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Witness the Spectacle, if You Can: An investigative analysis of the accessibility of democracy in Syracuse local government

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Witness the Spectacle, if You Can:

An investigative analysis of the accessibility of democracy in Syracuse local government

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Sociology

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Abstract

This qualitative study seeks to explore, analyze, and challenge the structure and participants in Syracuse local government. In 2015, a study done by Rutgers University professor, Paul Jargowsky, named Syracuse as the city with the poorest Black and Latino populations in the United States (Jargowsky 2015). This study has culminated into an in-depth examination of Syracuse local government and the accessibility of its representative democracy. This study utilizes qualitative methods: participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore how groups of citizens engage with the local government through attending public meetings. Three primary themes include: the emergence of a political in-group, the lack of accessibility, and the creation of a political spectacle. All three weaken democracy through discouraging and keeping certain social groups and populations from actively engaging in Syracuse local government.

Executive Summary

The project came about in response to a study released by Paul Jargowsky in 2015 about Syracuse as well as a course I took in the honors program. In 2015, Syracuse was named the city with the poorest Black and Latino populations out of the top 100 metropolitan cities in the United States (Jargowsky 2015). When this study came out, I was taking a course called "From Hill to Hood" in the Renee Crown Honors Program which brought Syracuse University students off campus and into the outer neighborhoods in the city. Witnessing the poverty that I had only heard about drastically changed my perception and shook me; how could this be going on so close to where I attend school? As a political science and sociology major, I wanted to investigate the issue within the lens of what I study here at Syracuse University. While I was taking a sociological qualitative methods course, I decided to begin my research by looking at racial representation in Syracuse local government. I wanted to see how racial minority populations were represented politically in the city. However, through preliminary participant observations, I found that a very small number of people were attending these local government meetings. The findings from this project pushed this research in a different direction, towards civic engagement.

At the beginning, I began investigating literature around community and local government relationships. Considering the lack of engagement on part of the citizens that I saw in my preliminary study, I wanted to see if these patterns were seen in other cities and other studies. Not too many studies focused specifically on this type of engagement in regards to numbers, but rather focused on the correlation between strong local democracy and the effectiveness of local government. I met with Professor Ackerman, who teaches political sociology, and he advised me to investigate participatory democracy literature and apply this to the frame work of this

research. From that point, I also began reading about Bourdieu's theories on cultural, social, political and symbolic capital which are woven into the analysis of my findings in this research.

Through an in-depth examination of literature based around participatory democracy, community engagement, local government relationships, and connections to civic engagement and social and cultural capital, I began this research investigating civic engagement with Syracuse local government. This is a qualitative study paired with a content analysis. I did nine participant observations at these Syracuse local government meetings: the Onondaga County Legislative Committee, the Citizen Review Board, the Common Council (on two separate occasions), the Common Council Study Session, an Area TNT 3 Southside community meeting, the Landmark Preservation Board, the Joint School Construction Board, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Zoning Appeals. In addition to this, I conducted four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Syracuse local government officials and one community member. These individuals were identified and recruited based off the participant observations I made at the local government meetings. The length of these interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour. The content analysis portion of this paper was on the information and materials available on the Syracuse city website regarding these local government meetings.

This research not only provides significant contributions to our understanding of Syracuse local government but also could be used to further understand Syracuse. These findings might be applicable to other cities and could contribute to improving local governments across the country. Accessing these political spaces can be difficult for they are often hidden. This research also evaluates accessibility to local government and examines the type of people who partake in civic engagement. Syracuse is a city that not only is facing financial issues, but also intense racial disparity as indicated by the Jargowsky study. With the work I have done, this

research significantly provides insight into some of the more hidden aspects to Syracuse local government and sheds light on what the Syracuse local government sphere looks like, who is participating, why, and just how accessible these spaces are. This is an era in time where people feel as though the government does not care about them or what they think. It is important now more than ever for governments, particularly local governments, to connect with communities and try to serve the needs of their constituents. From this point, this research could prove to be useful to the city of Syracuse and lay the groundwork for modifying policies, increasing accessibility or enacting more community outreach to enrich local democracy and ultimately make local government more effective and viable for all Syracuse residents.

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Acknowledgements

I would not have been inspired to explore this topic if it was not for Professor Mark Muhammad and his course "From Hill to Hood". The course brought other students and I out of the Syracuse bubble and into the outer community, particularly the Southside of the city. Interacting with the community there and seeing firsthand the immense poverty encouraged me to explore the issue. I want to thank Professor Flad for her support and guidance in this project. I began this research in her qualitative methods class and she continued to work with me and helping with data coding and structuring this paper. I also want to thank Professor Ackerman for his expertise advice with my literature review and theoretical aspects of this paper. Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow sociology undergrads for sharing their thoughts on my project, and providing emotional support during the journey.

Chapter 1: "We have a couple of regulars"

Introduction

A study released in 2015 by Rutgers University professor Paul Jargowsky, "Architecture of Segregation; Civil unrest, the concentration of poverty, and public policy" contended that Syracuse "now has the highest level of poverty concentration among blacks and Hispanics of the one hundred largest metropolitan areas" (Jargowsky 2015). Neighboring Buffalo as well as Rochester both made the top ten of this list as well. These findings are undoubtedly significant. Since the release of this study, even the Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, has come to Syracuse to address the issue of concentrated poverty in minority communities. During my junior year, I took a course at Syracuse that focused on bringing SU students from the "Hill" into the "Hood" and because of this class, I witnessed the poverty that I had only heard and read about. Both this class, as well as the findings of the Rutgers study, were factors that inspired this research.

The initial intent of this research, was to explore the relationship between Syracuse local government and the community, particularly communities of color. Considering that the Black and Latino community in Syracuse is the poorest out of the top 100 metropolitan areas in the country, how are they represented by their local government? What sort of agency do they have in it? I started exploring this in a qualitative methods course that I took in 2015; I did participant observation in public, local government meetings. From my observations, I discovered an apparent disconnect between the local government, and the community. My initial observations showed that a very small number of people attended these local government meetings. For the

purposes of my research, local government meetings refers to public meetings that are coordinated by the city of Syracuse, featured on the city website and are run by local government officials. I also conducted interviews with two political officials who run these meetings in which they both noted the lack of engagement on the part of the citizens. They both noted that "Not a lot of people come to the [local government] meetings" and that "We have a couple of regulars." If there is a clear disconnect between the overall community and local government, what is the relationship between communities of color and local government? Since this initial exploratory research, the focal point of this research transitioned from a specific focus on the relationship between communities of color and local government to an analysis of citizen political engagement in local government and participatory democracy.

Syracuse's Local Government and Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy encourages broad participation of constituents and advocates for active and inclusive forms of citizen participation, more than just representative democracy. Syracuse's legislative system resembles a representative democracy. The legislative body is called the Common Council and consists of a president and nine members. The president and four of the members are elected "at-large" or city-wide and their term lasts for four years; the additional five members of the council are district councilors and they serve two year terms. There are many other councils and boards in the city that hold public local government meetings; however, those individuals are appointed rather than elected. Who appoints these individuals and how they are appointed will be elaborated on in chapter 3. I chose to investigate Syracuse local government with participatory democracy in mind because of the findings from my preliminary research. As I will address in my literature review, previous research on participatory democracy indicates that the utilization of participatory processes in decision making can encourage more

civic engagement. Considering the small turn-out for local government meetings observed in preliminary findings, moving towards a more participatory model for Syracuse local government could encourage more civic engagement and therefore strengthen democracy.

Based off the initial observations from previous research, a very small number of people came to the public meetings. This study intends to explore why. Notably in "Power and Empowerment: A radical theory of participatory democracy" Bachrach and Botwinick argue that "the best antidote to the shortcomings of participation is still more participation" (Bachrach 1992). The transformation from a representative to a participatory democracy could enhance or encourage more participation. As an activist and community organizer, I am consistently working to get individuals politically involved especially on local and state government levels. I work in a variety of capacities to create spaces for all people to politically participate; therefore, a shift to participatory brands of democracy is something I believe should be embraced. I will elaborate more on my identity as an activist and its interaction with this research in further sections. However, first we must investigate who is engaging in Syracuse local government and what level of engagement within it is possible. A primary part of this research is evaluating the individuals who are engaging in local government. Civic engagement can take many forms, for the purposes of this research we will be regarding civic engagement in terms of citizen interactions with institutions of representative democracy, in this case, Syracuse local government meetings.

