West Deptford, New Jersey; perhaps considered the “new kid on the block” in Gloucester County, has seen its fair share of prosperity throughout its rich history. Formed by an act of New Jersey Legislature on March 1, 1871, West Deptford immediately began to add wealth to an already widely successful County. Perhaps merely tagged as a “vacation community” due to its proximity to both the Delaware River and the Atlantic Ocean on the onset of existence, West Deptford has truly grown into a mainstream society. While looking at its success as an incredible achievement, some residents have begun to feel an economic squeeze. What was once an affordable living area to some is now a distant dream—much like the vacation community of the past. As taxes and population numbers continue to rise rapidly, a cloud of uncertainty begins to emerge from the heavens, casting doubt on the future of the community.

Deptford—which later branched off into West Deptford—took its name from a small town in Kentshire, England. It was one of the original townships of Gloucester County. In 1623, it was settled in by the Dutch under Cornelius Jacobse Mey and was later claimed by the Swedes and the Finns before coming under British control.\(^1\) After coming under British control, Deptford became a melting pot of various different cultures and ethnicities. Also, thanks in part to the British occupation, Deptford was—and still is to this day—comprised of many settlements, including Almonesson, Jericho, New Sharon,

\(^1\)“Deptford Township, About Deptford” Deptford Township, NJ “http://www.deptford-nj.org/content/81/default.aspx”
Oak Valley, Westville Grove, Cooper Village, Blackwood Terrace, Hammond
Heights, Lake Tract, Woodbury Terrace, Woodbury Gardens, Country Club
Estates and Good Intent.\(^2\) In 1793, Jean Pierre Blanchard left Philadelphia
before an audience of President George Washington and other dignitaries in
America's first aerial flight via hot air balloon. Jean traveled 15 miles propelled
by air before landing in a clearing in Deptford. On March 1, 1871, West Deptford
was formed using portions National Park, Westville, and Deptford, New Jersey.

As of the census of 2000, the population of West Deptford was tallied at 19,368.\(^3\)

As the figure to the right shows, the population growth trend in
West Deptford has risen at an incredible rate over the past 70
years, with a projected 8% jump when the 2005 numbers are
finally released. Many scholars draw a correlation between
population growth and economic growth. The health of a
population almost seems to point to rapid economic expansion.
With a bigger population, the need for more houses,
transportation, and facilities rises. This, in turn, would create
several job opportunities to support such a rapid growth.

Although this seems like an ideal situation, we may just be taking these numbers at face
value. According to the Commission on Population Growth:

“This is important not simply because of the numbers but because it bears vitally
upon a fundamental question about the Nation's future: Do we wish to continue to
invest even more of our resources and those of much of the rest of the world in

\(^2\) “Deptford Township, About Deptford” Deptford Township, NJ “http://www.deptford-nj.org/content/81/default.aspx”

\(^3\) United States Census 2000
meeting demands for more services, more classrooms, more hospitals, and more housing as population continues to grow? Or should we concentrate our energies and resources on improving the quality of existing services and extending them to large numbers of our people for whom the "quality of life" still means just getting a square meal?"  

While many residents seem to enjoy the growth of West Deptford through the addition of good and services, many younger residents are beginning to feel the pressure. In March of this year, West Deptford unveiled its $41 million dollar budget, nearly double the numbers of 2005 ($25 million). The reason: education. As the growth of West Deptford continues, the types of households continue to become one sided. As of 2000, the number of households with children under the year of 18 occupied %66.4 of the total number of households in the Township. In a response to the continual growth in the numbers of children, it will cost West Deptford $2.1 million dollars more than last year to educate students. When asked about the rising student population problem, Superintendent Edward J. Wasilewski commented:

“Enrollment has not been going up a lot, but it has been going up steady over the past three years… we proposed a staffing budget increase for five teaching positions.” Further, “We have a very large kindergarten class this year, so to keep

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4 Population Growth and America's Future: A Family Planning Perspectives Special Feature
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our class sizes low we need to add one teacher…the world language department is also maxed out”

Compared to the rest of the Nation, West Deptford has a slight edge on the quality and quantity of high school education. Currently, the Township produces 85.65% of those eligible to graduate, while the national average falls short at 79.62 percent. However, if the population trend continues at the current rate, we may see a decline in the numbers of local graduates. As the Commission on Population Growth clearly points out, the public services will begin to suffer.

