

SPACE AS A SIGNAL: HOW EMPLOYERS PERCEIVE NEIGHBORHOODS IN FOUR METROPOLITAN LABOR MARKETS

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EMPLOYERS do not carry out their business in a geographic vacuum. They are surrounded by a spatial environment, and each manager forms his or her own mental map of that environment. Employers' maps, in turn, have important effects on the labor market. In this chapter, we use data from in-depth employer surveys in the four metropolitan areas of the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality to examine employers' mental maps, and how these maps shape their actions in labor markets. We particularly emphasize how space is linked to race in employers' minds and the consequences of that racialization for black and Latino urban communities. We argue, in brief, that space disadvantages some job seekers by acting as a signal for a whole complex of attributes—many of which are infused by race—that employers try to avoid in their location and recruitment practices.

Our point of departure is the extensive literature on the spatial mismatch hypothesis. The theory of spatial mismatch holds that within metropolitan areas, the locations of businesses offering relatively low skill jobs have disproportionately shifted away from the inner city and toward the suburbs. However, due to residential segregation, communities of color—particularly black communities—have remained concentrated within inner cities far from the loci of job growth. As a result, inner-city minority—particularly African American—populations, who on average have relatively low skill levels, have suffered heightened joblessness (see, for example, Kasarda 1993; Wilson 1987). While there is

growing evidence for the spatial mismatch (Ihlanfeldt 1999), most analyses simply consider the correlation between location and economic disadvantage, without exploring the causal links. Christopher Jencks and Susan Mayer (1990) posited four distinct mechanisms that could account for lower black employment in suburban than in urban businesses. In two of the mechanisms, distance forms a barrier to black labor supply. First, distance may increase the time and money costs of commuting. Second, information about job openings may diminish with distance. But distance can also be an indicator of racial discrimination, as spelled out in two additional mechanisms. Suburban clienteles, themselves disproportionately white and Anglo, may prefer to deal with workers who are white and Anglo, leading employers to tailor their workforces accordingly. And the employers with a preference for white Anglo workers may choose to locate in the suburbs.

The first two explanations target space (distance) as a barrier to employment, whereas the second two point to race, specifically to racial discrimination. Most research on the spatial mismatch has focused on space as a barrier—not surprisingly, since distance is far more readily measurable than discrimination, and policy solutions are more obvious. There is some evidence, particularly in more recent data, that distance and commuting-cost barriers contribute significantly to black labor market disadvantage, especially for younger workers (in addition to Jencks and Mayer 1990, see Holzer 1991, Ihlanfeldt 1999, and Moss and Tilly 1991). Recent findings from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality confirm the importance of space as a barrier (Holzer 1996; Holzer and Ihlanfeldt 1996; Ihlanfeldt 1995).

But a growing body of spatially oriented research spotlights discrimination. Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn Neckerman (1991) discovered that some Chicago employers used city or suburban school attendance, neighborhood, and even address (for example, whether a person lived in a public housing project) as screening criteria. Employers, they found, used space to refine the category of race, distinguishing among black workers. Philip Moss and Chris Tilly (1996, 2000) found that in Los Angeles and Detroit, certain employers targeted a suburban workforce, and therefore either located in the suburbs to access that workforce, or recruited suburban workers to urban worksites. In both studies, the employer actions tended to disadvantage black job seekers. Philip Kasinitz and Jan Rosenberg's (1994) study of the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn found that most businesses there did not hire local black workers, due to multifaceted discrimination (based on class and location as well as race) and to recruitment through social networks that tended to exclude blacks.

Recent results from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality also

build a case for the importance of discrimination correlated with employer location. Harry Holzer (1996) reports that even after controlling for job skill requirements, suburban employers hire a smaller proportion of black applicants than do urban employers (see also chapter 10 in this volume). David Sjoquist (1996) finds that after controlling for distance, blacks in the Atlanta area are less likely to search for work in areas rated by all respondents as more hostile toward potential black residents—despite other evidence that urban black workers who gain jobs in the suburbs earn a wage premium over those employed in the city (Holzer 1996; Ihlanfeldt and Young 1994). And Susan Turner (1996), drawing in part on some of the same data we analyze in this chapter, documents incidents of white suspicion of or hostility toward blacks traveling through predominantly white Detroit suburbs. Turner also reports that despite distance from black populations, some suburban Detroit employers nonetheless hire substantial numbers of black workers.

These findings suggest not simply that racial discrimination by employers and customers affects spatial outcomes, but that race and space are thoroughly intertwined in employer perceptions, making it difficult to fully separate the effects of the two causes. Space is a *signal* to employers: they have well-formed perceptions of certain neighborhoods, and draw inferences about the quality of workers from those neighborhoods. These perceptions, in turn, are strongly colored by the actual or perceived racial (as well as class) composition of neighborhood residents.

In this chapter, we build on these earlier analyses, drawing on employer interview data from the four cities surveyed in the Multi-City Study. Our key interests are, first, the way that employers view inner-city and minority areas, and workers from those areas; and, second, how employers' location and recruiting and hiring decisions are affected by these perceptions. We argue that for employers, space is a signal associated with perceptions about race, class, and worker skills and attitudes. However, within this mix, racial composition—in particular, the location of concentrated black populations—plays a prominent role in employers' perceptions of different locations within their metropolitan area. In many employers' minds, white areas are linked to positive workforce and location attributes; black and Latino areas are linked to negative ones.

Including four metropolitan areas helps us move beyond the “Detroit” metaphor that has dominated much discussion of the spatial mismatch hypothesis. Detroit is a declining Rustbelt metropolitan area with a monocentric spatial pattern and a sharp black-white divide that corresponds substantially with the central city–suburb distinction; the spatial mismatch is often viewed as if all cities took this form. Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles contrast markedly with Detroit in history and

current urban form, allowing us to examine space as a signal in varying contexts.

After describing our data and methods, we give a brief introduction to each of our four metropolitan areas to set the context for our findings, as well as reporting how employers see the overall maps of their metropolitan areas. In the next section, we present evidence on employers' views of the inner city and elsewhere as business locations and recruiting grounds for workers. Evidence on how these perceptions affect employer actions follows. The final section offers our conclusions.

Data and Methods

Our data consist of a unique, large set of in-depth interviews with employers at firms in the Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles metropolitan areas conducted as part of the Multi-City In-Depth Employer Survey. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at 45 establishments in Atlanta and Los Angeles, 46 in Boston, and 38 in Detroit, for a total of 174. Firms were surveyed between the summer of 1994 and the summer of 1996.

The sample for the In-Depth Employer Survey was drawn from the list of firms that had been identified by household respondents holding jobs requiring no more than a high school education, and had successfully completed a telephone survey. The response rate for screened firms in this subset of the telephone survey was 69 percent; the response rate for the in-depth survey was also about two-thirds. Interviewers spoke face to face with up to three (and in a few cases more) respondents per firm: the chief executive officer at the site or another top manager; a personnel official involved in hiring for the sample job; and a line manager or supervisor who managed employees in the sample job category. This strategy gathers the differing knowledge and perceptions of these various categories of managers. In smaller firms, these functions were often performed by two people or even just one person, so fewer interviews were conducted. In total, 354 interviews were conducted with 365 respondents (with some interviews gathering multiple respondents).

The in-depth interview involved a series of structured questions and follow-up probes. All questions were open-ended, and interviewers were trained to encourage respondents to elaborate, telling the story of their business's relationship to the labor market. Respondents spoke to a wide range of spatial issues, mainly in response to two questions focused specifically on space: "How is [this community] as a place to do business?" and "We have heard that [central city], particularly the inner city, is a difficult place to do business; what do you think?" Depending on responses, there were a variety of follow-up probes, notably: "Do you see a

difference between workers from [central city] and workers from the suburbs?" The varied discussions prompted by these questions form a rich database on how employers' perceptions and actions approach the maps of their metropolitan areas.

