

**Relocation to Representation: A Case Study on the Changing Face of  
Progressive Politics in Minneapolis**

Kara Lillehaug

American Studies Honors Thesis

Advisors: Professor Lowe and Professor Dhingra

June 2013 - May 2014

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank my advisors Professor Lisa Lowe and Professor Parwan Dhingra. This work would not have been possible without your expert guidance and advice. I would like to thank Professor Thomas Chen and Professor Jean Wu for their constant support and encouragement throughout this entire process. I am especially grateful for Emma Schneider, my mentor and cheerleader. Thank you so much for reading all of my outlines and drafts. To my fellow American Studies thesis writers, thank you for your thoughtful opinions and criticisms. Without you I would never have had the motivation to complete this piece of work. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank all of those people that I interviewed for this project. It was your enthusiasm to share your account and willingness to give your time that created this project. Without you there would be no record of this incredible and powerful story.

## **Abstract**

In 2013, Abdi Warsame was elected to Minneapolis City Council, becoming the highest ranking Somali in the United States and usurping three-time incumbent Robert Lilligren. His election came on the heels of a transformation of the redistricting process in the City of Minneapolis and an endorsement from the largest party in Minneapolis, the Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL). This thesis is divided into two parts. The first section reveals and explores the systems of power constructed by white, male, heterosexual interests that are present and operating in Minneapolis city politics. Specifically, I focus on how the influence of powerful special interests in Warsame's election and the lack of multicultural literacy in the Minneapolis DFL almost cost Warsame the DFL endorsement and have potentially altered his decisions after election within City Hall. The second section is focused on how the Somali community, as led by Warsame, was able to overcome these structures of power through their use of innovative grassroots organizing methods. In particular, I center on the new application of the Get Out The Vote method and reliance on alternative media outlets. As such, Warsame's story, although unique, illuminates some of the invisible structures of power present in many cities politics that operate, exclude, and manipulate newcomers and marginalized communities while providing strategies and methods for other disenfranchised communities seeking political power to overcome these barriers in their own communities.

## Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION.....	5
II. METHODOLOGY.....	9
III. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	12
A. POLITICS OF THE MARGINALIZED.....	12
B. REDISTRICTING IN THE UNITED STATES.....	14
C. THE DEMOCRATIC FARMER LABOR PARTY ENDORSEMENT.....	19
IV. SYSTEMIC BARRIERS OF EXCLUSION.....	22
A. INFLUENCE OF SPECIAL INTERESTS.....	22
B. INADEQUATE SOPHISTICATION OF THE MINNEAPOLIS DFL.....	25
V. INVENTIVE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING METHODS.....	34
A. FOCUS ON “ALTERNATIVE” SOURCES OF MEDIA.....	34
B. RE-DEFINITION OF GET OUT THE VOTE.....	38
VI. CONCLUSION.....	42

## Introduction

As you drive down Highway 94 coming from Minneapolis and heading towards St. Paul, the tall multi-colored buildings to the left of the road near the exit for the University of Minnesota stick out like a sore thumb. Their 70's style architecture, relatively tall height, and rainbow hues make them practically unavoidable. However, until this last summer these buildings and the people inside of them, mostly Somali Americans, had been relatively ignored by mainstream media sources throughout Minneapolis. That all changed on November 7th, 2014 when Abdi Warsame, a resident of these buildings, was elected to the Minneapolis City Council and became the highest elected Somali American in the country. He was elected with sixty four percent of the first place votes in the Sixth Ward of Minneapolis defeating three time incumbent candidate Robert Lilligren.

Warsame's path to the United States is similar to many other Somalis Americans living in Minneapolis. Warsame, like the the majority of Somalis living in the United States, immigrated because of the civil war in the 1990's. Counted at 85,700 in 2010, the Somali community in the United States is now among the largest of the Somali diaspora. Within the United States, the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota) is the area with the most Somali refugees, housing one third of the total United States population (Minneapolis Foundation, 10).

Soon after arriving in the United States, Somali Americans began to run for political office. This movement began with the late Hussein Samatar, who was elected to the Minneapolis School Board in 2005 and continued with Mohamud Noor, who ran in a special election for State Senate in 2010. These two individuals were fundamental in laying the groundwork of Somali political activism that would be continued by Warsame. However, during both Samatar's and Noor's elections, the Somali community was split geographically, and therefore politically, in Minneapolis. Instead of having a unified voting block, the Somali American population was divided between Ward Six, Seven, and Eight. This resulted

in the further marginalization of a population that already faces numerous racial, religious, and socioeconomic barriers. So, two years before Warsame even ran for City Council, the Somali community, lead by Warsame, decided to lobby for a change in the redistricting of Minneapolis in order to create a unified voting block for their community and almost one year later, the redistricting commission passed a map for the City of Minneapolis that made Ward Six a “Somali opportunity ward.”<sup>1</sup>

After successfully lobbying for a Somali opportunity ward, Warsame decided to officially announce his candidacy for City Council. As part of this decision, Warsame began to seek the Democratic Farmer Labor (DFL) party's endorsement. The DFL is currently the largest political party in Minneapolis followed by the Green Party. Although not always, many times the DFL endorsement is followed by success in the general election because of the importance behind this stamp of approval. After months of new voter seminars, fundraising, and community organizing, Warsame was able to flood the caucuses and secure the DFL endorsement and subsequently, like many former DFL endorsed candidates, went on to win the general election (Dwane, 7).

My research focuses on the redistricting and endorsement processes, the first two major stages of the election as a whole. There is already a large body of scholarship focused on the strategies and methods candidates can use to win their local or city general elections once they are already on the ticket. However, there has been little research done about what happens before the general election and the importance that early engagement, organizing, and creativity can have on the ultimate results of an election.

Focusing on the Minneapolis redistricting and DFL endorsement, I sought to answer my overarching questions – Were there any structural barriers to marginalized communities involvement

---

<sup>1</sup> A opportunity ward is defined as a the population in question comprising at or close to fifty percent of the total population of the ward.

present in Minneapolis city politics and if so, how was Warsame was able to succeed in winning his seat to the Minneapolis City Council?

The simple answer to the first of these questions was that yes, it is clear that there are still structures of power present in Minneapolis that create barriers for marginalized candidates seeking office. In Warsame's case, in addition to the racism, classism, religious discrimination, and xenophobia present in his everyday life, these structural barriers presented themselves in two main forms. The first was in the influence of special interests on Warsame's election. In order to obtain the resources and direction necessary to win, a "backer," or someone who had large amounts of time and money was essential. In Warsame's case, this special interest was one man in particular, Brian Rice. As a lawyer and lobbyist with an incredible stake in the outcomes of City Hall, it seems clear that Rice's influence was immense. Further, it is already clear after Warsame's first few months in office that the favors that Rice provided Warsame are expected to be returned and are influencing Warsame's decisions in City Hall. The second systemic barrier to representation that the Somali community faced was the Minneapolis DFL's failure to abide by the overall party mission and provide support for the Somali community. It was this inadequate multicultural literacy of the Minneapolis DFL that reinforced outdated partisan politics, community outreach strategies, and precinct caucus organization. As a result of these antiquated policies, Warsame's endorsement was almost revoked by the party a few weeks later.

However, despite these structures in place, Warsame was still able to win the general election and become a member of the Minneapolis City Council. In response to my second question, I found that Warsame was able to accomplish this because of his implementation of two new and inventive methods of organizing and communication. The first was Warsame's focus on "alternative media outlets," specifically his reliance on Somali speaking radio stations and word-of-mouth, instead of relying on mainstream news outlets. The second was his use of Get Out The Vote "GOTV" during the redistricting

and DFL endorsement processes instead of waiting to use GOTV until the general election, as it is traditionally employed. Although it is impossible to surmise whether Warsame would have lost if these two tactics had not been implemented, it is clear that they were highly influential to Warsame's, and the Somali community's, ultimate success.

This paper creates a space to tell, celebrate, and analyze Warsame's journey to Minneapolis City Hall. The election of Warsame is more than just one man's personal history. It is truly the accomplishment of the entire Somali American community in Minneapolis despite the sacrifices and negotiations that individuals and communities are forced to make in their quest for representation. Both the influence of special interest and the outdated practices of the Minneapolis DFL illustrate that there are still institutional barriers in place meant to exclude those people that do not identify as upper middle class, white, Christians, who were born in the United States. However it is clear from Warsame's split from those organizing tactics that had traditionally been considered "best" in progressive politics and implementation of new communications and GOTV strategies, that creativity and coalition building can overcome these systemic barriers. This case, which resulted in the turnaround of the Somali community from relocation to representation is one that can serve as a source of inspiration for other communities that have been historically disenfranchised in the United States as well as new Americans who have recently immigrated. As such, Warsame's story, although unique, illuminates some of the invisible structures of power present in many cities politics that operate, exclude, and manipulate newcomers and marginalized communities while providing strategies and methods for other disenfranchised groups seeking political power to overcome these barriers in their own communities.

