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## Deepening Democracy: Inclusion, Deliberation, And Voice In The Grassroots South

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DEEPENING DEMOCRACY: INCLUSION, DELIBERATION, AND VOICE IN THE  
GRASSROOTS SOUTH

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This project would not have been possible without the kind cooperation of my informants. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Eme Crawford and the folks at Tell Them (and WREN), Graham Duncan and the SC Progressive Network, Meeghan Kane of Auntie Bellum/Unsweetened, and Jess Oliver and the amazing Girls Rock Columbia volunteers and campers. Columbia, South Carolina is a better place because of them.

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In this and other areas of my life, my parents have given me immeasurable support, unconditional love, and an appropriate amount of heckling—all of which have proven

essential to my finishing this project. They raised me to own and appreciate my own voice, and for that I will always be grateful.

Over the years, my sister, Bonnie, has served as a constant motivator, and her work ethic is an inspiration.

Finally, I don't know how I could have gotten to this point, in this project or in life, without my husband, Kyle. His support has been relentless and vast, and his patience superhuman. Without his care for me and our family, this dissertation would not be.

## **ABSTRACT**

Through an exploration of grassroots challenges to shallow democracy in South Carolina, this dissertation offers a model of democratization based on inclusion, deliberation, and empowerment as a remedy for democratic insufficiency. I posit that greater emphasis on inclusive democratic deliberation, both inside and outside formal political structures, will help deepen the South's shallow democracy, and that inclusive deliberation fostered through grassroots organizing that prioritizes consciousness raising, empowerment, and activism training will positively affect participants, deliberation, and policy outcomes.

Taking a grounded theory approach, I consider case studies of three organizations based in Columbia, South Carolina, and their attending theories of democratization: The Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights (democratization through education); Tell Them (democratization through praxis); and Girls Rock Columbia (democratization through affirmation). The experiences of these organizations offer insights into how relatively small, locally-based organizations can deepen democracy by

confronting traditional barriers to inclusive democratic deliberation.

Through education, praxis, and affirmation, these groups give politically underrepresented people the tools they need to become self-advocates. More importantly, through consciousness raising and empowerment, the organizations lend a sense of authority to the potentially powerless. Finally, by imbuing participants with feelings of agency and authority, the organizations work to create a more representative, comprehensive body for future democratic deliberations. Individuals who are able (and willing) to advocate for themselves enhance the quality of democracy at each level of government, as well as in the nongovernmental aspects of their day-to-day lives. The inclusive grassroots work that the Modjeska Simkins School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock do is directly in support of this.

Each of the democratic elements I consider here (inclusion, deliberation, and voice) benefit from the incorporation of the other two. Ultimately, I find that a meaningfully deepened democracy requires inclusive deliberation that lifts up and empowers the quiet voices.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

The southern United States' traditional political culture and its attendant focus on status quo maintenance, elite dominance, and citizen non-involvement has created a politics of exclusion. Traditionally marginalized demographic groups, particularly women, the economically disadvantaged, people of color, queer and trans people, and people whose experiences span two or more of these identities, are routinely disenfranchised, underrepresented, and otherwise kept out of southern policy-making at much higher rates than their male, economically privileged, white, heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. Their exclusion is at higher rates than their counterparts in other regions. These exclusions often result in policy cycles that fail to address, and sometimes even worsen, individuals' and groups' marginal positions in the political, economic, and social spheres.

Given the barriers that the South's shallow democracy has installed in the formal political system, marginalized

groups have turned to grassroots endeavors. Grassroots organizations and programs aim to focus on unmet or unaddressed needs. Local groups work from outside the system to deepen democratic roots in the South. By fostering inclusion and honing previously quiescent voices, grassroots programs often facilitate the healthy growth of democratic roots from the ground up, opening doors to deliberative democracy where citizens can speak for themselves.

Through the study of three organizations that seek to foster grassroots action and advocacy among and for traditionally marginalized populations in the South, I examine, both empirically and normatively, whether the work that grassroots organizations and projects are doing outside the formal political system goes far enough to address policy shortcomings and to start deepening Southern democracy.

The organizations I study are local to South Carolina with missions mirroring other organizations throughout the Southeast. Given its regular spot at or near the bottom of the list of states with women serving in its legislative bodies (CAWP 2018), South Carolina is a useful case for studying the effects of participation in grassroots organizing in the face of limited descriptive

representation (an element considered in nearly all measures of democratic depth and strength). The state also consistently experiences lower than average voter turnout rates (again, negatively affecting democratic depth) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). While my findings may not necessarily be fully generalizable to other states and regions, they establish a baseline and lead to questions for broader study. Additionally, they further inform theoretical discussions surrounding deep democracy.

The first organization I consider is the Modjeska Simkins School, a "civic engagement institute" under the umbrella of the South Carolina Progressive Network. The Simkins School offers training in advocacy and activism to citizens from around the state. The second organization I examine is Tell Them, a Columbia, South Carolina based grassroots e-advocacy network designed to educate and advocate for better reproductive health policies statewide. During the course of my study, Tell Them has evolved to include a broader mission as the Women's Rights and Empowerment Network (WREN). While WREN is not the focus of this research, I consider contributing factors to the organization's evolution and offer a brief discussion of WREN's contributions to Tell Them's grassroots endeavors. Finally, the third organization I study is Girls Rock

Columbia (GRC), a year-round non-profit organization that culminates each year in a summer rock camp for girls, trans, and gender non-conforming youth. Girls Rock offers music education and other lessons designed to promote leadership, critical thinking, collaboration, and increased advocacy for social justice. While my fieldwork focuses specifically on GRC Columbia, I also consider the impact of the nationwide Girls Rock Camp Alliance, of which GRC is a member.

Each organization addresses issues facing politically marginalized people in the South. All three groups intend to arm people with the information, resources, and tools necessary to eventually advocate for themselves. If successful, participation levels should increase and Southern democracy should improve. Through the consideration of these organizations, this study addresses gaps in literature concerning democratic theory, interest groups and social movements, public activism, and Southern politics in general. Further, the intersectional lens through which I approach my study addresses the roles that identity, power, and powerlessness play in these fields, adding to the often unidimensional dominant scholarship on these issues.

## **Research Questions**

Broadly, this dissertation asks to what extent grassroots organizing and activism improves the quality of democracy in the American South. Through my research, I begin to answer this question by exploring the relationships between grassroots efforts in South Carolina and the quality of democracy practiced in the state. Specifically, I consider the potential effects of the actions of organizations and activists geared toward improving the lives of traditionally politically marginalized populations in South Carolina.

Extra-political grassroots endeavors amplify voices that would not otherwise be heard. Even if these voices are not heard directly in state capitols, organizations do important work in offering avenues for participation that would otherwise be absent. That said, it is possible that democracy can only be deepened so far from outside the traditional political system. Perhaps, to create lasting citizen activism, thickening must come from within existing political structures. Grassroots organizations may ameliorate immediate problems (potentially providing encouragement), act as training grounds or educational fora, and challenge the status quo from without. Yet, their reach remains limited if they are working only from outside

of the formal political system. Without taking the next step into the system itself, Southern democracy may remain thin, and the cycle of marginalization may continue.

This dissertation asks, and hopes to answer through the study of three organizations that seek to foster grassroots action and advocacy among traditionally marginalized populations in the South, the following questions:

1) In South Carolina, a state with demonstrably low citizen participation, are grassroots organizations trying to deepen democracy?

2) What are the short and long term political goals of the organizations in this study?

3) What motivates the activists and leaders I study to do what they do?

4) What political theories bolster these activists and leaders? What do we learn about democratic theory from observing these groups in action?

The generalizability of my inferences will be limited by the multiple case study approach. The relatively small number of organizations that undertake these and similar projects, combined with their citizen empowerment goals, is best approached with qualitative field research. What my findings lack in statistical generalizability they will

make up for in analytic generalizability and depth. Other potential limitations include the partial reliance on self-reported measures of success, as well as a relative lack of time and resources for an extended longitudinal study of these organizations.

## **Methods**

To explore these questions, I use four approaches: in-depth interviews with leaders and participants in each of the three organizations; analyses of archival and documentary records for insights into organizations' successes, failures, processes, and development; participant observation of events, workshops, and projects; and a theoretical discussion that incorporates these findings into what we know about democracy in the South and democratic theory in general. To a certain extent, I employ a grounded theory approach rather than identifying hypotheses to be tested. Given my knowledge of the literature and existing theory, it makes sense that I use an "extended case method" approach, comparing my observations to patterns and outcomes that theory suggests should exist.

My study considers these organizations from their inceptions through mid-2018. In addition to analyzing the organizations' backgrounds and general operations and



missions, I highlight one campaign/action/project per organization to focus on with greater detail.

My methods are inductive. Researchers enter a field of study with prejudices and presuppositions. Through self-reflexivity, I approach this study with an open mind and the realization that I am very much a part of what I am exploring. Although I am the one theorizing, I try to allow the people I talk with to speak for themselves. I use the voices and reflections of my informants to build my theory and conclusions.

My scholarship is a hybrid of Political Science and Women's and Gender Studies, and thus employs a multidisciplinary approach, with feminist standpoint and postmodern theories providing parts of the theoretical framework for my study. One person's (or even a group of people's) experience(s) cannot apply to or stand for all people's experiences. Jaggar (2008) writes, "postmodern feminist researchers cannot pretend to offer one true story, but instead must recognize that many stories may be told, each incorporating a partial truth" (2008: 345). This notion is particularly applicable to my project—although I do attempt to draw some conclusions, I recognize that these conclusions are based upon the various contingencies of my informants' experiences. Additionally, as I attempt to draw

conclusions I maintain a reflexive stance (Harding 1987), conscious of my place in the research, and in doing so, incorporate my own standpoint as I theorize (Hawkesworth 1989).

Additionally, as a lifelong South Carolinian, my connection to this study goes further than my role as researcher. While any gender-based marginalization I have personally experienced due to shallow democracy has been relatively minor in comparison to others, because I have both been affected by South Carolina's poor democracy and participated in grassroots efforts to challenge it, I am in many ways also a subject of this study. While my experience cannot stand in for the experiences of others, it does have epistemological value in and of itself.

### **Instrumentation**

How do groups define success? How do I define success? Here, I incorporate an adaptation of Shaw's (2009) Effective Black Activism Model (EBAM), which looks at utility, timing, and context to determine success and responsiveness (2009: 2).

An empirical analysis of my observations, interviews, and document analysis will determine if the grassroots efforts studied improved the situations of marginalized groups. Insights from democratic theory will help determine

the level to which the organizations deepen or improve Southern democracy, both for the participants and the region as a whole.

### **Outline & Chapter Summaries**

In Chapter Two: Theory and Background, I set the theoretical stage for my empirical study, offering brief overviews of relevant literature concerning democratic theory, grassroots organizing, and Southern politics.

In Chapter Three I present my empirical findings gleaned from interviews and content analyses of organizational and archival documents in three case studies: the Modjeska Simkins School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock Columbia.

In Chapter Four, I juxtapose my findings with the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two, exploring how they interact and reconsidering theories where appropriate.

In Chapter Five I conclude my study, examining the lessons learned and the theories advanced in the preceding chapters, and positing new directions for the study of Southern democracy while referring back to relevant democratic theories.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORY AND BACKGROUND

#### Introduction

Many of the limitations of Southern democracy are rooted in a tradition of elite, exclusive politics. This study is primarily interested in subverting this model, both theoretically and practically. Building on the work of Iris Marion Young and other democratic theorists, my first analysis frames the inclusion problem within the context of the historical and traditional South, and democratization more broadly. Second, I consider tactics grassroots organizers have used to confront political exclusion. Third, I discuss the efficacy of relying on deliberation to achieve a deeper democracy in a traditionally exclusive system. Fourth, I explore the role that voice plays in securing the roots of inclusion.

Ultimately, I offer a theoretical model of democratization that examines grassroots organizing through the triple lens of inclusion, deliberation, and voice. In Chapter Three I consider three cases and theories of democratization in light of this model.

## **Democratization**

First, an examination of how we ascertain the quality of a polity's democracy is needed. Whether considered in terms of depth, strength, thickness, or some other metric, scholars have developed an array of scaling systems used to quantify the quality of a polity's democracy. I find it helpful to frame democracy as a system with *roots*. Therefore, I refer to a scale with "deep democracy" at one extreme and "shallow democracy" at the other throughout this work. How other scholars approach such scaling, especially when it comes to the requisite conditions for each position on their respective gauges, grounds my analysis.

Democratization is often popularly conceived as the process of creating or installing a democracy in a previously non-democratic state. The process through which a society goes from being "less democratic" to "more democratic" can range from the transformation of an authoritarian state to a democratic state, to the "deepening" of democracy through an expanded franchise. "Democracy" should not be measured as an absolute, but rather as a continuum. Further, we should not be solely concerned with the degree to which a society is currently

democratic, but also with its democratic stability and longevity.

### ***Polyarchy and Democratic Development***

Dahl (1989) offers a sort of "overview" of democratization. Told through the lens of polyarchical development, Dahl defines polyarchy as "a set of political institutions that, taken together, distinguish modern representative democracy from all other political systems, whether non-democratic regimes or earlier democratic systems" (1989: 218), both historical and hypothetical. Dahl sketches out seven institutional conditions that are necessary for polyarchical development:

- 1) **Elected officials** must have constitutional "control over governmental decisions about policy";
- 2) There must be "frequent, fair, free," peaceful, and largely coercion-free **elections**;
- 3) Most adults must have the franchise, resulting in "**inclusive suffrage**";
- 4) Most adults must have the right to **run for political office**;
- 5) Citizens must have the right to **freedom of expression**;
- 6) Information dissemination must not reside in the sole domain of the government or "other single

group" - citizens must be allowed to access

**alternative sources of information;**

- 7) Citizens must have "**associational autonomy**," in that they are allowed to independently join organizations such as political parties and interest groups (1989: 221).

It is important to note that most of these conditions may not necessarily need to be present in an "absolute" sense. The degree to which they are present influences the "depth" of polyarchival development (Dahl 1989: 233).

Dahl also outlines three periods of polyarchival growth, between 1776-1930, 1950-1959, and the 1980s. During the first period, although there were governments in existence that approached polyarchy, most had "defective institutions." Namely, their governments did not grant policy control to elected officials, elections were neither free nor fair, and/or elected officials were still required to defer to the monarch or other "non-elected" official. Additionally, the demos was still largely exclusive, denying the franchise to large portions of the population (1989: 234-235). Inclusive suffrage (often specifically in terms of gender) was the final institution most eventual "full polyarchies" achieved. Indeed, Dahl refers to polyarchies prior to this inclusion as "male polyarchies."

Dahl also sets up three "patterns of development," determined by whether or not specific countries have favorable or unfavorable conditions for the development of polyarchy. First is the transition from "nonpolyarchical regime" (NPR) to stable polyarchy (under favorable conditions); second is the maintenance of NPR (under unfavorable conditions); and third, under "mixed or temporarily favorable" conditions, NPR transitions first to polyarchy then back to NPR, from NPR to polyarchy back to NPR then back to polyarchy, or continues an endless cycle of transformation back and forth (1989: 242-243).

In examining the "conditions [that] increase or decrease the chances for polyarchy" (1989: 244), Dahl looks at five primary variables, the presences and degree of which influences the potential for polyarchy: 1) "civilian control of violent coercion"; 2) "a modern, organizationally pluralist society" (aka: modern dynamic pluralist society/country); 3) subcultural pluralism; 4) "beliefs of political activists"; and 5) "foreign influence or control." Concerning the first variable, Dahl writes that if "military and police organizations exist, they must be subject to civilian control," and that these controlling civilians "must be subject to the democratic process" (1989: 245). He also addresses the historically based



theory that when militaries employ more "foot soldiers" (including "hoplites" in Ancient Greece and foot soldiers with spears and longbows in the Middle Ages) than horsed chariots, and knights, which require more stealth and training, there have been greater "prospects for popular government" (1989: 245). The development of mass armies armed with widely accessible weapons corresponded with the "Age of Democratization." Dahl also points out, however, that when weapons became more expensive and lethal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, polyarchy surged across the globe. He offers four other military-related conditions that might explain this: 1) keeping armies small and insignificant; 2) giving control over the military and police forces to many spread out local governments; 3) creating a military force made up of democratic citizens - people who wear "both hat and helmet"; and 4) the indoctrination of officers with loyalty and fealty. He highlights a special danger when gulfs develop between the military and civilians. These military conditions are necessary, but not sufficient, for polyarchy to develop.

The second variable is the degree to which the society is a "modern dynamic pluralist" society (MDP), which is involved with the traditional historical associations and conventional indicators of wellbeing (wealth, urbanization,

life expectancy, infant mortality, etc.). There are two main, mutually reinforcing "characteristics" of the MDP that Dahl asserts are "favorable to polyarchy": 1) "an MDP society disperses power, influence, authority, and control away from any single center toward a variety of individuals, groups, associations, and organizations," forcing these groups to cooperate with each other; and 2) "it fosters attitudes and beliefs favorable to democratic ideas," such as capitalism or industrialization, mass education, for example (1989: 251-252). However, Dahl also notes that "an MDP society is neither necessary nor sufficient for polyarchy" to develop (1989: 253).

A third variable that influences polyarchy is the threat of subcultural pluralism. If a culture is not sufficiently homogeneous, then governing with a "consociational democracy," in which major subcultures are involved in governing, including having a mutual veto, proportional representation, and a degree of autonomy increases community cohesion (1989: 256-257). In this situation, the more subcultures that are present the more favorable to polyarchy a country will be.

Dahl also takes into account the political beliefs of leaders and participants, both the elites and the masses, especially when it comes to belief in the legitimacy of

polyarchy and the tension between polyarchy and guardianship. It is crucial that the elites be supportive of democratic ideals for a polyarchy to develop, unless the masses are strong and numerous enough to succeed in introducing or deepening democracy from "outside" the state, as Dryzek (1996) might suggest. Dahl also briefly considers the role of political culture (whether or not the culture is friendly to traditional "liberal" ideals).

