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Race, Place, and Identity: Examining Place Identity in the Racialized Landscape of Buckhead, Atlanta

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RACE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY: EXAMINING PLACE IDENTITY IN THE RACIALIZED
LANDSCAPE OF BUCKHEAD, ATLANTA

by

ROBERT COCHRAN

Under the Direction of Dr. Katherine B. Hankins

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of racialized practices in the discourses and processes that alter place identity. Drawing on ethnography from the East Village of Buckhead, a once vibrant nightlife district in Atlanta, I examine how discourses of danger, colorblindness, and the race card have been employed to “whitewash” the discussions about the redevelopment of the Village. In effect, the business and civic elite of Atlanta (and Buckhead) deployed racialized conceptualizations of group identity. In particular, they utilized “public safety” discourses to influence the Atlanta city government to support the redevelopment effort. This led to the elimination of the establishments that attracted African American partygoers in large numbers. Using interviews with government agents, night club operators, and Buckhead civic and business leaders, combined with archival analysis of newspaper accounts, I implemented a hybrid content-discourse analysis to explore the ways in which the discourses of race and place

concerning the East Village changed between 2000 and 2008.

INDEX WORDS: Place identity, Colorblindness, Race card, White privilege, Racialized landscapes

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ROBERT COCHRAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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2009

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LANDSCAPE OF BUCKHEAD, ATLANTA

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May 2009

DEDICATION

To my mother and father: Thank you is far from enough, but it is the best I can do.

Thank you.

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An undertaking such as this requires the help of many individuals, and I would be remiss not to give them their due credit. First and foremost I must thank Dr. Katherine Hankins for her infinite patience and guidance. While this thesis may bear my name, there is no doubt it is as much a product of her mentoring as it is my hard work. Dr. Parama Roy and Dr. Jeremy Crampton, for guiding and challenging me all along the way. My sisters, Jennie, Allison, and Elizabeth, and my little brother, Harry. The way they have inspired, criticized, and questioned me can never be repaid. Dr. Gregory McMahon, for seeing something more to me than a dumb jock, and then forcing me to see it as well. Coach Joshua Willman, for teaching me to never give up, never give in, and when it gets frustrating, try that much harder. Matt Chapman, for providing me with the necessary cartographic information. Alice Fazlollah, for teaching me the value of engaging with uncomfortable topics, questioning one's identity, and introducing me to CRT. I could not have written this thesis without her input.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Background

The East Village is a small eight-block area in the Buckhead community of northeast Atlanta, situated along the famous Peachtree Road thoroughfare¹. In the 1980s and 1990s and into the early 2000s, the East Village was the preeminent nightlife scene in Atlanta with a reputation that extended well beyond the metropolitan area (Jarvie 2007). However, within the last five years the buildings that housed the bars and clubs have been demolished to make way for a luxury-shopping district. For this reason questions emerge concerning the motivations of the Buckhead elite to remove the enormously popular nightlife scene and replace it with high-end retail.

Part of the answer to this query may be shaped by the series of events that took place in the early 2000s. On January 31, 2000, following Super Bowl XXXIV, NFL star Ray Lewis was accused of homicide in an altercation which took place outside of nightclub *Chaos* in the East Village. This event brought debates about the area into the forefront of city politics, and kicked off a three-year argument between Buckhead elites and the predominantly African American city government over what should be done about the East Village bar scene. Several other murders, all involving African American males (both victims and perpetrators), caused concern on the part of some Buckhead residents about the increased crime issues of the Village (Tucker 2003b).

In 2000, city council members Lee Morris and Claire Muller proposed an ordinance which sought to change the closing hours of bars in the city to 2 a.m. instead of 4 a.m., in an attempt to crackdown on the illegal activity allegedly associated with the nightlife scene.

¹ See Appendix A, the East Village is demarked by the boundaries of Pharr Road to Paces Ferry (S-N) and Peachtree Road to North Fulton Ave. (W-E).

However, all eight African American council members voted against the bill, and all seven white members voted in favor, resulting in the failure of the bill to pass (Pruitt et al. 2000; Shelton 2000b). According to then councilman Derrick Boazman, as reflected in numerous newspaper reports, the bill was an attempt by white Buckhead elites to keep non-whites out of the area (Matthews 2000; Shelton 2000b; Tucker 2000, 2003a; Shelton and Hairston 2000). Buckhead leaders and residents countered that Boazman and other city leaders were playing “the race card” to make an issue about race where there was none (Matthews 2000; Shelton 2000b, 2000a).

Broadly, my research asks what the relationship is between racialized practices and the meaning of place. Specifically in my empirical study, I ask how the discourses over race and place have changed over the past ten years in the East Village of Buckhead. In this thesis, I explore the different conceptualizations of the East Village that were explicitly and implicitly articulated by city government officials, Buckhead business leaders, neighborhood organizations, and former nightclub owners. I draw from Cresswell’s (1996) concept of place transgression to understand the discursive and physical remaking of Buckhead’s party district. I argue that strategic discourses were utilized that have resulted in the racialized redevelopment of the East Village as a place of whiteness.

CHAPTER 2 – DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Study of Place

Place is not easily defined (Cresswell 2004), and according to Agnew (1987), three different understandings of place underlie much geographic research. The first conceptualization is that of place as location. Second, Agnew (1987) suggests a sense of place, or the attachment to a location by people and the way this attachment can affect the individual, group, and place identity. Third, he argues that place can be understood as a locale, which considers the role of place in people's actions and interactions. Place is subject to the relations of local and non-local events, which means that it is shaped by social institutions and cultural norms (Castree 2009b).

Understanding place as a multifaceted, social product allows geographers to examine the ways in which social processes 'outside' of a place can in turn shape the landscape and identity 'inside' a place (Castree 2009b; Cresswell 1996, 2004; Massey 1994). That is, individuals can 'transgress' the identity of a place, resulting in a social conflict between those on the 'inside' and those on the 'outside' (Cresswell 1996). One example Cresswell utilizes is the homeless, and the manner in which the presence of homeless people is felt to be unattractive, and harmful to a location's image. Taken another way, homeless people, according to Cresswell, are often thought of as representing danger and are unappealing aesthetically; as such their existence is a transgression that prevents an ideal image, or identity, of a space. In the case of the East Village I examine the degree to which place transgression occurred in Buckhead and furthermore how that transgression was represented among various actors involved in debates about the transformation of the East Village.

The concept of place is central to human geography (Cresswell 2004). This might seem an ambiguous statement, but to study humanity, and its space, it is essential to take place into account. The study of place is not a new concept, even the ancient Greeks were concerned with the role of place in the world (Casey 1997). However, the concept of place and what it means, beyond simply an important space, is a field of study not fully explored until the past 75 years. Prior to this most conceptualizations of place focused on the importance of places to specific people, usually without questioning the underlying constructions of place and its importance. Starting in the mid-20th century, scholars began to ask why places were important, and how they reflected and reinforced the identities of the people who found them important.

Where we come from, how we see those origins, how we in turn shape those places, all are important concepts of our being humans (Tuan 1974, 1977). Without designating spaces as places, or attaching a certain intrinsic human value to a space to make it a place, it is not possible for people to have a sense of place, much less the experiences inherent with having a place. Consequently a link has been made between humans and places on a psychological level (Relph 1976). Even when people find themselves out of place, they still can identify a place that is familiar where they can go to once again feel a sense of belonging (Casey 1993). We feel secure in our places, they are familiar, they have an identity we understand and that we in turn have helped create by giving them significance. As much as place shapes the human experience, humans shape places and their identity.

Casey, Tuan, and Relph serve as examples of the phenomenological approach to place; however another method of approaching place, a social constructionist model, is also prevalent in today's field. By social constructionist I mean the manner in which society creates places and identities through power dynamics. The social constructionist approach is the more accepted and

utilized amongst the geographic community today (Agnew 1987; Agnew and Duncan 1989; Cresswell 1996; Delaney 2002; Harvey 1996; Hoelscher 2003; Keith and Pile 1993; Kobayashi 2003; Lippard 1997; Logan and Molotch 1987; Massey 1994; Peake and Ray 2001; Reitman 2006).

Social Constructions of Place

Place is a contested idea, not only amongst scholars, but also in the world (Cresswell 2004). The discourses on place, and what place means, is not exclusive to academics; it is played out in everyday life. Cresswell (1996) examines the idea of place transgression. By this Cresswell means that some places have a certain identity (usually mirroring the individuals who claim that place), and that others occupying or coming into those places is seen as transgression (Cresswell 1996). By studying the geography of place, and the conflicts over certain places, we can gain a better understanding of the human experience than by just simply studying place alone.

The role politics and economics play in constructions of place is a very important (Agnew 1987; Agnew and Duncan 1989). Agnew (1987) finds is that there is a devaluation, or failure to understand the importance, of place in the modern day. He suggests that the political and economic ideals that go along with Marxist ideology tend to argue that place is not important, but by examining the role of place in the modern global capitalist market we can see that place is as important as ever (Agnew 1987). One way to examine this dynamic is by looking at the mobility of capital in today's globalized economy (Harvey 1996).

The mobility of capital causes conflict, creating what Harvey calls the 'power of place'. People and social institutions create certain infrastructures in places in order to create

institutionalized areas of power. Harvey argues that an economic approach is the best understanding for this phenomenon, but we can also observe how authoritative understandings of society, such as race, can reinforce the institutionalized power within a specific landscape.

Race and Place

Since place is best understood as a multifaceted, social product (Castree 2009; Cresswell 1996, 2004), place can be shaped by white privilege (Anderson 2002; Kobayashi 2003; Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Peake and Ray 2001; Pulido 2000; Reitman 2006). White privilege is an unconscious, but hegemonic, form of racism that plays a role in understanding the function of places (Pulido 2000). By drawing on the work of critical race theory, and place study, one can observe how American society perpetuates landscapes that reflect white privilege.

Race is not a topic new to the study of place and geography (Anderson 2002; Bonnett 1997; Crampton (forthcoming) 2009; Delaney 2002; Dwyer and Jones 2000; Gilmore 2002; Hoelscher 2003; Kobayashi 2003; Kobayashi and Peake 1994, 2000; Peake and Ray 2001; Pulido 2000; Reitman 2006). However, as Reitman (2006) notes, few geographers have grappled with the way white privilege has created white places (Reitman 2006). Reitman explores how racialized places are established. In a case study within a software firm, she conducted ethnography of the employees to ascertain whether or not the nonwhite employees were able to express their racial identity within the workplace. She found that while the office promoted politically correct language, it was actually reinforcing a sense of white identity. She accomplishes this by looking at how denying individuals the ability to identify racially ignores the marginalization of nonwhites, and reinforces white privilege (Aleinikoff 1991).

The result of this discursive practice is the creation of racialized places that serve as bastions of white privilege (Pulido 2000; Reitman 2006). These locations are identified, maintained, and protected through social and/or physical barriers as white spaces by both outsiders, and those inside (Reitman 2006). It is therefore important for scholars to fully explore the kinds of social techniques that are used by the privileged to maintain barriers of access and power. It is necessary to engage the discourses, as Reitman has done. That is, it is important to explore the different dialogues and statements that have constructed an understanding of a place's identity.

Discourse

To understand discourse I draw from the Foucauldian understanding of a formation of knowledge, through statements and debates (Foucault 1969). Taken further, discourse is not just a construction of knowledge, but also the power relations inherent in social practice that do more than dictate thinking and meaning (Foucault 1970/1981). Through this interpretation, discourse is representative of an assumed "natural" understanding, which is reflective of an attempt to create an objective understanding of a specific subject. That is, that discourse reflects power dynamics within a society, and by examining the process of creating knowledge, one can also examine social relationships. For example, a common understanding, such as people naturally choose to live near people similar to themselves, is based upon a perception that does not take into account such social practices as segregation, or the power dynamics that enable segregation.

Race

The study of power dynamics, and the way they shape place, is not the exclusive realm of politics and economics. Geographers have brought critical theory approaches to understanding place in order to explore how other socially constructed ideologies, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, have shaped our understanding of place. For the purposes of this study I will focus on how the racialization of place has been studied, and the use of critical race theory in understanding how white privilege has shaped places.

The idea that race is a social construct rather than an actual scientific codifier allows scholars to research the social context in which race and racialization practices play in place making and identity (Goodman 1995; Marks 1994, 1995). Through the works of several scholars we can understand that race, and the identity of whiteness, is a socially constructed phenomenon that is created and perpetuated to maintain an objective power dynamic in which the identity of whiteness dominates a constructed social hierarchy (Daniels 1997; Goodman 1995; Hale 1998; Haney Lopez 1996; Hartigan 1997, 2000; Marks 1994, 1995; Omi and Winant 1994; Pierce 2003; Roediger 1999; Crampton (forthcoming) 2009).

