

Overlapping Ethnicities and Negotiated Space: Atlanta's Buford Highway

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Abstract:

The unique intermingling of numerous businesses reflecting varied ethnic affiliations along Buford Highway in Metro Atlanta offers a case study combining cultural, social, and urban geography. Studies of ethnic retail concentrations generally focus on one particular group; the Buford Corridor offers a strikingly linear picture of convolving interwoven multiethnic retail and residential spaces. This research examines the built environment for evidence of population succession and entrepreneurial cultural adaptation strategies in which different groups are over- and underrepresented in relation to their regional presence. Explanatory factors proposed include the types of immigrants, timing of arrival in Atlanta, and host society absorptive capacity as epitomized by key individuals and organizations. The predominance of ethnic Chinese from a variety of countries is noted, as well as a secondary migration flow leaving California for better job opportunities elsewhere. An ethnic bipolar labor market enhances assimilation and interweaving of different skill and resource levels in the same ethnic establishments and shopping areas.

Article:

INTRODUCTION

A bustling retail ribbon, reflecting remarkable ethnic intermingling, threads across De alb County along Buford Highway connecting the western boundary of De alb County to its eastern boundary with Gwinnett County, Georgia (Fig. 1). The greatest ethnic-owned business concentration in the southeastern United States flows along this road. Its spatial transformation followed a social-economic evolution globalizing Metro Atlanta and the immigrants' home countries in the process. The colocated retail space of numerous ethnic groups occurs along a zone of transition from urban to suburban, from blue-collar factory workers and young couples to service economy singles and starter or extended families, and from native born to immigrants. Previous studies commonly trace the evolution and urban suburban spatial clustering of particular ethnic groups; Atlanta's Buford Highway Corridor presents a strikingly linear picture of coevolving multiethnic retail and residential space.

This research focuses on ethnic groups that established an entrepreneurial profile on Buford Highway, where they are located along that strip, why they came, and the resulting picture of both immigrant and host society working out markets and demands, Atlanta's gaze was long fixated on a black-and-white world, with immigrants off the radar screen (Stone 1989). This study is not an examination of late twentieth-century foreign-born immigration to Atlanta. Indeed, part of this story is the lack of retail representation on Buford Highway for a large number of metropolitan Atlanta's diverse immigrant population (Table 1). Half of the total current estimated immigrant population is Hispanic, and one-quarter is Asian. The proportion of particular ethnic groups involved in retail establishments does not reflect their representation in the total immigrant population, but is more indicative of differences in resources that various immigrant groups possess (Waldinger et al. 1990; Fortes and Rumbaut 1996). Later sections of the paper will enlarge on the roles played by major ethnic groups on Buford's retail landscape.

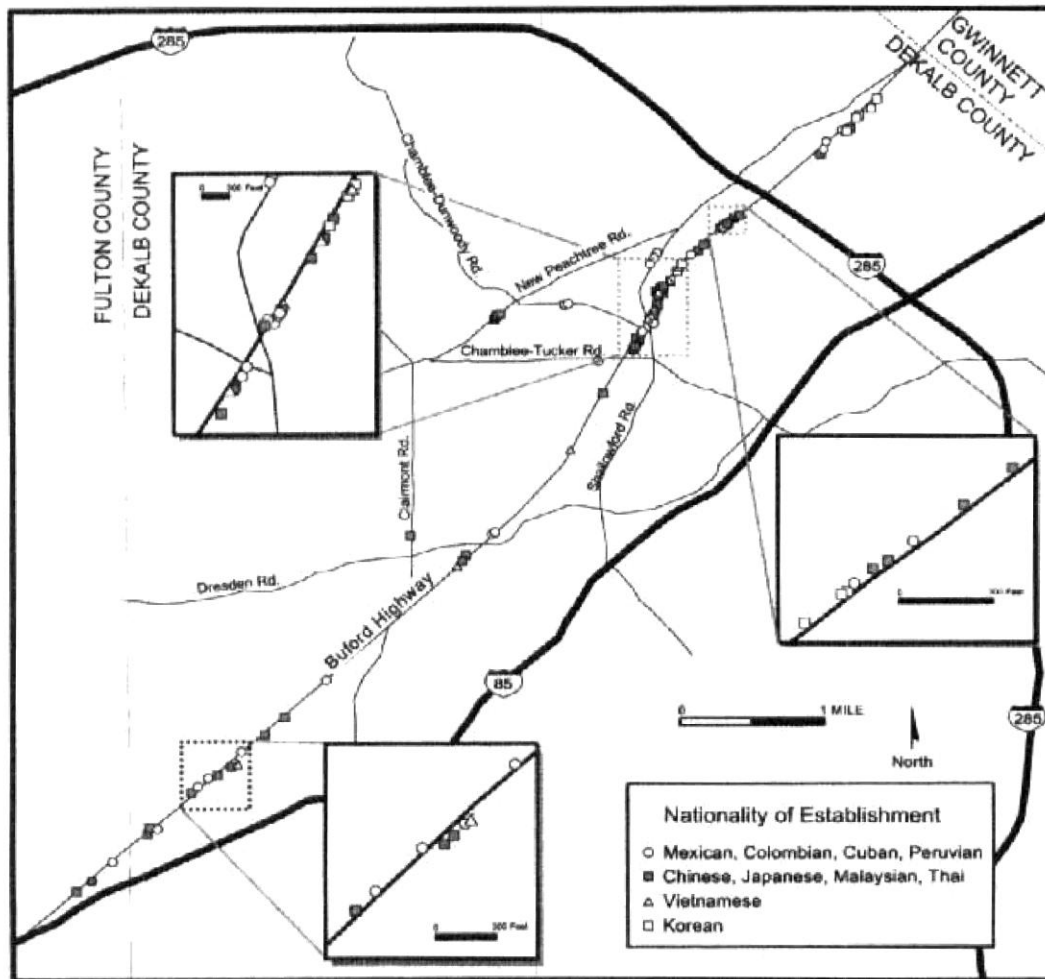


Fig. 1. Buford Highway ethnic establishments. Source: DeKalb Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Map by Cartography Laboratory, GSU.

