



# COLLISION & COEXISTENCE

*Buford Highway as a Locus of Articulated Social Relations*

ALEXANDER F. KRUPP



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*For Penn, always and forever.*



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#### AUTHOR'S NOTE:

*This is a multidisciplinary study which relies on qualitative methods, particularly first-person interviews. Any fault for an inaccuracy or contentious point lies with the author, and the author alone.*

頂好超級市場  
DINH HO MARKET OF ATLANTA

## PART 1: SETTING THE STAGE











## INTRODUCTION

*“Visible and tangible here in the lambent light of the setting winter sun, Atlanta makes a picture worth the keeping. And it reverses the cliché that to know is to love. Some of us love the unknowableness of it.”*

*- Celestine Sibley, Atlanta Journal Constitution columnist<sup>1</sup>*

MY FATHER MOVED TO A HOUSE JUST OFF BUFORD HIGHWAY, in DeKalb County, Georgia, when I was 11. We went to the farmers’ market up the road for groceries. I went to get my eyes checked at an ophthalmologist not far up from that. On special occasions, we would go to a Vietnamese place nearby with excellent goat curry. After class, I would go to a nearby coffee shop to study. This felt typical to me, and I never gave it a second thought until after I left home. When I did, I realized that it was not at all normal for a grocery store to have its Scandinavian section next to the Jamaican food. I also realized how unusual it was for a grocery to have those two things at all. My eye doctor spoke Chinese to most of his other patients. I have never seen goat curry on a menu anywhere else, and it is most certainly not normal for coffee shops in most places to have Chinese meat rolls. It dawned on me that the road I grew up on may not be the typical suburban American community.

Buford Highway runs through the intown suburbs of Atlanta, nestled in an interstitial zone between the glamorous high-rises of Buckhead, Midtown, and the commercial corridor of Interstate 85, a few miles to the northeast of

the central business district. **Figure 1** on the opposite page demonstrates this pictorially.

It is a wide road, even with seven lanes in some spots, heavily trafficked by pedestrians, cars, and the gray, lumbering, reticulated buses of the public transportation system. Just off the road's genesis outside of Lindbergh station is the Latin American Association, an organization which provides services and advocacy for local Latino populations. Heading outwards, one encounters a cornucopia of street signs, some of them readable to a native English speaker, some of them not; it is not uncommon to see five languages on one sign.

For people with eyes trained to expect this sudden burst of international character, the jumble of various cultures is normal, but otherwise it can be quite a jarring sight. There is a Zagat-rated Cuban restaurant just off the intersection with Clairmont Road in Chamblee. A little further up is a pho house that is open 24 hours a day. There is a pawn shop next to it, but the only way to tell, if the observer does not read Vietnamese, is from the flickering glow of the neon diamond in the window. Across the street from this is a Korean auto body shop and a video store. Keep going northeast and one is sure to hit all kinds of places, including groceries selling foods from every corner of the globe to people from every corner of the globe, giant dim sum houses that turn into hectic metropolises in their own right on Sunday mornings, and doctors' offices which cater to one ethnic group or another. It is a community of communities, unique in its diversity. It is understated, messy, organic, and bustling. This intensely multiethnic neighborhood, if it can rightly be called that, is located at the confluence of a multitude of communities and places. AJC staff writer Alan Sverdlik perhaps puts it best by stating "this unlikely street...is one of the few—if only—places in the Southeast where you can listen to a sermon in Korean, get tax advice in Vietnamese, and rent a Cantonese or Spanish video...(It) isn't quaint; it isn't charming...but for many of the thousands of immigrants who have streamed into Atlanta...the street is ground zero. It's home."<sup>2</sup>

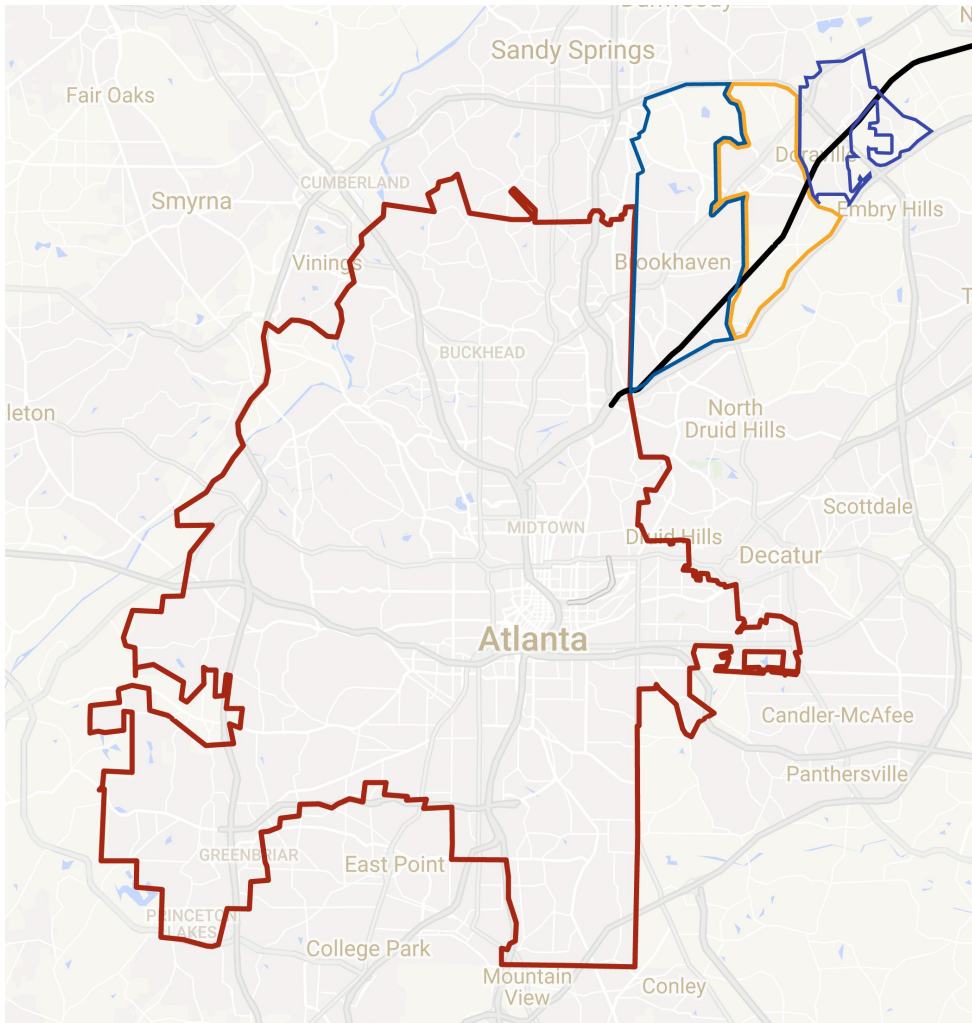


FIGURE 1: A MAP OF THE BOUNDARIES OF THE AFOREMENTIONED CITIES, WITH BUFORD HIGHWAY OUTLINED IN BLACK. THIS MAP IS INTERACTIVE ONLINE AT [G00.GL/404EFP](http://G00.GL/404EFP)

## LEGEND

- Atlanta city boundaries
- Brookhaven city boundaries
- Chamblee city boundaries
- Doraville city boundaries
- An 11-mile section of Buford Highway

## WHY BUFORD HIGHWAY

Studies of Atlanta have historically been dominated by fairly narrow-sighted reports on the dichotomy of race or tried and true urban issues like suburbanization, car culture, and urban decay. This is somewhat ironic as, since the mayoralty of Ivan Allen in the 1960's, Atlanta boosterism has been fairly singularly focused on becoming an "international city," culminating in its successful bid for the 1996 Summer Olympics. Even so, Atlanta has long been thought of as a biracial system. Scholars and laymen alike often think of the city in terms of two Atlantas: one white, one black. These ideas are rooted in romantic notions and convictions of what Atlanta ought to be. Joshi and Desai explain these notion-holders as perceiving the South "to be an exceptional space within and to be temporally asynchronous with the nation...reifying the dominant paradigm of framing race only through the binary terms of black and white..."<sup>3</sup> Whether exceptionalism is rooted in negative experiences of discrimination and repression or romanticized idealism fostered by works such as *Gone With the Wind*, Atlanta has always been a culturally and demographically bifurcated town. Schools, residential patterns, cultural institutions, and even the graves in historic Oakland Cemetery show an even and stark split between two cultural histories that have in reality always been interconnected.

This narrative, while very important to Atlanta's history and identity, is simply outdated. Jennifer Ho breaks down the phenomenon topically, arguing in relation to Asian immigrant experiences in Atlanta that "the South is an idea, I know. But then, so is the Orient. They are not places, but sites of elaborate mythologies, of longing, of profound feelings of repulsion and desire."<sup>4</sup> As Ho describes, Atlanta is not actually a binary system, even though the dominant narrative has long insisted that it must be so. Since the advent of the 20th century, demographic proportions have been increasingly altered by new groups from Vietnam, Korea, Mexico, and many other countries, much to the chagrin of the established social order that insisted on retaining a biracial system. Places like Buford Highway challenge this social order in earnest, "staking a claim," in Joshi's words, "to public space and pursuing cultural and political struggles against misrepresentation."<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this study, in keeping with that sentiment, is to muddle the idea of the “Two Atlantas” approach by highlighting an interstitial suburban area that has come to defy preconceived notions of communities generally and community in Atlanta specifically: Buford Highway. Buford Highway and its people show that the story of Atlanta is not as simple as black and white, and by giving it the academic treatment that has so long been afforded primarily to a biracial system, the narrative may hopefully become more representative. The fundamental purpose therefore is to discuss Buford Highway as a place, with all the attendant meaning ascribed to that word. Further, this is an attempt to explain how such a place with many different actors can create a powerful resonance of meaning, as opposed to the expected cacophonous randomness. This is important because Buford Highway is not only a diverse entity, but very much an organic place, while much placemaking in modern America is artificial. This is not to assume that artifice is inherently bad, but only to point out that Buford Highway is special for this reason. One need not look far for examples. Atlantic Station is a development on the west side of Midtown Atlanta. In her study of that area, Hankins explains place identity as “constructed through a complex social and economic negotiation among residents, retail corporations, city leaders, and investors.” That sounds like Buford Highway. Atlantic Station, however, aims to create this environment immediately, operating off the “perceived notion that people want identifiable places to consume.”<sup>6</sup>

Initially a steelworks in a relatively downtrodden area, Atlantic Station was reimagined in the mid-2000s as a gleaming grid of streets filled with retail establishments, all of it sitting above a multistory parking structure. There are several art pieces hearkening back to its past as a steel community, overshadowed by glass-clad skyscrapers and luxury boutiques. The developers of Atlantic Station deliberately attempted to create this place-identity to make their creation successful. **Figure 2** elucidates that idea. The triumphal arch looks very classical and old, but was actually finished in 2008 in a deliberate attempt to formulate a certain feeling about Atlantic Station. This has become the norm, in many ways. Buford Highway, on the other hand, exists in such a way naturally. Its identity as a place came as the communities



FIGURE 2: MILLENNIUM GATE, ATLANTIC STATION. AN EXAMPLE OF PLACE-IDENTITY FABRICATION

that occupy the space evolved. Buford Highway is important in this way. While developers and planners work tirelessly to create prefabricated places with unique identities, Buford Highway has that in spades without even trying. This being established, it is not only a fascinating melting pot, a locus of significant timeliness, and a subjectively excellent place to spend time, but it is also an important platform for understanding often underestimated realities about Atlanta and the South.

I aim to look at its past, its present, and its future: Where it came from and the challenges it faces today. No mistake should be made, there are challenges.