Before we go any further though, it would be best to define what racism means. Probably the most popular image of racism is Jim Crow-era discrimination, based upon an assumption of the inferiority of the black person (Bobo and Smith 1998). However, in many ways this manner of thought is considered archaic and inapplicable today due to such events as the Civil Rights Act. Nonetheless, there is a discomfort that some white Americans experience in their relation to blacks (Bobo and Smith 1998, 183). It is this discomfort that becomes integral to my interpretation of racism in trying to understand how and why white spaces are maintained. Bobo and Smith argue for a new interpretation of racism, which they label “laissez-faire” racism as

opposed to Jim Crow racism. Under this perceptive, racism no longer is based on the inferiority of the individual, but rather on the failings of black culture and the perceived inability of African Americans to level the socio-economic gap between whites and blacks. Through this interpretation, there is still an assumption of white culture being superior.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been used by geographers to try and understand place (Anderson 2002; Bonnett 1997; Delaney 2002; Dwyer and Jones 2000; Gilmore 2002; Hoelscher 2003; Kobayashi 2003; Kobayashi and Peake 1994, 2000; Peake and Ray 2001; Pulido 2000; Reitman 2006). However, the study of race and geography has predominantly focused on examining non-white groups and places, how the process of exclusion has marginalized these people, and the socio-political boundaries erected around places (Reitman 2006). While this is an important approach, I argue that geographers need to critically engage with the way privileged spaces are maintained, and through these present new understandings of how privileged groups reinforce their identity. Certainly the two approaches are connected, but the purpose of this study is to examine how discourses of race and place have maintained places of white privilege.

In order to accomplish this, I examine the shifting discourses on race and place in the East Village, Buckhead, between 2000 and 2008. To better understand these racialized practices and discourses, it is important to examine some of the dominant ways in which race becomes coded in terms and practices. In the following sections, I discuss the codes of race as danger, the ideology of the colorblind society, and the concept of the race card.

Race and danger

Racism is much more complex than just hate, and is partly based on discourses of fear and danger (Russell 1992). However, racism is usually only perceived as overt acts of hate (Lawrence 1987), and as such is poorly understood in American society (Crenshaw 1988). This

is partly due to an insistence of objectivity by the empowered (white) majority (Delgado 1992). We can observe this further through the discomfort described by Bobo and Smith, and the manner in which black culture has come to be considered inferior.

Taken in a different context, the legal system in the United States often reflects the bias in American society that non-whites are more dangerous than whites (Johnson 1985). In his study, Johnson found that black male plaintiffs are often found guilty at a higher rate, for the same offense, as whites, regardless of the racial make-up of the jury. That is, when two men are accused of the same crime, with one being white and the other African American, the white man is more likely to be acquitted based on a societal perception that black men embody violence/danger., even if the jury is composed of African Americans. This phenomenon is observable even with a predominantly African American jury. Hence, not only do whites perceive minorities as dangerous, but also often times other minorities will as well. This serves to further obscure how racism functions in American society (Delgado 1992).

We can also see this dynamic of representative danger within the functions of businesses and the state. Businesses and the police have often used gang-profiling to create discourses of fear and danger surrounding nonwhite youth (Russell 1992). The basis of this fear is the appearance and performance of the nonwhite youths. They act in a manner not deemed “white” and in doing so they have become dangerous. White is perceived as safe, while non-white is dangerous. Taken in relation to this research, we can follow how discourses of danger increased in the Village as the nightlife saw an increase in nonwhite patrons.

Colorblind society

Besides danger/fear, there are other ways in which American society seeks to remain “objective” and not see racism for what it is. In CRT one of the basic points of critique is the

phenomenon known as colorblind language (Bell 1995). By this, CRT means the ways in which the American legal, economic, and political system (and by extension society), have come to adopt language that does not acknowledge racial identity, in effect saying that since all are different all are equal (Delgado 1991). However, insistence on a colorblind society in effect silences the voices of the marginalized, and allows for racism to continue (Cook 1990).

A colorblind society does not acknowledge that racial marginalization is possible. It is this emphasis towards objectivity that allows racism to continue, and makes it so that whites do not often recognize that their own privileged status is based upon a racist society (Delgado 1988). Through colorblind language the racial identity of nonwhites is removed. However, it is important to allow minorities to identify themselves (Aleinikoff 1991). Racial identity can be very important for non-whites. The creation of whiteness in American society is based on an understanding that to be white is to not be black (Roediger 1999). As such, white is not an identity, but rather an antithesis of identity, based upon the identification of 'others'. To then deny these 'others' the ability to identify themselves fails to acknowledge the marginalization these 'others' have faced in American society (Reitman 2006). Taken another way, the 'other' identity has been established as inferior to in American society, and denial of this identity only further entrenches whiteness.

One other way that colorblind language creates racial disparity is in the value of property and capital. In American society, due to the institutionalization of racism, property that is understood as being white (owned/operated by whites) is considered more valuable to society non-white holdings (Bell 1988). In other words, because society values white identity, it will also value the property of whites more highly. The value is entirely subjective to the institutionalized authority of whiteness, but nonetheless leads to a devaluation of nonwhite

property. Former Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell once tried to sway the African-American businesses to “think white”, in effect saying that to preserve the economy of the city they needed to vote and think in a particular (racialized) way (Bayor 1989, p.89). Massell’s comment reflects common sentiments of the colorblind society. Because white is more valued, nonwhite is devalued. As such, to succeed one must act white, even if one does not identify as white.

Part of this practice of ‘acting white’, is an explicit performance of a particular identity. For that reason those who refuse to conform to this practice, and bring up racial identity must be silenced in order to maintain the power dynamic. One way this is accomplished is through the concept of the race card.

Race and the race card

The race card is a metaphor for an individual bringing up the topic of race in an attempt to question, or invalidate, a state of affairs. Using the colloquial phrase of ‘playing the race card’ implies someone has used his or her race inappropriately to question a situation. Mendelberg (2001) examines why most Americans view explicit claims of racial difference unfavorably because identifying racial difference challenges the egalitarian idea that all Americans are created equal. As a result, there are certain times when race is an ‘inappropriate’ topic of discussion. By suppressing the discussion of race, the privileged are in fact maintaining their privileged (racialized) status through a defensive use of the race card (Mendelberg 2001).

What now becomes the question is that if American egalitarianism is fiction, how has the discourse of the race card come about? Some would argue that in fact whites play the race card to deny race as an issue (Elise 2004). Elise uses storytelling to display that in America everyone is dealt a card based upon racial identity. In this sense, racial identity becomes linked to social standing, with whites occupying an empowered position at the expense of nonwhites.

Additionally, whites do not recognize or acknowledge they hold a ‘higher’ card, but are quick to deploy the discourse of the race card when a nonwhite questions this social dynamic. As a result, white identity can ‘trump’ minority identity through the defensive play of the race card, in effect denying race.

Since the colloquial phrase of ‘playing the race card’ is used as a negative connotation, it becomes even more difficult to understand when race is denied (Nelson, Sanbonmatsu, and McClerking 2007). To put it more simply, ‘playing the race card’ implies that those bringing race into a discussion are acting in a racially motivated fashion, and therefore are racists themselves. Nelson et al. (2007) make a case that different individuals and groups have different understandings of what racial identity means, and that the acceptability of playing the race card is highly contentious.

The race card, as a discourse, does not surface in CRT. According to CRT racism continues to shape American society through the application of legal, economic, and political norms that hold race as an unimportant indicator of identity (Aleinikoff 1991; Bell 1988, 1995; Culp 1992; Delgado 1988, 1991, 1992; Gotanda 1991; Karst 1988; Lawrence 1987). That is, race is not important because in America a discourse that “everyone sticks out, we are all different” (Reitman 2006, p.274) holds sway over political and economic institutions, which means that race is not an accepted means of (dis)empowerment. This implies that racism is a mostly defunct concept in America, and only considered to be applicable if there is empirical evidence of hate and/or discrimination, strong enough to hold up in a court of law (Pulido 2000). Aleinikoff (1991) and others (Bell 1995; Delgado 1991) argue that what this does is to further entrench racism in American society by making it more difficult to indict.

Understanding the ways in which race is engaged, and understood, also reflects the ways in which space is negotiated and governed (Hoelscher 2003). Place is constructed through the norms and values of a society (Castree 2009a; Cresswell 2004). In a society where race exists, it is important to study how places become racialized spaces. One example of this can be found in the East Village, Buckhead, where a nightlife district that catered to a racial mix of clientele was eventually replaced with a luxury retail/residence redevelopment.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Broadly, my research asks what the relationship is between racialized practices and the meaning of place. Specifically in my empirical study, I ask how the discourses over race and place changed between 2000 and 2008 in the East Village of Buckhead.

Case Study: Buckhead

Incorporated in 1952, Buckhead is a mixed residential and business district north of Atlanta's historic central business district. The community is legally defined as the area of the city falling northeast of Interstate 75 and northwest of Interstate 85 and within the actual city limits of Atlanta.² As of 2007, Buckhead had over 100,000 residents and was one of the nation's wealthiest communities (Stodghill 2007). The central core of Buckhead is a small area, and is divided into the northern business/shopping district (and includes Lenox and Phipps Plaza shopping malls) and the southern district, which includes the Village. Two major roadways divide this central core: Peachtree Road (north-south) and Paces Ferry (east-west), whose intersection serves as the geographical designation of 'downtown' Buckhead.³ The area that falls south of East Paces Ferry and east of Peachtree is known as the East Village, and was for the past several decades the entertainment hotspot for the southeastern United States (Torpy and Scott 2007). However, the late 1990s and early 2000s residents, politicians, and business leaders in the area perceived an increase in criminal behavior in the Village, which led to a heated debate over who and what was the cause.

² See Appendix B

³ The use of "downtown" to describe the central core of Buckhead is common vernacular amongst Buckhead residents.

According to multiple newspaper accounts, in the early 2000s the argument over safety in the East Village was a contested issue between the white residents of Buckhead and African-Americans who were outsiders in Buckhead. African Americans had increasingly been drawn to the Village in the late 1990s; around the same time Buckhead residents began to insist that the area was becoming violent and dangerous. As such, some African Americans argued that they were unwelcome in Buckhead, and that Buckhead residents were using the danger argument to force them out (Colvin 2000; Matthews 2000; Shelton 2000c, 2000b, 2000a; Shelton 2000d; Shelton and Hairston 2000; Shelton and Suggs 2000; Staff 2000; Tucker 2000). The conflict over the issue stemmed from differing perspectives on race, and whether or not racism motivated Buckhead residents to view the East Village as dangerous. Over the next few years, several key moments, including a racial split among the city council on whether or not to close down bars earlier in the evening and intervention by the NAACP to ascertain whether there was police profiling occurring in the Village (Hairston and Shelton 2000), led to further disagreement over the role of race in identifying the “true source” of the problems of the Village.

In 2002 a new mayoral administration and city council were elected in Atlanta. With this change, as well as extensive lobbying from Buckhead, in 2003 a new ordinance was proposed and passed with biracial support and the bars hours were shortened from 4 a.m. to 3 a.m. Following this, several real-estate brokers and developers spent the next three to four years buying out the leases and properties in the East Village to make way for the redevelopment project dubbed ‘The Streets of Buckhead’.



Figure 1: Current view of East Village looking southeast from Peachtree/Roswell/Paces Ferry



Figure 2: Current view of East Village looking northeast from Peachtree/Pharr

After the Ray Lewis incident in 2000, debates over the future of the area appeared in several print media. For example, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* hosted readers' comments about the emerging conflicts over what to do about Buckhead, with topics ranging from removing hip-hop music to the deterioration of the African American community (AJC 2000a, 2000c, 2000d, 2000b, 2000e, 2003; Colvin 2000; Staff 2003). However, following the decision in 2003 to close the city bars at 3 a.m. and end alcohol sales at 2 a.m., suggestions that the debate was racially motivated ceased to appear in reader's comments. The dialogue tended to focus more on issues of safety, aesthetics, and zoning regulations, and it largely ignored the ways in which race and place are linked.



Figure 3: Street sign found throughout Buckhead. Implemented by the Buckhead Alliance to promote more surveillance of the area (photo courtesy of Dr. Katherine B. Hankins)

Context

Before any study of Buckhead is conducted, it is important to situate the area within a larger historical context. Buckhead was incorporated into the city of Atlanta in 1952, as part of

one of many “gentlemen’s agreements” between the city government, under Mayor Hartsfield, and the African American leadership of the time. Facing a burgeoning of the African American population, combined with a housing crisis, city leaders realized that something needed to be done to prevent outright racial confrontations (Bayor 1996; Keating 2001; Kruse 2005; Stone 1989). White flight had begun, and Mayor Hartsfield feared losing a majority constituency within the city, and saw annexation as a way to establish a firm base of affluent voters (Bayor 1996; Kruse 2005). Through careful negotiation, the agreement reached opened up the west-end of the city to African American advancement, as long as it was understood Buckhead would remain off limits to blacks (Bayor 1996; Keating 2001; Kruse 2005; Stone 1989).

Buckhead’s origins within Atlanta were racialized, and it is this historical context that makes the East Village discussion even more important for a consideration of place transgression. The conflict was not over economic class, as the Village catered to an affluent clientele regardless of race (despite his alleged involvement in a homicide, Ray Lewis is still a wealthy individual). Rather it revolves around the identity of Buckhead, an identity established on an agreement that it was the white part of town.

Positionality

This thesis utilizes several different methods of research. However, before presenting these methods it is important for me to frame my own perspectives and experiences in order to acknowledge that what I am presenting is an analysis of discourses about Buckhead, not the transcendental truth, and that the discourses I present have been shaped by my experiences and perceptions. It would be inappropriate for me to discuss racial identity, and the social structures that shape that identity, without acknowledging my own social standing.