Cultural, Social and Political Capital

Bourdieu's "Language and Symbolic Power" also provides this research with groundwork and reference to what sort of social behaviors or functions occur at the site of local government. In regards to politics, Bourdieu argues that political capital is concentrated to the

hands of a small number of people and that to access it, one needs leisure time and cultural capital. Further, he states, "This means that the political field in fact produces an effect of censorship by limiting the universe of political discourse, and thereby the universe of what is politically thinkable" (Bourdieu 1991). This sort of gatekeeping helps those who possess cultural capital and power maintain that advantage. People of lower socio-economic status lack agency in mainstream politics because they lack the cultural capital needed to access these spheres.

Cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Examples of this are education, intellect, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance. It refers to the relative power or status associated with a certain cultural idea, style, or artifact (Bourdieu 1991). Bourdieu also discusses "authorized language" which is relevant to this research as well. Accessibility extends beyond physicality into the knowledge realm. Language, as expressed by Bourdieu "at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it" (Bourdieu 1991) and elaborates by calling on the characterization of languages and its place within an institution. Language is something that this research seeks to heavily evaluate particularly in regards to gatekeeping, accessibility and group formation. This paper will examine what kind of cultural capital is necessary to access local government spheres as well as argue that cultural capital serves as a gatekeeping tool, particularly in terms of language, in local government.

Similarly, social capital is a form of economic and cultural capital in which social networks are central. The term generally refers to (a) resources and their value, both tangible (public spaces, private property) and intangible ('actors', 'human capital', people), (b) the relationships among these resources, and (c) the impact that these relationships have on the resources involved in each relationship. It is generally seen as a form of capital that produces

public goods for a common good. While Bourdieu regards this as a mechanism that produces and reproduces inequality, for example, individuals gaining access to positions of power through using social connections; Robert Putnam's work frames social capital as a producer of civic engagement (Alessandrini 2002). Is lack of social capital in the Syracuse an explanation for low rates of civic engagement? Or is the way in which it is functioning actively producing inequality?

Lastly, symbolic power, which Bourdieu defines as, "the power to make people see and believe certain visions of the world rather than others" accounts for the unconscious modes of cultural/social domination occurring within the everyday social habits maintained over conscious subjects. Symbolic power is built from symbolic capital which can be possessed by individuals or objects and is commonly referred to as prestige. The framework, setting, and performance of these meetings will be analyzed through an understanding of symbolic capital and power.

Literature Review

The existing literature on participatory democracy, local government and connections to social, cultural and political capital provide insight and grounding to what this research seeks to prove. While some studies have been produced about the effectiveness of participatory democracy and programs, much of these have been conducted regarding other countries and cultures such as Brazil, Bolivia, Zapatistas in Mexico, and India. In examining local government, a lot of the current research explores how people engage with it, but very little focuses on who engages. Additionally, there is very little existing literature that demonstrates the connection between social and cultural capital and civic engagement with local government or politics. My research has the potential to contribute to existing literature because it seeks to tie Bourdieu's theories of social, cultural, political capital to the local government and civic engagement.

The existing literature on participatory democracy establish that participatory institutions demonstrate the potential to deepen the quality of democracy. A study on Brazilian politics explores the participatory budgeting practices within the country and the varied forms of participatory democracy that were enacted. While this study was done in Brazil and socio-cultural differences between South America and the United States may suggest that if these practices were done in Syracuse, it may produce different results; the findings in this study are significant in understanding the effects of instituting participatory programs. Through this analysis, it found that these programs "are living examples of strong democracy" and that they hold potential to "foster the active participation of citizens in state-sanctioned deliberative and policy-making processes" (Wampler 2008). The caveat of this is that governments must be willing to delegate "real authority" to its citizens and when this does not happen, it can produce cynicism, disillusionment and lead individuals to exit formal institutional processes. However; even when these programs produce weak outcomes, the mere introduction of the participatory process leads to "residual effects" such as public learning or individuals conceptualizing themselves as "rights bearing citizens". Ultimately, it found that participatory processes that are implemented in locations where individuals do not conceptualize themselves as citizens, could take years to demonstrate the "deepening of democracy".

Another study examining local government's effectiveness and democracy in the United Kingdom concretely links local government effectiveness with strong democracy. While this is another piece that is based in another country rather than the United States, it contributes to a discussion regarding local government and democracy. It argues that without significant engagement by individuals and communities in the local government process, local officials cannot garner enough knowledge or understanding needing to create effective policy. This study

ultimately argues that, "It is difficult to see how local government can realise its participative potential without thriving local democracy" (Bailey 2009). This study contributes to this research in that it underscores the idea that an effective local government is only possible with a strong local democracy.

Further literature I found investigates how citizens interact with their local government. Several studies have examined community and local government relations. A study by Peter Baldwin, "Representation in Municipal Government", analyzed the relationship between municipal governments and their citizens in terms of whether municipal governments were responsive to the demands, desires and efforts of its citizens. Through examining city conservatism, taxes per capita and public policy preferences in that city, the study found that "This suggests that city governments are responsive to the preferences of their citizens." (Baldwin 2003). However, these findings are based off the citizen's general political preferences to either liberal or conservative policies. It does not touch on the interaction between city government and its citizens, civic engagement. It lacks the exploration of the ways in which citizens engage, how often they engage and what groups of people engage, whereas my study is exploring this relationship between these topics.

A related study done by John Nalbandian, aids in demonstrating the inherent connection that local government must take a role in community building and connection to be successful; however, my study differs in that I am examining the disconnection between the two in the context of Syracuse, how that disconnection manifests, and the consequences of that disconnection. "Facilitating Community, Enabling Democracy: New Roles for Local Government Managers", evaluated the changing role of city management over the last ten years. Nalbandian found that community building has become a significant part of the city management

professional's role and they are increasingly expected to facilitate participation and representation. Nalbandian notes that "At a time when the value of government is being questioned, these changes provide direction for strengthening the local government professional's legitimacy in the eyes of citizens" (Nalbanian 1999).

While the previous works focus on community and government relations but lack discussion regarding civic engagement, there is a gap in research regarding civic engagement and political cultures and in-groups. Elaine B. Sharp (2012) explains that neighborhood-level political involvement "is a less heavily studied form of participation than voting" (Sharp 2012). Pre-existing research regarding neighborhood-level political involvement or civic engagement is limited, therefore there is significant space for this research to expand and serve as a framework or inspiration for other research. In the article, Sharp found that there is a case for the importance of participation of neighborhood-based organizations, particularly with face to face involvement as a stepping stone for social capital formation as well as inclusive, participative democracy. This contributes to some of the theoretical interests concerned with this project, specifically how we can increase civic engagement and through the development of social capital. However, this study is limited in that it focuses on the influence of policy on civic engagement, this research will be examining the type of civic engagement and the social capital that serves as the foundation for it. Additionally, there is no discussion about what kind of people engage politically.

"Political Traditionalism in Nigeria: A Case-Study of Secret Societies and Dance Groups in Local Government" also focuses on rural political leadership and relation to the community but details the creation and nature of "secret societies and dance groups" that transpire from them (Magid 1972). Despite that fact that this piece does not detail the accessibility or characterize the

people within the group; it follows the history and describes the structure of their meetings and how developed into an informal group. The most prominent contribution this piece of literature provides is the linking of local politics and political life to the creation or existence of a covert social group. It follows that these secret societies and dance groups played an important, yet informal, role in district politics. This bolsters some of what I am trying to prove as my research highlights the existence of political "in-groups" in Syracuse local government; however, my work contributes to existing literature in that I am investigating cultural capital needed to access political in-groups in Syracuse local government.

Through an analysis of political and social attitudes as well as behaviors of citizens in five different cities, "Quality of Local Government and Democratic Citizenship" by Chong-Min Park reveals telling information regarding local government, public perception and civic engagement. Park notes that popular involvement in local politics and voluntary associations are low, and that citizen empowerment is lacking. Park discusses in-depth the group involved in local government citing that, "Although the civic culture is a mixed political culture, it is an allegiant participant culture, in which the members of the participant polity tend to be explicitly oriented to the system as a whole, and to both the input and output of the political system" (Park 2003). The article is a key piece to the literature supporting this research because it links political engagement to civic culture and nods to formation of political in-groups.

Drawing from Robert Putnam's study "Making Democracy Work", Park elaborates on the socio-cultural sources of democratic citizenship and argues that "the formation of social capital is conducive to the development of democratic citizenship, which is essential for effective and stable democratic governance". Overall, he cites that social capital is a precondition for civic culture, they are complementary in explaining sources of democratic citizenship and governance

(Park 2003). The results of his survey demonstrated negative perceptions of local government and demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding local politics resulting in low civic engagement or "democratic citizenship". While this study is relevant in that it makes the connection that between social capital and civic culture, this research is seeking to characterize the population of those civically engaged. Additionally, this study was conducted in South Korea whereas this research is conducted in Syracuse, New York. There is the potential for cultural differences in terms of attitudes towards local government.