Buford Highway displays a host of dynamics at work constructing a uniquely interwoven space, with multiple uses negotiated amicably among varying ethnic groups. In contrast, previous examinations of ethnic concentrations dealt principally, with micro-settlements or a strip mall dedicated to a particular group within a majority society retail setting (Prod 1963; Anderson 1987; Lee 1995; Wood 1997). This study considers signage and human activity to indicate spatial patterns of land use. Interviews with over 30 community leaders and store managers along the length of the highway through DeKalb County explore the social and economic context of place creation. This is followed by a brief history of the transformation of the towns through which this section of the highway runs. The reconfiguring of retail space is then narrated by looking at the main ethnic groups involved. The conclusion analyzes formative processes underway.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Macrolevel structural explanations for the establishment of ethnic entrepreneurs often rely on sociological and/or economic factors, including a cultural predisposition to save, pool resources, and set up a business. The result is attainment of a local critical mass that can support such ventures (Waldinger et al. 1990; Lee et al. 1997). Qualitative research drawing on extensive interview evidence, however, reveals the importance of a mediating individual who links the embedded resources of the host society (bank capital, real estate space) with the needs of the new immigrant-entrepreneur seeking to serve a new market but who often lacks both capital and experience. The commercial and human succession process revives "relict proto-urban places" (Wood 1997) transitioning down in the aging or restructuring processes in marginal areas. A direct connection exists between cultural, economic, and spatial assimilation (Massey 1994; Allen and Turner 1996).

Table 1.

Atlanta Metropolitan Area Immigrant Population, 1997

Hispanic		Asian		Other	
Argentina	<500	Cambodia	5,414	Afghan	1,335
Bolivia	<500	China	10,500	Barbados	750
Brazil	750	Hmong	1,000	Bosnia	1,200
Chile	150	India	13,000	Dutch	656
Colombia	8,000	Japan	2,900	Ethiopia/Eritrea	4,550
Costa Rica	2,000	Korea	13,100	Germany	2,300
Cuba	6,000	Laos	6,400	Ghana	1,000
Dominica	2,000	Philippines	3,000	Greece	8,720
Ecuador	541	Thailand	1,400	Haiti	3,000
Honduras	650	Vietnam	11,951	Iran	1,000
Mexico	100,000	Total	68,665	Italy	2,281
Nicaragua	400			Jamaica	20,000
Panama	850			Liberia	2,000
Paraguay	<300			Nigeria	3,500
Peru	1,261			Poland	450
Puerto Rico	12,000			Russia	5,500
Salvador	1,340			Scandinavia	750
Uruguay	<500			Somalia	2,500
Venezuela	<500			Trinidad & Tobago	8,000
Total	138,242			Ukraine	170
				Total	69,662
GRAND TOTAL 276,569					

Source: Georgia State University Center for Applied Research in Anthropology, 1997.

Attention to place reveals the working out of social processes and intersecting social relations over time; processes and relations are laid down and made visible in a changing material landscape of constantly negotiated space. The "urban kaleidoscope" of cultures (Lees 1998) is both an urban and rural (in the case of the Hmong) phenomenon, attracting geographic attention to its various spatial forms. The evolution of Buford Highway varies from previous models of commercial strip development along arterial routes. The planned predominance of low-cost apartments and a stable contingent of automobile-oriented services catering to multiple successive populations stabilized the type of buildings, rather than changing them through a series of steps with each supplanting previous residence and retail landscapes (Berry 1959; Jakie and Mattson 1982).

Several theories seek to interpret the spatial dimension of social phenomena underlying the retail environment. Space, in this case study, provides the material environment (vast quantities of inexpensive apartments, willing home sellers, proximity to public transport, and availability of low-skill jobs) for a certain social phenomenon. Social processes are the object of interest, with the material environment noted primarily for its presentation of visual cues (Simonsen 1996)- Space presents symbolic representations of identity., drawing in particular targeted audiences (Lefebvre 1991). Focus is on the place-based context of social life and its mediation between the rules and resources of the society in which it operates, in this case both the macro/ No capitalist and micro/immigrant ones. Group characteristics breed particular compensatory strategies to deal with the challenges of Living in a new land (Waldinger et al. 1990).

Urban cultural geographers see spatial evidence in the urban landscape of temporal changes in the built environment via. The spread and transformation of culture groups (Sauer 192.5). Humans reshape and reflect their culture in their retail landscape (Price and Lewis 1993). The symbolic interaction "place-product-packaging" conveys through the built environment (Jakle and Sculle 1994) is, in this research, less a function of distinctive building types than of multiple occupancy and population succession. Such messages are conveyed by the layering of different languages in the signage for various buildings.