A Tale of Four Cities

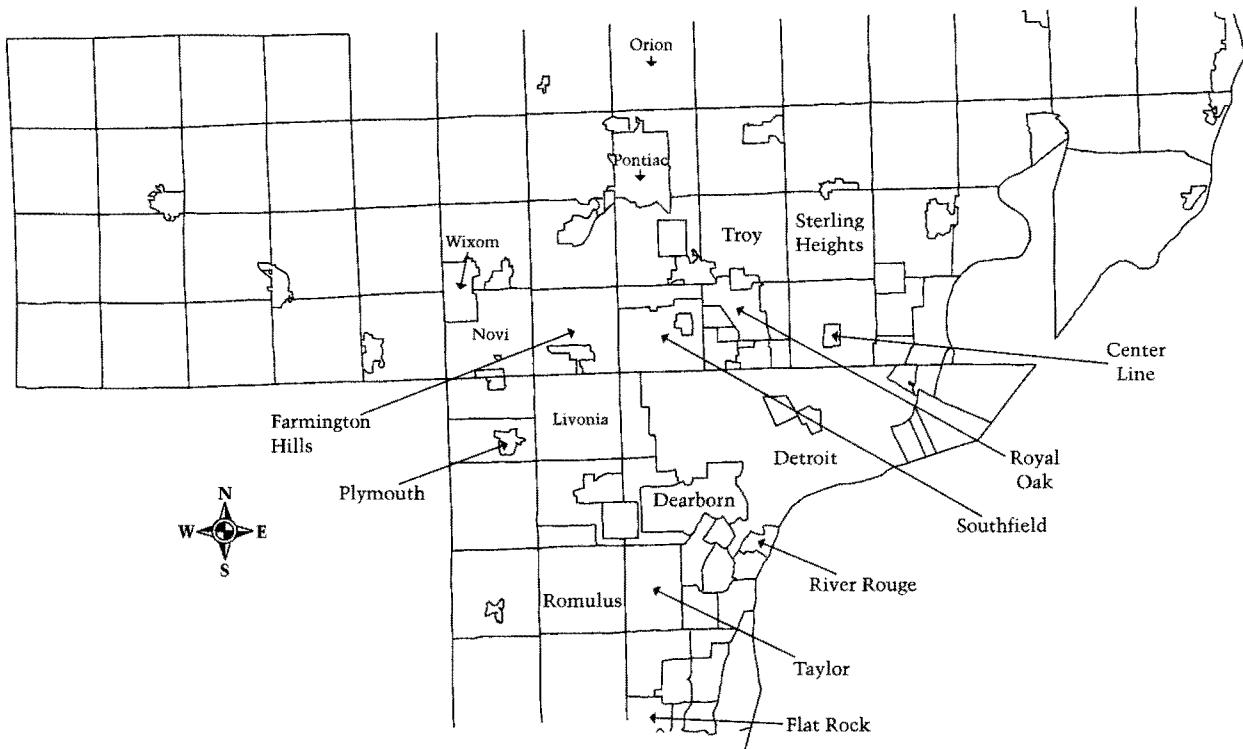
Views of the business environment and workforce of the inner city, or of minority areas in general, vary in intensity across the four metropolitan areas. For Detroit-area employers the inner city is a crisply defined, ever-present part of the map, even when geographically distant. For most Los Angeles and Boston employers, the inner city is remote, in many cases poorly defined, and irrelevant to their business activities. These differences in employers' mental maps are shaped by the social history of each area. The 1967 riots in Detroit etched the city-suburb distinction in stone in the minds of employers, and to many white employers the etching is defined in terms of black and white. The Watts riots in 1965 and the 1992 Los Angeles disturbances sharply outlined the predominantly black community of South Central as dangerous and undesirable, but the highly multiethnic character of its recent immigration makes the outer boundaries of the inner city diffuse. There certainly is no clear city-suburb distinction in Los Angeles. In the Boston area, decades-old black-white conflicts over school desegregation still resonate in the city, and presumed deficient education has become a strong signal attached to city minorities. But in many suburbs the recent Latino and Asian migrations raise the most immediate spatial-racial issues for employers. And in Atlanta, the north-south, black-white division is an issue for many businesses, but there is not Detroit's degree of disjunction between black population centers and economic activity.

Detroit: The Black-White Line

Industrial suburbanization in Detroit was launched by Henry Ford in the early 1900s, accelerated during the 1940s, and surged again in 1967 with white flight following Detroit's riot. (See map 6.1 for a map of Detroit and the surrounding area.) The current map of industrial activity in the Detroit area shows concentrations of manufacturing and industrial parks along every major road or highway leading out of Detroit, but relatively few within the city itself (SEMCOG 1984).

Overlying the industrial landscape is a starkly segregated racial geography. Detroit, perhaps more than any other city in the United States, has the image of "chocolate city, vanilla suburbs," George Clinton's phrase (put to academic use by Farley et al. [1978])—an African Ameri-

MAP 6.1 *In-Depth Survey Large MCDs in Detroit, Michigan*



Source: Center for Industrial Competitiveness, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

can central city surrounded by nearly lily-white communities. The Detroit metropolitan area was the most segregated of the forty-seven U.S. metropolitan areas with populations of one million or more in 1990, and the only one to increase its level of segregation between 1980 and 1990 (Farley and Frey 1994). While 76 percent of Detroit residents were black, only 5 percent of the residents of the remainder of the three-county area of Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland were (Farley et al. 1993). Put another way, 83 percent of blacks in the metropolitan area lived in Detroit, and 93 percent of whites lived outside it. A long history of resistance to integration by white communities helps explain these dramatic contrasts. The racial differences are compounded with class: in 1990, Detroit poverty rates were four times as high as in the surrounding area, and median family income was less than half as great (Moss and Tilly 1993).

The three-county area is stitched together by a transportation system consisting primarily of freeways radiating from downtown Detroit. Public transit links between Detroit and surrounding areas are notoriously bad, reflecting many of the communities' history of resistance to black access.

In the hypersegregated metropolis of Detroit, dividing lines between black and white areas play an extraordinarily large role in employers' perceptions of space. More significantly, the line between black and white is closely linked in respondents' minds to other distinctions, such as the city-suburb boundary—particularly the frontiers of Detroit, but also the line between Pontiac and other northern suburbs of Detroit. Indeed, the Asian male manager of a fast food restaurant on the south side of 8 Mile Road, which forms Detroit's northern border, stated, "We are on the [south] side, on the other side, on the black side of the road," and his assistant manager added, "People [on this side] don't go [to] that side that often, and that side['s] people don't come here." Many respondents also implicitly identified the division between black and white turf with distinctions between "good" and "bad" neighborhoods, and (relatedly) between poor neighborhoods and those with working-class or wealthier residents.

Some suburban respondents were extremely concerned about the process of neighborhoods "turning" or "going downhill." Respondents spontaneously raised the subject at one-quarter of suburban sites. In many cases (though not all), their comments on the subject conflated race and class:

I think [compared to Livonia, Southfield—an integrated community neighboring Detroit—is] a little less . . . a little more crime . . . a little dirtier out there. It's just kind of going downhill. Do you know what I'm

saying . . . ? I mean people are moving out to West Bloomfield, and Birmingham. You've, there's a big distinction between Birmingham and Southfield. . . . Because you're getting closer to Detroit, and I think it just gets a little yucky as you . . . [laughter].—White female office manager at the suburban regional HQ of a low-end retail chain

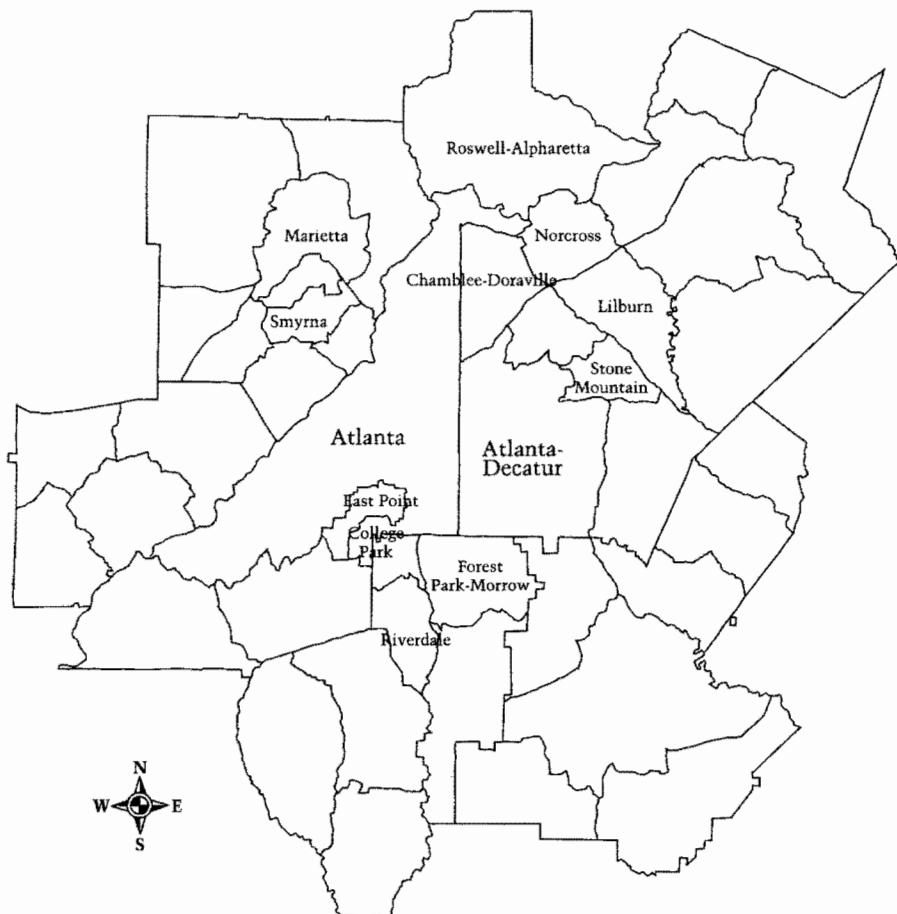
People are moving away [from the suburbs near Detroit]. You have a lot of blacks in the cities. It's very easy to make up your mind that you don't want to live in . . . those type of areas because you look around and you see things. I like nice things, I have a nice house, I take care of my yard. I go to areas maybe where there's a lot of blacks and I don't see what I want to see with respect to. . . . I wouldn't want to live there.—White male supervisor at a manufacturing plant located "downriver," in a primarily white area southeast of Detroit