In relation to Bourdieu's theories, "The Intergenerational Reproduction of Cultural Capital: A Threefold Perspective" evaluates the effect a parent's cultural capital has on their child's development of cultural capital through the lens of the three types of cultural capital; institutionalized, embodied, and objectified. It ultimately found that, "Respondents' schooling levels (institutionalized state) are affected by parental education and, to a lesser extent, parental cultural behavior, but both effects are smaller among younger generations. Cultural participation (embodied state) is consistently affected by all three manifestations of parental cultural capital. Possessing cultural goods (objectified state) is mostly affected by parents' cultural possession" (Kraaykamp 2010). There are few studies that intimately tie cultural capital to politics or government; however, this one demonstrates the influence family's possession of cultural capital has on their children suggesting cultural capital can be provided through family and in fact can come from a classist place. The lack of existing literature on cultural capital and local government or political in-groups demonstrates that there is a place for my research in a broader sociological framework.

The literature that has been done within these topics has provided me a clearer understanding and altered the approach I took with my research. Existing literature affirms that

strong local democracy makes local government more effective and that participatory processes have the potential to encourage civic engagement. There is also literature that speaks to the development and significance of in-groups within local governments as well as some of the precursors to civic engagement such as the possession of social capital. However, there are gaps in the literature in regards to the accessibility of information regarding local government and how this could increase civic engagement. All of this leads up to what I want to accomplish in this research. My research links cultural capital and social capital to civic engagement through an in-depth look at who engages with Syracuse local government. I will also connect how lack of accessibility to space and knowledge impedes on civic engagement.

Chapter 2: Research and Methods

Research Questions

The intention of this research is to answer the follow questions: What are the social dynamics in Syracuse local government like? How often and which citizens civically engage? How accessible is knowledge and space regarding local government? My identity as an activist and community organizer has influenced my research in such a way that in this research on local government, I hope it can inspire change. An activist is an individual who campaigns or works for bringing about political or social change. As an activist, I am interested in how we can create more accessible spaces and encourage participation for folks of all backgrounds. In this paper, I observe Syracuse local government meetings and the cultural capital needed to access these spaces. I also evaluate the amount in which citizens can participate in decisions regarding the city as well as the accessibility of information regarding local government and its proceedings.

Methods

All methodological decisions were made keeping time constraints in mind, the aims of this research and my identity as an outsider. For this project, I decided to utilize qualitative methods and perform participant observations on public local Syracuse government meetings, conduct four in-depth, semi-structured, interviews, as well as do a content analysis of materials and information regarding local government provided online and in-person.

For the participant observations, I attended nine Syracuse local government meetings: the Onondaga County Legislative Committee, the Citizen Review Board, the Common Council (on two separate occasions), the Common Council Study Session, an Area TNT 3 Southside community meeting, the Landmark Preservation Board, the Joint School Construction Board, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Zoning Appeals. I had planned on attending the Public Art Commission Meeting as well as the TNT Area 6 Eastwood meeting; however, both meetings were cancelled last minute and I was unable to attend their following meetings due to time constraints. I made the methodological decision to attend a variety of meetings on different topics to see if there were distinctions between the groups of people in attendance. Additionally, I am not a citizen of Syracuse, so I lacked knowledge about Syracuse local government as well as the culture around it. Due to this, I felt as though it would be best if I explored a range of local government meetings in order to get a sense of the nature of local government and community members that engage in it. The only meeting that I revisited was the Common Council meeting and this was to approach potential informants for the second part of this research; in-depth interviews.

Meetings were also selected based on my availability and access largely due to my identity as a student. The meetings lasted for different lengths of time and for those that lasted longer than I could stay, I would stay for a minimum of an hour if not longer. At the meetings, I

enacted a method of detached observation; I chose not to speak to anyone and merely observe and take notes on everything that I saw. I utilized this method due to that fact that I am, undoubtedly, an outsider in these spheres. Even though, as a student, I technically live in Syracuse, students rarely engage with the outer Syracuse community and usually do not partake in city politics because the rules of the university are more relevant to their everyday lives. These meetings take place far away from campus and students do not usually attend them. Due to my tight schedule, I could not change clothes or drop off my backpack before these meetings which I found often left me looking out of place compared to the other attendees at these meetings.

However, my outsider identity did provide some advantages. I possessed a sense of objectivity due to my lack of strong ties to the Syracuse community. Due to this, I had a fresh perspective on what I observed. However, I do not have a blank slate. My identity as an activist and community organizer brought in a lot of prior knowledge and bias in terms of how I envision political participation and from what social groups. I have worked for multiple political organizations and a large component of that work entails educating the public about social and political issues, voter registration, and fighting corruption. I cannot deny that part of my political agenda is to encourage more political participation from a wider variety of racial and economic groups. Also, to see those in power in political spheres come from more diverse backgrounds in addition to local government being more transparent as an entity. To ensure that I did not let these ideas interfere with my research I referred to Adler's "The Promise and Pitfalls of Going Into the Field" which cited that in order for researchers to combat bias, they "should include the voices of a full spectrum of participants, not just the ones they can easily reach" (Adler 2003). Adler further notes that it is easier for researchers to "study down," looking at the "downtrodden, the powerless, and the underclass, who, unlike the powerful, do not have the ability to insulate

themselves". In this project, I conducted four interviews; three of which were city government officials and one was a community member. I took what Adler argued into mind and I wanted to understand the perspective from the local government.

Six out of the nine meetings were at City Hall and these were held in the Common Council Chambers. At these meetings, apart from one, I sat in the back row. This provided a better view of the room, the audience and allowed me to count audience members more easily. I wanted to be able to survey the demographics of the audience and note racial and age representation. I sat in the front row for the Landmark Preservation Board meeting, because there were no microphones being used and I wanted to make sure I could hear what was being discussed. Nonetheless, there were only four people in the audience behind me. Then, I sat in the second row towards the door the second time I went to the Common Council Study Session; I will discuss this observation in-depth in a later part of this section given that it was a methodological outlier compared to how the other observations were conducted.

The night before every meeting, I looked over the agenda provided online and wrote a pre-memo which was mostly a content analysis of the Syracuse government website and the agenda. In addition to a list of questions and points I wanted to focus on during the meeting the next day. In analyzing the agendas and materials online, I focused on language, format, and the readability and cohesion of the provided sources. Understandably, my comprehension of the concepts, language, and process presented on the meeting agendas does not represent the universal experience for everyone. I am a college student who statistically has a more education than almost 75% of the population of Syracuse according to the U.S Census in 2015 (Syracuse City). Instead, I focused on whether the Syracuse website provided explanations, additional information or a 'reader's guide' to understanding these documents. I evaluated the accessibility

of explanations and answers provided online rather than basing my assessment on my personal knowledge of this type of language.

I walked or took the bus to all the meetings; however, discrepancies with the bus led me to be late to two of the meetings. I arrived 10 minutes late to one of the meetings and 5 minutes late to another. I, therefore missed out on pre-meeting observation and social behavior of the attendees. Generally, I tried to arrive 5 minutes before each meeting started so I could get a sense of the audience, whether people knew each other, and how they were interacting. Sitting in the backrow, I just used my laptop and typed notes about everything I saw and heard. There were at times numerous people talking at once, or the meeting moved along so quickly it was difficult to follow along with what was happening at a given time. Due to this, I pulled specific quotes that I found interesting but I failed to document all the conversations going on during the meetings.

This is where my identity as an outsider put me at a disadvantage. Because I was unfamiliar with the framework of each meeting, I was put in a position where I was somewhat lost and constantly trying to keep up with the conversation. Likewise, I missed some of the dialogue due to faulty sound arrangements and microphones not working. The meetings often went fast and were difficult to keep up with, so I chose to risk some inconspicuousness by typing publicly on my laptop so I could write field notes effectively. I have difficulty writing fast by hand and I was nervous about what I would miss or forget something if I did not write it down in the moment. For the meetings that I was able to stay past the adjournment, I tried to stay for at least fifteen minutes to observe the ways in which the audience interacted with each other. I coded my field notes and my pre-memos for recurring themes. Thereupon, I wrote up analytical memos explaining prominent themes I observed in the meeting including quotes as well as questions I had regarding what I had witnessed.