In the field of democratic analysis, the “health” of an area is dependant on the residents who preside over it. On the outside looking in, the perception of West Deptford would lead to healthy conclusions. A Sunday morning drive through the township will reveal plush green lawns, thousands of homes under construction and a bran new multi-million dollar community center. You will see multi-million dollar homes, picket fences, expensive cars, and happy faces. All of these things may put you in a good mood; however they are not contributing to West Deptford’s health a whole, or even at all. The truth is, perception certainly does not equal reality in this case at all. In a harsh reality, what you are being distracted from are terrible road conditions, the lack of legitimate businesses, and the continual use of any free space available to build new homes.

Driving past the a bran new multi-million dollar community center dubbed with the name “David P. Shield River Winds Community Center” (for its creator and its close proximity to the Delaware River) on a horribly paved road, I can not think of a better

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5 Vit, Jonathon “West Deptford District Unveils $41M Budget” Gloucester County Times. Wednesday March 14, 2007

6 United States Census 2000
example eluding to a performance democracy. Performance being the key term here, or—the lack thereof. In his examination of the classic performance democracy, Joseph Schumpeter states that voters are often on concerned with their own good, rather than the collective good:

“If the government performs well, that is, serves their immediate wellbeing, then they retain it; it not, then they vote to replace it.”

At election time, Schumpeter sees voters choosing between competing elites who offer their own products to voters who treat alternate policies as consumer products. David P. Shields, whom the Community Center was named after, just happened to be the mayor of West Deptford at the time of its creation. While residents were distracted by the many amenities that this facility promised, they were distracted by the fact that it would be costing them a fortune in return. This confirms that Schumpeter’s notion that “voters are subject to manipulation and frequently get something that they do not really want” is completely true.

Another feature that points us to a performance democracy within the Township is the entire government make-up and election process. The Township Committee is comprised of five members, the Mayor and four committee persons, whom each serve a term of three years. At a reorganization meeting in January, the Committee selects one of its members to serve as Mayor and another to serve as Deputy Mayor. The Township Committee forms the legislative branch of the Township government, which develops and adopts ordinances that eventually become the laws of the township. The only

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. 142
problem is, is that the “elites” or, Township Committee never actually changes. They mainly sit on the committee for 3 years, and vote themselves on every 3rd January at the reorganization meetings. This is obviously flawed and according to Schumpeter, “selection of the representatives is made secondary to the primary purpose of the democratic arrangement which is to vest the power of deciding political issues in the electorate”\textsuperscript{10}. If Schumpeter’s notion were to hold true—and I do think West Deptford is a prime example—then we could see the continual reelection of the same Committee members, with the same ideas. However, assuming that the election patterns of the Committee are the main reasons leading to West Deptford’s demise would certainly be foolish. For Schumpeter, the lack of competition for political leadership may play a more corrosive role than the decisions that come from it.\textsuperscript{11}

Taking a step back to reveal another side to this township committee, it becomes quite clear that this is more than just a performance democracy, there are definite ideas being brought through that resemble that of a protective democracy as well. We can see this through the shear numbers of “elites” whom are actually formulating law. Earlier on, I mentioned that the current population of the Township is 19,368. Yet, there are only 5 committee members that actually make up the local government. The entire basis for a protective democracy based on the fear of the potential abuse of powers by a large government.\textsuperscript{12} While the population of West Deptford is hardly comparable to the nation, I would say that a 5 person committee is an effort to minimize the voices in government. For contemporary protective democrats like Friedrich Hayek, this would be

