

“CLIMBING FOR HIGHER GROUND: RACE, CLASS, AND RESPECTABILITY
AMONG BLACK ATLANTANS, 1974-2010”

by

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(Under the Direction of James Brooks)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation contemplates the complex dynamics and long-term legacy of Atlanta’s Black mayors in office for the past six decades beginning in 1974. I focus primarily on the administrations of Maynard Jackson (1974-1982 and 1990-1994) and Andrew Young (1982-1990) but also touch on Shirley Franklin’s time in office (2001-2010). What did they achieve in their time in office? How did their administrations harm or help all Black Atlantans? And finally, after their time in office passed, what legacy did they leave? I argue that Atlanta’s Black mayors reflect a century-long tradition of Black involvement in both city and state politics that consistently prioritized an elite Black vision of Atlanta, doing little to address the everyday struggles and realities for most Black Atlantans. Exploring the administrations of Jackson, Young, and Franklin reveals how Black Atlantans of varied classes viewed their city and defined activism for themselves over the course of the twentieth century. All of this paints a picture of the underlying complexity of Black politics in modern Atlanta.

INDEX WORDS: Mayors, Atlanta, Transportation, Housing, Tourism, Urban Cities

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DEDICATION

Thank you to my parents, Yolanda Brooks, Harris Brooks, and Wendy Brooks for supporting my educational journey and for encouraging my love for Black history. It led me down the pathway to becoming a historian. This is also dedicated to independent coffee shops, everywhere. I couldn't have written this project without you.

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO ATLANTA

On October 16, 1973, Atlantans elected Maynard Jackson as their next mayor. When he assumed office in 1974, he became not only Atlanta's first Black mayor but the first Black mayor of a large southern city. His election reflected the culmination of a century's worth of work by Atlanta's Black elite. His great grandfather, Andrew Jackson, founded Wheat Street Baptist Church in 1869, one of the foremost Black Baptist churches in the city. His grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs, founded the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) in 1949. His parents, Irene Dobbs Jackson and Maynard Jackson Sr., both held doctorate degrees. The ANVL was founded to represent the political interests of Atlanta's Black elite, and by customary extension, all of Black Atlanta. Historically, the ANVL chose white candidates that they could support and then organized grassroots campaigns to motivate and mobilize the Black electorate.¹ This method of coalition politics set the stage for Atlanta politics for the rest of the twentieth century. Historian Tomiko Brown-Nagin has coined this the "Atlanta style politics of bi-racial negotiation."² A key part of this strategy, in which the Black elite worked with the white elite to win elections, often hinged upon excluding the voices of the Black masses. Thus, the positions of the Black elite came to represent the political voice of Atlanta's

¹ Maurice J. Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 53- 55.

² Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

entire Black population.³ Ironically, the excluded Black residents would prove to be the exact voting bloc Black and moderate white politicians needed to win elections.

Many challenges laid ahead for the first Black mayor. Atlanta was a city in transition in the 1970s. Multiple local and national events affected quality of life, including elevated murder rates, white residents fleeing the city for the suburbs, high unemployment, and increased poverty rates among poor Black residents. Jackson's administration sought to address these problems. He also hoped to foster Atlanta's reputation as an international city in the eyes of the world. This process came with growing pains, including the performative pressure of being "the first." While implementing his agenda, Jackson had to balance the expectations of Atlanta's Black elite, white business elites, and poor and working class Black Atlantans. Many of Jackson's goals for the city conflicted directly with those of at least one of these three groups. While in office, Jackson redeveloped Atlanta's airport into one of the biggest and busiest airports in the world, launched Atlanta's public transit, expanded Atlanta's tourism and hospitality industry, moved to update Atlanta's public housing, participated, albeit reluctantly, in Georgia's queer rights movement, and helped bring the Olympics to Atlanta in 1996.⁴ Doing this often angered at least one of the three groups he sought to satisfy; it is a wonder how he got anything done while in office. In the end, despite his limited efforts to the contrary, Jackson's administration frequently prioritized the interests of the Black elite.⁵ When his time in office came to an end after two terms, he

³ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 53.

⁴ Bradley Rice, "Maynard Jackson," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (2020), <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/maynard-jackson-1938-2003/>.

⁵ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 75.

passed the office on to Andrew Young, another person appointed to champion the interests of the Black elite.



Figure One: Maynard Jackson on Election Night November 1973. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

On October 26, 1981, following Maynard Jackson's two terms, Andrew Young was elected Atlanta's second Black mayor. This was the first time a Black mayor of a major city would pass his office to another Black candidate. However, Young's vision on how to best govern Atlanta differed from Jackson's. Young came into office with a polished pedigree and a decorated resume. Born to an affluent family in 1932 in New Orleans, Louisiana, he attended Howard University. An encounter with Congregational missionaries led him to place religion at the center of his advocacy work in pursuit of Black equality. During the Civil Rights Movement, Young worked in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) alongside activists such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to

1977. He also served as the ambassador to the UN under President Jimmy Carter.⁶ Because of his flashy resume, many doubted Young when he decided to run for mayor. They worried he would focus more on the international community and Black people across the diaspora rather than those who called Atlanta home. While able to overcome these stereotypes during the election, this critique of Young's administration proved enduring.



Figure Two: Meeting with Andrew Young, John Lewis, Maynard Jackson, and Jean Childs Young in 1981 during Young's mayoral campaign. Courtesy of Georgia State University Library

Young faced a city and decade in transition. The 1980s was a turbulent time across the United States, especially in Atlanta. Rising unemployment for Black Atlantans, a drug epidemic, increasing crime rates, and a funding crisis all threatened Atlanta's image on the international stage.⁷ Young also inherited Jackson's struggle with the

⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 133-138.

⁷ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 142.

divided expectations of Atlanta's white elites and Black Atlantans. Unfortunately, to maintain the decades-long alliance between white elite Atlantans and Black officials in city government, Mayor Young made decisions that alienated Atlanta's poor and working-class Black residents. During his time in office, Young focused on building Atlanta's international reputation through the expansion of the hospitality and tourism industry, ranging from the redevelopment of Underground Atlanta to the building of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. Young's international reputation also persuaded the International Olympic Committee to grant Atlanta the chance to host the 1996 Olympics. At the end of his two terms in office, he handed the office back to Maynard Jackson for one final term, which Jackson served until 1994.

On paper, at least, Atlanta thrived in the six years leading up to the 1996 Olympics during both Maynard Jackson's third term and Bill Campbell's two consecutive terms. Atlanta's economy stabilized: incomes increased across all demographic groups, poverty dropped, and the middle class remained steady. The city also gained 22,000 residents. However, that number is minimal when compared to the 44% gain in residents in the metro Atlanta suburbs. Businesses and jobs moved toward suburbia, depriving the city of valuable economic opportunities. These experiences also varied widely by race and class with Black and Hispanic residents. At the time, nearly one half of families with children lived below the poverty line and were disproportionately Black.⁸ Hosting the Olympic Games seemed like the perfect opportunity to create both immediate and long-term economic opportunities for both the city and its residents.

⁸ "Atlanta in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000," The Brookings Institute, last modified November 1, 2003, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/atlanta-in-focus-a-profile-from-census-2000/>.

This dissertation contemplates the complex dynamics and long-term legacy of Atlanta's Black mayors. I focus primarily on Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young, whose administrations are intimately related but also touch on the political work of Shirley Franklin from 1974 to 2010. For all, I contemplate the following questions: What did they hope to achieve in their time in office? What did they actually manage to achieve? Where did they fail to lead effectively? How did their administrations harm or help all Black Atlantans, the majority of whom did not belong to the Black elite? And finally, after their time in office passed, what legacy did they leave, in their own words and in measurable ways? I argue that Atlanta's Black mayors reflect a century-long tradition of Black involvement in both city and state politics that consistently prioritized an elite Black vision of Atlanta, doing little to address the everyday struggles and realities for most Black Atlantans. Exploring the administrations of Jackson, Young, and Franklin reveals how Black Atlantans of varied classes viewed their city and defined activism for themselves over the course of the twentieth century. All of this paints a picture of the underlying complexity of Black politics in modern Atlanta.