I was born and raised in the Buckhead community, in a small neighborhood that borders the East Village. My family is affluent, and my older sisters and I (like my parents) are socially identifiable as whites. However, I also have two younger siblings who are bi-racial and socially identifiable as black. As such, I have the experience of being white and wealthy, but having family members who are not identified as white. This does not provide me with any special insight, nor does it validate me as a voice to speak for those who do not identify as white. Rather, it puts me in a position of privilege as a white male in American society—a position I have consciously and unconsciously utilized throughout my life to gain access to certain places and resources.

I do not write this to promote myself as an enlightened individual who can speak definitively on topics such as race and marginalization, but instead to acknowledge I have benefited, and continue to benefit from, white privilege. It is because of this privilege, and the perspective that comes from it, that I write this paper. Those individuals who identify as white cannot speak for the marginalized, nor can they assume a position of objectivity and enlightenment and seek to enfranchise the disenfranchised. My positionality, and as a result, my research, allows me to critically engage with my own identity and perspective at the same time that I critically analyze the public and private discursive themes represented in newspaper accounts and by my interview participants.

Methods and Data

My methods involved a pilot study in the fall of 2007, and an extended, three-month ethnography of the East Village in the summer of 2008. I conducted fifteen interviews with former nightclub operators, civic and business leaders, as well as government agents. Many of

these interviews were only attainable due to my own positionality as an affluent white male from Buckhead. Because of this it is possible to view these interviews as social encounters, and not an objective interaction, with a very specific production of knowledge coming from the discussion (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). I approached the interviews in a semi-structured manner, but allowed each interviewee to dictate how the conversation flowed. This process of active interviewing permitted the respondents to feel more comfortable around me, but also created a specific setting under which specific information could be presented (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

Pseudonym	Age (+/- 10 yrs.)	Perceived Gender	Perceived Ethnic Identity	Affiliation/Occupation
B.G.	40	Male	White/Caucasian	Nightclub Owner
P.B.	45	Female	African American	City Council Member
C.W.	40	Male	African American	State Representative
L.W.	55	Male	African American	Fulton County Commission
G.W.	55	Male	African American	City Council Member
N.M.	55	Male	White/Caucasian	former City Council Member, attorney
S.B.	45	Female	White/Caucasian	Board Member Buckhead NPU
M.S.	55	Female	White/Caucasian	Board Member Buckhead Business Association
M.B.	75	Male	White/Caucasian	Board Member Buckhead Coalition
T.M.	35	Male	White/Caucasian	Employee Ben Carter Properties
M.N.	45	Male	White/Caucasian	City Council Member
R.W.	45	Male	White/Caucasian	Board Member Buckhead CID
F.T.	45	Male	White/Caucasian	Buckhead Business owner, Board Member Buckhead Alliance
E.C.	35	Female	White/Caucasian	Board Member Buckhead NPU, Buckhead Alliance
S.S.	45	Male	White/Caucasian	Board Member Buckhead Business Association

Table 1: Breakdown of the interviewees

Additionally, I examined newspaper and magazine articles, as well as advertisements, dating from the Ray Lewis incident in 2000 to the summer of 2008 when the interviews were concluded, to understand the discourses surrounding race and the East Village. In the end I

collected fifty-two articles, with forty-eight of them from *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution (AJC)*, one from the *Los Angeles Times*, one from the *New York Times*, and two from *Creative Loafing*.

It is also important for the positionality of the *AJC* to be assessed, since it does represent the bulk of the text I accumulated. The *AJC* was created in 2003, when *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution* merged. While the two papers represented different ends of the American political spectrum, the *AJC* is fairly sympathetic to the north-side of Atlanta, and as such has been fairly subjective in its representation of the Buckhead Village. This does not detract from the value of the *AJC* as a source, but it does need mentioning because it indicates the subjectivity of the *AJC* as a source, which is important when considering what voices are heard from a specific discourse. Further, it is only one source of news media, and not representative of the entire range of media outlets that report on goings on in Atlanta. Alternative sources, such as political blogs, other print media, and radio talk shows, to name a few, could also have been sought out for my research. However, this thesis is focused on the white space of Buckhead, and the various ways this identity has been maintained. As such the *AJC* is a very useful tool for assessing the discourses, as well as for understanding how the Buckhead image is reproduced throughout the city.

By separating the data into the newspaper accounts and interviews, I was better able to identify the discursive themes present within the text. Utilizing the methodological framework established by Ahl (Ahl 2007) I was able to apply the concepts of Foucauldian discourse analysis. The end result was a discourse analysis blended with content analysis to illuminate the various themes that emerged on race and place.

Ahl (2007) provides a methodology for applying Foucauldian principles and procedures to conduct discourse analysis. This is accomplished by first observing how a particular discourse is enabled and delimited through a seven-step process. The process involves identifying what the text prohibits, what is understood as the 'truth', the topics considered appropriate to the commentary, and the function of the author. Through these initial four steps, one is able to identify what knowledge is accepted and who has created said knowledge. Next the disciplinary regulations and the inclusion/exclusion of speakers is explored in order to come to the final stage of understanding the 'ideal truth' of the discourse. The 'ideal truth' is understood best as the common knowledge created by a discourse.

After the 'ideal truth' is identified, Ahl suggests four procedures for understanding how the discourse is restricted through an enabling and delimiting of the information. First, examine that which is not said, but rather that which is excluded. Second, understand that analysis does not lead to truth, just a different interpretation. Third, discourse is practice imposed upon a certain understanding. Fourth, do not look for any hidden or inner meaning from the discourse. These procedures provide the researcher with a framework to work within that does not lead to an assumption of 'truth', but rather a different understanding of the topic.

I partially followed Ahl's outline, while adding my own methods when applicable. First and foremost, I examined the interview transcriptions and the newspaper texts for common themes or threads. Once these themes were identified, I used a color-coding system to organize the data. That is, I took three separate colored highlighters and colored pencils to identify and comment on samples within the text. After the three themes had been identified and color-coded, I was able to connect the various samples into common perspectives. The samples that

supported a perspective were listed together, while those samples representing a dissenting voice were listed separately.

It was at this point that Ahl's work became the most influential and helpful. With the discursive themes identified and categorized, it became increasingly difficult to readily quantify the data. As a result, I used Ahl's qualitative methodology for examining the creation, implementation, and broadcast of dominant discourses to create a general knowledge and/or understanding. What this entailed was looking at the coded data for links between the supporting perspectives and the dominant discourses surrounding the Village. Additionally, it required examining how the dissenting voice serves as a tool of legitimization for those who support the common understanding. By using Ahl's outline I was able to not only analyze the content of the text, but also the discursive themes within that have created the common knowledge of the East Village.

To supplement the textual data I accumulated, I filed an open record's request with the Atlanta Police Department for crime statistics for the ten-year period of 1998-2007.⁴ The data were broken into citywide, Zone 2 (North Atlanta), and Beat 205 (Buckhead Village). I analyzed the statistical data as a supplemental method to help understand a different approach to some of the discursive themes I identified. That is, with the text displaying a theme of violent representation of the Village, and the reasoning behind this, I felt it necessary to engage the crime statistics to try and ascertain the validity of these claims.

⁴ See Appendix C

CHAPTER 4 – EXPLORING THE DISCOURSES

Once the data had been collected, three major discursive themes emerged from the text, and all were interconnected in shaping the discourses surrounding the Village. Through an analysis of the discourses within and the overall connections, we can see how civic and business leaders in Buckhead have maintained a racialized place identity by portraying the Village as dangerous. Further, through language representative of a colorblind society, the dominant understanding of the situation has denied the legitimacy of race. Moreover, by deploying the discourse of the race card, Buckhead leaders invalidated any opposing voice that suggests racism was a motivating factor in the redevelopment of the Village.

The perceptions of danger are tied to a common understanding that the late 1990s saw an increase of African American patrons to the clubs, especially with the rise of hip-hop in Atlanta. To counter claims of race, the dominant discourse turned to colorblind language to whitewash the issues. That is, race is ‘ignored’ to maintain a belief that all are equal in society, and so discussing race was irrelevant. Inevitably though, some individuals still saw the situation as motivated by racism, and it is at this point that the discourse of the race card was employed, to invalidate these dissenting voices. By looking at these three discourses individually and connectedly, we can better understand the racialized landscape of Buckhead.

Race and Danger

The most prominent discursive practice evident within the data was the discussion of whether or not the Village had become dangerous by the close of the 20th century. While the incident allegedly involving Ray Lewis serves as a major flashpoint, within Police Beat 205

(includes the Village and surrounding areas) there were 14 homicides between 1999-2004.⁵ Just within the 2001-2003 period there were 9 homicides within the Village, all involving black males as perpetrators and victims (Tucker 2003a, 2003b). From 1999-2000 the Village saw an increase in total numbers of class-1 felonies (this was observed from 2001-2003 as well).⁶ Examples such as this serve as evidence for those who felt that the Village was becoming more dangerous, especially when taken in context with the significant drop in total felonies between 2003-2004 (earlier bar closings) and 2005-2006 (as properties were bought out and bars closed down). The numbers certainly display a decreasing trend following stricter enforcement and establishment closings.

However, when the Beat 205 numbers are compared to the Buckhead totals (Zone 2), and the city as a whole for the same time period, one can see some interesting contrasts.

The city and Buckhead saw substantial decreases in felony activity during 1998-2005, and then an increase from 2006-2007.

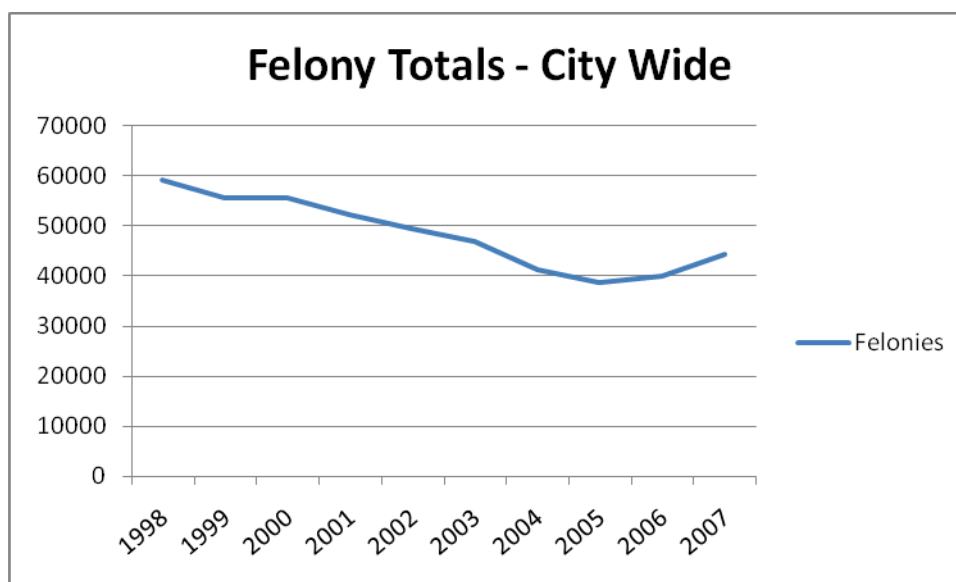


Table 2: Shows the total felonies committed city wide, 1998-2007

⁵ See Appendix C

⁶ Appendix C

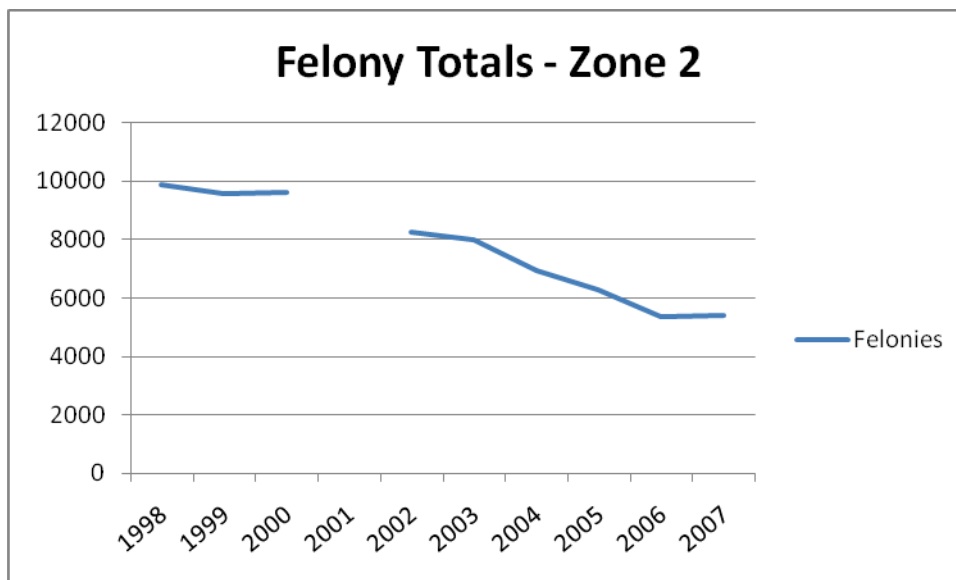


Table 3: Shows the total felonies committed in Police Zone 2 (encompasses buckhead), 1998-2007

What this trend may indicate is a citywide drop in crime while Beat 205 was seeing a downward trend as well, with exceptions in three years (2000, 2002, and 2003).