Gentrification and major questions of identity threaten to drastically affect the area, which makes investigation of the prospects for its future and the wider lessons this can teach imperative. Ultimately, it is my hope that this work can serve to complicate notions of what a community is and can be in a modern, globalized environment as well as a modern Southern American environment, and also serve to stimulate debate to that end through a case study into a fascinating, unique place.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper will proceed as straightforwardly as possible via a mixed-methods approach. First, the terms. There are hundreds of descriptions



and definitions of words like “community” and “place.” For anyone aiming to research such notions, an exploration of theoretical approaches to this conundrum is paramount in importance. Therefore, the first section is devoted to defining Buford Highway in terms of those ideas. What is community in the first place? What do people have to say about it? Further, how can it be applied theoretically to Buford Highway? In essence, this is an attempt to explain both the idea of Buford Highway as a locus of articulated social relations and the locus itself. This will be handled in the form of a literature review in which useful theory will be distilled from the works of important scholars in a diverse range of fields related to urbanism. The second section is an explanation of the social relations. It is a distillation of Buford Highway operates in the present day: Who lives there, works there, and has a say in what happens there. In other words, how has the information in section one manifested itself in the present? Research in this section will manifest as secondary research into the contextual realities of Atlanta and Buford Highway, utilizing a range of tools such as newspapers, statistics, and original scholarship.

The third section will be a discussion of the articulation, or how people and actors interact with the place itself, and how they feel about it. Research in this section stems from first-person primary interviews with a range of six key actors whom I have deemed form a cross-section of decision-makers and contributors to Buford Highway. Among these actors are the following individuals: Julio Penaranda is the property manager of Plaza Fiesta, a mall devoted to servicing the Latino communities. Victoria Huynh is the vice president of the Center for Pan-Asian Community Services, an organization which provides basic support for immigrant and refugee communities. Rebekah Morris is a teacher at Cross Keys High School and heavily involved in student advocacy at the majority-minority school. Susan Fraysse is a local citizen who sits on many community boards. Marian Liou is the founder of We Love BuHi, an organization devoted to advocacy and the building of a larger Buford Highway community. Finally, Donna Pittman and Shawn Gillen are the mayor and city manager, respectively, of Doraville, one of the local cities on Buford Highway. Such a method allows one to ascertain the

perspectives of major actors in their own words. Once establishing the basic nature of Buford Highway, it is important to learn about the challenges and possibilities that it faces. Hopefully, such narratives in juxtaposition can illuminate an overarching narrative in a new and honest way.

Mechanically, this final section uses the insight gained from interviews to build possible scenarios for Buford Highway's future and postulate on paths forward. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the road exists in a sort of interstitial zone, meaning that there are many actors tugging at it from many different sides, and gentrification is becoming a major question. In humanizing and defining Buford Highway as a real place, it can change from being a battleground of sorts and become more of a forum for envisioning desirable futures. This end goal is not entirely unlike the Mont Fleur scenarios, which was an exercise done by a South African team in 1992 in which the goal was to present representatives of various interests ranging from Nelson Mandela's African National Congress to the then-government of F.W. De Klerk with a range of possible scenarios for South Africa's future.<sup>7</sup> At the time, that future was by no means certain. Buford Highway is, of course, not South Africa, and its issues are not the same, but the basic idea of postulating an uncertain future through scenario building is a good one.

Lastly, it is by no means my intent to hide the fact that I have a personal history with the object of study. It is home to me. As such, much argument is informed by my own first-hand experience "in the field," as it were. The reader should therefore take into account my own personal bias towards this work and its conclusions.

## THEORY

### COMMUNITY

Before tackling any of these issues, it is important to weigh the concepts at play. People hear words like "community" and "place" and often have a fairly rigid and static definition of what those things mean, or just as often assume the terms to be commonsense notions generally undeserving of



investigation. People take these words at a certain face value, but the truth is that these are dynamic concepts that mean different things to different people. The range of ways in which they can be applied truly is endless. Therefore, when discussing such things, it is not enough to simply state what they “are.” It is more important to review relevant literature and come to an operational conclusion of what these seemingly basic words actually mean, especially when one of the key characteristics of the locale of study is its language diversity. To be clear, this is not an attempt to eliminate any wider meanings but rather an exercise to focus attention. In so doing, we can hopefully develop a more precise and targeted investigation into how these concepts are at play in and around Buford Highway.

## CORLETT: SEPARATING COMMUNITY AND COMMONALITY

Community is a term that gets bandied about with regularity. One will hear on the news of “the decline of our communities,” a new initiative to benefit an ethnic community, or the exploits of community activists, but what is a community, really? Is it a family? A group? A neighborhood? Merriam-Webster would say that a community is “a group of people who live in the same area” or “a group of people who have the same interests, religion, race, etc.”<sup>8</sup> William Corlett breaks down the word as having two etymological origins. *Communis* can mean “with unity.” It can also reasonably be interpreted as “with mutual service” or “reciprocal.”<sup>9</sup> More than baseline definition, however, he seeks to detach community from preconceived notions and his book *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance*, published in 1989, separates the idea of community from its traditional moorings. In his work, he argues that structure in community need not be planned a la Atlantic Station, but rather can and maybe should evolve accidentally. His theory emphasizes difference as the principal marker of meaning in society. In Corlett’s own words, “this book attempts to celebrate both community and difference.”<sup>10</sup> When examining Buford Highway, it is important to keep this in mind, as the social interactions therein are noteworthy precisely because they differ. Corlett’s work shows that the actors involved, diverse as they may be, need not act on a locus dissonantly.

Corlett struggles, as many have, to define community, but he emphasizes that a community does not have to be unified, arguing that a community of mutual service and interest is just as valid as a community of unity. Here, he differs from philosophers in the vein of Foucault, who argue that a community of mutual service exists “As a form of domination, or humiliation.”<sup>11</sup> What Corlett struggles with is the division between individualism and collectivism and how these two extremes can be reconciled to create a community. In a place like Buford Highway, where a shopkeeper may not speak the same language as his neighbor, these divisions are all the starker. Later, Corlett dives into that elusive word of community rather more directly. He argues that theorists often use community in a geographic sense to express ties of commonality; whether that idea is expansive or restrictive is up to the theorist.<sup>12</sup> Commonality, while a marker of community, is not necessarily determinative, and community exists more as a foundation for relations. He states: “people with nothing in common can register their pets in city hall, drive on state highways, or be fingerprinted by the federal government.”<sup>13</sup> While this is a very loosely related example, he makes the point that the argument that bonds of commonality exist as the determining factor of community is short-sighted. Theorists, in his view, are unduly obsessed with this core commonality.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Corlett defines community rather less specifically. He claims that it answers a question of tension between “short-term altruism and long-term self-interest.”<sup>15</sup> This can take many forms, commonality being one of them, but he also cites the idea of love.<sup>16</sup> Love can exist with very few bonds of commonality, inherent in the adage “opposites attract.”

In attempting to divorce community from commonality (or unity), Corlett does not aim to strip it of its powerful meaning, citing Michael Sandel’s theory that community is very powerful in a constitutive sense: “[people] conceive their identity—the subject and not just the object of their feelings and aspirations—as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part.”<sup>17</sup> Rather, Corlett advances a politics of difference as one of the keys to community. When different actors occupy a community (whatever that is), they negotiate through their differences to create what the other

writers referenced here define as a “place.” Corlett’s value to a study of Buford Highway, then, is transparent. While his work is generalizeable, one can learn from him that, contrary to much popular belief, a community does not have to be occupied by people who believe the same things or who act the same way. Indeed, commonality may even be a symptom of community rather than a cause. Rather, it is difference that foments community.

## SENNETT: AN ARGUMENT FOR DISORDER

Richard Sennett wrote *The Uses of Disorder* in 1970, arguing against restrictive ideas of community similarly to Corlett. His writing comes out of a highly volatile era, fresh off major riots in many American cities over some of the very differences that Corlett would argue can be positively used to create community rather than tear it down. Sennett operates on a similar premise, arguing that America’s nascent generations “have sensed in dense city life some possibility of fraternity, some new kind of warmth, that is now understood in the vague term “community.”<sup>18</sup> Sennett argues that much urban discord centers around the question of order, citing Franz Fanon’s theory that order presents a major problem for communities and that it would “destroy the feeling of closeness, of men wanting to share a better, more just life for all,” and that an over-ordering would cause people to be “pushed into private circles of security and eventually lost as revolutionaries.”<sup>19</sup>

Sennett describes cities (as a type of community) as “dense uncontrollable human settlement.”<sup>20</sup> He argues that this disorder, randomness, and organic nature is actually a positive influence on not only the development of communities, but on human nature itself. He accepts a definition of community less as a quantifiable entity and more as an idea or sense of being that can be attained. To him, it is an acceptance of diversity and disorder that “this generation has aimed for, vaguely and inchoately, in its search for “community.”<sup>21</sup> Sennett takes issue with developments like Atlantic Station, arguing that real community is neither neat nor ordered. He actually warns against such neatness, claiming that people find it very easy to order not just their own neighborhoods or towns, but through that, also their conceptions

of each other. It is very easy to band together in solidarity, to notice things that are different, and to shun them as antithetical to the way things ought to be. I suspect Sennett would view Buford Highway, a place where many different people from many different walks of life negotiate and coexist in a range of ways, to be more a community than most any area in Atlanta. Sennett's work shows, like Corlett's, that value in a community can come from differences in the same and perhaps even more profound ways than it can via commonalities. Sennett argues that cities exist as arenas for dialogue among different actors, emphasizing their "diversity and possibilities for complex experience" as very positive factors. Thus, Buford Highway's non-traditional nature can explain how it can be not just a community, but more evocative of a community's positive aspects than the traditional notions of such a thing

## BENDER: A WORKING DEFINITION FOR COMMUNITY

Corlett and Sennett set out to explain what community is not. It is not limited to a group of people who share many things in common and thus live and work in the same place with the same ideas. New York University historian Thomas Bender, however, attempts an explanation at what a community is, and argues that it would be a fallacy to tie notions of community to a set place. In his book *Community and Social Change in America*, he tracks down a working definition of community and investigates why people tend to tie the word to particular times and places. He asserts that there is a common narrative of loss when ideas of community are considered, and that "Modern Americans fear that urbanization and modernization have destroyed the community that earlier shaped the lives of men and women..."<sup>22</sup>

Most definitions of community attempted in a scholarly or even colloquial fashion view the concept statically: that the past featured community, which was good. Following that logic, if the concepts of the past and of community are to be linked, then the presence of community in the present is impossible and therefore, people look at community through nostalgia-colored glasses. He adds that most views on community are also tied to "a

particular locality.”<sup>23</sup> Bender argues that there is no reason why community has to be so vehemently tied down to these static concepts and that it, like everything else, grows and changes over time. Therefore, if one views the ideal community as a specific place in a specific past, of course there will be a sense of loss.

Buford Highway, however, is not static, nor is it merely a locale. It happens to be a place, but contains many units that may themselves be defined as communities, and its residents pull from all kinds of communities from all over the globe. Therefore, this thing that is Buford Highway does well to essentially prove Bender’s thesis. Instead of a community grown from a locality, it is more a locality grown from a multitude of communities crisscrossing and overlapping. He goes on to articulate in this vein that he considers community to be “best defined as a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds” that “may or may not be coterminous with a specific, contiguous territory.”<sup>24</sup> Moving forward, this will serve as a baseline working definition, and it does a good job of getting to the essence of community while liberating it from the confining notions to which it is often bound.