Housing, transportation, and tourism are focal themes that shape this dissertation and each mayoral administration. I ask how both public and private housing developed and changed over time in Atlanta. To understand how housing changed, I place the city in conversation with national housing trends throughout the twentieth century. In addition, I contemplate how people's experiences with housing were affected by larger ideas of race, class, and economics. In terms of transportation, I track the development of the public transportation system, MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority), from its origin to its ongoing struggle for expansion. While previous research on Atlanta has

focused on the city's transit history, rightfully celebrating Jackson for his role in the creation of the system, I consider the ambiguous legacy of MARTA for Black Atlantans. Who did public transportation claim to serve and who did it *actually* serve? I am also interested in the redevelopment of the Atlanta airport into a hub of travel for not only the South, but the entire country. The airport is a source of revenue for the city and jobs for its residents, but again, at what social cost? Today, the airport is the largest employer in the state of Georgia, but its development over time would not be possible without the city's Black residents.⁹ Finally, I explore Atlanta's complicated history with tourism that often elevated the reputation of the city over the well-being of its residents, from the cotton expos in the 1880s to the Centennial Olympic Games in 1996. I look at Atlanta tourist attractions as well as the building of prominent downtown hotels like the Omni Hotel, Peachtree Westin Plaza, and Hilton Atlanta to understand the progression of the tourism industry.

My work follows in the footsteps of historians Kevin Kruse's *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* and Maurice Hobson's *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta*. These monographs provided the foundation underlying my argument in the decades prior to the election of Black politicians to the mayor's office and in the decades that follow. Kruse paints a picture of Atlanta in the 1950s and 1960s from the perspective of white Atlantans. I use this book to recount the history of Atlanta's white politicians before 1974. His intervention on white Atlantans is valuable because white and Black Atlantans

⁹ "Fulton County's Major Employers," Development Authority of Fulton County, accessed April 11, 2024, <https://www.developfultoncounty.com/major-employers.php>.

did not live in isolation from each other, rather they intentionally formed a series of multi-racial coalitions to ensure victories on both sides, a coalition that continues to this day, but one that often fails to include economic uplift for working class Black Atlantans.

Hobson also focuses on the story of Black Atlanta throughout the twentieth century. We both center the discussion on Atlanta's first two Black mayors and their relationship to tourism and transportation. We also both explore topics like the development of MARTA and the hosting of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. But Hobson utilizes a cultural lens analyzing sensational storylines like the Atlanta Child Murders and Atlanta's rich music history in the genre of hip hop. Alternatively, I analyze Atlanta's Black history focusing on economic and social approaches. I also apply an interdisciplinary lens combining history with social sciences like urban planning and public policy in books like Akira Drake Rodriguez's *Diverging Space for Deviants: The Politics of Atlanta's Public Housing* and Edward Goetz's *New Deal Ruins: Race, Economic Justice, and Public Housing Policy*. Building on their work, I restore the voices of Black Atlanta public housing residents, through WSBTV news interviews and the records of the housing authority, in the last three decades of the twentieth century to provide additional insight to the wants and needs of Black Atlantans.

Likewise, historians have not addressed the progression of the Atlanta airport in the detail I have. I track its change over time from the addition of a new terminal in 1980 to the present utilizing a variety of primary sources and the memoir, *Flight Path: A Search for Roots Beneath the World's Busiest Airport* by Hannah Palmer. I assert that the airport is one of the key indicators of progress in the city of Atlanta. Departing from previous scholarship, I also argue that Atlanta's tourism formula, focused on building the

reputation of Atlanta as an international city, did not start with the '96 Games but in fact dates back to the cotton expositions of the 1880s and 1890s explored by scholars like Mabel Wilson in *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*. Analysis of each exist in separate works but my narrative arcs across the two time periods. This strengthens my analysis that Atlantan's tread a single pathway for a century and may continue to do so, replicating the complex inequities I detail in this dissertation.

My work extends the historiography forward into the twenty-first century. One book that explores Atlanta history in the twenty-first century is *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty-First Century Atlanta* by Dan Immergluck. That book provides critical interventions into the history of Atlanta tourism sights like Ponce City Market and the Belt Line, one built directly on the grounds of predominately Black neighborhoods and the other assisting in the displacement of Black Atlantans in the twenty-first century. At the same time, my work on Atlanta in the twenty first century continues to use the mayor's office as a lens, focusing on the administrations of Shirley Franklin from 2002 to 2010. Finally, what sets me apart is the personal. I have lived the majority of my life in the Atlanta suburbs. I also completed my entire education from K-12 through doctorate in the state of Georgia. I have personally seen Atlanta change and grow over time, for the better and for the worst. I am invested in the success of Black Georgians in the long term but to understand how we got to our present circumstances, we have to understand Georgia's Black past. This dissertation adds to this rich and storied history.

Terminology

To prevent any misunderstanding, it is important to define certain terms used in this dissertation. White elites were those who had prominent influence in Atlanta's business community in sectors such as banking, corporate law, and fundraising. Black elites were those in a position of leadership at city hall, city council, houses of worship, educational institutions, and apart of organizations such as the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA).¹⁰ They were also in positions of economic power in neighborhoods such as Sweet Auburn and the Atlanta University Center (AUC). Poor and working class Black Atlantans were those who primarily resided in southwest Atlanta and worked in the retail, service, and manufacturing industries, a majority carrying out redevelopment as city employees. Boosters were members of the white and Black elite who dreamed of Atlanta as an international city and would do almost anything to achieve it. As this dissertation also explores LGBTQ+ activism in Georgia in the 1970s, I refer to them as the queer community. Since terminology has changed over time, I choose queer because it is all-encompassing and embodies the intersectionality of the movement.

The title of this dissertation, "Climbing for Higher Ground: Race, Class, and Respectability Among Black Atlantans, 1974-2010," alludes to the slogan of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) "lifting as we climb." The NACW was one of the foremost organizations for Black elite club women in the early to mid-twentieth century.¹¹ The slogan embodied the Black elite's vision of respectability and their goal to uplift the entire Black race. The title also reflects the idea that, historically, Black

¹⁰ On official letterhead the Atlanta Housing Authority refers to themselves as The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta. On their website in their organizational history they refer to themselves as the AHA. Thus, I refer to them as the AHA throughout.

¹¹ Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted On Equality For All* (Basic Books, 2021), 160.

neighborhoods were often located on low ground and therefore residents were the first to deal with the effects of natural disasters like flooding.¹² “Climbing for higher ground” speaks to Black Atlantans’ struggle for physical and economic mobility out of their previous neighborhoods and into the American middle class. “Race, class, and respectability” calls out this project’s themes while simultaneously signaling the fragility of cross-class Black politics.

The Research Process

This project involved extensive archival research at archives across the city of Atlanta, including the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center (AHC), the Robert Woodruff Library at the Atlanta University Center (AUC), the Auburn Avenue Library for African American History and Culture, and the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA). I began my research at the Kenan Research Center, taking eighty photos in the Sally J. White Papers that primarily featured newspaper articles regarding the lead up to the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games.