In a few cases, respondents equated racial distance with physical distance. In a revealing comment, a white female suburban public-sector manager described her former home of Sterling Heights, which remains less than 1 percent black, as "thirty-five miles northeast of Detroit"; in fact, Sterling Heights is a rectangle extending from 6 to 12 miles above Detroit. Apparently, Sterling Heights feels far more distant from Detroit than it actually is.

Atlanta: The Line Moves North

The Atlanta metro area is markedly divided between majority-white areas in the northern suburbs and majority-black areas in the southern suburbs and inner city (see map 6.2). Jobs and population are growing at a rapid clip in the north, while growth in the southern suburbs has been spottier, and the inner city struggles to remain viable. As the population of the metro area has increased over the past three decades, the black-white dividing line has moved increasingly north, to where it now roughly separates the southern two-thirds of the city of Atlanta from the northern third and beyond (Bayor 1996; Rutheiser 1996). This bifurcation of space is facilitated by the sharp resistance of northern suburban homeowners to the extension of the mass transit system, MARTA, into their counties—a move that could provide African Americans from the city and the southern suburbs access to expanding job opportunities in the north.

Fulton County, which extends from the north of the Atlanta metro area through the bulk of the city down to the southwest corner, reflects some of the larger trends in the metro area because of its size and span. In the southern half of Fulton County, the African American population has grown from just over 15 percent in some areas in 1980 to at least 75

MAP 6.2 *In-Depth Survey Large MCDs in Atlanta, Georgia*

Source: Center for Industrial Competitiveness, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

percent in 1990 (Rutheiser 1996). In the northern half of that county, however, African Americans continue to comprise less than 15 percent of the population (Rutheiser 1996). This county includes the largest numbers of low-income and high-income households in the metro area, and class corresponds heavily with race (U.S. Census Bureau 1994). In true Southern spirit, north Fulton residents have even recently begun to push for secession from the county, claiming that their taxes are disproportionately being spent on the south side.

The population in the city of Atlanta itself has declined over 7 percent since 1980, although the racial balance has remained fairly constant, with African Americans consistently making up about two-thirds

of the city's population from 1980 to 1992 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1988, 1994). Outside the city all metro counties have experienced growth, especially in the northern suburbs of Gwinnett, Forsyth, and Cherokee—counties that are over 90 percent white. The counties experiencing the least growth since 1980, DeKalb and Fulton, also have among the highest population of African Americans. Interestingly, Cobb County, notorious for its conservative politics, has gone from almost 94 percent white in 1984 to over 42 percent African American in 1992, although its northernmost section is still almost all white (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1988, 1994).

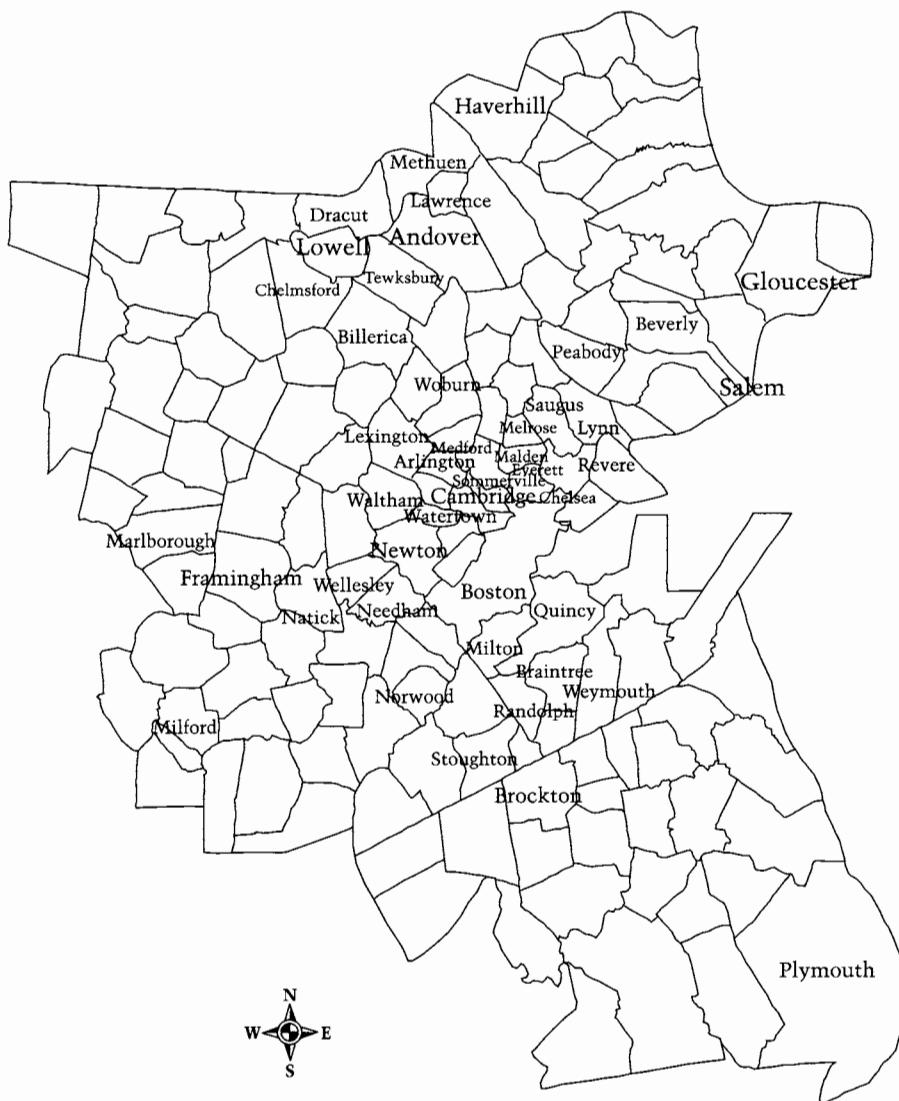
Originally developed as a transportation center, Atlanta has always had a largely service-based economy. Thus the decline of manufacturing and the rise of services that occurred across much of this country's urban space did not have the same fallout here as in many northern cities. While the "center of Atlanta" has not emptied as it did in Detroit, Atlanta is no longer solely centered around its downtown. The airport anchors the south; government, education, and professional sports dominate the old downtown area; the new retail, restaurant, and nightspot epicenter lies largely in a predominantly white area called Buckhead in the northern part of the city; and the primary new center of industry, business growth, technological innovation, and economic expansion lies in the northern suburbs. This all points to Atlanta's multinodal, rather than simply inner-city-suburban, character.

Atlanta employers are keenly aware of the north-south division, which is in addition a black-white division. But the city-suburb distinction also enters their considerations. "We define [our stores] as inner city and within the perimeter and outside of the perimeter," said the manager of a fast food restaurant, "and I'm outside the perimeter but I'm probably more like an inside store [because the workforce is overwhelmingly black]."

Boston: Black Plus Latino-Asian Inner Cities

The mix and geography of Boston-area jobs have changed markedly over the last several decades. Manufacturing has taken place well outside the city, either in satellite cities 15 to 40 miles from Boston, or dispersed along distant highways that circumscribe the city. Meanwhile, the economy of the city of Boston has been fueled by a growth in sectors such as legal services; finance, insurance, and real estate; and health care (Harrison and Kluver 1988; Porter 1994).

