In 1973 my son (then nine) and I were spending time in several of Alaska's Eskimo communities near the Kobuk River. We were talking with Eskimo families, trying to learn how certain Eskimo children grew up and assumed their particular lives. We were listening to men and women speak of the Arctic tundra, of the cloudy sky that covers it for so many months of each year. We were looking at the drawings and paintings of Eskimo children, noting their decided interest in connecting the world around them (the land, the vegetation, the animal and fish life, the weather) to their personal world. We were learning; we were seeing with our own eyes how a particular group of people living in a particular stretch of America conducted themselves in the course of their everyday lives.

As a child psychiatrist I was especially interested in what I heard—the various remarks, declarations, questions, statements of fact or fantasy spoken to a pair of visitors from (as it is so often put in Alaska) "the lower forty-eight." However, I was at the time breaking in a new kind of tape recorder and having an exceedingly rough time doing so. Meanwhile, my son was having a fine, free time of it with his camera—clicking away tactfully yet persistently, loading, emptying, loading yet again and, occasionally, helping out his mechanically dim-witted dad. All the while an Eskimo youth of twelve who had become a friend of my son's had been doing his own kind of observations, making his own appraisal of these two characters from afar. At one point the Eskimo lad decided to become somewhat more active in his approach to us and to abandon his posture of the one willing to provide quietly intelligent, good-natured hospitality in favor of a more pointedly instructive manner. His words of advice, or at least some of them, went like this: "Why not put that machine away? Don't worry about what we say! Lots of time we don't talk. We're talking now because you want us to talk! Your son is seeing us; that's what to do. The more you see here, the better you'll know us. We have some snapshots I could show you. If you want, you can make your own snapshots of us. You can take them back home and show us to people. You can take pictures of everyone here, our village [Noorvik], and tell everyone who looks at them that they've visited us, through seeing the pictures. They can see our houses, and our river, and our salmon drying, and our store, and our landing field, and our boats, and most of all, they can see us kids—what we do: going in our school and coming out of it, and playing and hunting and fishing. Then they'll know us, and we won't be strangers—they to us."

I thought of that child and our Alaskan conversations of years ago as I looked through these photographs of Boston's people and Boston's neighborhoods. I thought, too, of my own work in Boston, done during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the city was fast changing, becoming no longer only a place where the Irish and the Italians and the Jews lived in a sometimes uneasy peace (along with smaller concentrations of Polish and Greek people, and people from Lithuania, and of course those who lived in Chinatown, and those Protestants from the British Isles who called the Back Bay and Beacon Hill and parts of the Fenway their home). I thought, too, of the research I had done, of the bus rides I had taken to school—with black children from Roxbury going to Beacon Hill well before a federal judge issued his ambitious orders, which have become so significant a part of the city's social history. I was, then, trying to see what those children saw. As with the Eskimo boy, I soon enough heard exactly what those black children saw—a lot. "You go through lots of different places," one ten-year-old girl told me; then she ex-
plained: "There's us, here in Roxbury, then there are
the whites who aren't much better off than we are;
and then you can see the downtown area, and you
can see some people who are really on top, and they
look it and they walk it, and if you could hear them
talk, I'll bet they'd talk it! My momma told us Boston
is lots of cities in one city, just like it was down
South where she lived [Atlanta]. You can get yourself
an education just by riding the bus, if you keep your
eyes open and you sit near the window on the bus,
and you really pay attention. You just keep looking,
and you keep taking it in."

The "it" was, of course, the diversity of a given me-
tropolis, increasingly witnessed and comprehended
by a younger who may have been having her trou-
bles with a formal course of study, but who was not
unable to take stock of what was happening to her
native city. And yet, prompted by that ongoing visual
experience, she was able to put into words a running
commentary about a changing urban scene. Put dif-
derently, for this girl, as with the Eskimo boy, the
world was something to be absorbed through the
eyes, and then fathomed by a mind that gets won-
derfully stimulated and provoked through its ex-
sposure to the apparent, the evident—to what is in full
view. In contrast, alas, is all too often quite another
approach—certain thoroughly wordy and abstract
presentations that get called, in their sum, "text-
books," which have a collective "subject matter":
urban sociology, a branch of the social sciences.
Lord, we need our language, as it gets applied to this
life; and we need our scholars who examine long and
hard and closely one or another aspect of humankind.
In so doing, they emerge with generalizations and
formulations, with theories that (one hopes) become
not a testimony to our capacity for idolatry, so much
as expressions of our searching and our capacity to
explore, conclude, and, not least, have second
thoughts. Still, reading and writing are not the only
ways to come to terms with life. Nor is resort to ver-
bal speculations, never mind definitive assertions
called conclusions, the only way for one to begin to
get some much-needed sense of mastery over the peo-
ple, places, things of this earthly universe of ours.

In *City Limits* the cameras of certain photographers
have been allowed rein, and the result is comparable
to what the two children quoted above found avail-
able to them—pictures seen through the camera each
of us has as our inheritance. A world is witnessed,
the sight of a city is captured, engraved engagingly,
if not unforgettably: the nuances and the subtleties,
the ironies and the ambiguities, the ups and downs
of living, the good-natured moments, and, sadly, the
times of bad temper, of doubt and scorn and suspi-
cion and hate. Much has happened to Boston in the
past half-century, and *City Limits* casts a sustained
and honest glimpse at the consequences of all those
events: people of various "sorts and conditions," in
the phrase of the Book of Common Prayer, trying as
best they can to make do. In a sense, then, the
reader about to turn the pages of this book is some-
one embarking on a wide-ranging contemporary jour-
ney: America's oldest city in its newest presence.
This is a book in the best tradition of documentary
photography, not to mention urban studies: an origi-
nal, ambitious, and probing expedition into homes
and schools and churches and playgrounds and
stores, into streets that families reluctantly or cas-
ually or proudly call their own, into neighborhoods of
several kinds, into Boston as it grows close, indeed,
to the onset of the third millennium.

ROBERT COLES