My next stop was the Maynard Jackson mayoral administrative records located at the Atlanta University Center’s Robert W. Woodruff Library. These records are broken down by his three administrations and range from 1968 to 1994. During my first visit in October 2022, I searched through the records of his first two administrations, discovering six boxes and many useful items about public housing, the expansion of the airport, MARTA, and workers’ strikes against the city. I visited a second time in May 2024, searching the records of the third administration for two consecutive days. I looked at

¹² D. Ryan Gray, *Uprooted: Race, Public Housing, and the Archaeology of Four Lost New Orleans Neighborhoods* (The University of Alabama Press, 2020), 71.

fourteen boxes, giving me access to records of the Corporation for Olympic Development, more on the airport, the possibility of building a second airport, public housing, the Olympics, and the expansion of MARTA into Gwinnett County. During my third and final trip in July 2024, I searched through another eight boxes in the third collection. I examined the Atlanta Housing Authority records and records on affirmative action and affordable housing. My total photo count for the AUC is an astounding 1,108 photos.

Next, I visited the Andrew Young Papers at the Auburn Avenue Research Library. The collection spans fifty years of Young's life. During this trip, I searched Series 5, the mayoral collection, which spans from 1978 to 1989. I reviewed six boxes that ranged in topic from Young's campaign, newspaper articles critiquing his administration, public housing, and the airport. During my second visit, I searched through Series 7, the Olympic Games collection, and five more boxes. The grand total of photographs is 264. I found substantial print media coverage of Andrew Young during both his time as mayor and his time planning the Olympic Games after he left office. Print media offers an outsider's perspective on how Atlanta was viewed, and while it's not free from bias, it provides a different lens than my own. Throughout this dissertation, I rely on newspaper records to track public approval for Atlanta's Black mayors—a filtering process that may not fully capture popular opinion, especially in Black communities.

The final archive I visited was the Atlanta Housing Authority. After spending so much time in the records of mayoral administrations, it occurred to me that the housing authority might contain a wealth of resources. I wanted the voices of the working class,

not just the personalities of the people of power in charge of them. While I found ample evidence of the power of institutions, I did also manage to find the voices of residents, some named and many unnamed. Even though privacy laws disallow the names of actual housing residents from being shared, readers can still get a sense of their voices. I visited the AHA twice in the summer of 2024. During my first trip in May 2024, I looked through a total of eight boxes across three collections. The first collection I explored was the Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records. In these records, I found valuable information about the opening of Techwood in 1936, including demographics about its residents and their tenant handbook. I also found the plans for its revitalization under Mayor Jackson in celebration of its 50th anniversary. Most importantly, I found the records of the tenant association. Next, I examined the Bankhead Courts records, another well-known housing project. Here, I found more statistics about the building process and its residents, while also discovering more on tenants who looked to improve their surroundings and supported the demolition of rundown units. Finally, I looked through the records of the Olympic Legacy Program. This program sought to create 2,935 mixed income housing units at five housing complexes: Techwood, Clark Howell Homes, John Hope Homes, John Egan Homes, and East Lake Meadows. At an estimated \$100 million, the project utilized a combination of public, private, state, and local funds. However, the primary financial source was the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).¹³ Following my first visit, I received scans for a total of 81 pages. I visited a second time in July 2024 to look through two additional collections: the urban renewal records and the Moving to Opportunity records. I took 170 photos. I found

¹³ “Olympic Legacy Program Fact Sheet,” Box 2, Olympic Legacy Records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

items that included relocation contracts for public housing residents to be moved before the 1996 Olympics and Atlanta's 2000 comprehensive development plan.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, I explore Atlanta's Black history from the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the election of Maynard Jackson in 1974. This offers a full picture of how politics function in the city of Atlanta, the activism of Black Atlantans throughout the course of the century, and how Atlanta changed economically, socially, and geographically. In Chapter Two, I analyze the first two administrations of Maynard Jackson from 1974 to 1982. In Chapter Three, I examine both of Andrew Young's administrations from 1982 to 1990. In Chapter Four, I focus on highlights from Maynard Jackson's third and final term as mayor from 1990 to 1994. In Chapter Five, I analyze Atlanta's efforts to host the 1996 Olympic Games. In the sixth and final chapter, I explore Atlanta throughout the 2000s and include highlights from Shirley Franklin's time in office. By studying Jackson and the mayors that followed him, we can reflect on Atlanta's history; as we race through the airport we fly out of today, the trains we take across the city, and in the poll booths when we seek to turn the political tide of the state toward our notions of justice.

CHAPTER 1

BEFORE THE BLACK MECCA: FASHIONING BLACK ATLANTA 1865-1974

Class Formation

Understanding the elections of Jackson, Young, Franklin, and subsequent Black mayors requires investigating decades of Black class development that dates back to the end of the Civil War in 1865. In this period of newfound freedom, most Black Atlantans were working-class. This is why historian Alison Dorsey argues it is important to study Black Atlantans by considering social status rather than class during this period. Unlike other Southern cities like New Orleans or Charleston, Atlanta had fewer former free people of color after the Civil War. Black Atlantans tended to associate based on similar education, religious affiliations, club membership, and political ideologies, which came to be reflected in status criteria like best, rising, or poor. It was only in the first two decades of the twentieth century that an elite class in Atlanta emerged, and the Black Atlantans who managed to uplift themselves to this elite class often had close family living in Atlanta's poorest, most segregated districts.¹ Black Atlantans sought to solidify their social status, and thus cement their "elite" status, by monopolizing the resources available to the African American community. Private Black investors bought out the insurance groups of Black fraternal orders and churches and then served the entire community. This was the case with the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Similar events

¹Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (University of Georgia Press, 2004), 9.

occurred in the banking industry, thus affirming the status of these elite social groups and ensuring the economic future of their families. This also allowed them to form communities in churches, benevolent societies, and educational institutes.²

But the Black elite were not the majority. After the Civil War, the city's poor population was composed primarily of formerly enslaved agricultural worker who worked as day laborers in Atlanta's factories and households.³ The city's Black middle class served the city's white residents as laundresses, cooks, porters, and railroad workers and gained some upward mobility. Above them, making the most money and acquiring wealth in the post-war period, were those skilled professions like carpenters, blacksmiths, and brick masons. Some were also able to acquire wealth rapidly by serving white clientele as hairdressers, barbers, tailors, and dressmakers.⁴ For example, Alonzo Herndon, a man born enslaved, not only founded the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, but also a chain of successful barber shops, making him one of the first Black millionaires.

² Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 10.

³ Joseph O. Jewell, *Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class: The American Missionary Association and Black Atlanta, 1870-1900* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 66.

⁴ Jewell, *Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class*, 71.



Figure Three: Atlanta Life Insurance Company Photo. Courtesy of the New Georgia Encyclopedia and the Herndon Home

Yet, during 1870s and through the 1890s, Atlanta's white workers worried about job competition and gradually pushed middle-class Blacks out of the job market, solidifying whites' attempts at the racial subordination of Blacks.⁵ The economic depression of 1893 reinforced this, as white workers stressed racial solidarity and excluded Blacks from the job market.⁶ Atlanta's wealthiest Black residents responded by catering exclusively to the African American community to forge a functioning internal economic network. They also launched secondary business ventures. Black doctors, for

⁵ Jewell, *Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class*, 67-68.

⁶ Jewell, *Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class*, 73-74.

instance, also owned drugstores or grocery stores. Finally, they acquired real estate to gain wealth.⁷ Thus, Atlanta's Black elite class was born, slowly scraping for every dollar and step up the economic and social ladder. Nevertheless, the growing wealth of Atlanta's Black elite ignited jealousy in their white counterparts and led to white efforts to drag Black residents back down to the bottom of the social and economic ladder through violence.⁸

The last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw Black Americans moving to Atlanta from around the country, hopeful they could find consistent work and become a member of the Black elite. College-educated Black people were attracted to the numerous historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and the residential neighborhood known today as the Atlanta University Center: home to four HBCUs: Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University, and Morris Brown College. Nationwide, Black elites knew the reputations of the Department of Sociology and the School of Social Work at Atlanta University (later Clark Atlanta University), run by W.E.B. DuBois and Forrester B. Washington respectively, and strove to create a community around them. Black businesses from the Citizens Trust Bank and houses of worship like Ebenezer Baptist Church thrived in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood. With migration into the city, Atlanta's Black elite rapidly expanded and solidified into a more official category.⁹

⁷ Jewell, *Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class*, 74.