This study examines the spatial lineaments and interconnections of varied ethnic groups forging similar yet distinctive survival patterns in the same places. Time, as well as space, is a player in this picture as occupancy shifts through various demographic groups and the highway under examination acquires new names, reflecting new cultural resonance for new occupants (Farrar 1997). Applicable structural explanations include a cultural ecological look at the effects on immigrant settlement of global economic restructuring. Migration functions as

a political safety valve letting some people leave and enter in order to address labor surplus/need in another country with dual market capitalism demanding both highly skilled and low-wage workers. Two other elements are at work: mediating institutions easing immigrants' absorption into the host society (voluntary organizations, "pariah capitalist" ethnic networks), and the actions of individual agents such as realtors and ethnic entrepreneurs featured in the following case study.

Table 2.

Population by Ethnic Group in DeKalb, Chamblee and Doraville, 1970–1990

County or Town	DeKalb County			Chamblee			Doraville		
	1970	1980	1990	1970	1980	1990	1970	1980	1990
Population	415,387	483,024	545,837	9,097	7,137	7,668	9,066	7,414	7,626
% Anglo	85	71	53	N/A	92	45.5	73	93	61.3
% Black	14	27	42	N/A	5	19.4	21	3.6	18.6
% Asian	1 FB*	2 FB*	2.9	1 FB*	2 FB*	12	N/A	N/A	7.5
% Hispanic	N/A	N/A	2.9	N/A	N/A	23	N/A	N/A	8.4
Asian	N/A	4,572	15,025	N/A	133	922	N/A	138	559
Chinese	N/A	1,145	3,325	N/A	38	138	N/A	49	59
Filipino	N/A	208	535	N/A	1	0	N/A	1	9
Japanese	N/A	521	852	N/A	4	7	N/A	6	0
India	N/A	1,100	3,398	N/A	44	39	N/A	32	165
Korean	N/A	1,270	3,277	N/A	9	31	N/A	50	123
Vietnamese	N/A	328	2,290	N/A	37	383	N/A	0	129
Cambodian	N/A	N/A	429	N/A	N/A	214	N/A	N/A	0
Hmong	N/A	N/A	211	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	74
Laotian	N/A	N/A	531	N/A	N/A	100	N/A	N/A	0
Thai	N/A	N/A	177	N/A	N/A	10	N/A	N/A	0
Hispanic	1,760	4,331	11,782	N/A	119	1,787	N/A	113	580
Mexican	211	1,722	5,129	N/A	36	1,404	N/A	70	381
Puerto Rico	373	787	1,471	N/A	51	9	N/A	5	37
Cuban	1,176	1,822	1,884	N/A	31	35	N/A	38	64
Guatemalan	N/A	4,331	399	N/A	1	45	N/A	N/A	13
Honduran	N/A	N/A	261	N/A	N/A	33	N/A	N/A	0
Nicaraguan	N/A	N/A	183	N/A	N/A	11	N/A	N/A	0
Panama	N/A	N/A	264	N/A	N/A	12	N/A	N/A	47
Salvadoran	N/A	N/A	580	N/A	N/A	217	N/A	N/A	0
Colombian	N/A	N/A	925	N/A	N/A	13	N/A	N/A	38
Ecuadorian	N/A	N/A	196	N/A	N/A	8	N/A	N/A	0
Peruvian	N/A	N/A	490	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	0

*FB = Foreign Born (Census category).

Source: *United States Bureau of the Census. Georgia 1970, 1980, 1990.*

The timing of immigrant exodus and influx is critically important. Automobile-induced arteries have extended into the ever-expanding suburbs of Metro Atlanta since the 1970s. Their availability pulled whites out and left spaces for others fleeing both home country dictatorships and the economic restructuring tarnishing California's golden reputation as a popular first destination for immigrants to the United States in the early 1990s.

The timing also was ripe for benign political neglect. Economics and demographics moved to fill the needs of new bipolar labor market niches for both very high- and low-skilled workers while local politics in Georgia ignored non-black-and-white issues. Mediating organizations targeted Metro Atlanta for refugee settlement due to its economic boom and the availability of housing. Churches facing declining membership were also more willing to reach out to sponsor immigrant settlement in their area in order to fill pews. The particular adaptive mechanisms and personalities of individuals also played a role, from the large number of immigrant women seeking to establish themselves as economically independent to developers replacing one leasing market with another. These underlying dynamics and individual stories were all at work re-populating properties along Buford Highway.

HISTORY OF DEKALB COUNTY'S BUFORD HIGHWAY

Chartered in 1822, DeKalb County was one of the earliest settled areas in central Georgia. By 1845 the town of Chamblee, which along with neighboring Doraville is the focus of present-day immigrant settlement and retail

activity, was a railroad stop. The western border of DeKalb is only two miles from Veatchtree Street, the heart of Atlanta. Waves of immigration periodically sweeping America's shores and cities did not reach this area of the Deep South until the mid-1970s, during the fourth peak of heightened foreign entry (Hill 1979; Fennell 1977; Martin and Midgley 1994). The foreign-born population in Atlanta increased gradually from 4,184 in 1950 to 32,196 in 1960. The 1970 figure of 54,070 quadrupled in the next two decades to over 266,0(X), according to family-based population estimates by a university research group that used multipliers to compensate for census undercounts (Dameron and Murphy 1997). While the numbers of immigrants are small compared to those for larger east and west coast cities, the proportions and rates of increase are high for a Deep South city. Since the 1970s, Atlanta sought to establish an image as an "international city," a New South renaissance town emerging from the tensions of the preceding decade and forging links to a larger world. The difficulty of coping in a new country without language, culture, capital, or kinship-place connections led to the formation of ethnic support groups, as was historically practiced by immigrants (Hill 1979). Government and volunteer services such as language classes now provide a modern and trans-ethnic melding influence that is particularly effective at building friendships among school-age children.