Beyond Boston is a set of residential suburbs, the most affluent of which are to the west and northwest, and a set of smaller, far less affluent industrial cities (see map 6.3). The residential suburbs supply the

MAP 6.3 *In-Depth Survey Large MCDs in Boston, Massachusetts*

Source: Center for Industrial Competitiveness, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Note: Named cities and towns of 25,000 population or more in 1990.

commuters who dominate the job market in Boston (in 1989, 77 percent of jobs in the city were held by commuters [Dougherty 1993]). Other cities cut and fashioned by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, such as Lowell and Lawrence, 30 miles to the north of Boston, have struggled through most of this century. And in a ring around Boston, the well-known high-tech industrial complexes dot the landscape.

The public transportation system of Boston is quite extensive. The various parts of the city, the border cities and towns, and the inner residential suburbs are linked by subway and buses. Most of the outlying cities are on commuter rail lines. Travel from the subway and rail lines without a car becomes more difficult, of course, as one moves farther away from the city.

How does race map to the economic geography of greater Boston? In the decades prior to the 1980s, the nonwhite population of the greater Boston area was primarily black and living within the city of Boston. Further, blacks were concentrated in a few neighborhoods close to the central city, mainly Roxbury and the South End. In 1980, 8 percent of the population of the Boston Standard Consolidated Statistical Area (SCSA) was nonwhite, and blacks comprised half of that total. Within the city of Boston, however, blacks constituted 22 percent of the population and 75 percent of the nonwhite population. The segregation of blacks within the city of Boston, and the resistance to black access to white neighborhoods, were spotlighted in the mid-1970s by the difficult and at times violent course of court-ordered school desegregation (Lukas 1985).

During the 1980s, the overall picture of spatial demography changed significantly. By 1990, greater Boston had become much more racially diverse, with a pace and extent of change exceeding the nationwide average. The proportion of blacks did not change greatly, however. It was the inflow of Latinos and Asians that altered the terrain. Latinos almost doubled their population over the decade of the 1980s, reaching 4 percent of the Boston Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CSMA) in 1990, and the Asian population more than doubled, making up 3 percent of the CSMA in 1990. Latinos in Boston have settled particularly in areas that were primarily black, climbing from 6 to 11 percent of the city's population between 1980 and 1990. The most rapid growth among Latinos, however, occurred in Lowell, Chelsea, and Lawrence. Southeast Asian populations have expanded in some Boston neighborhoods, but the largest jump in the numbers of Asians took place in Lowell and surrounding areas. Overall, Boston-area Latinos and Asians have diffused more widely than have blacks.

The distinction between the city and the suburbs is not so sharp in the eyes of Boston's city and suburban employers as it is in Detroit and

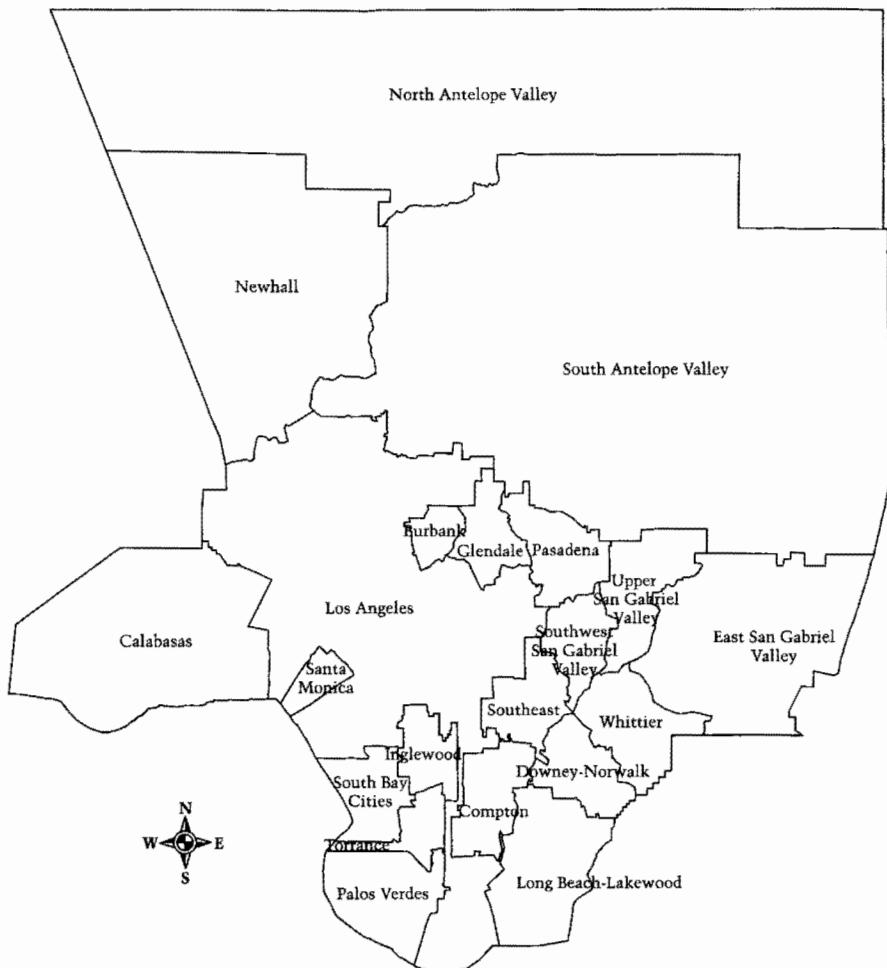
Atlanta. Respondents often defined Boston's inner city with a list of neighborhoods: "Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain . . . the most inner city of the neighborhoods." While this black-Latino core of the inner city was well defined in employers' minds, the boundaries were fuzzy—as indicated, for instance, by a respondent's inclusion of Cambridge (across the Charles River, predominantly middle class, but with a growing Caribbean population) in the inner city. Furthermore, employers' comments, while frequently negative, were not as racialized or pejorative, either about the inner city as a business location or about workers from the inner city, as were comments from Detroit and Atlanta employers. In contrast to Detroit and Atlanta, and more like Los Angeles, the substantial recent immigration and resulting racial and ethnic diversity in Boston and around the greater Boston area appears to have made the inner city, and black inner-city residents in particular, less important to Boston-area employers seeking low-wage labor. The old manufacturing cities such as Lowell and Lawrence, among others, have become important sources of labor for suburban Boston firms and have inner cities, and inner-city problems, of their own. It is useful to think of three geographic groups of firms in Greater Boston: the firms in the city of Boston, the firms in the suburbs of Boston, and the firms in cities such as Lawrence and Lowell, the particular satellite cities represented in our sample.

Los Angeles: What Is the Inner City?

The seemingly straightforward task of describing the objective contours of an urban space immediately bewilders when one arrives at Los Angeles (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). However, the characteristic urban sprawl and demographic diversity of Los Angeles are recent developments. The economy lacked a substantial industrial base until the early 1940s, when war in the Pacific motivated a defense-based economy, transforming the entire area into one of the most multiethnic, fastest-growing urban regions in the world.

Edward Soja, Rebecca Morales, and Goetz Wolff (1983) argue that in Los Angeles we see a combination of both Sunbelt and Frostbelt dynamics. The original "center" of industry, from South Central to San Pedro and Long Beach, echoes Detroit's decline, while the growth of high tech compares with Silicon Valley and the addition of low-skilled, exploitative manufacturing resembles Hong Kong and Singapore. This fragmented economic development contributes to the fragmented character of the region's physical space and to the socioeconomically polarized character of its population.

Los Angeles has never been very centralized, instead maintaining a

MAP 6.4 *In-Depth Survey Large MCDs in Los Angeles, California*

Source: Center for Industrial Competitiveness, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

low overall population density, distributed in socially distinct ways across space (see map 6.4). In recent shifts, the black population has stabilized (growing by only 1 percent between 1980 and 1990), the white population has declined (dropping by 8 percent), and the Latino and Asian populations have rapidly expanded (growing by 62 percent and 119 percent, respectively). In Los Angeles County an expanding Latino population has begun to overtake black majorities in South Central and

challenged Anglo strongholds in the San Fernando Valley; Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants now inhabit the once all-white, middle-class neighborhoods in the San Gabriel Valley; some northern areas have experienced white growth; and Anglos maintain their exclusive enclaves along the coast: Santa Monica, Malibu, Brentwood (Clifford and Roark 1991). Segregation persists, but in a checkerboard pattern. The extensive freeway system links this multiethnic, geographically dispersed population with their places of work.

