to develop the arguments of this article.

The Community Meeting Setting

Before analyzing how actors invoked "the community" in public meetings, it is useful to first describe the meetings themselves. Residents of the Fairmount Corridor engage with redevelopment officials in semiformal, structured settings. Officials and local nonprofit leaders announce meetings by distributing flyers, often including the text "Community Meeting" in large font. Their central targets for outreach are immediate residents of a particular redevelopment project ("abutters") or other knowledgeable residents and nonprofit leaders ("stakeholders"). Meetings are held in the late evenings or on weekends. Rain or shine, meeting participants shuffle into church basements, public gymnasiums, or nonprofit conference rooms. Plastic chairs are assembled into rows, often divided with a center aisle. The room can be new, like the Mattapan Library's multipurpose room, with modern light fixtures dangling six feet from the ceiling. Or the room can be old, like the Great Hall in Codman Square, with creaking wood floors and the kind of dirt found in nooks and crannies that can never be completely cleaned. Figure 2 depicts one such meeting held in the Great Hall.

A small table will be placed somewhere near the front door of the meeting room. On that table will be a meeting agenda and a sign-in sheet with spaces for participants' names, affiliations, and contact information. The sign-in sheet gives the impression that officials systematically collect contact information and will notify participants of future meetings or decisions.

The meeting's moderator opens the meeting by introducing him- or herself, welcoming the people in attendance ("the community") and explaining the purpose of the meeting. He or she will ask any elected officials or members of the press to identify themselves, giving the meeting a sense of official importance.

After 15–30 minutes of formal presentation, moderators will "open it up" for feedback from meeting attendees. Since most meetings include fewer than 50 participants, these feedback periods follow a ritual similar to a classroom lecture: anyone present can raise their hand at any point, and when called on by a moderator, can raise any point they feel like raising. The practice conveys

Figure 2. Community meeting in Great Hall, Codman Square

Photo credit: Patrick D. Rosso

equality and openness; it gives the impression that no point is off-limits, and that no attendee receives unfair preference. For government-sponsored meetings, an official or consultant will record notes ("meeting minutes"). An official note-taker signals a transparent process, but more importantly, encodes the ceremony with a sense that participants' remarks are acknowledged and taken seriously.

After approximately two hours, the moderator closes the meeting by addressing "next steps": the schedule of the development project, the process for incorporating feedback, and a promise to notify attendees about future meetings. Officials note that "This is just the beginning of the process," even if there have already been many meetings on the same development project. The statement implies indefinite future opportunities to influence redevelopment plans, though in reality, officials place limits on the time available for meetings and comment periods.

However, meetings are not neutral, apolitical spaces where issues of redevelopment are discussed soberly on the merits of each individual project. In the remainder of this article, I illustrate how the floating signifier of "the community" and its shifting boundary paradoxically makes residents seem empowered while also undermining their dissent.

Giving the Appearance of Local Power

In participatory processes, residents and nonprofit leaders claim authority based on their representation of "the community." References to community credentials precede specific points or suggestions, providing individuals' comments with an added sense of value. For example, Shauntel Simmons,[3] a resident of Mattapan, invoked community membership during a discussion of redevelopment in November 2011. She was one of 17 people at a sparsely attended meeting, hosted by the state transportation authority, focused on housing uses for a state-owned, underutilized parking lot in Mattapan.

"Just a quick question," the soft-spoken African American woman in her early thirties commented, her hand in the air, arm bent slightly at the elbow. Instead of immediately asking her "quick question," however, she began her comment with a claim of group membership. "My name is Shauntel Simmons," she said, "and I'm a community member here." Shauntel's comments were straightforward: a question about the residential mix of units in the potential project, and a worry about "gentrification in the community." By couching her comments in the discourse of "the community," Shauntel elevated her concerns beyond the specifics of housing affordability. She didn't simply ask "a quick question"; she asked a quick question as "a community member here." A white state official in his late fifties looked her in the eyes as he responded. Shauntel nodded, satisfied with his acknowledgment. The official's body language suggested that he took her concerns seriously.

In disadvantaged neighborhoods, community representation can carry racial symbolism (see Gotham [1999] and Lichterman [1996]). Consider a meeting held in Four Corners on a balmy Wednesday night in March 2010. Officials from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) invited residents to a local meeting hall. Participants discussed employment opportunities for the construction of a new commuter rail station slated for their neighborhood. The contractors responsible for building the new station were on hand to "hear from the community," according to the stack of flyers located near the front door.