A breakdown by ethnicity for DeKalb County and the two towns currently most impacted by immigrant population, Chamblee and Doraville, reveals the rapid and transformative population influx from 1970 through 1990 (Table 2). Foreign-born settlement along Buford Highway has occurred principally since 1980. Before that, several longtime residents characterized Chamblee and Doraville as typical small southern towns with a blue-collar Caucasian core. The size and growth of these two towns were roughly parallel in 1970 and 1980. The 1990 population figures, though universally conceded to be a vast undercount, were a great surprise but gave some idea of the intervening population shift. Chamblee now has a greater concentration of immigrants in general and Hispanics in particular, with Doraville drawing more Koreans and Asian Indians. While DeKalb County's proportion of foreign born increased steadily over these decades from 1-3%, the impact on Chamblee and Doraville was huge. Between 1980 and 1990 Chamblee's Vietnamese population jumped from 37 to 38.3. Doraville's Asian Indian population rose five-fold, and its Mexican population quadrupled. At the same time, nearly 16,000 non-Hispanic whites left DeKalb County in the 1980s while Asians increased by 10,453, Hispanics by 6,475, and African Americans by 12,724 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1980, 1990). The influx of upland Hmong to Doraville and lowland Laotians to Chamblee resulted from separate group sponsorship for the warring factions.

Real estate transition patterns are an important factor for the concentration of immigrants in the Chamblee-Doraville area along Buford (Pillsbury 1998). Much of the large stock of rental units in this stretch along the highway was constructed in the 1950s and early 1960s for young Metro Atlanta singles and new couples living on the margin of affordability. When the economic slowdown of the 1960s resulted in factory layoffs, rental vacancy rates soared and prices plummeted. The number of multifamily units rose by 50% between 1980 and 1990, while single-family units decreased by 30% in the same period. The concentration of Jewish homeowners in this part of Atlanta also contributed to the relatively easy transition to ethnic occupants, since they were relatively more willing than the non-Jewish population to sell their homes to immigrants (Fennell 1977).

The "Havana Sandwich Shop," founded in 1976, is probably the oldest ethnic eatery on Buford Highway (Fig. 2). The highway at that time was a simple two-lane road. Havana's life as a former auto parts shop (note the "Elite Automotive" remnant sign) is typical of many automotive service outlets still in the area. The restaurant attracts a largely Anglo clientele, due to its location close to the Atlanta city line. Across the road relatively expensive new condominiums are the latest real estate attempt to upgrade area occupancy by demolishing prevalent aged "apartment row" stock in hopes of tapping into the trend toward housing closer to jobs in the city.

Demographic succession in Metro Atlanta continued from the 1960s through the next three decades. A brief upsurge in African American housing occupancy in the 1960s was quickly inundated by the leading edge of agency-led immigrant placement. Georgia's population of non-native English speakers increased more (by

113%) than that of any other state in the 1980s (Waldrop 1993). The median monthly rent in Chamblee alone almost doubled from 1980 to 1990. By the 1980s the area was served by two Metropolitan Area Rapid Transit (MARTA) stops and a bus route, further enhancing its appeal to low-income residents dependent on low-wage jobs in a restructured economy. The number of single-family housing units in the city of Chamblee declined 29% between 1970 and 1990, while the number of multifamily units increased by 50% due both to conversion of older units to offices serving the new population and construction of newer apartments. Owner occupation dropped by 13% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1970, 1980, 1990).



Fig. 2. Havana Sandwich Shop. Photograph by author.

Waves of immigration swept in to succeed the out-migrating portion of white population in the area of Buford Highway. The increase of non-native language students in DeKalb County schools, traced annually by the Georgia Department of Education by language group, provides another measure of the increase of immigrants from 1982 to 1996 (Fig. 3). This is an imperfect instrument, since some groups tend to have more children per family (e.g., the Firnong), and others are represented by many single adults as well as extended and starter families (e.g., Mexicans), but it gives an indication of trends in this section of Metro Atlanta supported by other population figures. Two macroeconomic changes help explain the large increase in both Hispanics and Asians, especially Vietnamese, around 1990. Collapse of the Mexican economy as a result of oil industry and debt restructuring impelled the former, while demilitarization and economic slowdown in California encouraged secondary out-migration. Establishing the exact extent of such migration falls beyond the scope of this paper, but its existence and effects came up repeatedly during the course of interviews.

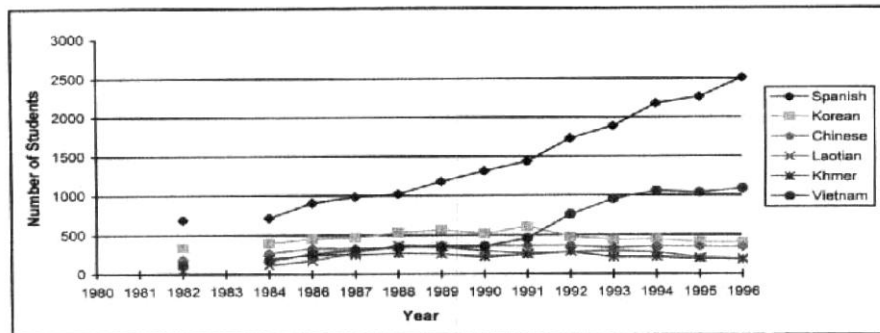


Fig. 3. Language Minority Students in DeKalb County Schools, 1982–1996. Source: Georgia Department of Education, *Annual Report on Language Minority, Limited English Proficiency, and English Speakers of Other Languages, 1982–1996*.