The complex geographic, industrial, and population differentiation of Los Angeles is reflected in employers' views of space. With the exception of South Central, the black-white, city-suburb, good-bad distinctions are not so vivid for Los Angeles employers. Areas that employers see as highly desirable and highly undesirable are scattered across the landscape. Employers tend to be concerned with their own current locations, not with areas that are both socially and physically distant. Respondents typically described the "inner city" by listing communities; those lists comprised low-income areas inhabited primarily by people of color—always black, sometimes Latino. Relatively few employers explicitly identified space with race, but many spoke readily about class markers such as housing costs and general levels of affluence. Some employers gave narrow definitions of the inner city as the black-Latino areas in and immediately adjacent to South Central. Broader definitions included downtown or extended the defined area west and/or east. Perhaps the most expansive definition came from the general manager of a LAX-based airport service company, who stated that his "inner city" janitorial workforce sweeps "from East LA, all the way through the South Central, the Watts . . . Carson, Culver City, Inglewood, Hawthorne, a little in the Torrance area." Some suburban employers expressed a more diffuse sense of the inner city's location, saying "it's just everywhere" or professing ignorance. Most respondents saw the inner city as socially and physically distant, and indeed their discourse about the inner city referred often to "what you see on the news" and "what you read in the papers." Despite their distance from it, most employers had opinions about the inner city and could describe what it connoted.

Employers' Perceptions: The "Signal" of Space

Employers in our four metropolitan areas are wary of the inner city as a business location and wary of the residents of the inner city as employees. This is true for a sizable fraction of employers across city, suburban, and other locations in each of the metropolitan areas.

Where employers locate and whom they hire are the ultimate con-

cerns, but employers' views are important as well. The narratives of their attitudes give insight into why certain patterns of location and hiring outcomes, such as those we see in the Multi-City Study quantitative employer survey (see chapter 10), occur. The narratives help uncover the many reasons for employer decisions, more than the one or two that are measured and could be investigated in quantitative data. Finally, employers' discussions of their perceptions help explain why the location and hiring decisions that hurt urban minority workers occur more or less frequently in some areas or among some kinds of employers. Although we make some conjectures about the motives behind the perceptions employers voice, in particular, that attitudes about race—prejudices, stereotypes, and biases—are connected to some degree to employers' negative "business" views of the city and its residents, we cannot prove these conjectures. However, we have tried as much as possible to weigh the evidence.

How widespread are the negative attitudes toward an inner-city business location and toward workers from the inner city? Table 6.1 displays the views from the 354 interviews in our sample of 174 employers, broken down by the location of the employer—primary central city, other central city, or suburb. Although there are many other reasons employers gave for disliking the inner city as a business site, as we will discuss, we focus here on the issues of crime and the quality of the inner-city workforce.

Several patterns are apparent. Respondents at a majority of businesses noted crime and workforce problems in the inner city. Suburban employers were more concerned about the inner city as an unsafe place of business than were their counterparts in the central city. Conversely, employers in the central city were more critical of the quality of the inner-city workforce than were employers from areas outside the central city. The two issues listed in the table, quality of the workforce and crime, were expressed with similar overall frequency. It should be noted, however, that interviewers were asked to probe about workforce quality if the respondent did not bring the topic up spontaneously. This was not true about crime.

Our job now is to try to understand the story behind these outcomes.

Perceptions of the City as a Business Location

Employers voiced a number of factors when they expressed their hesitancy about the city as a place to do business. The most frequently ex-

TABLE 6.1 *Employers' Attitudes About Inner-City Business Locations and Workers, by Respondent Business Location*

	Primary Central City	Other Central City	Suburb	Total
Percentage of firms where respondents stated concerns about:				
Inner-city crime a problem for business				
At least one respondent	57%	65%	61%	60%
Half or more of firm respondents	43	50	55	50
Inner-city workforce worse				
At least one respondent	64	62	48	57
Half or more of firm respondents	40	53	37	41
Inner-city workforce better				
At least one respondent	15	15	30	21
Half or more of firm respondents	12	15	24	17

Source: Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality.

Note: "Other central city" also includes any municipality other than the primary central city that has a black population of 30 percent or more.

pressed concerns were those given in table 6.1: workforce quality and safety. Other issues raised were congestion, parking, traffic and commuting, taxes, unfriendly regulations, and government treatment of business (particularly salient in Detroit). These latter factors are part of the force pushing employers out of the cities, and creating a greater locational barrier for inner-city residents in search of work. Our concern in this chapter is with perceptions and factors tied to the *populations* living in the city, or in the inner city, the most important of which is the perception that the city is unsafe.

Employers in all cities expressed concerns about crime, violence, and safety, and the consequent fears of customers, employees, and proprietors. Employers located within the city complained of break-ins and gangs. In each metro area, several city employers described how they had secured parking areas and buildings for their employees. A number of city firms expressed concerns about being able to recruit employees who would fear working in rough areas of the city. The concern was voiced most frequently in regard to recruiting management-level employees, and much less when entry-level jobs were discussed. Several firms in Los Angeles spoke of the difficulty they faced getting em-

ployees to work in city areas after the disturbances following the 1992 Rodney King verdict.

Social service and public-sector agencies that served a variety of city neighborhoods frequently mentioned fear as a factor for some of their employees, as well as an influence on the public's image of the city. Detroit is "a place that suburban people don't want to go to," observed a manager at a Detroit-based nonprofit. "I have a hard time getting people to work in Roxbury if they are not a minority and they've been working other places," one public-sector manager noted. "Some people are very scared to go to Roxbury. They don't want to work there." Interestingly, the strongest racialized statement of concern for safety was voiced in the context of blacks traveling to work in South Boston, a primarily white area with a long history of animosity toward blacks.

However, several social service agency respondents moderated their comments with statements that the view of the inner city from the outside was exaggerated, and that the problem did not seriously compromise their ability to function. Indeed, employers located within the city in all four metro areas tried to counter the perception of their city as a scary place to be. Several Detroit employers decried the exaggerated negative views of others, using words such as "hysteria," "racism," and "overstated," and a few reported that they or colleagues were pleasantly surprised upon working in Detroit for the first time. Inner-city employers in Atlanta were quick to defend their turf from suburbanites' negative perceptions about issues like crime. "People have the idea that downtown is a more dangerous place than other parts of Atlanta," remarked the white general manager of an inner-city hotel, "which . . . people should be figuring out is probably not true anymore."

As table 6.1 suggests, the concerns about fear and safety were particularly strident among suburban employers. The perceptions varied somewhat across the metropolitan areas, reflecting the different pattern of city-suburb geography in the four areas. Most Atlanta employers in the southern suburbs remarked that crime is a problem in their locations. These responses show most poignantly how race is confounded with the desirability of particular locations. These employers explicitly linked crime with African Americans, and implicated areas where black populations are high as undesirable, both from customers' and employers' standpoints: "East Point and College Park area [two southern suburbs] has a fairly high crime rate . . . and the whole south side of Atlanta is fairly high on blacks, which makes a lot of whites nervous coming down in this area," said a white assistant director of a government agency.

Employers from the northern suburbs of Atlanta expressed concerns about crime in Atlanta itself, which they commonly defined as either

the area encased in Atlanta's city limits or, more generally, the area inside the perimeter and south of them (including the inner city and the southern suburbs).

Boston employers in suburbs close to Boston certainly expressed concern with crime in Boston's inner city, which most often meant Roxbury (the largest concentration of blacks in Boston, but increasingly a Latino neighborhood as well). However, most firms in the suburbs closer to Boston were not as connected to the city as were firms in the suburbs of Detroit and Atlanta, and questions about the inner city of Boston as place to do business elicited less of a response. Firms in Boston's more distant suburbs think of the inner city of Boston very little, and the firms closer to or within the satellite cities, such as Lowell, Lawrence, and Brockton, view the inner city of those cities when they think of the inner city. These cities have concentrations of minority populations, and crime and drugs form an important part of the image of these populations.

Finally, many employers outside the city of Los Angeles spoke of a Los Angeles crime problem. Employers most frequently associated crime with the inner city with reference to the concentrations of blacks (and, increasingly, Latinos) in South Central Los Angeles. Such images of neighborhoods as crime-ridden may bear not just on their desirability as business locations but also on employers' views of workers from these areas. We turn now to these perceptions of the quality of the inner-city workforce.

Perceptions of the City Workforce

As table 6.1 demonstrates, negative views of inner-city workers are widespread. A range of concerns were common to employers in all four metropolitan areas. In many instances inner-city workers were seen as relatively lacking in hard skills such as reading and writing and soft skills such as communication and interaction with others, work motivation, and attitude in general. The response of a white supervisor at a suburban Detroit-area utility illustrated the concern with hard skills: "The more applicants we've been hiring from the Pontiac and Detroit area[s], the [more the] failure rate [on the company's exam] has increased." Skill deficits were only part of the list of criticisms, however. At times personal deficiencies of character were cited, along with educational background, family problems, and drug use. Respondents attributed causes that included class and culture in the inner city, single-parent and dysfunctional families, and inferior educational systems in the cities. Less often, they attributed workforce problems to inner-city residence itself, or to race, pure and simple. In these instances the racial

group viewed negatively was most frequently black. This was true in Detroit and Atlanta, where minority status almost exclusively means black. But it was also true in Boston and Los Angeles, where there are other minorities as numerous or more numerous than blacks.

