The Cities and the Sites

"The Crescent" in Atlanta and
"Greenfield" in Boston

In many respects, Atlanta and Boston are perfect opposites; Atlanta has a recent history of little overt racial conflict relative to the rest of the Deep South, while Boston's recent history involves a number of violent racial encounters. Boston has a long history as a port of call for immigrants to the United States, especially many European groups such as the Irish, Italians, and Portuguese. Atlanta has received comparatively little European immigration, as it was struggling to overcome the devastating effects of the Civil War while Boston underwent considerable industrial growth during the late nineteenth century. Consequently, identification with a European ancestry group is lower for whites in Atlanta than in Boston (according to the 2000 U.S. Census). In addition, blacks have always been a much larger proportion of Atlanta's population than of Boston's. Each city has also had a very different labor history, with Boston being a stronghold of labor unions while Atlanta's workers remained largely unorganized in a right-to-work state.[1]

The considerable differences in the demographics of the two metropolitan areas are evident in table 1. Blacks form a much larger percentage of the population in Atlanta than in Boston or the United States; within the city limits the percentage of Atlanta's residents who are black is more than double Boston's and about five times that for the United States.

Table 1. *General Demographic Characteristics of Atlanta and Boston, 1990 and 2000*

	White Population Percentage		Black Population Percentage		Median Family Income		Poverty Rate	
	1990	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*
City of Atlanta	31.1	33.4	67.1	61.2	$25,173	$37,231	27.3	24.4
Fulton County	47.8	48.1	49.9	44.6	$36,582	$58,143	18.4	15.7
Atlanta metropolitan statistical area	71.3	64.2	30.0	29.6	$41,618	$59,313	10.0	9.4
City of Boston	63.0	54.5	25.5	25.3	$34,377	$44,151	18.7	19.5
Suffolk County	66.1	57.8	22.5	22.2	$34,850	$44,361	18.1	19.0
Boston metropolitan statistical area	88.9	86.7	5.7	6.0	$48,618	$64,538	8.1	8.6
United States	80.3	75.1	12.1	12.3	$35,225	$50,046	13.7	12.4

Source: Unpublished data in 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census Summary File 1 (SF-1) and SF-3 files, analyzed by the author. Figures have been rounded and may not sum to 100 percent.

When comparing metropolitan areas, which include white and affluent suburban areas, the Boston area's black population is only 6 percent of the total, while blacks make up almost a third of the population of the metropolitan Atlanta area. While the contrast between median family incomes is not quite as stark, Boston is also a more affluent city than Atlanta.

While Boston has long served as a major destination for immigrants, much of Atlanta's growth has historically been fueled by internal migration, especially from the rural areas of the South. In recent years, Atlanta has become home to a significant number of African immigrants and to Mexican immigrants as well, although the Mexican American presence is much less prominent in Atlanta than in other parts of the state. Boston has one of the largest concentrations of Caribbean immigrants in the country and has long been a bastion of white ethnic politics.

Table 2 shows the considerable differences in the regional origins of the non-Hispanic white population in the Atlanta and Boston metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs).[2] While Boston has a somewhat larger foreign-born population, the greatest difference is between the proportion of residents who were born in the region; three-quarters of white Boston residents were born in New England, while less than two-thirds of Atlanta's white population hails from the Deep South (the population of the Deep South states is almost twice that of the New England states). The long-term connection of many residents to the Boston area may, in part, explain the possessiveness that a number of whites display toward "their" neighborhoods and communities.

The foreign-born black population in both areas has increased dramatically in the last twenty years (table 3). While Boston has long been home to a vibrant West Indian community, the percentage of black residents who are foreign-born skyrocketed to 27 percent by 2000, driven largely by a huge influx of Haitians settling in the area. Atlanta's foreign-born black population has also increased considerably during the last twenty years, although it is still a relatively small proportion of the overall black population. In contrast to the white residents of the Atlanta

Table 2. *Birthplace of Non-Hispanic Whites Living in the Atlanta and Boston Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 1980–2000*

In percentages

	Atlanta		
Birthplace	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
Foreign-born	2.4	3.0	3.6
Georgia	54.9	48.8	50.2
Deep South*	64.5	58.3	58.2
	Boston		
Birthplace	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
Foreign-born	9.2	8.1	8.1
Massachusetts	74.0	71.1	70.4
New England**	78.5	75.6	75.6

Source: Unpublished data from 1980–2000 U.S. Census 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), analyzed by the author.