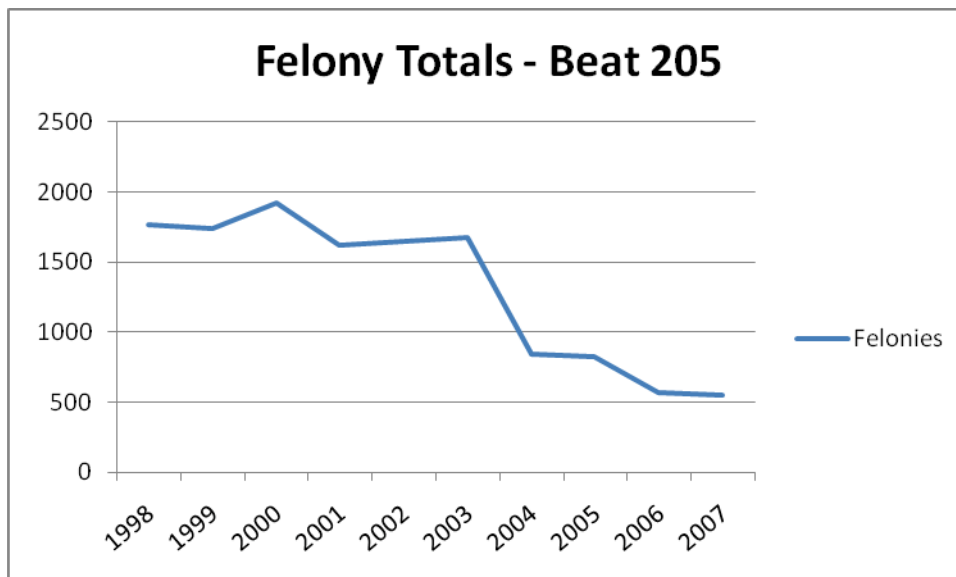


Table 4: Shows total felonies committed Police Beat 205 (encompasses the East Village)

These numbers do not provide conclusive evidence one way or another. While it is certainly the case that the numbers support that the Village became 'safer' with earlier bar-hours

and the eventual removal of the establishments, the overall downward trend in felony numbers indicates perceptions of danger are open to interpretation.

Danger within the text

Regardless of the crime statistics, review of the newspaper and interview accounts reveal that perceptions of public safety and marking particular individuals as dangerous were contested issues when discussing the Village. In one reader response post, written leading up to the 2003 ordinance vote, these comments were issued, “Buckhead dress code, pre-1996 – sports coat required. Post-1996 – bulletproof vests required,” (Staff 2003). By evoking the image of a bulletproof vest, in contrast to a sports jacket, the respondent has given the impression that a once high class area has become rife with danger. Through such descriptive language it is not hard to imagine how some came to perceive the East Village as violent.

We can see further evidence of this in an *AJC* article written around the time of the 2000 ordinance vote. In this piece, the authors provide an anarchic image of the Village: “... violence and lawlessness [are] in the streets” (Shelton and Hairston 2000). What these words inspire is an understanding that the Village was a warzone, which personal experience and crime data do not support. However, by representing the situation in such stark language in the newspaper provides the imagery necessary to construct the Village as being overrun with dangerous behavior.

The idea of behavior is directly indicated in several instances. In an interview with a current City Council member, I asked the question of what had spurred the city government to vote to close down the bars earlier in 2003, and she replied

“...you have one group imposing bad behavior on the broader group... So you want to get rid of the public nuisance... [bars] brought with them a clear bad element and a clear set of bad behaviors...” (P.B. 2008)

‘Bad’ is a very subjective term, but also very useful if one is trying to portray something as aberrant. By describing both the bars, and the people in them, as ‘bad’, the City Council person has indicted the establishments and clients as the problem with the Village.

Along with behavior, the idea of ‘bad’ comes out in a sense of aestheticism. Another interviewee, this one also with a current City Council representative, answered the previously stated question with this response:

“You know the trash, the noise, the traffic congestion, the violence on an almost you know weekend basis for all but a few months of the year just got to be overwhelming. People were murdered every year.” (M.N. 2008)

Once again we see references to violence, but added in now are ideas of garbage, loud music, and gridlock. By emphasizing the murders, and then building on that with descriptive language we get a portrayal of the Village as ugly. The violence is the main point, but using aesthetic descriptors helps to highlight the situation as degenerating from its once classy image.

Besides direct references to violence and aesthetics, the dialogue also would indict hip-hop culture as a problem within the Village. In a letter to editor during the summer of 2003, before the ordinance vote, the author comments on the increased population of partiers in Buckhead during NBA All-Star weekend: “Buckhead was once again invaded by unruly, uncivilized college students and wannabe hip-hop artists” (*AJC* 2003). Nowhere does the author specifically indicate the problem as being caused by a specific racial group, but by describing the crowd as hip-hop influenced, this reader suggests the presence of African Americans. The inclusion of college students serves to make it seem as if the problem is youthful indiscretion. However, another reader response on the same topic made these remarks that make it harder to not understand the problem as being caused by young African Americans, “When did Buckhead become Bankhead” (*AJC* 2003)? Referring to Bankhead is rife with racial innuendo, as

Bankhead is a historically black community on the west side of Atlanta. Comparing Buckhead to Bankhead implies that the presence of nonwhites in some way led to the troubles within Buckhead.

The link between hip-hop and the perception of increased danger within the Village is clear in comments made by two reporters for the *AJC* during 2001, after the failure of the 2000 ordinance had allowed bars to remain open until 4 a.m. “The change in Buckhead began a couple of years ago, when clubs began marketing to African Americans with hip hop...” (Shelton and Esters 2001). The change referred to is the perceived time, sometime in the late 1990s, when the Village became “violent.” As these statements indicate, this period is seen as combined, or due, to the increase of hip-hop establishments and African American clientele. That is, there is hint of a link between increased perceptions of violence and increased numbers of African Americans, with hip-hop serving as a stand-in for direct racial identification.

One former East Village nightclub operator who was bought out by the Carter Properties suggested that Buckhead was a “... new haven for the hip-hop community... it did just get out of control,” (B.G. 2008). The question that prompted this answer was whether the interviewee felt the area had become dangerous. Surprisingly, as the interviewee had indicated his opposition to redevelopment, these comments support the impression that hip-hop led to danger. By combining the Village with hip-hop, and then describing it as out of control, the commentary makes it so that hip-hop appears to be a ‘bad’ influence.

Another good example of how hip-hop was linked to violence can be found in the letter to the editor written by Mr. Colvin in 2000. Written in response to the failed ordinance, Mr. Colvin proposes that all of the problems in the Village will go away if hip-hop is removed:

“I have a simple solution to the problem: remove the water, and the mosquitoes won’t come to bite you. In other words, change the climate, type of music in your bars and you will see a change in behavior.” (Colvin 2000)

We can see that there was a very specific link between the type of music being played and the people it was meant to attract. With the Village becoming a “haven”, more and more African Americans began to frequent the Village. Following this increase in African American clientele (especially youths) “dangerous” behavior increased, according too many Atlantans.

During the time after the 2000 vote, there was some acknowledgement that there was a disconnection between Buckhead and the rest of the city in terms of understanding race. In one article, the reporter explains how the increase in African American partiers did lead to an escalation in the perceptions of the Village:

“Frictions had heated up in the Buckhead Village area as more black youths began partying in what traditionally was a mostly white bar scene.” (Shelton and Staff 2001)

From this we observe an understanding that the increase in ‘black youths’ led to the conflict over how to manage the Village. However, through other examples in the text we can see how this is also linked to behavior.

One interview was with a board member for the Buckhead Alliance, a non-profit organization established by Buckhead to monitor safety in the Village. The interviewee provided an interesting perspective when asked who was causing the problems in the Village:

“... I don’t know if it was like – if you would call it a gang, but like a lot of that kind of feeling... you didn’t see a lot of whites in this area near the end.” (E.C. 2008)

The statement is somewhat disjointed, and in the context of the interview it was quite clear that the respondent was struggling to answer. However, the end of the sentence makes quite an

impression where the interview participant directly stated that it was not white people causing the trouble.

Not all of the dialogue on danger within the Village was presented racially. Many examples from the text avoided racial language and focused on perceptions of public safety. In an editorial column, written in support of the 2000 ordinance, we are given an image, “People are sick of drug dealers, prostitutes at 4 a.m.” (Campbell 2000b). This columnist is intentionally using this imagery to promote the perception of Buckhead as dangerous.

The understanding of the Village as being dangerous was very much still part of the discussion with the lead up to redevelopment. In the following piece, the reporter describes the Village as having been ‘defined’ by violence, “Crime, including several high-profile murders outside throbbing nightclubs, suddenly defined the Village,” (Jubera 2007). Once again the subjectivity of perception is ignored, and high-profile murders are used to advance the image of the Village as dangerous. Another *AJC* article, from 2006 when the Village was seeing its final days as an entertainment district, provides similar language:

“... the famous, and later notorious, village... there were stolen cars and mayhem, pedestrians run down, shooting – nine over four years – and the Ray Lewis incident...” (Woods 2006)

The Village has degenerated from ‘famous’ to ‘notorious’, which is similar to comparison between sports coats and bulletproof vests. Additionally, adjectives such as ‘mayhem’ further serve to offer a perception of the Village as a place of violence.

Buckhead was constructed as a place of danger, and as a place that had to be remade, through redevelopment and the closing down of the bars. In an article written with the beginning of the redevelopment project, we are given this understanding explicitly, “after outbreaks of violence, the city cracked down on the revelry, making more arrests and shortening hours,”

(Duffy 2007). Duffy is describing the time after the 2003 vote, when hours shortened, and pressure on the part of Buckhead leaders led to heightened surveillance of the Village.

‘Outbreaks of violence’ offer adequate reasoning for this response, and is supplemented by other examples, “[Buckhead was home to]... a string of high-profile slayings and other violence...”

(Jarvie 2007). Jarvie’s article comes from around the same time as Duffy’s and serves the same purpose: to suggest that the district needed to be remade.

While interviewing a leading Buckhead businessman, I asked the respondent about his/her decision to buy out several leases in the East Village. I was given this answer, “It’s getting too dangerous, people dying. You know, we got to stop it...” (F.T. 2008). At this point, it useful to return to links between these discourses of danger, with the topic of race. The NBA All-Star weekend of 2003 provided some of the most virulent text pertaining to the question of race and Buckhead. One reader respondent went so far as to indicate the deterioration of the African American community in Atlanta as the cause for violence in Buckhead:

“The actions of the African American individuals in Atlanta this weekend reflect the deterioration of that community and this city. Name a single time in the history of Atlanta where the actions of whites resulted in the closing of two major malls.” (*AJC* 2003)

The malls referenced, Lenox and Phipps were ‘closed’ that weekend as a preemptive attempt by the fire marshal to keep down crowds. The ‘actions’ that the respondent mentions were assumed to have occurred. This indicates a preconceived notion on the part of Buckhead that African Americans are dangerous and would crowd into Buckhead.

Despite the vote of 2003, and the subsequent crackdown on illicit behavior in the Village, many still saw the situation as unacceptable. Even as late as 2004 reporters for the *AJC* were describing the Village as dangerous, and linking this to the nightlife establishments:

“...Buckhead... has been replaced by a never ending strip of bars, drunken customers and

violent crime...” (Woods 2004). The use of the word ‘replaced’ here seems to especially stand out. We have seen several examples that describe the Village as having changed in the late 1990s, and the word ‘replaced’ serves to highlight this point. It calls to mind the idea that the identity of the Village has been lost.

Along with this sense of loss comes the commentary that links violence with African Americans. In a response to an *AJC* column, in which the staff member argued Buckhead was being portrayed a dangerous because of a fear of black men, the author emphasizes the fact that the homicides in the Village involved black men as perpetrators. “... Black men commit a disproportionate share of violent crime,” (*AJC* 2000a). The author is using less than five examples to serve as justification to quantify black men as violent.

In another letter to the editor, in response to the same column, we can observe this perspective again. We can see a link between nonwhites and violent behavior, as well as indications that this is ‘denied’ by nonwhites: “Not many black people have the courage to say that blacks... are responsible for a disproportionate share of violent crime,” (*AJC* 2000a). This response makes an assumption that most African Americans deny that they are somehow representative of violence. By linking an entire population to a few extreme incidents, the authors create a judgment that African Americans are violent

While some linked violence in the Village to African Americans, they also established that violence is acceptable, as long as it does not directly impact Buckhead residents. A Buckhead businessman made this (chilling) statement: “Luckily, the people that got killed – I hate to say it – but deserved to get killed” (F.T. 2008).

When I asked my interviewees if the decisions that led to redevelopment had been influenced by racism, I mostly received “no” as the answer. The most common answer pointed

to the danger in the Village, and made assumptions that this danger was observable and understood by all. One of the board members for the Buckhead Business Association supplied this response:

“... there was a need to sort of clean up a pretty base, if you will, lifestyle... I can remember times in Buckhead when I felt unsafe... I really think the driver on this project was more safety and not racial at all.” (S.S. 2008)

The language of ‘clean up’ and ‘safety’ serves as an effective tool to promote the situation as one of danger only, not race.

The understanding of the East Village as a place of danger was not lost on the Ben Carter Properties. In an interview with a representative of the corporation, I asked what prompted the Carter Properties to seek out properties in Buckhead. The response was that the area had become dangerous, and did not fit with the image of what Buckhead should be: “... [Buckhead is] an area that I think became more crime infested,” (T.M. 2008).

