

HOME AND AWAY: BRIDGING FIELDWORK AND EVERYDAY LIFE

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In the course of developing a dissertation proposal, I received advice from numerous faculty members who, having already been through the experience, wanted to impart upon me their wisdom. From several I received the admonishment to choose a topic that could hold my interest because, they foretold, not only would I concentrate the years of my dissertation fieldwork and write-up on that topic but I would likely also spend the first half-decade or more of postgraduate life mining that research for articles and maybe even a book. More interesting was the advice of an anthropologist, the late Daniel Nugent. Over a pitcher of beer, with the hot Tucson sun setting behind him, Daniel told me to choose my field site well. After all, he warned, fieldwork isn't just about research and writing. I was about to spend a great deal of time with the people I studied. And, he continued, noting my stated interest in studying police in Boston, did I really want to hang out with cops?

Daniel nearly scared me off. Yet, seven years later, I have to admit that I do like hanging out with cops—or, more specifically, with the folks in District C-11, Dorchester, Boston (Figure 1). In fact, I had so much fun doing follow-up research in the summer of 1999 that in 2000—a summer I didn't spend in the field—I found myself pining for the excitement and good times I'd had the previous year, cruising through Boston in squad cars, shooting the breeze with police officers, and meeting with community activists eager to tell me their stories of how they're making the Boston Police Department more responsive to locally defined—though not necessarily parochial—concerns.

For me, going into the field is like going away to summer camp. Not only does it mean leaving the everyday—both its place and its routines—to become immersed in a life somewhere else, among other people, doing things very different from those I do at home, but it's great fun, too. Unfortunately, with pressure to publish being what it is, many of us feel compelled to extract every possible article, chapter, or book from our fieldwork. Never mind that I think fieldwork is so much fun that I *want* to go back into the field—maybe even to someplace completely different—before I've finished mining my last excursion for all it's worth. In 2001 my career demanded that I stay home.

In important ways, doing fieldwork defines me—and not just me—as a geographer and a social scientist. At a general level, my work as a social scientist depends on and in part consists of going into the field to make observations. Those observations, together with any formal and informal interviews, focus groups, and documentary research I may conduct, constitute the bulk of the original data that I will

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