SETTLEMENT AND LINGUISTIC PATTERNS OF WEST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

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ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

Located a mere thirty-minute ride away from New York City, West Orange has been an established part of Essex County, New Jersey, since 1862. Currently the 40th most populated city in the state, West Orange boasts a rich cultural and linguistic history with over 30 languages reportedly spoken among its citizens. Although the diversity of West Orange youth might give the impression that the township has a rich history, it was not until recently that the West Orange that can be seen today began to take shape.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

West Orange began as a small, mostly-white populated town. However, various events that took place in the latter half of the 19th century led to the diversification of its population. West Orange was the final destination for many black Southerners that traveled North during the Great Migration and initially settled in neighboring towns. Moreover, while census records show that West Orange as a whole is still about 50% white, the high school's student body is 50% black and 30% Hispanic, according to numbers from the West Orange Board of Education. Thus, the goal of this paper is to analyze the influential shifts in the population that affected its demographic makeup and later focus on the linguistic variation of two major groups of people: Black people (both from the Caribbean and Africa) and "White" people of Hispanic origin, as the census labels them. Furthermore, it will pay attention to the language patterns of those 24 and younger, the reasons for which will be made clear later.

ORIGINS

West Orange sits at the peak of the Watchung Mountains, and its original inhabitants, the Lani Lenape Indians, used the vantage point the Watchung Mountains offered to detect oncoming danger and safeguard their people. More importantly, however, modern-day West Orange's land was sacred to the Lani Lenape, as it tangibly connected them to their Creation story. The story goes, "as Turtle continued to raise his back, more water drained off, and the mud that grew and grew became dry, becoming the land. And the animals had dry land to live upon. [Then], there grew a tree. From that tree grew a shoot. And, from that shoot sprouted [the first] man [and the first woman]... They are the ancestors of us all" (Nanticoke and Lenape Confederation). As North America was known to them as "Turtle Island," and the highest point of West Orange is a tessellation of rocks resembling giant turtles' backs, the Lani Lenape considered this location to be a direct connection to their Creator. To this day, their influence remains, and that location holds the name "Turtle Back Rock Picnic Area." However, like most of the history with Native Americans and white settlers, this land was later forcibly ripped from Native Americans to begin the creation of the Newark territory, which later broke off into many smaller towns, including West Orange (West Orange Homepage).

MODERN-DAY WEST ORANGE

The exploration of modern-day West Orange and how it came to be began with an interview with Antonio, a 72-year-old Italian-American, as he recounts an early childhood memory. Growing up in a tight-knit community, Antonio remembers thinking everyone in town was Italian or of Italian descent

and, as a result, would make jokes that borrowed from Italian culture. While his jokes were usually received with laughter from those around him, one day, a kid could not comprehend the joke, saying he was not Italian but Jewish. In response, Antonio responded, "what's a Jewish?" At the very least, this anecdote demonstrates the racial homogeneity of the time. Furthermore, Angelica, another older, Italian-American woman, also added that although the Italian community she grew up in once thrived, the expansion of Interstate 280 between the borders of West Orange and Orange disrupted their businesses and community, forcing many to move out. These anecdotes are corroborated by the census data available at the time: many countries of origin were either North America or European countries (1960 census). As time progressed, the data began to shift, showing that many people of Italian descent ended up leaving the West Orange area. The effects of the construction of Interstate 280 were so profound that today in Orange, in the region directly bordering West Orange that once flourished with Italian markets, there only remain 10 Italian-American residents native to the area (Meagher). It can be assumed at the time (as the census record does not show native languages spoken) that those from Italy spoke Italian, those from America spoke English, and so forth. Thus, the languages spoken up until the 1960s seem to be primarily English, with a few European languages sprinkled in.

Furthermore, the West Orange township homepage states, "many of the industries that had made West Orange grow left the area by the 1960s, [which] left some urban blight and abandoned warehouses in the Valley, in contrast to wealthy communities on top of the mountains." West Orange Township spreads over 12.13 square miles. Most of the territory is considered Down the Hill (as it is not at the peak of the mountain) and is part of "The Valley" of West Orange, which, as mentioned, underwent a drastic change in population. This quote is noteworthy because segregation in West Orange prevails to this day, with a common question being, "are you from up/down the hill?" which all interviewees have admitted they've asked/been asked at some point. The significance of this question is that there seem to exist two distinct geographical areas within West Orange, which has implications for the residents of the respective areas; a person who resides up the hill is regarded as prim, proper, and "rich," while those from down the hill are considered "ghetto," remarked one interviewee. Another interviewee, an elementary school teacher in West Orange, even goes as far as to say that there is a marked disparity between the resources allocated to schools in the same school district. Due to budget cuts, The elementary school "down the hill," Washington Elementary, recently got its crossing guards taken away, resulting in the injury of one of its students due to the dichotomy of care that the "white schools" up the hill receive versus schools like Washington. While this anecdote, in particular, does not hold linguistic significance, the effects of the demographic makeup of elementary schools both up and down the hill, as well as various literature, such as "Housing Segregation Produces Unequal Schools: Causes and Solutions" by Gary Orfield, provide a possible explanation for the discrepancy of care. Washington Elementary has a 97.5% minority student body, which is contrasted to the 30% minority student body at St. Cloud Elementary, located up the hill (USnews.com). Additionally, St. Cloud Elementary is the only elementary school (out of seven) in West Orange that does not have a majority minority student body, which indicates the presence of racial segregation in the population, which is essential when analyzing linguistic patterns. This paper in no way, shape, or form is meant to support the historical injustice that has surrounded West Orange's history since its inception; it is meant to highlight the effect that bordering on the Orange/East Orange area had on the linguistic community.