⁸ Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (University Press of Florida, 2008), 2-3.

⁹ Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 3.

Several key components defined Atlanta's Black elites during the late nineteenth century. Atlanta's Black elites emerged over time. Because Atlanta did not have many formerly free people of color in which to form an elite class, Atlanta's Black elite rose to elite status through the slow accumulation of wealth. They were adaptable, simultaneously catering to both the white clientele who refused to allow them equal class status and the entire African American community. This adaptability was highlighted by their ability to survive the 1890s recession. Atlanta's emerging Black elite also consisted of outsiders who wanted to make Atlanta home, drawn to the city by its educational center, its civic and political thought leaders, and the hope of finding jobs that matched their intellect. Through this combination, Atlanta's Black elite grew to maturity.¹⁰

The Politics of Respectability

Atlanta's newly-formed Black elite were not solely concerned with the accumulation of wealth. They also wanted to form a plan to achieve equality for all Black Atlantans. Their primary strategy lay in racial uplift. This called for enacting their competency for citizenship through behavior. By behaving respectfully and adhering to an elite moral standard, they believed white Atlantans would no longer view them as inferior. These standards of respectability were nuanced and difficult to navigate, especially for Black women who had complicated relationships with both Black men and all of white society.¹¹ The Black elite championed this idea independently of poor and working-class Black Atlantans, which meant, in Kevin Gaines' words "this group's

¹⁰ Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 9-10.

¹¹ Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting The Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012) 54.

particular ideology and program for liberation began to represent all African Americans with little to no accountability to the rest of the black community and with disregard to or dismissal of other strategies of freedom.”¹² Due to a combination of factors, this racial uplift ideology failed to protect Black Atlantans and other Black citizens across the U.S. from both violence and discrimination.

Yet many Black Atlantans did not have the leisure and resources to perform respectability. Poor and working-class Black people were more concerned with their everyday survival than with racial uplift and found few allies within the Black elite. Despite their best efforts to be seen as respectable in the eyes of white society, white residents grouped all African Americans into one category. If someone had even “one drop” of Black blood, then they were viewed as Black by white society.¹³ Black elites tried to circumvent this categorization by doing everything they could to separate their behavior, cultural expressions, and education from those of the Black masses, but their efforts failed time and time again.¹⁴ Black elites did have some success registering Black voters during the post-Civil War period, but any mass voter registration attempts were thwarted by the election of white candidates in favor of Black disenfranchisement like Hoke Smith.¹⁵ Before his election as governor in 1906 and filling a vacated seat in the

¹² Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 4.

¹³ Gaines, *Uplifting The Race*, 49-50.

¹⁴ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 5.

¹⁵ Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 81.

U.S. Senate in 1911, Smith worked as publisher of *The Atlanta Journal* and trial attorney.¹⁶

The Atlanta Race Massacre of 1906, in which white mobs assaulted and killed dozens of Black Atlantans and destroyed places of Black enterprise, demonstrated the weakness of racial uplift ideology and any notion of Black Atlantans as a monolith. The violence served to unite Black elites in an attempt to maintain their status. In *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Kevin Gaines argues that “the Atlanta riot marked the collapse of what had appeared to be a harmonious period of interracial cooperation, with moderate white elites joining with civic-minded black leadership in the birthplace of Booker T. Washington’s 1895 Atlanta Compromise address, to endorse slow and gradual steps toward Black freedom.”¹⁷ The race massacre followed years of the media inciting white masses against Atlanta’s Black population. *The Atlanta Constitution*, led by Henry Grady, specifically sought to inflame the fears of white Atlantans of supposed rampant Black crime throughout the city.¹⁸ Articles frequently mentioned the “threat to white womanhood” by potential Black male

¹⁶ Duncan Maysilles, “Hoke Smith,” New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified November 10, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/hoke-smith-1855-1931/>.

¹⁷ Gaines, *Uplifting The Race*, 51; Much of the literature on the Atlanta Race Massacre calls it a riot but since their publication the popular terminology has changed to “race massacre” to acknowledge its victims take away the blame white Americans placed upon them. See the source, Serena McCracken, “Riot or Massacre: How 1 Word Changes Perspective,” Atlanta History Center (blog), December 28, 2022, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/riot-or-massacre-how-one-word-changes-perspective/>.

¹⁸ Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 4.

rapists.¹⁹ The newspapers, along with politicians like Hoke Smith, managed to unite white Atlantans across class lines against the Black community.²⁰

Dorsey argues that Atlanta's whites were angry because they feared the growth of Atlanta's Black community, which was headed up by progressive, upwardly mobile leadership, and the potential threat posed if this growth was allowed to continue unchecked. In their eyes, Black Atlantans had become too independent and needed to be taught their "true" place in the social and economic hierarchy.²¹ Therefore, when armed white citizens rushed into Black neighborhoods on September 22, 1906, they did so to terrorize, reaffirm their white manhood, and destroy Black efforts towards equality. Black Atlantans' class status did nothing to protect them as the upper-class Black neighborhood was invaded by white policemen. They marched 300 Brownsville residents, composed of both Black men and boys, down to the stockade.²² By the time the massacre ended, between twenty-five and forty Black Atlantans died, showcasing white Atlantans use of violence to protect their power.²³ Yet, Black Atlantans sought to find a way forward in a city that clearly did not want them to rise above their present circumstances. For Atlanta's Black elite, that meant pushing even harder for acceptance. They united with Atlanta's white elites and blamed the lower classes of both races.²⁴ Thus, the ultimate

¹⁹ Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 77.

²⁰ Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 28.

²¹ Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 3.

²² Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 109.

²³ Clifford Kuhn and Gregory Mixon, "Atlanta Race Massacre of 1906," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2022, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/atlanta-race-massacre-of-1906/>.

²⁴ Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 119.

cost of racial uplift ideology undermined the racial solidarity of Atlanta's poor and working-class communities with elite Black Atlantans. 1906 forecast the beginning of Atlanta's Black and white elites started to work together without input from poor and working-class residents.



Figure Four: Coverage of the massacre abroad in a French paper. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

Black Women's Labor and Organizing in New South Atlanta

Just as members of the Black elite moved to Atlanta in hopes of upward mobility, so too did poor and working-class Black southerners arrive in the city. In the 1880s and 1890s, rural working-class Black southerners began to migrate from the countryside to major cities. Slavery may have ended, yet sharecropping kept struggling farmers tied to the land just as they had been before, still subject to the whims of white landowners. Theoretically, cities offered more opportunities for personal, social, and economic freedom. Historian Blair Kelley calls this the “Great Migration before the Great Migration.” Once Black men made their way to cities like Atlanta, they got jobs in heavy labor building infrastructure and were excluded from other areas of the job market. Meanwhile, Black working-class women worked in manual labor and personal service.²⁵ In fact, “by 1890 75% of black women working in cities did manual labor or personal service. Black women were more than 80% of those who worked as maids, cooks, or laundresses.”²⁶ In Atlanta, Black female domestics workers made up 98% of Black female wage earners.²⁷ However, for Black working-class women, living in the city still subjected them to dangers of police violence, vagrancy charges, and the threat of being sentenced to a chain gang. Unlike white women, who could avoid being forced into a chain gang, Black women had to serve time on the gang before being released into the “freedom” of serving as a domestic in a white household. In Georgia, nearly 2,000 Black

²⁵ Blair L.M. Kelley, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (Liveright Publishing) 2023, 81.

²⁶ Kelley, *Black Folk*, 82.