## PLACE

Communities are not static geographic locations, but dynamic and vibrant social entities that occupy a place. But “place,” of course, also merits definition. Tim Cresswell, a human geographer, explores the concept of place in a book that is quite aptly named *Place: An Introduction*. While Bender’s discussion of community largely transcended location, Cresswell attempts to discuss just what is meant by place, a term tied rather firmly to location. Place is a tricky concept that is both simple and complex. Most everyone knows what it is, but taken in different contexts, what it “is” changes, so the concept needs to be broken down. Cresswell makes a point to separate the notion of place from that of space. In his estimation, space can be any location. When that location takes on a personal meaning for an individual, it becomes a place. Place exists within space. He focuses on New York City as a case study:

“If we heard that two planes had flown into 40.46 degrees N, 73.58 degrees W it would not have quite the same impact as hearing that they had flown into New York, into Manhattan, into the Twin Towers.”<sup>25</sup> Going off of that notion, he states “This is the most straightforward and common definition of place—a meaningful location.”<sup>26</sup> Further, this concept of location exists mainly as a “material setting for social relations.”<sup>27</sup>

Does place depend on location? Not necessarily, per Cresswell, but the two concepts are closely related. He also stresses that place is a dynamic concept that can change over time. To explain, he focuses on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. That area has been a place for many years, but the nature of the place has changed dramatically depending upon who puts meaning into it. Whether it exists as the center of immigrant tenement housing or as a beat writer’s haven, the actors involved in the place actively rewrite its meaning. Buford Highway, with its many immigrant communities, is analogous. The Cambodian donut shop and the predominantly Latin American high school rewrite the meaning of Buford Highway as they evolve. The location itself is a stage for that.<sup>28</sup> So, in Cresswell’s estimation, a place is a location where community happens.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Having tentatively defined both community and place, the task remains to put the two together. In his book, Cresswell mentions Doreen Massey, a British geographer who makes efforts to do this in her essay “Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place.” Massey concerns herself with issues of globalization and progress, challenging notions that globalization is equivalent to homogenization. She focuses on something called “time-space compression” which, in her words, relates to “the geographical stretching out of social relations...and to our experience of all of this.”<sup>29</sup> She argues for an expansion of debate on this topic. Globalization has changed the way people interact and communicate with each other. Therefore, as geography becomes less and less of a constraint on relations, one’s sense of place and its relation to location also becomes less tied down to a fixed notion. Complex and fluid social relations in

the modern world are too broad to be explained by static notions of capital. She goes on to explain that these social relations which encompass our conception of place are situated in a power geometry within which “different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections.”<sup>30</sup> She critiques most western thought as ignoring this fluid notion of relationships and focusing on static concepts of place as a “source of stability and identity”. This creates western conceptions of place as reactionary and “sanitized and introverted obsessions with ‘heritage.’”<sup>31</sup>

Instead, Massey argues for a global-local context, directly against the idea that places have essential identities. She argues that places are dynamic, featuring multiple identities, and implores her readers to examine real places and to observe that, while each place is unique, it is “absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares.”<sup>32</sup> Coming to the conclusion of her argument, Massey states that **“the uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences, and understandings...”** and that this is both a local and a global phenomenon.

Each of these authors creates their own definitions, but they are all related and, more to the point, can all be related specifically to Buford Highway. Corlett’s theory of communities of difference and Sennett’s of disorder are there. Bender’s conception of complex social relations is there. Cresswell’s conception of place as “where life happens” is also there. Massey combines all of these by framing those complex social relations defined as the essence of community in a place. She is able to distill from the more theoretical ideas of the other authors a more workable definition for the purposes of research. Buford Highway is a location, but it is also a locus of articulated social relations on both a local and global scale. The people who immigrated there all have their own connections to their own places of origin and, in a way, that place came over with them. This is especially so when one considers phenomena in which people move to a place because they have relationships with communities that exist there. In that sense, one can see a Vietnamese pho house as a structural vendor for food, or as an enclave of Vietnamese culture which can welcome



not only people who wish to experience that, but also Vietnamese people who need a community to anchor to. It is a slice of that community, and this can be observed over and over again within the context of the larger place of Buford Highway. The complex social relations there are, of course, very clearly ethnic at times, but not always. There are family relations (many businesses are family-owned.) There are relations between governments and the people who live there. To make matters more complex, there are multiple municipal jurisdictions which overlap with Buford Highway, and each has its own agenda, just like every business, every family, and every person. It may be messy, but that is precisely why Buford Highway is an excellent case study in the task to complicate preconceived notions of community and place.

## A NOTE ON INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

There are many ways to bring a study of something like Buford Highway to life. Community and place are complicated. Their study crosses traditional disciplines and invites diverse ideas. Concepts and theories are important to establish a base, but theory without application remains just that. Cresswell hints at this with the statement that “when it comes to place, life is fieldwork,” showing that studies like this are inherently based on experience in addition to theory.<sup>33</sup> Ethnography as a field is broad, but ethnographic methods, such as first-person interviews, are generally more hands-on, embracing fully the adage of walking a mile in another’s footsteps. In his book, *Being Ethnographic*, Raymond Madden discusses this concept. He describes it as a “study of the particulars of everyday human existence” and establishes the study as highly important and purposeful in a context in which “global flows have triggered renewed localized identifications as humans strive to find their particular place in a rapidly changing world order.”<sup>34</sup>

The concept of ethnography as a personal study of people is important here because the place in question is one made up of people, all different kinds of people with different kinds of interests. While the discipline of ethnography seems like a very separate field from the theoretical one I have outlined, it can be a useful tool, as elements of ethnographic, face-to-face study show one the



real context of what is being studied. With so many groups of people essentially cohabiting the same place, it is vitally important to understand where they are coming from on a basic level. That entails ethnographic thinking, but not necessarily the classical type where a researcher can embed themselves within a culture for years at a time in order to come to qualitative conclusions about a place. No, the aim here is to borrow certain aspects of ethnographic methodology: using key informant interviews to evaluate Buford Highway as a place. I have discussed interlocking social relationships as being key to explaining this topic, and interview-based efforts are a good way to figure out just what those relationships are and how they work, especially when there is a rather severe dearth of qualitative research that exists concerning Buford Highway or how it fits in Atlanta. To demonstrate how this approach can augment theory, I quote an exchange I had recently with an American whose parents are first-generation immigrants from Thailand. I asked her if, in the context of Buford Highway, she thought community could be defined in ethnic terms, and I believe that her entire response deserves quotation.

*I had defined it as people who spoke the same language, identified with the same kind of customs, celebrated the same holidays. It manifested for me at the temple...That was the one place where we all met up. And we would have things at other peoples' houses during the holidays. But that was like, special occasions. When I was younger and we went to Buford Highway to shop, we would run into other Thai people, or go to the one Thai grocery store. At the time I thought it was strange because Alpharetta was still relatively white, not a lot of Asian people, so it was kind of separate for me, like the community I had on the weekends vs. the white suburban life I had on the weekdays. I don't think I saw it as ethnic because I thought it was normal. I didn't understand or realize that other people didn't shop like this or have separate cultures or languages or holidays.<sup>35</sup>*

As this shows, a contextual understanding of how people interpret the place where they live, even if only as supplemental evidence, can be powerful. It serves as an important reminder that if we are to discuss places in spaces, we must also discuss the people who make those spaces the places that they are. In this exchange, one can see how Buford Highway serves as a sort of locus for ethnic communities, even if some do not actually live directly at that

site. The interviewee lived in Alpharetta, a predominantly white suburb to the north of Atlanta, but attached a sense of community to Buford Highway. This is fairly strong evidence bolstering the idea that community is anything but static. Key informant interviews of people who have a real stake and powerful role in shaping events are an efficient and illuminating method by which to bridge the gap between the theories above and the realities below.

In another interdisciplinary vein, this work's unabashedly qualitative nature does not mean shirking quantitative data. Massey, in her piece, also discusses movement being key in modern, globalized communities, and Atlanta is no exception. Indeed, the concept is critical to the idea of Buford Highway as a type of community that is made up to a significant degree of immigrants. Statistics demonstrate this quite well and help to explain not just the fact that Buford Highway is a community, but also how it exists as such. As of 2016, census data indicates that 5.7 million people call metro Atlanta home, another reason why exclusive study of the central city misses the big picture.<sup>36</sup> This also demonstrates an increase of almost 2 percent since 2014. Closer inspection of demographic data is even more revealing. In 2013, the Atlanta Regional Commission compiled data indicating that the total foreign-born population of metro Atlanta grew by 69 percent in the 2000s.

Gwinnett County, which shares part of the admittedly vague bounds of Buford Highway, features a foreign-born population of over 25 percent.<sup>37</sup> DeKalb County, which contains most of the area known as Buford Highway, has experienced an increase in the foreign-born population of over 300 percent since 1990. The Regional Commission also compiled a map featuring the locations of residence of the foreign-born population and it is difficult to miss the intensely heavy clustering in the vicinity of Buford Highway.<sup>38</sup>

These statistics help to fill in the factual interstices of argument. The numbers tell a story, and that story is very pertinent to the bigger story of Buford Highway. They literally show where people have been, where they are, and where they are not, but more generally demonstrate where and how the community came to be and how it is changing. For example, in *Past Trends and Future Prospects of the American City: The Dynamics of Atlanta*, the authors

juxtapose three demographic maps showing the concentration of various ethnic groups.<sup>39</sup> These maps show that different groups have different residential patterns, and patterns say something about the context in which those groups exist. Looking at such representations over time shows that the community is a fluid and constantly evolving thing.

Clearly, studying an area like Buford Highway in many ways requires a hybridized and creative approach. Because the area has been summarily neglected by prior research, one cannot fall back on a singular method targeted to a relevant topic. Much work on Buford Highway has really been incidental in nature, relegated to body paragraphs and footnotes. Through a multidisciplinary approach that emphasizes secondary research, first-person interviews, and data, this no longer need be the case. Further, once this approach is established, it can be further operationalized to focus on issues. For example, as a place with many interrelated groups, Buford Highway serves as a sort of inadvertent forum for many convergent and divergent interests. A restaurant owner, the metro bus service, and the city of Doraville may and often do have conflicting ideas on what to do with Buford Highway. As growth reaches appreciable levels in the wake of the 2008 recession, the decisions on those conflicting ideas are coming, so a project like this is necessarily timely.

Buford Highway is a crossroads at a crossroads. As the dynamics of Atlanta change, more attention is being paid to the area and its opportunities. Development projects have sprung up in surrounding areas, and proposals for “redevelopment” on Buford Highway itself are plentiful. As this research unfolds, the information presented can serve as a baseline source of information from which the various actors, interests, and players who inhabit and use Buford Highway can operate to generate mutual understanding based on good research. Hopefully, this can foment a “politics and discourse of sustainability,” a concept discussed by Yanarella and Levine in their study on best practices and the benefits of multiple scenario building.<sup>40</sup> As research progresses further, I endeavor to explain Buford Highway as a place existing in the larger fabric of Atlanta in an intelligible way using the tools which I have elucidated here.

## PART 2: CONTEXT









## ATLANTA AND BUFORD HIGHWAY

THE WORD “ATLANTA” HAS THE DISTINCT POTENTIAL to be misleading in a purely geographic sense. The word specifically describes the city of Atlanta, located in central Fulton County and home to about 450,000 people. In common parlance, however, Atlanta is a much larger entity composed of a multitude of jurisdictions and encompassing at least 9 counties. Perhaps Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt put it best when they explained Atlanta’s “prevailing laissez-faire market economy-driven approach to growth.” They argue that this approach resulted in a highly decentralized system in which “comprehensive county-level service providers, known as urban county units, emerged.”<sup>41</sup> It is in this decentralized environment that Buford Highway exists, extending outward from Atlanta all the way to the city for which it is named.

**Figure 3** is a large-scale representation of Buford Highway that shows the city-level jurisdictions it passes through in a 10-mile stretch in the inner suburbs. The innermost city is Brookhaven, followed by Chamblee, and finally Doraville. The Atlanta system explained by Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt, then, creates a scenario in which Buford Highway interacts with many independent jurisdictions, each with its own independent agenda.