During the discussion period, a resident named Clarence Wise captivated the room. "My name is Clarence Wise, and I'm representing the community," the middle-aged African American man announced. He stood in front of his chair, wearing a black baseball hat, black sweatshirt, and paint-stained jeans. Heads turned to face him. Bodies shifted. Clarence spoke in a lyrical cadence, invoking community membership alongside symbols of racial progress. From my field notes:

> Clarence says he has little faith in the state transportation authority to hire minority and female workers for the new station, and a few members of the audience nod their heads. He says, "…we as the community must make sure that we hold everybody that's supposed to be held accountable, to make sure that these quotas are met." … He addresses the contractor directly, using his right index finger to point, demanding minority subcontractors. "We have an African American president—first time. We got a healthcare reform—first time. We got a commuter rail [station]—first time. I'll be *darned* if I'm gonna…sit here for the millionth time to see business ran as usual. Not today. Not now." Heads nod throughout the room…Clarence finishes his remarks sharply: "Because I'm not here to play games. I'm here to make sure folk work and make sure we do what we gotta do. That's it. Thank you." A loud applause erupts. Clarence sits down, his arms crossed.

For Clarence, his representation of "the community" was couched in decidedly racial symbolism, relating racial quotas for construction jobs in his neighborhood to the election of an African American president. The broader symbolism associated with

"the community"—what Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014) call "the community of identity"—bolstered his call for minority employment opportunities.

At the end of the meeting, an African American proprietor of a dirt-hauling company introduced herself to the contractor. Her firm would later receive a subcontract and join the construction team.

Individuals do not need to be residents in order to invoke community membership during discussions of neighborhood redevelopment. The racialized subtext of "the community" in disadvantaged neighborhoods allows nonprofit leaders or other minority non-residents to publicly claim community representation. One example is Marie LaGuerre, a Haitian American woman in her late twenties who lives in Roxbury but works five miles south at a social service agency in Mattapan. On a brisk November night in 2012, she attended a meeting to advocate for better transportation service in Mattapan. In her public remarks, she referenced Mattapan as "our community," while simultaneously acknowledging that she is not a resident:

> Hi, everyone, my name is Marie LaGuerre, and I work at [an organization] here in Mattapan as a lead organizer for the One Mattapan initiative. I want to thank everyone for their comments today, because as I was sitting here I just realized…the commitment that people have to our community…I actually live in Roxbury, near the Upham's Corner [transit] stop, and we see how the transformation has happened. I mean, it's—all of the business developments there, the development that has happened, new restaurants being put up…this needs to happen in our community. One Mattapan took a community assessment, and the main things that came up were the diversity in businesses in our community. There's not diversity in them here, and we have the capabilities, here, in our community, to do this.

Marie buttressed her central point—that having increased transit service would help spur development opportunities in Mattapan—with four claims of in-group membership ("*our* community"), even though she does not live in Mattapan. The state official moderating the meeting thanked her for her remarks. Another state official recorded her comments. Input from the meeting informed a report released by the governor in January 2013.

Residents can also use the boundary of "community" membership in attempts to delegitimize the positions of opponents—a practice of "policing" the boundaries of community in-group and out-group members. As conflicts arise, the discursive tactic of "policing" community representation is used instead of countering competing claims directly; to be classified as an out-group member is enough to have one's substantive comments invalidated for not representing the common good.

In 2010, for instance, residents of the Fairmount Corridor appeared to persuade the Department of Transportation to award a contract for a transit needs study to a consultant team with greater "community representation." The state Department of Transportation had received five bids for a contract to conduct a Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan Transit Needs Study. Before the Department of Transportation awarded the contract, officials required the two finalists—Arch

Professional Group and McMahon Associates—to present their study plans to local residents. A meeting was held in a public library in Roxbury. A question-and-answer session followed each group's presentation.

The consultant team assembled by Arch included mostly people of color who identified as residents of Roxbury, Dorchester, or Mattapan. An African American man led their presentation. One of the first questions from the audience was, in fact, a statement: "It's nice to see so many folks from the community on this team," a middle-aged African American man said. "I don't know how many planning processes I am a part of, and the consultants are never from our communities, and not familiar with our communities." One of the consultants took the opportunity to equate her own interests with the interests of the common good, noting, "With our being part of the community…I can continually stay in touch, as a member of the team. But also as a resident, I have a vested interest in this being successful because this means that *my* neighborhood can [benefit]."

