

Ice Cream Shops, Saturday Night, and Peace

Waffle cone.

That delicious scent is probably the first thing to draw my attention to the ice cream shop. It's one of the most packed places in a busy Atlantic Station on a busy springtime Saturday night in Atlanta.

Sitting outside are several families – mothers, fathers, children. One is a Muslim family. One couple is speaking in another language. I looked up. This ice cream shop was brimming over, with people of multiple ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, even nationalities all coming together for some delicious frozen dairy.

Here in the heart of good old American consumerism are groups and identities that for most of human history haven't been able to reconcile themselves to each other – Muslims and Christians, white people and black people, nativists and immigrants. But if our Saturday nights are any indication, people in Atlanta – in America as a whole, even – are starting to figure it out.

These people licking ice cream cones all come together to have a good time, to delight their little children, and to enjoy the delicious scent of waffle. Here borders and divisions melt away faster than a scoop dropped on the ground.

Ice cream brings people together. But so does Saturday night – the relief and the openness – and the place these people decided to spend it.

It's a radical experience in human history for people to have the financial means and the freedom to go out to see a movie, to take the children out for an ice cream, to walk through a welcoming, light-strewn outdoor mall. But that's what a Saturday night in Atlantic Station is for all of these people. It's more impressive when I consider that some of these people from minority cultures are likely immigrants. This Saturday night may have been someone's first night around all of this extravagance.

But besides the extravagance, maybe, like me, they notice another miracle.

Here on this ice cream shop's sidewalk in spring in Atlanta I walk past the impossible – the sharing of peace, mutual respect, mutual goodwill, and cheer among people who for most of human history and in most parts of the world have considered each other enemies and aliens. Here is a true “melting pot” – without loss of identity, and without the need for propaganda or war to do the job.

Ice cream will do that. So will Saturday nights.