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. 150
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 91
the best form for West Deptford’s Committee. Hayek would say that an overly active
government in West Deptford threatens the freedom of its citizens, while a popular rule
would serve the cause of liberty best when commits itself to restraining the amount of
voices heard.\textsuperscript{13} While trying to narrow the voice of government, Hayek also speaks
strongly for restraining the powers of government as well:

“The effective limitation of power is the most important problem of social order.
Government is indispensable for the formation of such an order only to protect all
against coercion and violence from others. But as soon as, to achieve this,
government successfully claims the monopoly of coercion and violence; it
becomes also the chief threat to individual freedom.”\textsuperscript{14}

Milton Friedman, another well noted economist, completely agrees with Hayek’s notion
of a minimal government. For Friedman, it is by preserving the most minimal political
arrangements that the government fulfills its obligations to provide the maximum
freedom to its citizens at the lowest possible cost.\textsuperscript{15} The cost—meaning freedom in this
case—is the most important venture for Friedman:

“A government which maintained law and order, defined property rights, served
as a means whereby we could modify property rights and other rules of the
economic game, adjudicated disputes about the interpretation of the rules,
enforced contracts, promoted competition, provided a monetary framework,
engaged in activities to counter technical monopolies and to overcome
neighborhood effects widely regarded as sufficiently important to justify

\textsuperscript{13} Ronald J. Terchek and Thomas C. Conte “Theories of Democracy” Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield
Publishers, INC.) p.91.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid 105.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid 91.
government intervention, and which supplemented private charity and the private family in protection the irresponsible, whether man or child—such a government would clearly have important functions to perform. The consistent liberal is not anarchist. Yet, it is also true that such a government would have clearly limited functions and would refrain from a host of activities that are now undertaken by the federal and state governments in the United States…”

Examining Friedman’s statement, most—if not all—of it comes into compliance with the makeup of the West Deptford government. The committee has indeed kept a state of law and order—and a good one, at that. As reported in 2005, the FBI measured the amount of violent crimes in West Deptford at a mere 31, while murders and homicides rang in at 0. Even more, the crime rate was only at 1.6 per 1,000 residents. This law and order points to a success by the committee members in creating an excellent place to live, and for Friedman, this would count as a great success for a protective democracy. Further, economists like Hayek and Friedman would suggest that less government interaction in West Deptford would most likely produce even more favorable results.

While examining the census data pertaining to West Deptford, we come across our first critique. As pointed out quite clearly by the figure below, the race layout in West Deptford is particularly one sided.

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17 “West Deptford Community Profile” http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/genInfo.php?locIndex=59904
18 Ibid.
This is particularly related to the proximity to Camden, NJ—which is heavily populated by African Americans.

While this may lead to some sort of explanation for the lack of African American population in West Deptford, it still seems inexcusable. Perhaps even more troubling is the fact that nothing seems out of the ordinary. While most of the nation seems to be in the grips of an interracial struggle, West Deptford lies on the forefront of what exactly is the problem: Lack of interest in the problem. As the living standards continue to increase throughout West Deptford, the race dispersion increasingly becomes one-sided.

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19 United States Census 2000
20 United States Census 2000
As seen in the figure above, West Deptford falls above the national average in every category. With these numbers, the lack of racial dispersion is almost inevitable.

Although the problem is clearly outlined, there is no easy way to fix it. One solution, proposed by Cornel West, author of *Race Matters*:

“One essential step is some form of large-scale public intervention to ensure access to basic social goods—housing, food, health care, education, child care, and jobs. We must vigorate the common good with a mixture of government, business, and labor that does not follow and existing blueprint.”

The application of West’s idea into the idiom of West Deptford is simple: West Deptford has gotten too good for itself. In order to “swing” the race numbers in either direction, we need to make things more economically comfortable for every man. Not just the doctors and lawyers in society, but the “average Joe”—a fleeting thought in the West.