There are weaknesses to these methods. My decision to take notes on my laptop proved to be alienating. I spent a decent amount of time in the early observations looking down while I was typing and this kept me from being fully engaged in my surroundings. I did manage to pull some great quotes from the conversations going on during the meetings; however, I was not fully experiencing my surroundings and I could have missed the essence or feeling of what being in one of these meetings is like. Observations are subjective, I tried to be as objective as possible, but the data is ultimately my experience with what I witnessed from my personal viewpoint, in addition to my interpretation and analysis of it as an outsider, a student, a researcher and most importantly, an activist. Additionally, observation does not provide the option to hear other viewpoints or interpretations as is possible with interviews or surveys. During the process, I encountered a lot of questions that I couldn't find answers to because my frame of knowledge was limited to what was available online and what I received at the meetings. Speaking to or interviewing individuals was the next step to this research to add another dimension and perspective.

The additional data collected is based around four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Syracuse local government officials and community members. As noted in *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, "the in-depth interview is modeled after a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange" (Taylor 2016). Additionally, I chose this type of in-depth interviewing to learn about events and activities that cannot be directly observed. Participants were identified and recruited based on participant observations I made at public local government meetings. I was looking to interview local government officials and leaders of community organizations. For government officials, I decided who I wanted to interview based on if they were facilitating the local government meeting I was at, how they

conducted themselves at the meeting, and what how accessible the individual was after the meeting was over. I interviewed one government official who was the leader of the local government meeting they ran, I interviewed another official based on accessibility because he had a connection to Syracuse University and the last individual I interviewed as based on their comments made during the meeting I did participant observation at. At that meeting, one of the resolutions he was proposing was met with a lot of a backlash from other members of the council. One of his colleague became very angry with him during this meeting. For this reason, I chose to interview him because I felt as though he could provide a unique and telling perspective of this part of Syracuse local government. When looking for community members to interview, I looked for individuals who were heavily involved in the community, or are community leaders.

After I identified who I wanted to interview, I either approached them at the public meeting and inquired about an interview with my IRB approved protocol, or looked online for their contact information and called them to set up an interview. I explained my study and asked if they were interested in doing an interview with me. I got informed consent with an IRB approved consent document and participants agreed and signed off on me recording the interview.

I contacted participants a few days after initial contact, giving them adequate time to consider whether they would like to be involved in the study. I referred to Adler again when I took measures to make my informant feel most comfortable; allowing my informant to choose where they wanted to interview conducted, and making sure that space was private (Adler 2003). In contacting them, I explained my study again and asked when would be a good time for an interview. This gave them the ability to choose not only a time that worked for them but also a location that was also convenient and comfortable to the participant. On the day of the interview

I introduced the consent form and re-explained my study to them and explicitly told them at any time, they can choose to not participate. Participants were given numerous opportunities to opt out of the study should they feel uncomfortable. I also made sure that my participants could read the consent form and there are no language barriers; meaning that I ensured that my participants were proficient in English. I have been trained in a qualitative research methods class and am familiar with the steps that must be taken to minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence.

Each interview lasted about thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to my password protected computer. After that, the audio was deleted and solely the transcription was kept. Everyone I interviewed was assigned a pseudonym and all identifiers were changed to mask identity. For example, the name of a participant's political position was changed to maintain confidentiality; however, this did not greatly impede my research because it is not the exact position that was essential to know, but rather the knowledge the participant could provide. All consent forms were kept separate from transcripts.

The biggest weakness that came from the interview portion of this research was finding participants. Several individuals, community members and local government officials, I reached out to would not return my calls or were not interested in participating. One individual at City Hall I reached out to responded, "I'd be happy to but I will warn you depending on the questions I may feel a little uncomfortable with some and may not give you a ton." He ended up deciding not to participate in this research. As noted by Adler, people Due to the hesitations and time restrictions I faced in this research, I was only able to get four interviews instead of five as planned.

The last portion of this research is a content analysis of materials available in-person and online regarding Syracuse local government. These materials were examined and coded with specific attention to the language utilized, the clarity of the documents, and explanation or information made available about the documents. The city of Syracuse website where the online materials are located was also examined for clarity and accessibility. I tried to utilize the resources made available online to gain an understanding of Syracuse local government and the intentions behind local government meetings.

Chapter 3: Findings

Through nine participant observations of Syracuse local government meetings, four semi-structured in-depth interviews, content analysis of local government agendas and provided materials, as well as the accessibility of the City of Syracuse website, there were three primary findings: The emergence of a political "in-group", 'performative politics' or meetings that perform democracy as opposed to enacting it, and a general lack of accessibility on multiple frontiers within Syracuse local government.

The Emergence of a Political 'in-group': "You can guess the room before you get there"

As shown with the study done in Nigeria on political traditionalism, "secret societies" or in-groups can possess a significant sway over local governments (Magid 1972). An "in-group" is hard to define, especially one that is somewhat clandestine. For the purposes of establishing a definition of 'in-group', we will be basing it off Macionis' definition which states that an "in-group" is a social group toward which a member feels respect and loyalty and that an individual identifies in a positive direction. Characteristics shared by the group may be interests, values, representations, ethnic or social background, or even kinship ties (Macionis 2010). Through

solely participant observation, it is hard to gauge specific values or kinship ties; however, the political "in-group" in which I am focusing on demonstrates shared interest, representation, ethnic and social background.

Notably, certain meetings produced different audiences. Before discussing the emergence of the "political in-group" in Syracuse, it is essential to first discuss the meetings that did not have a distinct "political in-group" present. In focusing on these meetings first, one can get clearer picture of Syracuse's "political in-group" through juxtaposition. Meetings that were public hearings or held public comment periods such as the Citizen Review Board (CRB), and the Board of Zoning Appeals produced more diverse audiences that showed a distinct disconnect from the local government officials and appointees running these meetings.

Meetings without political in-group

The Citizen Review Board holds public board meetings the first Thursday of every month in the Common Council Chambers in Syracuse city hall from 5:30 to 7:30pm with a recess at 6:30 for public comment. The Syracuse city website cites that the CRB "was established to ensure an open citizen-controlled process for reviewing grievances involving members of the Syracuse Police Department" and that in its mission to do so, it provides a forum for citizen complaints regarding Syracuse police officers to be heard and reviewed in a fair and impartial manner. Police accountability, particularly with excessive force, is an issue that tends to affect Black and Latino communities more any than other. The Washington Post found despite making up six percent of the U.S. population, black men accounted for forty percent of unarmed deaths involving police officers in 2015 (Somashekar 2015). Additionally, a Gallup poll from 2011-2013 found that 38% of Black individuals and 55% of Latinos had confidence in the police

(Gallup 2013). This sentiment was reflected in the audience, which was majority made up of people of color.

The Board of Zoning Appeals meetings are held on Thursdays at 1pm in the Syracuse Common Council Chambers in city hall. While the Syracuse city website provides no further information on the meeting, I learned from my participant observation of the meeting and review of the meeting agendas, that the meeting is a public hearing in which a series of cases from citizens are presented and audience members are given time and ability to speak in support or opposition of zoning changes to properties. Anyone who wants to re-zone a property or do some type of commercial construction must appear before the Board of Zoning Appeals to present their case and citizens are allowed to speak for or against the project.

Discussion

The subject matter of these two meetings are based on improving or protecting the community. The premise of the Citizen Review Board is to create a safer community and to hold police accountable. Meanwhile, the Board of Zoning Appeals creates space for community members to support or oppose property and business changes in their neighborhoods. While there was only one public comment made at the Citizen Review Board meeting I attended, there were multiple comments made for the Board of Zoning Appeals. Based on what was discussed in the Board of Zoning Appeals, it seems that the primary reasons for community members favoring or disfavoring a presented proposal, were concerns regarding the welfare of the neighborhood, safety, and the youth. Every community member who spoke against a proposal for a new corner store, mentioned that it would bring more crime, and that they were concerned about the youth who could become involved in criminal activities as a result. The other proposition I saw was for a "safe house" for children to be built on the south side of Syracuse.

People from the audience came to speak in favor of this proposal. The youth and safety concerns seem to be a uniting force for the community members.

To try to understand the community member perspective, I conducted an in-depth interview with Margaret*, a Syracuse native from the "Southside" of town, who attends local government meetings. Margaret noted that she was not initially interested in government, but what brought her to local government meetings was her interest in helping her community; "My main focus was helping my community be more aware of certain issues that affect them on the day to day basis, but then also helping them to become self-efficient (sic) and finding ways to solve their own problems. Versus depending on the government or any outside source to solve their own problems. And then after a while with doing a lot of different community work, I realized that a lot of the issues that people from my community have can be resolved through government and through policies."

Despite this joint concern for the community, the attendees of these meetings largely did not seem to be familiar with one another. From these two meetings, I witnessed that attendees did not speak to one another before or after the two meetings. Essentially, I observed limited socialization between audience members. People entered the meeting either alone or with what appeared to be a family member. Before the start of the meeting, people quietly spoke to those sitting next to them; however, people were relatively spread out around the room. Based off these observations which suggest the audiences lack of familiarity and connection to one another, it was clear that at these two meetings, attendees were not part of a shared social group.