Finally, Dahl looks at the role that foreign influence and control play in the development of polyarchy. In this complex situation, a more powerful country may either inhibit the development of a polyarchy or actually "contribute to the development of local institutions favorable to polyarchy" in a country over which it rules.

Dix (1994), too, offers a series of variables, partially echoing Dahl, to consider when explaining democratization. Dix includes "levels of economic development and social mobilization, the relative concentration of resources or income, patterns of political culture or beliefs, and leadership skills and strategies" (1994: 91). Dix (1994) is primarily concerned with the latter two variables, as he examines and poses challenges to two of Dahl's hypotheses about the influence of historic situation on the development of polyarchies.

The first hypothesis that Dix recounts is the notion that if political competition among elites is established before suffrage is extended to the masses, the polyarchy is more likely to maintain stability (1994: 91). Following this logic, the second hypothesis is that polyarchies that evolve gradually are more likely to succeed and remain stable than are polyarchies that result from sudden regime change or revolution" (1994: 92). Both of these hypotheses stem from the notion that the existing state must have both a political culture that is favorable to democratic ideals and elites that support the growth of democracy.

Although Dix agrees that historically both of these hypotheses have borne out, he argues that "third wave" democratization (post-WWII, postcolonial) does not demonstrate quite so much support for them (1994: 99). Although many democracies that are the product of the third wave have not had sufficient time to prove their stability, it appears that some states that have arrived at democracy via revolution are contingently stable, as are states that have expanded participation before developing a competitive system among elites. Further, these two hypotheses have been less connected in third wave democratization - one might bear out, but not the other. Ultimately Dix concludes that while "historical sequences" can play an important

role in determining the success and stability of a democracy, they are less important than other structural and cultural variables (1994: 102).

Lindblom (1977) argues that one of these structural variables is the presence of a private enterprise, market oriented economic system, which he ties to the notion of individual liberty to which polyarchy acts as a "means" (1977: 163). Based on their studies of Latin American states, Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens (1997) place a heavy emphasis on the "balance of class power" in determining what kind of democracy will develop and how deep it will be (based in part on the degree of participation of the "subordinate classes" (1997: 338)). They also note the importance of "state structure and state-society relations," again citing the effect on the participation of subordinate classes, particularly in terms of accountability; as well as "international power structures," which, in their studies, tended to "encourage formal democracy" while discouraging the deepening of democracy (1997: 338).

### ***Democracy in the United States***

Hill (1994) employs Ranney and Kendall's (1956) definition of democracy as characterized by popular sovereignty, popular equality, popular consultation, and

majority rule. He draws a distinction between procedures and results, and notes that goals about democratic outcomes "represent the *promise* of democracy: what we hope will be the consequences of having a truly democratic government" (1994: 5); this "promise can be fulfilled" if we insure democratic procedures. Hill also discusses the differences between direct and representative democracy, pointing out that "all modern nations that presume to be democracies have adopted...*representative* democratic mechanisms" (1994: 6; emphasis Hill's). Though citing a growing disillusionment with representative democracy in the U.S., Hill argues that representative democracy has been successful at "certain times in certain places in the United States," and that by learning about these times and places we may be able to "invigorat[e] representative democracy elsewhere today" (1994: 8). Like Dahl (and others), Hill includes in the essential traits of representative democracy:

- 1) Equal political rights (those rights that "concern participation in the policy decisions of government through the election process");
- 2) Free and fair elections;
- 3) Participation by the majority of the public;

4) And competing nongovernmental institutions (i.e., political parties) (1994: 11-12).

Hill uses a state by state approach to explore the degree to which the United States is truly democratic. Based on state-level analyses of voting rights, party competition, and political participation in the 1940s and 1980s, Hill ranks each state based on its commitment to these essential tenets of democratization, individually and in sum. Ultimately, he finds that while some states have increased their levels of democracy over time, as a whole the nation experienced a democratic decline between the two testing periods. Further, he establishes a link between democracy and policy consequences, demonstrating the importance of inquiry into the democratization process.

Using Dahl's polyarchy as a stand-in for true democracy, Hill sets up his state by state approach, citing the nation's different "political cultures" with their attendant democratic values, different "party systems" within each state, and the impact of historical development as justifications for why there might be useful democratic variation among the states (1994: 16-17). He writes, "If democracy exists in America, it surely exists at the state level" (1994: 16).

Arguing that there was a mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century "revolution...in the democratic process," Hill focuses his analyses on the late 1940s and the 1980s. Sandwiched between these two periods was simultaneously a growth in enfranchisement, and a "decline in overall public participation in politics" (1994: 18). By analyzing the extent and nature of democracy (based on voting rights, party competition, and political participation), in each U.S. state before and after this upheaval, Hill explores "the nature and the degree of our progress toward democracy, as well as the specific locales where that progress is most advanced" (1994: 19).

Hill posits the "right to vote in free and fair elections" as the "most critical of democratic rights," and explores how voting rights evolved during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing particularly on the status of these rights during the late 1940s and the 1980s (1994: 21). In examining the degree of democracy in the states in the 1940s, Hill weighs five conditions:

- 1) the status of the African American franchise in the eleven former Confederate states (labeling these states "highly undemocratic" (1994: 28));
- 2) voting rights of Native Americans in Arizona and New Mexico (labeled moderately undemocratic);



- 3) literacy requirements in several states (which only appear to have systematically affected the franchise in the former Confederate states and Arizona and New Mexico (1994: 30));
- 4) the effects of "political machines" (with Texas and New Mexico labeled moderately undemocratic because of these influences (1994: 31));
- 5) and the vote-diluting effects of malapportionment (which tended to favor rural districts with greater representation and was present in every state, but especially in Alabama, California, Florida, and Georgia) and gerrymandering (which Hill concedes he cannot fully evaluate because of the lack of documentation of the practice at the time of his study) (1994: 31-34).

Using these criteria, Hill creates an ordinal scale:

- 1) Democratic
- 2) Polyarchic
- 3) Modestly undemocratic
- 4) Undemocratic
- 5) Highly undemocratic;

And places each of the 50 states into one of the three "undemocratic" categories based on their scores (1994: 34-38). The states with the most restrictive voting rights

based on ethnicity (essentially all of the former Confederate states plus New Mexico) fall in the fifth category (highly undemocratic). The states that show the effects of malapportionment and "either political machines or moderately restrictive ethnicity-based discrimination" fall into the fourth, "undemocratic," category (only Arizona). And states that showed the effects of malapportionment, political machines, and most likely gerrymandering fell into the third category (modestly undemocratic - which Hill found characteristic of the remaining states in the late 1940s) (1994: 38).

Hill cites a "voting rights revolution" between the 1940s and 1980s as being responsible for formally lifting many restrictions based on ethnicity, literacy, residence, etc. Not only did this revolution, he asserts, lead to near universal suffrage, but also recharacterized the right to vote as a "good thing" deserving of protection by the federal government (1994: 39-40). Key among these changes was the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which eventually regulated practices in 39 states (chiefly those with histories of racial and ethnic discrimination); the "one person, one vote" approach to addressing malapportionment; and crackdowns on political machine corruption (1994: 42-43).

However, according to a review conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, as well as testimony from hearings before the House of Representatives, voting rights were still being infringed upon in a few states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and a little bit in Virginia) in the 1980s, particularly affecting racial and ethnic minorities (1994: 46). Abuses were further uncovered in reviews of "election procedure changes" submitted for federal "preclearance" (or not submitted and subsequently discovered) (1994: 46-47). Additionally, new forms of vote dilution have sprung up through the creation of at-large elections and election district gerrymandering - again, these tools are concentrated in a handful of Southern states (1994: 48-49). Finally, Hill notes the anti-democratic (compared with most other Western nations) effects of voter registration laws and requirements in every state except North Dakota (1994: 50). Based on this set of criteria, Hill once again puts each state into a category - North Dakota alone is classified as "democratic," the previously mentioned Southern states with lingering ("if subtle") restrictions on minority voting rights are classified as "moderately undemocratic," and the

rest of the states are classified as "polyarchic" (1994: 50-51).

Hill examines a second essential element of democratization and establishes the importance of political parties to American government, writing that "parties bring life and direction to government" and that parties are "mechanisms for communication whereby public sentiments are transmitted to government...overcoming the practical obstacles in the way of expressing the majority will" (1994: 54). Essential to political parties are their "linkage" function and "competition," which requires "organizational expression to be fairly represented in the governing process" (1994: 54). Ultimately, Hill includes in his study how well parties fulfilled these two functions during the 1940s and 1980s.

Hill also argues that despite the appearance of two-party competition at the national level throughout the nation's history, individual states have been largely dominated by single parties, at least up until the 1940s. That said, he outlines predictions of increased two-party competition within single states after the 1940s, based on "increased industrialization, urbanization, and related forms of 'modernization'" in the states, and then sets out

to see whether or not these predictions have panned out (1994: 59) .

Using a slightly modified Ranney index to measure state party competition from 1946 - 1952, and from 1980 - 1986, Hill divides the states into three categories: "one-party domination, two-party competition, and modified or weak one-party control" (1994: 60). He finds that in the first time period measured, thirteen states were "two-party competitive," fourteen states were "one-party dominated" (mostly Democratic Southern states), and twenty-one states had "modified one-party control" (1994: 60). In this last category, although the minority party was nowhere close to potentially controlling the government, it was at least fairly well represented in the state legislature and was slightly competitive gubernatorially.

Hill does not find evidence that party competition growth predictions played out as strongly as expected by the 1980s. While the number of one-party dominated states fell to three, most of the states moved into the modified one-party category, rather than the two-party category, which contained only sixteen states. Hill labels two-party competitive states "democratic," one-party states "highly undemocratic," and modified one-party states "polyarchic" (1994: 64). While this is an improvement over the situation

in the 1940s, it still leaves much to be desired in terms of democracy - especially when one considers the potential powers of dominant parties to bend election laws (think gerrymandering, voter ID requirements, etc.) to their will. Hill is careful to note the distinction between party competition at the presidential level and party competition at the state level - especially in the mid-realignment Southern states where at the time voters often supported Democratic candidates at the local and state level and Republicans for president.

In considering electoral participation, Hill looks at the final essential element of democratization. He writes that "public participation in government is the trait most commonly associated with democracy (1994: 72) and that "there is substantial evidence...that elections and parties are instruments for public influence of government, even if in more diffuse ways than simple-minded versions of democratic theory might suggest" (1994: 73). He argues that "throughout most of our history...only a minority of citizens were allowed to participate in elections" (1994: 74). Outlining a theory for increased participation post-World War II (based on diminishing limitations on suffrage, "increased two-party competition at the presidential level," and increasing mass education, which is often

linked to increased political participation (1994: 76)) Hill subsequently finds that although voter turnout did increase between the end of World War II and 1960, these numbers soon dropped, and continued to diminish all the way up into the 1980s (1994: 76).

Hill is not interested in national turnout rates, but rather examines the situation at the state level to determine the health of democracy in terms of political participation in the states. However, instead of simply relying on a standard measure for voter turnout - total turnout as a percentage of the voting age population, Hill argues for an adjusted measure that accounts for all those members of the voting age population who were effectively disenfranchised, as well as for those voters who voted only for down ticket races, and whose ballots "were declared spoiled or invalid by election authorities" (1994: 137). This measure, he claims, presents a more accurate picture of the overall turnout, which has been higher than previously thought.

Allowing for disenfranchisement of a small portion of the population ("aliens, incarcerated felons, many of the mentally ill, and many convicted felons who have returned to society" (1994: 77)), and that it is often impractical for many of the "institutionalized population" to vote,

Hill argues that "at least 80 percent or more of voting-age citizens" should vote for a state to be considered democratic (1994: 78). Arguably, the "allowance" for a certain number of incarcerated persons or convicted felons who would otherwise be members of the voting eligible population should be reexamined in light of trending demographic disproportionality (Alexander 2010), but Hill's findings are worth discussing nevertheless. Examining the time period from 1946-1952, Hill considers states with turnout rates of 51-79 percent to be polyarchic, 33-50 percent to be undemocratic, and under 33 percent to be highly undemocratic (1994: 78). He notes that during this time period, many primary elections held in the solidly Democratic South enjoyed much higher turnout than did the general election, and factors the exclusive natures of these primaries into his analysis). Using census data, the Book of the States, and previously reported election data, Hill finds that nationally, an average of 51 percent of the population turned out for gubernatorial elections during this time period; there were no states he judged to be democratic, though 27 fell into the polyarchy category; fourteen were undemocratic, and seven were highly undemocratic (all of these were Southern states) (1994: 79-81). Further, Hill presents a side by side analysis of the



mean turnout rates of his previously established categories of democracy levels based on voting rights, party competition, and a new measure, election calendar effects (1994: 81). The turnout levels support Hill's arguments, and demonstrate how state laws (election calendars and franchise regulations and limitations) affect democracy (1994: 82).

Arguing that turnout growth and decline was selective after 1960 and that national trends do not accurately capture this, Hill again examines gubernatorial turnout rates between 1980 and 1986. He finds that the national turnout average during this time fell to 46 percent (1994: 83); 16 states were polyarchies, 30 were undemocratic, but only four were highly undemocratic (1994: 84). Hill also finds, based on a state by state analysis, that when a state has a higher turnout rate, there is less of a class bias among those who turn out (i.e., the ratio of lower class to upper class (based on education levels) voters is larger (1994: 88). Hill argues that the class makeup of those voters who turn out can affect the policies enacted to favor and disfavor those who do and do not turn out (1994: 88). Ultimately, Hill concludes that the nation as a whole became less democratic based on political

participation during the time between his two periods of study (1994: 89).

Ultimately, Hill considers the three elements of democracy previously examined individually (voting rights, party competition, and mass participation) in a more interactive sense, to get a grasp on the overall level of democracy in each state in the 1940s and 1980s. To illustrate this, he suggests envisioning a three-dimensional cube. To be considered highly polyarchic, a state must ensure voting rights for "virtually all adult citizens" and either have "two-party completion and voter turnout in the range of 60-80 percent of the voting-age public" or "modified one-party competition that leans toward two-partyism and voting turnout greater than 80 percent (1994: 93). In this way, proficiencies in one area can make up for deficiencies in another area - this works the same way for modest polyarchies, but at a lower level. Hill refers to the most highly undemocratic states as "closed party oligarchies," and those states one level up (i.e., states that foster slightly higher levels of participation) "relatively closed party oligarchies" - these states have limited voting rights, little to no party competition, and low rates of political participation (1994: 94).

Using these criteria and scales, Hill ranks individual states during the 1940s and 1980s. Using a multivariate model to obtain each state's overall ranking on the democratic scale (taking into account each state's scores on the ordinal scale of voting rights, the interval scale of party competition, and on the interval scale of participation (in gubernatorial elections)), Hill finds that no state falls into the democratic category, and that the decline in the number of states in the highly polyarchic category from the 1940s to the 1980s is striking. Although all of the states that were considered closed and relatively closed party oligarchies in the 1940s increased their democratic rankings in the 1980s to what Hill terms mediocre democratization (but still below "modestly polyarchic") most of the movement is down the democratic scale. All of the states with the lowest rankings in both time periods are Southern states, largely due to one-partyism and low turnout rates.

Perhaps the most important element of Hill's study is his examination of the policy consequences of democratization in the states. The first policy-oriented hypothesis he offers is that "democratization will inevitably lead to an increased government commitment to welfare policies favoring the interests of the poor or

lower classes" (1994: 111). The idea is that as the potential recipients of the benefits of these policies will have a greater voice and input into the process, through its processes, democracy will indirectly bring about better welfare policy (this can be extrapolated to other policy areas - at its root it is just the idea that policies will change once those people who were previously unheard from are given a voice). An important distinction, however, should be made between the idea that democracy provides a direct link to policy change, and the idea that democracy merely facilitates policy change (see also Carnes 2013).

The second policy-oriented hypothesis that Hill presents concerns civil rights - the idea being that "democratization enhances policy responsiveness" to those people and groups of people who have traditionally been underrepresented. Hill approaches this hypothesis in a similar manner as the welfare hypothesis, again attempting to distinguish between causation and facilitation (1994: 115). The final hypothesis (supported by Mancur Olson and others) is that greater democracy comes hand in hand with the creation of interest groups, each of which will eventually claim the ear of policymakers and ultimately increase the size of government (1994: 116).

Hill empirically tests each of these hypotheses for the 1940s and the 1980s. For the welfare policy hypothesis, he "use[s] three measures of policy over which states have discretionary authority" (1994: 116) - the Budgetary Spending Index (takes into account "the level of budgetary commitment to welfare in light of the level of need for welfare"), the state's AFDC enrollment level, and the state's AFDC payment level (1994: 116-117). For the civil rights hypothesis he uses different measures for each time period: the McCrone-Cnudde Civil Rights Scale (CR legislation in three policy areas) (1940s), the Lockard-Dye Civil Rights Scale (1940s), and two "original measures of civil rights policy," a "fair housing scale" and a "fair employment scale" for the 1980s (1994: 117). Finally, for the size of government hypothesis, Hill uses measures of the state and local government employees per capita and the state and local government general revenue per capita for each state (1994: 177).

Based on the expectation that "the more democratic a government is, the more of certain kinds of policies it will support," Hill's first test examines only the basic correlation between his democratization measure and the selected public policies (1994: 118). For most of the policies measured for the first two hypotheses, he finds a

good deal of support - for the most part, more democratization equaled more welfare and civil rights policies (1994: 119). However, support is weaker for the third hypothesis, which highlights the role of interest groups.

In his second multivariate test, Hill tries to get more of a causal link as well as look for evidence of direct (as opposed to facilitative) effects, controlling for the "wealth" of the state, social mobilization in each state, public liberalism (only available for the 1980s), and the amount of federal subsidy/influence in each state (1994: 120-122). Ultimately, he finds that "democratization...does not have a universally powerful relationship with all [the] measures of civil rights and welfare policies in the 1980s" but that "the degree of democratization is closely and directly associated with some notable policies that favor those 'not hitherto represented'" (1994: 124). The third hypothesis is not supported at all.