It wasn't necessarily safety

While the preponderance of the text portrays the Village as having degenerated into violence, there were those who voiced a counter-perspective, and argued that violence was not the main motivation. In an interview with a former city council representative who is now a county commissioner, I got the first hints that maybe some did not agree with that the Village had become dangerous, and felt that racism motivated the redevelopment, “... it wasn't necessarily safety,” (L.W. 2008). The respondent was directly involved in both the 2000 and 2003 vote, and as s/he indicated, safety was not necessarily the reason to close down the bars. The insinuation of the response was that the decision was racially motivated.

Talking with a State Representative, I asked to what level violence in the East Village influenced the decisions to redevelop. The response was, “... I think it has been blown out of

proportion,” (C.W. 2008). For the interviewee, the violence was a tool used to paint the Village as a ‘bad’ place, and gather support throughout the city to pass the 2003 ordinance and eventually redevelop.

A current City Council member went even further in his comments, to indicate that violence was not in any way relative to the Village. “[For Buckhead]... it’s a culture game,” (G.W. 2008). Taken in context with other statements within the interview, the respondent felt that Buckhead wanted to maintain a ‘pristine’ (white) image and that in order to remove the African American partiers they used a discourse of danger to portray hip-hop culture as dangerous.

Influential people were not the only ones voicing a counter-perspective. That is, some members of the city’s African American population felt that they were singled out and perceived as dangerous by those in Buckhead. As reported in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the owner of *The Cobalt Lounge*, the establishment where the Ray Lewis incident originated, suggested that there was a perception that Buckhead wanted to remove African Americans. “Cook said the undercurrent is racism and that the reason the club is being singled out is because his... crowd is mostly African American,” (Suggs 2000). Following the Ray Lewis incident, the Atlanta Police Department added extra patrols to the Village to try and present itself as addressing the concerns of the residents.

However, this response was not welcomed by all, and as one *AJC* article suggests, it added to the perceptions of racial discrimination, “... some claim the beefed-up police patrols are unfairly targeting black people” (Davis 2000). The fact that some felt this way shows that the picture of the Village as unsafe does not represent everyone. We can observe this further, by looking at the comments made by one *AJC* reader after the NBA All-Star weekend in 2003.

“Would the upscale white citizenry prefer that we “Negroes” go back to the ghettos” (*AJC* 2003)? Once again there is a presentation of a counter-understanding that argues that African Americans were not welcome in Buckhead.

In addition to these comments that challenge the racial undertones of the “safety” discourse, there are those who questioned why African Americans are portrayed as dangerous. A reader response to the NBA All-Star weekend proposed that the danger in the Village, while overblown, had always been there, but was only considered inappropriate when involving blacks. “I guess a gathering of drunken whites is just not as scary as a large gathering of drunken African Americans,” (*AJC* 2003). In a bar district, there was certainly going to be a segment of the population who was drunk, but as the author indicates, this is only scary when it is made up of ‘others’.

One *AJC* columnist, Tucker, wrote several pieces, between 2000 and 2003, concerning the perceptions of African Americans in the Village. She acknowledges that the perpetrators of the homicides were African American men, and that this was unacceptable, but also argues that Buckhead viewed all African Americans in the Village as dangerous. “These days, longtime white residents of Buckhead refer ominously to a ‘dangerous element’ that walks their formerly safe streets,” (Tucker 2000). The ‘dangerous element’ is the young African Americans attracted to the area by the increase of hip-hop establishments. This column was written around the time of the 2000 ordinance vote, and was meant to heighten the understanding of why some opposed the bill.

In a column she wrote three years later we can still see this dynamic of Buckhead demonizing African American presence, “America continues to stereotype black men as dangerous predators... White callers to radio shows denounced blacks for ‘ruining’ Buckhead,”

(Tucker 2003b). Buckhead was ‘ruined’ by blacks is a very contentious statement, and one that would not be accepted by those who have supported the image of the Village as a place of danger. However, it reflects quite clearly the differences between the various perspectives.

Interpreting the discourses

Of all the views involved in the Buckhead Village, the notion of public safety and danger is the most apparent discursive theme. The discourse of danger represents the Village as having degenerated into a violent district dominated by hip-hop clubs and black youth by drawing on common stereotypes of black men, and American societal perceptions of nonwhites as dangerous (Johnson 1985; Russell 1992). Johnson (1985) examines why American society tends to view black men as dangerous more frequently than white men. Through an examination of trial data, Johnson finds that African American defendants are convicted more frequently than whites for the same crimes, regardless of jury makeup. That is, whether or not the jury is predominantly white or African American does not matter, black men are still more likely to be convicted because of a societal understanding that they represent danger.

The change in the Village during this time was considered as transgressing Buckhead. Whether it was a perception of danger, the increase in African Americans in the area, or a combination thereof, the identity of Buckhead had been violated by this shift in the East Village atmosphere. The discourses of danger are one response to this transgression, and were based upon actual events of real danger and violence. However, they were also taken out of proportion as the actual crime in the area had not shown any significant increase. This does not invalidate perceptions of danger, but it does indicate a possible connection between the increase in African Americans, and a sense that Buckhead’s identity had been transgressed.

While there are those who propose a counter discourse, through such discursive themes as the race card and colorblind language, these voices are used as evidence for the lack of racism involved in the decision making process. What this indicates is the power dynamic between those who feel the Village was dangerous, and those who do not adhere to that interpretation. White Buckhead is represented as the victim in the situation, with the Village 'replaced' by violence, and those who try to propose a counter-perspective are blocked by the use of colorblind language.

Colorblind Society

While the question of safety in the Village was the most highlighted topic within the text, the ways in which individuals denied racialized perspectives stands out as a provocative discursive theme. As we have seen, some language can be observed linking the perceived violence in the Village with the presence of African Americans. However, when this possible connection is brought up by those who do see race involved in the East Village, it is usually disregarded.

Colorblindness is heavily critiqued by CRT which argues that American society utilizes language to remove racial identity (Bell 1995; Cook 1990; Crenshaw 1988; Delgado 1991; Gotanda 1991). American society portrays itself as colorblind, in that all individuals are equal, and therefore racial differentiation is not pertinent. However, this fails to address the presence of racism in society, because it ignores the inequality within society based on race. That is, colorblind language denies racial identity, and in doing so reinforces the power dynamic of white as superior (Aleinikoff 1991). We can observe this discursive practice in the Village by looking at various examples in which voices from newspaper and interview accounts deny race by

suggesting that they do not see race. Additionally, there are samples from the data that provide the argument that since we all are different we are all equal, which inherently ignores the marginalization of nonwhite people (Delgado 1991).

Those who do not see race

By not acknowledging the existence of racial identity, those who represent the Village as an issue of danger, not race, do not accept the existence of racism. One manner in which this has been accomplished is through the lack of evidence of racial profiling in the Village. By this, what is understood is that there was not any finding of the Atlanta Police Department targeting African Americans for illicit behavior within the East Village. Following the 2000 vote's failure, some within the Atlanta City Government questioned if the Buckhead community was using the vote to reduce the presence of African Americans in the area. One response to this was an invitation on the part of the Atlanta City Government to the NAACP to spend time in the Village to observe and question if profiling was happening. "Other black leaders, including the NAACP... have found no evidence [of discrimination]," (Shelton and Esters 2001). As this piece from the *AJC* suggests, there was no evidence to be found that supported the theory that racial profiling was occurring. Many used this as proof that race was not something considered when trying to reign in the bar scene.

One of the best examples of this denial comes from former Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell. Mayor Massell is the head of the Buckhead Coalition, and played a major part in lobbying the City Government to pass the 2003 ordinance and heighten police enforcement within the Village:

"Former Mayor Sam Massell... said, 'Let me assure you, nobody I know in Buckhead has said that any blacks aren't welcome in Buckhead... We don't know any profiling.'" (Shelton and Suggs 2000)

These comments, taken immediately after the 2000 vote, prompted the NAACP observations. As we can see, according to official reports, there was no profiling, and therefore there was no “official” finding of a racial component to the 2000 ordinance.

Massell was hardly the only spokesman for this position. Several members of the *AJC* Staff wrote a column around the same time in which they criticize the Atlanta City Government for contemplating racism. “[Opponents of the 2000 ordinance]...absent any evidence... complaints are now inspired by racism,” (Staff 2000). Without evidence, there cannot be racism. At least that is the assertion made here. However, this ignores that race is a very subjective topic, and that nonwhites and whites tend to disagree on what constitutes racism (Delgado 1992; Nelson, Sanbonmatsu, and McClerking 2007).

We can observe this assertion through commentary received during an interview with a member of the Buckhead Coalition. They used arrest numbers to try and make the case that there was no evidence to support racism, “... they had made something like 13 arrests and 11 of them were white people. So you know, it was obviously not a racial purpose” (M.B. 2008). These comments came in a monologue following my initial question concerning whether or not there had been racial motivation in redeveloping the East Village. The respondent was very adamant in his position that the truth of the matter did not involve race. However, as displayed in the previous section (see *Race and Danger*), several African Americans, when interviewed by the *AJC*, felt they were observed by Buckhead residents as dangerous and unwelcome (Davis 2000).

The difference in opinion between the observations of some and the perceptions of others seems to indicate a lack of universal understanding on what racism implies. Lacking empirical evidence of police profiling, many Atlantans accepted that racism was not a consideration in the

Village. Instead, they pointed to other considerations, such as behavior, to explain why the bars' hours needed shortening. In an article written around the 2000 ordinance, several *AJC* reporters presented this argument, "Basically, it's a behavior thing. It's not a black or white thing," (Shelton 2000c). What makes these statements especially interesting is the assumption made on the part of the *AJC* reporters that behavior is a universal concept, and a single definition is accepted by all in society. They do not consider the possibility that behavior is a subjective understanding and could be racially influenced.

Geographic location of City Council districts was also indicated as being a point of contention around the Village. Following the 2000 vote, former Councilwoman Cathy Woolard made a statement that the issue was divisive due to geography, and the Council members who did not live in proximity to the bars (in Buckhead or neighboring areas) did not understand how the behavior within the district impeded residents' quality of life. "Councilwoman Cathy Woolard... said the split was more about geography than race," (Shelton 2000b).

In all of my interviews, I asked if the respondent felt racism had been involved in the conflict over the East Village. In most cases, the interviewee would answer in the negative. One example comes from my interview with a member of the Buckhead Alliance and Buckhead Business Association, "I don't know that it was racial, per se... I don't think it started as racial at all. I think it was too much partying" (M.S. 2008). The respondent has presented that partying was the issue. The problem with this is that the Village was an entertainment district, and partying was the purpose for going to the Village. This may have not been what Buckhead residents ideally wanted, but the removal of the nightlife scene did not occur until after African Americans arrived in large numbers at the end of the 1990s.

When speaking with a former City Council representative for Buckhead, the same question was posed. S/he responded with a chuckle, giving the impression that anyone to think racism had been involved was laughable, “None what-so-ever. None whatsoever... division tends somewhat to be economic as opposed to racial...” (N.M. 2008). The response indicates that the problem was economic, not racial. Unfortunately, there was no further explanation on what the economic issue was concerning the Village. Certainly Buckhead is an affluent area, and those coming into the Village from outside would not likely be as wealthy as local residents. However, this does not explain why these outsiders, and the bars, were unacceptable in the Village. Instead, the language used removes race from the discussion, and accomplishes this by making a (tenuous) link to economics.

One member of the Buckhead NPU (neighborhood planning unit) also turned to economic to explain the situation. S/he felt that the decision to redevelop was based on a desire to increase revenues for properties in the Village. “... it’s all about the money.... No, I don’t think that’s it [race] at all. I really don’t. You know, once again, I might be naïve in saying that, but I really don’t” (S.B. 2008). It would be unlikely for someone to accurately assess how much money the night clubs accumulated, and then compare this to the East Village after redevelopment. Certainly after the 2003 vote, and subsequent crackdown within the Village, the revenues for the bars dropped, as this is what made it possible for them to be bought out. However, before this change in operations, the bars were quite lucrative. Once again we have had monetary implications utilized to try and direct the discussion away from race.

While these examples from the interviews display colorblind language, comments elicited from the question when posed to the chairman of the Buckhead Business Association serve as a classic demonstration of how language can display colorblindness:

“Personally, I’ve never seen it as a racial issue... I don’t see it as a racial thing at all. But maybe that’s the world I live in. I don’t live in a – I don’t see things in black and white. I see every color...” (S.S. 2008).

Making a claim that one does not see race reinforces racism due to its failure to acknowledge the marginalization of nonwhites within society (Delgado 1992). Furthermore, it asserts a position of power on the part of the speaker that removes power from those who would disagree (Aleinikoff 1991).

Another clear illustration comes from an interview with a leading white Buckhead business-person. Using an almost cliché response, s/he denied the presence of racism. “I just don’t see black-white... some of my best friends that I really respect the most are African American,” (F.T. 2008). We cannot speak to the racial makeup of the respondent’s social circle, but we can observe discursive use of colorblind language. Similarly to the previous example, the interviewee does not ‘see’ race.

These kinds of models can be found not only amongst interviewees, but within the newspaper accounts as well. In a column printed in the *AJC* following the 2000 vote, Matthews makes a claim that racism is an outdated concept, not worth discussing for the past two decades:

“What is truly sad is that he [Boazman] and other people in ‘his part of town’ apparently have no idea how outmoded, irrelevant, and dumb that kind of statement sounds today. Twenty years ago, sure. But, folks, Atlanta is a city that’s some 70 percent black...” (Matthews 2000)

Not only does Matthews present the position of race being ‘outmoded’, he also uses language such as ‘irrelevant’ and ‘dumb’ to further discredit those who would disagree. Moreover, he points to Atlanta being a predominantly African American population in order to make it appear ludicrous that any Atlantan would act in a racially motivated manner.