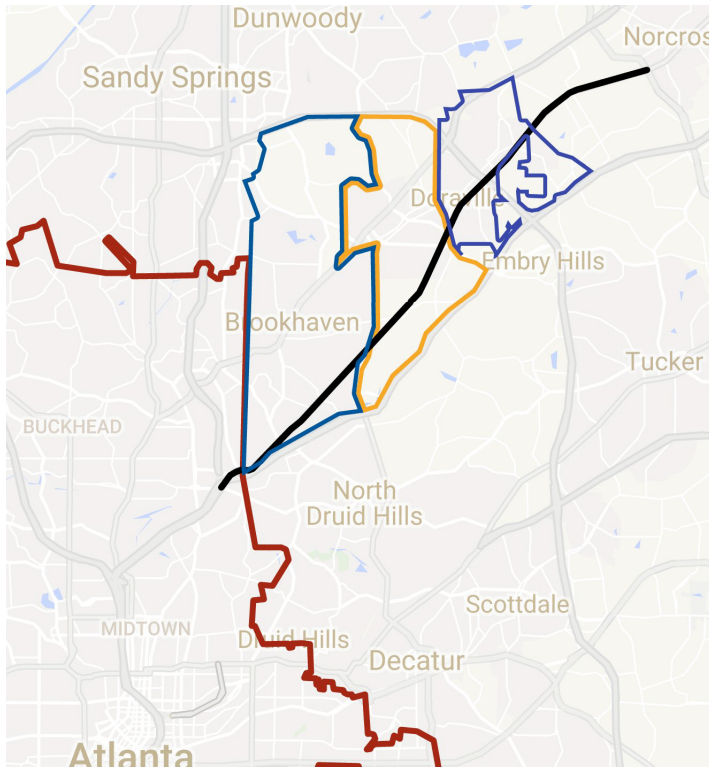


FIGURE 3: A LARGE-SCALE LOOK OF THE CITIES OF BROOKHAVEN (BLUE), CHAMBLEE (YELLOW), AND DORAVILLE (PURPLE), WITH BUFORD HIGHWAY OUTLINED IN BLACK.

To fully grasp Buford Highway, then, it is also necessary in this sense to explore its environs.

Atlanta is a fairly young city. It was only incorporated in the 1840s. It exists because, geographically, it is at the perfect spot for a railroad to loop around the Appalachian Mountains and extend into the west. Eventually, as more railroads were built, linking Atlanta to Birmingham, Macon, Augusta, and Chattanooga, the city became a transportation hub and has been ever since. The city itself, however, has remained geographically small, and many smaller cities grew and prospered around it without being directly in it. There have historically been several initiatives to incorporate a metro-wide



government, largely because of the desire for a wider tax base. Since the mid-20th century, however, largely white suburbanites have been steadfastly opposed to being governed by the central city, and the African American community in the city has been none too keen on losing the political power they fought so hard to achieve. This phenomenon led to Atlanta being the hub of a vast network of smaller jurisdictions.

## CHAMBLEE AND DORAVILLE

Before the post-World War II boom years, the cities surrounding Atlanta operated in a relative state of independence, always economically and culturally tethered to the main city but encompassing economies and cultures all their own. Two cities in particular grew up along Buford Highway and their histories contextualize its own: Chamblee and Doraville. The map above demonstrates the relationship between those cities and Buford Highway geographically but, as Brookhaven is a new city, much of Buford Highway's history as an area overlaps with these two. Both cities, like Atlanta, find their genesis in railroads, and Chamblee specifically at the intersection of the 'Buck' rail line and the Air Line Belle, which extended from Atlanta to Toccoa, Georgia, on the South Carolina border. Before its incorporation in 1907, Chamblee's name reflected this heritage: Roswell Junction. It is important to note this industrial origin of the economy. The city, like much of DeKalb county, was not a traditional patrician, agricultural area.

After incorporation, the area was known as a local center for milling and dairy production until World War I, when it became the home of a major military base. This began an "era of drastic change and growth for the city and surrounding area."<sup>42</sup> The economy continued to boom and was only moderately hampered by the Depression Years, a phenomenon Vivian Price Saffold has attributed to strong church organizational structure at that time. After World War II, General Motors installed an assembly plant in Doraville, which directly impacted the growth of the nascent Buford Highway. Prior to the plant's arrival, Buford Highway was "a dirt road when it was designated Georgia State Road 13 in 1932. In 1936, it was paved 20 feet wide with concrete

at a cost of \$2,300.”<sup>43</sup> Herman Mason Jr. relates that it was due to the GM plant that “developers later built complexes along Buford Highway.”<sup>44</sup> In 1965 alone, Chamblee granted a record number of building permits (\$1,176,000) for new development, like an addition to the Kodak plant and 3 new apartment buildings.<sup>45</sup> The now-demolished plant’s impact can be felt just by walking through the neighborhoods around it and observing road names like Belair Court. This growth and change was not necessarily met with open arms by the entire community, however, as Saffold recounts a construction situation in the postwar years: “Mayor Count Kellum had already issued a permit to build a new “motor court” on New Peachtree Road. Citizens claimed that undesirable elements would make use of the cabins.”<sup>46</sup>

## IMMIGRATION AND BUFORD HIGHWAY

The crux of Buford Highway’s opportunities and issues today center around ideas of growth and change, but as local history shows, this is nothing new to the area. Historically, those sources of growth came from shocks such as a world war or a major economic development. After the 1965 Immigration Act, however, a new source of growth emerged that has continued to shape Buford Highway economically and culturally to this day: immigration. A salient factor in Atlanta generally, ethnic diversity’s nature has changed over time. Consider for example this entry from an 1877 guidebook:

*This metropolitanism is the result of public spirit and the mixed elements of its population. Public spirit fosters every source of increased population or business, and the varied classes and nationalities into which its people are divided, creates sympathy and kindliness to all men of whatever name or pursuit. The stranger, on his part, finds congenial occupation and society. The population contains representatives of many nations: English, Irish, German, Italian, and French being the most numerous. A nervous energy permeates all classes of the people, and all departments of trade, and the spirit of enterprise never sleeps.*<sup>47</sup>

These immigrants were all white, however, and state and local leaders had a vested interest in keeping it that way. Clarence Stone points out,

though, that there was a marked shift in local politics in the mid-20th century and Atlanta, with its progress first mindset, became more amenable to change.<sup>48</sup> Thus, after 1965, a large influx of people from Asia and Latin America began to change metropolitan Atlanta's landscape. Joshi and Desai explain that, in relation to Asian-born population specifically, "the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation-Houston, Atlanta, and Dallas-Fort Worth- had growth rates of approximately 25 percent which accounted for over 50 percent of the growth in Texas and Georgia." Immigration is particularly concentrated on Buford Highway in Chamblee and Doraville, of which the culture derives from a multitude of international influences.<sup>49</sup> A concentrated, metropolitan agglomeration of immigrant populations on a large scale like this is unusual on a national level. All relevant statistical information on Atlanta suggests that international immigration into areas like Buford Highway has historically far outstripped the city proper and continues to do so in the 21st century.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 4** illustrates this point. It shows the central counties of metro Atlanta. The dark grey swaths in the rightmost two counties represent Asian populations in the area. The second county from the right is DeKalb, and the darkest area in DeKalb constitutes Buford Highway.<sup>51</sup> **Figure 5** is the same representation, but of the Hispanic population. Note the same concentrations on Buford Highway, outside the central city.<sup>52</sup>

Demographic studies by the Atlanta Regional Commission show that a very large number of Atlanta's foreign-born population lives in the Northeast part of the metro area, specifically the Buford Highway area. Ethnic groups that do not fit the mold of Caucasian or African American cluster disproportionately along this area, following with a striking consistency the path demarcated by Buford Highway. Clayton, Hewitt, and Hall, in their demographic study of ethnicity in Atlanta, agree with that sentiment, concluding that "large numbers of Atlanta's newer immigrants have settled in the Chamblee area...these trends reflect the gentrification that has taken root in the city of Atlanta proper, which has compelled the newer immigrant groups, especially Hispanics, to seek more affordable housing in the city's suburbs where the housing stock is older."<sup>53</sup> Time has shown this trend, in

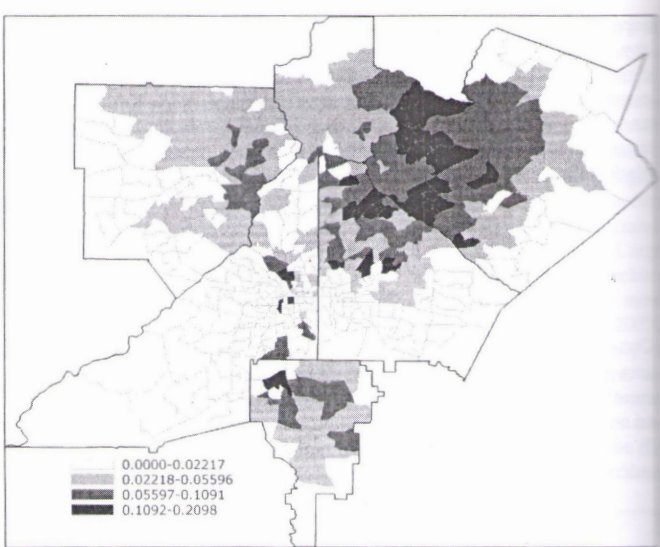


Figure 10.3. Asian Population, 2000

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF ATLANTA ASIAN POPULATION, 2000. COUNTIES ARE, CLOCKWISE FROM THE UPPER RIGHT: GWINNETT, DEKALB, CLAYTON, FULTON, COBB. BUFORD HIGHWAY IS IN THE UPPER RIGHT QUADRANT OF DEKALB.

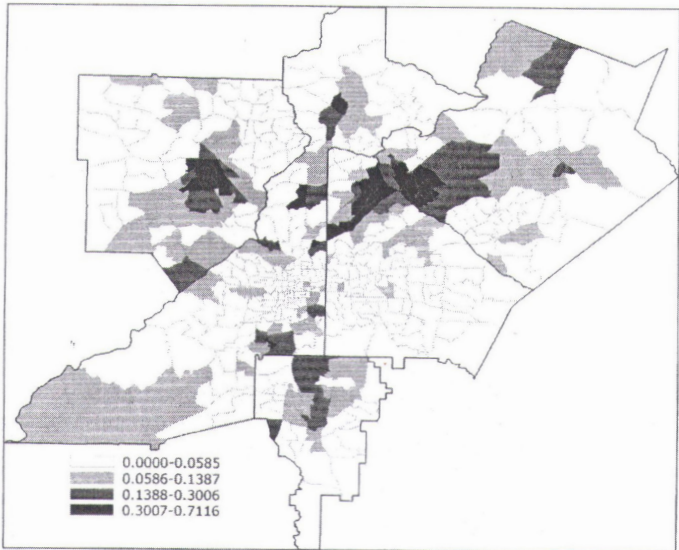


Figure 10.2. Hispanic Population, 2000

FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF ATLANTA'S LATINO POPULATION, 2000

fact, to be accelerating. DeKalb County's Latino and Asian populations have increased several hundred percent from their pre-2000 levels and Gwinnett County registered as a majority-minority county as of 2016. According to the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta's immigrant population has grown 472% over the last 25 years and the "majority of these residents have settled in the northern and eastern portions of the region."<sup>54</sup> Buford Highway is not only a microcosm of this phenomenon, but also the locus at the heart of a new "New South."