Finally, Hill conducts a test for "facilitative democracy-policy linkages." To do so, he creates new measures "for the relevant facilitative relationships" based on theory and previous empirical work. These interaction terms include "a high level of democratization

coupled with a liberal citizenry," "democratization coupled with an especially liberal political party," and "democratization coupled with high wealth" (1994: 125). In this way, Hill is able to "distinguish those states that are both relatively liberal and relatively democratic from those that are only liberal or only democratic, and from those that are neither (the same goes for the other two variables). After running these additional regressions, Hill compares the results (including the  $R^2$ s) to the results from the direct effect regressions in order to determine which effects explain the most variance (1994: 126). The only policy measure that demonstrates a facilitative effect is the fair employment measure (from the civil rights hypothesis), though this measure is also strongly and directly affected.

From his findings, Hill concludes that democracy does, in fact, matter in terms of policy changes and adoptions in the United States - directly more so than facilitatively. This translates to the notion that democratic governments promote the interests of lower classes more than undemocratic governments, and that democratization promotes more "equitable" policies (1994: 128; see also Carnes 2013). Ultimately, Hill finds that "fair approximations of representative democracy do, in fact, exist in some states"

(1994: 131). Despite his findings that democracy was trending down through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he maintains that Americans must have faith in the "importance of democracy" in order for it to flourish. He further suggests that those states that are somewhat lacking in the democratization department should learn from those states that are "highly polyarchic."

### ***Redefining Democracy***

Walby (2009) argues that "[d]emocratic governance is a key component of good governance, which also involves the rule of law, the protection of minorities, human rights, and those institutions sufficiently developed to deliver democratic intent" (2009: 178). However, she contends that "the conventional definition of democracy is too narrow," and calls for a broader conception of democracy that includes the traditional measures of suffrage and elections *as well as* measures of "the presence of women and minorities within the institutions of governance," and is specifically designed to "address complex inequalities" (2009: 178). Arguing that "policies that allow access to political power for some groups but not others are not fully democratic," Walby presents a ten-point scale, to be considered in tandem with more conventional scaling



systems, to measure the *depth* of a polity's democracy (2009: 179). This scale is reproduced here:

- "1. no hereditary or unelected positions, including a monarch and members in either chamber of parliament;
2. no colonies (i.e. no governance of territories that do not also meet these criteria);
3. no powers of governance held by an additional non-democratic polity (e.g. organized religion);
4. universal suffrage, de facto as well as de jure;
5. elections, especially those that are free, fair, and competitive, in a context of free speech and free association and developed civil society associations;
6. a low cost for electioneering, either by law or by custom;
7. an electoral system with proportional representation;
8. an electoral system with quotas for under-represented groups such as women;
9. a proportionate presence in parliament of women and minorities;
10. a range of institutions (e.g. welfare

services) that are governed by the democratic polity;"

(Walby 2009: 179-180).

Walby uses this scale to measure countries' democratic depths, establishing three major classifications, ranging from the shallowest to the deepest. The first classification, which concerns the first five points on the scale, she terms "suffrage-democracy;" the second, which concerns the first nine points on the scale, she terms "presence democracy;" and the final, deepest classification, which encompasses all ten points, she terms "broad democracy" (Walby 2009: 180). Crucial to this last classification is the "application of democratic principles of governance across a broad rather than a narrow range of institutions" (Walby 2009: 180). Though Walby applies this scale globally in order to compare countries' relative democratic depths, because U.S. election laws (and other relevant legislation and history) can vary state by state, it can also be applied to individual U.S. states and regions.

While each point on Walby's scale merits additional discussion, this study is chiefly concerned with points four, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. In South Carolina, and in Southern states in general, de facto universal

suffrage has existed for only the past 40-50 years, and even since the advances of the Civil Rights movement has continued to be threatened by voter suppression tactics ranging from the adoption of voter ID laws and discriminatory redistricting to calculated dissemination of misinformation. Both historically and contemporarily, the South often fails to fully conform to Walby's fourth measure, universal suffrage, threatening compliance with even the shallowest democratic classification, suffrage-democracy.

Walby's sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth points determine the degree to which a polity has reached "presence-democracy," and are more concerned with individuals' and groups' access to the political decision-making process at the governing, rather than the voting, level. These points measure how well population subgroups are represented in governing bodies and other elected offices. While relative representation levels in Southern states have improved in recent decades, women and people of color are still disproportionately underrepresented in most Southern states (National Conference of State Legislatures; U.S. Census Bureau).

Walby (and others, see Thomas (1991), Swers (2002), McDonagh (2009), Carroll (2001) etc.) points out that

electoral underrepresentation has consequences at the policy level. She notes that, "On average, elected women are more likely to support policies that directly or indirectly support gender equality" across a wide range of policy areas, including reproductive rights, domestic violence, and sexual assault (2009: 182). Women are also more likely to prioritize policies that positively affect other underrepresented groups (racial/ethnic minorities, children, economically disadvantaged, etc.). Invoking Pitkin (1967, 2004), Norris and Lovenduski (1995), Phillips (1995), and Squires (1999), Walby challenges traditional discussions of the relationship between "descriptive" and "substantive" representation, concluding that "presence matters" (2009: 183).

Ultimately, though, Walby argues that democracy does not reach its full depth in a polity until it has applied "the democratic principle to a broad range of institutions," including education, healthcare, the criminal justice system, the workplace, and the military (2009: 183-184). For this to happen, she notes, citizens must be directly involved in "deliberative or empowered participatory" decision making. In Southern states, where tradition has dictated a largely elite-driven policy making

process, citizen involvement faces the hurdles of history, poverty, and education.

So, we know that deeper democracy begets more equitable (and arguably more just) policies. But how does a democratically shallow polity dig deeper? In the next section, I begin to address deepening democracies.

### ***Inclusion, Participation, and Deliberation***

One of the major focuses of this study, and one of the most important democratic values, is inclusion. While important, inclusion is also one of the most difficult democratic values to secure, in part because it is not always universally appreciated. Perhaps easiest to obtain through participatory or deliberative democracy, there are steps that liberal-representative democracies, such as the United States, can take to ensure that they are sufficiently and effectively inclusive. Young (2000) makes the case for the importance of inclusion in democratic states: "Inclusive democratic practice," she writes, "is likely to promote the most just results because people aim to persuade one another of the justice and wisdom of their claims, and are open to having their own opinions and understandings of their interests change in the process" (2000: 6). Given her view of deliberative democracy as "a means of collective problem-solving which depends for its

legitimacy and wisdom on the expression and criticism of the diverse opinions of all the members of society," it is easy to see how inclusion is a natural component of the democratic process. It is more difficult, in a practical sense, to account for inclusion in a representative democratic setting.

Throughout much of the existence of the United States we have, at best, approached a liberal-representative model of democracy. This model privileges individual liberties and private interests over the common good (or rather, the idea that it is in the interests of the common good for each person to have their individual interests met). In this model, democracy is carried out through a representative system that arrives at decisions by aggregating individual preferences - according to Dahl (1989), Mill (1861), and others, it is this practice that makes democracy possible at such a necessarily large scale. One of the key components of liberal-representative democracy is conflict brought about by the heterogeneity of those represented and each individual's concern with their own rights (Dahl 1989). One benefit of the representative system and the focus on the preservation of individual liberties is that even those people who either haven't the resources or the desire to participate in the process can

still take advantage of the protections guaranteed by the decision-making body, as there is (ostensibly) someone acting on their behalf. (Look at G&T (2004) p. 50).

Rather than conceiving the goal of democracy to be about a "common good or common interest," which inevitably involves conflict between individual interests, Young (2000) advocates a conception that sees "democratic discussion and decision-making" as "a process in which differentiated social groups should attend to the particular situation of others and be willing to work out just solutions to their conflicts and collective problems from across their situated positions" (2000: 7).

Ultimately, widening inclusion deepens democracy. Young (2000) cites a "reinforcing circle between social and economic inequality and political inequality that enables the powerful to use formally democratic processes to perpetuate injustice and preserve privilege" that exists in actual democracies, hampering the intrinsic link she sees between democracy and justice in ideal societies (2000: 17). She argues that we should challenge this cycle, and increase the level of democratic justice, by including more people in the democratic process.

In building this argument, Young considers both aggregative (as in liberal-representative) and deliberative

models of democracy, concerning her analysis more with the "process" of each model than with the "institutional frameworks" each entails (2000: 18-26). She criticizes the aggregative model by questioning the legitimacy of preferences on which it is based, its lack of a public nature, its "thin" conception of rationality, and its skepticism "about the possibility of normative and evaluative objectivity" (2000: 21).

Young favors, instead, deliberative democracy, noting that "in the deliberative model democracy is a form of practical reason," positioning its cooperation against an aggregative model's competition (2000: 22). According to Young, deliberative democracy's interlocking normative attributes include **inclusions**, here meaning that "a democratic decision is normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making;" **"political equality,"** meaning that all of the affected people should be included in decision-making "on equal terms," including equal opportunities to speak and question as well as "freedom from domination" and coercion (2000: 23); **"reasonableness,"** which means that all participants are willing to engage in discussions about decisions, "to be willing to change [their] opinions or preferences because others persuade us



that our initial opinions or preferences, as they are relevant to the collective problems under discussion, are incorrect or inappropriate" (2000: 25); and "**publicity**," which basically means that these inclusive, politically equal, reasonable deliberations take place in a public forum, peopled by participants from varied backgrounds who share their experiences with other participants and hold each other accountable (2000: 25). Given these four conditions, Young describes a model of democracy that has the potential to be "transformative," and to educate its participants even as they use it to make decisions. This is especially true when the model is characterized by inclusion, in that all those who will be affected by the decision are part of the decision-making (2000: 26).

Young goes on to describe how these "ideals" ensure a deliberative democracy that is "likely to promote the most just policies" (2000: 27). "If discussion reflects all social experience, and everyone can speak and criticize freely," she writes, "then discussion participants will be able to develop a collective account of the sources of the problems they are trying to solve, and will develop the social knowledge necessary to predict likely consequences of alternative courses of action meant to address them" (2000: 30). This collective, social knowledge will not only

allow the people to make just decisions, but it will also ensure that these decisions are "empirically and theoretically sound" (2000: 30-31).

Young proposes "two ideals of social justice" - self-development, which deals with distribution, power, status, and communication; and self-determination, which is another articulation of being free from domination (2000: 31-33). These two concepts, which comprise Young's social justice, can be achieved through the practice of deliberative democracy operating under the previously specified conditions. She goes on to address the circular nature of these notions, as well as the "structural inequalities" that make it impossible for most existing democracies to begin their deliberations from a place of justice - the privileged tend to use "democratic procedures" to reinforce their privileged status, marginalizing others' voices in the process (2000: 34). Young suggests that this cycle can be overcome through revolution or authoritarian imposition, but dismisses these methods as again not starting from just/democratic places. Instead, she believes that "oppressed and disadvantaged people" must use democratic processes to assert their equal rights to speak - must work within the system to improve it (2000: 35). Key to this notion is the idea of "struggle" - participants in Young's

democracy do not necessarily strive for consensus, rather, they try to "engage with others in the attempt to win their hearts and minds, that is, their assent" (2000: 51).

Young advocates strengthening inclusion as a way to deepen democracy, as Dryzek (1996) and others discuss. Along with inclusion, however, she also stresses the need for all participants to hold each other accountable - this, she says, will best lead to justice. "When public debate gets beyond soundbites and manipulated opinion polls," she writes, "issues often are seen as more complex and less polarized, and thus more open to minority voices" (2000: 35). On a practical level, Young posits "campaign finance regulation, lobbying regulation, corruption investigation, rules for hearings, procedures for public comment," etc., as tools for increasing inclusiveness and accountability in the decision-making process (2000: 36).

That said, Young also examines a series of potential limitations of deliberative democracy (and inclusion itself, in any conception of democracy) that may impede its ability to ensure justice, including the "privileging argument" - as all participants come from varied backgrounds, it may be difficult to establish "givens" or "premises" from which to proceed to discussion and argument (it may be difficult to get everyone on the same page),

which may, for all intents and purposes, leave participants from the margins out of the discussion altogether. It also limits the possibility for "reasonable deliberation" and may privilege those people who are better able to "articulate" their arguments (who are also usually economically, educationally, and/or socially privileged). Further, it may unduly privilege "reason" over "emotion," which does not always lead to a more reasonable discussion and again threatens to re-privilege the voices of the already privileged (2000: 39). A similar critique can be made of participatory democracy, in that the model may privilege people who have greater innate participation skills or the resources to acquire them, effectively silencing-excluding-people who do not feel comfortable speaking in public (or are simply unable to) or have difficulty articulating their needs/opinions/etc. I consider these criticisms, specifically, more closely below.

Young also considers the criticism that deliberative democracy "privileges unity," both as a necessary condition and as a goal (2000: 40). Without denying that there is a "common good" that warrants discussion, Young argues that democratic societies are actually quite heterogeneous, which challenges the idea that "unity" is a necessary

condition for democracy, and that establishing unity as a goal of democracy promotes exclusion, "narrows the agenda," and takes away some of the "deliberative" component (2000: 40-44). Further, "transcending differences" violates Young's previously established conditions and robs the process of the educational, transformative component.

Young also looks at problems with "assuming face-to-face discussion," calling for a "decentered model of deliberative democracy," which may include representation, and which increases people's opportunities for participation (2000: 46). This echoes Pateman's (1970) assertion that there is actually a continuum that connects representation and participation (1970: 44). In this conception, representation is a form of participation (albeit watered down)—as long as representation is faithfully carried out (granted, this could mean any number of things—see Pitkin (1967), Reingold (2008), Miller and Stokes (1963), Burke, and others), citizens who otherwise lack the resources to participate are able to participate in the process *through* their representatives. Young also considers the problems with "assuming a norm of order," which again threatens to exclude those people or groups who fall outside the status quo in terms of how they express themselves.

Similarly, Plotke (1997) argues, "...the opposite of representation is not participation...the opposite of representation is exclusion" (1997: 19). Representative government is often considered an imperfect but necessary component of large scale democracy (Dahl (1989), Young (2000), Federalist Papers, etc.), Urbinati (2000) and others argue that a representative system offers benefits not afforded by a more direct system (2000: 759), and even Young (1997), though elsewhere acknowledging its imperfection, claims that "political representation is both necessary and desirable" (1997: 760).

Though a representative system runs the risk of creating a "passive electorate," Urbinati argues that mass participation and representative government are actually mutually beneficial—the spatial and temporal gaps between citizens and their representatives actually foster interest and encourage citizens to participate through voting in elections. Urbinati even presents the notion that representation and participation, rather than working in opposition to each other, work as one continuous variable. Representation also improves inclusion, especially when conceived of as a form of advocacy.

Argues Plotke (1997), "Representation is not an unfortunate compromise between an ideal of direct democracy

and messy modern realities...representation is crucial in constituting democratic practices" (1997: 19). Theoretically, this supports the argument that representative democracies may actually be better at including the typically excluded than more deliberative or participatory systems. That said, care must still be taken to ensure effective representation—Urbinati cautions that proportional representation, for example, can actually be used against the interests of minority groups when their presence in a representative body "legitimize[s] the majority's decisions," which may harm the minority's interests (2000: 759).

Continuing in this vein, Guinier and Torres (2002) warn that the assumption that "true representation" can result from aggregative elections relies on accepting the myth that "the majority stands in for the minority" (2002: 170). They challenge the notion that as our winner-take-all elections are currently conducted it is possible for the "losers" (people who voted for the losing candidate) to have effective representation (2002: 178, 190). Exploring "representation based on demography, not geography," Guinier and Torres seek to "invigorate the definition of representation," envisioning a system of proportional representation in which "the voter is actually represented

by the person for whom she votes rather than by the person who gains the most votes and thus represents 'everyone,'" (2002: 202, 221, 210).

Of course there are other threats to representative equality to contend with as well. Thompson (2018), for example, argues that the demographic evolution of the United States into a primarily metropolitan country has led to a system in which citizens residing in different metropolitan regions are not only represented differently proportionally (quantitatively), but also have "different *kinds* of representation" (2018: 4). Even taking the obvious U.S. Senate malapportionment out of the equation, and assuming that state-level redistricting was somehow magically executed in an impartially just way, because of how once discrete cities have grown into metropolitan behemoths that cross not only county but often state lines, it may be impossible to achieve truly equal representation within our current system - even if the formal conditions were optimal.

### ***Deliberation without a Voice?***

One of the major criticisms of deliberative democracy is that it tends to privilege citizens who have the skills, social encouragement, confidence, and/or inclination to speak up. Without taking proactive measures, there is a



great chance that many voices - and the interests they represent - never make it into the discussion. Particularly problematic is the fact that entire groups of citizens - especially women, racial/ethnic minorities, and members of other political minority groups - are routinely silenced by both external and internal forces.

Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) explore the social and institutional conditions that give rise to this silencing, and the consequences that come with its practice. Specifically interested in how gender affects participation in discussion and debate, and defining "authority" as "the expectation of influence," they argue that "men and women tend to enter the room with different levels of expected influence," and that the subsequent "actions that people exchange during discussion affect the authority gender gap" (2014: 1). Specifically addressing the debate over the virtues of deliberative democracy, Karpowitz and Mendelberg credit democratic deliberation, particularly when carried out through "participat[ion] in town-meeting-style forums," and "revitalizing...vibrant grassroots associations of the past," as a "potential remedy" for modern citizens' "woefully low levels of political knowledge, reasoning, and interest" (2014: 5). They also note, however, the potential "pitfalls" of deliberation that occurs in small groups -

particularly concerning gender inequality. "Women are highly disadvantaged in many deliberative settings," they contend, "and this disadvantage affects everything from how long they speak, to the respect they are shown, to the content of what they say, to the influence they carry, to their sense of their own capacity, and to their power over group decisions...The problem is not that women are disliked or formally discriminated against; rather, the problem is that while women are liked, they are not given equal authority" (2014: 5).