Furthermore, in studying the migration patterns in and out of West Orange, it is important to study the Great Migration and its effects on surrounding towns. While the population of West Orange was not directly affected by the Great Migration, the neighboring cities of Orange, East Orange, Newark, and more were. Job opportunities were the main catalyst that drove black Southerners up in droves, and West Orange (and the surrounding area) had many mills/industrial jobs that would look opportune to those searching for work: the West Orange Quarry, the Hat Industry, the Edison factory (which was closing pretty much right as the Great Migration was starting but still could have enticed those to come up in the early stages) and various breweries/mills (*CARCOMF*). Down the hill, as already noted, was struck by urban blight in the 1960s, leaving it primarily deserted and available for interested homeowners in neighboring towns to move into easily- which they did. Ranked among the top 10 school districts in Essex County, the township of West Orange has historically outranked the neighboring school districts,

especially the bordering towns of Orange and East Orange, making it a desirable location for young families with children to settle down. The prospect of better educational opportunities for children, along with more affordable housing, drove many people, especially minorities from surrounding areas, into West Orange (Lynn, personal interviews.) Due to these reasons, there was a 40% increase in the town's population between 1960 and 1970, and with most new inhabitants being minorities who previously resided in surrounding towns, the town's demographics swiftly began to shift (WOBOE).

The different migrations to and from West Orange and the constant cycling of younger people in and out of the town provide a backdrop to the "newer" town that is standing today. The two largest age groups in the township are those 65 and older, and those 24 and younger, yet most West Orange Public schools are populated by minority students. Hence, extrapolating from available census data and West Orange Public School records, it can be concluded that most white people living in West Orange fall into the older age groups, and the newer settlers (younger people/school-aged classified as 24 or younger) are non-white. Specifically, large populations of Hispanic and Black citizens reside in West Orange, and the trend in the data suggests the phenomenon of white flight has struck the newer generations of West Orange inhabitants (WOBOE). This is reflected in the constant proportional decrease in West Orange High School records, as the percentage of minority students increases as the number of white students decreases at the same rate (WOBOE). Therefore, the data collected in the form of interviews mainly focused on younger people and/or people that fit into one of these two categories (Black or Hispanic.) For the purpose of this paper, the language/English variation most often associated with a racial group will be used to describe their linguistic variation.

INTERVIEWS

In analyzing the data from the conducted interviews, it is worth noting that the variation/linguistic dialect that someone speaks is not directly correlated to their race/country of origin. Instead, dialects are marked by specific linguistic features connected to vocabulary, grammatical phrases, pronunciation, etc. Furthermore, dialects are often used as a social marker to indicate comradery and are therefore subject to change under different circumstances. Hence, it is assumed for simplicity that the dialect used by interviewees in their interviews is their main form of language and will be analyzed as such.

The subjects interviewed were Walter, a 21-year-old Haitian-American, Kelly, a 21-year-old Cuban-born woman, and David, a 23-year-old Ecuadorian man. All subsequent information was extracted from personal interviews. Kelly and David underwent the same immersive ESL program at West Orange High School. KG was born in Cuba and immigrated to the United States at the age of 11. She is completely fluent in both languages (Spanish and English.) She is a citizen of the United States, and she identifies as both American and Cuban. She does not cite any significant complications with either of her languages, although she says her family in Cuba sometimes makes fun of her for her Americanized accent on some words. David immigrated to the United States at the age of 13. He does not consider himself bilingual and answered some questions in the interview in Spanish. He commented that he still struggles to communicate his thoughts clearly and often resorts to hand gestures or facial expressions to communicate his feelings. Although a citizen of the United States, he identifies as Ecuadorian. David exemplifies many more characteristics of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) than Kelly does, as he uses the habitual be, copula deletion, and the absence of the third person -s. However, both used "ain't" and "y'all," as well as other familiar markers such as "sis" and "brother/bro" to talk to people who passed by. Walter is Haitian American and exemplifies many more dialectal features of AAVE, including all of the features listed above, in addition to the use of past participle form as past tense and the generalization of "is" and "was" to plural and second person subjects.

It is important to note all interviewees live down the hill. As Wolfram and Schilling Estes' book American English points out, AAVE is partially a product of a people's pride and unity that is often overlooked. The dichotomy of sentiments towards those from up versus down the hill could lead to a desire to feel unified as a "people down the hill." Speech is a form of unification, and with the majority of people living down the hill in the 24 and younger category being Black, one theory is that AAVE could be a technique in the unification of this community and would account for why Walter, David, and Kelly all

exemplified characteristics of AAVE to different extents. In the same vein as this hypothesis and keeping in mind that down the hill encompasses most of the West Orange population, it is then apparent how AAVE transfers to those who do not fit into the "expected" racial category for this mode of speech, and is the overarching variety heard in school and other social arenas.

The constant cycling of people in West Orange from all different backgrounds makes it extremely difficult to pinpoint a standard dialect spoken by people 30 years old and younger. However, AAVE seems to be the main variation of English spoken, possibly because of the image people are trying to portray and the community they are trying to be part of. Additionally, as demonstrated by the key interviewees, most citizens are bilingual or, at a very minimum, fall into multiple linguistic categories. When asked, they all agreed that if they wanted to, they could find a community of linguistically similar people in West Orange with whom they could communicate comfortably (in both their native and secondary languages.)

In retrospect, the constant influx of people moving in and out of the township makes it nearly impossible to identify completely unifying linguistic patterns to describe the linguistic variation among speakers. While the West Orange that stands today began as a one-man town populated with farms and mills, it is starkly contrasting to its current suburban environment that is overflowing with linguistic and racial diversity from an everchanging population, which is the trend for the foreseeable future.

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