In addition to this disconnect from one another, both meetings demonstrated a separation between the audience and the board not only in representation but also in the dialogue between the two groups. As noted, most of the attendees in both meetings were people of color; yet, most

of the members of both boards were Caucasian. The Board of Zoning Appeals has five board members and only one of them is a person of color, a black woman. Meanwhile, the Citizen Review Board has nine members with only three people of color, all of whom are black. The gap did not stop there. Board members of both the Citizen Review Board and the Board of Zoning Appeals would sometimes read or talk to one another during the meetings, even while a public comment was being made. This was not seen as frequently at other local government meetings I attended; this I will discuss in coming sections. Additionally, the apparel differed between the boards and the audiences. The board members dressed in business or business casual clothing whereas members of the audience ranged from business casual to casual; with individuals wearing jeans, sweatshirts and sneakers.

Of the public comments made during both meetings, there were comments that directly addressed the boards and addressed concerns and dissatisfaction with the boards and the people on them. At the CRB meeting, a young black man wearing a suit who stated, "The Citizen Review Board needs to have more interaction with the community to be successful"; Comparatively, two comments made at the Board of Zoning Appeals drew on the inconvenience of the meeting times and the disconnect from the Board. One man stated that, "It is tough to get folks out to a 1pm meeting" and a man who identified himself as the executive director of a neighborhood organization asserted that, "You guys have a lot of dough that you're not giving to the community. Got money? Spend it. So they [gestures to audience] can come out to a 1 pm meeting." Not only do these public comments show strained social relations between the community and the local government, but they also indicate economic differences. A meeting at 1pm on a Thursday is a difficult meeting to attend for anyone who works a typical 9 to 5 job.

Therefore, being able to attend one of these meetings is either a display of economic privilege, or of age such as retired individuals.

Meetings with political in-group

Conversely, the other meetings I observed presented a different type of civic engagement. The Syracuse Common Council Regular Meeting, Common Council Study Session, Onondaga County Legislative Committee, the Planning Commission, the Joint School Construction Board and the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board not only differed in subject matter and framework, but also in the type of people who attended these meetings. These people appear to be part of 'in-group'. The group has a clear shared interest: local government and Syracuse politics. However, not all local government meetings are attended by this crowd, just the ones listed above which have more to do with resolutions, law, and economic development; as opposed to the meetings more focused on community relations.

The Syracuse Common Council Regular Meeting and Common Council Study Session are both facilitated by the Syracuse City Common Council. The council is made up of a president and nine members. The president and four members are elected at-large or city-wide for a term of four years. The other five members are district councilors which serve two year terms, and each represent a district in Syracuse. The council also considers and adopts the annual budget. At the Common Council Study Session, councilors go through the agenda made for the Common Council meeting and review and debate on the resolutions, sales, amendments, authorizations, ordinances, applications and permits. These sessions take place on either Mondays or Wednesdays (prone to changing) at 12pm in the Syracuse Common Council Chambers. The Common Council Regular Meeting always follows one of the Study Sessions from that week, but not both, (it does not follow every study session but the regular meetings are always

preceded by one) and is the meeting where council members officially vote on the items detailed on the agenda.

The Onondaga County Legislative Committee is not exclusively a Syracuse local government meeting, but it is featured on the city's website under local government public meetings. This committee meets on the first Tuesday of every month in the Legislative Chambers in Syracuse's court house and operates through six standing committees. Each standing committee oversees the work of executive branch departments and is expected to review and study policy issues related to the subject matter under its jurisdiction. The legislature's primary annual responsibility is to review the County Executive's proposed budget, modify it (if necessary) and approve an adopted County Budget. The Onondaga County Legislature consists of 17 members, each of whom is elected from a single-member district, which contained at the time they were drawn in 2011, approximately 27,400 people. Two districts are located entirely within the City of Syracuse, eight are located entirely outside of Syracuse, and seven are located partly within or outside of the City. The Chairman who presides over the legislature is elected by the members at the first meeting of the year.

The Planning Commission meetings are held at Mondays at 6pm in the Common Council Chambers. The commission board is made up of four individuals appointed by the Mayor. The meetings are public hearings consisting of a cases regarding property development or city planning. The Joint School Construction Board meeting takes place in the Syrastat room in City Hall on Thursdays at 9am. Within this, there are seven board members, including the Mayor, and six advisory staff. The purpose of the board is to redesign, upgrade, and overall improve the quality of Syracuse's schools.

Lastly, the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board meets the first and third Thursday of every month at 8:30am in the Common Council Chambers. The Board also recommends to the City Planning Commission the designation of Local Protected Sites and Local Preservation Districts. This board is made up of nine members appointed by the Mayor. Two of them are nominated by the American Institute of Architects, one is nominated by the Real Estate Board, one by the Preservation Association of Central New York, one by the Onondaga Historical Association, and one by the Conservation Advisory Council. According to the city website, this board is authorized to regulate any material changes in appearance of any property within a Local Preservation District or that has been designated as a 'Local Protected Site'. Additionally, the board reviews demolition proposals for any property that may be eligible for historic designation.

Discussion

Individuals at these meetings demonstrate a shared representation through their clothing. The attendees clothing and dress more closely resembles that of the board and council members who run the meetings. Men are dressed in business attire and oftentimes the most "underdressed" man in the room is wearing at the very least, a button-down shirt with slacks and business-like shoes. At the Joint School Construction Board meeting, I noticed that all the men were wearing suits with ties or button downs with slacks. Women's clothing in these meetings varied and hinged more on the business casual side. Some women wore dresses and others wore skirts; a lot of them wore heels. I did not see a single individual in these meetings wearing jeans, a hoodie, or anything less than business casual attire. Council members were dressed similarly, there were no striking differences in presentation between the council members and the audience. How they dressed for this occasion denotes the importance this event has to these individuals. Additionally,

the similar style of dress and representation denotes some shared aspect. It should be recognized that clothing style is a form and expression of cultural capital, a social asset that promotes social mobility, therefore how someone dresses plays a part in granting them the ability to enter political spheres.

Individuals at the CRB and Board of Zoning Appeals meetings for the most part did not dress in business or business casual attire. There is nothing on the Syracuse City website that specifies mandatory or suggested attire for the public meetings; therefore, the shared type of dress and representation can arguably be a signifier of an in-group. Individuals in this in-group may choose to dress and represent themselves in this way due, in part, to the symbolic capital they view their local government and these meetings possess. The Common Council chambers in Syracuse City Hall is a location of symbolic capital because it possesses a sort of prestige (Bourdieu 1991). City Hall resembles a sort of castle and the Common Council chamber resembles a court room adorned with Civil War paintings and an American flag all of which inspire nationalism and honor. While this may be part of it, the Citizen Review Board and the Board of Zoning Appeals were both held in the exact same room in City Hall and their overall dress and representation is vastly different.

The racial composition of the attendees to these meetings is majority Caucasian. During my observation of the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board and the Planning Commission, the entire audience was Caucasian (or appearing to be white). While there were people of color present, there were very few of them and they make up only a small percentage of the audience. The racial make-up of this group is notable. Margaret, who identifies as African American woman, recognized that she is a minority among people who attend these types of public meetings and noted "it's a lot of older people, older white people and then you have the middle-

aged people, there's not too many younger people that come to Common Council sessions and there's not too many African Americans that go." While this in-group is not based on race, the resulting group is made up of a primarily Caucasian group of individuals which does qualify it under Macionis' definition of in-group in terms of shared ethnic background (Macionis 2010).

In the interview, Margaret also spoke to the type of individuals who come to meetings like the Common Council and related others noting that, "the same people are always there. Like all the time. You can kind of guess the room before you even get there." While Margaret does not speak for all community members from the Southside, this does affirm that there is a general understanding, image or conception, of the type/group of people involved with local government in Syracuse. This kind of public perception of the groups or types of people involved in local government could discourage individuals who do not 'fit the mold' from participating in local government or other democratic processes within the city.

Considering the time of most of these meetings is 1:00 pm, 9:30 am, or 8:00 am on weekdays and considering their frequency, the participation in this sphere indicates class status. Many people work during those times and it is a privileged position to not be working a nine to five job and instead be at those meetings. Bourdieu establishes in his chapter on political representation, that to enter the political realm, you need cultural capital and poor people do not have political agency in mainstream politics because they lack cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991). Based off these theoretical underpinnings, since these individuals are engaged in local government, they must possess some form of cultural capital which inherently unites them in a classed way. Therefore, these individuals also share a social background in this respect.