Given that "groups with less power and authority in society are less likely to participate in politics," it is particularly troubling that when members of these groups *do* try to participate in a deliberative setting, they often face additional, unique hurdles. As Karpowitz and Mendelberg note, "Attending a meeting is not the same as speaking up. Speech is an act of political participation in its own right. And while women are dutifully showing up, they are not actively participating" (2014: 10-11). This finding is key. While many argue that descriptive representation in decision-making bodies is essential for deep democracy to flourish, we should not assume that presence alone is sufficient.

Of course, this is not to say that we should lay all of the blame for unrealized levels of participation at the feet of the women who are showing up. In fact, Karpowitz and Mendelberg note that in some situations, the more women who show up to participate, the more men in leadership positions become "verbally dominant and less inclusive of women" (2014: 17; see also: Kathlene 1994). Given this potential for backlash, it is perhaps not surprising that often, "feminist movements and organizations in civil society affect social policy much more than 'intra-legislative political phenomena such as...women in government'" (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014: 17-18; Htun and Weldon 2012: abstract).

But it is not simply out of a sense of fairness or inclusion for inclusion's sake that proactive measures should be taken to amplify women's (and other silent) voices: there are policy consequences as well. "[Women's] increased voice has an effect on collective outcomes: the group sets policies that are more generous toward the poor and vulnerable" (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014: 2). It is important to note, too, that it is not only the substantive content of deliberation that changes when more women are present and equally participating: the very nature of the deliberation itself changes as well. In general, women are

more socialized to prioritize empathy, cooperation, and collaboration than are men, and these priorities tend to spill over into deliberations when women are steering the process (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014: 19).

Karpowitz and Mendelberg also note that the "combination of more inclusive and more deliberative interaction can create a feedback loop for women's representation, further increasing the authority of the women who are present...If interaction becomes more feminine - that is, more deliberative and democratic - then women's authority can rise" (2014: 21). Conversely, the less women interact in deliberative settings - and the less these deliberative settings prioritize the kinds of interactions suggested by women - the more women's authority is depressed.

Consequently, it is not only the status of women that is at stake when their authority is depressed, but also the quality and usefulness of democratic deliberation itself. While "social equality of actual participation and influence" is often heralded as a hallmark of deliberative theory in general, the initial unequal distribution of authority along gender lines can be difficult to overcome in practice, especially in the absence of proactive/preventative measures. (For a more in-depth look

at the policy and democratic consequences of "unequal political voice," see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012)).

### ***Inclusion, Deliberation, and Voice***

Given the obstacles to inclusion, the shortcomings of deliberation, and the dampening of underrepresented voices, how do we make our shallow democracy more just? How does the South, which has been built literally on the backs of people excluded from the democratic process and has been slower than any other region to invite those excluded people in, deepen its democracy?

### **Inclusion in the Grassroots**

Perhaps answers can be found in the work of grassroots organizers and activists. Woliver (1993) discusses grassroots activism as it relates to social movements, writing:

"Social movements can sometimes overcome the obstacles challengers face in the political system. A social movement provides a language with which to describe injustice, connections to like-minded individuals, and a sense that change is possible. Understanding social movements, therefore, is integral to the analysis of the fortunes of ad hoc, grass-roots interest groups" (1993: 19-20).

Shaw (2009) argues that grassroots activism "includes the broad repertoire of collective actions lower-income activists take to demand government accountability—from mobilizing the vote against jaded incumbents (normal politics) to standing in front of bulldozers (extra-normal politics)" (2009: 2). Both of these conceptions, especially if expanded to include the broad category of "politically marginalized" individuals, involve people from outside the formal political realm using an array of tactics to elicit a response *from* those in the formal political realm.

That said, as this study considers the potential remedies to problems of exclusion and voice in democratic deliberation that grassroots activism may offer, I am less concerned with the relationships between grassroots organizations and formal political structures than I am with the relationships between grassroots organizations and citizens themselves. Considering "social movements as mechanisms for political inclusion," Costain (2005) argues "for reframing the study of social movement politics to re-emphasize their role as mechanisms for incorporating marginalized groups into the polity" (2005: 109). It's the mechanics of this incorporation - and empowerment - of the previously excluded that I explore here and in later chapters.

### ***Consciousness, Voice, and Empowerment***

Woliver (1993) argues that "One power social movements have is the reshaping of consciousness of injustice and rights for adherents. Recognition of problems as political, not simply personal or individual, and identification with some of the goals of a movement means a social movement can have an impact much broader than displayed by the people actively participating" (1993: 20-21).

This notion echoes sentiments of early Second Wave women's movement organizers. A major component of Second Wave activism and organizing was the development of "consciousness-raising" (CR) groups, which generally involved a combination of personal testimony or storytelling, "consciousness-raising actions," and organizing activities (Morgan 1970: xxiii; Sarachild 1970). In turn, a major component of CR was "consciousness-raiser (organizer) training - so that every woman in a given 'bitch session' cell group herself becomes an 'organizer' in turn, of other groups" (Morgan 1970: xxiv; Sarachild 1970). Helping others start new CR groups, understand CR theory, and ultimately realize personal/political intersections was an essential goal not only of CR participants, but also of (often radical) feminists in general.

Levit and Verchick (2016) describe CR as "the process by which individuals share personal experiences with others in an effort to derive collective significance or meaning from those experiences"; consciousness-raising fosters "a sense of collective identity" useful in inspiring public action (2016: 45). Since Robin Morgan cited Kathie Sarachild's breakdown of CR technique in 1970's Sisterhood is Powerful, potential CR venues have evolved from small, in-person group meetings to include virtual interactions, social media communication, television programs, blogs, and even "a universe of homemade confessionals on YouTube" (Levit and Verchick 2016: 46). Citing CR as "the quintessential grassroots movement," Levit and Verchick identify the "underlying values" of consciousness-raising as: "a commitment to collective engagement, the public significance of private life, and an acceptance of individual perspective," emphasizing the prioritization of process over result (2016: 46).

Pearson (1999), finds that "women's grassroots movements have sprung up throughout the United States to address needs not being met by government, churches, and traditional social service agencies," and that "these groups focus on notions of democracy that are seen through a 'female' consciousness that reflects women's experiences



as wives and mothers" (1999: 328). Focusing on impoverished women in Central Appalachia, she is particularly interested in the role of empowerment, "a term closely linked to this 'female' conception of democracy" (1999: 329). Citing its connection to a "participatory grassroots democracy model with its focus on social justice and development of the individual," Pearson breaks down "empowerment" into several components: "voicing the silenced, owning one's own vision, facilitating self-transformation from subject to object, creating autonomy, raising self-esteem, and developing a person committed to reconciliation, inclusivity, and consensus building while allowing for diversity" (1999: 329). This broad conception of empowerment, as well as its close link to women's grassroots organizing, begins to address some of the voice issues that arise even in justice-minded democratic deliberations.

### ***Inclusive Grassroots Work***

Guinier and Torres (2002) seek to "create a dialogue about interactive forms of representation and more inclusive practices of democracy. Political representation becomes less about relinquishing power or seizing power or surrendering power. Instead, it becomes more about facilitating a dynamic engagement that begins to tell new stories about democracy. These stories involve organizing

at the grassroots level, sharing power, and engaging the people themselves in actions that dissipate fear and build confidence" (2002: 221).

Traditionally and contemporarily, one of the most important pillars of grassroots organizing has been "activism training." This can range from simple guided letter-writing to teaching organizing tactics and other leadership skills. As participants perform various "activism tasks," they learn about the tools of the grassroots trade - what they are, and how to use them.

The tools themselves, however, are perhaps secondary to the context in which the training occurs. Alinsky (1971) stresses the importance of using "personal experience...as the basis for teaching" (1971: 64). While eventually aggregated personal experiences should coalesce around a broader central concept, it is crucial that organizers initially engage with participants/trainees within the context of what the participants/trainees know or have experienced. This is where the storytelling and personal testimonies of CR techniques can be helpful - for an organizer to be able to teach within the context of personal experience, they have to first know what that experience includes.

Of course, there is a reason CR groups started out as

intimate, in-person gatherings. It is much more comfortable to share one's stor(ies), and experiment with exercising one's voice, in a small, familiar setting, than it is to do so with strangers. Grassroots organizers and activists have worked to develop strategies to overcome difficulties of empowering the voiceless in large scale and/or impersonal settings, at times taking notes from activists and organizers in formal political realms.

### ***Systems of Representation and Deliberation***

Recent work in democratic theory explores new ways of thinking about representation and deliberation. Rather than considering only traditional "promissory" forms of representation, conceiving of representation as a "system" allows us to expand the notion to include actors and participants at all levels - not only those empowered by the formal system to make wide sweeping decisions, but also those affected by the decision-making (Mansbridge 2003; Disch 2011; Montanaro 2012). In a way, this gives grassroots organizations a more formal seat at the representation table.

In a similar way, new scholarship on deliberation envisions a whole "deliberative system" in which informal deliberations (even including personal conversations) are connected to deliberation in the formal halls of

policymaking (Dryzek 2010; Mansbridge et al. 2012). Once again, this potentially situates the often informal deliberations that happen at the grassroots and community levels on a continuum with arguments on the U.S. Senate floor.

Considering both representation and deliberation in terms of "systems" mirrors the conception of a democracy with roots. In these cases, just because the roots of the system are invisible or difficult to see does not mean that they don't exist. Indeed, the roots are absolutely essential.

### ***Trusted Sources***

One area where grassroots organizing and formal electoral politics have intersected is in Get Out the Vote (GOTV) and voter engagement efforts. In recent years, organizations (especially women's organizations) have employed a "trusted source" model for voter engagement - by exploiting existing networks and infrastructures, organizers can reach potential voters through means (and often spokespeople - celebrity and lay alike) that they are familiar with—that they already trust (Woliver and Boiter-Jolley 2018).

The trusted source model is more generally used in grassroots organizing in two ways: first, the rise and

pervasiveness of social media outlets has facilitated contact between trusted sources and potential activists (arguably, this has created a "boom" of "trusted sources"), making calls-to-action easier than ever before; second, through traditional and contemporary grassroots training tactics, more and more participant activists are gaining skills and confidence to become their own trusted sources. By developing a sense of ownership not just of the content of their chosen message but also of the tools with which to wield it, they no longer need to look to an external trusted source for direction—they can trust themselves.

Trusted source networks that exist through the use of social media give rise to twenty-first century consciousness-raising activities that transcend geographical limitations. The recent "#metoo" movement (which Carty (2015) might refer to as a mass "digital whistle-blowing"), in which survivors of sexual assault and harassment "outed" themselves via Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking platforms, is a classic example of using storytelling and personal testimony to identify and call attention to the intersections of personal and political shared experiences. Conversations once relegated to the "circles of trust" found at kitchen tables, beauty parlors, and small feminist gatherings are now taking place

on a much larger scale because of the trust inspired by (largely) self-selected and curated virtual social networks. Both witnessing others' and sharing one's own stories help potential activists and organizers learn the power and worth of their voices, and the continued use of technology and new media helps translate that power into action in ever expanding ways (Carty 2015).

### **Conclusion: Southern Democracy and Grassroots Inclusion**

The South is historically and contemporarily democratically deficient. Through legal disenfranchisement, underrepresentation, discouraged participation, and a history of codified and de facto discrimination, Southern political leadership has systematically maintained an at-best shallowly democratic, exclusionary regime. Culturally characterized by traditional gender roles; a history of both informal and sanctioned racism; a tradition of elite political domination; relatively high poverty rates and relatively low health and education standards; and a conservative religiosity that condemns nontraditional gender roles and sexual orientations and identities, Southern citizens who fall outside the narrow description of the dominant caste (white, male, straight, cis, Christian, financially secure) have been routinely excluded (officially or by way of social convention) from formal

political deliberation. Traditionally marginalized groups (women, people of color, poor people, queer and trans people) remain underrepresented in legislative bodies and other elected offices. Not only does this result in these populations' policy interests being un- or under-met, but the routine exclusion reinforces itself in an ongoing cycle of shallow democracy.

While social movements have arisen to challenge the system and infiltrate formal political realms, and in many cases have met with success (see, especially, the organizations and pursuits of the Civil Rights Movement (Payne 1995, and others)), a lasting sense of true inclusion has been elusive. Even organizations designed to confront exclusion in formal politics have faced their own internal tendencies to exclude voices that don't sound like (or aren't as loud as) those of group leaders. While this is, of course, not entirely unique to the South, because of the region's pervasive traditionalism and palpable discrimination it has been observable in higher relief than elsewhere in the U.S.

I posit that a greater emphasis on inclusive democratic deliberation, both inside and outside formal political structures, will help deepen the South's shallow democracy, and that inclusive deliberation fostered through

grassroots organizing that prioritizes consciousness-raising, empowerment, and activism training, particularly among traditionally excluded populations, will positively affect participants, deliberation, and policy outcomes. In chapter three, I examine three organizations that purport to incorporate one or more of the above priorities in their pursuits. Chapter four explores how these organizations' experiences inform our understanding of the effects of inclusion, deliberation, and additional voices on the South's shallow democracy.



## CHAPTER 3

### CASE STUDIES: DEMOCRATIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION, PRAXIS, AND AFFIRMATION

#### Introduction

To examine contemporary grassroots responses to South Carolina's shallow democracy, I consider three organizations based in Columbia: The Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights, Tell Them, and Girls Rock Columbia. The groups employ nuanced standpoints, embedded in democratic theory and intersectional feminism, in their goals to deepen democracy. The Modjeska School focuses on teaching the role the past plays in the present. Tell Them guides participants' activism as they learn how to use new advocacy tools. Girls Rock is concerned with finding and validating new voices. All three organizations incorporate degrees of grassroots activism training specifically designed to address issues faced by different marginalized populations, but each organization embodies a different theory of democratization at the individual level.

The first organization is the Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights (informally, the Modjeska School), housed

under the umbrella of the South Carolina Progressive Network. Named after the civil and human rights icon and lifetime Columbia resident Modjeska Monteith Simkins, the school holds yearly sessions designed to expose students to the tools and skills necessary for effective grassroots advocacy. They work to instill a working knowledge of "a people's history" of South Carolina. With a nod to Howard Zinn, a slew of historians, activists, and historian-activists reexamine the state's complex and often problematic history. The curriculum touches on people and events not regularly studied in public schools or even basic college history courses. By the end of each session, graduates emerge with new advocacy weapons to wield and a more comprehensive understanding of where they come from and what they're up against.

The second organization, Tell Them, was first organized under the umbrella of the New Morning Foundation and has since been absorbed into the Women's Rights and Empowerment Network (WREN). The New Morning Foundation, which is currently sunseting, was primarily established to address sexual and reproductive health issues in South Carolina, and has funded a variety of projects and sister organizations geared specifically toward areas ranging from teen pregnancy and cervical cancer prevention to medically

accurate sex education in schools and contraception access. Tell Them billed itself as a "grassroots e-advocacy" network, and was largely devoted to facilitating web-based activism efforts. From training sessions to lobbying days, the organization mobilized around issues relating to women's and girls' health and reproductive rights. Importantly, Tell Them taught through action, hosting events like "Bee Day," during which attendees made the rounds of "activism stations," writing letters, sending emails, and making phone calls, culminating in a group lobbying trip to the South Carolina State House.

Third, Girls Rock Columbia brings girls (as well as trans- and gender-nonconforming youth) together each summer for a week-long camp during which they learn to find and amplify their own voices. Through workshops such as zine making, self-defense, songwriting, and media literacy, campers develop skills to help them articulate the issues they face, collaborate with others, and of course, express themselves through music. By the end of the week, each camper has become part of a band, helped write a song, and learned that their voice matters and deserves to be heard.

Each of these three organizations focuses on a different - but essential - aspect of grassroots organizing; each group also engages different segments of

South Carolina's population. The leaders of each organization understand the unique challenges that traditionally politically marginalized citizens face when trying to access and exercise influence, and have designed programs to help overcome these challenges. By focusing on political minorities and exploring extra-political advocacy tactics, the Modjeska School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock directly confront South Carolina's thin democracy and politics of exclusion.

### **Democratization through Education: Teaching a People's**

#### **Activism at the Modjeska School**

##### ***Background***

The South Carolina Progressive Network, a descendent of organizations like the Grass Roots Organizing Workshop (GROW) and other grassroots and civil rights efforts in South Carolina, represents "a coalition of organizations and individual activists from across the state who have joined forces to promote social and economic justice" ("About," 2018). Conceived of with a mind both toward community organizing and governmental accountability, the Progressive Network's mission encompasses "human, civil, and workers' rights, reproductive freedom, environmental protection, and governmental reform," and is pursued

through "education and action" including monthly meetings and ongoing projects ("Mission," 2018).

In 2015, the South Carolina Progressive Network expanded its 20+ year mission with the launch of the Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights. Named to honor Simkins' legacy of human rights advocacy (including work in school desegregation, health education, and voter registration and engagement, among other crusades), the school is coordinated by Education Fund arm of the South Carolina Progressive Network. Students and faculty both are "guided by Modjeska's fighting spirit as they take on issues of economic and social injustice that keep [South Carolina] at the bottom of too many quality-of-life rankings" ("About," 2018).

Modjeska School organizers developed a curriculum in 2014, and the first eight-week session was held in the spring of 2015. Conceived of as a "civic engagement institute designed to help citizens of all ages learn how to promote democracy and justice in South Carolina," the program's ultimate goal is to "empower citizens so they can transform the power structure in South Carolina" ("Modjeska Simkins School," 2018).

The 2016 and 2017 sessions (each extended to 10 weeks) were held at the historic Seibels house in downtown

Columbia, about four blocks away from the cottage Modjeska Simkins called home from 1932 to 1992 and which now houses the South Carolina Progressive Network. Classes were held the first year at a now-defunct eclectic music venue across the Congaree River in West Columbia. Each year the class has been capped at around 30 students.

The 2015 session served as a sort of test run; for the most part, students were already members of the SC Progressive Network and relatively tapped in to the grassroots organizing community in Columbia. Organizers wanted a "captive audience" on which to test the curriculum, and as one organizer noted, "activists will show up if you tell them something's going on and tell them you'll give them pizza or something" (Duncan interview, 14 November 2017).