McMahon's team, composed of five firms, presented next. Their group was predominantly white. They emphasized their technical expertise and past experience working in low-income neighborhoods. With a South Asian accent, one of the consultants emphasized the team's desire to "really meet the needs of you, the community: the businesses, the residents, the people who live and work here."

After the presentation, Michael, an African American independent laborer and Mattapan resident, questioned how policy recommendations would emerge from the study. In particular, he challenged the ability of the consultants to represent the community, distinguishing "the community" ("we") from the consultants ("they"):

> I hear you saying "we." I'm trying to understand clearly, who is "we"? Is that the [consultant] team? Does it involve community participation in that? And have you talked at all about the finances of "we," and who's getting paid, and how much, and how does the community fit into that structure? Because I see us constantly having this battle of "we" versus "they"—you're doing something supposedly for our benefit, but *we're* not included financially, in the planning…Can you talk a little bit about that, and how you set that in motion so that people who are part of these communities—people who live in those communities—actually participate in the planning, and get paid for doing it just like you're getting paid?

An elderly African American man asked a more direct follow-up question, attempting to clarify Michael's opening query: "How many people from the district represent your company? And your company? And your company?" He pointed to each consultant sitting at the front of the room.

John from McMahon Associates replied, "How many people *live* in the study area? I don't know that we have an answer for that."

"Is it zero? Is it zero?" Michael pressed, his deep voice booming across the room.

"I don't believe it's zero, no. But I don't know…What I do know is that the folks you see before you have been working in Roxbury, in Dorchester, in Mattapan, throughout the city of Boston, on transit projects—"

"C'mon, let's keep it real!" Michael shouted dismissively.

The elderly man kept pressing the consultants. "But how many live in the district?"

"In the study area? I don't know."

"Not one," Michael asserted, sitting back in his chair.

Charles, the lone African American consultant at the front of the room, said that he lives in Dorchester, a few blocks from the specific study area, but asked why the question was important in the first place.

Michael answered, scrunching his brow. "We're not included, man! That's the answer!" he said. "We're not included. I see five groups up here and they're all from outside making money—huge amounts of money—at our expense, and we're not included! What are you—it's a no-brainer! You brought five groups up there. How many of them include people from our neighborhoods? …How many of them? One? *Your* group [pointing at Charles]? That's one person? C'mon!"

The moderator, a state official, broke up the conversation. "Michael, if I may, it sounds like they don't have an answer."

"Exactly! There's no answer. It's obvious we're being taken advantage of, and we have continuously for years," Michael replied.

"We have a limited amount of time, Michael."

"I got you. It's very limited when we start asking hard questions."

Brianna, a Hyde Park resident, raised her hand and expressed support for Michael. She implored the consultant group to answer "the question of where you are from, because it's very important to the community." In her comments, she reinforced a symbolic boundary between "the community" and the consultant team, punctuated by an expression of community membership:

> You can't *learn* the culture of a person, of a group of people, of a community—so you need to have the input from people who really understand the culture…I would have thought that everybody would have championed, and stood up and said, "I take [public transportation]," or…"I live somewhere nearby," or "I've lived in this community for this amount of time," or whatever. But, to shut that down, like, "We don't want to answer that question"—I just think that was very unfortunate, because it was very important to the folk in the room who are asking that question. And I would like to see there be a relevant answer, in that *the community*, and our wishes, are respected. I'm a lifelong Boston resident. Born and raised here, in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.

The interrogation lasted until a security guard politely asked everyone to leave so that he could close the building for the night.

McMahon Associates did not win the contract. Arch Professional Group completed the study in September 2012.

Three aspects of the preceding example are illuminating. First, individuals invoked very different definitions of "the community," yet interacted and engaged in dialogue without confusion. Sometimes "the community" referenced a group of *people*—the people attending the meeting (when Brianna referenced "the folk in the room"), or the people living in the neighborhoods—yet it also

signified a *place*—the neighborhoods selected for the transit needs study (when Michael referenced "people who live in those communities"). As the consultant groups responded to questions from residents, many definitions were simultaneously in play, yet no statements were misunderstood.