*States of the Deep South include Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Data from Georgia is included in Deep South percentages.

**New England includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Data from Massachusetts is included in New England percentages.

MSA, a majority of the black population hails from the state of Georgia, although this proportion has been steadily declining.

The ethnic identity of whites and blacks in Atlanta and Boston is starkly different (see tables 4 and 5). Boston's reputation as an ethnically conscious city is borne out by census data: a majority of residents report an ethnic ancestry, including almost 25 percent Irish, 15 percent Italian, and 12 percent Haitian. In contrast, the ancestries identified by Atlanta residents reflect a relative lack of ethnic identity. For example, the most common ancestry claimed by whites in Atlanta is "American," and the most common among blacks is "Afro/African American."

Table 3. *Birthplace of Non-Hispanic Blacks Living in the Atlanta and Boston Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 1980–2000*

In percentages

	Atlanta		
Birthplace	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
Foreign-born	1.1	2.7	5.9
Georgia	80.3	68.8	59.0
Deep South*	87.4	78.4	68.4
	Boston		
Birthplace	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
Foreign-born	13.9	23.1	27.0
Massachusetts	50.4	47.1	50.3
New England**	51.5	48.1	51.2

Source: Unpublished data from 1980–2000 U.S. Census 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), analyzed by the author.

*States of the Deep South include Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Data from Georgia is included in Deep South percentages.

**New England includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Data from Massachusetts is included in New England percentages.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ATLANTA

In downtown Atlanta, a statue entitled "Phoenix Rising from the Ashes" symbolizes the city's comeback after near destruction by Sherman and his troops during the Civil War. Atlanta has rebuilt itself to become the largest and most influential city in the Deep South. Like many southern cities, Atlanta has always had a large black population. The black middle class has been both sizable in numbers and nationally prominent in influence. With four historically black colleges, including prestigious Spelman and Morehouse colleges, many of the black intellectual elite,

Table 4. *First Ancestry Mentioned by Non-Hispanic Whites Living in the Atlanta and Boston Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 1980–2000*

In percentages

	Atlanta			Boston		
Ancestry	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
American	10.3	10.8	16.7	3.6	2.8	4.2
Native American	1.9	2.4	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.1
English	32.3	17.2	10.9	13.0	10.4	8.4
French	2.4	2.7	1.7	4.9	3.5	3.2
French Canadian	0.2	0.4	0.5	1.1	2.6	2.8
German	9.9	16.8	9.1	3.9	6.4	4.1
Greek	0.3	0.4	0.4	1.6	1.4	1.3
Irish	11.1	13.4	9.1	25.8	26.2	23.0
Italian	1.4	2.6	3.4	15.1	15.8	15.4
Polish	1.1	1.7	1.5	3.1	3.1	2.8
Portuguese	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.6	1.6	2.2
Russian	0.7	1.0	0.7	3.0	3.0	2.2
Scotch Irish	*	4.6	2.5	*	1.8	1.6
Scottish	5.0	2.8	2.2	3.1	2.4	1.9
White/Caucasian	0.4	1.8	2.0	0.1	0.4	0.3
None reported	12.7	10.7	26.0	7.8	6.1	13.4

Source: Unpublished data from U.S. Census 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), analyzed by the author.

*Not tabulated.

including E. Franklin Frazier and W.E.B. Du Bois, have lived and worked in Atlanta. As exemplified by Alonzo Herndon's Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Atlanta has long been home to successful black businesses. Today, the historically significant Sweet Auburn district and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Site commemorate the rich legacy of black accomplishment in Atlanta, and one of Atlanta's selling points to potential tourists is its central place in black history.