²⁷ Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 50.

women were sentenced to chain gangs for misdemeanors in the first three decades of the twentieth century, while only four white women faced time.²⁸

Yet Black working-class women were far from powerless. Working as domestics gave them autonomy because they could choose for whom to work. If their employer mistreated them, they quit; they could always find more work. In the process, these women established communal ties to take care of their children and created an informal network of information on both safe and unsafe employers. Their bonds were forged in the physicality of their labor, working from six to seven days a week, sunup to sundown.²⁹ Their everyday experiences, on the forefront of Jim Crow racism, crafted a unique relationship to activism. According to Hickey,

Poor and working-class African Americans lived with and endured segregation on a daily basis, but this is not to say they passively accepted it. In often deliberate and quiet ways, African Americans struggled to control their daily lives and relations with others. While elite blacks built strong institutional bases for their reforms. Atlanta's African American working class engaged in less formal, though no less committed, activism of their own. For Atlanta's black working class, public transportation served as a moving theater in which members waged everyday struggles against racism. Racial tensions in the workplace often spilled over to conflicts on public transportation. Sometimes we'd have arguments, recalled one working class black, little specks on the bus or streetcar. Some people would just get determined- "I'm not going to work all day and stand." Through these actions, Atlanta's working class created their own sense of respectability, which relied heavily on their own dignity, time, and labor.³⁰

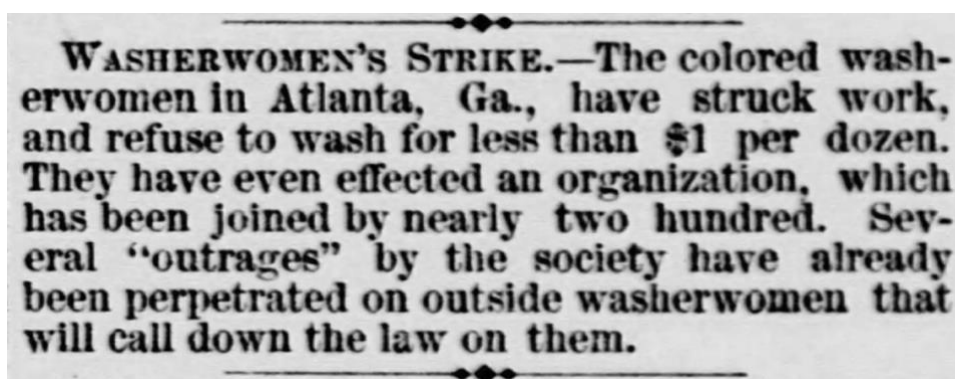
²⁸ Sarah, Haley, "Like I Was a Man": Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia," *Signs* 39, no. 1 (September 1, 2013): 53–56, <https://doi.org/10.1086/670769>.

²⁹ Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom*, 54–58.

³⁰ Hickey, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, 116.

Thus, a Black middle-class definition of respectability and activism took hold, distinct from those of their elite counterparts.

Nothing embodied that activism like the organized strikes by Black laundresses in Atlanta in the 1880s. In 1881, twenty Black women formed the Washing Society and called for a strike to establish higher wages at one standard rate, which would eliminate internal competition for lower pricing. Unlike their elite counterparts, they ignored ideas of respectability and womanhood for their cause. Their methods ranged from knocking on doors to fighting in the streets. These working-class women, whose ranks included older women with children, would do anything to ensure the survival of their families. Their numbers quickly grew from 20 to 3,000 within the first three weeks. They earned a nickname from their enemies, “The Washing Amazons,” which although meant to be an insult, it speaks to the power these Black women held in upholding this section of the labor market in the city of Atlanta during this period. They were threatened with a tax, yet in the end, their efforts succeeded. The protest resulted not only in a raise in wages, but an increase of “awareness of laundry workers roles in the new south economy.”³¹



WASHERWOMEN'S STRIKE.—The colored washerwomen in Atlanta, Ga., have struck work, and refuse to wash for less than \$1 per dozen. They have even effected an organization, which has been joined by nearly two hundred. Several “outrages” by the society have already been perpetrated on outside washerwomen that will call down the law on them.

Figure Five: Report from *The Washington Star* on the strike. Courtesy of the Library Congress.

³¹ Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom*, 81-95.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Atlanta was determined to emerge as the leading city of the New South and build an international reputation. Led by white elite Atlantans like Henry Grady, boosters stressed industrial capitalism that broke from antebellum agriculture and turned towards the use of industry and manufacturing like their northern counterparts. This new economic order ensured that white wealthy elites remained at the top of the social strata.³² By hosting international cotton expositions and its manufacturing dynamism, they could showcase Atlanta as worthy of notice in industry like the cities in the North.³³ Yet laundry strikes led by Black women threatened to disturb the image of Atlanta that Grady was creating. Thus, these strikes were both economic and political in nature. Black working-class women found ways to participate in the system that insisted on their exclusion.³⁴ While the strikes eventually ended, Atlanta's insistence on building an international reputation persisted.

While the laundry strike proved successful, Black women still struggled to find joy in the face of oppression. To aid in this struggle, Black women employed as domestics in the 1910s and 1920s built solid kinship networks like women had decades before them. Seeking further pleasure and relief from the experiences of their everyday lives, Black working-class women in Atlanta gathered at the dance halls on Decatur Street. These dance halls served as spaces for coed mingling and offered them the

³² Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*, (University of California Press, 2021), 42.

³³ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 47.

³⁴ Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom*, 85, 96.

opportunity to shed the literal clothing of servitude for dress that represented them.³⁵ In public, elite white Atlantans claimed a moral high ground over their Black counterparts, yet many of them went “slumming” on the sly at Black dance halls. Atlanta’s Black elites, especially pastors and politicians, sought to close them down altogether.³⁶ Black middle-class women took much of the criticism, which proved a problem for Atlanta’s Black elites. In truth, writes Tera Hunter, “the ubiquity of black female servants on the urban landscape, in the minds of most whites, made them metonyms for the black race. The black bourgeoisie fully understood and resented this guilt by association. It dealt with this tendency by lamenting the shame that befell the entire race when workers failed to live up to the expectations of dutiful service.”³⁷ In other words, Black female workers did not fit the model of respectability touted by Atlanta’s richest Black residents. Rather than forming solidarity with the Black masses they claimed to represent, the rich publicly critiqued their emerging culture, a rupture felt in the decades ahead.

The experiences of Black elite women in Atlanta differed from their working- and middle-class counterparts. For women such as Lugenia Burns Hope, activism in the 1910s took the form of organizations like the Neighborhood Union. These organizations lobbied the city for more resources for Black communities in the west side of the city. In their pitch, they emphasized their members’ respectability and morality. They also sponsored free health clinics, recreational activities, and neighborhood cleanup

³⁵ Tera W. Hunter, “Work That Body: African American Women, Work, and Leisure in the New South,” in *The Black Worker: Race, Labor, and Civil Rights since Emancipation*, ed. Eric Arnesen (University of Illinois Press, 2007), 85.

³⁶ Hunter, “Work That Body,” 79-81.

³⁷ Hunter, “Work That Body,” 82-83.

campaigns. It was their hope that these actions would garner the respect of Atlanta's white community. They especially sought to recast middle class Black women as respectable models for Black motherhood and womanhood. When Black women did not fit their image, the Neighborhood Union did not hesitate to call on the City Council and the police department to remove these women and their families.³⁸ And even though Black women from all classes experienced the double burden of gender and race in the Jim Crow South, the differences in class experience and activism for Black women in Atlanta and across the nation must be acknowledged.³⁹



Figure Six: Lugenia Burns Hope and the Neighborhood Union. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center and the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library.

³⁸ Georgina Hickey, "From Auburn Avenue to Buttermilk Bottom: Class and Community Dynamics among Atlanta's Blacks" in *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: African Americans in the Industrial City, 1900-1950*, ed. Henry Louis Taylor and Walter B. Hill (Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 117-119.

³⁹ Hunter, "Work That Body," 88.