Why Buford Highway has managed to find its own cultural, geographic, and economic niche in Atlanta is up for debate. It is interesting to note, however, armed with knowledge of Atlanta's retail-based placemaking trends, that Buford Highway occupies not only a figurative niche, but a literal one as well. In addition to considerations made by Clayton, Hewitt, and Hall above concerning reverse suburbanization and gentrification, there are more historical reasons for Buford Highway. There are four major interstates in Atlanta. I-75 comes in from the Northwest and extends Southeast. I-85 comes from the Northeast and goes Southwest. I-20 cuts transversely across the city in an East-west pattern. Finally, I-285 forms a 66-mile loop around the city. When a map of retail growth is transposed over the top of the interstate map, striking similarities emerge. Retail establishments mirror the interstates in a fairly consistent pattern. Atlanta's largest malls exist at major interstate junctions. Buford Highway is in a crux between interstates 85 and 285, roughly equidistant from major malls at Perimeter, Lenox, North DeKalb, and Norcross. The relative economic and logistical importance of these roads and nodes has allowed Buford Highway to fly somewhat under the radar, close enough to major economic conduits so as not to warrant overdevelopment, keeping property values comparatively low in the process. **Figure 6** demonstrates this phenomenon in relation to office parks. Each black dot is an office park, and each black line is an interstate. The interstate heading out up and to the right (east) is I-85. Buford Highway runs parallel to it directly to the north.

In addition, the area is sufficiently close to the central city that suburbanization cleared out much wealthier white competition for property.

Such a process was also aided by Buford Highway's location alongside but not within the central downtowns and wealthier subdivisions of Chamblee and Doraville.

This combination of factors led Buford Highway to be highly attractive to entrepreneurs and to immigrants. They could open a business at comparatively low cost and, if it were to be profitable, would serve as an anchor for migration of families and community groups. Restaurants were a logical manifestation of that process. It was something that people knew how to do and was marketable. Modern Buford Highway is a result of 50 years of that process. In short, Buford Highway's status as an inner suburban area with economic opportunity and low levels of competition until recently has made it an ideal ground for fostering growth of new communities. Gallagher summarizes this phenomenon as being unique to the region: "Typical immigrant groups have settled in inner city neighborhoods (but)...Latino migration in the Southeast has been characterized by settlement in counties that the census and demographers define as suburban."<sup>56</sup> On Buford Highway, this in-migration was facilitated by Bernard Halpern, a developer who owned a large amount of property along the road. A Korean entrepreneur bought a place from Halpern and, to the developer's surprise, the store he started was successful. Soon, his relatives joined him and formed the roots of a Korean community that would grow exponentially through the next half century.<sup>57</sup> Pulitzer Prize-winning Vietnamese American author Viet Thanh Nguyen explains how this process often occurred in such nascent immigrant communities in a personal anecdote:

*There was a big Vietnamese community in San Jose because the weather was good. ...what happened was through their personal connections, they started to send a signal out that California was a good place to live...and Vietnamese people who had been scattered all over the country by deliberate government policy in order to encourage assimilation, many of them heard that message and came to California and to other places like it...When we fled...the person that we had fled with was a very good friend of my mother's, a single woman who was an excellent businesswoman. She made it to San Jose. She opened possibly the first Vietnamese grocery store there and she told my mom, you know, that they definitely needed*



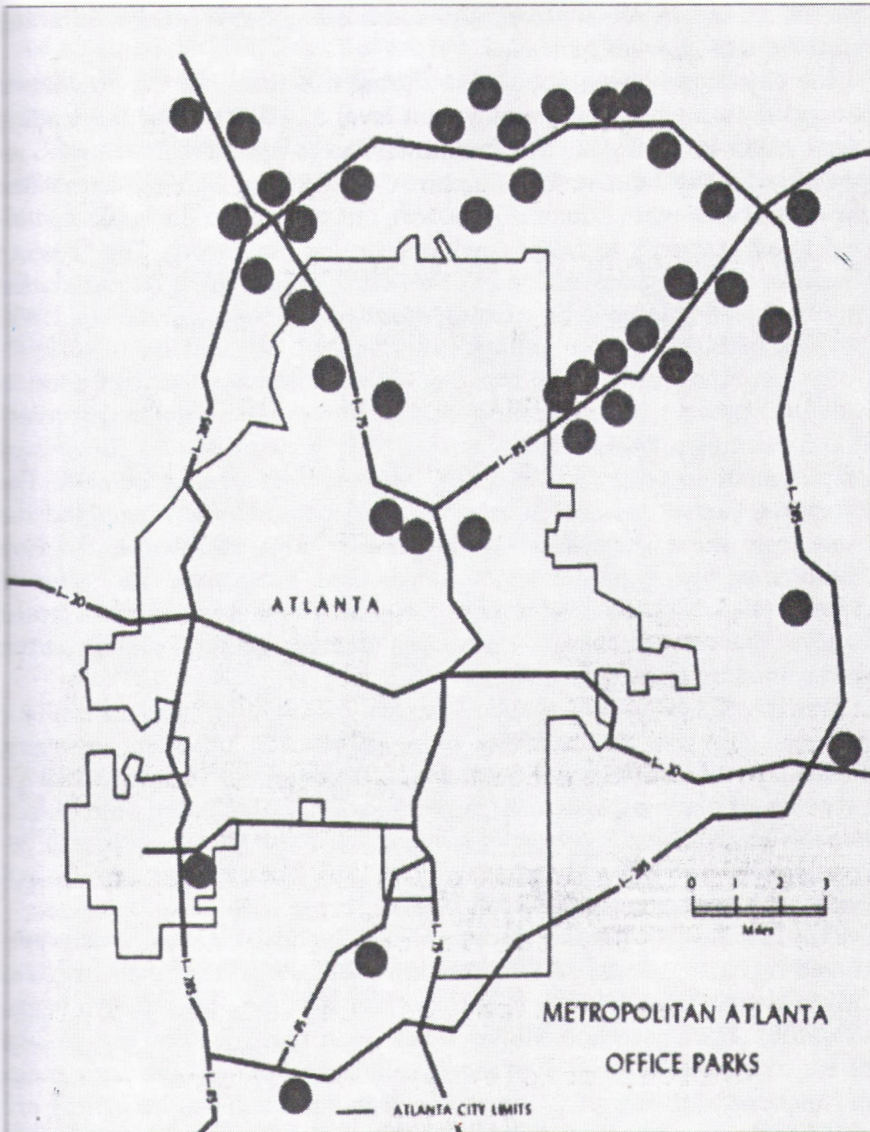


Figure 6.7. The pattern of office parks in Atlanta revealed in this 1970 map shows the close correspondence of their locations along the radial freeways and the I-285 perimeter highway. Note the paucity of office parks on the Southside.



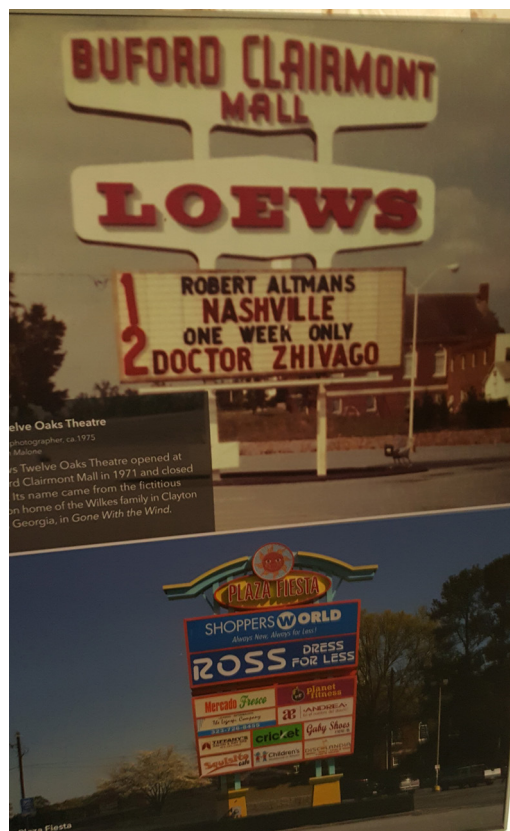


FIGURE 7: JUXTAPOSITION OF PLAZA FIESTA SIGNAGE FROM THE 1970S TO THE PRESENT DAY.

*to come to San Jose to just have a better economic opportunity and that's why we went. And we went and worked for this friend in her grocery store and within a few months or maybe a year, we (my parents) opened their own Vietnamese grocery store not far away.<sup>58</sup>*

Similar patterns emerged among other immigrant groups for similar reasons and, just like the World Wars and the GM plant had done in years prior, this pattern brought significant changes to the local area, particularly after Atlanta gained official status as a federal refugee city in the 1970s. Everything accelerated. As AJC staff reporter Elizabeth Kurylo explained in 1998, “no master plan dictated the change. The corridor became international because of the individual decisions of hundreds of entrepreneurs (at least 700) who often work 14-hour

days with no time off, borrowing from relatives and friends to expand their small businesses.”<sup>59</sup>

Representative examples of the changes Buford Highway experienced in the 1960s and after are abundant. One exists just north of the road's intersection with Clairmont Road in Chamblee, at Plaza Fiesta. In 1968, it was simply known as “Buford-Clairmont Mall” and was nothing special as far as malls go. As immigration picked up, however, the “typical suburban shopping center,” according to the Atlanta History Center, “underwent several changes as the neighborhoods around it welcomed new residents.”<sup>60</sup> It became an outlet mall, then an Asian-inspired mall and, finally, developers realized that “it was just a matter of time before the Hispanic community

needed a community center.”<sup>61</sup> Now, “more than 280 stores offer a wide range of distinctive goods and services...merchants cater to a multicultural community...some stores offer high-quality Latin American products scarce even in their countries of origin.”<sup>62</sup> **Figure 7** is a comparison of the original site to what it looks like now. Plaza Fiesta is a fully fledged international mall primarily serving Buford Highway’s immigrant communities from Latin America.<sup>63</sup>

Another example, just up the road, is Oriental Square Mall, established in 1997. Orient Center, Little Saigon, Pung Mie Plaza, Asian Square, and many other developments sprang up as well. Asian square, which would previously have been a nondescript strip mall is, true to its name, filled with small businesses owned and operated by Asian immigrants.<sup>64</sup> According to Laura and Ken Barre, Taiwanese backers were also responsible for one of Atlanta’s first Buddhist temples at this site.<sup>65</sup> **Figure 8** is an image of Orient Center’s signage, which is typical of any of these developments.<sup>66</sup>

This explosion of economic institutions is mirrored by residential patterns, as Kurylo reports that “the census tract that contains DeKalb-Peachtree Airport (along Buford Highway in Chamblee), had more than 40 percent Asian and Hispanic residents in 1990,” with those numbers continuing to grow. When Kurylo authored her report in 1998, she recorded that almost 60 percent of Chamblee children