Table 5. *First Ancestry Mentioned by Non-Hispanic Blacks Living in the Atlanta and Boston Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 1980–2000*

In percentages

	Atlanta			Boston		
Ancestry	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*
African	0.8	*	2.9	2.1	*	4.3
African American	83.6	83.4	71.1	66.2	56.5	40.1
American	2.6	2.5	1.4	2.4	1.8	3.5
Barbadian	0	0.04	0.1	1.1	1.3	1.4
Black	*	*	3.8	*	*	4.1
Cape Verdean	0	0	0.02	0.6	1.6	2.4
Haitian	0	0.04	0.5	2.7	10.7	12.4
Jamaican	0.2	0.6	1.3	2.6	3.7	5.1
Trinidadian	0	0	0.2	0.9	1.1	1.6
West Indian	0.03	0	0.2	2.5	2.3	1.3
None reported	10.5	10.4	14.5	12.4	12.8	15.5

Source: Unpublished data from U.S. Census 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), analyzed by the author.

*Not tabulated.

    Although the black upper and middle classes have long thrived in Atlanta, they have coexisted alongside a large poor and working-class black population. Vast stretches of the city's southern half are populated by desperately poor black households; several notorious black housing projects have been leveled in recent years after their appalling conditions came under public scrutiny. Yet a number of large projects continue to populate the south side, as does mile after mile of small, rundown shacks. Interspersed among the poverty are solid working-class neighborhoods, a scattering of affluent black neighborhoods, and a small number of predominantly white neighborhoods. However, the vast majority of whites in Atlanta live in the northern half of the city.

The Atlanta metropolitan area is bisected by two major interstates: I-85 runs north to south and I-20 runs east to west. Most whites, and many affluent blacks, live in neighborhoods on the north side, while most blacks live south of I-20. Many of the suburban areas north of the city have higher property values and status than the middle-class suburbs to the south. Whites in the southern suburbs of Atlanta had a lower household income in 1989 than whites in either the northern suburbs or the city itself, the latter reflecting the concentration of urban whites in affluent north-side neighborhoods (Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt 2000). Much of the "spatial mismatch" between low-wage laborers and available jobs in Atlanta reflects the concentration of less affluent blacks in the city and southern suburbs, where they are hampered by poor public transportation in getting to jobs generated in the northern suburbs (Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist 2000). As a result, wages are often higher in the northern suburbs than in the city, especially for low-wage workers such as those in the fast-food industry (Ihlanfeldt and Young 1994).

The north-south division is manifested in violent crime rates, school quality, availability of jobs, and public perceptions of the desirability of residential neighborhoods. Atlanta's major industrial areas and its primary airport are located to the south of I-20, while its high-end shopping malls are located to the north. Atlanta's notorious traffic problems also reflect this divide, as commuters from the south rarely need contend with significant delays while those from the north are typically stranded in gridlock. Unlike many metropolitan areas, there is not a stark divide simply between the suburbs and the city, as northern parts of the City of Atlanta have experienced rapid job growth and have some of the highest real estate values of the entire region (Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy 2000).

This north-south divide is strongly associated with race (see table 6). Though Atlanta has been nicknamed "The City Too Busy to Hate," its history (and present) has been indelibly stamped by racial conflict, racialized politics, residential segregation, and patterns of economic development that have not benefited all races (or classes) equally. That said,

Table 6. *Racial Composition of the Population of Fulton County, Georgia, 2000*
In percentages

	White	Black	Asian
Central Atlanta	23.4	70.6	2.6
Northside	70.1	20.9	4.3
Southside	13.7	81.6	1.1

Calculated by the author from unpublished Atlanta Regional Commission compilation of U.S. Census data (www.atlreg.com).

Atlanta does have a favorable history when compared to cities like Birmingham and Little Rock, Boston or Chicago. The transition from the Jim Crow era proceeded with fewer incidents in Atlanta than in many other parts of the South, primarily due to a concerted effort by political and business leaders to avoid the negative economic impact that open racial conflict had in other cities (Bayor 2000).

Nonetheless, Atlanta is a highly segregated city. The dissimilarity index for the metropolitan area declined slightly between 1990 and 2000, from 65 to 63; much of the integration reflected in this figure is driven by suburban settlement patterns.[3] The segregation rate for the city itself is 80,[4] virtually unchanged from 1990. White-black segregation is highest among the most affluent households and lowest among poor households in the city. The Mumford Center for Comparative Urban Research found that the Atlanta metropolitan area had one of the highest rates of disparity between the central city and the suburbs, ranking 276th out of 326 metropolitan areas in the United States. For example, the unemployment rate in the city of Atlanta was 14 percent in 2000 (up from 9 percent in 1990) but only 4 percent in the suburbs (down from 4.6 percent in 1990).