## Methodology

In order to get a wide variety of perspectives on Warsame's journey, of which no formal scholarship has yet been completed, over forty people were interviewed from public officials to community activists. To obtain participants for my research I used the snowball sampling method. This is done through a series of referrals that are made starting with an initial contact and branching off to connect with acquaintances of the initial person (Atkinson and Flint, 1). I chose to use this method because I was not previously familiar with any members of the East African Community in Minneapolis and needed a specific section of the population, those involved in Minneapolis politics, non-profit work, or the Warsame and Lilligren campaigns, for my research. My first contact was with Jason Cassady, one of the conveners for the Ward Six Precinct Caucus Convention and connected with other individuals from there.

I used semi-structured structured interviews as the basis of my research. A semi-structured interview entails three things. First, the interviewer and respondent engaged in a formal interview. Second, the interviewer develops and uses a guide (Appendix A) that allows them to have a plan for the conversation. Third, the interviewer follows the guide but is able to follow different topical trajectories that may stray from the guide (Bernard, 158). According to "Research Methods in Anthropology," semi-structured interviews are best used when either you will not get another chance to speak with a participant or you are sending several interviewers into the field (Bernard, 158). The interviews were conducted in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. I met respondents wherever was most convenient for them, mostly local coffee shops or restaurants. There was no monetary fee given to any of the respondents for their participation in the interviews. However, in all cases, I did offer to pay for their coffee or meal with the \$1,000 Shapiro Award grant that was awarded to me from Tufts University to work on this project.

Recording devices were used during most of the interviews. Since semi-structured interviews contain many open ended questions and often diverge from the original script, I felt it was important to be engaged in the interview process as it occurred and have the tapes for later transcription and analysis (Bernard, 158). Before recording was taken however, the respondents were asked to sign a form of consent (Appendix B) for the interview itself, recording, and later use.

Throughout the interviews, I practiced the consent principles taught in the Collaborative Institutional Training (CITI) workshop required by Tufts University. My consent form, interview questions, and research was approved by the Tufts Institutional Review Board. My research was given an “exempt status” under Category One, meaning that my research was conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods (Tufts IRB Official Website).

However, there were limitations to my investigation. The first is the the language difference that was present during my of my interviews. Many of my respondent’s first language was Somali or Oromo, different than my own first language, English. Although all respondents did speak English, there are certain words and phrases that cannot be directly translated and in turn cause a changed meaning than if the interview were taking place in their native language. Secondly, I am a person with privilege and the dominant narrative supporting almost all (femininity aside) of my identities, including but not limited to my whiteness, heterosexuality, upper-middle class background, private school education, and able body. As such, when I enter a room to meet with a respondent, all of these factors are present and manifest themselves in the responses that participants feel comfortable sharing in an interview and how they present their answers to me. Because many of the participants whom I interviewed carry less inherent privilege than I do, including but not limited to, people of color, refugee

status, lower socioeconomic background, and non-native English speakers, there were many times that my racial location might have effected the results of the interview. Lastly, because I was only in Minneapolis from June until August, I was not able to see first hand the events that transpired. As such, my interpretations take place within the framework of the interviewees viewpoints.

## Review of the Literature

### *Politics of the Marginalized*

Voter participation and mobilization of certain ethnic communities have long been considered an important to scholarly research. However, most of these studies explore the individualistic factors that cause members of historically disenfranchised groups. “Despite the centrality of individual political participation to democratic politics, few studies of mass political behavior explicitly consider the more narrow question of how individuals' social contexts structure their political participation.” (Leighley, 35) Although evidence of individual motivations are interesting in the context of political participation, they are even more important when focusing specifically on the Somali community in Minneapolis. Although Warsame was just one man elected to the City Council, his success represents a larger mobilization of the Somali community living in Minneapolis.

Three studies dominate the investigative field of mass political behavior of marginalized communities. The first, conducted by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) states that individuals are more likely to participate if they have been asked or recruited to do so. The second, Verba and Nie (1972), explains that individuals are more likely to participate if they have more positive civic orientations in their community. The third, conducted by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) argues that mass behavior occurs more often for high status individuals because, “The dominant interpretation of this research is that high status individuals have more resources (i.e. time, money, and skills) available to facilitate engaging in political activity (Leighley, 82).” In addition, Leighley adds to the findings of these studies and proposes a fourth element to mass political behavior – the candidate themselves.

The findings of the first study of Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) seem to play a large part in the mobilization of the Somali community throughout the redistricting and endorsement processes. This recruitment process according to Rosenstone and Hansen is anything from door-knocking, phone

banking, or community meetings. Although not explicitly stated it seems that the effect of this contact disproportionality affects marginalized communities who are statistically less likely to be contacted by generalized recruitment campaigns (Leighley, 63). It seems that Warsame's large emphasis on connecting directly to the Somali community instead of intermediary channels was effective in turning out large numbers of Somalis to both the Redistricting Commission meetings in Minneapolis as well as the DFL endorsement process.

It seems clear that community organizations and a positive civic orientation of the Somali community contributed to their political mobilization as explained in the second study of Verba and Nie (1972). This conclusion is rooted in substantial post WW-II history such as the importance of civic groups in the 1960's Chicano movement and the civil rights movement for Black Americans in the 1950's and 60's. "They demonstrate that Blacks in counties with strong Black organizations were more likely to be registered and more likely to vote. However, organizations do not have to be political (Leighley, 85)." In addition, Bobo and Gilliam (1990) found that "Blacks living in high-empowerment areas (where a Black serves as mayor) [thereby encouraging political engagement] tend to know more and feel more positive about government and politics." The Somali American community is no exception to this rule with numerous civic engagement organizations present in the community such as the African Development Center, Somali Action Alliance, Center for Religious and Civic Culture, and Somali Institute for Peace and Justice.

The third study of Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) corroborates the findings of another study titled, "Citizens by Choice, Voters by Necessity: Patterns in Political Mobilization by Naturalized Latinos." In it, the author lists several factors such as socioeconomic status, group identity, language, and culture that are typically offered as explanations for differences in participation levels across minority groups." However, unlike certain marginalized groups like the traditional African American community or the Latino community that have been studied extensively in scholarly literature, studies

of the Somali immigrant population of the United States are a relatively new phenomenon. Because of this fact, and the lack of census data on the Somali community specifically throughout Minneapolis, it is harder to determine which of the factors listed above, if any are benefitting the Somali community's political participation. However, despite the lack of data Leighley argues that “immigrants naturalizing in a politically charged environment represent a self-selected subsample of all voters, identifying individuals who feel strongly about the political issues at hand, and who seek enfranchisement as an act of political expression.” Anecdotally, this phenomenon seems to hold fast with Somali Americans attributing their own active political participation to past disenfranchisement in their home country.

Finally, Leighley gives a fourth factor in the ability of mass political mobilization of marginalized people, which is the candidate themselves. “With the increasing number of African American candidates and elected officials over the past three decades, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars have emphasized the importance of African-American candidates and officials in mobilizing the participation of the Black community.” This same philosophy should be regarded surrounding Warsame's candidacy. Although many other factors of community mobilization were at play in the election, Warsame's personal leadership skills and grassroots organizing methods contributed significantly to his ultimate election.

### *Redistricting in the United States*

Redistricting is the process of drawing United States electoral district boundaries, often in response to population changes determined by the results of the decennial census. This history of redistricting in the United States is one that has been fraught with racism ever since its creation and application after the United States Civil War. Historically (and many times currently) redistricting has been used to systematically keep groups of color from gaining voting power by packing the entire community into one district, where their power will be confined, or spreading them across several

districts, where their power will be dispersed.

Although felt personally by many, the issue of racism in redistricting policies was not discussed on a national main stage until the civil rights movement in the 1960's in the United States, when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. "There shall be no "political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color," stated Section Two of the Act with Section Five mandating that any areas with a history of discrimination in redistricting would need the approval of changes to mandated plans from the federal government. The Act, as the first piece of federal legislation addressing the problematic nature of redistricting seemed to be encouraging of racial equality.