Second, residents challenged each firm's membership in, and representation of, "the community"—a boundary explicitly defined by residence, but also implicitly defined by race. They forcefully challenged the legitimacy of McMahon Associates based on their lack of (subjectively) sufficient community representation. As such, "community" boundary work can appear to be an important cultural resource for poor urban residents. The residents never attacked the consultants' plans directly, but only questioned each group's degree of community representation—indeed, their representation of the common good. Residents used the malleable "community" definitions to classify McMahon Associates as outside the boundary of "the community," and as a result, the consultant team appeared illegitimate.

Finally, it is important to recognize the stakes at hand. Like the state official acknowledging Shauntel, or the governor's report including comments from Marie, awarding the state contract to Arch Professional Group did not go against officials' stated interests. Nor did it involve a substantive claim or request for resources. Money for consultants had already been allocated, and officials did not express a preference for one consultant team over another. Michael's query about paying residents, however, was ignored. In fact, a state official steered the conversation away from the politics of redevelopment consulting, and limited the interaction to clarifying questions about matter-of-fact answers (cf. Eliasoph [1998], 165–209). The meeting was a politically charged debate, to be sure, but centered on the decidedly low stakes of which consultant firm would be chosen, rather than what would be studied or how resources would be allocated.

A "Community Process" Without Community Influence

Ironically, non-resident redevelopment elites can retain ultimate decision-making power by *also* relying on appeals to "the community" during these public meetings. Drawing on the vague yet valued definition of "the community," officials host a series of meetings, label it a "community process," and claim due diligence for satisfying any concerns of "the community." Because "the community" has no single definition, government officials can avoid empowering actual community *members* by merely lauding the *value* of "the community."

Officials' appeals to "the community" are so common that calling it a "pattern" would be a misnomer; I observed 218 instances during my fieldwork. There are often handpicked steering committees or boards for "community oversight." Objections to government plans for redevelopment are met with assurances that "the community" will be properly consulted—and, once vetted, "the community" will benefit. Of course, officials never explicitly articulate who, precisely, is included in references to "the community." All of these structures and associated rhetoric represent nods to the value of "the community"—accepting

the cultural value of "the community" and responding, in kind, with signals of deference to the common good.

Yet officials' gestures to "the community" can mask disregard for the interests of residents—a use of the concept I observed 63 times during my fieldwork. Consider, for example, a "community visioning forum" held in February 2013 in Upham's Corner. Residents and stakeholders were asked to describe the sort of redevelopment they'd like to see in the neighborhood. The room was hardly representative of neighborhood demographics: only 33.2 percent of the 70 participants lived in the neighborhood, 40 percent reported incomes greater than $100,000 (compared to a median family income in the neighborhood of $34,659), and over 40 percent identified as "white" (compared to only 10.5 percent of the neighborhood). After a formal presentation, officials from the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) split participants into small groups. City planners and employees served as moderators and note-takers for the small-group discussions. Officials explained that the note-takers would aggregate comments from the groups in order to channel residents' interests into development plans.

In one group, Nancy, an employee of the BRA, served as official note-taker. She diligently recorded comments ranging from complaints about local transit service to recommendations for business district improvements. The tone of the conversation shifted, however, when a specific housing development came under discussion. Marla, a local resident, was upset about City Hall's failure to adequately represent local interests in the development plans. "The community already came up with a plan," she claimed. These plans included a community center, subsidized housing, and a shared parking garage. "[City Hall] has completely ignored what we as a community want," she forcefully declared.

Nancy did not record Marla's comments.

Marla continued. She identified a local nonprofit developer—"a stakeholder in the community"—that had not been mentioned by redevelopment officials in their presentation. This nonprofit has been in conversation with the owner of the infamous Leon building, an abandoned 60,000-square-foot storage facility. It's important for the local nonprofit to be included and considered in redevelopment discussions, she demanded.

Nancy simply wrote down: "Identify vacant parcels/abandoned buildings."

The resident, of course, did not realize Nancy had misrepresented her comments. In fact, the misleading notes served as the basis for a summary of development recommendations. The BRA hosted a public meeting the following month to present the plans. Speaking in front of a dozen residents, a consultant hired by the BRA introduced the results as "information coming from the community and the forum." However, the recommendations—calls to "integrate training and job incubator clusters" and "concentrate clustered uses and convert to housing," for example—were far more technical than the actual recommendations residents raised during the forum. The official made no mention of Marla's concerns about the housing development or her request to include a local organization in future planning. The few residents in attendance sat in silence as the consultant detailed complex plans full of urban planning jargon.