The biggest signifier of an in-group that I felt as an observer in these spaces was the socialization and behaviors before, during and following the meetings. To draw on a specific

example, I arrived at the Common Council meeting five minutes early to make sure I could get a good seat for observation. Upon my arrival, there were three people standing outside the council chambers talking. I walked into the room and while there were only fifteen people in the room at that time, and it was not even close to being half full, the room was buzzing with conversation and laughter as people were socializing in small groups around the room. The room was audibly loud enough that I would need to raise my voice to talk to someone next to me. As time came closer to the meeting's start time, people arrived together, often in pairs or in groups of three, like how they would leave the room at the end of the meeting. In my field notes I even noted, "It is 12:58pm and people are still talking, there has been no change in room atmosphere despite the meeting starting in two minutes." This pre-meeting socialization was not unique to the Common Council. I arrived ten minutes early to the Planning Commission meeting and there were fifteen people already present and conversing like the way in which they did at the Common Council meeting.

The social interactions and behaviors during these meetings are indicative of an in-group as well. The Common Council Study Session, which was the only meeting I attended twice, provided some of the most interesting examples. Based off what I learned through interviewees and documents made available, the Common Council Study Session is a meeting intended for Common Councilors to debate amongst each other on resolutions, sales, and other actions regarding Syracuse. Throughout the entire session, there was a gentle murmur of multiple conversations going on while the Common Council was running the meeting. There were people in the back of the room sitting on a table, talking and laughing. At one point, a man who had just spoken in front of the council at the front of the room walked to the back to the group of men sitting on the table and proceeded to shake hands with one of the men there. On the other side of

the room, there were eight people standing and leaning against the right wall of the chambers talking to each other. I also saw a man waved to someone and motion them to come over to talk. This Common Council Study Session seemed to serve much more as a social event than a local government meeting.

These meetings share a common ending. When these meetings are adjourned, the room erupts in conversation. This group of individuals generally stays behind after the meeting for what appears to be purely social reasons. I timed how long most people stayed in the room to converse. At the Joint School Construction Board meeting, more than half the people stayed 15 minutes after adjournment and at the Common Council Study Session, more than half of the audience stayed for 10 minutes after the meeting. The conversations I heard ranged from business-like proposals and political rhetoric such as "This is what happens when you've got term limits!" and "Mr. Brady, do you have five minutes?" to personal stories and family updates such as "yeah, my youngest is graduating."

Undeniably, the voluntary participation in socialization for that extended period suggests that these individuals are relatively acquainted with one another and share connections. They are part of some type of social community in this sphere. It's not simply the conversations, but how they leave these meetings that suggests that this is an in-group. At the end of the Common Council meeting, a man in a suit walks by with other men in suits and I heard one of them behind me joyfully say, "Alright, lunchtime!" as they walk by. In my observation, I noticed that they generally leave the meetings with each other. Based on the conversations I heard as groups walked out of the Common Council Chambers, a lot of them go eat lunch together following the meeting. Also, following one meeting, there was a group of young men wearing suits and ties standing and leaning at the back of the chambers. They wished people a good afternoon as they

left. A council member walked up to one of them and joked "Well, we didn't destroy the city today!" These individuals are electively engaging to spend time together and do activities together such as go out to lunch in a group and that is an indicator of an in-group as well as a community.

The final characteristic that must be addressed in regard to this political in-group is its somewhat intimate relationship with Common Council and board members. As stated before, the council and board members as well as those within the political in-group dress in similar fashions, or represent themselves in similar ways. I do not have enough data to assert that council and board members are a part of this in-group entirely; however, my observations not only affirm the in-group's close ties with council and board members, but also highlight the unique way their relationship grants members of the political in-group social capital. Following the adjournment at the Common Council, Common Council Study Session, and the Joint School Construction Board, council and board members converse with audience or in-group members and go to lunch with them. Friendships and relationships with individuals is not a bad thing, but in several observed instances, councilor and board members' relationships cross over into more professional spheres.

In a meeting for the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board, a board member called out an audience member by his first name and asked for his opinion, "David, what do you think?" in regards to a proposal they were discussing. The framework of the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board meetings does not allow for public comments and while the public can observe, the board makes decisions on the spot without audience input. This showed a personal connection between a board member and someone in the audience, on what must be a somewhat significant level in order to refer to that person by their first name. This is demonstrative of an

inner community and the social capital it grants a member of the political in-group. David's membership to the political in-group and his relationship with the board member is social capital which granted him power to give his opinion on a matter even when no one else in the room could. This same situation happened again at the Common Council study session, one of the council members called out a man standing at the back of the room by his first name, in the middle of the meeting to ask, "Do you have something to show us for this program?". Despite not being next on the agenda, this man's proposal was privileged over others. Whether he is an actual member of the political in-group is unclear; however, he reflected the qualities of the in-group being Caucasian, in a suit and tie, and he had the connection to the councilor so there is a definite likelihood.

The social capital acquired from being in the political in-group additionally allows access to exclusive knowledges. When I arrived to the Syrastat room for the Joint School Construction Board meeting, there were two men standing outside the room. They told me that I could not enter because they were in executive session and they would let us know when we could enter. Specific positions in local government are granted access to this type of knowledge or spaces that possess insider knowledge. The men standing outside the room and I did not have this access. When the two men in suits and I entered the Syrastat room, it was set up with a large wooden U-shaped table at the front of the room and six people, whom I can only assume to be the board members, were seated at it in swivel chairs and nametags. On the other side of the room, there were four rows of chairs all facing towards the wood table, the space for the audience. I was surprised to see that there were nine other people already seated in the audience area, meaning that they were included in the executive session. After the meeting, I checked online to see if they held any executive positions in regards to the board. While pictures weren't

provided, there are six people on an advisory staff in addition to the board members. However, that does not explain the three additional people who were included in the executive session granted that six of them were indeed members of the advisory staff. The decisions and what was discussed during the executive session were not indulged to us at any point in the meeting; signifying the privileged nature of the knowledge.

Through observation of local government meetings, there appears to be two spheres that attend public meetings. The first are community members who come to public meetings and provide public comments to make their voices heard and take steps to ensure safety for their communities. This sphere is made up of largely people of color and disabled individuals. Despite their mutual concern and regard for the community, the individuals who come to the meetings lack an intergroup relationship. The other sphere can be described as a political in-group; observational research shows that members of this in-group dress and represent themselves in a similar way which express the cultural capital needed to access these political spaces; they have a shared interest in local government and Syracuse politics, the majority share an ethnic (Caucasian) background, and share a privileged social background based in their possession of cultural capital. Observation of their interaction and socialization at local government meetings further solidifies that this is an in-group.

To enter the politic field, and ergo, this Syracuse political in-group, one needs cultural capital. People in Syracuse's political in-group possess a form of cultural capital that unites them all and most likely serves as a gatekeeping tool as well. The observed relationships and incidents between Common Councilors/board members and members of the political in-group suggest the social capital that members of the political in-group benefit from. Finally, the site and space in

which they congregate, Common Council Chambers in City Hall, is a space that exudes symbolic capital. Together, as a political in-group, they possess symbolic power in Syracuse.

"I Pledge Allegiance, to the Spectacle" - Performative Politics

The second notable finding within this research is the performativity of politics and how these meetings perform democracy as opposed to enacting it. In *Democracy's Performance,* John McKenzie draws on Nietzsche's assertion that man will fall victim to his performance and connects this type of performance to democracy and America. Nietzsche viewed democracy as transforming into a type of performance and within performance, stripping the democratic parts from democracy (McKenzie 2007). I want to take this a step further, and assert that this type of performance has led to a creation of a spectacle within politics. In the final chapter of Edelman's book, *Constructing the Political Spectacle,* he argues that the political spectacle is used as a tactic to demystify populations (Edelman 1988). Anderson expands on this through including the media but he also asserts that this new culture of performativity is a key element in the construction of a specific brand of new citizen, one who is a spectator (Anderson 2007). According to Edelman, the political spectacle will distort reality. Theoretically, it could put us under the illusion that true democracy is occurring when in reality, it may not be. These findings denote that Syracuse local government is not as democratic as we are led to believe; Boards are not democratically elected by the people, citizens are being kept out of or are only granted limited space in the decision-making processes, and Syracuse's representative democracy does not actually represent the city of Syracuse.

Whereas the Syracuse Common Council and Onondaga County Legislative Committee are made up of elected officials, some of the other boards and representative bodies in Syracuse are assembled through appointments by government officials. As described on the city website,

the Syracuse Planning Commission is made up of four individuals appointed by the Mayor. Additionally, the Landmark Preservation Board is a little bit more complicated in that; two of them are nominated by the American Institute of Architects, one is nominated by the Real Estate Board, one is nominated by the Preservation Association of Central New York, one is nominated by the Onondaga Historical Association, and one is nominated by the Conservation Advisory Council. These were the only two meetings I attended that included information regarding how the boards were assembled on the Syracuse city website.