Atlanta has never had a high level of unionization, instead employing a primarily low-wage, low-skilled labor force (Keating 2001). White labor unions have played a role in keeping black workers out of jobs as plumbers, electricians, and truck drivers (Bayor 2000), conspiring with employers to do so.

Such actions reflect a clear trumping of race-based over class-based interests. Aside from the notable Fulton Mills strike in 1914–15, the white workforce has been largely disorganized and quiescent.

The difference between Boston and Atlanta in the size of the black population is only one aspect of the different racial environments of the two cities. Atlanta is known as the "Black Mecca," attractive to middle-class blacks for the variety of social and employment opportunities in majority-black settings (Hewitt 2004). While majority-black jobs usually result in lower wages, Atlanta is one city in which this is not necessarily the case. Through black dominance of local government, majority-black jobs in construction and government have wages and benefits that are on par with those of majority-white jobs in the city (Hewitt 2004).

"The Crescent"

I call the specific neighborhood where I conducted research in Atlanta "the Crescent." The area comprises three census tracts, one primarily white and the other two predominantly black. The town I lived in, "Holton," is about 80 percent white and is bordered by predominantly black areas to the east and west (both areas are predominantly black and working class, with significant white populations). About 15 percent of all adults in Holton are college graduates; more than half the workforce is employed in blue-collar jobs. The biggest employer is retail trade, followed by clerical, skilled blue-collar, and service. The median family income is about $28,000, several thousand dollars below the national median, but only about a thousand dollars below the median for Atlanta as a whole. Less than 10 percent of the population of Holton lives in poverty, which is below the city average.

I made my initial visit to the Crescent during the summer of 1997 to find an apartment as well as to insure that the neighborhood resembled the area described by the 1990 census data. Beginning in August of 1997, I rented part of a duplex near the center of Holton. Most of my neighbors

on the street were older whites who lived in small, well-tended single-family homes. A handful of the families on the street were younger black families with children, and there were younger white families with children who lived around the block, as well. I rarely saw most of my neighbors, with the exception of Jerry (who rented the other half of the duplex) and Blanche (my next-door neighbor). The quality of the housing, based on external appearances, varied widely from block to block in Holton. The duplex I was renting was one of the most run-down homes on my street, and decrepit and boarded-up housing could be found on nearby streets. There were also well-maintained single-family homes scattered throughout Holton, as well as some multifamily housing in average condition.

"General Fuel"

Shortly after my arrival in Atlanta, I obtained a job as a clerk in "General Fuel," one of Atlanta's twenty-eight hundred convenience stores, and in an area department store. This work brought me into contact with a wide variety of people, many of whom were from the immediate area. As the work did not demand constant activity, there was plenty of time to talk with customers, who would often "hang out" for a while. I also formed close relationships with my coworkers, most of whom were black, which provided me a window into black working-class racial attitudes and entrance into other social groups. Additionally, I developed friendships with a couple of regular customers (both whites), one of whom introduced me to a number of neighborhood residents.

I also spoke regularly with several people who lived on my street, all of whom were white. In addition, I became involved through one of my coworkers with a community organization, in which I met a number of people in the community (mainly black). However, the vast majority of my data came from my work in the convenience store. The store was extremely busy, and a wide range of people would come through on any given day; two registers were in operation at all times during the day

shift, and only rarely did more than five minutes pass with no one in either line. While many of the customers were from the surrounding area, a number of other people would frequent the store due to its proximity to a major interstate and industrial area. These customers tended to be whites dressed in professional attire.

Aside from gasoline, the primary purchases were cigarettes, beer, soda, and snack food. The owner of the store preferred not to sell lottery tickets, as he was concerned about the types of people that might attract. A handful of personal items, such as toothpaste and hairbrushes, were sold at exorbitant prices and were only rarely purchased. There was also an automatic car wash available, although this was popular only with taxi cab drivers. One free weekly car wash was one of the "benefits" provided to General Fuel employees, along with unlimited coffee, fountain drinks, and popcorn.