1906-1974

In the decades following the massacre of 1906, Atlanta's Black elite, represented by the "Talented Tenth," struggled to maintain their status.⁴⁰ They campaigned for resources on behalf of Atlanta's Black community, including requests for a Black police force, higher teacher salaries, parks, schools, and regular access to electricity in their neighborhoods, while simultaneously advocating respectability politics as a means to uplift the entire Black race.⁴¹ They also emphasized the differences between the respectable Black elite and the working class. Despite their efforts, they remained consigned to the margins by white society.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a new class of Black elite leaders rose to prominence on Auburn Avenue, another center for Atlanta's Black elites other than the AUC. People like John Wesley Dobbs (head of Prince Hall Masons), L.D. Milton (eventual president of Citizens Trust Bank, one of very few Black-owned banks), C.A. Scott (newspaper publisher), and Martin Luther King Sr. took charge of the movement on behalf of Atlanta's Black elites and Atlanta's Black community as a whole.⁴² In their eyes, this generation of Black elites did not utilize the conciliatory tactics of their predecessors, too many times burned by white politicians. They argued for internal self-organization—a new method of organization that built civil rights court cases, organized protests, and

⁴⁰ Many people credit W.E.B. DuBois for the term talented tenth, which he used in an essay in the book *The Negro Problem* in 1903, "the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth.." but he was not the first to use the term. Henry Lyman Morehouse (Morehouse College is named after him) first used the phrase in 1896. See Henry Louis Gates Jr. "Who Really Invented the Talented Tenth," *The Root*, February 18, 2013, <https://www.theroot.com/who-really-invented-the-talented-tenth-1790895289>.

⁴¹ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 4.

⁴² Hickey, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, 121.

established collective electoral strategies. With overtly political language and goals, they helped to create organizations like The Atlanta Civic and Political League, whose goal was to increase the number of registered Black voters to 10,000. Their efforts met with a lackluster response, since these leaders were too busy pushing their political agendas and distancing themselves from the Black leadership of the past to listen to Black working-class residents whose focus was on their daily lives and labor rather than formal politics.⁴³ Unfortunately, from the heights of Atlanta's Black universities, they would, "never reach the majority living in the hollows and bottoms of Atlanta's hilly terrain."⁴⁴ In other words, they believed their efforts could affect the entire Black community because they used different methods, but just like those who came before them, only a certain few were affected.

The Depression further cemented the social distance between Atlanta's Black elites and poor and working-class Blacks. Gradually, each group lost touch of the other's needs.⁴⁵ With the election of President Roosevelt and the creation of the New Deal, things began to improve for Atlanta's Black elites. According to Karen Ferguson's *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, the New Deal hardened the gap between Atlanta's poor and working-class Blacks and those of the Black elite. Karen Ferguson argues that it "set the stage for the widening gulf between those African Americans who have been able to take advantage of positive recognition from the state since the New Deal and those consigned

⁴³ Hickey, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, 125-126.

⁴⁴ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 9.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 7.

to remain at the margins of civil society.”⁴⁶ She asserts that “Atlanta’s black reform elite immediately recognized the New Deal’s potential as a tool to escape its borderline position and to advance Black citizenship.”⁴⁷ They took jobs in new federal agencies as teachers, social workers, and directors of the Negro divisions to shape their own New Deal.⁴⁸ They thought that the more Black people they could lift into government positions, the better their circumstances would be, as federal welfare programs were essential to their uplift strategy. However, only a few were able to climb up into the ranks of government jobs, as the majority did not have the opportunity.⁴⁹ Thus, by the 1940s, both classes of Black Atlantans were organizing on parallel paths with little communication between the two.

The end of the New Deal also saw a change in the structure of city politics. Since 1917, Georgia elections had utilized the county unit system. Under this system, “each county in Georgia was granted twice as many unit votes as it had members in the lower house of the legislature.”⁵⁰ This gave more power to rural counties as people moved to urban centers. This meant that politicians in the state ignored the city of Atlanta and focused on the rural vote to ensure that state offices upheld white supremacy, allowing Governor Eugene Talmadge to become a three-terms governor by 1940. Talmadge used violence against Black voters to ensure his undisputed power. White politicians in the

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 2.

⁴⁷ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 6.

⁴⁸ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 6.

⁴⁹ Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 11-12.

⁵⁰ Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 20-28.

city drew power from a ward system, which for decades meant that city council ran things, while the mayor's office remained weak. City councilmen were able to bargain on behalf of white working-class needs. This changed with William Hartsfield's election to the mayor's office in 1936. His time in office instituted a stronger mayoral grip on city power as he eliminated over 200 city government jobs. He also allied with powerful white business leaders like Ralph McGill, editor of *The Constitution*, and Robert Woodruff, CEO of The Coca Cola Company, who also had ties to the Center for Disease Control, General Electric, and Southern Railway. With these types of men on his side, Hartsfield eroded the power of white working-class voters and secured the control of white business elites.⁵¹

However he felt about Black Atlantans personally, Mayor Hartsfield quickly realized that he could not continue to be successful in office without Black votes. With the end of white-only primaries, Black Atlantans made up a quarter of the voting population. Hartsfield narrowly won re-election in 1949. In a move meant to grant power to both elite Black and white Atlantans, Hartsfield created a political coalition with Black elites that included politicians and church ministers from Auburn Avenue. White politicians obtained their voters, and the Black elite gained an opportunity to lobby the city for more resources. Each side used the other to gain more power.⁵²

One of the early examples of the coalition at work appeared in the campaign to add Black police to the Atlanta Police Department. The effort by Black leaders in the

⁵¹ Kruse, *White Flight*, 20-28.

⁵² Kruse, *White Flight*, 30-37.

coalition led to Atlanta's first Black police officers in 1948.⁵³ APD put stipulations on its new Black officers: no arresting white Atlantans, no entry into APD headquarters, and no driving squad cars. In addition, they worked in a YMCA basement under the supervision of a white captain and only had authority over Black areas of the city.⁵⁴ Black elites celebrated their success while poor and working-class Black residents remained wary.⁵⁵ Differing goals between working class Black Atlantans and elite Black Atlantans characterized racial politics henceforth. In the eyes of working-class Black Atlantans, Black police did not solve the systemic issues of racism that affected their everyday lives. Their perspectives on the best ways to achieve Black equality and the resulting activism were fundamentally different by mid-century on the eve of the emergence of the civil rights movement.

The size of the city further propelled the coalition to work. By 1950, a third of Atlanta's population was Black. This worried white elites, so they came up with a Plan of Improvement that featured an annexation policy, which encompassed "the practice of expanding municipal boundaries through land acquisition, which results in consolidation—the new municipality that includes the expansion."⁵⁶ By increasing Atlanta's city limits so they included more white communities, white elites simultaneously expanded the white population of Atlanta, the white voter base and

⁵³ Hickey, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, 109.

⁵⁴ Karen Grigsby Bates, "Darktown Imagines What It Was Like For Atlanta's First Black Policemen," *WABE Atlanta*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/09/23/495065415/darktown-imagines-what-it-was-like-for-atlantas-first-black-policemen>.

⁵⁵ Hickey, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, 109.

⁵⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 81.

increased white power. Some leaders within the Black community considered the annexation argument, as increasing city limits could lead to an increased tax revenue base to utilize for city services. However, they quickly realized that the benefit did not outweigh the need to keep a strong Black votership. The 1950 plan tripled the size of the city and increased the population by a fourth. Endorsed by John Wesley Dobbs' Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) and supported by the rest of the Black members of the coalition, the plan went into effect in 1952. In turn, Black candidates such as Rufus Clement, Miles Amos, and Austin Walden were elected to both the Board of Education and Third Ward representatives in 1953. In a rare moment of public frustration from the Black elite, Dobbs accused Hartsfield of moving slowly with their goals and resigned from the ANVL.⁵⁷ This threatened the fragile nature of the coalition, only one disagreement away from falling apart.

