



## Local Democracy Under Siege: Activism, Public Interests, and Private Politics

By Dorothy Holland, Catherine Lutz, Donald M. Nonini, Lesley Bartlett, Marla Frederick-McGlathery, Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen, Enrique G. Murillo Jr.

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What is the state of democracy at the turn of the twenty-first century? To answer this question, seven scholars lived for a year in five North Carolina communities. They observed public meetings of all sorts, had informal and formal interviews with people, and listened as people conversed with each other at bus stops and barbershops, soccer games and workplaces. Their collaborative ethnography allows us to understand how diverse members of a community not just the elite think about and experience “politics” in ways that include much more than merely voting. This book illustrates how the social and economic changes of the last three decades have made some new routes to active democratic participation possible while making others more difficult. *Local Democracy Under Siege* suggests how we can account for the current limitations of U.S. democracy and how remedies can be created that ensure more meaningful participation by a greater range of people.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“*Local Democracy Under Siege* argues persuasively that American democracy is at a pivotal moment where the forces of exclusion and the ideology of market rule contest with new forms of political activism and engaged citizenship. Readers will see many of the same issues that North Carolina faces in their own communities and will take away new perspectives on power, race, class, and activism from this cogent and timely analysis.”

-Louise Lamphere, Past President of the American Anthropological Association

“Produces new insights into the ‘makeover’ of local government”

-*Choice*

“This book opens up the crucial questions of what democracy means in the U.S. today and the ways in which everyday Americans struggle to make themselves heard. Conceptually, methodologically, and theoretically this book realizes the potential for anthropological analysis as a way to understand the dangers of increasing inequality in the contemporary U.S. It is a major contribution.”

-Ida Susser, author of *Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood*

“Debates about democracy often get stuck at the national scale. But the capacity for ordinary people to shape the conditions of their lives through politics and public speech is often greatest at the local level. This important book opens up anthropological perspectives on how this happens. It situates the challenges of local politics amid the constraints of neoliberalism, but also reports on the creative solutions different communities have developed to the distinctive problems they face.”

-Craig Calhoun, President, Social Science Research Council

“A luminous work about everyday citizens that should free up local democratic energies across the land!”

-Aihwa Ong, author of *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*

### About the Author

**Dorothy Holland** is Cary C. Boshamer Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Donald M. Nonini is Professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

**Catherine Lutz** is Professor of Anthropology at Brown University, where she has a joint appointment with the Watson Institute for International Studies. Her books include *Homefront: A Military City and the American 20th Century*.

**Lesley Bartlett** is Assistant Professor of Comparative and International Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

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