At the forum, Nancy's overtures—being the note-taker at a public "community vision" meeting—implied a level of transparency and respect for meeting participants. But the *content* of her note-taking revealed a deceptive disregard for residents' recommendations. Although Nancy selectively omitted certain resident concerns, that didn't stop officials from calling the process "community driven." More generally, the unrepresentative demographics of meeting participants went unchallenged when subsumed under the banner of "the community process."

Deference to "the community" can silence residents from disadvantaged neighborhoods in more explicit ways, as well. For example, in 2013 the BRA held a meeting in Upham's Corner to solicit input about bike lanes, traffic congestion, and other transportation issues. A transportation consultant contracted by the BRA presented plans to consolidate two bus stops on a street in the neighborhood. The state transportation authority had already committed to the consolidation; the consultant was just explaining the change as background context for her additional recommendations.

Residents at the meeting were both unaware and upset with the bus stop consolidation. Cedric, an African American resident in his forties, argued that the bus stops were important for "this community." The consultant responded that a "robust public participation process" had already occurred, and during that process, "people were invited to submit comments." A young African American woman asked if it was too late to comment on the decision. The consultant paused as the room fell silent, then admitted that "it has pretty much been closed out." There were public meetings, she claimed, "and this was ultimately the decision that was made with the consensus of the community working with the City of Boston, and working with the [state transportation authority]."

Residents at the meeting raised concerns about the alleged "robust public participation process." One claimed, "[W]ith all this community input, I was never invited. I didn't even know it was going on." Cedric agreed, concerned that "the citizens that's being affected by this are not being made abreast of this until after the fact." He added, "That plan there, I see all the complications that's going to come with it. For the community. That's going to affect the community. You know, as residents."

Their objections were fruitless. An official from the BRA shrugged his shoulders and claimed that the consultants were simply relaying the information. The transportation authority, he said, "[already] went through a public process." As the consultant had articulated, the decision was made "with the consensus of the community." No further discussion was allowed.

Resident resistance was similarly shut down when parking came under discussion. The transportation consultant presented the benefits and disadvantages of resident-only on-street parking. "It's a trade-off," she casually observed. Cedric grew irritated. He shouted, "I don't believe—see, you're saying it's a 'trade-off.' I don't believe it's a 'trade-off' when you're coming into someone's community and you're telling me I have to…take it or leave it." He argued that, "*as a resident*," the consultant's trade-offs were unacceptable.

Cedric's attempt to elevate the value of his argument—clarifying that he was a resident, objecting to the consultant "coming into someone's community"—

was met with deference to "the community." A BRA official placated Cedric by claiming that these parking stipulations were not the ideas of the consultants; they emerged from "the community." Indeed, the official argued with another shrug, "The context that got this all started here, came out of the community vision…We're not just throwing this out, pie in the sky. This started percolating at these community visions a lot of people had." He added dismissively, "If any of this is implemented, it's got a lot of community process to happen." Cedric slumped in his chair and did not respond.

In the bus stops and parking examples, non-resident elites responded to resident dissent with deference to "the community." In the case of the bus stop consolidation, a "community consensus" had already been reached. And in the parking case, the official assured, "[I]t's got a lot of community process to happen." For these officials, references to "the community" signified an abstract general public that attends, or will attend, community meetings. Dissenting residents were disempowered since they did not attend the previous "community process," and by default, have not yet attended any future "community process." A "community process" is a nod to the *value* of "the community," yet limits community participation to predefined times when one's past absence places them outside "the community." A "community process" also implies an unspecified future. Assurances of a future "community process"—whether or not there are actual plans for participation—can silence residents when they express dissent.

These cultural processes can play a direct role in resource allocation, as well. Consider the Fairmount Corridor Planning Process. Throughout 2012 and 2013, the BRA convened a 26-person working group of nonprofit leaders, development professionals, and (some) residents to plan community development projects in the Fairmount Corridor. The working group's monthly meetings were ostensibly "community meetings," open to the public. In January 2013, BRA officials informed the group that resources were available for neighborhood-specific planning for housing, economic development, and public realm improvements in two of the eight Fairmount Line station areas. The advisory group—with input from "the community"—would make the selection at their March meeting.

Nearly 70 people attended the meeting, held in the basement of a community center in Hyde Park. A redevelopment official, Richard, opened the meeting by noting, "This is an advisory group meeting; however, we make this open to the public. We want people to see what's going on…We want the community to be part of this process." He added, "Obviously we have an advisory group, but the community also has a role in this, developing and agreeing with what we're going to go forward with."