Together, the coalition created a new version of Atlanta in the public imagination that traced the footsteps of Henry Grady's New South Atlanta. Hartsfield coined the term "The City Too Busy to Hate" in 1955 and it captured popular imagination. It signaled to the rest of the country that in Atlanta, white city leaders were willing to work with the African American community to slowly desegregate.⁵⁸ According to historian Kevin Kruse, "affluent whites acquiesced to limited changes in hopes of presenting a positive image for themselves, their city, and most importantly, their business interests."⁵⁹ In reality, Atlanta was no different than other Jim Crow South cities, and Kruse argues "as

⁵⁷ Kruse, *White Flight*, 37-39.

⁵⁸ Andy Ambrose, *Atlanta: An Illustrated History* (Hill Street Press, 2003), 172-174; Kruse, *White Flight*, 39.

⁵⁹ Kruse, *White Flight*, 35.

Atlanta emerged as the center of civil rights activity, it still remained the site of sustained segregationist violence. Some of the most brutal incidents of Jim Crow violence occurred inside Atlanta.”⁶⁰ Atlanta was not as progressive as it pretended to be.

By the late 1950s, Black Atlantans, beyond the elite few bargaining for power in the coalition grew increasingly frustrated. Voting was not their only concern. The allocation of resources, representation in office, and the general treatment of working- and middle-class Black Atlantans remained distinctly unequal. A report created by the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action, led by young middle-class activists at Atlanta University, found that Black residents had unequal access to education, housing, health, employment, and transportation. For example, Black graduate students in the University System of Georgia received only \$13,000 in funding, while white Georgians received over six million dollars in funding. In terms of government positions, there were no Black Atlantans in the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Atlanta Real Estate Board, the Georgia Educational Association, and any of the larger trade unions. It was clear that the accommodationist policies of the generation before had not worked in the manner envisioned by the Black elite.⁶¹ The next step was direct action by groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

SNCC lead the way across the South. SNCC was formed by Miss Ella Baker at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. Baker saw an opportunity and strategy in the successful attempt to integrate in Greensboro. She believed that those young college students could

⁶⁰ Kruse, *White Flight*, 14.

⁶¹ Winston A. Grady-Wills, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Duke University Press) 2006, xii-xv.

be the new faces of a militant and grassroots movement. But she realized that they needed guidance, which she could provide with her many decades of civil rights work in the NAACP and SCLC. This organization would stage some of the biggest protests and organized voter campaigns of the modern civil rights movement.⁶² Protesting as a SNCC women in Atlanta, and in other chapters across the South came with even more complications around race and gender. Much like the Black women who came generations before them, SNCC women of the early 1960s relied on respectability politics. This manifested in the clothes they wore and the way they styled their hair. As they sat lunch counter protests in their Sunday best, they faced violent dehumanization as food was thrown on their clothes and white customers spat on them. It was hard for these women to come to terms with a messy appearance in public. Their parents raised them to take value in their looks when they stepped out of their homes. For a century following the Civil War, Black middle- and upper-class women claimed their womanhood through their appearance, especially at schools like Spelman. When they were arrested, the trauma of the experience continued as they were forced into wagons and sexualized by the arresting officers who had no respect for their womanhood or their Blackness. These women also had to suffer this repeatedly, in recurrent protests each week, but their commitment to return speaks to their strength.⁶³ Regardless, “as well-dressed black women sat at lunch counters throughout the South, they created collective political and aesthetic power, which coupled with direct action, nonviolent tactics presented a two-

⁶² Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003),

⁶³ Tanisha C. Ford, “SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 79, no. 3 (2013): 628-636, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23795090>.

pronged attack on segregation.”⁶⁴ In SNCC, Black women would not let the respectability politics of the past stop them.

At the same time that the SNCC was formed, college students in Atlanta began organizing their own protests. In March 1960, more than 200 students from six different schools were led by the All-University Student Leadership Group (AUSLG) in protests at places like government buildings and segregated restaurants. Through a written appeal for human rights that appeared in *The New York Times*, protestors called for a global end to white supremacy. Many of the narratives from the civil rights movement focus on its Black male leaders, yet the most vocal leader and the author of the appeal was Roslyn Pope, class president at Spelman. Shortly after, the AUSLG reorganized as the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR), making their goals clearly identifiable. The university presidents insisted that students should focus more on writing their concerns than protesting. They even went so far as to expel students and teachers who participated in protests, their decision to do so supported by the conservative voice of *The Daily World*, Atlanta’s Black newspaper. The newspaper called for students to direct their efforts towards voter registration, school desegregation, and civil rights laws. Meanwhile, Martin Luther King Sr. helped to raise funds to bail out protesters, and the NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins, while reluctant at first, eventually endorsed the protestors. These enthusiastic student protesters did not trust the older generation of Black leaders to move quickly into direct action.

They came from the same class background as the people they critiqued, something that was not uncommon. While debates on human rights, equality, and Black

⁶⁴ Ford, “SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress,” 632.

freedom occurred across class lines, these debates would also ensue within a single class. Many poor and working-class Black Atlantans remained aware of this middle-class activism occurring at the universities. Protests continued into the spring semester, including one in which 4,000 students marched from the AUC to the Georgia Capitol before they were diverted.⁶⁵ Fulton County solicitor, John Kelley, charged protesters with trespassing and conspiracy against three state laws. The sheer number of arrests put the lie to a city dependent on its reputation as the “city too busy to hate,” especially as protesters used that imagery to both mock officials and reveal the true state of race relations in the city.⁶⁶

In the fall of 1960, the student protesters launched a second campaign. In October 1960, at the largest protest seen thus far, students protested at sixteen different targeted locations. Fifty-two people were arrested, including Martin Luther King Jr. Mayor Hartsfield negotiated a month-long truce, but his subsequent inactivity caused protests to continue throughout November, December, and into 1961 before both sides were able to reach a final agreement. This agreement embodied Atlanta politicking. Older Black leaders made a deal, without consulting the more radical student protesters, with white elites to lay out a plan for gradual desegregation of lunch counters across the city. This gradual plan meant that for the next several months, lunch counters would remain segregated, but when Atlanta schools desegregated in the fall of 1961, lunch counters would, too. 75 stores signed on to this agreement. While MLK Jr. gave a speech rallying support for the agreement, Lonnie King, co-leader of COAHR, called the entire deal a

⁶⁵ Grady-Wills, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*, 5-12, 32.

⁶⁶ Grady-Wills, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*, 10; Kruse, *White Flight*, 182.

farce, effectively demonstrating the tensions between both the varied approaches of movement leaders and the generations of leadership, as well.⁶⁷



Figure Seven: Protest to the state capitol on May 17, 1960. Courtesy of the Digital Library of Georgia.

School desegregation looked like progressive politics, yet coincided with the phenomenon known as white flight which turned city schools increasingly mono-racial. When Atlanta Public Schools (APS) integrated on August 30, 1961, few noticed because it looked nothing like the violent desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1958, Hartsfield decided to offer a local option plan that allowed for parents

⁶⁷ Grady-Wills, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*, 17-30.

to pick the school their children attended. State legislators immediately took notice and openly protested this decision. It made the state look like the guilty party against integration. To combat this image, the state repealed old laws and passed new ones that allowed the local option, clarified student placement, and created grants for students to attend private schools. This proved yet another example of the ongoing battle between the city of Atlanta and the rest of the state. Going forward, Atlanta practiced token desegregation by focusing on placing a few Black high school juniors and seniors in select schools. Of the 50,000 Black students in Atlanta Public Schools, only nine were chosen to go to white schools. Media coverage of the day highlighted successful school integration. Black students were still isolated from their communities and were still turned on by white masses, experiencing just as much mistreatment as other Black children around the country who bravely stood on the front lines of school desegregation.⁶⁸ Atlanta was just better at hiding it. School integration would not magically solve all of America's issues. It began a move toward equality, but not to the finish.