NEGOTIATED SPACES: RECONFIGURING RETAIL

The characteristic spatial pattern distinguishing "La Buford," as it is known to Hispanic residents (Darner on and Murphy 1997), is the intermingling of ethnic retail establishments providing a complete array of services along the highway ribbon. Buford is a suburban retail and residential ribbon, but not an "ethnoburb" (Li

1995). Atlanta sports no "Koreatowns" (Lee 1995) or "Chinatowns" (Anderson 1987). Two shopping center signs literally illustrate the negotiated spaces of intermingled and overlapping ethnicities. Sun Tan Center (Fig. 4) refers to a Cantonese pronunciation of the two Chinese characters above its name. Occupants include a Chinese and a Korean restaurant (identified in their respective scripts), a Mexican video store, a travel agency run by Colombians (as is "Frutti Valle"), and a Thai restaurant (also advertised in native script). According to informants at the Hispanic travel store, the corner presence of a dance hall well known to the Latino community draws customers. All managers claimed that cross-ethnic traffic was good for their business.

Shared, alternating ethnic spatial intermingling extends from retail to entertainment facilities. "The International Ballroom" just over the Gwinnett County line, out of street view behind a raised railroad bed and bordered by industrial lots and auto parts dealers reminiscent of previous decades, features live bands from Mexico on most nights interspersed with Vietnamese music groups on the weekends. "The Rex" in a largely Vietnamese-Chinese mall, is a Hispanic ballroom accommodating up to 2,000 revelers. Its Caribbean salsa bands and live music from Mexico attract a youthful crowd willing to pay the \$25450 admission price, while Vietnamese bands from California entertain on Chinese New Year.



Fig. 4. Sun Tan Center. Photograph by author.



Fig. 5. Orient Center. Photograph by author.

The second shopping center featured, Orient Center (Fig. 5), invokes the Orient in its broadest geographic sense with several Western incursions. Five Vietnamese shops (several of whose owners came from California) and a large supermarket share the parking lot with a Malaysian restaurant and a Chinese dentist from Hawaii. All are run by overseas Chinese (ethnic Chinese who are citizens of and were raised in other countries). Several stores are Taiwanese-owned. A Bangladeshi dry goods store whose owner is from New York City, and a Western drug store balance an herbalist outlet; another mall contains an herbal shop whose Chinese owner came from Argentina. Concentrations of ethnic groups in certain apartment complexes represent extended families or language groups (Duchon 1993). Although the stores reflect the ethnicity of nearby area residents, the weekend crowds include customers from neighboring states and throughout Georgia.

The difficulty of finding a job, given language problems and mismatches of training or skills, drives many immigrants to the challenge and opportunity of starting their own businesses (Goff 1996). Informal pooling of scarce funds among relatives and friends often forms the first source of seed capital. Only later, with a track record of experience and collateral, do entrepreneurs often look to a bank for loans, even one set up within the ethnic community to serve their needs. Buford Highway's stock of aging 1950s strip malls builds on a very traditional base, often anchored by a large grocery store such as Publix or Kroger. A single realty company manages a dense cluster of three ethnically mixed retail areas in the center and eastern edge of the Buford

Corridor. The longtime owner traced this section's transition back to the mid-1980s, when there was a vacancy in a difficult-to-lease corner property of the area's largest mall. A recent immigrant from Korea had approached him with an interest in using the site for a restaurant, but lacked both credit and experience. The developer decided to take a chance, and the venture proved successful.

A snowball effect soon set in, given pent-up demand. When the adjoining retail space became available, a relative of the original tenant approached the owner with a proposal for a bookstore. Word spread throughout the local would-be entrepreneur immigrant community about the willing landlord who "in openness or ignorance leased to whoever showed up" J. Halpern, telephone conversation with author, 3 March 1999). Long-standing Caucasian retailers in the mall reached the point where they began to voice concerns about the diminution of traffic flow to their stores. At this juncture, the developer was put in touch with a Korean shareholder of the bank on whose board he also served. A trip to visit Los Angeles' Koreatown was arranged, and the developer returned convinced that transition was a good (i.e., profitable) thing to allow to occur. The board of the bank involved, founded in 1986, is now half Asian, with a particular portfolio involvement in funding Asian-American entrepreneurs.

Transition along the highway was piecemeal and without a master plan, a truly opportunistic evolution. The size and nature of the emerging transition was off the radar screen of the majority community as residents left for newer subdivisions or jobs and spaces gradually passed into new hands. A former Lionel Play world to store is now the Korean-owned "Buford Highway Farmers Market," with tropical products in demand by groups from the Caribbean to sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian sub-continent. A Spanish language sign proclaiming the availability of Mexican products hangs prominently underneath the main banner. Aisles are marked with banners proclaiming the country of origin of their products, with representation divided among Hispanic, American, and Asian wares. The store is reportedly the major wholesale Asian grocery supplier in the Southeast. An anticipated expansion to an adjoining shopping center will double its capacity. A former Outlet Square retains discount stores like a Burlington Coat Factory and Marshall's, but it is now part of "Oriental Mall" anchored by the Hong Kong Supermarket, previously a Winn-Dixie (Kurylo 1998). Retail duplicates relic functions, within a new niche. Firms appealing to a wider majority society market spatially coexist with "adjustment entrepreneurs" and "ethnic middlemen" (Maldinger et al. 1990).