Richard stood in front of the room, facing a three-sided table where the advisory group members sat. The rest of the meeting's attendees sat behind the advisory group in four rows divided by a center aisle, with additional seating around the room's perimeter. Richard began with a slideshow presentation. He hedged as he proposed the agency's quantifiable selection criteria for resource allocation: "It's not scientific"; "This was just to start the conversation"; "If we were to put numbers to rank these station areas, this is how it *might* fall"; "This is give or take; these numbers aren't perfect. You can go either way, but this is an *estimate*."

Richard then announced the BRA's proposed selection: one station area in Mattapan, and the other in Four Corners. "Our hope is that we're going to get some kind of consensus tonight," Richard told the group.

The meeting agenda then called for the advisory group and members of the public to discuss the merits of each "community"—that is, each station area. A resident presented facts about each neighborhood and listed ongoing initiatives, making a case for the additional resources.

After the presentations, the advisory group then voted for two areas to receive the planning resources: 15 votes went for the station area in Codman Square, 10 for Four Corners, three for Mattapan, and two for Hyde Park.

A member of the advisory group noted that a decision had been made; the votes revealed that the residents from Codman Square and Four Corners had made the most compelling case for resources. But murmurs spread throughout the room. One advisory group member, Carla, director of a social service agency in Mattapan and resident of Hyde Park, noticed that the Codman Square and Four Corners stations are directly adjacent to each other. Though distinct neighborhoods in the eyes of locals, Codman Square and Four Corners are nevertheless within the same larger neighborhood district of Dorchester. "That is way too close for other communities that are being left out," Carla complained. "So now we got everything concentrated in just Dorchester, so what happens to Mattapan and what happens to Hyde Park? One community is benefiting from all of this, and that's just not right." A dozen residents from Hyde Park in attendance applauded in agreement.

The scope of the debate had shifted: initially, each station area was a distinct "community." But now, multiple station areas within the same large neighborhood districts—the stations in Codman Square and Four Corners—were part of a *single* "community." For the next hour, the advisory group debated the question of geographic distribution. Finally, one Hyde Park resident raised her hand and pressed, "Why don't you just do one [planning process] from each community [station area]?" A few advisory group members nodded their heads, and the group agreed to a compromise that involved splitting the planning resources across all of the station areas.

The BRA moderators pushed back. One of the officials, Maria, justified the BRA's recommendation to allocate the resources to Mattapan and Four Corners, and *not* Codman Square (part of the advisory group's original recommendation) or all of the station areas (the compromise):

> In talking to people in the community, and what I'm hearing tonight, is Four Corners definitely has good momentum, and [Mattapan]…[the BRA thought] it would be a great way to sort of bring the community together around an issue…Bringing resources to the community through this process and sort of galvanizing folks around the Fairmount Line—that was a thought that we very much talked about with folks in the community.

No one questioned which "folks in the community" Maria spoke with, or which community she hoped to "bring together."

As the meeting wound down, Russell Holmes, a local state representative, made one final plea to spread the planning resources throughout the Corridor: "I'm pushing back to you [the BRA] to say, you've heard from the community. We've heard them say, 'One from each community.'…And so, please do that." The BRA officials agreed to consider "the community's" proposal, and called the three-hour meeting to a close.

In an e-mail to the advisory group on April 3, Richard used passive voice as he noted that "the decision was made to move forward" with planning processes in Mattapan and Four Corners—the BRA's original selection.

At the March meeting, "the community" referred to the general public, the specific people in attendance at the meeting, each geographic station area, each multi-station neighborhood district, and finally, an abstract public that a BRA official claimed to speak with. The meeting opened and closed with deference to "the community"—which only *partly* meant the people sitting in the room participating. Political jockeying also revealed the geographically fluid definitions of "community." When Carla defined "community" as a large neighborhood district—rather than the sub-neighborhoods surrounding each station area—she undercut the advisory group's vote in favor of her own interest in seeing the resources allocated to Mattapan or Hyde Park.