Since then, organizers have worked hard to cultivate a diverse "student body" each year, reaching out to area HBCUs in search not only of students of color but also of students younger than the average SC Progressive Network member. Project Coordinator Graham Duncan argues, "This isn't doing anybody any good if we're not engaging with the black community - they're the ones suffering the most from politics in South Carolina." Students have ranged from retirees in their 70s to college and even a high school

student. Some weeks, organizers' and lecturers' elementary and middle school-aged children have attended sessions as well.

Classes are held every other week for two hours on Monday evenings, generally from late-March through early-June. Students pay a \$190 tuition fee (with some scholarships available); this includes course materials and helps cover rental fees, the food provided at each class meeting, and other incidental costs - the goal is for the program to be self-funding rather than function as a fundraising source for the larger Progressive Network.

In addition to two assigned texts included in the tuition fee (Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States and Maria Fleming's A Place at the Table: Struggles for Equality in America), students follow a general narrative document composed by school organizers which provides an overview of the South Carolina-specific course material. Organizers supplement these texts with several articles (often from academic publications) per week, which Duncan notes are generally read as follow-ups to topics students find themselves particularly interested in.

While Duncan and a few other core organizers craft the (constantly evolving) curriculum, class sessions are often led by guest lecturers and speakers. Guest faculty range

from specialized historians to grassroots organizers to sitting state representatives. According to Duncan, the most effective (and popular) lecturers are those who are activists themselves - people who blend their work in their field of expertise with their work for social justice. As of this writing, the Fall 2018 session has been rescheduled for 2019.

### ***Knowledge is Power***

The bulk of each 8-10 week session is dedicated to contextualizing contemporary inequalities within a centuries-long historical framework. After an orientation session, students trace life in South Carolina from the "earliest human habitation through Native presence" through colonialism and the advent of slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, Jim Crow and the rise of the Dixiecrats, the Southern Strategy and the United Citizens Party, the evolution of progressive organizations and networks, up to the work of the present day and future challenges. Only in the last two class sessions are students directly exposed to strategies and praxis; the penultimate session asks, "What are our sharpest tools for building and sustaining a popular movement for a revolution of social values? What skills do we need, and what resources do we have?" (2017 Class Schedule, in author files); and students use the



final session to design and launch their own organizing project.

Modjeska School organizers operate under the theory that the hurdles faced by marginalized South Carolina residents today are best understood through the lens of historical context: the past informs the present. They also trace the state's persistent shallow democracy to the earliest days of colonization. Project Coordinator Graham Duncan explains, "...from its founding, South Carolina wasn't a shining city on the hill like Massachusetts where everybody came for religious freedom and stuff - no, we were set up as a slave-based economy to make money for a certain small number of people, and we've operated that way for the entirety of our history" (Duncan interview, 14 November 2017).

Duncan cites this in-depth understanding of South Carolina history as the most useful takeaway for Modjeska School alumni, noting that for many students, these classes are the first time they've been presented with the details of the codified racism of the Jim Crow era or the explicit disenfranchisement contained in the 1895 state constitution.

"It's not that we're out there teaching anything too revolutionary," he says, "but if you didn't do upper level

history in college or something like that, you probably didn't do an in depth look at the way Reconstruction operated in South Carolina...a lot of folks haven't had a history class since maybe a survey class in their freshman year of college or maybe high school...and in both situations you do kind of a rushed look at history" (Duncan interview, 14 November 2017). Even when students have had a more comprehensive experience with South Carolina history, it's often not been at the hands of a teacher or professor who is especially attune to continuing inequalities or problematic power dynamics at play.

Of course the Modjeska School is not just a history course. An emphasis is placed on teaching the history because of the transformative effect that placing oneself within a developing narrative can have. Students are not only taught what has come before and how those events influence their present, but they are also taught to see themselves as active agents in determining what comes next.

Making the connection between lived inequalities in the 21st century and discrimination written into law in the 19th century is empowering in its own right. Being able to see patterns of disenfranchisement that transcend centuries legitimizes and gives a name to nagging feelings. If a person has gone through life feeling as though they're

operating from an uneven playing field, it can be validating - even vindicating - to learn that the playing field was intentionally built on a tilt. This sense of validation - similar to that found through "consciousness raising" during the second wave of the U.S. women's movement - can be the difference between accepting democratic exclusion and insisting on space in democratic deliberation.

Extending this theory that knowledge leads to validation leads to empowerment leads to deliberation leads to a deeper democracy, the Modjeska School's curriculum also highlights the points in South Carolina's history when marginalized people have been able to break through barriers and reach, if not always a seat at the deliberation, at least a position from which to more effectively disrupt the deliberative status quo (see also Freire (1970) and Alinsky (1971)). For instance, students learn how the United Citizens Party challenged the South Carolina Democratic Party's race-based gatekeeping in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They learn about the problems, but they also get to see examples of how those problems can be successfully addressed, even in a democratically exclusive system. The school's philosophy is captured well by its namesake, Simkins: "I'm not going to say that there

hasn't been change; I'm saying that it all came as a result of struggle. The power structure doesn't give anybody anything" (Robbins 2018, 15).

***Projects - Missing Voter Project; Democracy Project; Monuments Tour***

The Modjeska School and its students have worked at deepening democracy in South Carolina in more direct, less theoretical ways as well. As the session wraps up, students are charged with creating their own organizing project, but they are also introduced to the ongoing projects spearheaded by the South Carolina Progressive Network, many of which are specifically geared toward improving democracy in the state. Major projects underway include the Missing Voter Project, which focuses on registering and engaging South Carolina voters; and the Democracy Project, which focuses on educating and lobbying around gerrymandering and redistricting, in an effort to create more competitive elections in the state.

The most recent class (2017) of Modjeska School graduates, however, developed a project more in line with the philosophy of the school itself: the Monument Project, designed to "reinterpret the monuments on the State House grounds to more honestly reflect the state's complex and often troubling history" ("Monument Tour," 2018). After

studying the history of a selection of monuments, the graduates developed a tour that offered more comprehensive, contextual information than was available in material on the grounds. The ongoing project embodies the theory that sharing knowledge can deepen democracy.

### ***Conclusion***

Modjeska Simkins “called herself ‘a people’s activist’” (Jones-Branch 2012: 236). The human rights school named in her honor teaches students what it means to be “a people’s activist” by contextualizing their activism within “a people’s history of South Carolina.” By teaching to empower and validate, the Modjeska School’s curriculum not only trains activists, it activates people.

### **Democratization through Praxis: Doing Activism with Tell**

#### **Them**

#### ***Background***

When I began this project in 2015, Tell Them was in its tenth year, and I discussed past and ongoing projects with Eme Crawford, who was then the Associate Director of Online Communications - the de facto head of the organization. When I spoke with Crawford the following year, right before Tell Them hosted a revamped “Bee Day,” the organization was preparing to separate from its parent organization, the New Morning Foundation, which is set to

sunset in 2022 at the end of its 20-year mission (Crawford Interview, 25 February 2016). By the end of 2016, Tell Them had been absorbed into the newly launched Women's Rights and Empowerment Network (WREN), where Crawford and many other former Tell Them organizers continued their work on a broader scale.

While WREN embodies many of the tactics and objectives first practiced at Tell Them, the scope and purpose of its mission are more diffuse. Since I am primarily interested in the democratization function of the organization, I limit my study here to the engagement efforts practiced at Tell Them, rather than expanding the scope of my study to include WREN. That said, it speaks to the efficacy of Tell Them's tactics and practices that they are still employed by the new organization.

The New Morning Foundation (NMF) was funded by two private donors in 2002 with the twenty-year mission to reduce unintended teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in young people (Crawford Interview, 8 April 2015; "Achievements" 2018). Initially, the organization focused on conducting presentations and demonstrations in various communities, as well as advocating for funding for similar ongoing education, ensuring that nurses or other well-informed professionals

were present in schools, and making sure students had at least some way of accessing contraception. Additionally, NMF provided community grants to address communities' specific needs (this is ongoing).

Crawford cites the state-based nature of the organization as a major reason for its efficacy. Unlike other larger organizations with a national mission, "We figure out what works best for us...we know, especially living in a redder state, that there's the ideal, and *here* are the things we can actually get done on the ground in South Carolina" (Interview, 8 April 2015). "It's all about South Carolina."

By 2005, NMF organizers realized that while the community work was essential to their mission, a lot of the roadblocks they were running into were at the policy level. Tell Them was launched that year to develop grassroots structures to mobilize community members to urge their lawmakers to change policies. Core among the organization's daily tasks were issue education and communication and leveraging the engagement and lobbying power of the quickly developing grassroots network.

In early 2015, Crawford was a three-year veteran of the organization and the only full-time employee of NMF specifically assigned to Tell Them, though she had three

part-time employees under her, as well as several volunteers and interns (Interview, 8 April 2015). She worked closely with the leadership of both NMF and the South Carolina Coalition for Healthy Families, which were then housed in the same office space, in developing policy priorities and legislative "watch lists," and generally keeping tabs on activities at the State House. When I spoke with her in 2015, she was excited that their focus had recently shifted from "exclusively running defense" (i.e., trying to prevent harmful bills from passing) to taking a more proactive stance on bills geared toward reforming sex education.

The challenges of organizing in the South are not lost on Crawford. She cites the struggle, however, as a major reason that Tell Them's work is so important:

"We have a conservatism in South Carolina that breaks down along political, cultural, and religious lines...I don't know if that makes us more important, but it makes our jobs more difficult. We're in a state where we're already in the top ten for all the worst things, you know, in terms of public health outcomes—it's not just sexual reproductive health, it's men killing women—it's a difficult place to be a woman.



**South Carolina is a difficult place to be a woman"**

(Interview, 8 April 2015; emphasis Crawford's).

***Climbing the "Ladder of Engagement"***

In its heyday, Tell Them used both conventional and more innovative grassroots strategies to push for policy changes at the state level. On the conventional end, the organization developed a marketing and PR strategy that employed billboards, community presentations, and other forms of publicity. But the meat of the mission was in building person-to-person connections. Early on, Tell Them had a particular emphasis on "e-advocacy," which focused on using technology to connect people: the organization facilitated signing petitions, sending emails to lawmakers, and building a network of activists. While this tactic evolved to incorporate a wider range of engagement activities in later years, the main goal remained the same: to make the engagement process as smooth as possible.

Crawford describes the ideal process as "working up a ladder of engagement" (Interview, 8 April 2015). In this paradigm, the role of Tell Them is to escort activists up the rungs of this ladder, providing them with tools and guidance and reducing as much "friction" as possible along the way. For Tell Them, the top rung is sitting down and

talking with a lawmaker in person - according to Crawford, this is the "gold standard" of engagement.

But they start slow. Toward the bottom of the ladder is emailing representatives. Tell Them facilitated this by asking potential activists to enter their email and physical addresses on their website, and then sending them to a form email populated with the appropriate representatives' names, titles, and addresses, as well as copy in the body of the email detailing the issue position, which activists could personalize as desired. Sending the email required no additional research - neither into the issue nor to identify one's representatives.

While email engagement is better than no engagement, Crawford stresses that going up the ladder it is important to realize that "the easier it is to take action, the less weight it's going to have for a lawmaker. We want to focus not on what's easy, but what's going to have an impact" (interview, 8 April 2015). She describes the process of climbing the ladder:

"We work with people to take them from the level of doing things on social media: changing their profile picture or their cover picture or posting an image either on their page or on their lawmaker's page, or tweeting at lawmakers to do stuff; working from low

levels like sending an email or signing a petition, and then working up to where they feel educated and confident enough to have a meeting" (Interview, 8 April 2015).

Throughout the year, Tell Them approached this mission by making activism opportunities available on their website and social media channels, as well as hosting "in district" meetings in the field. Once a year, during the spring legislative session, the organization hosted a concerted "lobby day" in Columbia, when Tell Them members from around the state could join together and visit the State House *en masse* to advocate for selected bills. The lobby days grew in attendance from 10-15 people the first year (2010) to over 100 participants in 2015 (Crawford interview, 8 April 2015).

Crawford notes that in the span of time during which Tell Them was developing their "e-advocacy" methods, changing technologies necessitated changing strategies. In early years, the organization included a "virtual march" as part of their State House lobby day efforts, which allowed activists who could not physically participate in the lobby day to send a coordinated email to their representatives. At the time, Crawford notes, this was relatively innovative. "No one else, especially no one in this state,

was doing anything like this" (Interview, 8 April 2015). Just five years later, sending emails as a form of engagement had become so expected as to no longer make much of an impact - even when coordinated as a "virtual march."

Crawford repeatedly stressed the importance of person-to-person engagement:

"The in-person component is what I don't want to ever get lost as part of grassroots activism. You have to have that. The online components are a great way to recruit people - to let people know that you're out there and hear what the issues are. But for anyone who just thinks that's where it starts and ends - I don't think it's ever going to work that way. It's - you're pulling people in and then working them up this ladder" (Interview, 8 April 2015).

In addition to "e-recruitment," Tell Them maintained an ongoing "ambassador program," made up of influential community members and leaders and experts in certain relevant fields. These people, who Crawford envisioned as the "grass tops" of the grassroots, participated in specific training sessions during which they learned about Tell Them's mission and larger goals, as well as the specific ways they could use their leverage or expertise to help further the organization's mission and goals. In

addition to working with ambassadors to prepare them for things like writing op-eds or testifying in legislative subcommittee hearings, Tell Them also encouraged ambassadors to return to their fields and communities and educate their peers and colleagues about the issue on behalf of which Tell Them was advocating. For instance, Tell Them would identify influential nurses or educators (often in underserved communities), provide them with ambassador training, and then help facilitate information sessions led by these ambassadors and populated by the ambassadors' peers.

According to Crawford, community members and professionals were often more willing to listen to, and ideally be persuaded by, someone they already knew, who could speak to the realities of their community or profession. This mirrors research in the GOTV field that finds that potential voters are more likely to register to vote, and then turn out to vote after they have engaged with someone they know (Woliver and Boiter-Jolley, 2018). As with other training and recruitment methods employed by Tell Them, using ambassadors as "trusted sources" minimizes barriers to engagement (in this case, doubt, suspicion, and irrelevance) and reduces the friction between inaction and activism.

## ***Project - Bee Day 2016***

The most representative embodiment of Tell Them's democratization theory was their annual lobbying day, dubbed "Bee Day." I attended Bee Day 2016, held on 16 March 2016 at the Marriott Hotel in Downtown Columbia, right as Tell Them was preparing to wind down and give way to WREN. Although WREN's launch had not yet been announced, in retrospect, the broader scope of participating organizations at Bee Day 2016 foreshadowed the coming shift.

Bee Day 2016 consisted of many elements. When I arrived at the Marriott around eleven in the morning, most of the organizers and participants were attending a press conference a few blocks away at the State House concerning legislation Tell Them was advocating for that session. Along with a handful of other attendees who were also missing the press conference, I wandered around the perimeter of the large combined ballroom where approximately twenty information tables had been set up, staffed by representatives from organizations ranging from the League of Women Voters and Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands, to Lutheran Refugee Services and SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center.

As I waited for organizers and participants to return and begin the "lunch with legislators" portion of the day's programs, I got the lay of the land and spoke with organization representatives at a few of the tables. While there were "activism stations" interspersed among the organization tables, they were largely unstaffed before lunch.

I spoke first with Alexis Stratton, then an Evaluation and Training Associate with the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA). We shared words of excitement at the sheer number of organizations represented, and I picked up literature detailing SCCADVASA's mission, services, and resources, as well as information on national domestic violence resources. I moved then to a table representing the Women's Health Research Team at the College of Charleston, where I learned about the work the organization was doing to advance education about and adoption of "long-acting reversible contraceptives" (LARCs) such as IUDs and implants, particularly among young women and students. Again, I picked up literature about the organization generally and their highlighted Bee Day topic more specifically; this time the brochures were accompanied by a trendy-looking button advertising LARC use.

The last table I visited before the lunch program was staffed by the Columbia chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV). There, I picked up LWV-branded voting rights and voter registration/education materials, as well as a membership form. I spoke with the women managing the table for several minutes about their mission to recruit younger women to join, go to meetings, and eventually "take over" the organization. Interaction with a potentially "younger" audience was a specific goal of their participation in Bee Day.

As participants and organizers began to trickle back to the Bee Day headquarters at the hotel, I took a break to leaf through the registration packet I'd been given upon my arrival. In the "Bee Day" branded folder, I found an array of materials featuring information about both Tell Them and the day's activities. In addition to an hour-by-hour itinerary, the packet included a "#BeeDay2016 Overview" sheet, which laid out the day's practical application of Crawford's "ladder of engagement." The text read in part:

"Today you have a variety of diverse and dynamic tools to connect with your elected officials and a group of experienced and passionate advocates to walk you through each one! **Create your best #BeeDay2016 experience** by



selecting the advocacy path that works best for your schedule and comfort level:

- Email your legislators;
- Connect on social media with your legislators;
- Write a letter to your legislators;
- Call your legislators; and
- Meet your legislators at the State House

Make your way around the perimeter of the room and **meet** some of the **most effective organizations** around the state who support women, girls and their families"

("#BeeDay2016 Overview" 2016, in author files).

The overview continued with exhortations for participants to "stop by the Bee Day photo booth and snap a picture," "swing by the video diary corner and share [their] story of how [they] felt exercising [their] advocacy muscles," and "relax at a center table with a stress relief coloring page." Tables in the center of the ballroom were well stocked with a variety of pages featuring black and white outlines of the Bee Day logo; the State House in the process of being swarmed by bees; and block lettering of such phrases and words as "Choice," "Respect," and "I support medically accurate sex ed."; as well as the requisite crayons and colored pencils. (Author will supply personal coloring attempt upon request.) ("#BeeDay2016

Overview" 2016, in author files). The folder also included a Tell Them staff directory and general brochure.