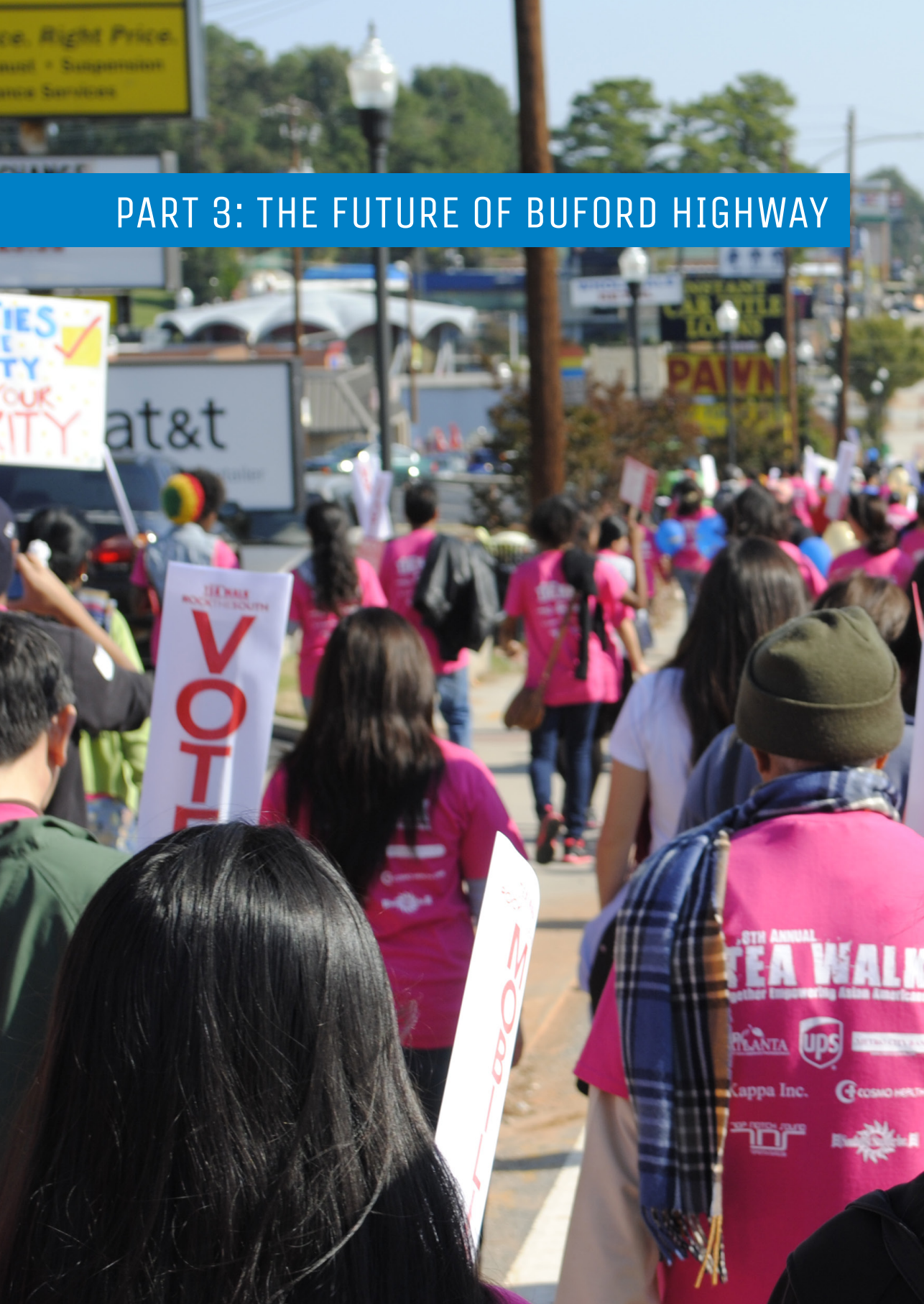


FIGURE 8: ORIENT CENTER SIGNAGE IN 2017

belonged to ethnic minorities.<sup>67</sup> Cheryl Crabb and Charles Davidson of the Atlanta Business Chronicle note that the rapidly growing international community in Buford Highway, “compared with established ones in cities such as New York and Los Angeles, blends Asian and Hispanic businesses and people. That sets it apart from other cities, where different ethnic groups tend to establish distinct neighborhoods...”<sup>68</sup> At present, Buford Highway is a massive jigsaw puzzle of identities and its nature as an undisputed crossroads of identity can inform our larger notions of the same idea on a broader level. Clayton, Hewitt, and Hall conclude that “one thing seems agreed upon by all residents, despite some resentments of the past and struggles for well-being in the present: they love Atlanta.” With that sentiment in mind, we press on.







## PART 3: THE FUTURE OF BUFORD HIGHWAY









## BUFORD HIGHWAY TODAY

THE OFFICIAL EMBLEM OF THE CITY OF ATLANTA IS A PHOENIX. This is a metaphorical representation of the city's own experience rising from literal ashes to become the metropolis it is today. Back during the building boom of the 1980s and early 90s, however, many joked that the symbol instead ought to be a crane. The city and its environs have seemingly found themselves in a similar position today. Almost a decade out of the recession of 2008, there is a growing demand for retail, housing, and office space throughout the metro area. A new, \$1.5 billion football stadium is slated to open in June, 2017. A luxury condominium that would be the second tallest in the city has been approved in Midtown. Development is also occurring on a smaller level, however and this is evident in the areas around and, increasingly, on Buford Highway. In Chamblee, a Whole Foods Market is opening, accompanied by a mixed-use shopping center. Just down the street, Olmsted Chamblee, a

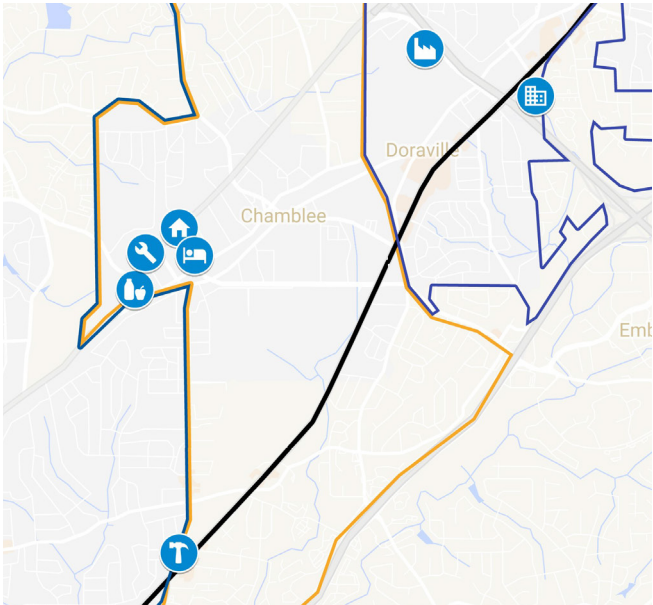


FIGURE 9: DEVELOPMENTS FORMING AROUND BUFORD HIGHWAY

ICON/LINE	SITE	INFORMATION
	Buford Highway	
	City of Brookhaven	
	City of Chamblee	
	City of Doraville	
	5587 Buford Highway NE, Doraville GA 30340	Site of Nexus BuHi, a mixed-use development in the works across the street from the farmers' market
	Former GM Plant, Doraville, 30340	Assembly development planned for the old GM plant. Would include retail, office, residential, and a movie studio
	5195 Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Chamblee, GA 30341	Olmsted Chamblee, a luxury apartment complex which will soon open down the street from Chamblee High School.
	5001 Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Chamblee, GA 30341	Whole Foods Market will anchor a new mixed-use development across the street from Lowes.
	3476 Clairmont Road, Atlanta, GA 30319	Originally a low-income apartment complex that was torn down. Will now become a luxury apartment complex called Skyland Brookhaven. Across the street from Plaza Fiesta and many Latino-owned businesses.
	4613 Chamblee Tucker Road, Chamblee, GA 30341	Currently an empty lot across the street from the Chamblee MARTA station. Slated to become Trackside Chamblee, a residential development.
	5102 Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Chamblee, GA 30341	Formerly a wooded area adjacent to Keswick Park in Chamblee. In process of being reconstructed into a large mixed-use development called Parkview on Peachtree.

luxury apartment complex, is almost ready for its first residents. For some time, these developments have grown and changed the landscape of northeast Atlanta, but now, Buford Highway itself must grapple with the prospect of redevelopment.

The city of Brookhaven, newly incorporated, aims to capitalize on this prospect. A February 2017 article cited city officials' ideas for "opportunity zones," which "offer tax credits of up to \$3,500 per job that a business wants to bring into the area." City officials were quoted saying that "this is pristine ground and we have to create the standards by which we can get the quality development we are demanding."<sup>69</sup> They need not look far for examples of development, though.

As previously stated, the Doraville GM plant played a major role in the area's development. It closed in 2008 and has since been demolished. A new project, titled the Assembly, has been in the works for some time. Spearheaded by a group called Integral, the development will feature retail, office space, housing, and restaurants anchored by a film production studio. This project is a long-term one, requiring a massive amount of funds in the neighborhood of \$1.5 billion.<sup>70</sup> If it does get built, it will undoubtedly drastically change the landscape of Buford Highway, which it would abut. Another major project in the works for Buford Highway is called Nexus, which would be located at the site of an old Kmart across the street from the Buford Highway Farmers' Market. Nexus's developers advertise it as "the very best of BuHi."<sup>71</sup> It will feature mixed-use developments, ranging from retail and shopping to residences and assisted living. Its style is designed to appeal to millennials moving in from the suburbs, and it is set to open in 2018. The interesting thing about Nexus, though, is that they are changing their marketing to a distinctly more international flavor. This shows that the developers attach certain meanings to the location of Buford Highway, which is evocative of an established identity. **Figure 9** shows just a few of the developments that are under construction or have been approved on and around Buford Highway. These developments present a severe social dilemma. They increase revenues and economic opportunities, while at the same time raising local prices. As previously stated, many of the businesses

on Buford Highway are privately owned by immigrant families, and rising prices may force them to leave. The branding changes at Nexus, however, do at least show that people are becoming aware of Buford Highway's unique attributes. Good or bad, though, redevelopment is going to change things.

Another issue is that of education. There are two public high schools in the immediate vicinity of Buford Highway, as well as one private Catholic school. The way the district is set up, however, is uneven. Zoning for Cross Keys High School includes a ten-mile-long strip that ensures enrollment from nearly all the minority and lower class students in the area. Chamblee High School is positioned so that it mainly serves the upper middle class white neighborhoods to the north of Buford Highway. This results in severe stigmatization of Cross Keys students. In a discussion of the issue, Cross Keys English teacher Rebekah Morris told me: "...I thought, this isn't right. Chamblee is right there, Tucker is there, Dunwoody is probably closer for some kids, and Lakeside. They pretty much unashamedly drew in apartment complexes to this school district. And it used to be dangerous, like there were gangs. But it gets worse as more and more people start thinking it's bad, more kids start pulling out, and it gets a bad reputation."<sup>72</sup> This district-level effectual segregation morphs Buford Highway's identity in a negative fashion, even if the reality is entirely different. Cross Keys has, in many ways, been able to overcome being stigmatized, but stereotypes still abound.

Issues such as these and many more are compounded by communication problems. While Buford Highway geographically is a diverse blend of people creating a unique entity, those people tend to operate within their own spheres, even as they operate literally right next to each other. As Julio Penaranda, property manager at Plaza Fiesta mall, told me,

*...we see right now that there's a big disconnect between all the communities on Buford Highway. There's an Asian community, there's a Latino community. There's the Anglo community. There's the African American community. There's, it's not a big one, but there are some Hindus on Buford Highway. But, again, we're all segmented. We're all trying to keep each other to our side of the street, just to say it in another way, but if you go up and down Buford Highway you see that there's a strip center that is Asian. Right next to it,*

*there's a strip center that is all stores from different Latin American communities. There's another strip center where half of it is Asians, half of it is Latinos. So, you see that things are being segmented.*<sup>73</sup>

In today's climate, this communication deficiency is very dangerous. After President Trump signed an executive order banning immigration from certain countries in January, 2017, rumors began to propagate about immigration enforcement agents rounding up immigrants on Buford Highway. Naturally, this terrified people and the rumors began to take on lives of their own without an organized way for the community to productively respond. Communication issues are compounded by the fact that communities along Buford Highway exist on their own and traverse three different city boundaries. With all the groups along Buford Highway separated, the community is ill-equipped to deal with just these sorts of issues.