Specifically, it was the Voting Rights Act that allowed the creation of creation of "minority-majority" districts beginning in the late 1980's. This term, like the name implies, means that a certain district has a larger percentage of minority residents than of Anglo-white residents. The possible effect of "minority-majority" districts came into the spotlight in 1992, when it was this redistricting strategy that elected a record number of Black and Hispanic Americans to the United States Congress. It was one such case that threw the Voting Rights Act back onto the playing field as a case, *Shaw v. Reno*, was brought to the United States Supreme Court to determine the constitutionality of a minority-majority ward in North Carolina. However, unlike the previous courts which had a liberal and progressive lean, the 1993 *Shaw* case was decided under the notably conservative Rehnquist court. It was in her majority opinion that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor stated,

"When a district obviously is created solely to effectuate the perceived common interests of one racial group, elected officials are more likely to believe that their primary obligation is to represent only the members of that group, rather than their constituency as a whole... Racial classifications of any sort pose the risk of lasting harm to our society. They reinforce the belief, held by so many for too much of our history, that individuals

should be judged by the color of their skin. Racial classifications with respect to our voting carry particular dangers (*Shaw v. Reno*, 658).”

This attitude, which can be described as “colorblind,” fundamentally changed the reach of the Voting Right Act of 1965. The Act, which had been specifically designed to combat racism, was now significantly less powerful because according to O'Connor, now any acknowledgement of race is unconstitutional.

Since 1993, the precedent set by *Shaw vs. Reno* has not been overruled despite the court's more liberal make-up in recent years. In the case of *Hunt v. Cromartie* in 1999, the Court ruled that a forty seven percent African American district was allowed because there was no actual intent present in separating the district based on race. Instead, the intent of the redistricting commission was to create a majority Democratic ward and a byproduct was to create a majority black ward; “That a concentration of Black voters did not necessarily make a majority-minority district unconstitutional as long as the intent behind the creation was political rather than racial (*Hunt v. Cromartie*).” However, despite this definite win for those in favor of allowing “majority-minority” districts or wards separated on the basis of race or ethnicity, the Court’s original intention of a colorblind redistricting was not dismantled. This strict interpretation of the law has been applied in many other similar cases that were brought to the Supreme Court such as *Shaw v. Hunt*, *Bush v. Vera*, *Johnson v. DeGrandy*, *Miller v. Johnson*, and *United States v. Hays*. In application, this makes it significantly more difficult for states to voluntarily use race-based redistricting as a means to remedy past discrimination and comply with the remedial provisions that the Voting Rights Act prescribed.

It is within this context that redistricting occurs across the United States. The ways in which redistricting is actually performed varies across each state, district, and city level. Three main methods of redistricting currently exist on the state level in the United States –

commission-based redistricting, legislative-based redistricting, and a hybrid of these two methods. It is the commission-based form that is considered the most “liberal” method of redistricting. In this method, the certain states give an independent commission the primary responsibility of drawing legislative and congressional boundaries. Members are usually selected by a state's Governor or by another elected official. Other officials that usually appoint individuals to redistricting commissions are not limited to Secretaries of State, leaders of the Legislature, and State Supreme Court justices. States such as Washington, California, New Jersey, and Arizona apply the commission-based method of redistricting. On the other hand, the most “conservative” method of redistricting is the legislative-based form. In this method, the State Legislature has the primary authority in drawing Legislative and Congressional boundaries. Most states require the Governor to approve and have the power to veto the redistricting plans. However, unlike the commission-based method of redistricting the legislative-based form allows for more variability. For example, states such as Florida and Delaware allow for all of the redistricting boundaries to be drawn by the legislature with no gubernatorial oversight. This process reflects the most “conservative” of the redistricting policies, meaning the highest rates of stagnant boundaries and incumbent success. Other states like Georgia and Alabama appoint part of the legislature to specifically serve on the “Reapportionment Committee” and redistrict. A hybrid method is a mixture between these two forms. This is where states such as Minnesota fall. On a state level the legislature forms a subcommittee on redistricting that consists of two Democrats and two Republicans from the Senate and House of Representatives (State-by-state Redistricting Procedures).

The policies that govern Minnesota redistricting on a state wide level differ from those of the City of Minneapolis. Originally, Minneapolis was redistricted by individuals, chosen by Minneapolis City Council members, who would represent the Council members interests. This

system, created direct ties between the outcomes of redistricting and members of City Council. As such, this method, which could be described as relatively “conservative,” kept boundaries stagnant and allowed for high levels of incumbent advantage and success. These two facts created an environment where disenfranchised communities voices, which have historically been silenced by those in power, continue to be excluded.

However, this system changed in 2010, when the Charter Commission of Minneapolis (a sub-group of the Minneapolis Redistricting Group) decided to place an amendment on the ballot to change how Minneapolis is redistricted. The redistricting system became a commission-based redistricting system instead of a legislative-based one, in which current City Council members had relatively little influence on the final maps of the city. (It does seem, from the final map created in 2012, that this principle held true, as the ward boundaries were changed more than they had been in the previous few redistricting initiatives.) The 2012 election was the first time that Minneapolis operated with such a redistricting system.

The Redistricting Commission was composed first, by the creation of a Charter Commission. Members who were interested in being on the Charter Commission applied and were selected by the head judge in Hennepin County. Barry Clegg, the head of the Charter Commission explained that the judge for Hennepin County included individuals from a variety of political backgrounds including Democrats and Independents (who generally dominate the City of Minneapolis politically), but also Republicans as well. The Charter Commission deals not only with the redistricting but other issues as well such as the approval of ballot initiatives. Once the Charter Commission had been formed applications went out for larger the Redistricting Commission and applicants were chosen based on an interview process.

The redistricting group as a whole was comprised of 23 individuals, with 9 serving as members of only the redistricting group and not the Charter Commission. Of those individuals, there were no

members of the Somali community as part of the redistricting group. In addition, around 70 percent of the members serving on the Charter Commission were white, over the representative proportion according to current City of Minneapolis demographic statistics.

However, the Charter Commission was aware of this fact and did push to include people of color and of other marginalized backgrounds in the redistricting commission. According to Clegg, “There were some people on the charter commission who felt that some minority populations, all minority populations, were underrepresented on the [Minneapolis City] Council.” Later in the redistricting process, this sense and hunger for a racial diversity would become one of, if not the most important fact in allowing the Somali community to achieve the ward that they did.

Now, over a year after the Minneapolis Redistricting Commission's final map, there has been no case brought against the city by any party. This means that Minneapolis was in compliance with all of the federal rules and regulations (some of which were discussed above) regarding redistricting in the United States. This is important to note because despite the court's general conservative leaning during important decisions such as *Shaw v. Reno*, it seems that a commission-based style of redistricting, or one that is described as “liberal” is able to exist within the context of past judicial decisions.

### *The Democratic-Farmer Labor Party Endorsement*

The process by which candidates are endorsed in the United States varies greatly by governmental level, region, or party. At the national level in both the Democratic and Republican parties, the endorsement process is conducted through primary elections (voting at poll location individually) or caucuses (voting in a community setting) depending on the state. After this, national conventions for both parties formally endorse the victory candidate from the nomination process. The Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL) in the City of Minneapolis works in a similar way to this national process. However, in Minneapolis, only caucuses are used to cast endorsement ballots. A

precinct caucus is a public meeting where participants select candidates and cast their votes in order to select delegates for the next level of party convention. It is normally meant for eligible voters from each precinct to attend. In most cases voters from the same precinct cast their ballots at the same polling place, the precinct caucuses are essentially community meetings. In Warsame's case, this endorsement process took place first at the precinct caucus scattered across Ward Six and was finalized during the DFL Convention for Ward Six.

David Lebedoff, author of the book *Ward Six*, an historical account of Ward Six in 1968 explains that the caucus system is dying in the United States today. This is due to the inherent exclusionary nature of the caucus system. First, it is important understand who is attending the caucuses, especially in Minneapolis and second, understand how this affecting city politics.

In interview after interview conducted with participants, a theme that was commonly repeated was the traditionally low turn outs to the precinct caucuses throughout Ward Six and the entirety of Minneapolis. For example, in 1972, turnout in the presidential delegate-selecting caucuses averaged about six percent of eligible Democrats and today that number hovers around the same percentage (Marshall, 170). One potential reason for this is because the caucus system is “very complicated. The precinct caucus is very difficult and so the average citizen finds it very difficult to participate and therefore doesn't participate.” Rules and voting practices, different than most citizen use on a regular basis are required. In addition, because of the small turnout to precinct caucuses and the small surplus budgets of major parties it is hard to spread their existence quickly effectively through media or advertising to those who are not already informed.