However, the informants from my interviews shed some light on the other meetings I attended. One of my informants, Mr. Leighton, a city employee, explained to me the structure of the Citizen Review Board, "there's eleven of them [board members] all together, the five district councilors on the common council each appoint one. The four at large councilors, which are elected by the whole city, the appoint a total of three board members. And then the mayor's office appoints three board members." Additionally, Councilor Green informed me that the entire Board of Zoning Appeals is appointed by the mayor. Because of the current system that exists for board appointments, the Common Council and the Mayor have nearly complete decision-making power over of who sits on these boards. These boards serve many purposes and make decisions for the Syracuse community regarding police accountability, zoning and business development, and landmarks. Their roles are significant enough to make an impact in the Syracuse community and yet they are not democratically elected individuals.

However, this influence seems to extend beyond board appointments. When discussing his campaign process for the Board of Education in Syracuse, my interviewee, Mr. Scott informed me that "No one gets to run for any elected position as a democrat without the official approval of the Democratic Committee of Syracuse." This committee is chaired by the Mayor as

well. There is a covert nod to social capital within this. In order to run for an elected position as a democrat, you must first be approved by a committee that is led by the mayor. Not only does this suggest that an individual needs social and interpersonal connections but also an alignment with the dominant political ideology currently present within Syracuse local government. Councilor Green summarized it best in saying, "you have a select group of people, regardless of who they are, who have had a monopoly on nominating the sort of candidates that tend to always have a certain thing about them". Not only does this speak to the finding of political in-groups but it also the troubling and potentially undemocratic nature of the system. A monopoly is not a democracy. This is just one channel in which democracy is being performed rather than enacted in Syracuse local government.

In regards to the representative democratic institutions within Syracuse local government, there are limits to how much a citizen can be involved in decision-making processes. The Joint School Construction Board, the board that works towards improving and updating Syracuse city schools technologically and academically, started their meeting off by holding an executive session for 20 minutes. During this session, non-executives like myself were not granted access to be in the room. After the non-executives were invited back into the room, the meeting was adjourned five minutes later without revealing the decisions made during the executive session. Two meetings I went to, the Onondaga County legislative committee and Syracuse Common Council lasted only 20 minutes. My experiences observing both meetings were confusing. Agendas were provided for both at the back of the room and they both began with the pledge of allegiance followed by an invocation, or a prayer, and roll call of the representatives. What followed was a rapid string of "ayes" and "nays" that I could not to keep up with what was being agreed upon. Essentially, I walked out of those meetings having no clue what happened.

At the Syracuse Common Council meeting, they went through the entire opening with the pledge, prayer and roll call, and proceeded to go through an agenda with seventy-three items all under 20 minutes. I broke my detached observation methodological approach when at the end of one of these meetings, I bumped into an acquaintance who now works at Syracuse City Hall. I asked him why the meeting was over so quickly and he informed me that "The common council meeting is much more a formality. We make all the real decisions at the study session." If I didn't have a personal connection to someone in Syracuse local government, or the social capital, I would not have found this out considering that the materials made available online did not explain the differences between the two meetings. Based on this, it is possible that Syracuse citizens may not know the difference between the Common Council and the Study Session either. These topics will be further explored in the third finding.

In addition to these short and confusing meetings, were also meetings that provided public comment periods as well as public hearings, but did not announce decisions or vote on issues. Through the action of making a public comment, one can feel empowered and that their voice has been heard. However, there are limits on public comments. Councilor Green noted that Common Council Study Sessions is the only time the Common Council allows for public comments except for a public hearing. Citizens are given a maximum of two minutes to make a public comment and the public comment can only be made if it is related to something on the agenda provided by the Common Council for the day. Hence, engagement and comment opportunities are limited.

When I asked Councilor Green if he felt as though the council is representative of the city of Syracuse, he responded with "No, not at all". He expanded on this statement, expressing that there is the obvious answer; ethnicity, but also there is a great discrepancy in age representation.

These sentiments are supported by my observations and census data. According to the U.S. Census, in 2015 56% of Syracuse's population was reported as white (Syracuse). This means that nearly half of Syracuse is non-white; however, much of the councils and boards are composed of white individuals. Additionally, 52% of Syracuse's population is female, yet women continue to also be a minority in local government spheres. To provide an example: the Syracuse Common Council is composed of twelve councilors; eight are men and four are women, eight are white and four are black. The U.S. Census also indicates that in 2010, 10.6% of the Syracuse population was 65 or older. Councilor Green and Margaret both informed me that there is a disparity in age representation and that the majority of local government officials or elected persons are elderly. As far as a representative democracy goes, the local government does not adequately represent the demographics of the city.

As these findings show, democracy in Syracuse local government is not as one would picture it and it's possible that these facts are being hidden by the political spectacle. The creation of the political spectacle would not be possible if it was not for symbolic capital. These local government meetings are done in spaces riddled with symbolic capital such as City Hall. As cited before, the Common Council Chambers in City Hall resemble a courtroom. It is decorated in nationalistic and symbolic imagery such as Civil War paintings and several flags. Performance and symbolic capital go hand in hand. The location (City Hall), the utilization of prayer, the pledge of allegiance, all provide prestige to the event and gives it 'power' and a sort of respect. Part of the construction of a political spectacle depends on having the public as political spectators who also engage in "reactive rituals" which we can clearly be seen in local government meetings (Edelman 1988). The utilization of symbolic capital is effective because not only does it create an aura of respect and prestige towards the political process or action, but

it also renders the participant to their fallback identity when confronted with nationalism: citizen. So, when we are performing democracy in a nationalist space filled with symbolic capital, it can give the illusion of democracy.

Lack of Accessibility

The third most prominent finding was the lack of accessibility on multiple levels. Through my experiences trying to navigate these spaces and observing them, physical accessibility, as in access and ability to attend local government meetings, is notably lacking. On a personal level, my means of transportation, walking, took up a half an hour, and I walked through areas that could be considered unsafe including walking underneath I-80. I tried taking the bus a few times, but I never keep cash on me so that option was difficult for me. The two out of the three times that I took the bus to go to a meeting a City Hall, it went poorly. I accidentally took the wrong bus the first time and the second time the bus was late which made me late to the meeting. Of course, there are more bus capable people out there but a lot of the bus schedules that go by City Hall do not line up with when the meetings are: you either have to come an hour early or get there when it's halfway done.

Then there is the struggle of finding the meetings. When I entered City Hall to go to one of the first observations, there was no sign or posting visible telling me that there was a meeting upstairs. I ended up wandering the building until I found it. For the Joint School Construction Board, I did not know where the meeting room was. I knew it wasn't in the usual meeting room on the third floor in the council chambers. There was no sign present at the front of the building saying there was a public meeting, and the meeting took place in the room farthest from the front. The biggest debacle, was the Onondaga County Legislative Committee. I asked the security guard when I entered where the Legislative chambers were. He told me the fourth floor,

but it wasn't there. So, I asked someone else and they told me the second floor, but it wasn't there either. It took me asking four separate people who all worked in the building where this important budgetary meeting was being held and no one knew except for the secretary on the third floor. This was indicative that knowledge regarding local government even for people who work within city government buildings.

From a disability perspective, City Hall is not the most accessible building. To enter city hall, you must walk up a flight of stairs and once you enter through large doors, you must walk 20 steps up just to get to the main floor where there is access to an elevator. There was not a clear entrance for wheelchair users or physically disabled individuals. During the meetings, it is very difficult to hear what is being said from the board and it can be difficult to follow the motions and conversation. Additionally, there are no sign language interpreters nor live transcription being done during these meetings which makes me wonder how hearing impaired individuals can participate or learn what is happening. The council also sits far away from the audience which could even make lip reading difficult. The meetings can also be very confusing in terms of what is happening, and while there are paper copies of the agenda provided (which can help with following along) there are a limited number, and in one meeting I walked in there were only 11 copies provided. The location was not accessible.

Having the time and means to attend meetings is another issue. Most the meetings take place during the week. For example, the Board of Zoning Appeals is at 1 pm on Thursdays which can make it difficult for anyone who has a 9 am – 5 pm job to attend. There are not many, if any, local government meetings on the weekends. The meetings that are held at night are often TNT area meetings which are less government meetings and more so community meetings. As noted before, even community members gave public comments during the meetings saying that,

"it is tough to get folks out to a 1 pm meeting". One meeting, the Syracuse Planning Commission

public hearing, takes place at 6pm on Thursdays, and other than the Common Council Study

Session, that meeting had the largest audience with around 3/4th of the seats full. It's very

possible that citizens want to attend more public meetings but are simply unable to because of

the times they take place.