Consider first the views of suburban businesspeople. Unfortunately, as far as most suburban employers in the Detroit metropolitan area are concerned, Detroit workers carry with them much of the baggage of the city. Given Detroit's degree of segregation, an important issue is suburban customers' discomfort with black employees. Only a small number of managers commented on this, but their testimony was potent. Respondents told us about customers who don't want black workers at a laundry touching their clothes, retail customers who are uncomfortable with black employees, and a suburban school system that "get[s] real hysterical" about the hiring of one or two black custodians.

Suburban employers in Atlanta, though they complained about their local labor pool, ascribed much more serious problems to the inner-city workforce. A white store manager noted that "it's real difficult [finding enough qualified workers] in this area, when you're competing with the mall." But, he added: "I worked downtown in a [grocery chain] store, and it was . . . a nightmare. . . . It was so difficult working inner city to find anybody that's a pretty . . . a good person. Maybe one out of twenty people was a . . . was a halfway decent, moral person that you could . . . that would show up . . . that would, you know, do the job that they agreed to do."

In fact, over half of the northern suburban Atlanta employers expressed negative attitudes toward inner-city workers. They sometimes attributed the deficiencies of inner-city workers explicitly to the race of the area's residents, and other times blamed crime, drugs, housing projects, and "welfare mentality"—all racially loaded issues. Given this negative assessment, northern suburban employers expressed no desire to confront the barriers of distance and transportation to hire inner-city workers. That inner-city residents often need public transportation to get to the northern suburbs is often a barrier in the minds of northern suburban employers, but it is also a signal of other problems, including class, that they see with inner-city workers. A white woman general manager from a northern suburb said: "Your labor force [from the inner city] is comprised of a different education level and a different income level. . . . In the city of Atlanta, I have sometimes run ads in the Atlanta paper. And I find that all the employees . . . if you're not on the MARTA [the Atlanta public transit system] route . . . are not interested in working for you."

Boston-area employers spoke of similar problems with the inner-city workforce, but we heard the litany of race, class, and culture less often than we did from employers in other cities. Instead, several subur-

ban employers, as well as Boston-based organizations, cited the schools as a key or the key difficulty with the inner-city workforce. Perceptions of the quality of Boston's inner-city workforce appeared to be closely connected to views about the quality of the Boston public schools. One public sector manager declared,

I think we have a real problem. I think the problem is centered in the Boston public school system. Clearly, in my opinion, the school system in this city is not producing young people with the educational skills to get into the workforce, and in many cases, perform. . . . In most cases, the white . . . has gone either to private school or gone almost overwhelmingly to the Catholic parochial school system. . . . Minority kids either went to school in the deep South, where the per capita expenditure for education is as weak as you can imagine, or they graduated from the Boston public school system.

The Boston public schools have been a flash point for race relations in the city of Boston for many years, even before the confrontation over busing in the 1970s. The schools have become overwhelmingly minority, as white residents have left them for private schools or fled to the suburbs. Respondents drew a sharp contrast between the Catholic private schools and the public schools, where they alleged students get pushed through without receiving basic skills and without being given the sense that effort is required for achievement or reward. The purported crisis of the Boston public schools appeared to be a crucial way in which employers—including liberal ones—expressed negative views of inner-city workers. Given the evolved demography of the schools and the history of controversy, it is difficult to pull apart the issue of educational preparation from the issues of race, class, and space that the Boston public schools have come to symbolize.

Suburban firms farther from Boston paid little attention to the residents of Boston as a source of labor. When the employers near Lawrence or Lowell spoke of the inner city, it was their own inner cities they had in mind. Several employers in this group who sought soft skills (bank tellers, school bus drivers), voiced concerns about the poor skills of inner-city Latino residents and a reluctance to hire these residents.

Suburban employers in Los Angeles, for whom the notion of relocating to the inner city was an abstraction, generally expressed negative views of the inner-city workforce. A middle manager at a rehabilitation center thought an inner-city location would bring more black applicants, and commented that the center "get[s] a very low quality of work from black people." A supervisor at the same firm did not believe

he could find the skills required for even a dishwasher job in the inner-city workforce.

In a few cases, suburban employers—and even some urban ones—dismissed the urban workforce altogether. From his standpoint in the northern suburbs of Detroit, one white lawyer implied that there simply is no clerical workforce living in Detroit, commenting that businesses in the city have a difficult time recruiting clerical workers because “economically, you have to offer something more to get people down there.” A white female suburban retailer who has hired Detroiters for a store near Detroit with a largely black clientele described the young black women she hired as exceptions: “only a few [good] people out of a school of twenty-two hundred people.” Even at one of the Detroit employers with a social commitment to remaining in the city, the human resource director admitted: “Our demographics don’t come anywhere close to reflecting the Detroit workforce.”

Quite a few urban employers echoed their suburban counterparts. In Atlanta, for instance, most inner-city employers remarked that they thought the quality of workers available in the inner city to be poor. Respondents related the poor quality of their labor supply with varying combinations of race, single motherhood, values, and education. But frequently it was explicitly linked to race, as in the case of this white male plant manager:

When we get into the inner city, in my opinion, work values change, because you’re talking about people that are primarily raised in a single [-parent] family. Very poor environment. . . . Now, I’ve not only got to teach them the job, but I’ve got to teach them values. And those type basic things that I don’t want to teach. I want somebody that already has that, so all I’ve got to do is train him how to do my job the way I want it done. And if you’re downtown, that’s what you’re faced with. . . . Just somebody just sitting there and listening to this will say, “You know what you’re saying? You’re talking about black people because that’s primarily what’s in the inner city.” And unfortunately, that’s true. I can’t help it if they don’t receive that type of upbringing.

And at a Los Angeles business that had moved from the inner city to a suburban location, a white human resources manager linked a workforce that “didn’t care about their jobs” at the former site to “a predominantly black workforce” and “a lot, lot of single mothers.”

Some respondents grounded their negative perceptions in concrete experiences. More often—especially in the case of suburban businesspeople commenting on the inner city—employers expressed views as opinions. The fact that the fraction that speaks disparagingly about inner-city workers is higher among employers located in the city than

among suburban employers (see table 6.1) suggests that experience is likely to be important in forming opinions. Indeed, it suggests that employer encounters with real hard and soft skill gaps is likely to be an important contributor to the observed negative views and to differential hiring patterns as well. The types of expressions chosen, the association of inner-city residence with a litany of stereotypes, the at times seamless interchange between "inner-city" (in response to a direct query about the inner-city workforce) and race and class—most notably low-income black—suggest to us, however, that the negative attitudes about and reluctance to hire inner-city residents go beyond skill deficiencies.

Employers' spoken evaluations of the skills of urban and suburban workers were far from monolithic. In every city, substantial minorities denied that there was any difference between urban and suburban workers. Indeed, in quite a few cases respondents at the same business, and sometimes even the same respondents, gave apparently conflicting assessments. Why this mix? In many cases, managers volunteered negative views of urban workers, but when asked point-blank whether they saw a difference between city and suburban workers, answered no. We suspect, therefore, that many of these comments simply reflect respondents' attempts to provide socially desirable answers.

As table 6.1 indicates, a small minority of respondents even indicated that the inner-city workforce was better than the suburban workforce. The typical reason given for this ranking was that suburban workers—particularly young people—are more privileged and do not need to work as much as lower-income inner-city workers. The result was a lower work ethic and higher turnover among the suburban workers. Such responses occurred in all four metropolitan areas, particularly among businesses offering low paid or menial work. For instance, manufacturers based in Lawrence and Lowell were quite comfortable with inner-city residents—in these cases, immigrants and Latinos—as a low wage, hard-working labor force, despite making negative comments about inner-city life. The white male manager of a sporting goods store in a western suburb of Detroit, similarly, remarked: "[City workers] might be more motivated, they might be harder workers, more willing to do things for you. . . . They maybe do menial tasks, you know, take out the trash type of, physical labor type of things that some of our suburban employees might be against or, for instance, 'Oh, I don't cut the lawns at home, I'm not going to cut the lawns here,' type of thing."