Once someone does overcome these challenges and makes it to a caucus, “Minnesota DFL attenders proved more likely to be male, younger, of a higher educational level, and to report no church affiliation. DFL caucus attenders in the Twin Cities area were better educated and hailed from higher socioeconomic status. In short, where differences proved significant, caucus activists consistently were

of a higher economic status than those not participating (Marshall, 171).” Jamaal, a senior staffer for U.S. Representative Keith Ellison echos this sentiment by stating in an interview that “The people who usually showed up at the precinct caucus were senior white people that showed up.” There are truly too many factors that support this conclusion including, but not limited to, the facts that women are more likely to have to stay home with small children, non-English language speakers are not properly informed of the caucus, caucuses usually take place on weekday nights during non-traditional working hours when lower-income people might be at their second job, etc. The list goes on and on.

Although it is hard to make broad assumptions about the caucus system as a whole, it does appear that the system has traditionally functioned on the philosophy of exclusion of those without time, power, and money on their side, keeping white, upper-middle class, males with the power of determining the endorsed candidate.

## Systemic Barriers of Exclusion

Since colonization, institutional power<sup>2</sup> and prejudice<sup>3</sup> have been operating to create a system of oppression<sup>4</sup> for marginalized communities in the United States (Leaven, 1). Examples of these structures of oppression are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing. Groups that are not afforded privilege<sup>5</sup> are constantly fighting in order to achieve equal civil rights such as those listed above as well as the right to politician representation. However, those who do have privilege many times do not see these structures of power because they are not working against them on a daily basis. As such, this section seeks to illuminate two of the most glaring power structures present in city politics in Minneapolis – the influence of special interests and the lack of multicultural literacy in the Minneapolis DFL – in order to explore their functionality in within the context of Warsame's campaign.

*Brian Rice*

A special interest is defined as a a person, group of people, or an organization seeking or receiving special advantages, typically through political lobbying. Although special interests are many

---

2 The ability or official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The capacity to exercise control over others.

3 A judgment or opinion that is formed on insufficient grounds before facts are known or in disregard of facts that contradict it. Prejudices are learned and can be unlearned.

4The combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant groups”).

5Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. In the United States, privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups: white people, able-bodied people, heterosexuals, males, Christians, middle or owning class people, middle-aged people, English-speaking people.

times thought of in presidential elections in the form of Super-PAC's or billionaires, special interests existed even in Warsame's Minneapolis City Council election. The largest one in Warsame's case being Brian Rice, a lawyer, lobbyist, and long time DFL member in Minneapolis. Rice's investment in Warsame's campaign, both through connections and monetarily, shows the deep stake that Rice has on the decisions of City Hall and a lack of authentic connection or support for the Somali community as a whole.

Warsame met Rice at Governor Dayton's house at a party celebrating the election of Kari Dziedzic. As an essential part of Noor's campaign, Warsame was invited along with his fellow campaign staffers to the party with Noor. There, Warsame connected with Rice who expressed interest in becoming involved with the future political endeavors of Somali community.

As a lawyer at the firm of Rice, Michaels, & Johnson it may not seem immediately clear to those not involved in city politics the immense stake that Rice has in the decisions that come out of Minneapolis City Hall. However, Rice's familial history, position as general counsel for the Minneapolis Police Relief Association and the Minnesota Fire Relief Association (commonly called the police and fire unions), and position as both lawyer and lobbyist for the Park Board of Minneapolis, makes him one of the most powerful special interests in the City of Minneapolis.

Rice seems to be following in his families footsteps in his current role in Minneapolis politics. His father, Jim Rice, was a member of the DFL and a representative for Minneapolis's North Side and part of the original "political machine" present in the city. In addition, Rice's uncle, Dick Kantorwicz served on the Park Board from 1955 to 1961, part of the time as president. Family friend Ed Gearty served on the Park Board from 1959 to 1963 and later served as the Park Board attorney.

In 2001, Rice's firm made \$439,000 from the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board from contract work as its general counsel and lobbyist and that number has only increased over time. However, Rice's interest in furthering his client's agenda is not simply limited to the workplace. Rice

also donated to the same group where his firm made so much money. In 2001, Rice and his wife gave \$8,600 to Park Board races. Compared to some elections, this \$8,600 seems like a small donation but this is considered a hefty sum for a Park Board race in which the total amount of money raised by a candidate rarely, if ever, exceeds \$10,000. In addition, Minneapolis Police Relief Association and Minnesota Fire Relief Association, which Rice also represents, also contributed \$3,600 as well to Park Board races. In addition, Rice explained that he helped to organize fundraisers for the candidates of the Park Board races, a job that lies outside of his official duties as a lawyer and lobbyist. Out of the eight incumbent Park Board members, six of them received 13 or more percent of their funding from Rice or one of his clients.

One interesting detail to note about Rice's personal contributions is that his campaign fundraisers do not stay within a single party. From former Republican gubernatorial candidate in 2001 to the current DFL mayoral candidate Mark Andrew, Rice has campaigned for both Democratic and Republican candidates at levels from local Minneapolis seats to state wide. He says, "I do a lot of legislative stuff," he said. "I've given to the House Democrats, the House Republicans, the Senate Republicans, the Senate Democrats -- that is the way the world works." (Southwest Journal) Since every year that goes by creates a more polarizing environment for political candidates on the local, state, and national scale, the fact that Rice has donated to both political parties raises questions and elicits further investigation. Many have suggested that this bi-partisan support from Rice is done so that he can reach out to as many elected officials as possible, without alienating either party, and more successfully push forth his agenda for the Park Board and Firefighter and Police Relief Associations.

Although at first glance Rice's business model and personal campaign donations seem to have little to do with the redistricting that occurred in Minneapolis and the DFL nomination and general election that followed, nothing could be further from the truth. The former mayor of Minneapolis, R.T. Rybak stated that Brian Rice was, to date, "the single largest special interest coming to the City of

Minneapolis.” And and such, Rice wields an enormous amount of influence over those who he helps elect.

It is this context that Rice must be viewed instead of simply as an altruistic individual who seeks to assist marginalized communities. Brian Rice acts as part of a greater system, one in which special interests try to influence who is able to obtain power in City Hall for their own benefit. It is already clear from Warsame’s first few months that the favors that Rice provided are being returned.

Only six months after election, an example of this influence can be seen. Currently, there is a contested seat for State Senate between incumbent Phyllis Kahn and Mohamud Noor. Brian Rice, formerly Kahn’s campaign manager in 2012 has been working for her again in the 2014 race. From this alone it is clear that Rice’s motivations lie far outside simply “supporting the Somali community” and helping them achieve their goal of political representation. However, even more interesting is Warsame’s endorsement of Kahn as well. It begs a question of why Warsame would support a different candidate than the one he had previously thrown himself into organizing for and one would continue to represent the Somali community. It seems clear that Rice is ultimately a special interest looking to influence the decisions made in City Hall and ultimately potentially has the power to affect Warsame’s decisions both in and out of his official Councilmember position.

#### *Inadequate Sophistication of the Minneapolis Democratic Farmer Labor Party*

The mission of the Minnesota DFL party is as follows; “The Minnesota DFL supports and works to enact the ideals and principles of the Democratic Party and strives to sustain the foundations in our Party’s grassroots history. We believe that every American and Minnesotan, regardless of their background or other immutable traits, has a right to stable employment with fair wages, to proper education, to raise and provide for a family, to accessible and affordable healthcare, to live in safe communities, and to retire with dignity and security. In the course of our Party’s history much as been

accomplished and we at the DFL Party will continue working for a better Minnesota into tomorrow and beyond.” This statement, although broad, expresses the intentions of the DFL party in Minnesota. It mentions inclusion of all people above all else, sometimes called “big tent” philosophy. However, despite these good intentions on behalf of the state party, the Minneapolis DFL’s actions do not represent these ideals. This is due the lack of cultural competency of the Minneapolis DFL staff which resulted in outdated policies of the organization such as unsuccessful community outreach plan, imprudent planning of the precinct caucuses in Ward Six, and preference for an incumbent candidate.

Despite their philosophies of inclusion, the executive committee of the Minneapolis DFL is entirely white. This executive committee is comprised of the Chair of the Minneapolis DFL Dan McConnell, Roann Cramer, the associate chair, Becky Boland, the secretary, Ellen Anderson, the outreach director, and Tim Bohham, the treasurer. Although a person does not necessarily need to look like the populations that they serve, it is clear that the Minneapolis DFL did not even understand what populations were their constituents.