The store was arranged with security the foremost consideration; four video cameras, with sound, ran constantly. The two cash registers were behind a wall of bullet-proof glass, as was the store safe and the supply of cigarettes. The entire parking area was well lit, and the store was extremely neat and well kept, both inside and out. Part of the reason the premises were so clean was the owner's practice of having more cashiers on duty than were actually needed to wait on customers. The extra cashier(s) could arrange shelves, clean, and watch customers to prevent shoplifting. I am certain the owner more than made up for his increased labor expense, as shoplifting was extremely rare, the store was not robbed once the entire time I was there, and customers would often extol the cleanliness of the restrooms. Employee morale was also quite high, given the nature of the job and the low wages. Each shift of cashiers would try to outdo the others by leaving the store cleaner than we had found it. In the words of several of my fellow cashiers on first shift, the store looked "pimp tight" after we finished our workday.

Most of my fellow cashiers were black, although there was one other white cashier who worked on my shift. In addition, most of the cashiers were women, although three were black men, and a white man did light

maintenance at the store. Of the cashiers whom I worked with regularly, all but one had no plans to leave for other employment or schooling in the future. The owner was planning to retire and sell the business within the next five years, but the assistant manager and the day-shift cashiers were intent on staying at the store, which uncharacteristically gave automatic pay raises after every six months of employment. As a result, everyone who stopped working at General Fuel during my period of employment did so because they were fired. Vendors who regularly visited the store were mainly white men, although there was one black woman vendor. Hence, there were numerous interracial interactions within the store itself, as well as interactions between different social classes.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC
BACKGROUND OF BOSTON

In contrast to Atlanta's rise from the ashes of the Civil War, Boston has been a culturally and politically important city in America since the seventeenth century. Its location as a New England port has long rendered it an urban settlement for immigrants from Europe and elsewhere. The Boston metropolitan area is in many ways the antithesis of the urban sprawl that characterizes Atlanta and many other sunbelt cities—central-city Boston is still very much the commercial heart of the area, and while there are a number of corporate offices along suburban Route 128, Boston has nothing like the far-flung series of office complexes that dot the northern suburbs of Atlanta.

   Nonetheless, the Boston metropolitan area, as well as the city itself, is highly racially segregated. While not divisible into a simple north-south dichotomy, many of Boston's black residents live in a handful of neighborhoods in the south-central section of the city, such as Roxbury, Mattapan, and parts of Dorchester. Reflecting the numerical concentration of whites in the Boston metropolitan area, many predominantly white neighborhoods of varying social-class compositions are located throughout the city itself as well as in the mainly white suburban areas.

Like many older cities of the Northeast and Midwest, Boston is a city of clearly demarcated neighborhoods, many with particular ethnic or cultural characteristics attached. South Boston, a low-income white neighborhood near the central business district, gained national notoriety during the early 1970s as a center of opposition to busing to achieve racial balance in the Boston Public Schools. Violent protests, with demonstrators often adopting overtly racist imagery, were nationally televised, cementing an association between Boston's white working class and racism in the minds of those whose knowledge of Boston was primarily through media representations. The reality, however, was not quite so simple; the issues surrounding the antibusing controversy involved more than antiblack racism (although there were plenty of racist sentiments expressed), if anything, demonstrating the hostile defense of neighborhood turf that threatened Bostonians could marshal in the face of externally imposed change (Formisano 1991). The anti-busing conflicts involved issues of elites versus nonelites, suburbs versus city, and paternalism versus independence as well as white versus black. White ethnic, often working-class "defended neighborhoods," in the words of Formisano (1991), were key to understanding both the antibusing conflicts of the 1970s and contemporary racial hostility. The sense of a clearly defined, autonomous, and relatively homogenous neighborhood can explain much of the defensiveness expressed by working-class Bostonians in the face of change. The movement of outsiders into a neighborhood or of outside influence into neighborhood institutions (such as schools) is experienced personally, much like a theft of or attack on something that is owned rather than jointly inhabited.