We can also see further connections between behavior and race within the context of colorblindness. It has already been mentioned that behavior was used as an indicator to steer the

dialogue away from race, and in an *AJC* report from 2000 we can observe this clearly. “Black or white, Atlanta residents want to believe the city government can keep chaos off their streets,” (Shelton and Hairston 2000). This is another example of affirming there is a transcendental acceptance of behavior by all within society. This ignores the subjectivity of the situation, and instead uses a position of authority to make claims such as ‘chaos’ within the Village. We can also observe this within a letter to the editor of the *AJC* from the same time period, which makes a tenuous link between behavior problems and race:

“Many friends and I have patronized Buckhead since 1983, when only a handful of blacks frequented the area. Odd as it may seem there were no 2 a.m. shootings. We were all a product of our upbringing and we conducted ourselves appropriately.” (*AJC* 2000a)

The author, an African American woman, presents a generational rift as being the heart of the conflict, but also states that in the 1980s only a handful of African Americans went to the Village. This seems to imply that an increase in young African Americans, who did not share the author’s ‘upbringing’, brought the behavior problem with them.

Behavior was commonly referenced to deny racism. Another affluent area of Atlanta is the Ponce de Leon/Virginia Highlands, located southeast of Buckhead. A reader respondent wrote to the *AJC* in 2000 supporting Buckhead, and linking the Poncey-Highlands to the Village. “We in Poncey-Highlands sympathize with those in Buckhead trying to live peacefully... the problems are not race- or gender-related,” (*AJC* 2000c). The bar scene in the Poncey-Highlands has never seen the density of the Village, but as the author hints, it was a fractious topic. What is more, they assert that behavior is not race related, and that residents of both areas just want to ‘live peacefully’.

Taken in context with another reader response from the same edition of the *AJC*, we can observe that there is an “objective” assumption of behavior connecting the Poncey-Highlands

and Buckhead. “We want them to understand that noise and garbage cross all lines: racial, gender, and sexual orientation,” (*AJC* 2000c). These comments are referring to the Atlanta City Government’s vote that turned down the 2000 ordinance. They promote behavior as crossing ‘all lines’, not allowing for the possibility that people in the Village bars felt safe, were having fun, and did not believe they were preventing anyone from enjoying an acceptable quality of life. Assuming a position of power to present an objective understanding removes the authority from any other position.

In my interviews I would ask if it was plausible for some people to see a connection between race and safety in the Village. That is, I asked whether the Village was seen to be more dangerous with the increase in the number of African Americans in the area. A high ranking official within the Buckhead CID (community improvement district) argued that the behavioral problems were perpetrated by members of all races:

“... we’re talking about of all races... The fact that black folks were involved or black folks were present or enjoyed coming to the bars had nothing to do with the effort to solve the underlying problem.” (R.W. 2008)

The response has asserted colorblindness by speaking of ‘all races’. Ignoring racial differentiation has permitted the speaker to make the case that the “problem” was not linked to the increase in the number of African American partygoers.

The discourse of violence within the Village was very effective and allowed speakers to claim a position of authority. In my interview with a leading Buckhead business-person, he pointed out the diversity of the police force within Buckhead as evidence. “... we had officers and people of every color and race in this area, trying to solve the crime issue” (F.T. 2008). This statement does not allow anyone to question if there was a crime issue or not. It asserts there was a problem, and both white and black police officers were trying to ‘solve’ the problem.

Additionally, by pointing out the multi-racial mix within the police force, the interviewee has detached race from the conflict.

To refute colorblind language is to admit racism, possibly on the part of the individual speaking. This could be quite upsetting and uncomfortable, and so the colorblindness remains to maintain the more pleasant egalitarian fiction that race is not applicable to a situation. Adamant refusal to see racism helps to illustrate this point. One such approach comes from a letter to editor written in 2000. The reader is quite heated in his use of language to make the point that race was not a consideration, "... you don't know or care what the color of anyone's skin is. You just want them to shut their ignorant mouths and go home" (*AJC* 2000d). The response comes from a Buckhead resident making the case that regardless of race, when someone is acting inappropriately late at night he or she needs to be removed. However, the reference to 'ignorant mouth' hints that those who 'care' about race are themselves ignorant. Obnoxious behavior at 3 a.m. seems to be something anyone would agree is not acceptable, but what constitutes this obnoxious behavior is debatable, and calling those who would debate 'ignorant' is placing oneself as the voice of authority.

Taken in another context, the refusal to observe racism and instead point to behavior serves to take away power from those who argue for a consideration of racism, and establishes a common knowledge that racism is not a valid topic of discussion. One interviewee, a current City Council representative, does just that in the following comments, "It was an economic issue, it was a behavioral issue," (P.B. 2008). This statement was made in response to the question of what motivated the removal of the nightlife scene. At no point was race even mentioned, it was distinctly absent in a discussion centered on money and behavior.

One other way the discursive practice of colorblindness was deployed was through attempts to connect the perceived behavior problems with white individuals. A leading businessperson went so far as to connect hip-hop with a white man in order to show that the increase of hip-hop establishments brought a multi-racial ‘bad’ element:

“Now, the interesting thing was, is they said it was a black-white issue... but at the time all this was happening, the top hip-hop group was white. It was a white guy.” (F.T. 2008)

By linking a white “guy” with hip-hop, the respondent is removing race from the discussion. Through the identification of the “top” artist as white, the interviewee has indicated that people of all races were causing problems, but that hip-hop was common theme attracting these people. That is, s/he acknowledges hip-hop as a problem, or the very least a lure for dangerous people to Buckhead, but tries to do so in a manner that ignores race.

We can observe this further through commentary taken from an interview with a former Village nightclub operator. He makes the case that it did not matter what the race was of the partiers, the behavior would have led to removal nonetheless:

“So I think it’s more a class issue than a race issue... it’s a class and education issue... if it was a bunch of rednecks... coming to Buckhead the reaction would have been the same.” (B.G. 2008)

But it was not rednecks, it was African Americans. The presence of hip-hop directly correlates to an increase of African Americans within the Village.

Colorblind language was an effective tool. It helped to further the discourses that denied racism and promoted redevelopment for the benefit of the East Village, and Buckhead. However, these comments just further a discourse that ignores the prevalence of racial misunderstanding and marginalization (Delgado 1992).

Those who do see race

It is not difficult to find examples that challenge colorblindness, as any voice that mentions race would be denying colorblindness. Consequently, the counter-perspectives presented throughout this thesis all promote a race-conscious understanding.

In an interview with a current City Council member, s/he argues that racism is a part of the Buckhead identity, "... their [Buckhead] deep-seated racism causes a lot of discomfort... [Buckhead has an] inability just to frame the conversation," (G.W. 2008). The 'inability' to 'frame the conversation' speaks to the use of colorblind language, as this discursive practice fails to acknowledge the presence of racism within society. This is further observable in the statements by State Representative Kasim Reed in response to the racial divide amongst the City Council for the 2000 vote. "State Rep. Kasim Reed (D-Atlanta) said Atlanta's racial problems have been glossed over..."(Shelton and Suggs 2000). Reed has asserted that Atlanta has racial problems, but they have been covered up. In context, Reed said that Atlanta has continued to promote itself and has refused to acknowledge racial problems to avoid any bad representation. These are only two examples, but they serve as good models for how some consider racism and race to be applicable.

Can we see race?

Not only have the discourses surrounding the Village tended to represent the place as one of violence and danger, but they have done so in a manner that refuses to acknowledge racial identity, or the possibility of racism affecting the way in which the situation is understood. The prevailing knowledge holds that anyone could see how the area had degenerated, and that it was only logical for the area to be redeveloped to promote public safety.

Applied to place transgression, this indicates that use of racial dialogue was not in keeping with the ethos of Buckhead. To clarify, the use of colorblind language was as a discursive tool to counter the claims of those who did argue the situation was racially motivated. As such, these claims of racial intent were transgressing the identity of Buckhead, because they questioned the image promoted by Buckhead of colorless society.

However, what does this mean for those who did see race? Colorblindness serves as one discursive practice that illustrates the way language can be used strategically to remove the power from those who promote a counter-discourse. One reader response supports the colorblind perspective by indicting the validity of those who would question it: “Regarding Buckhead, let’s get rid of the [race] rhetoric and come up with solutions,” (*AJC* 2000c). The language used here is declaring that discussing race is ‘rhetoric’ and therefore useless.

Defensive discourse of the race card

Beginning in 2000, the discussion surrounding the Buckhead Village began to focus predominantly on issues of crime in the East Village linked to the nightlife scene. After the Ray Lewis incident, crime became the hot topic. Even as late as 2007, reporters for the *AJC* were discussing how the Village had degenerated into violence. In an article discussing the planned ‘Streets of Buckhead’ and the necessity for redevelopment, one reporter pointed to the violent past: “After outbreaks of violence, the city cracked down on the revelry...” (Duffy 2007). Duffy’s article is a report on the contracted sculptures and hotels for the development, but specifically mentions the violence to demonstrate the importance of redevelopment in bringing the Village more in line with the identity of Buckhead.

In another *AJC* article, the reporter provides a biography on Ben Carter, the head of the development group putting together ‘The Streets of Buckhead’. The article emphasizes the roots Carter has with the Buckhead community, while also lauding him for helping clean up the area: “... Much of the Buckhead Village devolved into a rowdy, sometimes dangerous bar district before embarrassed civic fathers pulled the plug,” (Jubera 2007). Jubera may be writing a piece on Carter, but he is also presenting language that indicates the violence in the Village as an obvious reason for promoting redevelopment. Describing the area as “rowdy” and “dangerous”, as well as insinuating this behavior “embarrassed” Buckhead.

Looking at an example from 2003, we can see that the violence was not a product of the current reporting, but had been a topic of the *AJC* for years. In the following article, published after a shooting in Buckhead resulted in two homicides, the reporter points to the demand of residents to have a safe environment, but that they were denied in 2000 by the failed ordinance: “...residents demanded that the city bring order to what has become a sometimes wild and violent party scene” (Visser 2003). A double homicide is certainly a violent event, and according to Visser and Tagami it would have been avoided had the city council voted for earlier bar closings in 2000. Similarly to the articles of Jubera and Duffy, the emphasis is placed on the danger facing Buckhead residents, as opposed to any other topic.

Race is not a “real” issue

When I asked interview participants whether race played any role in the decision to redevelop the Village, those who employed the discourses of danger strongly denied any connection. According to former Mayor, and current head of the Buckhead Coalition, Sam Massell the idea that the 2000 ordinance was an attempt by Buckhead to keep out nonwhites was ridiculous:

“...Sam Massell (former Mayor and head of Buckhead Alliance) said, ‘You can say whatever you want to say. The problem in the Buckhead Village nightlife area was not racial and is not racial.’”(Shelton and Esters 2001)

Massell was quoted for these comments in a report following up on the one-year anniversary of the Ray Lewis incident. He expresses a view that there is no link between race and the ‘problem’ in the Buckhead Village. He does not indicate what the problem is, instead emphasizing the invalidity of racial claims, with the assumption that violence was understood as the ‘real problem’.

In a letter to the editor before the 2003 ordinance vote, a reader made comments similar to the views expressed by Massell. Their support of the bill is implied through the language, and asserts that everyone agrees that something needed to be done. “Yes, we all agree something has to be done, but this isn’t a racial issue” (*AJC* 2003). What the reader fails to acknowledge is that there could be those who do not agree that something has to be done. The possibility of some finding the Village to be enjoyable and safe is lost in these comments, because the view asserts a position that violence is understood by all as the true issue, not race.

When race was brought up, supporters of the danger discourse established a position of denial, and countered that discussing race was detrimental to addressing the problems in the Village. In a piece written immediately following the 2000 ordinance vote, the reporters describe how most people in Atlanta felt that “racial rhetoric” was preventing progress. “Many people believe that the escalation of racial rhetoric has obscured the path to real solutions” (Shelton and Hairston 2000). This assumption of “real” issues not including race denies the relevance of race. Pointing to “real solutions” implies that race is not real.

In 2003, racism as a motivating factor in the discussions to change the Village was still being denied. With the passing of the ordinance late that year, one *AJC* reporter looked at how

biracial cooperation had allowed the bill to pass, and served as evidence that race was not an issue. "...offended black City Council members tended to kill the idea of shutting down the bars slightly earlier,"(Campbell 2003). Campbell's comments are directed at former Mayor Bill Campbell and the African American council members who had opposed the ordinance in 2000. He calls them "offended" to turn the situation into a personal affront. By presenting the situation in such a manner, Campbell is able to discredit the claims of those who viewed the situation as involving racism. They were "offended" by Buckhead, and so in retaliation ignored the "real" issue of violence and opposed the 2000 ordinance.

All of these examples follow the perspective taken by Massell, and assert the invalidity of race as a topic of discussion, and as a point of contention in Buckhead. Additionally, all three examples make a conclusion that there was a problem in the Village, and that everyone knew there was a problem. However, these assertions ignore that there was not a consensus, and that some people did view the situation as racially influenced.