Because of this lack of multicultural literacy of the Minneapolis DFL, the community outreach strategy was severely out of touch with the needs of the community in Ward Six. However, this issue began before the community outreach director was even hired. It was Roann Cramer, the Vice President of the Minneapolis DFL, who recruited Anderson to serve as the Outreach Director. When asked why she chose Cramer to be the community member serving in that position, Cramer explained that “She was one of the only people she could find who would be interested in the job.” Upon further evaluation, this statement seems to express the general sentiment that is prevalent on the executive committee of the Minneapolis DFL. The recruitment and advertisement of the positions at the Minneapolis DFL as a whole, and specifically the Outreach Chair, seemed to be lackluster at best. The majority of the recruitment was done among the white community where members of the executive board already had ties. As such, it can be said that the person who filled this position, a white middle class woman, who

had no previous history of activism or commitment to the inclusion of marginalized people, was doomed to fail.

The Minneapolis DFL's new Outreach Officer, Ellen Anderson, lives in Ward Six and joined the executive board approximately six months before the precinct caucus election in 2013. When interviewed, Anderson talked about her interest in politics and her alignment with the Democratic party. She spoke about her ideals of the democratic process such as "inclusion of everyone" and a "fair democratic system." However, despite her residency in Ward Six, not once in those six months after being hired did she reach out to the Somali community and engage them on what their needs or desires might be in regards to the precinct caucus. When asked what communities she was involving, it seemed that Anderson was engaging with the limited users who had subscribed to the Minneapolis DFL's Facebook page and was doing little to no engagement with the underrepresented communities in her own Ward or the other Ward's across the city. This is mentioned not to place blame on one individual in particular, but to create an understanding of the systemic problems that are reinforced in the DFL party and to give a wider lens as to the reasons for lack of involvement of particular communities in the planning of the precinct caucus.

The Minneapolis DFL's posts the information for its office on the Minneapolis DFL public website. Its policy is to let those people who are interested in pursuing the endorsement to contact them and inform them of their intent to run. The same strategy is used when preparing for the precinct caucuses. The DFL expects that residents who have concerns about the precinct caucus to call and voice their requests to the executive board.

Cramer, the Vice Chair of the DFL, expressed the idea that this way of allowing services is a universally equal method. She states that by allowing everyone to approach the DFL they are not "favoring" or choosing to prioritize one community over another. However, the problem with this method lies in the limited understanding that the Minneapolis DFL has regarding accessibility of these

services to the entire City of Minneapolis. The sentiment that Cramer explains of equal access would be true if the entire city was of the same racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, education levels, etc. Obviously this is not true anywhere. So, therefore the Minneapolis DFL's assumption that every resident of Minneapolis has equal access and ability to request services is inherently flawed.

If two residents of Minneapolis are compared with each other it is not necessarily true that they will equally be able to access the resources that the Minneapolis DFL has to offer. For example, here is a hypothetical comparison of two residents of Minneapolis. One is a white woman, living in an area with a history of politically active residents. She is upper middle class, as finished high school, college, and has a graduate degree. She has voted in every presidential election and a few local elections. She has been to one precinct caucus before. She has a laptop and high speed internet at home. Another resident is a recent immigrant to the United States. She lives in an area of mostly new immigrants from the same location as her. As a result, she does not need to speak English at home. She is currently working towards her GED. She has never voted. She does not own a computer and has to travel to her local library, whose hours keep getting cut back, to use a computer. These two women are equal. There is a significantly higher chance that the first woman is going to be able to request the potential services to that she might need to be politically active than the second woman.

It is impossible to definitively prove that this inequality gap created by the DFL's policies and methods led to the problems that the precinct caucuses in Ward Six had. However, other wards that have a majority white and higher income individuals did request services and place inquiries at a higher frequency than did Ward Six. Ward Six residents placed no services such as translators, voting materials, transportation to and from caucuses for elder members of the community, etc.

This deficiency of cultural competency can be seen in the planning and implementation of the precinct caucuses as well. As part of the executive committee of the Minneapolis DFL, Cramer is part of the group overseeing the precinct caucuses and endorsement process as a whole. Specifically, she is

in charge of the organization and process of the endorsement; “I’m much more on the process side than on the political strategy side...” Therefore it was Cramer who was in charge of the planning the precinct caucuses. Before the actual caucus, Cramer planned training sessions for the precinct caucus chairs and the local residents who were going to run the various precinct caucuses across the ward in January of 2012 for Ward Six. There were multiple items discussed during the precinct caucus training, most importantly touching upon the script that the conveners would be using during the proceedings of the caucus, ie. how many people would be attending the caucus, and the system for registration and attendance that would be used. Currently, the Minneapolis DFL policy is that it expects that the precinct conveners/chairs to ask for materials and assistance in planning their precinct caucus if they feel resources are lacking. Without their official request or the request from the candidates themselves, the Minneapolis DFL will rarely, if ever, decide to change the format of the caucus as it has existed in the past. (In this case, entirely in English without translators.) However, not all of the precinct chairs/conveners attended the precinct chair/convener training session. Only eighty five percent of the precinct chairs/conveners attended the training before the precinct caucus. Of the eighty five percent who attended, all had English as their first language and were predominately white. The one precinct chairs/convener in Ward Six who was a native Somali speaker was not able to attend. In addition, it seems as if none of the attendees thought to bring up these issues of language and as such, all of the materials stayed only in English and no translators were requested.

During the training, Cramer also discussed the system that would be used for registration of precinct caucus attendees. The system that ended up being decided upon was a sort of “DIY” type system. Precinct chairs/convener’s were allowed to decide between pre-printed registration sheets, blank registration sheets, or index cards. The chaotic nature and lack of organization of the system quickly disintegrated once people started to arrive at the precinct caucuses. In addition, the lack of instruction and personnel contributed to the struggle that was about to occur during the entry of all of

the data that the precinct chairs/conveners collected.

It was during the data entry process that the lack of instruction and quality control of the information was apparent. Cramer remembers seeing index cards that had information such as “Mohamud” with the address 167 listed without a street name or building. The reason for this seemingly being the lack of clear instructions about how to accomplish the registration process. This could have come from the lack of translators to explain properly, the registration forms that were only listed in English instead of Somali, or the three different type (cards, highlighted form, or blank form) of registration materials. Whatever the reason, by the end of the precinct caucus there seemed to be little quality information that could be entered. There were also reports of both Somali speaking and English speaking members of the caucus ending up in the wrong precinct voting location. This is because there were no translators provided at any of the precinct caucuses in Ward Six. In addition, the only script provided to the conveners was in English with no Somali, Oromo, Spanish or Hmong scripts being provided. This precinct caucus complications were fundamentally caused by a flawed and outdated DFL policy that Cramer or other members of the executive committee failed to stop or reexamine.

Although the DFL did create and perpetuate this resource gap with its outdated policies of outreach and precinct caucus planning, why did Warsame himself not actively advocate for the resources that his community needed to come from the DFL? Through numerous interviews with both the Warsame team, Lilligren team, and executive staff of the Minneapolis and state DFL party, it was explained that the Minneapolis DFL and the established “DFLers” or important party members had connections with Lilligren and were working with him and his campaign staffers about logistics surrounding where to hold each of the precinct caucuses.

Warsame knew this and as such felt that “Insert quotation but basically not needed” to becoming involved in the planning of the precinct caucus. Warsame instead did not use the DFL resources but

chose to organize all of the resources that he knew he would need in order to succeed at the precinct caucus. This includes using Brian Rice to create workshops for Somali Americans to learn how to conduct a walking sub caucus, providing bussing to and from the precinct caucuses, providing snacks, and recruiting enough bi-lingual participants so that there could be a translator for almost every non-English speaking Somali voter.

Although there were logistical problems that occurred because Warsame chose to keep his GOTV strategy and methods of organizing close to the vest instead of asking the DFL for assistance, in the end Warsame won the majority of the precinct caucuses and achieved the endorsement. This “messy” process that occurred at the precinct caucus was worth it. Because Warsame knew of the close connections between the Minneapolis DFL and the Lilligren campaign, it seems likely that if he had asked for specific resources the DFL they would have pressed him and his strategy, and perhaps his lead would have been ruined. Warsame, the candidate who was the new and unestablished candidate, was in a position where DFL support could have made his campaign process much much easier. However, the threat of losing became so immediate and such a threat that he chose to pick the more work intensive route in order to promote his campaign.