"Greenfield"

Boston contains fewer white working-class neighborhoods that are proximate to predominantly black neighborhoods than does Atlanta, chiefly because the black population is much smaller in Boston. However, one neighborhood, "Greenfield," is mainly white and mainly working-class

(although there are middle-class pockets on its edges) and is located in a predominantly black corridor of the city. Greenfield is about two-thirds white. Unlike in similar areas of Atlanta, most of the whites in Greenfield identify with a traditional ethnic group, mainly Irish. In contrast, the most common ethnicity claimed by those in the Crescent is "American." An additional, potentially important difference between ethnic identifications in the two neighborhoods is the high percentage of blacks in Greenfield who identify as West Indian. While the majority of blacks in this part of Boston are native-born, a significant minority are either West Indian immigrants or claim West Indian heritage. Sixty percent of the workers in Greenfield are employed in white-collar jobs, most of them clerical positions; only 16 percent of adults aged twenty-five or older have received a bachelor's degree. Most adults are employed as clerical or service workers, and the median family income is about $34,000. This is slightly below the median family income for the city of Boston.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to find affordable rental housing in Greenfield and ended up commuting to my job from a neighborhood on the other side of the city.[5] In contrast to Holton, there was a shortage of available rental housing in Greenfield. The price of rental housing in the Boston metropolitan area is much higher than it is in the Atlanta metro area, and the vacancy rate is much lower. While all of the observations I recorded were from my time in the Greenfield neighborhood (*not* the neighborhood across town where I lived), the majority of these observations involve the convenience store, the neighboring bar, local stores, and a nearby bank. Occasionally I spent time in the homes of neighborhood residents, but most of the socializing with my coworkers and others I met in Greenfield took place in the store or at the bar.

"Quickie Mart"

The "Quickie Mart," the convenience store in Greenfield where I worked, was in the middle of a major commercial district of the neighborhood and was more commonly accessed by foot than by car.

Consequently, most of the customers were local residents rather than a mix of locals and outsiders. The presence of a lottery machine in the store insured a steady stream of regular customers, most of whom would stay in the store to scratch their tickets and fill out their bet slips. Both blacks and whites worked as vendors who visited the store regularly; all of the cashiers were white. In contrast to the store in Atlanta, my coworkers were all men when I first started work; a woman was hired about a month after I was. Both of the male cashiers had been working at the store for several years, and one of them had a second job as a bartender. The female cashier who was hired after I was had no other source of employment. As far as I knew, none of my coworkers viewed the job as short-term, and all of them were still working at the Quickie Mart when I left.

The store itself was run-down, and there would occasionally be graffiti painted near the front entrance, although the physical structure of the building was intact, with no broken windows and functioning locks on both external doors. The trash dumpster for the Quickie Mart was located in a dimly lit side alley, but otherwise the exterior of the store was well-lit with a fairly large (for Boston) parking area. While a video camera and VCR were prominently displayed by the cash register just inside the front entrance, the VCR contained no tape, so no store activity was actually recorded.[6] The Quickie Mart was open late, although not twenty-four hours a day, as was General Fuel. Consequently, the evening clerk was responsible for counting the money in the cash register drawer as well as taking inventory of the lottery tickets and moving them to a safe under the counter before closing for the night.

The Quickie Mart was larger than General Fuel in terms of square footage, but the overall number of customers was lower. In an average hour, roughly twenty-five customers would enter the store, including those who were simply purchasing lottery tickets. Milk was often on sale as a loss leader to entice customers into the store, and traffic would fluctuate somewhat relative to the price of milk at a nearby supermarket. The additional traffic from targeted milk purchasers did not typically have an impact on the number of observed interracial interactions, as

these customers would often enter and exit the store quickly, as if on a mission. Although there was also a small section of fresh fruit and vegetables, much of the merchandise was typical convenience store fare, such as candy bars, soda, and cigarettes (but no beer, as the licensing fee to sell beer in Boston is prohibitive). A handful of white elderly customers would walk to the store from their homes and do all of their grocery shopping at the Quickie Mart, but most customers bought fewer than five items at a time. From early afternoon onward, many of the customers were adolescents from nearby schools buying snacks on their way home. A small group of white, black, and Hispanic boys in their early teens would congregate outside the front of the store until chased away by the store manager. Despite their relatively small number, they were an often exasperating presence and, I suspect, kept away customers who did not wish to run the gauntlet of taunts and spitballs to enter the store.