While talking with a leading Buckhead businessman, I was informed that viewing the situation racially was inaccurate, because leading African Americans supported redevelopment:

"Now, the interesting thing was, is they said it was a black-white issue... It's not – it certainly wasn't a race issue, and Mayor Franklin and Pennington and, you know, Lisa Borders, President of City Council, and everybody who I know well – I went to school with Lisa Borders – they realized that is wasn't a black-white issue." (F.T. 2008)

Once again we find a perspective that does not see race as important. The interviewee asserts a position of authority by pointing to social connections with members of the African American community, and the city government. By connecting Buckhead with the African American leadership, the interviewee presents an understanding that race cannot be involved if there is biracial support.

Probably the most heated commentary on the inappropriateness of “playing” the race card, and clouding the “real” issues with the topic of race, came in the form of indictments against the Atlanta City Government, specifically former Mayor Campbell and Councilman Derek Boazman. Following the 2000 vote, Boazman made a comment that he opposed the ordinance because it was an attempt by Buckhead to keep out blacks. One *AJC* reporter commented that Boazman had played the race card:

“Surprisingly this time it wasn’t the mayor (Campbell), who’s usually the first to throw down the race card... It was City Councilman Derrick Boazman... Drafting the Buckhead issue into the race-politics game is also perverse...”(Matthews 2000)

Matthews indicts Boazman and also alleges that Mayor Campbell frequently bought up race at inappropriate times. By declaring the race card has been played, Matthews presents a defensive discourse that utilizes the concept of the race card to imply that race is not pertinent, and therefore denies the power of Boazman’s perspective. Including an adjective, such as “perverse”, serves to further invalidate Boazman’s claims by making it appear he has acted in an unethical manner.

Mathews was hardly the only critic of Campbell and Boazman, and reader comments in the *AJC* were commonly negative in their view. In response to the failed 2000 ordinance, this letter to the editor declares Boazman to be “moronic”:

“Will the Atlanta City Council and Mayor Bill Campbell ever start acting like civilized, responsible elected officials? The assertions of certain council members [Boazman] that the efforts to close Buckhead bars at 2 a.m. are a racist attempt to discourage African Americans from patronizing the area is one of the most moronic things to ever pass their lips.”(*AJC* 2000d)

The writer is very adamant in their disapproval of the perspective voiced by Boazman. For the writer, to consider race is “moronic” and as such, the perspective of Boazman is invalid.

Indicting Boazman, the Mayor, and others as irresponsible furthers this defensive discourse.

Boazman has also been criticized as being “ridiculous” in his comments. Another reader commenting on the failed 2000 ordinance, expressed disbelief that anyone would actually consider race as a factor:

“I was amazed at the ridiculous comments of City Councilman Derrick Boazman...that closing the bars earlier than 4 a.m. was racially motivated. That is utterly absurd.”(*AJC* 2000e)

The stunned response by the reader, as well as describing considerations of race as “absurd” supports the earlier understanding that violence was the obvious problem in the Village. By expressing their disbelief, and asserting their position as the correct one, the reader has invalidated race in the discussion.

While interviewing a current City Council member, I asked him if there was any validity to Councilman Boazman’s comments. The interviewee was unhappy with the position taken by Boazman, and felt that he had been inappropriate in making his statements. “I take exception and resent greatly when the race card is played on every issue... He [Boazman] portends to be a victim. I refuse to be a victim,” (P.B. 2008). By portraying Boazman as a victim, and using language that negatively represents victims, the interviewee expresses support for a colorblind perspective. Directly indicting the play of the race card serves to remove the power from Boazman’s stance, and maintains the power of Buckhead representatives.

In an interview with a former City Council representative I got a very similar response to the same question. S/he expressed regret that Councilman Boazman had chosen to “play the race card.” This expression seemed to indicate that Boazman had in some way failed to live up to the interviewee’s expectations, “...it was unfortunate Mr. Boazman chose to play that card but he did...” (N.M. 2008). “Unfortunate” is the adjective chosen by the interviewee, and serves to promote the image of regret. For the interviewee race is not a topic to discuss, and to bring it up

is a regrettable action, leading to the assertion that Councilman Boazman failed to maintain some set of standards. However, by utilizing this defensive discourse of the race card through regret, the interviewee has asserted a position of superiority based on the assumption that it is “unfortunate” to mention race.

Another former City Council representative, Fulton County Commissioner Robb Pitts, was quoted in 2000 as demanding a cease to racial talk. He made these comments in response to Councilman Boazman, and while he did not vote in the 2000 ordinance (he was Council President, a position of nonvoting power) his comments supports an understanding that something was “wrong” in the Village. “Pitts said that kind of talk [referring to Boazman] has to stop,”(Shelton 2000d). Pitts served as a peacekeeper between Boazman/Campbell and the Buckhead leadership during the 2000 vote. Pitts does not admit any validity to Boazman’s opinion and in failing to do so appears to be in support of the Buckhead perspective.

While Councilman Boazman’s comments outraged many, former Mayor Campbell tended to receive equally heated allegations concerning the race card. In an interview with a member of the Buckhead NPU (neighborhood planning unit), I asked how Mayor Campbell had hindered the redevelopment of the Village:

“Bill Campbell... He hated Buckhead. Probably still does... I mean he is pretty racist himself... I think he was a big part of the problem... You know it’s the white man’s trying to keep us down kind of deal and that’s – and of course that’s one view, but it doesn’t exactly fit with reality.” (S.B. 2008)

The language here claims Mayor Campbell is a racist and does not see “reality”. While we cannot speak to the validity of Mayor Campbell hating Buckhead, or being a racist, we can observe how these claims serve to remove the power from the Mayor’s position. By making these claims the interviewee uses racism as a tool to incriminate Mayor Campbell.

In a different interview, this one with a current City Council member who represents parts of Buckhead, I posed the question as to what role the Mayor had played in redevelopment, specifically the differences between the Campbell and Franklin administrations. The interviewee seized on the racial rhetoric of Mayor Campbell and how it had been detrimental to solutions:

“One difference is we had a mayor in one situation who actively suggested that it was a racial situation... a whole lot of provocative rhetoric came out of that...”
(M.N. 2008)

Mayor Campbell’s support of race as a factor in the situation of the Village led to “provocative rhetoric”, which is unhelpful according to this interviewee. The language is not directly denying race as a topic, but it is indicting Mayor Campbell as acting inappropriately. Similar to the comments mentioned earlier by Commissioner Pitts, by stating that racial rhetoric is inappropriate, the interviewee has granted support to the view that race should not be discussed.

Some sources pointed to political posturing as a reason for Mayor Campbell’s decisions to discuss race in the context of the Village. *AJC* reporter Campbell (not to be confused with the Mayor) wrote pieces in 2000 and 2003 that accused Mayor Campbell of “stirring” sentiments by using race as a topic of discussion. Campbell displays contempt for Mayor Campbell viewing the situation as racial. “Mayor Bill Campbell... sees the uproar over the “Village” as racial (rather than as a problem of noise, gridlock, traffic, and crime)...” (Campbell 2000a). To Campbell, the “real” issues are noise, crime, etc., and race is not a factor. He displays contempt for Mayor Campbell’s view by using the parenthetical reference to the “real” issues.

In a later article, published in 2004, Campbell again returns to the question of race and politics. He does not mention Mayor Campbell directly, but he does allege that African American leaders will bring up the subject of race for “petty political” reasons. “Some prominent blacks... like to stir the pot of racial animosity --- often for the pettiest political

ends,”(Campbell 2004). This piece is not specifically on the Village, but it does reference it as an example of race being inappropriately being discussed. Campbell is making the case that some African Americans will use race simply to sway voter decisions and garner support.

The observation of Mayor Campbell “playing” the race card for political advantage was a very contentious issue around the 2000 vote. Once again *AJC* reporter Campbell provides an example. After the failed vote, Mayor Campbell called for a conference on race amongst city leaders to try and address the gap between the two perspectives. Campbell denotes this as a poor attempt by the Mayor to direct the conversations away from violence:

“...I’m sure many found his (Mayor Campbell) Buckhead inspired race conference a transparent attempt to change the subject [to race] from violence in Buckhead.”(Campbell 2000b)

Calling the conference a “transparent attempt” allows Campbell to remove any validation from the Mayor’s perspective. He also links the “real” issues to violence to further demonstrate the illegitimate view of the Mayor. Additionally, by stating that “many” agree with his report, Campbell has asserted a consensus view on the situation leaving the Mayor as a lone detractor without any valid reasoning.

In another piece written following the 2000 vote, an *AJC* reporter looks at how the demographics of Atlanta do not support Mayor Campbell’s views on race influencing decisions. The article presents that Atlanta is predominantly African American, and that the city is home to a vibrant African American middle class. “...the mayor (Campbell) has forcefully brought up an old political subject, race...”(Baxter 2000). Baxter calls race an “old” subject, implying that racism is a thing of the past in society. He also claims that Mayor Campbell “forcefully” brought up race, indicating that it was not pertinent to the discussion and had to be intentionally brought up.

One example that stands out comes in the form of a letter to the editor written in response to the failed 2000 vote. The reader comments on the decision by some African American leaders to “play” the race card, such as Councilman Boazman commentary:

“It saddens me to see some black leaders playing the race card about Buckhead when the situation is clearly about getting rid of thugs, regardless of color.”(Colvin 2000)

Colvin is an African American man, who felt that the whole situation was about thugs in the bars of Buckhead. Through his comments we can fully observe how a discourse of danger was readily acceptable, and understood as the “real” issue. Through his commentary we can examine how the race card is not always a discourse perpetuated by one racial group against another, but in fact is shaped by the myriad social structures found in American society.

Race is an issue

While the majority of the text supports the discourses of danger and colorblindness, there are those who maintain a perspective that views racism as an important factor in the redevelopment of the Village. In a letter to the editor, the author is criticizing the editorial written by one of the *AJC* staff (Matthews) when he alleged that Boazman and Mayor Campbell played racial politics. The letter writer argues that Matthews’ critique ignores the prevalence of racism in society, and denying race as a “real” issue creates an understanding that racism is not part of reality. “... race politics is not in any sense a game. Our lives are not games; the racism we experience every day is a reality. Racism is alive as ever,”(*AJC* 2000b). The reader comments that racism is real, which is in direct contrast to the colorblind discourses of the Village.

Another point of contention is the assertion that all people can agree that there was a situation needing to be addressed in Buckhead, and that it was an issue of public safety, not race.

In an interview with a former City Council member, and current County Commissioner, I asked why there was so much discrepancy over the 2000 vote:

“...the white elected officials, you know, they supported basically the white point of view with Buckhead. And the black ones, on the other hand, supported the black point of view. And therefore that split.” (L.W. 2008)

He expressed an opinion that different racial groups might have viewed the situation differently, which led to the racial rhetoric and denial of race by the dominant (white) perspective. This runs counter to the assumptions that “everyone” could agree on there being a problem in the Village, and on what that problem may have been.

We can observe this point through the comments of former City Councilman Bond, made to a couple of *AJC* reporters after he voted against the 2000 ordinance:

“City Councilman Michael Bond said whites and blacks view the same incidences differently, that whites aren’t likely to view events as racism because it does not affect them.”(Shelton and Suggs 2000)

Bond argued that his constituents would view the situation differently than those in Buckhead, because people in Buckhead were not likely to see things as racially motivated because they are never affected by racial motivation. By presenting the possibility of multiple interpretations of the events, Bond has urged the consideration of race.

The final point that those of dissenting opinion expressed was that the perspectives of nonwhites were being ignored and invalidated. In this article Tagami is writing on the issues facing Derek Boazman during his failed attempt to gain the city council presidency in 2004:

“Yet Boazman has said things that some whites might not want to hear... Boazman said at a public meeting that race appeared to be the driving issue [behind the East Village]... ‘they don’t want black people in Buckhead’ ”(Tagami 2004)

Boazman had angered many whites during his commentary on the Village, and that made it difficult for him to be a viable candidate. Boazman’s comments offended whites because it

indicted their privileged position, and in doing so denied the presence of an egalitarian playing field in society. All of these examples of dissent present a divergence from the race card concept, and suggest that racism is an important topic, and shaped discussions and actions addressing the Village.

In one interview, with a current City Council representative, I got a direct statement about the presence of racism and how it shaped the situation. When asked the direct question of whether or not race played a role in the redevelopment of the Village:

“Did they want the black man out of the area? Yeah, because the Buckhead people want a pristine community all the way. They don’t want any foreign cultures creating the situations that doesn’t allow for their commercial and retail growth.” (G.W. 2008)

These comments suggest that racism was directly involved in the decisions to redevelop the Village.

Playing the race card to racialize Buckhead

The concept of the race card has played a pivotal role in the East Village and the end of the nightlife scene. The use of the race card metaphor by business and civic leaders in Buckhead and the city government has steered the understanding concerning the East Village away from the issues of race and racism. This strategy to deny race as a “real” issue has denied the validity of those who argue racism has motivated many changes in Buckhead. I argue this strategy has in effect racialized Buckhead as a place of whiteness.

Through the interviews and newspaper accounts the dominant discourse about the redevelopment of the East Village maintains white privilege by removing race from the discussion. While there are some who do argue that racism has played a pivotal role, they mostly serve as examples for to point to as “plays” of the race card. This is not to say that these

views are not important, but it does display how the race card can serve as a defensive strategy to remove the power from those who do see race.