Also included in the packet were fact sheets on the legislation Tell Them was focusing on in both their e-advocacy and in-person lobbying efforts: the Cervical Cancer Prevention Act (S.278 and H.3204), which called for increased education about and access to the HPV vaccine, and the Amendments to Comprehensive Health Education (S.574 and H.3447), which called for increased oversight of school districts' compliance with the availability of medically accurate, evidence-based information required by the Comprehensive Health Education Act. Both sheets included overviews of the bills in question, as well as specific facts and talking points highlighting the elements of the legislation Tell Them recommended prioritizing in communications with legislators. Finally, each sheet included a "What You Can Do" section, listing 3-4 easy ways readers could immediately take action ("The Legislation" 2016, in author files).

By this time, the crowd in the ballroom had grown and lunch (traditional "Southern" food, buffet style) was being served. The lunch program included an overview of the cervical cancer and sex education legislation, as well as the recognition of State Senators Karl B. Allen (D-

Greenville) and John L. Scott, Jr. (D-Columbia), who were both in attendance and had been instrumental in their sponsorships of the impending legislation.

Overall, the crowd was older than I expected; most of the young people in attendance I saw seemed to be affiliated with Tell Them or one of the organizations staffing the tables. That said, it was the middle of the day on a Wednesday, when I imagine potential younger attendees may have had education-related conflicts. Later in the afternoon, as attendees drifted in and out of the ballroom, I noticed an uptick in younger participants.

During the lunch, I was seated at a table with the event photographer, Molly Harrell, who had been present at past Bee Days. When I mentioned how well organized the overall event seemed to be, she noted the similarities in the organizing style to her experiences with sororities in college: organizers had set the day up in such a way as to try to eliminate any excuses for not attending. Food was provided in the morning and at lunch, the itinerary was flexible enough that attendees could tailor it to their schedules, and parking was clearly identified and included (field notes, 16 March 2016).

As the lunch program wound down, Eme Crawford spoke about the rest of the day, noting that the South Carolina

Assembly would soon be back in session, and reminding attendees that golf cart shuttles would be on hand to transport them back up to the State House to meet with legislators. She particularly stressed the need to call out Senator Lee Bright's (R-Spartanburg) objection to the Cervical Cancer Prevention Act, both during in-person interactions and lobbying remotely.

Before heading to the State House myself, I completed my journey around the ballroom. I spoke with representatives from most of the organizations:

- the American Association of University Women (AAUW), who shared policy fact sheets, information about grants and fellowships available for young women and college students, and a list of public policy resources, including the "AAUW Action Network - 'Two Minute Activist,'" "Woman to Woman Voter Turnout Manual," and "Pay Equity Resource Kit" (author files);
- the Ovarian Cancer Coalition of Central South Carolina, who supplied educational literature and branded "swag;"
- South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center, who focused on the Medicaid expansion-related

health insurance coverage gap in South Carolina, and offered an educational brochure on domestic violence and resources provided by the organization;

- Lutheran Services Carolinas Refugee Resettlement Program, who offered letter-writing help and asked attendees who were planning to lobby legislators in person to ask state Senators to oppose S.997, which was designed to limit refugee settlement in South Carolina;
- South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, who offered resources and information for teens, parents, and advocates;
- Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands (STSM), who were primarily educating attendees about their services, but also offered fact sheets and information about their upcoming "Walk a Mile in Their Shoes" awareness event and fundraiser;
- AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), who were facilitating postcard-writing to U.S.

Representatives in reference to Drug Pricing legislation at the federal level (table staffers helped participants find their legislator, add a

personal note, and even stamped and mailed the postcard for writers);

- Girls Rock, who were getting the word out and soliciting volunteers;
- Auntie Bellum (now *Unsweetened Magazine*), who offered information about the contemporary publication and the 1970s iteration on which the organization is based, and specifically noted the “health insert” which listed abortion clinics and prices in South Carolina, that was included in issues of the original publication;
- the I Believe Anita Hill Party, who, like the representatives for the League of Women Voters, were hoping to solicit involvement from younger demographic groups; and
- the Feminist Collective at the University of South Carolina (FEMCO), who offered a zine-style flyer that included information about their meeting place and time, social media information, a definition of feminism, a brief rundown of the topics the organization grapples with, and Flavia Dzodan’s famous, “My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit.”

Interestingly, I ran into three former undergraduate students who were staffing tables for different organizations.

Interspersed throughout the organization tables were five "Activism Stations": one for engaging with your legislator on social media, one for emailing your legislator, one for writing and mailing a letter to your legislator, one for calling your legislator, and finally, one for meeting with your legislator in person. Each station had all of the materials and/or resources necessary to complete the activism task, and almost all were staffed by Tell Them representatives to help answer questions and walk participants through the process. This was helpful for two reasons: first, it made the task much less overwhelming; second, it ensured that each participant would actually follow through with the entire task (rather than pledge to call, email, etc.).

Perhaps the most helpful aspect of the activism stations, however, were the detailed "Best Practices" sheets at each one. This information was useful not only in the moment of the activism action, but also provided attendees guidelines for continuing participation on their own. It proved especially helpful at the social media activism station, which was unstaffed when I stopped by

(although there was an open laptop at the station, presumably to be used for tweeting purposes). As I was not an active Twitter user at the time, I didn't mind skipping this rung on the engagement ladder, though I did pick up the "Best Practices for Tweeting Your Legislator" sheet.

The practices outlined in the sheet were detailed:

- "You only have 140 characters. Use them wisely by only making ONE ask per tweet;
- Find your allies, plug into wider conversations, and become known by legislators and media by using **hashtags** like #SexEd #CervicalCancer #BeeDay2016;
- **Include photos** as often as possible - it shows legislators you're a person who stands behind what you say and engagement from other tweeters is 5 times more likely;
- Remember that social media is a public forum.  
**Think before you post** and especially when interacting with legislators who may not share your viewpoints, let honesty, tact, poise, compassion and respect be your guiding forces" ("Best Practices for Tweeting Your Legislator" 2016, in author files).



The sheet also advocated taking a “#BeeDay2016 selfie” and tagging Tell Them (@TellThemSC) to share how the day was going so far. As of May 2018, searching #BeeDay2016 brings up dozens of photos and posts related to the event. From the social media station I moved to the emailing station, where staffers made the process incredibly easy. They had set up a laptop, where I entered my address, filled out a little bit of information about myself, and sent the email off. Again, the best practices guidelines provided were helpful both in the moment and to take with me for future use:

- “In the subject line, the first line of the message, and the last line of the message, **clearly state the bill number and how you want the legislator to vote** (Example: I’m a constituent in your district and I urge you to vote YES on the Cervical Cancer Prevention Act, H.3204);
- If you are a constituent, **let them know you live and VOTE in their district**. An elected official is more likely to listen to those s/he represents than an anonymous writer or a writer from another state. Your power is in your vote!;

- Support your position with **facts** and **personal stories** about why this issue is important to YOU! Legislators have a lot of information to absorb about many different issues. Often, personal stories are what stick with them, persuade them that this particular issue should be a priority, and help them remember who you are;
- Keep your email **brief**. Lawmakers' time is precious and most of the time they will not be able to read a multi-page message. State how you want them to vote, why, and close with a "**thank you**" and restatement of how you want them to vote" ("Best Practices for Emailing your Legislator" 2016, in author files).

From the email station I moved to the letter-writing station, where the best practices guideline stressed that, "Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective and time-honored traditions of influencing South Carolina lawmakers" ("Best Practices for Writing a Letter to Your Legislator" 2016, in author files). As Crawford mentioned in our previous discussions, a handwritten letter stands out and makes a much greater impact than a social media engagement or an email because of the time and effort involved in writing and mailing it.

True to form, though, the Tell Them representatives who were staffing the activism station did their best to make the process as smooth as possible: provided at the table were paper, envelopes, and templates for writing letters about both the Cervical Cancer and Sex Ed bills. The templates offered a sort of "form letter" hybrid - I had all the information I needed in front of me, but because I was handwriting the letter it was easy to inject my personal experience and opinions (the template even suggested where in the letter this would be most effective with the prompt, "Why does comprehensive sex education matter to you? Use this space to tell your legislator!") ("Sample Sex Ed Letter to Your Legislator" 2016, in author files). Again, staffers were on hand to help letter-writers identify their representatives and answer any questions; the staffers also collected the completed letters to deliver to legislators at the end of the day. The best practices guidelines were similar to those for writing an email, but included tips for making the body of the letter sound more personal and meaningful.

I finished my letter to my representative and moved on to the "call your legislator" activism station. Here, I entered my cell phone number into a computer, and shortly thereafter received a phone call that first gave me a spiel

about how to effectively talk with a legislator, and then patched me through to Senator Lee Bright's (R-Spartanburg) office. A staffer answered and offered to take a message, at which point I took advantage of a script that had appeared on the computer screen and ad-libbed about why *I* thought Senator Bright should remove his objection to the Cervical Cancer bill. As someone who suffers from phone call-related anxiety, I found the process relatively easy and empowering. That said, I learned *after* I had made my call that I was the first person to take advantage of that particular activism station the whole day (at this point it was almost 2pm).

The best practices guidelines offered at this station stressed that, "Talking with your legislator on the phone - or more likely, a staffer in your legislator's office - is a useful way to connect on more time-sensitive matters like when a vote is pending. A few calls into an office over a short period of time can bring an issue to the attention of your legislator in a big way!" ("Best Practices for Calling Your Legislator" 2016, in author files). Again, the guidelines mentioned the importance of identifying myself as a constituent, keeping my message simple, and having facts about the bill in front of me for reference. The

sheet also offered a bit of advice I found particularly helpful:

**"Don't sweat the hypothetical unanswerable question."**

Some advocates worry that they will be asked a question they don't know how to answer. Staffers typically focus on recording the message rather than asking for intricate details; however, if they do ask a question that you don't know the answer to, tell them you'll find out and call back. Just remember to follow up with the information!" ("Best Practices for Calling Your Legislator" 2016, in author files).

While this may be somewhat obvious, seeing it included as an "official" best practice, and just the reminder in and of itself, helped allay my anxieties about making the phone call.

After hanging up, I had finally reached the top of the day's ladder of engagement as I walked up to the face-to-face meeting activism station. Here, I was met not only with a best practices sheet, but also with a queue for golf cart rides up Main Street to the State House. Since it was just a few blocks and a lovely day, I opted to walk rather than wait for a ride.

It was at this station that the day's organization seemed to break down a bit. Perhaps because relatively few

people had opted for a face to face meeting, or perhaps because it was getting late in the day. Once I arrived at the State House, it was not clear where Bee Day participants were to convene; by this point, most folks still in attendance were either already affiliated with Tell Them, either as staff or volunteers, or were with other lobbying groups interested in the cervical cancer and/or sex education legislation.

I opted to observe rather than try to personally meet with my representatives (in part, because my representatives had already expressed support for or even co-sponsored the legislation in question). I did witness a constituent of Senator Lee Bright's (R-Spartanburg) recount their experience meeting with the lawmaker: while they had not been met with enthusiastic support, it did appear that the Senator and the constituent/Bee Day participant had a meaningful interaction as the constituent implored Bright to remove his objection to the cervical cancer bill.

While I was unable to personally speak with this constituent, I imagine they took advantage of the best practice suggestions provided by Tell Them:

- **"Be gracious.** Always begin by thanking the legislator for providing the opportunity to listen and speak with you;

- **Be focused.** Stick to the issue. Information about more than one topic will only confuse the message and dilute your point;
- **Make a personal connection.** Let the legislator know that you are a constituent and if you have any friends, relatives, and/or colleagues in common;
- **Consider yourself and information source.**  
Legislators have limited time, staff and interest in any one issue. They can't be as informed as they'd like on all the issues. You can fill in the information gap. Encourage the policymaker to ask questions;
- **Tell the truth.** There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator. If they ask a question that you don't feel comfortable answering (or don't know the answer), be honest, but offer to follow up with the correct information;
- **Be specific in what you ask for.** If you want a legislator to vote a certain way, ask directly and get an answer;

- **Follow up.** Send a thank you note after your conversation restating your position. It is also very important that you thank the legislator for a supportive vote, or ask for an explanation of an unsupportive vote;
- **Don't burn bridges.** If legislators disagree with you, be sure you leave the conversation on good enough terms that you can return to them on that or another issue. Don't get into a heated argument—your strongest opponent on one issue may be a great proponent on another!
- **Remember, legislators represent you.** Be courteous, but don't be intimidated. They are accountable to you and oftentimes, are grateful for your input," ("Best Practices for Meeting Your Legislator Face-to-Face" 2016, in author files).

In what I would later come to think of as a foreboding turn, as Bee Day participants and Tell Them staff gathered in the lobby of the State House, we could overhear an ongoing press conference supporting legislation establishing "personhood status" for fetuses (the press conference was complete with swarms of prop-like children). This and similar legislation would end up being the targets



of much of WREN's expanded efforts in its first two years of existence.

The organized portion of the day kind of fizzled as we milled about the State House lobby. Although I did not meet with a legislator face-to-face, I felt like I had experienced the spirit of the day. I had learned about and interacted with representatives from organizations with women's rights-centric missions; I had gained a better understanding of then-current legislation and the greater policy mission of Tell Them; and I had climbed a ladder of engagement by implementing tools and practicing theories of activism.

### ***Conclusion***

Eme Crawford talks about the challenge of the "culture of silence" that informs social expectations in the South; particularly among women. Speaking from the position of a woman who has spent nearly all of her 31 years *in* the South (albeit first in a progressive family and then in a university setting, which is by no means the norm), I can attest to this notion that Southern women are often taught that complaining, speaking up, or calling out is not only rude but somehow antithetical to the practice of "being a woman." Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) show us the far-reaching implications of this culture of silence. My

experience at Bee Day 2016, both as a participant and as an observer, speaks to the stranglehold that this culture can have on even the most engaged individuals, leading me to believe that to reach the democratic depths a ladder of engagement can access, we must first break our silence and find our voices.

### **Democratization through Affirmation: Raise Your Voice**

#### **'Cause Girls Rock**

##### ***Background***

Girls Rock Columbia (GRC) was founded in 2013 by a group of women—some musicians, some activists—who had been inspired by the Girls Rock Charleston (now Carolina Youth Action Project) camp launched two years earlier (Dozier 2013; “What We’re About” 2018). Many of the founding organizers had participated in the Charleston camp as volunteers or performing musicians, and wanted to offer a similar experience to girls in Columbia. While some early leaders were seasoned activists and organizers, GRC was the first foray into organizing for many participants.

Girls Rock Columbia is a member organization of the international Girls Rock Camp Alliance (GRCA), and held its first camp in the summer of 2013. That year, 17 girls between the ages of eight and 17 learned how to play instruments, write songs, collaborate with other musicians,

and use their outside voices. Over the course of the four subsequent summers, the number of campers has quadrupled, GRC has begun offering adult programs, and the organization has hired a full time executive director ("About Us" 2018; Oliver interview, 9 November 2017).

The backbone of Girls Rock is the annual summer rock camp. While the Girls Rock Camp Alliance provides guidelines and general mission direction, local chapters are largely autonomous and able to tailor specific camp details to the needs of their region and target population. GRC's camp is designed for girls, trans-, and gender nonconforming (GNC) youth between the ages of eight and 17. Some camps, like the Charleston camp, have opted to drop the "Girls" from their organizations' and camps' official names, especially as the numbers of trans- and GNC campers have risen; while Columbia's camp has kept the "Girls" in its title, and as of 2017 had not yet been confronted with a situation in which a trans-boy or trans-man has wanted to participate as a camper or volunteer. Executive director Jessica Oliver stresses the inclusive mission:

"Our goal is to create a space where you feel comfortable being yourself and you feel good and as safe as possible, and if Girls Rock is something you want to be a part of, and you're going through a transition, then we're

happy to have you. We don't want to exclude anyone who feels like we can give them something that they need" (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017).

Indeed, by the summer of 2018, when I attended Girls Rock Camp as a volunteer-observer, camp leaders and counselors regularly stressed inclusion through the identification and use of "preferred pronouns." Each camper, volunteer, workshop leader, and performer was encouraged to include their preferred pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them) on the nametags they wore each day and when making introductions.

Over the course of the week-long camp, campers "learn an instrument, form a band, write an original song, and perform a concert at a live music venue" ("What is Girls Rock Camp?" 2018). Supplementing the instrument instruction and band practice is a series of workshops that "promote self-confidence, positive skills, and further [campers'] education about being strong members of society" ("What is Girls Rock Camp?" 2018). Camp goals specific to Girls Rock Columbia include "[encouraging] an environment that cultivates self-confidence, challenges gender stereotypes, [and] promotes positive female relationships, creativity, and leadership," and to "empower everyone involved, both campers and volunteers, to take the sense of community

learned from within the organization and carry that throughout the city they call home" ("What is Girls Rock Camp?" 2018).

GRC campers are not required to have previous musical training; in fact, if they do have experience with a particular instrument (generally, campers choose or are assigned guitar, bass, drums, or vocals) they are encouraged to try something new (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017). Each day of camp, campers have instrument-specific instruction as well as guided band practice. Generally, bands are made up of four campers (one each on guitar, bass, keyboard, and drums, with singing duties often shared) and arranged by age group and previous musical experience.

Both because of the nature of band formation and the program's goal of inclusion, GRC doesn't accept campers on a first-come-first-served basis. Prospective campers must submit an application. However, they do not select campers based on applications alone. Rather, organizers consider the camper makeup holistically, striving for as diverse a group as possible (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017; "What Is Girls Rock Camp?" 2018). Additionally, organizers reserve an allotment of camper spaces for scholarship students. Camp tuition is \$350 per camper; however,

organizers use an income-based sliding scale to “better serve a diverse economic population”). Oliver stresses the importance of diversity in camper population:

“We do make an attempt to create a diverse environment, because we feel like that’s what’s going to benefit everyone the most, and that’s kind of the point of [camp]—meeting people who come from different places than you, and learning how to recognize your differences and work across them, and then in the end, hopefully celebrate them” (interview, 9 November 2017).

At times, GRC even works with other area organizations and nonprofits to identify young people who might especially benefit from the programming. In 2017, for instance, GRC offered camper spaces to girls from refugee families (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017). As of this writing, 75% of GRC campers have benefitted from “reduced or waived tuition,” two-thirds cite camp as their only musical experience, and over half have returned for a second year or more (“About Us,” 2018).