It seems unfair that the DFL, which is supposed to be the neutral organization that all potential candidates can come to in order to be endorsed, should not be working so closely with one candidate over another prior to the endorsement caucuses. In addition, I believe that their entirely white Anglo staff, with no new immigrants, all native English speakers, did not help the situation. Despite the DFL's “big tent” and “pro-diversity” attitude, the make up of the staff and preference of Lilligren and his team, however unintentional it may have been, created an even bigger challenge for Warsame’s campaign.

It was after the precinct caucus was over that the Warsame campaign began to get involved in the process. Many members of the Warsame campaign spent hours trying to decipher the data and enter the

names of all of the precinct caucus attendees. There were also volunteers from the DFL that were there trying to enter the data as well as a few Lilligren volunteers. However, at this time, the majority of the Lilligren supporters were in conversations with Lilligren and his campaigns staff in order to create their next step of action.

The Lilligren campaign felt the the precinct caucus had been unfair and votes were potentially skewed because of the chaotic process. In this case, the Lilligren team contested that many of their caucus attendees were sent away, or sent to the wrong room purposefully in order to have Warsame have more supporters at the caucus. They were worried that Somali's who lived outside of the Ward had been bussed from other areas in order to win the endorsement, that the votes were not counted properly, that Somali's had left their precinct to move to others where there were less Warsame supporters, and that the Warsame supporters were shouting homophobic slurs in order to convince potentially undecideds from the Somali community to vote for Warsame. Because of these instances the Lilligren contended that some of the Lilligren supporters left the caucus, leaving Lilligren with even lower numbers than he originally had. Likewise, members of the Warsame team felt that their caucus goers had been lead into the wrong precinct caucus locations (when there were two caucuses next door to each other in the same building) and felt attacked by the comments of the Lilligren campaign, indicating that these were microaggressions against people that did not look, act, speak, or vote like the majority of Lilligren's supporters.

Ultimately, the mission of the Minnesota DFL was not upheld through the actions of the Minneapolis DFL. It was a lack of multicultural literacy among the Minneapolis DFL staff that ultimately reinforced outdated policies such as an unsuccessful community outreach plan, imprudent planning of the precinct caucuses in Ward Six, and preference for an incumbent candidate.

After the chaotic precinct caucus, the Lilligren campaign decided to invoke a challenge against

the results of the precinct caucus. A challenge is a formal complaint to the executive board of the Minnesota DFL made in order to contest a result of a caucus or the way that the result was achieved. The Lilligren campaign understood that it would not have won the caucus even if everything had gone smoothly and according to plan. Instead, their intention was to try and revoke Warsame's endorsement. After the challenge was submitted there was a meeting of the Minnesota DFL Executive Board to decide on the result of the challenge. As part of this, the Minneapolis DFL conducted a mini investigation to determine if the alleged statements and actions did occur and if so, how and why. What they found was very unclear. Stories did not match, very few people were willing to speak openly about the caucus, and both candidates stuck by their own versions of the story. In the end, the DFL decided to deny the challenge. Although in the end, the result played out favorably for Warsame, that should not be the ultimate take-away from the precinct caucus and challenge process. Instead, it should be made clear that until the Minnesota DFL stepped in to deny the challenge, the Minneapolis DFL itself was creating a structure that was harmful to both of the candidates and facilitated an environment where threatening tones and microaggressions were allowed to reign.

## **Inventive Grassroots Organizing Methods**

In order to analyze how Warsame made it to City Council, I relied on *Politics the Wellstone Way*, a guide on how to elect progressive candidates and win on issues. The book was written by Wellstone Action, a nonprofit organization headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota that focused on training progressive leaders in electoral politics, public policy, and grassroots organizing. It is currently the largest training center for progressives in the country. It self-describes as being written for “Those who want to work on an electoral campaign as a staff member or volunteer, those who want to work on an issue-based campaign or organizing drive, and those who want to run for office themselves.” The manual has received endorsements from a number of successful politicians and community members including former Vice President Walter Mondale, Senator Al Franken, Senator Russ Feingold, and Leo Gerard, the President of the United Steelworkers of America. In addition, during my conversations with both the Minneapolis and Minnesota branches of Democratic Farmer Labor Party, it was reiterated that *Politics the Wellstone Way* is one of, if not the, foremost how-to’s of grassroots and electoral organizing in Minnesota and the country. As a result, I relied heavily upon the book to examine what I viewed as the “best practices” and “how to’s” of organizing.

### *Focus on “Alternative” Sources of Media*

In regards to “Bilingual, Speciality, and Community Press,” *Politics the Wellstone Way* explains, “These media outlets are eager to interact with political candidates and issue campaigns, especially if the candidate or campaign is relevant to them.” This statement, while clearly attempting to address alternate news and media sources besides those that are seen as most “legitimate” by mainstream white society in Minneapolis, fails to do so in a way that reinforces the dominate narrative surrounding bilingual, speciality, and community press sources.

The most important assumption that *Politics the Wellstone Way* makes is that the organizers, activists, and most importantly, candidates reading the book do not come from one of these “speciality,” or marginalized, communities. This assumption is made clear first by using the term mainstream, as a coded racial narrative for the word white. Instead of allowing mainstream news sources to perhaps be a Somali radio station or a Latino newspaper for a particular individual, those news sources are relegated to a sub-section of the entire communications section of the book focusing on earning and paying for white controlled media attention. However, despite this clear and implicit message about the nature of communications strategy presented in *Politics the Wellstone Way*, Warsame actively chose to identify these “Bilingual, Speciality, and Community Press” sources as his “mainstream” news outlets. in order to spread his message regarding the redistricting of Minneapolis and DFL endorsement in order to create a Get Out The Vote (GOTV) style campaign.

One of the main reasons that Warsame chose to focus away from traditional mainstream news outlets such as Minnesota Public Radio, the Star Tribune, and Kare 11 (just to name a few) was because of the historical precedent surrounding the treatment of Somali Americans that these news stations have set. For example, Maya Rao, a reporter for the Star Tribune was focused on communicating Warsame’s journey to the public. However, in her reporting “People thought it was a substandard of journalism. A lot of hearsay...,” according to Jamaal Adbuali, a senior staffer for Representative Keith Ellison.

In addition to this misrepresentation of Somali Americans by “mainstream” news outlets, Warsame also had a historical knowledge of specific traditional Somali methods of communication that aided in his communications plan development. As recorded by the Minnesota Humanities Center, Somali’s are an oral people. Like other migratory communities, such as many Native American tribes in the United States, the Somali people originally passed down stories and poetry orally from generation to generation.

“The Somali oral tradition like any other oral tradition extols the virtues of memory.

And memory presupposes two things: the existence of a pool of memorizers and secondly, a constant repetition of the “word” for its survival. In oral cultures, children are taught about their tradition by word of mouth. Each generation in the process selectively preserves its wisdom and that of preceding generations for posterity. Oral literatures, therefore, apart from their aesthetic quality and the experiential wisdom inherent in them, ensured the survival of tradition in the minds of the young.”

This oral communication relied on by the Somali community entirely shaped the way that Warsame connected with his constituencies, organized, and pursued his GOTV recruitment. It is this history of oral tradition that fed into the two main channels of communication that Warsame used. The first main communication method that was used was word of mouth inside the Somali community. It was because of Warsame’s community engagement and prior organizing with the African Development Center (ADC), Cedar Riverside apartment buildings, and Mohamud Noor campaign that he was able to successfully spread news via word of mouth about the redistricting and potential DFL endorsement.

Warsame was able to use his experience with the ADC to create a word of mouth communication method about both the redistricting and DFL endorsement. Warsame has been part of the Cedar Riverside community of Minneapolis for over fifteen years. Soon after Warsame’s arrival in Minneapolis, he began working with the original founder and CEO of the ADC. The ADC is a non-profit located on South Fifth Street, in the heart of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, home to the majority of Somali immigrants living in Minneapolis. The ADC “is dedicated to the economic empowerment and success of African immigrants. Minnesota is home to over one-hundred thousand African immigrants, many of whom face language, cultural, and religious barriers. ADC actively works to reduce these barriers and create a path for African immigrants to achieve financial success.”As one of the founding members of this organization, Warsame created a solid connection to the members of the Somali community he served which span across gender, age, and clan lines long before his run for

City Council.