Across the street from the store was a bar that served as a social center for a number of neighborhood residents. Women composed about one-quarter of the regulars at the bar (one was also a bartender there), and most of the patrons were white. Many of the bar regulars were also recurrent customers at the convenience store. Virtually all of my close contacts in the Boston neighborhood were white; I spoke regularly with numerous black customers, but I was unable to form the close relationships with them that I formed with my black coworkers in Atlanta.

METHODS

My primary means of collecting data was by keeping a detailed log of each day's events and observations. In some situations it was possible to jot down notes on observations in a notebook as they occurred; however, this was typically too obtrusive. Stopping at the end of the day to record field notes, while not ideal, was usually the only available option. At the Boston site, I dictated my field notes into a digital recorder while driving home at the end of the day.[7] To protect the confidentiality of those I observed, no tape recordings were made nor pictures taken without

express written consent from everyone involved. In addition, the actual names of the respondents are kept in an encoded and locked computer file, with only aliases reported in the field notes and subsequent reports on the research.[8]

Given the sensitive nature of racial attitudes, my intentions with regard to studying such attitudes were not announced to the subjects. I invoked a "cover story"; my stated intention was to conduct a study of the effects of economic restructuring on working people in the North and South. This subject is less charged than the subject of racial attitudes, yet it enabled me to ask questions of subjects that would seem odd if posed by someone who was not doing research. If I had stated my true research intentions at the outset, it would very likely have affected the validity of the data; in such cases, a certain amount of secrecy is therefore necessary (Mitchell 1993). The secrecy of the research grew less secure as my relationships with local residents became stronger; however, only one person guessed the true nature of my project. I informed those to whom I had grown closest of my actual research intentions before I left the sites.

While the research sites in the two cities were selected to be as similar as possible according to standard demographic data such as education, occupation, poverty rate, and racial composition, the divergent urban environments of Atlanta and Boston render each location qualitatively different. Some of the most important differences that might influence interracial interactions include the racial composition of the metropolitan area, the salience of European ethnic identities, the strength of labor unions and its attendant influence on working-class consciousness, the spatial organization of the cities, and the different histories of interracial interaction. The purpose of this research is not to determine which of these factors, if any, are of primary importance in framing contact between blacks and whites in the city—ultimately it would be impossible to specify causal primacy with only two in-depth case studies. Nonetheless, by observing thousands of interactions in natural settings in both

locales, one may see the ways in which "contextual effects" such as differences in city demographics, history, and culture impact race relations in daily life.

The patterns of black-white interactions discussed in the chapters that follow were identified after a detailed coding of field notes when the entire period of research was completed. Some of the city differences, such as the influence of European ethnic identities and immigrant narratives, were immediately apparent shortly after beginning the second field study in Boston. Other disparities were evident only after months of analysis, such as the extent to which perceived slights motivated antiblack comments in the Crescent yet had little such effect in Greenfield. On many other dimensions, such as the associations between race, gender, and crime, urban context made little difference, as black men were stereotyped as more violent and prone to criminality than others in both the Crescent and Greenfield.

In both cities, race and place are undeniably interwoven. For affluent whites who commute from (or live and work in) distant suburbs, race may function more like an abstraction—a politically and socially important abstraction, but unlikely to be continually considered. For less affluent whites who live and work in close proximity to blacks, race is not a mere abstraction but a major factor in everyday life. In both the Crescent and Greenfield, schools, neighborhoods, jobs, sex, safety, shopping . . . all are subject to considerations of race. As a result, the impact of the substantially different urban environments of Atlanta and Boston can be recognized in the language and attitudes of working-class blacks and whites going about their daily lives. A history of neighborhood defense in Boston generates a very different posture toward black residential mobility than does a history of white flight fueled by rapid suburban growth in Atlanta; anger and aggression in Boston is countered by fatalism and frustration in Atlanta. Just as race itself is a complex social construction, so too are the contextual effects of urban environment on racial interactions a reflection of national, local, situational, and idiosyncratic factors that underlie social life in any American city.