### ***Empowering Voices***

While Girls Rock Columbia has grown over the past five years (from 17 campers the first year to 75 campers in 2017), its central mission and “point of unity” with the

larger Girls Rock Camp Alliance (GRCA) has remained the same: a “direct attempt to amplify voices that have otherwise been told to be silent” through “music, art, and creative expression” (“Points of Unity,” 2018).

Girls Rock organizers recognize the inherently political nature of their work, though their political role is primarily structural and facilitative. The GRCA mission statement explains:

“Our work is political. We work to dismantle intersecting systems of oppression and acknowledge that they do not affect us all equally. Our work must be led and built by those most impacted by systemic oppression and colonization” (“Points of Unity,” 2018).

The GRCA mission also sees the very use of music and arts as tools for amplifying voices as part of its politics, stating that, “We do not use these tools by accident; we use them because music and creative expression are accessible, community-based, collaborative, and political” (“Points of Unity,” 2018).

When current GRC executive director Jessica Oliver was hired in 2017, one of the tasks she was charged with was developing a plan for future growth. Part of that plan involved narrowing the scope of the organization’s

activities—identifying where programming and services overlapped with other local organizations and nonprofits, and refocusing on GRC's central mission: "focusing on the fact that we are a group that encourages using your voice and speaking out about the things that you believe in and being confident, and bringing that confidence that you learn with us into other parts of your life" (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017). Oliver is particularly concerned with keeping the focus of the developing year-round programming on using "music as a vehicle" (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017).

While a central focus of GRC is definitely on empowering individual voices, programming also encourages collaboration and the realization that empowered voices do not have to be lone voices. A quote from a former camper demonstrates success in this area: "I am so much more confident in myself! I feel that I can always voice my opinions. I learned how to talk to others and make friends, and that there are people like me out there fighting the same fight" ("About Us," 2018). This sense of vocal collaboration is evident intergenerationally as well; a volunteer noted, "It was incredible to meet other women and immediately feel their support, regardless of our differences. By reaching out to these kids, a lot of us



were reaching inside ourselves. We were talking to the girls we used to be. We were telling them they were strong, they were brave, they were capable," ("About Us," 2018).

### ***Project - Girls Rock Camp***

Though the number of campers (and bands) has grown over the past five years, the basic structure of the summer Girls Rock Camp has stayed the same. My observations here are drawn from my interview with Oliver, perusal of the GRC website and social media presence, examination of camper and volunteer handouts, and from my own experiences as a volunteer counselor during the 2018 camp (July 15-21, 2018).

Volunteers (including counselors, instrument instructors, workshop leaders, and others) load in and have an orientation session the Sunday of camp week, and campers arrive Monday morning. Each morning starts off with an assembly, which usually involves some sort of "pump up" exercise, after which campers split off into either a workshop or instrument instruction (because GRC has worked with limited (usually donated/loaned) musical equipment, instrument instruction and band practice are staggered so that everyone has access to an instrument). Some workshops are designed for campers of all ages, and others are geared more specifically toward different age groups (campers tend

to be in bands and attend workshops with campers of similar ages ("littles" and "biggles" to Oliver). Oliver cites the "consent" workshop as one that's more helpful with the material can be tailored to specific age groups—while it's an important concept for all ages, it likely will mean something different for a 16 year old than for a nine year old (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017). More on workshops below.

After the first session of instrument instruction or workshop, campers reunite for a snack and then rotate to a workshop or instrument instruction, depending on what they'd done for the first session. After the second session, campers reunite once again for lunch, which features a different outside guest "lunch band" each day. Typically, the lunch band is either an all-female band, a band with a prominent feminine presence, a gender nonconforming presence, or "someone who would be a role model for our camper base" (Oliver interview, 9 November 2018). According to Oliver, "We try to include lots of different styles of music, like acoustic guitar folk music...all girl punk bands...[and] we try to get a DJ to come on Friday [for] like a fun dance party, [or] a hip hop singer who makes their own tracks and backs their own tracks and talks about it...all kinds of fun stuff"

(interview, 9 November 2018). The lunch band performance is usually followed by a Q&A session before the campers split back up.

After lunch, campers split up into either workshops or band practice, then rotate once more before the day ends around 5pm. Over the course of the week, they collaborate with band members on an original song, help create screen-printed band t-shirts, and contribute a page to the camp zine. The week culminates with a showcase on Saturday afternoon, which is open to the public and features each band performing their original song. Past showcases have been held at Tapp's Arts Center, the Columbia Museum of Art, and most recently, the Music Farm Columbia, and Columbia College. Videos of past showcase performances can be found on the "Girls Rock Columbia" YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV0Qn3MqiInTXyx2cOvyZ5g>).

While the band formation, practice, songwriting, and performance are all essential parts of the Girls Rock experience, the workshops held throughout the week are just as important. Usually led by volunteers and community members, topics span a wide range of genre and interest. Workshops in past years have included screen printing, creative writing, self-defense, yoga, constructing with power tools, podcasting, home recording, music videos, rock

journalism, rock photography, zine making, global feminism, spoken word, embroidery, stage presence, "herstory of women and rock," privilege, "know your rights," stagecraft, "your voice, your story," disability awareness, body positivity, improv, "arranging," "lead the way" (self-advocacy, empowerment, and personal as well as disability pride), and blackout poetry (per Oliver, blackout poetry is "really cool—it's where you take a page of a book and you cross out the words you don't want to use with a Sharpie" and are left with a poem) (Interview, 9 November 2017). See Appendix B for examples of the camper handbook other camp documents.

While there are some workshops that happen every year (consent and self-defense, zine making, screen printing, to name a few), others change from year to year. For Oliver, the most meaningful workshops are those that leave campers with something they can take with them into the rest of their lives. For instance, home recording (using apps like Garageband on iPads and/or smart phones) is helpful because it takes something that many campers have regular access to, and teaches them how to use it in a new way (learning to use the programs, how to "stack tracks" and make collaborative projects) that they can continue to use after they leave camp. This experience is personal for Oliver,

who is a musician herself. "That's really what kind of got me started playing music and writing songs for myself," she says, "was me sitting in my room with a laptop using Garageband, and figuring out on my own how to record and mix the levels of the tracks and stuff" (Interview, 9 November 2017). Year-round accessibility is important to Oliver; while screen printing camp t-shirts, for instance, is a fun workshop and an essential part of the camp experience, it requires "a lot of expensive equipment like heat guns and stuff," which most kids don't have access to outside of camp.

Zine making is another favorite of Oliver's. "We do all this modern stuff with technology," she says, "but it's really cool to also have this old school thing where it's like, 'Hey, this is something everyone can do'—everyone has pens and paper laying around. And it's one of the oldest forms of quiet activism" (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017). In addition to being a fitting call back to the DIY (Do It Yourself) aesthetic of the Riotgrrrl movement of the early 1990s, each camper's individual zine page is combined into a camp zine which is photocopied and given to each camper at the end of the week—yet another example of the collaborative camp spirit.

Oliver also notes the importance of workshops that incorporate more “traditionally feminine” crafts, such as embroidery; in these workshops, campers are often taught about the legacy of such work, then work together to “reclaim” it and use it in a new, explicitly feminist way. Workshops like improv are helpful for bringing shy campers out of their shells and making everyone comfortable expressing themselves publicly, according to Oliver (interview, 9 November 2017).

As a counselor, I observed several camp workshops as I herded the group of four 12 and 13-year-olds for whom I was responsible (they eventually named themselves “Static Uproar”). All first-year campers, including myself, attended “Herstory and Theirstory of Rock,” which served as a kind of “Girls Rock 101,” on the first day of camp. Accompanied by images, videos, and audio clips, the workshop leader, historian Meeghan Kane (who also serves as a faculty member for the Modjeska Simkins School), surveyed over a century of women’s contributions to what eventually became rock and roll. Kane frequently asked workshop attendees *what* the musicians were singing about, especially when they lyrics seemed frustrated or angry or tired or sad, and encouraged campers to speculate about *why* they may have chosen music as their form of expression. In a

relatively short time, campers were exposed to a large catalogue of woman- and girl-centric music, and also started to think about potentially larger implications of songwriting and music making.

Campers also participated in a workshop on intersectional feminism, during which the workshop leader asked them to move around a room based on what part or parts of their identit(ies) they felt most keenly in certain situations. The inability of campers to split themselves into two or more categories left many standing in the middle of the room, physically demonstrating (and feeling) the crux of intersectionality. While all of the terminology might not have stuck with younger campers, the frustration and confusion they faced when asked to try to focus on one aspect of their identity at a time was not lost.

The workshop I was struck by the most, however, happened on the last day of camp, amidst the craziness of screen printing t-shirts, posing for band photos, and conducting a dress rehearsal. The "Art as Advocacy" workshop, led by Megan Plassmeyer of WREN and GRC Executive Director Jessica Oliver. The two women offered a brief overview of "women changemakers in South Carolina history," including Septima Clark and Modjeska Simkins. Towards the

end, the workshop leaders emphasized that the GRC campers were now becoming a part of that legacy of South Carolina activism, especially at the intersections of women's rights and civil rights. Campers were then charged with the task of "moving outside what we traditionally see as activism" and using visual art to demonstrate how *they* were challenging the ways they'd been stereotyped in the past. The self-portraits they created were inspiring, heartbreaking, and incredibly thoughtful (images of the work displayed during the culminating showcase in author files).

Important to note here is the fluid and collaborative sharing of expertise and social capital assets between grassroots groups. A Modjeska Simkins School faculty member and a WREN leader helped with Girls Rock. Often separate organizations survive in a social movement community where cultural and political projects and goals blend together. When groups overlap as I observed in the 2018 Girls Rock camp, they build on the synergy of non-organized coalition behaviors (Woliver, 2018).

The effects of these workshops are evident in the camp showcase at the end of the week. The performances that I've seen in person and virtually feature bands made up of confident, loud, musical girls with something to say. The



long term hope is that camp veterans will continue to speak up and "say it loud, say it proud".

### ***Conclusion***

While the success of the Girls Rock programming is evidenced in the campers' performances at the annual end-of-camp-showcase, the effects of the programming on the adult women involved is less public but no less profound. Oliver's full time employment as the organization's executive director can be directly traced to her somewhat tentative involvement as an instructor several years ago. She tells her story best:

"I was just a musician, and a friend asked me to come teach drums at Girls Rock Charleston, and I just thought it was a music camp and I was really nervous and I was like, 'I'm not that great of a drummer, and I've never really taught drums before,' and they were like, 'You'll be fine, trust me.' And I got there and I realized that it was so much more than a music camp for girls. And so it's opened my eyes to a whole like— it just changes the way you live your life. I think even if kids don't go on to be activists or active advocates for things, they're advocates just in the way that they treat each other after camp. And just in the way they're aware of experiences outside their

own. It's changing the culture just by changing the way people think and see each other. It doesn't necessarily have to be protest," (Oliver interview, 9 November 2017).

## **Conclusion**

In Chapter Four, I consider the roles of inclusion, deliberation, and voice in democratization, in light of what I have found through observations, participation, interviews, and archival analysis about how the Modjeska Simkins School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock Columbia use education, praxis, and affirmation to deepen democracy in South Carolina.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **INCLUSION, DELIBERATION, AND VOICE IN THE GRASSROOTS SOUTH**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter Two, I examined a number of elements and values theorists have cited as democratically important. While each has its use in measuring, and in turn improving the quality of a polity's democracy, I argue that in the case of the southern United States, and South Carolina specifically, we might reach the greatest democratic depths by emphasizing inclusive democratic deliberation, and that fostering this inclusive deliberation through organizations with specific priorities and practices can positively affect participants, deliberation, and policy outcomes.

I theorize democratization brought about through qualified inclusion, and in turn qualified deliberation. Increasing inclusion alone will make only a superficial dent in democratic barriers. Democratic gatekeepers must keep in mind that equal inclusion does not automatically guarantee equal participation, and care must be taken to ensure that all those included have the opportunity and

ability to participate in democratic deliberations. Participation that is facially egalitarian does not necessarily lead to egalitarian deliberation. Young (2000) cautions against deliberative traps that among other problems “re-privilege” the voices of the already privileged.

It is not just the equal presence of diverse voices in democratic deliberation that makes it inclusive, but the equal and enthusiastic empowerment of diverse voices. Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) equate the consequences of disparate roles in deliberation with disparate levels of authority, which has documented policy implications (2014, 19), as well as negative influences on the quality of the deliberation itself. But we should not expect these multilevel imbalances to remedy themselves organically.

Inclusion, deliberation, and voice, considered together, represent three legs of a democratic stool. Above, I discuss the shortcomings of inclusive deliberation without equal voices; equal voice in a deliberation that is not inclusive similarly does nothing to deepen democracy, nor does an inclusive gathering of voices sans deliberation. Only when inclusion, deliberation, and vocal empowerment work in tandem can democracy truly be deepened.

Below, I examine how inclusion, deliberation, and

voice interact with the democratization theories employed by the three organizations I highlighted in Chapter Three, and explore how democratization through education, praxis, and affirmation informs our understanding of the effects of inclusion, deliberation, and additional voices on the South's shallow democracy.

### **Inclusion**

All three organizations make a point of including the presence and interests of marginalized people and groups in their ranks and policies. The Modjeska School actively recruits people of color and those whose lives are particularly negatively affected by the South's traditional politics of exclusion. Additionally, the Simkins School includes the histories and experiences of people who have been erased or ignored by mainstream syllabi in its curriculum, and ensures that its faculty is drawn from diverse populations. Furthermore, the student projects it facilitates are often designed to increase inclusivity in South Carolinians' daily lives. The Modjeska Simkins School pursues a deeper democracy by teaching inclusive stories to an inclusive student body.

While inclusivity is less of a hallmark attribute of Tell Them's mission, the organization by no means promotes exclusivity, and by advocating for policies that directly

benefit young women and girls—many impoverished and/or lacking education—includes the interests of underrepresented groups in its stated goals. While its target participant pool is perhaps more narrowly focused than the Modjeska School's, its policy goals are more specific as well.

Like the Modjeska School, Girls Rock Columbia prides itself on inclusivity. Both the School and GRC tailor their participant groups (students in the first case, campers in the second) with a mind toward creating a well-rounded, diverse body. All three grass roots organizations also consciously strive to have diverse and inclusive staff, teachers, mentors, and leaders. Organizational leaders assert that this inclusion and diversity not only benefits members of otherwise traditionally excluded groups, but actually improves the experiences of all participants and the work the organizations do in general. They believe these efforts and experiences will have a positive, long term impact on group participants, thus helping to thicken the chances of creating deeper democracies. This philosophy echoes Young's (2000) argument that inclusion will "promote the most just results," and parallels her vision of deliberative democracy as "a means of collective problem-solving which depends...on the expression and

criticism of the diverse opinions of all the members of society” (2000, 6).

### **Deliberation**

In focusing on democratization through education, the Modjeska School instills in its students the tools with which to articulate and situate their experience within the greater history of South Carolina. In learning the *people’s* history of the state, the students can more easily see themselves and their positions through the lens of historical context. Given this tool—this knowledge—they are better able to advocate for themselves and speak—*deliberate*—from a position of authority, both internal and external. Going through the curriculum, and putting new knowledge into practice, *validates* their lived experiences and perhaps newfound expertise.

Similarly, Tell Them uses both knowledge and praxis to level the deliberative playing field. Again, armed with relevant, accurate information and the confidence instilled by being walked through potentially intimidating encounters, participants emerge better able to advocate for themselves and others, with the authority to assert themselves in deliberative spaces. One difference, however, is that while the Modjeska School is set up as a private (though inclusive, and often subsidized) tuition-dependent

space, the deliberative tools Tell Them offers are presented more as a public good or service, available to anyone. Although the Modjeska School and Girls Rock are *intentionally* inclusive, the open, public nature of Tell Them's Bee Day (and online resources) technically provides for fewer barriers to inclusion. Access always matters.

Finally, Girls Rock fosters deliberation skills through collaborative exercises and a focus on treating others with compassion, regardless of differences in experience, identity and situation. GRC organizers and counselors dig down to the fundamental root of democratic deliberation, creating a space where deliberators (campers) can feel safe both in what they know and what they don't know, and where the assumption is that each person's position is valid, and each person is just as willing to change their own mind as they are to try to change others'. By instilling the importance of recognizing the agency and authority that their peers have to speak their own truths, GRC affirms the deliberative agency and authority in each camper.

### **Voice**

Of the three organizations I studied, it is, perhaps, in the context of the intentionally "safe spaces" of the Girls Rock Camp that quiet voices are most effectively and



immediately amplified. Both the Modjeska School and Tell Them help bolster meek voices with the confidence that comes with knowledge and praxis, but Girls Rock is expressly about helping people find their voice and then use it not only to advocate for themselves but to encourage more democratic global citizenship. Learning to use music and other forms of "artivism" as vehicles to express that voice is important, but it's the vocal training itself that makes the camp transformative (Oliver Interview).

It is not insignificant that this most fundamental element of deliberative democratization is incorporated in the praxis of the organization that works with the youngest participants of the three groups I studied. Girls Rock campers enter the deliberative field with a leg up: not only have they found their voices and learned how to use them as children, but they've also learned the value of including others' voices in democratic conversations. They may not learn these terms explicitly or even make the connection later in life, but the lessons are there. They see, hear, and appreciate that individuals can make music alone, but also experience the transformation that collaboration brings about - both to sound and process. The two approaches to music and voice are not either/or but both.

There is also something symbolic about the “throwback” nature of some of the GRC programming. Beyond taking cues from the DIY, Riotgrrrrl movement of the early 1990s, many of the workshops are modeled in the fashion of the consciousness-raising groups of Second Wave feminism. They take place in small, safe, intimate groups which are, if not women/girl-only are generally at least women/girl-identified- and GNC-only spaces. They allow participants to learn new things and share their experiences, and they open up connections between the personal and the political. Continuing the homage to feminists who came before, the official GRC camp song repeats the refrain, “Sisterhood is powerful,” several times.