Warsame became involved with his community on a personal level as well. Like many other Somali immigrants, Warsame lives in the Cedar Riverside apartment complex. This collection of buildings houses hundreds of Somali and other East African immigrants and is the literal, geographic center of the Somali community in Minneapolis. Warsame became involved in his building by running and being elected as the head of the tenant association for the Cedar Riverside complex. This position allowed him to build a record of action and engagement among members of the Somali community. It was also in the Cedar Riverside buildings that door knocking, a type of word of mouth communication, was used effectively to organize constituents to attend the DFL endorsement caucuses. Unlike door knocking in a typical suburban neighborhood, which can take a lot of time and walking to get from one family household to another, in the Cedar Riverside towers it is actually faster to use door knocking than to use phone banking, flying, or another method of communication. This proved especially helpful for Warsame because door knocking is proven to be the method of organizing out of the three listed above that is the most effective (i.e. convinces and organizes the most undecided voters).

Finally, Warsame had been involved in Minneapolis politics even before the 2011 redistricting occurred. In 2010, Warsame worked on Mohamud Noor's campaign as he ran for State Representative in 2010 against Kari Dziedzic. Warsame cites this experience as one of his most formative. Although Noor did not win the seat, it was one of the first times the Somali community organized behind a candidate of their own. As an organizer on the campaign, Warsame was able to meet dozens of Somali constituents and grow his network of personal connections.

From his leadership at the ADC and Cedar Riverside tenant association to his work on Noor's campaign, Warsame was able to form connections within the Somali community of Cedar Riverside. As a result, when Warsame wanted to first push his redistricting agenda and then secure the DFL endorsement, he was able to call upon all of his contacts and ask them to come out and support him.

The second method used by Warsame was Somali radio stations that reached out to a broader Somali audience throughout Ward Six in Minneapolis. Radio, as opposed to newspaper or television, is a medium of communication which resonates deeply with many members of the Somali community because of their historical (and current) ties to oral communication. Anecdotally, Somali radio stations in Minneapolis are very popular among the community. This fact is due in part to male Somali taxi drivers, one large subset of listeners. Taxi driving is a popular profession in the Somali community. Due to the flexibility of hours that allows for prayer times, autonomy of the taxi driver as compared to many other jobs, and accommodation of taxi companies to employ new Americans (Source). Even beyond this subset of radio listeners, the oral tradition of the Somali community has translated into a popular and influential culture of radio. Warsame explains that his invitation to speak on Somali radio stations had an effect on turnouts at the Redistricting Commission meetings and even more so at the DFL endorsement caucuses.

Unlike the advice given in *Politics the Wellstone Way*, Warsame choose to focus his communications away from the traditional “mainstream media sources” and instead rely solely on those sources deemed “Bilingual, Speciality, and Community Press.” It was Warsame’s knowledge of his community's cultural practices, especially its oral history and subsequent break from the traditional communications methods that allowed him to be spread his message successfully.

#### *Re-definition of Get Out The Vote*

*Politics the Wellstone Way* explains the traditional definition of Get Out The Vote as something that “should be seen as a culmination of the process of base buildings and expanding” and a true test of a campaign come “election day.” Here it is made clear that GOTV is an effort reserved until the general election because of the immense amount of time and energy that it takes to mobilize entire communities. However, Warsame did not abide by this traditional definition of GOTV. Instead, he used

both inventive communications strategies to and a new style of GOTV in order to influence both the redistricting commission meetings and the DFL endorsement caucuses.

From the very first meeting of the redistricting commission, Warsame was present with members of the Somali community who supported his plan for redistricting the City of Minneapolis. Warsame was encouraging the committee to change the boundaries of Ward Six in Minneapolis in order to create a Somali dominated ward. Warsame, and his constituents, believed that the creation of such a ward would provide them with the opportunity to run for political representation. As discussed before, Warsame used word of mouth and Somali radio communication to get his most dedicated voters out to the redistricting committee meetings.

Jill Garcia, a member of the redistricting commission, says about the final map of the redistricting process, “The groups that had the most lobbying effort got the most out of the process.” It was the Somali community that had the largest presence at the redistricting committee meetings over any other ethnic community such as the Latino, traditional African American, Hmong, or Native American communities. Although it is impossible to state with one hundred percent certainty, it seems likely that without Warsame’s GOTV efforts and his constituency’s presence at each and every redistricting committee meeting, the committee’s decision may have been drastically different.

One example of the difference in outcomes that could have occurred was the identification of the Somali American community with the traditional Black community in Minneapolis. It was necessary for some members of the Redistricting Commission as well as Warsame and Somali members of the community to define and explain terms (such as the difference between black, African American, East African, and Somali American) to other members of the commission who were using the terms incorrectly. One member of the commission defined Somali American immigrants as part of the African American community. However, other members of the Redistricting Commission were hesitant to group people of the African American community who had lived in Minneapolis for over four

generations with new immigrants who had a different language, different religion, and different customs. It was this change in definition for some members of the Redistricting Commission that began to move the conversation towards a more informed and developed tone. “There were at least three of us who were very much coming back and kept hammering at the process and the concept until something took. and there were a few members, commission members, who finally got it,” Jill Garcia states of the transformation of the Redistricting Commission over the three months they were together. Despite GOTV’s traditional use as a general election strategy, Warsame decided to mobilize his community for the purpose of influencing the redistricting of the City of Minneapolis. The result was that the Somali community, over any other community received all of the requests that it had put forth to the redistricting commission.

Warsame continued this GOTV style of organization into the DFL endorsement process. He did this first and foremost, in order to mobilize all of his constituents who attended the DFL precinct caucus and ward conventions, Warsame ordered busses to move his base from their home sites to the precinct caucus and back. In an interview, Warsame says that this is where he spent most of the money that he raised before the endorsement. The busses allowed Warsame to have an easy method of transportation for some of his most important voters, the elders of the Somali community, many of whom have limited mobility.

Secondly, Warsame also provided training for many of his constituents before the caucus in order to increase his GOTV’s effectiveness at the actual precinct caucuses locations across the ward. Many of Warsame’s supporters in the Somali community are new Americans and as a result, the 2013 DFL precinct caucus was going to be the first caucus process in which any of them had participated in. Because of the inherently complicated nature of the precinct caucus and endorsement system, Warsame foresaw that issues might arise because of language and cultural barriers. So to combat this, Warsame began to organize his constituents over a year in advance of the precinct caucus and provide them with

training sessions to answer their questions about how the precinct caucus would work, how to have their votes counted, etc. This type of organizing around the mechanics of the precinct caucus is almost unheard of in any other community in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Clearly its effectiveness was clear when the members of the Somali community showed up and voted in high numbers. During the precinct caucus, Warsame was elected by an overwhelming majority of supporters who stayed for the entire process. During the ward convention, the follow up to the precinct caucus where Warsame was officially endorsed by the DFL, not one ballot was spoiled. Although this may seem like a small detail, the enormity of this feat should not be overlooked. “Almost every ward convention that has ever occurred has had a spoiled ballot,” says Jacob Fry who was the chair of the convention. It is clear that the voters at the convention had been trained and practiced in order to get their vote to count and elect Warsame.

Despite the traditional use of the term “GOTV” as presented in *Politics the Wellstone Way*, Warsame implemented the strategy in new and exciting ways. As a result of his GOTV style of organization at an earlier timeline than traditionally used, i.e. during the redistricting commission meetings and the DFL endorsement, he was able to influence the outcome of both of these processes in order to favor the Somali community and his own campaign.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this research, I sought to answer two questions regarding Abdi Warsame's election to City Council in the city of Minneapolis. First, were there any structural barriers to this marginalized community's involvement in Minneapolis city politics? And if so, how was the Somali community, led by Warsame, able to succeed in winning a seat to the Minneapolis City Council? I sought to answer both of these questions based on my numerous interviews with key players in the election together with the theoretical framework provided by notable scholarly literature.

I discovered that the traditional system of power still operates in Minneapolis city politics in the form of both special interests and a lack of cultural competency from the leading political party of the city itself. This realization is one that was startling to me, student and citizen who had been raised to trust in the American political process. Although I still believe in the ideals of equal opportunity and access to political power and representation, the picture has become more complex in my mind, and perhaps the minds of those reading this paper.

However, I also discovered that even if historically marginalized communities cannot change the way the system operates, they do have the power to manipulate that system in order to gain political enfranchisement. Warsame was able to do this through his use of “alternative” media outlets and an inventive use of Get Out the Vote strategies.

As such, Warsame's story, although unique, illuminates some of the invisible structures of power present in many cities politics that are designed to operate, exclude, and manipulate newcomers and marginalized communities while, at the same time, provide strategies and methods for other disenfranchised groups seeking political power to overcome these barriers in their own communities.