Fig. 6. Baden Baden Hof Korean Restaurant. Photograph by author.

Another mall on the eastern edge of the Buford Corridor doubled in size a decade ago, adding space across from the traditional mall segment's parking lot for an ethnic restaurant complex featuring a mixture of Ethiopian, Peruvian, Salvadoran, Chinese, and Vietnamese stores. Its relative proximity to the expensive Lenox area, site of Atlanta's two most expensive malls, allows this strip to purportedly pull in a business crowd beyond local traffic seeking an exotic but convenient concentration. The restaurants differ in their clientele, however, with the Salvadoran establishment clearly catering to their compatriots. The Peruvian restaurant took over from an

Italian one and transitioned its clientele by initially offering a split menu featuring both Apennine pasta and Andean potato dishes, while posting a pair of stuffed llamas at the door.

Other prominent street signs on the eastern edge of DeKalb County also signal cultural succession, such as the former German "Baden Baden Hof" restaurant, advertising its remodeling and current affiliation in Korean characters (Fig. 6). It was originally a fried chicken franchise. The low Firestone facility next to it is from earlier times, while the low-interest check cashing sign on the other side serves the needs of low-wage workers living from paycheck to paycheck. The pillar under the "Atlanta Inn" (Fig. 7) displays Chinese characters, while the marquee between the two signs offers the explanation that "new ownership-new management" is responsible for its transformation to the "Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation." It pays to have an up-to-date travel accommodation guide for Metro Atlanta!



Fig. 7. Atlanta Inn. Photograph by author.

The variety of businesses reflects primarily on a few ethnic groups* profiled in the next section. These include four of the top ten language minority groups in DeKalb County: Hispanic, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese (GDOE 1982-1996). Some language groups are represented in one or two firms (Peruvian, Colombian, Ethiopian, and Cuban), while others are not at all present on this highway. Access to ethnic resources," defined as the sociocultural features of a group that support endeavors of that group, has been cited in several studies (Min and Hart 1985; Boissevain et al. 1990; Fortes 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1996) as a vital factor underlying the success of some ethnic businesses (e.g., Korean), but critically inadequate for others (e.g., African American). The existing ethnic retail landscape reflects those groups with a propensity and need for entrepreneurship, and those with underlying resources sufficient to sustain an often marginal and longterm effort for economic survival.

Twenty-eight interviews with entrepreneurs along the length of Buford Highway in DeKalb County revealed both expected and unexpected results concerning the ethnicity of store management and the range of products featured in any one store. A variety of establishments were contacted, on both sides and along the length of the

highway. The survey (Fig. 8) was shown to each subject prior to the interview, to obtain their informed consent. The 10 basic questions provided comparability of responses, but the interview was open-ended and conversational enough to permit extended exploration of particular topics. Since the timing occurred during the workday, interviews were occasionally punctuated by attention to customers.

Survey: Buford Highway Businesses

***DIRECTIONS:** This survey is being done for a research project at Georgia State University to determine the types of retail shops along DeKalb County's portion of Buford Highway. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge, seal and return (postage prepaid).*

1. How long have you been in business at this location?
2. What business was at this location before you came here?
3. Before this business, what type of job did you have?
4. Did you come to Buford Highway mainly because (check all that apply)

☐ rent was affordable
☐ you knew others who were here

☐ good market for your type product
☐ other reason: _____
5. Your business mainly sells: _____
6. Does your business mainly attract a market of:

☐ same ethnic group
☐ Anglos
☐ local area people
☐ mixed
7. Your employees are mainly

☐ same ethnic group
☐ Anglos
☐ local area people
☐ mixed
8. You are from the country of _____.
9. You have been in the Atlanta area for:

☐ less than 5 years
☐ 5-10 years
☐ 11-20 years
☐ longer
10. What improvements could the city of Chamblee/Doraville make to improve your business?

Thank you very much for taking the time to respond to this survey!

Fig. 8. Survey of Buford Highway businesses.

The biggest surprise in this survey was how international entrepreneurs are by country of origin; of the 26 who answered the question as to their ethnicity, 13 different places were represented. Typical of immigrants, as a strategy to save money, major employees are usually of the same ethnic group (Lee et al. 1997; Prides 1995). The country of origin for the storeowner, given the general category of "Chinese," for example, can vary greatly. Japanese run none of the four Japanese establishments listed. One has a Taiwanese owner who employs Chinese waitresses and utilizes Hispanic kitchen help; it was formerly a Chinese restaurant. Other Chinese come from Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Korea as well as Taiwan and the mainland. A number hailed most recently from California, an interesting migration trend, finding Atlanta through kinship information chains as a good place to start a business.

The age of the stores ranged from three months to 23 years, largely divided between those in existence from 6 to 10 years and 2 to 5 years, often reflecting the age of the shopping center. The most common factors influencing location include the availability of a large ethnic market, affordable rent, and a busy street. For

those not located in a same-ethnicity mall, another establishment would draw customers and give them visibility. For a Bengali grocer, for example, the presence of a popular vegetarian restaurant (Chinese in management and menu, hut multiethnic in clientele) across the parking lot also led customers to his location. Most effective advertisement media for Hispanics in particular were (in. order) Spanish language radio, newspapers, and TV stations. Of the 24 respondents who employed ethnic laborers, 18 used workers of the same ethnicity (including family). Many who responded "mixed ethnicity" employed Hispanics in the kitchen. The following section explores retail activity in more detail, based principally on interviews, observations by the author, and local newspaper articles. Characteristics vary by ethnic association, so analysis is divided to reflect the appropriate national origin group.