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Deptford of today. In order to create these changes, West would suggest that we are due for a change in leadership—other than the same committee members.

“The major challenge is to meet the need to generate new leadership. The paucity of courageous leaders—so apparent in the response to the events in Los Angeles—requires that we look beyond the same elites and voices that recycle the older frameworks. We need leaders—neither saints nor sparkling television personalities—who can situate themselves within a larger historical narrative of this country and our world, who can grasp the complex dynamics of our peoplehood and imagine a future grounded in the best of our past, yet who are attuned to the frightening obstacles that now perplex us.”

West’s notion of a change in leadership is compelling yet; West Deptford is not ready for such a change.

Cornel West’s words about political leadership inspire our next critique of West Deptford, the very leadership itself. While the points in this paper have pointed to a widely successful Township, they have also pointed to a more problematic view into the minds of local leaders. Along with his ideas of a performance democracy, Joseph Schumpeter also writes on leadership:

“The first condition is that the human material of politics—the people who man the party machines, are elected to serve in parliament, rise to cabinet office—should be of sufficiently high quality. This means more than that individuals of adequate ability and moral character much exist in sufficient numbers.”

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24 Ibid. 153
Looking around West Deptford, I do see multimillion dollar homes and lavish golf courses. I do see picket fences and happy faces, but things are much more problematic. While things appear to be great on the surface, there is tension building underneath. The quality of roads in West Deptford is horrendous, along with the reliability of the trash service. The streets are often littered with trash, sitting months without care. Snow plowing in the winter is inadequate, leading to accidents that are completely preventable. Water, heating, cable, and electricity bills are rising by the year, with no end in sight. All of these downfalls point to one problem: poor leadership.

In retrospect one could possibly put together that the future of West Deptford has some troubling aspects. The inequality in the race distribution leads to a troubled road ahead, as does the scarce makeup of the Township Committee. Looking around the Township today—as stated before—I see million dollar home and yet poor overall maintenance of the community. A question that I often ask is: What good are facilities without an adequate method of getting there? Perhaps even further: What good can come out of a Township Committee that may or may not have such a limited view? Even more troubling is the state of the education system, which fails to keep up with the demand put on the district. It remains true that West Deptford produces some of the best education in the state, but if this trend keeps up, how long will it take before we see the effects of a backslide? This could indeed paint an ugly forecast of what is to come:

- If these trends continue, I predict that West Deptford’s race distribution will become even further one sided. As a direct result, more families that are not white will feel pressured to move elsewhere, perhaps feeling unwelcome.
This will lead to an overall negative outlook for the Township, thus hampering future development.

- On the front of the Township Committee, I see a monopoly of power fairly possible. If we continually see the same members, no new views of the Township will ever be realized. This could lead to one-sided development projects and a negative view of the Township. If public maintenance continues to take the back view, we could see a negative effect on development as well.

- On the Education issue, it is fairly obvious to see that this is going to be a failure. The Township is suffering greatly thanks to the over-production of houses and the dire need for adequate schooling. As the population continues to grow, the effects on the education of West Deptford’s minor population will continue to slide, until it reaches rock bottom—or, the tax payers are called upon.

While painting a grim picture for West Deptford seems like an unnecessary feat, it is necessary for us to realize how quickly such a prosperous town could become a failure. As with any town in the United States, West Deptford has its success stories and failures—yet we must not dwell on our successes if we hope to recognize our failures. My overall view of West Deptford continues to be: A great place to live and succeed, if you are willing to succumb to the inefficiencies of a weakening democracy.
“Deptford Township, About Deptford” Deptford Township, NJ
“http://www.deptford-nj.org/content/81/default.aspx”

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Ronald J. Terchek and Thomas C. Conte “Theories of Democracy” Boulder:

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