There seems to be unlimited opportunity for further study on this topic from following Warsame's path in City Hall to investigating internal factions with the Somali community which appear to have

developed since the November 2013 election. Whatever the direction this project takes, I do hope that other communities looking for empowerment will use Warsame's story in their journey and that my analysis will perhaps provide a mirror for the the special interests and Democratic Farmer Labor Party participants and politics to be critiqued and analyzed. Integration of all residents of the United States into our political system is something worth striving towards. For “If man is to survive, he will have learned to take a delight in the essential differences between men and between cultures. He will learn that differences in ideas and attitudes are a delight, part of life's exciting variety, not something to fear.”

## Bibliography

- Atkinson, Rowland, and John Flint. "Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies." *Social Research Update* 33 (2001): 1-8.
- Bernard, H. Russell. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002.
- "City of Minneapolis - Ward 6." Map. N.p.: n.p., 2012. N. pag. Print.
- City of Minneapolis Redistricting Charter Commission. "City of Minneapolis - Ward 6." Map. N.p.: n.p., 2013. N. pag. Print.
- Damberg, Jay. *Ward Six Convention*. 27 Apr. 2013. Minutes. Minneapolis.
- Dean, Dwane H. "Brand Endorsement, Popularity, and Event Sponsorship as Advertising Cues Affecting Consumer Pre-Purchase Attitudes." *Journal of Advertising* 28.3 (2013): 1-12.
- Delton, Jennifer A. *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002. Print.
- Gilbert, Curtis. "Lilligren Wants DFL to Rescind Opponent's Endorsement." *Minnesota Public Radio* [Minneapolis] 7 May 2013.
- Haynes, John Earl. *Dubious Alliance: The Making of Minnesota's DFL Party*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984. Print.
- Lebedoff, David. *Ward Number Six*. New York: Scribner, 1972. Print.
- Leighley, Jan E. *Strength in Numbers?: The Political Mobilization of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001.
- Lilligren, Robert. *Challenge*. Apr. 2013. Minneapolis.
- Lofy, Bill. *Politics the Wellstone Way: How to Elect Progressive Candidates and Win on Issues*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005. Print.

- Marshall, Thomas R. "Turnout and Representation: Caucuses Versus Primaries." *Midwest Political Science Association* 22.1 (1978): 169-82.
- Minneapolis DFL. *Minnesota DFL Constituency Caucuses*. N.p.: n.p., 2013. Print.
- The Minnesota DFL State Constitution, Rules, and Bylaws Committee. *Findings of Fact and Conclusions*. 9 June 2013. Minneapolis.
- Minneapolis Foundation. *Immigration in Minnesota: Discovering Common Ground*. Minneapolis: Minneapolis Foundation, 2004
- Rao, Maya. "New Faces, Similar Names in Minneapolis' Sixth Ward Council Race." *Star Tribune* [Minneapolis] 14 Aug. 2013: n. pg. Print.
- Rao, Maya. "Political Hardball Alleged in Minneapolis Council Race." *Star Tribune* [Minneapolis] 26 Apr. 2013: n. pag. *Political Hardball Alleged in Minneapolis Council Race*. Web. 16 Aug. 2013.
- "Robert Lilligren's Campaign Accuses Somali Challenger of Using Homophobic Tactics." Web blog post. *City Pages*. N.p., 3 June 2013. Web.
- Schneider, Jeff. *2010 Census Redistricting Summary*. Rep. N.p.: n.p., 2011. Print.
- "State-by-state Redistricting Procedures." N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2014.
- Stevens, Brett. "The Other 'F' Word." *Lavender Magazine* 11 July 2013: n. pag. Web. <<http://www.lavendermagazine.com/our-affairs/the-other-f-word/>>.
- Spannaus, Roy T. *A Trust Misplaced*. St. Paul: Ballista, 1990. Print.
- Yusuf, Ahmed Ismail. *Somalis in Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2012. Print.

## **Appendix A – Interview Guide**

Please tell me about your background in Minneapolis politics and how you came to be involved in this race?

Were you involved in the redistricting that occurred in 2011 and if so, how?

How were other minority communities involved in the re-districting process (Hmong, Latino, Native American, etc.)

Tell me about what happened before the precinct caucuses?

Can you explain the timeline of events the night of the precinct caucuses?

How did language play into the precinct caucus?

Explain to me the differences in organizing strategy between Mr. Warsame and Councilman Lilligren?

What does this mean for the Somali-American community going forward?

Looking back on the events, should you/the Minneapolis DFL have anticipated that this was going to happen?

## Appendix B – Sample Consent Form

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kara Lillehaug from the American Studies department at Tufts University. The purpose of the study is to explore the politics behind the Minneapolis City Council race of the sixth ward. The results of this study will be included in Kara Lillehaug's senior honors thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your connection to either party in the election or do to the topic as a whole. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- This interview is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time or for any reason.
- You will not be compensated for this interview.
- By conducting this interview you are giving me permission to use your name, title, and / or quote you in any publications that may result from this research.
- I would like to record this interview so that I can use it for reference while proceeding with this study. I will not record this interview without your permission. If you do grant permission for this conversation to be recorded, you have the right to revoke recording permission and/or end the interview at any time.

This project will be completed by May 2014. All interview recordings will be stored in a secure work space until 1 year after that date. The tapes will then be destroyed.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

*(Please check all that apply)*

I give permission for this interview to be recorded.

I give permission for the following information to be included in publications resulting from this study:

my name    my title    direct quotes from this interview

Name of Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact Kara Lillehaug with any questions or concerns.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Health Sciences Campus Institutional Review Board, 800 Washington Street, Box 817, Boston, Massachusetts, 02111. Phone number 617-636-7512.

## **Appendix C – Interviewees**

- Adbuali, Jamal. Personal interview. 15 Aug. 2013.
- Albee, Robert. Personal interview. 18 July 2013.
- Anderson, Ellen. Personal interview. 5 Aug. 2013.
- Blodgett, Jeff. Personal interview. 7 Aug. 2013.
- Brown, Brenda B. Personal interview. 24 July 2013.
- Cassady, Jason. Personal interview. 23 June 2013.
- Clegg, Barry. Personal interview. 16 July 2013.
- Cramer, Roann. Personal interview. 5 Aug. 2013.
- Damberg, Jay. Personal interview. 9 July 2013.
- Farah, Ahmednor. Personal interview. 18 July 2013.
- Garcia, Jill. Personal interview. 8 Aug. 2013.
- Gilbert, Curtis. Personal interview. 11 July 2013.
- Graham, James. Personal interview. 16 July 2013.
- Hoffner, Fabian. Personal interview. 10 July 2013.
- Jama, Mohamed. Personal interview. 2 Aug. 2013.
- Jumale, Mustafa. Personal interview. 1 Aug. 2013.
- Killian, Kendall. Personal interview. 5 Aug. 2013.
- Langston, Mona. Personal interview. 31 July 2013.
- Lebedoff, David. Personal interview. 13 Aug. 2013.
- Lilligren, Robert. Personal interview. 16 July 2013.
- Mains, Sheldon. Personal interview. 25 July 2013.
- Margolis, Eric. Personal interview. 13 Aug. 2013.

Martin, Ken. Personal interview. 25 July 2013.

McConnell, Dan. Personal interview. 12 July 2013.

Noor, Mohamud. Personal interview. 24 July 2013.

O'Brien, Kelly. Personal interview. 22 July 2013.

Omar, Ilhan. Personal interview. 11 July 2013.

Powers, Jeremy. Personal interview. 26 June 2013.

Rao, Maya. Personal interview. 29 July 2013.

Reinhardt, Hazel. Personal interview. 8 Aug. 2013.

Rice, Brian. Personal interview. 31 July 2013.

Rupar, Aaron. Telephone interview. 1 July 2013.

Rybak, R.T. Personal interview. 3 Aug. 2013.

Schuler, Kathleen. Personal interview. 31 July 2013.

Shafi, Hashi. Personal interview. 7 Aug. 2013.

Vitali, Gia. Personal interview. 1 Aug. 2013.

Warsame, Abdi. Personal interview. 29 July 2013.

Woehrle, Susan. Personal interview. 19 July 2013.

Woodard, Kenneth. Personal interview. 31 July 2013.

Woodruff, Stephanie. Personal interview. 2 Aug. 2013.

Young, Elizabeth. Personal interview. 23 July 2013.

Yusuf, Ahmed. Personal interview. 23 July 2013.

Appendix D – Final Map of the Ward Six Redistricting (2011)