### **Conclusion: The Grassroots South**

The Modjeska School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock represent just a glimpse into the grassroots organizing happening in Columbia and across the U.S. South, but their experiences offer insights into how relatively small, locally-based organizations can deepen democracy by confronting traditional barriers to inclusive democratic deliberation. Through education, praxis, and affirmation, these groups give politically underrepresented people the tools they need to become self-advocates. More importantly, though, through consciousness-raising and empowerment, the

organizations lend a sense of authority to the potentially powerless. Finally, by imbuing participants with feelings of agency and authority, the organizations work to create a more representative, comprehensive body for future democratic deliberations.

In Chapter Five, I return to the research questions I outlined in my introductory chapter, explore new theories advanced, and offer suggestions for future study.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **Lessons Learned, Theories Advanced, Voices Added**

Setting out on this project, I had broad questions in mind. Chief among them was, to what extent grassroots organizing and activism improves the quality of democracy in the U.S. South. Given the relatively abysmal quality of Southern democracy, as measured by electoral, voting, and representation metrics, it would seem that any degree of organizing or activism would deepen our democracy at least a little bit. The focus of this study was on the mechanics of democratization itself. As I explored both Southern democracy and Southern grassroots activism, it became clear that I was not looking at a monolithic movement, but rather at a collection of theories about how to democratize the South.

The three organizations I studied, and so many like them, each prioritized a different theory. The Modjeska School focused on education and history, Tell Them focused on praxis and engagement, and Girls Rock focused on affirmation and empowerment. There were overlaps, which was

to be expected as all three organizations centered their programming around elements of grassroots activism training, but there were also departures, separate from those predicted by different target populations and policy goals.

Both the Modjeska School and Tell Them were successful at addressing one or more of the immediate problems they were designed to remedy: the Modjeska School brought attention to the “troubling history” of many of the monuments on the State House grounds through its “Monument Tour” that debuted in 2017, and Tell Them successfully lobbied Senator Bright to remove his objection to the Cervical Cancer Prevention Act in 2016. But these results are perhaps “one-off” and not necessarily predictive of future successes. However, social movements build from a new place after they have achieved even a seemingly “one-off” victory. As Tarrow reminds us, even in defeat, or partial progress, or one isolated success, social movements leave residues of reform as they engage the state “as a fulcrum to advance their claims against others” (1998: 58).

In evaluating the relationship between grassroots activism and political accountability or responsiveness, Shaw (2009) adopts a model that considers utility, timing, and context (2009: 2). While my research is interested less

in the responsiveness of public officials than in the responsiveness of the activists themselves (i.e., when does activism foster *more* activism), considering tactics, timing, and settings together is helpful in comparing the effectiveness of the theories of democratization the three organizations I study employ. Importantly, Shaw's Effective Black Activism Model (EBAM) centers the "perceptions and imaginations of activists" rather than the forces from which they seek accountability (2009: 18). This is essential when evaluating democratization from a bottom-up perspective. When empowering deliberative voices through inclusive grassroots work, it is equally important to consider the *perceived* limitations of the voiceless as it is to highlight structurally imposed limitations.

This theory informs my approach to considering whether or not the organizations I studied were "successful." Based on steadily increasing participation numbers, the Modjeska School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock have all been successful at increasing participation among traditionally marginalized people, at least in terms of their own projects and programs. These organization leaders and project facilitators, for the most part, understand that with the right combination of tactic, time, and context, activism begets activism and participation persists. The

amount of overlap in leadership, volunteers, and other participants is a testament to this.

Further, there is at least limited evidence that participation in grassroots organizing is having an effect in the formal political sphere as well. Sam Edwards, who started working with GRC in 2015, cited her involvement with the organization as a major contributing factor for her 2018 run for SC House District 85. And though her campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, when it was all said and done she was so appreciative for what GRC had given her that she donated "a small portion of [her] remaining campaign funds" to a recent GRC fundraiser (Facebook communication, 11 November 2018, in author files). In her own words:

"I got involved with Girls Rock Columbia a mere 3 years ago, and, like everyone who volunteers or attends camp, it changed my life for good. This organization is all about empowering young folks and making space in the world for them to do anything...Pretty sure I would never have considered running for office if I hadn't gotten involved as a GRC organizer" (Facebook communication, 11 November 2018, in author files).

It is not clear, yet, what effect grassroots activism has on the overall quality of democracy in South Carolina.

But through this study I've come to find that aggregative data about formal democratic participation tells only part of the story. For each student of the Modjeska School, participant in Tell Them's Bee Day, and Girls Rock Camper, grassroots activism has had quite a significant effect on the overall quality of democracy in South Carolina. To further highlight my empirical findings and situate the theoretical insights derived from my observations within the broader activism and democratic theory literature, I now return to the research questions I outlined in Chapter 1:

**1) In South Carolina, a state with demonstrably low citizen participation, are grassroots organizations trying to deepen democracy?**

The answer to this question is a resounding "yes." Even as the groups I studied attempted to achieve specific, immediate goals, each was keenly aware of their role - and responsibility - in democratizing South Carolina. This finding dovetails into to my second question:

**2) What are the short and long term political goals of the organizations in this study?**

Each group had short term goals in mind: the Modjeska School aimed to educate activists who would then go on to complete a social justice-minded project in South Carolina



that reflected their newfound knowledge; Tell Them sought to educate South Carolinians about reproductive rights and policies and to advocate for South Carolinians at the State level; Girls Rock wanted to teach South Carolina girls how to form a rock band during a weeklong summer camp. But central to each of these short term goals was a larger mission rooted in democratization. Each group sought to increase the decibel level of participants' voices - to foster greater agency and instill a drive for future participation, both among and on behalf of marginalized populations. Which leads to my third question:

**3) What motivates the activists and leaders I study to do what they do?**

Over the course of my fieldwork I spoke with people from all sorts of backgrounds. Some had pursued graduate degrees, some had switched paths and/or careers midway, some had actually gone to school to learn how to do the thing they were doing, and some had just happened upon their role or organization on a whim. But for the most part, the people I talked to had one major motivation in common: an almost moral imperative to use their individual skills and talents to empower others to join in their fight for justice. Again invoking Shaw (2009), the leaders and activists I spoke to had *democratic faith* - "the conviction

that *deep democracy* - the mobilization and representation of the most marginalized citizens - will eventually compel meaningful political reform...the belief that, if citizens do their part, social change is not only possible but inevitable"(2009: 192; emphasis in original; see also: Woliver (1993). For the stakeholders in the Modjeska School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock, the motivation is not only the classes, the advocacy, the camp - as Woliver (1993) found in her work on grassroots dissent, "It is the striving for a goal itself that is one of the goals" (163). But how does knowing this inform how we evaluate South Carolina democracy? I leave that for my final question:

**4) What political theories bolster these activists and leaders? What do we learn about democratic theory from observing these groups in action?**

In Chapter 2, I established a theoretical base that informed my analysis of the fieldwork I conducted for my three case studies. I considered the role (or lack thereof) of inclusion within the context of the historical and traditional South, reviewed the tactics that grassroots organizers use to confront political exclusion, discussed the efficacy of deliberation in attempting to democratize a traditionally exclusive system, and explored the role of voice in securing the roots of inclusion.

To begin with, I presented a range of metrics used to “scale” democratic depth, including Dahl’s (1989) institutional conditions for polyarchical development; Hill’s (1994) essential traits of representative democracy; and Walby’s (2009) 10-point scale that measures a broader, more complex conception of democracy. While Dahl, Hill, and Walby each treat the concept of citizen participation differently, all include it in some form as a means of improving the quality of democracy. Whether it appears as freedom of expression or associational autonomy (Dahl 1989); free and fair elections and participation by the majority of the public (Hill 1994); or de facto universal suffrage, “free, fair, and competitive” elections, low-cost electioneering, and proportional representation (Walby 2009), the *people* are essential to the equation. Walby especially stresses the importance of citizens being directly involved in “deliberative or empowered participatory” decision making (183-184). During my fieldwork, I found that each organization I studied offered a venue for this crucial citizen participation, directly and/or facilitatively.

Tell Them was particularly successful at facilitating participation. Referring back to my Chapter Two discussion of systemic representation and deliberation, Tell Them

provided participants with a crucial link between the “public space” of Bee Day (for instance) and the “empowered space” of the state legislature (Dryzek 2010; Mansbridge, et al. 2012; Disch 2011; Montanaro 2012; Mansbridge 2003). Importantly, this “transmission” that Tell Them helped facilitate was not only for the benefit of the participants, but also improved the entire representative and deliberative systems.

But it is not citizen participation alone that deepens democracy - participation must be *inclusive*. When issues of scale require representative democracy, inclusive participation can be difficult to come by - though not impossible, as Young (2000), Dahl (1989), Mill (1861), and others find. The challenge is one of conception, and requires participants to see the act of participating as a democratic goal in itself. This is perhaps most effectively achieved via deliberative democracy. Young highlights the model’s attributes of “inclusions,” “political equality,” “reasonableness,” and “publicity” (2000: 22-26). The model prioritizes flexibility, learning, growth, and compromise and has the potential to be “transformative.” I saw this conception of progress through process mirrored especially in the work of Tell Them and Girls Rock; however, all three organizations I studied were vigorously inclusive in

recruiting participants, which may have to agendas that included a wider range of issues than were necessarily experienced personally by group leaders.

One of the biggest hurdles to truly inclusive participation and/or deliberation, however, is that not all participants start out on the same participatory footing. As Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) warn against the effects of disproportionately allocated "authority," which often takes the form of silencing potential speakers (2014: 5). As they note, "Attending a meeting is not the same as speaking up" (2014: 10). Young (2000), also, warns against deliberative settings that run the risk of re-privileging the already deliberatively privileged. The fault, however, lies not only with the structural inequalities that effectively silence politically marginalized people. Even in inclusive, inviting, "judgement free" arenas, participants can be silenced by internalized oppression and notions about who *should* be talking.

This was highlighted in the first couple of days of Girls Rock camp. Even in the warm, silly, accepting embrace of the experience, there were shy girls who stayed quiet, hugging the walls, probably afraid. But camp leaders expected this, and were prepared with responses, activities, and alternatives that allowed even the campers

who hadn't yet identified their inner rock stars to be a part of the process. It was the priority placed on voice and expression, and the knowledge that sometimes we are our own silencers, that made the Girls Rock democratization so effective. Whether it was adult volunteers anonymously sharing fears about camp (only to find that we were not alone in our apprehensions) or the "sound circle" that encouraged each camper to contribute a vocal, clapped, or stomped sound to the serial cacophony, Girls Rock camp met the potential pitfalls of deliberative democracy head on. Though it happened in a relatively low-stakes setting, compromise, kindness, and empowerment combined to raise voices, necessarily in unconventional ways. The Modjeska School and Tell Them demonstrated important democratic work - inclusive, deliberative, and voice-enhancing. But Girls Rock is "telling new stories about democracy" (Guinier and Torres 2002: 221).

One of these new stories is about becoming our own "trusted sources" (Woliver and Boiter-Jolley 2018; see also: Montanaro 2012's discussion of "reflexive constituency formation"). Having a voice and knowing how to use it in a deliberative setting is incredibly important to deepening democracy. Trusting our own voices gives us authority and representation. Self-representation, yes -

but real representation all the same. And just as essential is having the *courage* to climb a "ladder of engagement" and know that your voice is powerful, and true, and worthwhile. Inclusive deliberation arises much more readily among people who believe in their own voices.

A meaningfully deepened democracy requires inclusive deliberation that lifts up and empowers the quiet voices. Each of the democratic elements I considered (inclusion, deliberation, and voice) benefit from the incorporation of the other two. Inclusive grassroots organizing works best when it includes empowerment efforts and deliberation-related training, and participants, at least anecdotally, are more likely to continue to participate or go on to participate in other arenas when their voice is affirmed and activated.

Many master narratives underscore the conceit "you can't fight city hall" and "when I fight authority, authority always wins" (John Mellencamp; see also: Edelman (1964), 1971)). Countering efforts to "tone it down" and "use an inside voice" while "acting like a lady" include religious institutions like the Black church, girls' sports clubs (where, to once again invoke Young, "throwing like a girl" is the whole point), communities of readers, dancers, and music lovers who affirm the pricelessness of a life

well lived which includes personal agency and democratic engagement. The three groups studied here are part of a counter message of "yes we can," being "fired up," and "nevertheless, she persisted". Importantly, each of these groups also encouraged participants to draw from their own position and experience - to use the language and cultural context (whether through music, art, story-telling, etc.) that felt like - *that was* - their own.

Of course, empowering voices alone does not automatically deepen democracy, but it does provide a more fertile ground for democratic roots to take hold. Deeply rooted democracy grows from the ground up; when individuals have the tools, voice, and agency to effectively enter a deliberative field they can collaborate with others to effect more inclusive representation. A population empowered at the individual level would allow for structural changes like the Elective Metropolitan Regional Assemblies that Thompson (2018) advocates for as a way to challenge the representation problems and opportunity hoarding that arise from metropolitan fragmentation. Individuals who are able (and willing) to advocate for themselves enhance the quality of democracy at each level of government, as well as in the nongovernmental aspects of their day-to-day lives. The inclusive grassroots work that



the Modjeska School, Tell Them, and Girls Rock do is directly in support of this.

While democratization through education and praxis is effective, as demonstrated by the Modjeska School and Tell them, democratization through empowerment is essential, and in this Girls Rock has capitalized on tactic, timing, and context. As Meeghan Kane, who now develops and leads GRC workshops, sits on the faculty of the Modjeksa School, and represented the revival of Southern feminist magazine Auntie Bellum at Tell Them's Bee Day 2015, told me:

"Girls Rock changed my whole world. If I hadn't [volunteered] at camp that first year it wouldn't have even occurred to me to start something like [Auntie Bellum]. To have the confidence that women would work with each other in such a spirit of not just camaraderie and sisterhood, but also just cooperation and getting the work done. I hadn't really worked in that capacity in my entire life; it was more than organizational cooperation - it was sisterhood and solidarity," (Interview, 26 April 2017).

The Modjeska School for Human Rights, Tell Them, and Girls Rock Columbia have all empowered marginalized citizens to find and trust their own voices. They have readied the soil in South Carolina with education, praxis,

and affirmation, preparing it for deeply democratic grassroots and new stories about democracy.

### **For Future Study**

Future studies in this field would benefit from incorporating a broader range of organization types, and widening the geographical scope. While Southern democracy and grassroots attempts to deepen it remains a worthwhile subject, I would be interested in comparative case studies based in different cities and states. In a city the size of Columbia, personnel overlap was to be expected, but I was surprised to find how many of the same activists and organizers were involved in two or more of the organizations I studied. In light of this, future study should also incorporate more analysis of and discussion of activist networks - both overlapping and isolated - including potential benefits and inhibitions of working together and apart.

A more explicitly longitudinal study that considered changes in voter turnout and office seeking among politically marginalized populations over time might also prove useful, as would a follow-up study of participants five to ten years down the road. Given relative longevity and consistency (and continued existence), I think future research on Girls Rock Columbia, as well as Girls Rock

organizations based in other Southern cities, would be the most interesting, as well as the most relevant and useful to the study of Southern democracy.

Important to this and future studies is the realization that South Carolina has many interconnected democratic problems. There is no single solution, and the work is necessarily ongoing - after all, the process is part of the progress. In light of this, as democracy deepens in the state, theories of democratization will evolve and benchmarks will move. For instance, if one ultimate goal is better representation in the formal political system, the informal representation of grassroots activism, and the deliberative work that happens in community meetings and around kitchen tables, must continue to improve as well. Deep democracy is not measured in legislatures and voting booths alone.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED AND EVENTS ATTENDED**

April 8, 2015: Eme Crawford, Tell Them, Columbia, SC.

February 25, 2016: Eme Crawford, Tell Them, Columbia, SC.

March 16, 2016: Bee Day, Tell Them, Columbia, SC.

April 26, 2017: Meeghan Kane, Auntie Bellum/Girls Rock,  
Columbia, SC.

November 9, 2017: Jessica Oliver, Girls Rock Columbia,  
Columbia, SC.

November 14, 2017: Graham Duncan, Modjeska Simkins School,  
Columbia, SC.

July 15-21, 2018: Girls Rock Camp, Girls Rock Columbia,  
Columbia, SC.

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## APPENDIX B

### SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS



Figure A.1: Pages from the Girls Rock Camper Handbook

# girls in the GRAVEL LOT

They want us to smile  
And sit a certain way  
Gonna do what we want  
Listen to what we say

We are beautiful  
We are unique  
We are not here now  
To hear your critique

Not gonna be that way  
Gonna do what we want  
We have freedom  
We have talent  
We have actual thoughts

Don't try to sweet talk us  
Don't ask us to cook  
You better watch it  
We'll give you the look

Not gonna be that way  
Gonna do what we want  
We have freedom  
We have talent  
We have actual thoughts

Don't try to judge us  
We've heard it all before  
Don't try to stop us  
Just keep talkin' out the door

Not gonna be that way  
Gonna do what we want  
We have freedom  
We have talent



ATALA



LILA



AMELIA



GABRIELLA



We have actual thoughts

# STATIC SUPROAR<sup>13</sup>

Short short, tight jeans, is this what you expect me to be  
I don't like your personality  
If I want to be how I wanna be then  
I'll be how I wanna be  
I'll just be free  
From your sea of greed

From your sea of greed

You say, "hey girl!"  
You know I will go away girl  
'Cause I got a name  
Yeah, I got that name

Women are brave, women are strong  
Women got it goin' on  
Women can sing, women can work  
Work all night  
Women ain't these delicate people  
'Cause we are the sequel  
We are the sequel

We should be equal  
Because we all are us  
You think we're just pretty, you're so wrong  
We are strong, we're more than that  
Yeah, we'll get you back

Women got it goin' on  
Women can sing, women can work  
Work all night  
Women ain't these delicate people  
'Cause we are the sequel  
We are the sequel

We are the future  
We are the future  
We are the future  
We are the future



Sadie,  
Sydney,  
Kaif Lynn,  
Keyora,  
Kamilo



Figure A.2: Pages from the Girls Rock Camp Showcase Program