However, quite a few employers attributed this superior work ethic to a desperate need for work derived from the financial exigencies of single parenthood, tying a positive evaluation of work ethic to a negative evaluation of city workers' character and family life. Moreover, these comments were largely limited to employers hiring for low-wage

retail, service, and manufacturing jobs, meaning that the relevant suburban comparison group was primarily teens and very young adults.

In sum, employers in all four metropolitan areas viewed the inner-city workforce with a jaundiced eye. The incidence of such responses was higher among employers located in the city. Although skill deficits were frequently noted, the range of other attributes attached to the perception of inner-city workers, most notably whether or not they are black, suggests that inner-city residence broadcasts a negative signal over and above the actual skill level of the individuals involved.

How Perceptions Translate into Decisions: Location and Hiring

Employers' perceptions of space are particularly important to the extent that they shape their actions—chiefly, decisions about business location and recruiting or hiring. We do not observe behavior longitudinally, but we did gather information on the nature, rationale, and consequences of employer decisions. Our evidence for the relation between racially and class-tinged perceptions and actual location and hiring decisions remains primarily indirect.

Employer Perceptions and Location Decisions

How do employer perceptions of various localities color their location decisions? The In-Depth Employer Survey oversampled employers who reported a move in the last ten years, and asked them additional questions about a move. Thirty-six percent reported a past move (with four out of five of the moves after 1979), and 38 percent reported contemplating or planning a move; because of substantial overlap between the two categories, a total of 42 percent either had moved or were planning to do so.

However, most movers stayed within a particular type of area—for example, moving within the central city or from one suburban location to another. Table 6.2 examines the smaller 12 percent (twenty firms) that crossed from one type of location to another, organized by their point of origin. Confirming the results from the larger Telephone Survey analyzed by Moss and Tilly in chapter 10 of this volume, we find that firms that started out in the central city were almost twice as likely to leave as the average; suburban firms were one-third as likely to leave. Comparing movers' destinations with the original locational distribution of movers and nonmovers combined, we see that though 42 percent of firms started out in the central cities, only 10 percent of movers went

TABLE 6.2 *Firms That Moved, by Original Location and Destination*

	As Percentage of Total	Percentage Who Moved	Of Those Who Moved, Percentage Who Moved to			Row Totals
			Primary Central City	Other Central City	Other Suburb	
Original location						
Primary central city	42	22	—	6	94	72
Other central city	15	4	0	—	100	25
Other suburb	44	4	67	33	—	75
Total	100	12	10	10	80	172
Column totals	172	20	2	2	16	

Source: Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality 1994.

Note: "Other central city" also includes any municipality other than the primary central city that has a black population of 30 percent or more. In this table, "movers" include only those who moved from one type of locality to another (for example, from the primary central city to the suburbs). We include a small number of firms that have not moved but have an explicit plan to move in the near future.

there. Conversely, 80 percent of movers went to suburbs without high minority populations, even though only 44 percent of firms started in such suburbs. Table 6.2 documents the flow of firms from central city to suburbs, particularly to whiter suburbs.

So far the findings are familiar. The in-depth interviews also gave employers the opportunity to talk about their reasons for moving. Most movers gave standard business reasons that have little to do with perceptions of neighborhoods: needs for a larger space or lower rents or taxes; consolidation of scattered operations after downsizing; need for better access to transportation. But about one in seven of those moving or planning a move (eleven out of seventy-three) raised "inner city" issues in explaining the firm's decision to move or choice of destination. While this group represents a small minority of movers, their concerns are of interest as one contributor to location decisions.

At all firms in this small group, respondents raised issues of crime or related environmental issues of vandalism, trash, and economic class. For example, the white personnel director of a food processing firm that recently moved from one suburban location to another said that, although they looked at sites in Detroit, "We realized that we didn't want to move to Detroit. . . . For all the reasons about Detroit. I mean I know people myself that own businesses in Detroit. One in particular the guy was killed walking into his building."

Crime, class, and location quality were often linked together in

ways that were objectively and subjectively correlated with race. In Atlanta, for instance, a white personnel officer at a household repair service that moved from the East Point area commented, "See, East Point was starting to get a more . . . higher crime rate. . . . The further south you go the worse it gets." Of course, the racial composition also becomes more black the farther south you go in the Atlanta metro area. In a statement we reported earlier in the chapter, a white supervisor at a Detroit-area retail administrative headquarters endorsed her firm's move from Southfield (adjacent to Detroit, 29 percent black and rising) to Livonia (0.3 percent black) by commenting that Southfield is "kind of going downhill." In the Los Angeles area, the Anglo owner of a bookkeeping and tax service explained that he had left Bell Gardens, a community that experienced a 61 percent decline in its white population and is now 88 percent Latino, to move to nearby Downey because "Downey is a nicer city than Bell Gardens is in my opinion. . . . Downey was pulling me because it had a higher economic standard than Bell Gardens did." None of these statements indicates that racial antipathy itself motivated a move, but all represent antipathy toward the *communities* in which blacks and Latinos reside.

In two cases, respondents raised workforce issues in addition to concerns about crime and class in general. The case of a financial research firm that relocated from the LAX airport area to Orange County, over 30 miles away, as told by an Asian American manager, is particularly interesting:

Respondent: [At the LAX office] a lot of them just kind of lived in the Inglewood area and that office mix was ninety-five percent black. . . . That work environment and that work attitude is night and day from this, this office. . . .

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Respondent: Just . . . you know coming to work, doing your work. There every rule, every policy was challenged. . . .

Interviewer: Why do you think it was different there from here?

Respondent: I think I . . . the employees I had, were, like I said were ninety-five percent black. It was their culture. I mean I really truly believe it was their culture.

When the company decided to move, the manager continued,

They narrowed it down here, this location, and there was a place in Glendale. . . . I said we need to like to [go to] a mall. . . . If I go to the mall, I will

let you know, I can tell what kind of clientele shops there. Depending on what kind of clientele shops there, they have to live there and we'll figure out what kind of work source we're going to have. So . . . the senior vice president and my boss, the vice president, went to the [local] mall. I saw the second floor, so I said, "OK, I can hire from this place." 'Cause you know the people that were walking around . . . they were predominantly white but they still were a mixture of . . . other races. . . . And the way those people were dressed you could kind of tell they were educated. They weren't gang-related or street . . . you could just tell.

This narrative is quite dramatic, but it is also exceptional in our data. Paralleling the paucity of accounts of workforce-driven avoidance of the inner city as a business location, among businesses originally located in central cities the correlation between making or planning a move and expressing concern about the inner-city workforce is a scant 0.02. The correlation between moving and voicing concerns about crime is a slightly higher 0.04. The Anglo production manager of a manufacturing firm in Lawrence, predominantly Latino and the poorest community in Massachusetts, contrasted crime and workforce issues succinctly:

Respondent: Right now [our location is] an issue . . . for us. It's all crack houses and prostitutes out here. You look out, right, . . . I'll guarantee you'll see somebody out there. And it's tough for us right now . . . bringing customers in . . .

Interviewer: . . . What about in terms of getting qualified workers in the area . . . how is that?

Respondent: Ahh . . . that hasn't been too, too difficult.

Indeed, this manufacturer, paying seven-dollar-an-hour entry wages, relies heavily on Lawrence's predominantly Latino workforce, who have few economic alternatives.

The eleven movers who attributed their moves (at least in part) to inner-city problems do not tell the full story. We asked about the most recent move, but some firms had an earlier history of multiple moves, branch plant closings, and/or shifts of production activity. Respondents at two large manufacturers in the Los Angeles area, for example, told of shutting down inner-city facilities. "It was never terribly efficient," the white manufacturing director at one of the companies remarked; "I think the work ethic was tough."

Moreover, for many firms the inner city was a nonissue because it simply was not on the map of possible locations. For instance, although Detroit is the geographic hub of southeastern Michigan, managers referred to Warren, Troy, and Livonia as "centrally located." The manufac-

turing human resource manager who called Warren central remarked, "We are probably as close to Detroit as you can get"; a law firm's senior partner called Troy "as close to everyone as we could be." The Latina controller of a West Los Angeles food manufacturer discussed plans to move to the southeast, near the city of Industry. When asked whether the company would consider South Central Los Angeles, located squarely between these two locations, she was clearly taken off guard:

Respondent: No, I just know that it's, kind of like, not safe, safe area. That's all I know. And again, I don't think it's good for our industry or anything. If it's not safe for the employee . . . so you would be scared just to go to work. Just driving in those streets, so I think that is not a good idea at all.

Interviewer: Do you think there would be hiring issues if you moved to, say, South Central?

Respondent: Definitely. . . . Or maybe the people that would be in the area are not people that you want to work with you. You know what I am saying?