What is most important about this example, however, is that residents of Codman Square and Hyde Park were denied resources—despite their active participation during the meeting and vocal support from an elected representative. When Maria stated that she spoke "with folks in the community," she was referring to unverifiable opinions from an abstract general public. Invoking the common good allowed Maria to ignore the wishes of participating community members while still appearing to empower "the community"—an undeniably valued entity worthy of resources. Though the advisory group initially voted for Codman Square and Four Corners, and the "community process" yielded strong support for equity across the Corridor, neither of those considerations won out. Instead, the process of the meeting became the end in and of itself, and the BRA officials reinforced their authority under the façade of democratic decision-making.

Discussion and Conclusions

When poor urban residents, urban planners, and government officials reference "the community" during discussions of redevelopment planning, they draw on the classification's favorable evaluative connotations. "The community" represents a symbolically meaningful entity without a standardized definition. On the surface, residents appear empowered as members of "the community." Yet non-resident officials can incorporate the same term into their rituals of participatory governance and circumvent or silence urban residents. This poses a paradox of "community" power: the power of "community" *as a concept* can ironically undermine the power of community *members*.

This study advances the literature on participatory democracy by using the tools of cultural sociology to explain the decoupling of participation from influence. The existing literature tends to view culture as repertoires of habits, skills,

and styles that *differentiate* social groups. In this perspective, poor urban residents lack influence in participatory governance because they lack middle-class cultural capital. I departed from this research by conceptualizing culture as a *shared* process of intersubjective meaning-making (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014; Lichterman 1996; Silber 2003). The symbolic boundary of "the community" is a shared classification, understood and invoked by both dominant and non-dominant social groups.

Indeed, there is no dispute that "the community" is a valued symbol of the common good, and that membership affords certain privileges and powers. Considerably less clear is what, precisely, "the community" signifies. I theorized "the community" as a floating signifier of the common good—a simultaneously vague yet undeniably valued entity. It is this vagueness that makes the symbolic boundary surrounding "the community" a transformable political tool. When a resident claims membership in "the community," she can mean residents of her street block. Yet a government official can use the same term to signify an abstract ideal—a "community process," for example, in which "the community" does not signify any particular group.

The concept, in short, means different things when spoken by different people—and all are accepted definitions. With respect to participatory democracy, this makes it difficult to ensure that government officials are actually empowering residents through participation. Consider an alternative scenario. If "the community" had a more precise definition, like "the 20 closest residents to a particular redevelopment project," then community empowerment is much clearer: "the community" is empowered if the 20 residents are able to influence the plans through their participation. But if "the community" is a vague ideal, then officials cannot be held accountable to a specific group or population. Officials can publicly praise "the community," go through the motions of a "community process," and then claim due diligence for satisfying residents' needs. "The community" is effectively reduced to a bureaucratic procedure, and as a result, the act of participation is decoupled from the promise of decision-making power.

Future studies can investigate the language of "community" in alternative contexts, exploring potential variation by neighborhood, city, or time period. Moreover, the study of participatory democracy and urban inequality may benefit from paying closer attention to floating signifiers of the common good. Concepts like "democracy" (Gallie 1956), "partnership" (Pacewicz 2015), "empowerment" (Eliasoph 2011), "grassroots" (Eliasoph 2014), and even "participation" evoke favorable notions of the common good without relying on static definitions. They can also disempower citizens; to be a member of the "grassroots" depends on who defines "grassroots," and how they define the concept. Like "the community," these additional concepts may act as taken-for-granted cultural cues in participatory governance. If and how they systematically exclude certain social groups or silence dialogue are open empirical questions. That is a task for future research, where a deeper understanding of cultural processes can build on this study's findings and enrich our understanding of inequality and projects of urban democracy.

Notes

1. Each count represents an instance in which I recorded someone using the word "community" in my field notes. The purpose is to illustrate the prevalence of "community" talk beyond what can be analyzed using ethnographic data. However, "community" talk is best understood as interactions unfolding over time, rather than independent cases of speech acts.
2. Three stations have been completed as of this article's writing. The fourth station remains in design.
3. All names are pseudonyms except for elected officials who identified themselves in public meetings.

About the Author

Jeremy R. Levine is an Assistant Professor of Organizational Studies at the University of Michigan. He is interested in politics, organizations, and inequality in cities. His work has appeared in *American Sociological Review, Sociological Forum,* and *City & Community,* among other outlets.

References

Alford, Robert R. 1969. "Bureaucracy and Participation in Four Wisconsin Cities." *Urban Affairs Review* 5: 5–30.

Baiocchi, Gianpaolo. 2003. "Emergent Public Spheres: Talking Politics in Participatory Governance." *American Sociological Review* 68(1):52–74.