But there is also a growing consciousness of those issues, and a community infrastructure that has grown significantly in the past several years. Plaza Fiesta is becoming a platform through which community-building events can be staged. In addition, an organization which has existed on Buford Highway since the 1980s is CPACS, or the Center for Pan-Asian Community Services. CPACS provides services to immigrants and refugees who have trouble negotiating with traditional government because of language barriers, logistics, or other issues. It offers senior services, legal services, medical services, translation, transportation, and various other programs designed to facilitate participation of marginalized communities on Buford Highway within the system. One program in particular combines English language learning with American civics. As Victoria Huynh, CPACS vice president, relates, "You can learn English but you can also learn about U.S. civics, U.S. history and help those people move in the pipeline towards citizenship. So, each year we serve about a thousand students in the ESL civics program and about 90% of them pass. Because they learn English. They learn U.S. civics. And they get to move and become U.S. citizens and contribute back to the community."<sup>74</sup> And it goes beyond just CPACS. Susan

Frayse, who is a member of many local activism boards, focuses on getting those people involved: “We always have a registration table...We’ll organize soccer tournaments that gets kids there and we’ll present information about public services...We survey people. We work on registration and community building. But it takes a lot of support. Things aren’t going to change if people don’t express their concerns to school boards and news media...I think there are conscious efforts to raise peoples’ expectations and help them ask for more...nobody works harder than the LAA [Latin American Association], CPACS, and other groups.”<sup>75</sup>

A more recent institution that aims to help guide the issues on Buford Highway is We Love BuHi. Formed by Marian Liou, the organization aims to create a Buford Highway identity and promote local, immigrant-owned businesses in order to facilitate community strength. In her words, “...now developers are like ok, let’s tap into that ethos of messy realness. But even with that, it’s this weird cultural appropriation. So, what I want to do is allow places like this [immigrant-owned businesses] to stay and allow new immigrants to find a place on Buford Highway. And the reason it exists is because it’s affordable...How do you keep those conditions that make it affordable and attractive to new immigrants and yet improve quality of life? I don’t think anyone has been able to find that balance yet, but we’re going to try.”<sup>76</sup> This issue that Ms. Liou addresses is one that has no easy answer. Officials at the city of Doraville understand this and, when city manager Shawn Gillen spoke to me, he indicated the following:

*There hasn’t been a problem yet because the developments haven’t come and driven the prices up yet...I think there are also concerns with students who go to Cross Keys. Are they going to be able to afford to live here? It’s something we’re entertaining and looking at because we don’t want that to happen. You want to be able to have affordable living in your community as well. So, we recognize it’s an issue. We haven’t dealt with it yet... They’re worried about us gentrifying smaller businesses out by raising up the value but the challenge is, how do you prevent that? And I’m not aware of policies that could work. They have rent controls in New York, but rent controls lead to housing shortages. So, if you put those same controls on businesses and on redevelopment, it’s not going to happen. If I can’t*



*make money on my development, I'm not going to do it. They're not doing this out of the goodness of their hearts; they're trying to make a profit. We've got to let our tax base grow. There will be increases in value and prices will go up. I don't know how you prevent that. It's already happening. Just from having the GM plant changing, values are going to go up. It's a tough policy question. We can put policies in place but whether or not they'll work is, on a national level, untested at best.<sup>77</sup>*

What we have, then, is a Buford Highway that has a messy jumble of identities and interests, each pulling at it from different directions. Whether it be cities, community activists, service providers, citizens, or businesses, they are all concerned with the same issues, but in different ways. What is more, there are very different audiences at play. Places like Nexus and the Assembly appeal strongly to suburbanites, from millennials to empty nesters. Buford Highway is simply becoming desirable. It is close to town, directly on a subway line, and offers an experience that other neighborhoods certainly do not. But, as the presence of organizations like CPACS show, Buford Highway also means something to immigrants and refugees. It provides an environment where nothing is normal, and everybody is alike in the fact that they are different. Ms. Huynh relates that it is important that “we’re not pushing out low income families that make this place great. They own businesses or they frequent this area. We’re not pushing out communities who love being here because they’re close to their ethnic goods and services...”<sup>78</sup> Thus, ethnic businesses and institutions on Buford Highway do not merely provide intrigue; they also provide a valuable service to the immigrants who live there, immigrants who are often forgotten as simply a part of the landscape.

## SCENARIOS

A common theme that came across in interviews with key individuals in the community was uncertainty. There was uncertainty as to whether Buford Highway is a community at all. It is a unique area dealing with issues that it has never faced, and nobody knows for certain what the future holds. The goal here is not to prognosticate, but in order to better understand potential

consequences of the realities laid out above, I have mapped out three hypothetical scenarios for Buford Highway's future.

## GENTRIFICATION SCENARIO

In this scenario, caution has been thrown to the wind. As the intown area becomes more desirable, developers offer larger deals to redevelop Buford Highway. They use terminology like "rehabilitate," which implies that Buford Highway needs to be fixed. Though individual businesses call the various strip malls home, the potential profits are great enough that developers are willing to raise the money to buy them out. The developers focus on large, mixed-use communities aimed at young, wealthy people moving in from the suburbs. Small, immigrant-owned businesses are forced out, but rising prices also force low-income families out of the apartments that line Buford Highway. Those same apartments are torn down to build luxury condominiums. As immigrants move elsewhere, likely to areas in Gwinnett County, the ethnic business community, which largely catered to them, moves along with its market. Ironically, the unique atmosphere that an immigrant community fostered was the area's main marketing standpoint, and it soon becomes a simple, upper-class, inner suburb like those found throughout most of Brookhaven.

Here we see some of the inherent dangers that come with unchecked progress. If people fail to account for the fragile ecosystem on Buford Highway and view any development as good development, then they will essentially be sacrificing the long-term future of the area in exchange for short-term benefits. Mr. Penaranda explained that "when you start transplanting, changing apartments to million-dollar homes, that community that was in those apartments, they're gonna go somewhere else...And they're going to take their shopping and eating habits with them somewhere else. So, that business that was dependent on those 500 families, if he doesn't have his sales, he's gonna leave."<sup>79</sup> Ignoring this connection between businesses and communities and thereby losing both is a real risk that occurs when people are unaware of the complex social relations on Buford Highway. As the

redevelopment map shows, construction is already occurring. This does not mean necessarily that such projects will automatically create a gentrified, cookie-cutter Buford Highway, but the mere presence of those projects shows that it is a possibility. And past events show that it has happened before. The first map of Buford Highway shown in this paper demonstrates where it is in relation to the city of Atlanta. The point where the two connect is where much of the original ethnic businesses on Buford Highway were once located. But developers eventually built condos and retail establishments like Target and Starbucks that pushed those businesses up the road to where they are today. There is a real difference between renewal and erasure. This scenario shows the dangers of conflating the two.

## SUPERFICIALITY SCENARIO

A new restaurant opened at the start of 2017 at the intersection of Buford Highway and Chamblee-Tucker Road. This is one of the most intriguing parts of Buford Highway, with a strong Vietnamese presence, a diverse income housing market, and large institutions like a CDC annex. The site had been occupied by a dozen or more restaurants before, but this one was immensely popular on opening. Its name is The Halal Guys, and it is a middle-eastern focused chain headquartered in New York. This presents an intriguing and confusing set of possibilities. The restaurant was and is immensely popular and, one would assume, profitable.

One must also assume that there is a reason it exists where it does: at one of the nodes of one of the most international areas of Atlanta. This shows that people are adapting their viewpoints to certain expectations of Buford Highway. Unlike the gentrification scenario above, this represents an acknowledgement that Buford Highway is different and companies are responding. On the other hand, though, institutions like this still run into the audience problem. They feed into the expectations that people moving in from the suburbs have about Buford Highway: They see a restaurant like that and think diversity. They are right in a way but, unlike the case with many Buford Highway businesses, this diversity is superficial. One of the great

strengths of the community is its locally owned, high quality businesses which serve both ethnic communities and the wider Atlanta community at the same time. If people settle for restaurants like Halal Guys as the solution, then they ignore the depth and complexity of the communities on Buford Highway. It is vital to remember that these institutions and restaurants that make Buford Highway what it is exist to serve their communities. They are not intrinsically motivated to satisfy the wanderlust of curious Atlantans. If we do settle for superficial representations, then the area runs the risk of becoming another modern Chinatown like the one in Washington, D.C.



There, one can go to a Dunkin Donuts with Chinese characters written on the sign that is, in effect, just a Dunkin Donuts, as can be seen in [Figure 10](#).<sup>80</sup>

Outward marketing can be a positive tool, but if people are complacent with it as the

entirety of what makes Buford Highway, then it may become a caricature of itself. This is difficult to consider because people respond to outward marketing. It makes money. But as the title of this scenario suggests, that beauty is only skin deep. Going down the rabbit hole and allowing things like the Dunkin Donuts above to become a measuring stick for abstracted notions of diversity would be negligent at best. Buford Highway is special, first and foremost, because of the people, and this is what the superficiality scenario ignores.

## ENGAGEMENT SCENARIO

At the same intersection as Halal Guys, just across Buford Highway, is City Farmers Market. It was built in 2015, and so constitutes a new development. It sells the standard groceries like any other store, but unlike much of the new development going in, it also sells alcoves where people can display shrines to ancestors or religious figures. Next door is a currency exchange.

While Whole Foods and other such businesses are clearly targeted at other demographics, institutions like this clearly take the immigrant communities into account and show that development does not have to be a single-sided thing.

In the engagement scenario, potential for this sort of development puts Buford Highway residents and ethnic communities in the driver's seat. In this situation, communication networks are well-established, government is receptive and reflective of local people and concerns, and development is driven by the best interests of those people. It would essentially preserve the characteristics that make Buford Highway unique while also finding a way to make those characteristics more attractive and celebrated than the gentrification scenario would suggest. Members from every community, from Hondurans to retirees, would be engaged and concerned not just about their own communities, but about Buford Highway's future, and they would be willing to fight for that future. Developers would market to the people they market to now, but also to the market that exists in Buford Highway already, and mixed-income development would be emphasized. In essence, Buford Highway would maximize its status as a locus of articulated social relations efficiently to create productive change for everyone there. One can still have the mixed-use developments and the boutique stores, but decision making would be less top-down. Such a scenario could also have a wider impact as a model for other areas in the South dealing with change.

## WHAT TO DO

All three of these scenarios stand as distinct possibilities for the future of Buford Highway. It is impossible to know the future and it is difficult to make normative judgments on what is best, but I believe the engagement scenario to be the most preferable, if also by far the most difficult to plan for. When asked if they think that Buford Highway is a community, many struggle with their answer. Some assert that it most assuredly is. Some argue that things are a work in progress. At the beginning of this paper, though, scholars like Corlett, Bender, Sennett, Cresswell, and Massey dismantled

traditional notions of community. Their work shows that unorthodox places like Buford Highway, while lacking all traditional markers of the concept, can still exist as communities. Buford Highway does not conform to those traditional notions, and it would be harmful to apply them. To grow in an equitable way, then, it is important to look at Buford Highway as the locus of articulated social relations that it is and to recognize that such a system can be even more dynamic than traditional ideals of community through engagement. Creating such a scenario with a strong Buford Highway that serves its people is incredibly difficult, and there are many structural, practical, and social barriers against it. To circumvent these requires communication, participation, long-term thought, and expression. In some ways, though, such strategies are already being implemented.

## COMMUNICATION

One of the main issues on Buford Highway which is intrinsically related to its nature and origins is communication. At a basic level, this makes sense as any given person who lives and works there may have grown up speaking literally any language. Compounded with this basic language barrier is the fact that, again, Buford Highway is not a traditional community. It did not grow in the same way that most do and so does not have the same anchoring institutions that many communities do. Not only do people struggle to communicate, but forums to communicate in are historically difficult to find. Compounding upon these factors is the fact that not all people who spend time on Buford Highway live there. Many of the owners of ethnically Korean businesses live elsewhere, as do a portion of the people who patronize Buford Highway businesses in general. Finally, many immigrant families in the area are slow to adapt to the local American system of civic communication. There can be a sentiment of implicit trust in ethnic communities, so government has a hard time ascertaining peoples' desires. This combination of factors has always been one of the defining struggles of Buford Highway, but several groups and individuals are already in the process of establishing, little by little, communication networks. These networks are vital because they provide a cohesion and a voice for



Buford Highway which can place power directly in the hands of the people who make it special.