HISPANICS

The initial flow of immigrants from Mexico started with the decline of that country's economy in 1975. Suburban Atlanta's booming job market in the 1980s drew migrants from other states in the United States as well as Mexico (GSU-CARA 1994). Good schools, combined with pockets of affordable housing and good public transportation along Buford Highway, attracted immigrants to DeKalb County and then to Gwinnett County, as families were able to afford more expensive real estate. Lindbergh Shopping Center was an early haven for Hispanic and Asian firms, predating the arrival of MARTA trains. The Havana Sandwich Shop was established in the mid-1970s, following one of the three waves of immigration out of Cuba. A descendant of this early Cuban immigration became the Chief Executive Officer of the Coca-Cola Company, which is headquartered in Atlanta.

The influx of Mexican immigrants in the 1990s represented a less-skilled, less-educated segment than that which arrived a decade earlier. This bipolar immigration is typical of groups over time, and in the short run they all need jobs and transition assistance (Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994). Newer businesses reflect the size of the Hispanic community, which grew large enough to cater to itself in specific ways. Butcher shops prepare cuts of meat needed for Mexican dishes, travel agencies serve the cyclical migrant, hair parlors perform on familiar hair types, and music stores stock recordings popular south of the border.

Outlets mirror the concerns of culture and capital (large market, low outlay) important to marginal ventures (Prod 1963). Restaurants represent about half of the Mexican-owned establishments in Atlanta, split between ethnic and No markets. Franchises such as McDonalds also frequently employ backroom Mexican labor. As in other major immigrant destination cities, help-wanted signs are posted in Spanish as well as English (Gold 1994). Immigrants come from several different states in Mexico. Those who hail from Jalisco live in one end of Buford, while the entrepreneurs from Nuevo Leon, Guerrero, and Michoacan are proud of their own identity and economic niches in different sections along the highway. Settlement patterns follow blandishments on Hispanic radio and newspaper ads. These are utilized particularly by small firms that lack access to more expensive advertising outlets.

Even churches compete for adherents among the immigrant population, and assist the concentration of their adherents near their houses of worship dispersed along the highway. Southern Baptists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians actively assisted (and at least passively recruited) Cubans in the 1960s, Vietnamese in the 1970s, and Mexicans in the next two decades, ceding no spiritual territory to the also active Catholics. As Anglo populations departed mainstream churches, pastors sought—often successfully—to fill pews with parishioners and accommodate new languages and customs. A Hispanic wedding store and the only non-Korean outlet in one Buford mall, pulls customers from two Hispanic-oriented churches further down the highway by catering to the dress preferences and ceremonial needs of different groups within Hispanic countries, as well as clients varying from Koreans to African Americans.

VIETNAMESE

The main period of Vietnamese immigration to the United States came in the years immediately following 1975. Voluntary agencies, funded as intermediary institutions by the United States government, sponsored most refugee resettlement. All of the major relief organizations (International World Rescue, Catholic Relief, and

other church agencies) maintain offices in Atlanta as the major southeastern regional city. Areas of Vietnamese concentration tend to be on the eastern side of Atlanta, where there are aging, affordable apartments. A North Vietnamese area around the airport on the southern side of Atlanta reflects the presence of a Vietnamese-speaking pastor. Atlanta's Vietnamese population increased sharply in the 1990's, representing secondary migration from California and other areas in the country that were not doing as well economically as booming Atlanta. Retail businesses concentrated along Buford supply all the needs of the various immigrant communities, from groceries to restaurants, nail salons to cosmeticians, auto dealers and repair shops, travel connections and local entertainment, doctors, and assorted professional services (GSU-CARA 1994). Sites of Vietnamese shops range from a large mall, with an entrance archway in Vietnamese, to interspersed locations in an ethnically mixed strip mall. Many Vietnamese entrepreneurs are "Viet Hoa," or ethnic Chinese, as are many Thai storeowners (Gold 1994; survey by author). These immigrant entrepreneurs cater to both a niche market and mainstream needs. Their presence forms a critical mass accelerating both immigration and retail formation.

CHINESE

Although Chinese workers came to Georgia in the 1800s, and flourished as Atlanta freemasons in the early twentieth century, their retail imprint left no concentrated mark until the mid-1970s (GSU-CARA 1994). The first major ethnic shopping mall on Buford was Chinatown Square built in the late 1980s with money from Taiwan and overseas Chinese in the Philippines (D. Yu, banker, telephone conversation with author, 8 March 1999). Hispanic immigration has overtaken that of Chinese, leaving the latter entrepreneurs dependent on Mexican help to meet the demand of an Anglo as well as ethnic market for "Chinese" food. Chinese retail outlets also feature jewelry shops, video outlets with Chinese language tapes, and bookstores. While no particular spatial concentration of Chinese residences developed, the northeastern suburbs contain the greatest numbers of this ethnic group due to the culturally strong emphasis on education and the clearly superior performance of schools in this section of the metro area. The majority of Chinese immigrants to Atlanta are middle-class professionals, so they have the means to support ethnic retail outlets in the Buford Highway area and live in homes in a more desirable part of town (Zhao 1996).