Berrey, Ellen C. 2005. "Divided over Diversity: Political Discourse in a Chicago Neighborhood." *City & Community* 4(2):143–70.

Bennett, Elizabeth, Alissa Cordner, Peter Klein, Stephanie Savell, and Gianpaolo Baiocchi. 2013. "Disavowing Politics: Civic Engagement in an Era of Political Skepticism." *American Journal of Sociology* 119(2):518–48.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Duneier, Mitchell. 2012. "How Not to Lie with Ethnography." *Sociological Methodology* 41(1):1–11.

Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

———. 2011. *Making Volunteers: Civic Life After Welfare's End.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 2014. "Measuring the Grassroots: Puzzles of Cultivating the Grassroots from the Top Down." *Sociological Quarterly* 55:467–92.

Fung, Archon. 2006. *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fung, Archon, and Erik Olin Wright. 2003. *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance.* London: Verso.

Gallie, Walter B. 1956. "Essentially Contested Concepts." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56: 167–98.

Gotham, Kevin Fox. 1999. "Political Opportunity, Community Identity, and the Emergence of a Local Anti-Expressway Movement." *Social Problems* 46(3):332–54.

Guttman, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. 2004. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hillery, George A. Jr. 1955. "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement." *Rural Sociology* 20:111–23.

Lamont, Michelle, Stefan Beljean, and Matthew Clair. 2014. "What Is Missing? Cultural Processes and Causal Pathways to Inequality." *Socio-Economic Review* 12(3):573–608.

Lamont, Michelle, and Virag Molnar. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:167–95.

Lee, Caroline. 2007. "Is there a Place for Private Conversations in Public Dialogues? Comparing Stakeholder Assessments of Informal Communication in Collaborative Regional Planning." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(1):41–96.

———. 2015. *Do-It Yourself Democracy: The Rise of the Public Engagement Industry.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Lee, Caroline, Michael McQuarrie, and Edward Walker. 2015. *Democratizing Inequalities Pitfalls and Unrealized Promises of the New Public Participation.* New York: NYU Press.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1950. "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss." In *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, by Marcel Mauss, ix-lii. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Lichterman, Paul. 1996. *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lichterman, Paul, and Nina Eliasoph. 2014. "Civic Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 120(3): 798–863.

Madsen, Richard. 1991. "Contentless Consensus: The Political Discourse of a Segmented Society." In *America at Century's End*, edited by Alan Wolfe, 441–61. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1980. *Beyond Adversary Democracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McQuarrie, Michael. 2013. "No Contest: Participatory Technologies and the Transformation of Urban Authority." *Public Culture* 25(1):143–75.

Moody, Michael, and Laurent Thévenot. 2000. "Comparing Models of Strategy, Interests, and the Public Good in French and American Environmental Disputes." In *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States*, edited by Michele Lamont and Laurent Thévenot, pp. 273–306. London: Cambridge University Press.

Morone, James A. 1998. *The Democratic Wish: Popular Participation and the Limits of American Government.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Pacewicz, Josh. 2015. "Playing the Neoliberal Game: Why Community Leaders Left Party Politics to Partisan Activists." *American Journal of Sociology* 121(3):826–81.

Pattillo, Mary. 2007. *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Plant, Raymond. 1978. "Community: Concept, Conception, and Ideology." *Politics & Society* 8:79–107.

Rao, Vijayendra, and Paromita Sanyal. 2010. "Dignity Through Discourse." *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.* 629(1):146–72.

Rodgers, Daniel T. 1998. *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sampson, Robert J. 1999. "What 'Community' Supplies." In *Urban Problems and Community Development*, edited by Ronald F. Ferguson and William T. Dickens, pp. 241–92. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Schudson, Michael. 1998. *The Good Citizen.* New York: Martin Kessler.

Selznick, Philip. 1949. *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Silber, Ilana F. 2003. "Pragmatic Sociology as Cultural Sociology: Beyond Repertoire Theory?" *European Journal of Social Theory* 6(4):427–49.

Walker, Edward T. 2009. "Privatizing Participation: Civic Change and the Organizational Dynamics of Grassroots Lobbying Firms." *American Sociological Review* 74(1):83–105.

Williams, Rhys H. 1995. "Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources." *Social Problems* 42(1):124–44.

Young, Iris Marion. 2000. *Inclusion and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.