At a lot of the meetings I went to, there was someone video recording the meeting in the

corner. I wrote about it every time I saw it, thinking it was something Syracuse local government

was doing, with the intention of asking the videographer how someone could access the footage

of the meetings; however, the videographer always seemed to leave immediately after the

meetings and I could never talk to them. At the last meeting I attended, I found out the truth. The

videographers were all just SU students videotaping for a class they had to take. People who are

unable to attend a meeting cannot see video footage of it. According to Councilor Green, there

has been an effort to try and get meetings televised and he passionately stated that "We need to

get as many people attending or watching as possible". The problem seems to be funding and

other members of the board who are not as passionate about the community outreach effort.

In addition to physical accessibility issues, we must also consider the accessibility of

knowledge. Coming to know of a local government meeting is difficult. The only place where

local government meetings are advertised is on the Syracuse City website. The website features

an attached google calendar that holds all the dates, times and locations for public meetings in

Syracuse. It is not user friendly by any means. The website is cluttered with text, and different

colors; it is somewhat difficult to find what you're looking for. In addition to this, certain

meetings lack a description on what they are about or what they accomplish/work towards. Even

one of the people presenting to the Board of Zoning Appeals noted in his testimony that they had

opened the corner store unknowing that they needed to go through the Board of Zoning Appeals first. If people lack knowledge or access to knowledge about what a board or council is about, their ability to participate is hindered.

Margaret attended her first public meeting in her late twenties, when she was running a community event and a Common Councilor who knew a friend of hers invited her to come to a city meeting, "I didn't know that you could just go to an open meeting and I'm sure there's a lot of people in the city that don't know". Elaine B. Sharp argues in her work on neighborhood and civic engagement that participation in neighborhood based organizations is a stepping stone for social capital formation (Sharp 2012); and this proved to be true for Margaret who met the Common Councilor and got involved in local government because of her involvement in the community. Park (2003) also asserts that social capital is the precondition for civic culture and the source for democratic citizenship.

When I asked Margaret about the city's efforts to make local government meetings known, Margaret responded that, "It's not one of those things where I think they think they have to advertise, you know, because its city government. It's like you should already know this is going on." Councilor Green provided some additional commentary to the publicizing of local government meetings and clearly stated, "I don't think the government does enough to get the word out about meetings" and that "government fails regularly and it's not just because of low participation. It may be because people are not aware of the preparation for elections, the committees who nominate candidates, they're not involved and they don't know". The general lack of knowledge regarding government and political systems among certain communities keeps them from participating. If that information is not accessible, then it weakens democracy and therefore the effectiveness of Syracuse local government.

Following this, Margaret explained how people in her neighborhood don't see how it directly affects them and how their general preoccupation is with feeding their families; "they feel like they're not a part of it, so they don't really look into it and try to figure out where they fit it". People who do not know about local government meetings cannot participate in the political process. Additionally, if groups of people are feeling excluded or like that space is not meant for them or not accessible to them, then that infringes local democracy. As argued in "Taking Local Government Seriously", effective local government is only possible with a strong democracy (Bailey 2009). We cannot have a strong local democracy if local government is not accessible to all its citizens.

City Planning Commission
Planning Commission Meetings are held on Monday evening at 6:00 p.m. in the Common Council Chambers located on the third floor of Syracuse City Hall located at 233 East Washington Street, Syracuse, N.Y. unless otherwise indicated. **Click here for the full Planning Commission schedule for 2016 (revised).**

Public Notices:
> **December 19, 2016**
> **December 5, 2016**

Case #	AS-16-27	R-16-55	SP-84-25 M3
	PR-15-19 M1	R-16-62	SP-98-28 M1
	PR-16-44	R-16-63	SR-11-10 M1
	R-16-51	R-16-66	Z-2798
	R-16-53	S-16-04	
	R-16-54	SP-16-19	

Figure 1

Not only do we need to talk about the accessibility to knowledge about local city government, but we also need to discuss the intellectual accessibility of government documents for the public, such as agendas. Figure 1, a portion of the City Planning Commission webpage (City of Syracuse 2017), is what you are brought to on the Syracuse City website when you click on the City Planning Commission. There is no explanation or additional link provided to

learn about what the planning commission does or who is on it. Simply where and when the

meeting is held. The letter and number combinations are case numbers for the cases they plan on

seeing on a given date. The hyperlinked date provided is an agenda for the meeting. However,

there is no explanation of this featured on the website. Instead, it just looks daunting and foreign.

Figure 2

Figure 2, an excerpt from a Common Council Agenda on the city website (City of

Syracuse 2017). While the production of an agenda and its availability provided online and in

paper form at the meeting is positive, this is not a rhetorically accessible document. There is no

section or feature or article provided by Syracuse City Government that provides an explanation

for meaning for this political jargon. In searching for resources on the Syracuse City website, I

was unable to decode the difference between amend, authorize and contract. An extension of this

lack of accessibility to knowledge regarding local government is subliminal gatekeeping through language which is enacted through documents like shown above. Bourdieu asserts that "Language at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it. There is rhetoric which characterizes all discourses of institution" (Bourdieu 1991) and that sentiment is being exemplified here. Political discourse is specialized and requires cultural capital to access and understand it. The codified language of politics and local government effectively discourages those who do not possess cultural capital from engaging in the political process.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The three primary findings in this study indicate that the strength of representative democracy in Syracuse local government is weak. Certain groups of citizens are being not included in local government spheres through in-groups that require cultural and social capital and inaccessibility particularly with gatekeeping language; and this weakens democracy. Considering that Syracuse local government is a representative democracy, the Common Council and supporting boards should represent the real demographics of city, but it doesn't. Syracuse has the poorest Black and Latino populations out of the top 100 metropolitan cities in the country, and that is a serious problem. The bigger problem is that even though almost half of Syracuse's population is people of color, we do not see those groups represented or present in Syracuse local government. This research suggests that these groups are being discouraged from local government spheres through lack of accessibility and the political in-groups; and this fact is distorted by the creation of the political spectacle.

This research found that there is a lack in accessibility in terms of knowledge and physicality regarding local government. Limited knowledge is made available via the city Syracuse website, but the language utilized in local government is heavy in political jargon or a

specialized vocabulary. This serves as a gatekeeping tool and essentially restricts access to those who do not possess cultural capital.

The analysis of this political in-group demonstrated the various intersections it has with its cultural capital that each of its members possesses, social capital which is attained through whose relationship with Common Council elected officials and board members, and the symbolic capital stemming from their primary sphere of occupation: City Hall. With additional investigation and research, I think this has potential to prove that this body of people, this political in-group, possesses symbolic power. Symbolic power is unconscious modes of cultural or social domination that occurs in daily social habits maintained over conscious subjects (Bourdieu 1991). Like Margaret mentioned, "you can guess the room before you get there" and this is another tool that excludes or discourages people from participating in Syracuse local government.

Of course, all of this is hidden through the political spectacle that performed at these meetings. Political spectacles, enhanced and supported by use of symbolic capital, distort our sense of reality. Symbolic capital which draws on nationalism, patriotism, religion, are all present in Syracuse local government meetings. Ultimately, the performance is what is covering up the truth; true democracy is not being enacted. Meetings that are "just a formality" are not honest to the public, they are not transparent and they contribute to the creation of the political spectacle.

Further research regarding this topic should focus on measuring community understanding and comprehension of local government documents, and this could potentially pave the way for increasing rhetorical and physical accessibility to local government or more citizens garnering enough cultural capital to access local government spheres. Examining these

institutions of power and who is involved in decision making could potentially provide us with answers for poverty alleviation in Syracuse. Although it may not be racist in its intent, it is possible that this is a mechanism that reproduces racial inequality. However, there are steps to be taken in-between. Further research should be done on community members that engage in local government. Garnering a broader base of knowledge about what brings nonmembers of the political in-group to the meetings, how they learned about meetings, what they think about local government, could prove to give insight into differences in cultural capital accumulation as well as intentions behind civic engagement.

My project is contributing to a realm of research that has not been fully explored yet. Research done on local governments are incredibly limited and are usually restricted to quantitative studies analyzing the effectiveness of a policy or how citizens feel about local government. Little research has been done on what types of people are engaging with local government, how they are structured, or the strength of their democracy. As we enter into an era where democracy is under attack, with the influence of money in elections, we must critically look at the democratic institutions that are closest to us: local government. If democracy is crumbling in the Syracuse local sphere, what can be said about other local governments around the country?

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