Many efforts to this end are grassroots, ground-up movements. There is a Buford Highway community association, as well as a brand new business association. Ms. Liou's organization, We Love Buhi, is a good example. According to her, "the only way you can keep the messiness and authenticity is for people who are here now to start communicating and talking to each other and not be willing to sell out to the highest bidder. How we're doing that is by saying that you have an amazing thing going here. How can we support you to continue this? The challenge here is also that people have bought property here, and they've held on to it for decades, always looking for the right opportunity."<sup>81</sup> She aims, then, to facilitate communication within the business community: "My proposition is that we...need a local, geographically-based business association that can advocate for the businesses here. A lot of the ethnic associations are based in Gwinnett or places where they live in north Fulton. And then they're all separated by ethnicity. So how can we form a coalition that is representative of people who live and work here and get them to cooperate?" By using the concept of "BuHi" as an organizational heuristic, she is able to facilitate these goals and base them in ideas of Buford Highway as a place.

Businesses are an important piece, but one of the primary threats to Buford Highway is the rising cost of housing. In order to address this, Rebekah Morris, among others, has taken part in the creation of an apartment association which, in her words, "will provide some level of protection for people who aren't documented who don't feel like they can go in front of the mayor. And then there's also the broader sense that this is an organization with weight, which Buford Highway hasn't had."<sup>82</sup> This effectively summarizes the importance of communication in a place like Buford Highway. Sometimes, building community and strengthening place identity is as simple as talking to each other.

And on a more basic level, organizations like CPACS devote substantial efforts to language programs, as well as services to aid people who have

little facility with English. CPACS also engages in community organizing to help break the stereotype of silent immigrant communities. In response to overcrowding in local schools, Ms. Huynh recalls that “the Latin American Association, CPACS, and the Cross Keys Foundation came together and we helped to bring the community together, to mobilize the community’s ability to stand up and speak out to the board of education meetings. We helped them to tap into the resources that they need to address this and so on December 5th the board of education voted to approve to rebuild some of the schools.”<sup>83</sup> These are examples of how communication can facilitate positive change, but communication is also the bedrock upon which all other efforts rest. Without it, Buford Highway is merely a fractured amalgamation of micro communities susceptible to the slightest threat.

## PARTICIPATION

On a civic level, communication feeds into participation. It is, frankly, difficult for government to function properly if it is not reflective of the people it serves, and it is difficult for it to be reflective if people do not participate. Mayor Pittman of Doraville relates the challenges facing the city with civic engagement: “We have newsletters that go out in other languages. We’re trying to get with community leaders, but it’s difficult to get some communities involved for fear of some stuff, especially the Latino community. They always have a fear of deportation if they communicate with the government. So, we have to explain to them that we’re not going to deport you, that’s not what we do. We just want to talk to you, we want you to be a part of decision making.”<sup>84</sup>

CPACS also involves itself in this arena, providing citizenship training, civics education, and other paths to participation. Ms. Huynh relates that, in regards to local immigrant participation, “it’s not that they don’t want to, it’s more which opportunities are there for them to participate...There’s a high percentage of communities with limited English proficiency, and there’s a high percentage of communities that are limited income. So, when you’re having meetings in the afternoon, what is a working family going to do? They

have to work and support their families.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, it is important to provide alternate opportunities.

Ms. Morris, at the largely Latino Cross Keys High School, champions the idea that the key to future change is education. In that mold, she tailors her English classes toward civic engagement. Instead of doing daily grammar practice, perhaps the students practice writing letters to local government leaders. Instead of a book report, maybe they write an action plan to address a local issue. She states that “these weren’t honors kids, just regular, half-engaged students. And I had fewer students fail last year than I’ve ever had. And then when the year ended, they kept it going with tactical urbanism... And it was very organic. We now have an advisory council with student leaders and we meet every week and they’ve gone and spoken before city councils. I offered extra credit if they go to a public meeting. And I would teach them, this is why putting your comma in the right place [is important], because the mayor won’t take you seriously otherwise.”<sup>86</sup> This kind of grassroots engagement effort teaches newer generations on Buford Highway how to engage with a system that can be threatening and confusing, especially with three separate city governments.

These steps are building blocks and representation is a slow process with little immediate gratification, but strides are happening. Ms. Fraysse expressed that, in the past, “we were run by old white men, good old boys who meant well, but they were really only looking out for them and a small portion of the population. They couldn’t see. Just thought immigrants were transient and not connected...Being on the council has always been difficult because of competing populations and demographics. But they got elected by white people who voted. Until very recently, other people didn’t vote.”<sup>87</sup> As of 2017, however, Doraville does have a city councilor named Nasser who is from Bangladesh. Diverse representation in opinions and in backgrounds is important on Buford Highway which, as Ms. Fraysse related, has a history of top-down patriarchal and sympathetic governance. By increasing participation and representation, that narrative can be reversed into bottom-up empathetic governance. Policy can then more accurately reflect the needs of all the people on Buford Highway.

## LONG-TERM THOUGHT

In our interview, Ms. Liou mentioned that one of the most difficult aspects of community organizing is the fact that people are naturally reactive. They tend to care most vociferously about issues only after feeling consequences first hand. It is far more difficult to get those people to think proactively because they are naturally self-interested and tend not to act with no perceived danger to their personal status quo. The problem with that, however, is that Buford Highway is more complex than many give it credit for and finds itself on the cusp of a crucial moment. If people treat issues on Buford Highway in a reactive fashion, then their efforts may be too late. It is then important to facilitate and promote long-term thought, especially when approaching ideas such as Assembly, a multibillion dollar project. Not only can this help to prevent undesirable outcomes, but it also promotes desirable ones. Policies do not simply spring from nothing; they are negotiated over time. Long-term thought creates goals and common points of discussion toward this end.

Until the 2010s, long-term thought was difficult to come by on Buford Highway for many of the same reasons that struggles in communication and participation occur. In 2016, however, the cities of Chamblee and Doraville paired to apply for a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) study. The Atlanta Regional Commission runs the LCI as a way to identify and address areas that would benefit greatly from increased planning and infrastructure and provides grants to select applications to carry out a study for feasibility and ideas. Having an LCI on Buford Highway presents many advantages. It focuses attention on the area as a cohesive place. It also, in Ms. Liou's words, serves as "a way to get in advance of the change and shape change that is more reflective of the community."<sup>88</sup> The study offers a plan aimed to support transit alternatives to cars: bike lanes, public transit, sidewalks, a road diet, etc. Whether or not one agrees with all aspects of that plan is a personal decision, but plans can be debated and amended. The most impactful function of the LCI may not be its physical achievements. Rather, it may be more to facilitate debate, which in itself is a manifestation of identity. This is what

long-term thought does. It forces people to think about what a place means to them and, hopefully, creates personal stakes in that place.

## EXPRESSION

Tim Cresswell discussed how place is defined by identity. On Buford Highway, identity can mean many things, but it is best fomented and expressed through expression, which here simply means an outward display of identity. Buford Highway has a strong and vibrant identity, but with expression, that sense can be translated into community. This forces agents of change into a reactive position where they must conform to Buford Highway's standard of place, not the other way around. Plaza Fiesta is an important locus for such an expression. Mr. Penaranda related that its status as a multicultural mall allows people who come from different backgrounds to both find comfort and branch out because the complex caters to different people of different backgrounds. This cross-cultural exchange "opens up the community to a wider market where it exposes the goodness of the community, the good deeds that are done, the good people that are here. It's not just like it's been set out there by the president now that it's just a bunch of murderers and rapists and convicts. No, it's nothing like that."<sup>89</sup> While Mr. Penaranda aims to achieve this on a small scale at Plaza Fiesta, he also points out that it is important that this happen on a larger scale, as well.

Plaza Fiesta also takes part in larger events, spearheading a December 2016 parade designed to "get all the communities involved." It was very successful, creating large crowds, and prompting the city of Chamblee to ask for another one. As to why such an event is important, Mr. Penaranda explained that "we see that's missing in the community; we see that people have been asking or wondering why something hasn't been done or figuring out why a celebration wasn't done for this or that, and we try to do that." This event was designed to reduce segmentation on Buford Highway. It is plain to see, then, that expression is an actionable way to promote identity. It simply takes initiative.

CPACS also recognizes how effective events can be and so for the past decade have organized the TEA walk. Originally “Together Empowering Asian Americans,” it has since shifted its message to “Together Empowering All.” The walk is a march up and down Buford Highway aimed at promoting civic engagement by underrepresented groups. It has grown over time to be a very large event. Ms. Huynh explains that, in the most recent iteration, “we brought out celebrations and highlighted different cultures through performance, through food. And it was the largest civic engagement advocacy empowerment-type walk of its kind in the southeast. And we still hold that title.”<sup>90</sup>

As simple as these concepts seem, they are very difficult to enact. I have highlighted individuals and organizations who are attempting to create, largely from the ground up, a civil society apparatus which needs to be further developed. Service and community organizations, entrepreneurs, city governments, private citizens, and teachers: These are specific examples of that growing civil society which, if nurtured, can facilitate the aspects, such as communication or expression, which are conducive to progress. Each of these aspects affects the others and all play off each other. The examples used to illustrate their utility could easily be interchanged. But no matter how they are measured, each one is important to achieving the engagement scenario illustrated above.



## CONCLUSION

### COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION, LONG-TERM THOUGHT, AND EXPRESSION

are, I acknowledge, abstract ideas that are much easier discussed than implemented. I have attempted to show practical examples as evidence for how these concepts can work, but I hope that this paper can motivate people to talk about how to operationalize them into real results, and there is quite a lot of additional work that needs doing. The intent here has been to start a conversation that can be built upon. I interviewed 6 people who I consider to be key informants, but future research needs to give voice to more people on Buford Highway; small business owners, for instance. Further, this paper has largely focused on ethnicity as an organizational structure, but Buford Highway has many facets. The LGBTQ community has a strong history in the

area, and faith-based communities play an important role in people's lives. Future work would do well to flesh out their roles on Buford Highway.

There is a Celestine Sibley quote at the very beginning of this paper. It was not put there to wax poetic or to provide some sort of ethereal quality to scholarship, but to capture the idea that Atlanta is beautiful not because it is simple, but because it is complex. And every part that makes it so deserves its narrative. That is the essential core of this piece, to start a discussion of a crucial piece of the Atlanta puzzle at a critical time for its own uncertain future. I firmly believe that Atlanta needs Buford Highway. The city is getting more diverse, not less, so it is important to talk about the areas where this is the norm. Most significantly, these words are fully intended to break stereotypes about the city and the South and, hopefully, to instill the idea that Buford Highway is worth caring for, and why. It seems too often to be perceived as a commercial entity. People think about it in terms of its food, its "realness", and its ethnic diversity. But all of these attractive and exciting qualities exist because of real people. Those people are why Buford Highway is important. It defies traditional ideas of what communities ought to be. It goes much deeper than soup dumplings and tacos. These are important points of exchange, but the essence of Buford Highway is and always has been people of all shapes, sizes, colors, and mindsets. It is a special place that is difficult to describe. In short, there is much to be learned about Buford Highway, but the more one learns about it, the more one is inclined to learn for it.

Within Buford Highway itself, diversity is worth fighting for as a moral concept. But it is also an asset. If communities and actors work on making progress while retaining what makes Buford Highway special, a situation unfolds where everyone wins: A dynamic, prosperous, strong community not of commonality, but of utility. Further, it can reshape the way people talk about what makes a community in the first place. In my interview with Mr. Penaranda, he discussed with me how Buford Highway had dozens of micro communities, but when asked whether Buford Highway on the whole is a community, he simply responded that "it's a family." There's a mother and a father in the Latino and Asian spheres. "Then you have brothers and

sisters and aunts and uncles and family members that don't get along with each other, family members that love being with each other, family members that you never want to see again because they did something to you. It's a great big happy dysfunctional family."<sup>91</sup> I am unsure if Buford Highway has the cohesiveness to really be labelled as a community yet, but with the efforts and attitudes of people like those I interviewed, it will get there, and we will all be better for it.



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