What of inner city-based businesses that choose not to move? We found three such groups. First, for smaller businesses and those tied to local clienteles (such as local merchants or banks), relocation is not an option. Second, a variety of employers, such as universities, government agencies, and nonprofits, have a strong commitment to their locations. The African American director of a Detroit social service agency stated, "Well, I suppose for our business, because it's a community service business and in part some of the stuff we do is to serve a distressed community, so it's probably a great . . . place to do business, yeah. I mean you're sitting right in the middle of your kind of customers." In fact, a federal agency had recently bucked the tide by relocating a suburban satellite office back into the city. "We'll never leave Detroit," an African American manager at the federal office stated flatly. "Congress doesn't like us to do that."

Third, some low-wage and/or environmentally deleterious industries found inner-city workforces and sites advantageous. This reminds us that business movement toward the inner cities does not necessarily represent a completely desirable trend: for example, a penal institution was one of the small number of firms moving to an inner-city location. The president of a manufacturing firm declared, "We will always be in Atlanta. . . . Our president was born and raised here in Atlanta"—but shortly afterward added, "In order to all of sudden decide you're going to manufacture somewhere else you run into a lot of legislative regulations, EPA issues, which now are more and more difficult." The CEO of

a Detroit snack food manufacturer, who paid a black workforce from the neighborhood \$5.63 an hour in 1994, summed up his situation by saying: "It's, like, I have this and it works, OK, and I'm able to make a profit at it, so why would I close that up? Even though there is some cost associated with being in Detroit that you may not have in another place."

To summarize our findings about firm relocations, in general our data reflect the well-known shift of low-end employment from central cities to suburbs. Only in a few cases did movers raise "inner city" issues to explain their move, and they primarily spoke of crime rather than workforce quality. But in other cases flight from the inner city predated the most recent move, or the inner city was simply overlooked in relocation decisions. Despite all this, a mixed group of businesses remain rooted in inner-city areas.

Employer Perceptions and Hiring

Modifications to employers' *hiring* strategies based on their perceptions of space were less visible than locational decisions in these data. While many employers' perceptual soliloquies included overt racism, few described active measures to avoid hiring workers from spaces they defined as less desirable. They may in fact have avoided taking such measures, since that would risk violating antidiscrimination laws. However, we suspect that some employers' silence amounts to the provision of socially acceptable answers. Striking evidence of this comes from the Telephone Employer Survey that served as the sampling frame for our in-depth interviews. When asked if they target particular neighborhoods for recruiting workers, 12 percent of employers replied "always," another 17 percent "sometimes," and 15 percent specified "rarely"; a slim majority of 55 percent said "never." But when asked if they *avoid* particular neighborhoods, 90 percent replied "never"—even though targeting some neighborhoods implies avoiding others.

One notable exception to the silence about spatially focused hiring was an employer in an organization in our sample that had sites across a county that reaches from the far north to the far south of Atlanta, encompassing most of the city itself. This employer presented an elaborate series of rationales for why he preferred to hire workers from the north, which he characterized as "wealthy," and is also predominantly white. Citing reasons primarily having to do with a higher rate of desperation "due to the socioeconomic background of south [county]" and lower skill level in applicants from the south (despite the fact that this organization had to train every worker they hired in the specialized skills required to do the job), he said that they weeded out fully 66 to 80 percent

of the applicants from the south end, but they hired at least half of the north end applicants. His evaluation of southern applicants may have certainly been based on an objective appraisal of them compared to those from the north. Yet what was notable about his stance was that an applicant's address automatically determined her or his odds of passing the first screening: "So what we basically do is if we have forty applications from the south end, we'll try to screen them down to the best ten." Despite this selectivity in the south, he said, "We are always fighting in north [county] just to get the applications in." Consequently, applicants from the north got at least a stronger look, indicating that in the employment practices of this organization, space was a salient signal of employee desirability and a basis for hiring decisions.

Unlike this employer, who offered an above-market wage and was able to exercise a good deal of selectivity, most employers in every city drew their entry-level employees primarily from the immediate vicinity. Despite this, some employers did discuss their use of selective recruitment strategies that indirectly allowed them to avoid hiring employees from particular neighborhoods. Upon describing where they found workers to be most desirable, employers sometimes remarked that they relied on advertisements in the newspapers in those areas to recruit applicants. For example, a restaurant manager in College Park, a predominantly black southern suburb very close to Atlanta, complained about applicants from the local area. Since he was not impressed with these potential workers and was also uncomfortable with the amount of crime he said they attracted, this employer said he recently began to recruit workers from a white suburb about twenty miles farther south:

I try now to run them [job advertisements] in a local paper instead of *Atlanta Journal Constitution* because you, you can actually select individual areas that you want to interview from. Like right now I have an ad running in the Newnan paper and I've got a really good turnout from it lately. You know, I ran an ad in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* which is actually the most expensive paper you can run an ad in, I think [chuckle], and the turnout that you get may be minimal. And then again the turnout that you get may be from the other side of the city, and they just don't really know . . . "Why are you driving forty-five minutes to come to work for me?" You know, "Do you have" . . . you know . . . you're not really supposed to ask somebody if they have . . . you can ask them if they have reliable transportation or how they're going to get to work, but you're not really supposed to ask somebody if they have a car, blah blah blah and all that. "Are you on the bus line?"

Like this employer, who based some of his recruitment strategies and hiring decisions on the signals of space, many others in the suburbs

sang the woes of public transportation in explaining why they advertised only in specific suburban newspapers rather than in the broader metropolitan dailies. Hiring practices that worked to change the racial balance of workplaces from minority to white, some suburban employers explained, were sometimes an unavoidable consequence of transportation problems for city residents. As one suburban Detroit employer with an all-white staff explained: "I think it's mainly geography. We advertise for our people mostly in the Macomb newspapers, because that's where we get the best results. We don't discriminate, but because of our distance from the city, where there's a larger black population, we hired from that area, but they find it difficult to get here." Eventually she discontinued any recruitment from majority-black areas, including the inner city. Unprompted, over one-third of Detroit employers—both suburban and urban—and many Atlanta employers alluded to city residents' difficulties with transportation. Since the need for transportation was so intertwined with the areas where workers lived, these perceived difficulties became a space-based signal to some employers about worker reliability.

Thus, by recruiting workers through newspapers in white suburban areas and counting out potential workers who relied on public transportation, some employers in all four cities in our sample acted on their perceptions of spatial patterns of race and class.

We must also note that in response to the ways they perceived space in its relationship to class and race, some employers took affirmative action in their hiring practices. A number of employers in each city remarked on how they actively attempted to recruit minority workers from various areas in an attempt to make their workforces reflect the demographic composition of their cities. Because of the substantial negativity imbued in employers' perceptions of workers from minority neighborhoods, we suspect that some proclamations of affirmative actions were, in part, simply more acceptable to make than admissions of discriminatory hiring practices. Yet the prevalence of these sentiments is still encouraging and reflects the fact that some employers use spatial targeting to attain diversity rather than avoid it.

Conclusion

In segregated urban America, race is a crucial factor determining people's conceptions of space—and employers are no exception to this generalization. For employers in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles, racial dividing lines, often closely correlated with class, are important perceptual demarcators. This is particularly true in Detroit, where the

city-suburb line is paramount, and in Atlanta, where the north-south divide looms large. In Boston and Los Angeles, where concentrations of people of color and with low income are more dispersed and more multiethnic, employers have less crisp conceptions of what "inner city" means, and are more likely to simply ignore low-income, minority areas than to use them as a reference point.

Substantial minorities of employers across the metropolitan areas associate inner cities with crime and a lower quality workforce. Such conceptions surely have some objective basis—inner-city areas do have higher crime rates and lower average educational attainment—but other employers based in such communities criticize these views as overblown. Nonetheless, for many business decision-makers these negative views mark communities of color as undesirable places to locate and/or from which to recruit. For many business-based observers, these perceptions of the inner city are tied to race, class, and a variety of perceived urban ills, such as family breakdown, welfare dependency, and inadequate education.

Our evidence for actions flowing from such perceptions is considerably more limited. Perceived crime problems contribute to driving some employers away from black and Latino areas, and lead others to foreclose these communities as potential locations. However, the small number of respondents tying their moves to such concerns is overshadowed by a much larger (and overlapping) group citing traditional locational factors of cost and convenience. Examples of spatially selective hiring policies are even fewer in number. It seems likely that our data have captured only part of the actions driven by negative perceptions of black and Latino communities, and that some respondents are censoring or tailoring their responses toward greater social acceptability. Further research exploring the link between employer perceptions of space and employer actions within space would help determine whether the limited actions we have found accurately capture the true scope of this connection.

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