KOREANS

Koreans entered the United States as agricultural workers in the late 1800s, similar to many Chinese and Japanese migrants of that time period. Their presence in the Atlanta region accelerated since the 1970s. With a metropolitan area population of approximately 300 in 1970, 5,500 in 1980, and 13,000 in 1990, the Koreans represent a relatively concentrated section along the east end of Buford (GSU-CARA 1994). Given the economic boom fostered by the 1988 Seoul Olympics, many Korean entrepreneurs hoped Atlanta's 1996 host city status would also bring them good business. Korean businesses in the metro region increased from 326 in 1982 to over 1,000 in 1994 (GSU-CARA 1994; Korea Times Daily 1999). Korean immigrants are primarily well educated, seek to settle in areas with excellent school systems, and are noted for several characteristics shared by other ethnic entrepreneurs: savings, hard work, pooled capital (*kae*), and living separately from the business (Cary 1996).

A study based on Atlanta's Korean small business complex found that commercial success built on a core of "hard work and frugality" (Min and Jaret 1985). Koreans also benefited from their ability to move in quickly and convincingly to fill an economic opening left by departing Anglos. The first ethnic business opened in an Anglo mall on Buford was a Korean venture. Unlike Chinese entrepreneurs, Koreans often lack specific business experience (Min and Jaret 1985; Cary 1996), relying on ethnic resources in the form of kinship-based loans and advice to get established initially. While 75% of Koreans in the Washington, D. C. area are shopkeepers, some 70% in the United States hold college degrees—an example of a well-educated, underemployed population deferring earnings and gratification to model survival for the next generation.

They are also a closely-knit community, supporting several Korean language newspapers, a radio, television station, and numerous religious, civic, and cultural organizations. Many stores display stickers in English warning of their protection by a "Korean Community Patrol" set up to respond to its members' unanswered

911 calls. Concerns about vigilance and stock security were frequently expressed. Prominently displayed literature in Korean, from church bulletins to a newspaper and community services, evidences a consciously maintained group.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Cooperation networks within each particular ethnic group are created and activated to extend entrepreneurial opportunities, leveraging scarce current resources for future returns (Light and Isralowitz 1997). The specific attributes and opportunities of any particular group, interacting with the demand for distinct products of that group, are less predictive of entrepreneurial success than underlying attributes such as industry and frugality that adhere to all successful entrepreneurial endeavors (Portes 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Weber's "Protestant ethic" and the more recently hypothesized "Confucian ethic" (Chan 1993) are descriptors whose causality implications are reversed by immigrants who change institutional affiliation following migration.

This examination of metropolitan Atlanta's Buford Highway retail strip, also referred to as a "business ribbon" (Berry 1959) or "International Corridor" (DCVB 1998), focused on its ethnic concentration of both retail and residence patterns. A possible explanation rests with three factors: the nature of the immigration, the timing of immigrant succession, and elements in the host society. Analysis of the interworking of these elements draws on Giddens (1984) three-part structurationist proposal: the rules and resources of the structures (economic deindustrialization, population succession, immigration policy), mediating institutions (churches, voluntary agencies), and agents involved (realtors, bankers, entrepreneurs, community leaders).

Timing of the migration movement came when the global and regional economy in general was undergoing a restructuring. Manufacturing jobs underlying the older community gave way to service jobs and low-paying but much-needed positions serving a booming suburban construction period. Jobs were less available to young Anglo office workers, who left to live with parents, providing gaps in rental housing markets. Deindustrialization sent former manufacturing workers looking for work elsewhere. The number of immigrants in any one group was relatively small and spread out spatially and temporally through the 1990s, though Hispanics in particular are currently exerting a cumulative visible effect. Immigrants sought jobs within the economically expanding larger society, rather than building a protective enclave. They often came as a family group, and targeted affordable housing in areas known to have good schools, following their income to even better districts in neighboring Gwinnett and north Fulton counties. Aging and relatively derelict central urban areas were thus avoided.

The linear highway frontage of apartments and retail strips configured for cars in the 1950s and 1960s converted at about the same time to extensions of public transportation lines such as MARTA and bus routes. On the other end of the income spectrum, global boom and bust restructuring left overseas capital accumulations looking for safer investment havens in the Sunbelt. Both California and Mexico were hit by economic slowdowns. Asia overproduced highly educated workers in some countries and lower skilled refugees fleeing communist dictatorships in others. Looking for jobs, Asians found opportunities in retail. A bipolar labor market absorbed workers at both skill levels.

Mediating institutions such as voluntary organizations sustained by federal funds and staffed by remnants of religious institutions (whose parishioners soon melted away into more distant suburbs), were ready to transition new immigrants. The economy and culture of the local host society was also open to new dollars and new energies. Decisions made by individual agents to lease space and provide loans to immigrants were made on an economic basis. The particular Asian immigrants were often those on whose behalf Americans had gone to war. From the need for investment money in a shrinking economy to the need for labor in a booming local economy, local opportunities somewhat resembled those in post-World War II Europe.

The spatial distinctiveness of Metro Atlanta's immigrant retail ribbon raises the question of regional development and timing. Further studies are needed to examine whether other Sunbelt boom towns attracted a similar influx of immigrants to fuel their economy and settle aging apartment and retail corridors in the wake of retreating whites migrating northward along suburban arterial roadways. The movement of immigrants from the port of initial entry in California to another economically booming Sunbelt city such as Atlanta needs further research. Geographers should continue to examine evolving sociospatial patterns as metropolitan areas experience demographic reconfiguration.

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