What this means for place study is a better understanding of the social processes (and discourses) that determines who is included “inside” versus the “outside”. The race card is one such discourse that has addressed the (identity) transgression of the East Village. By understanding how hidden and misunderstood racism and white privilege are, geographers can get a better understanding of how racialized landscapes are produced and maintained. Through examination of the various actors and agents involved in a conflict over place, and the ways they invoke or deny racism, one can see how the barriers around places are established, negotiated, and transformed.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS

Buckhead is a predominantly white and mostly affluent district within a city that is primarily nonwhite. Because of the historical dynamic within the city wherein the north side has been the bastion of the white elite, Buckhead has a historical identity as a place inaccessible to nonwhites (Bayer 1996; Stone 1989). The late 1990s saw an increase in the number of African American partiers within the Buckhead Village, as well as discourses portraying the Village as becoming dangerous. While there certainly were extreme cases of violence in the East Village, the discourses took them out of context in order to make the Village appear more dangerous than it was. This was done in response to the transgression of Buckhead, caused by the increase of African Americans to the area.

With Buckhead's historic context as a racialized enclave, it is not difficult to imagine that some would perceive the attempts to redevelop the Village and remove the nightlife as an attempt to maintain this historic (white) identity. However, most of these dissenting voices are silenced through the application of discourses such as colorblindness and the race card. While Buckhead may no longer be legally segregated from the rest of the city, the social construction of race continues to create discourses that represent Buckhead as a racialized landscape.

As Bobo and Smith (1998) argue, Jim Crow racism has been a largely defunct concept within American society for several decades. Along with this understanding of racism, is a belief that segregation ended with the Civil Right movement of the 1960s. However, I would argue that while legal segregation is not longer observable, social segregation is still quite apparent within American society, and Buckhead serves as one example. The "laissez-faire" racism presented by Bobo and Smith provides a framework in which to situate Buckhead, as well

as American society at large. That is, a “natural” state is thought to exist, in which segregation is acceptable because people have chosen to separate themselves from each other. However, this ignores the role racialized discourses can play in creating a common knowledge that upholds the privilege of whiteness.

Some scholars would urge for an understanding of Buckhead, and society at large, through economics terms, and would argue that focusing on identities such as race detracts from the larger conflict of class within American capitalism. I would disagree, and the East Village serves as an example of how economic class is not always a useful tool for analyzing social disparity. Buckhead was established as a protected section of the city, in which the white constituency would reside. Since annexation in 1952, Atlanta (as well as the United States) has seen significant change in the socioeconomic makeup of the African American population. In particular, the African American middle-class has grown. Atlanta is somewhat unique in this, as the city is predominantly African American and is often popularly known as a home to strong economic and political traditions amongst its African Americans (Bayor 1996; Keating 2001; Kruse 2005). However, Buckhead has remained a segregated place, inaccessible to African Americans in many ways.

As a social phenomenon, the place of Buckhead has been shaped by the inside influences constituted by the perspectives of the residents, business, and civic leaders. It has also been subject to the outside forces of the city government, perceptions of nonresidents, and the relationship between the police force and the Village clientele. Through these interactions and social connections, Buckhead is in the process of being remade—from a nightlife scene to a luxury retail destination.

However, this decision is also subject to the discourses that have emerged in response to the interactions between Buckhead leaders and the rest of the city. The discourses that portrayed the Village as violent utilized a social perception of African Americans as violent (Johnson 1985). Through a connection between perceived increases in violence in the Village, and an increase in African American clientele, the discourses of danger have linked the violence to African Americans. Utilizing colorblind language allowed the supporters of the dialogue on violence to “whitewash” the topic (Reitman 2006). That is, by using language specifically designed to deny or ignore race, those who perpetuated the discourses of danger were able to invalidate the presence of race and/or racism in the discussion.

Finally, when colorblindness and perceptions of danger were not enough, the concept of the race card was used to guide the discourses away from race. Utilizing a colloquial understanding of “playing” the race card, removed the power from those voices who urged a consideration of racism within the context of the Village. As such the identity of Buckhead has been shaped by racialized discourses, which is reflected in Buckhead *as a racialized place*.

The geographic study of racialized places and spaces has tended to focus predominantly on marginalized people, and the spaces they occupy. In this research, the focus has been on the privileged, and the discourses that have maintained a social hierarchy of whiteness. Exploring the ways in which discourses of danger have been employed to maintain the white identity of Buckhead, as well as how colorblindness has enabled a whitewashing of the discourses, we are better able to grasp not only the identity of the place that is Buckhead, but the social processes that have been involved in the construction of this identity.

It is important for further research into white space and white identity, because only through an exploration of these social norms will it be possible to better understand how racial

differentiation is maintained in American society. Exploring how the marginalized have been disenfranchised is important, but only by critically engaging with the empowered will it become possible to demystify the notion that it is somehow natural to maintain racial and economic homogeneity.

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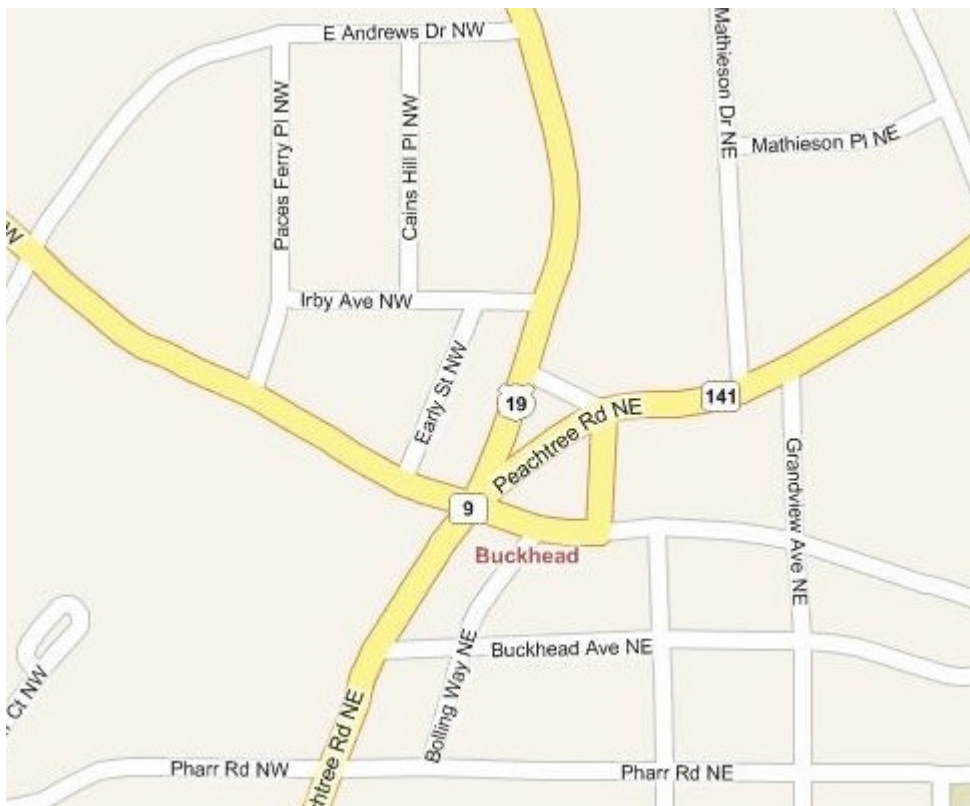
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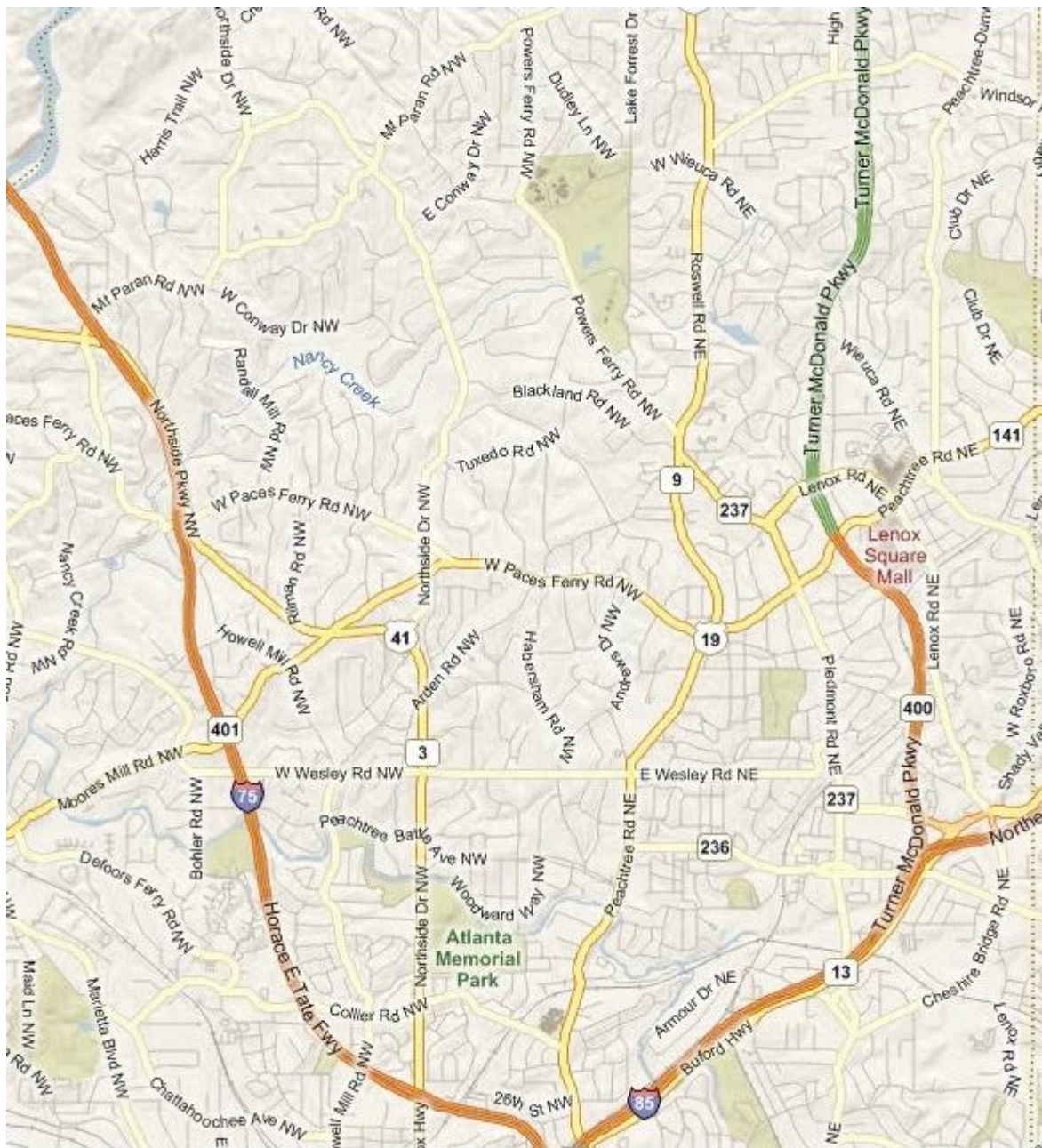
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APPENDIX A: MAP OF BUCKHEAD VILLAGE



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>
2009 Microsoft Corporation

APPENDIX B: MAP OF NORTH ATLANTA/BUCKHEAD



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>
2008 Navteq

APPENDIX C: CRIME STATISTICS 1998-2007

Crime Type	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
City Wide:										
Homicide	149	143	134	144	151	149	112	89	110	129
Rape	385	321	278	367	276	281	267	223	171	148
Robbery	4658	4072	4322	4341	4168	3701	3116	2861	2959	3577
Agg. Assault	7432	6691	6849	5956	5373	4360	4427	4039	4308	4221
Burglary	9093	8571	9256	8731	8554	8065	6726	6648	7401	8859
Larceny	28513	28352	27278	25721	23706	22931	20703	18993	18952	20353
Auto Theft	7899	7328	7351	6935	7222	7235	5756	5756	5878	7020
TOTAL	59129	55478	55468	52195	49450	46722	41107	38609	39779	44307
TOTAL CHANGE		3651	10	3273	2745	2728	5615	2498	-1170	-4528
Zone 2										
Homicide	4	13	11	NA	15	16	9	9	8	5
Rape	30	22	25	NA	23	27	27	12	16	8
Robbery	435	371	437	NA	453	387	295	257	224	251
Agg. Assault	392	397	374	NA	359	247	265	236	212	181
Burglary	1237	1136	1204	NA	1272	1148	961	854	779	795
Larceny	6702	6570	6463	NA	5173	5043	4559	4121	3511	3539
Auto Theft	1078	1068	1107	NA	943	1146	836	802	615	615
TOTAL	9878	9577	9621	NA	8238	8014	6952	6291	5365	5394
TOTAL CHANGE		301	-44	NA	NA	224	1062	661	926	-29
Beat 205										
Homicide	0	1	4	1	3	3	2	0	0	0
Rape	7	6	6	4	3	7	2	1	1	1
Robbery	90	68	81	99	103	75	41	31	26	24
Agg. Assault	89	67	89	61	75	46	43	29	27	14
Burglary	157	131	129	155	220	139	51	62	46	39
Larceny	1222	1239	1357	1130	1063	1145	601	596	411	426
Auto Theft	202	223	257	173	179	257	101	98	54	42
TOTAL	1767	1735	1923	1623	1646	1672	841	817	565	546
TOTAL CHANGE		32	-188	300	-23	-26	831	24	252	19

Data not provided for Zone 2, 2001. APD failed to produce data.