⁶⁸ Kruse, *White Flight*, 143-157.



Figure Eight: Atlanta Public Schools integration, 1961. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

In the eyes of white Atlantans, Black people were infiltrating their schools and their neighborhoods. As a result, many chose to flee the public school system and attend private schools.⁶⁹ Others chose to leave the city altogether when Black families moved into their communities. This left formerly white neighborhoods entirely Black. According to the data, “in 1960 the total white population of Atlanta stood at barely more than 300,000. Over the decade 60,000 whites fled. During the 1970s, another 100,000 would leave as well.”⁷⁰ They did not exit quietly, either. They complained loudly to the mayor who had succeeded Hartsfield, Ivan Allen Jr. In a 1961 incident that quickly gained the local and national attention of civil rights activists, construction crews placed physical

⁶⁹ Kruse, *White Flight*, 164-165.

⁷⁰ Kruse, *White Flight*, 6.

barricades to define the dividing line between Black and white sections of the city, an area called Peyton Forest. Nicknamed the Atlanta Wall, activists immediately picketed and set fire to the barrier overnight. The next night, fully-costumed members of the Klan guarded the barrier. The courts eventually ruled that the physical barricades had to be taken down, but white families continued to sell their homes and leave.⁷¹

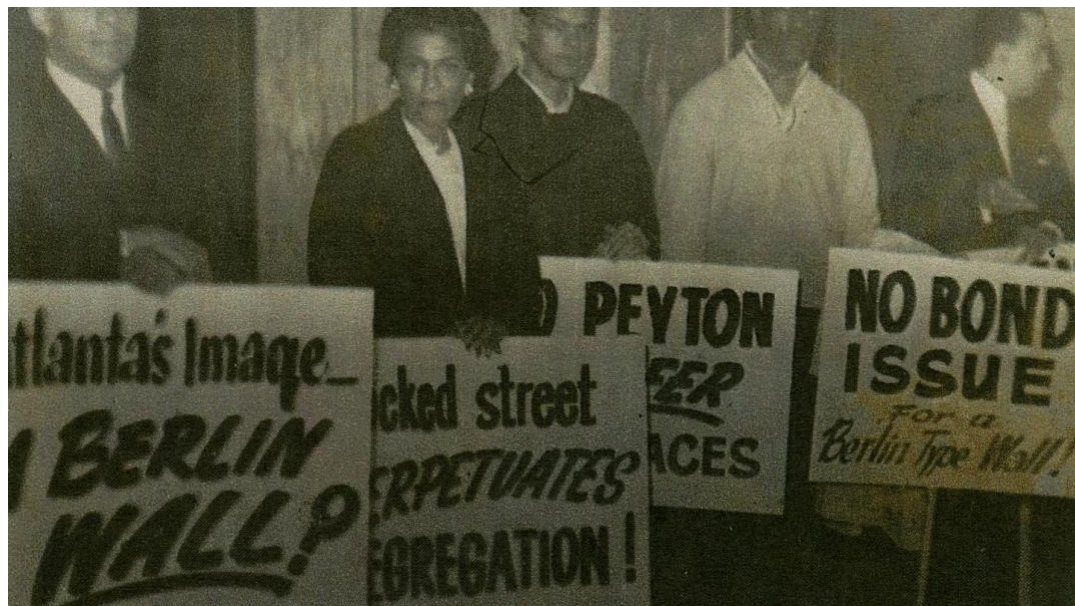


Figure Nine: Protesters hold up signs against the Peyton Wall calling it Atlanta's Berlin Wall. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

Miller Johnson Jr., a Black man who lived in Moseley Park during this time, said of his experience with white flight: "Black folks moved in and white folks out. They didn't live next door. That's something you see today. When we moved there were five or six whites left. They had signs in their yard to sale. They were trying to get out and just hadn't yet."⁷² Once white residents left a neighborhood, city planners and zoning

⁷¹ Kruse, *White Flight*, 3-5.

⁷² Miller Johnson Jr., interview by Edward Hightower, July 25, 2018, *Cascade Oral History Project*, Atlanta University Center Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta, GA, <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12322/auc.172:0002>.

committees wrote off these now-Black neighborhoods as slums and “lowered their standards for the region and began approving projects they would have rejected if the residents were still white. After fighting to get into a neighborhood of single-family homes, middle class black residents now saw cramped apartment complexes and commercial projects springing up nearby.”⁷³ This did not go unnoticed by Black Atlantans. At a 1966 public hearing on zoning for residents, one Black women attested to this phenomenon: “Seemingly each time Negroes begin to move into areas where there is decent housing some speculators of some sort always come in with an idea of moving apartments into this area.”⁷⁴ By 1970, Atlanta was more segregated than it had been in 1940.⁷⁵

The civil rights era in Atlanta drastically shaped relations among the coalition. Neither the older Black leaders nor the white moderate leaders like Hartsfield welcomed the protests. White business elites saw these protests as threats to their livelihood. They were so offended that they even considered abandoning the Black leaders in the coalition and aligning with the hardline white segregationists. It also revealed what had been clear throughout the decades to everyone but the white elite: that “Atlanta’s black community—long understood by all sides as a monolithic Negro bloc—was in truth, several communities with contrasting experiences and expectations.”⁷⁶ By 1969, a new,

⁷³ Kruse, *White Flight*, 74.

⁷⁴ “Public Hearing on Zoning for Low Income Housing,” WSB-TV Newsfilm Collection, reel 1340, 32:58/34:32, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁷⁵ Kruse, *White Flight*, 237.

⁷⁶ Kruse, *White Flight*, 182.

more covert, version of the coalition formed. Many of the older Black leaders had passed away and were replaced by a new generation of Black political leadership. However, moving forward, they agreed that the Black and white sides would be quiet partners who operated separately.⁷⁷ Thus, the repercussions of the civil rights era on the coalition and politics in the city of Atlanta reverberated into the following decades of Black mayors.

Poor and working-class Black Atlantans during the 1950s and 1960s fought to improve their slowly deteriorating homes while maintaining their sense of community. Neighborhoods in Atlanta such as Summerhill, Vine City, Mechanicsville, and Peopletown faced a failing sewer system, flooded streets, overcrowded housing, and hunger. They achieved better access to voting in the 1950s, which was clearly the least of their problems.⁷⁸ Yet poor and working-class Black Atlantans refused to be ignored by city officials. Historian LeeAnn Lands remarks that,

As Atlanta's leaders fashioned a new city, Atlanta's poor joined with others distressed by persistent poverty to insist that poor families' lot should improve too. Across Atlanta, poor residents and allies organized and mobilized to confront high rents, urban development programs that bulldozed neighborhoods, low pay, poor housing conditions, inconsistently delivered city services, dangerous work conditions, welfare programs and wages that left families in poverty, lack of transparency in government programs and services, and discrimination. Using a range of techniques—petitions, lawsuits, pickets, sleep-ins, walkouts, and lobbying—poor people and anti-poverty activists exposed policies and practices that robbed families of opportunity.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Kruse, *White Flight*, 235-236.

⁷⁸ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta: Poverty, Race, and the Limits of Sunbelt Development* (University of Georgia Press, 2023), 3.

⁷⁹ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 3.

New Black leaders understood it would be up to themselves to organize their communities without reliance on a national civil rights organization or a charismatic activist. To prove that point, in 1963, SNCC began a project in South Atlanta to organize residents to petition for resources from the city. But SNCC only stayed in the area for one year, leaving locals to carry on the work.⁸⁰ Martin Luther King Jr's SCLC understood the conditions poor Black Atlantans lived under, but failed to organize significantly within the city of Atlanta.⁸¹

New federal funding and President Johnson's War on Poverty Programs meant to address some of these. In 1965, an organization called the Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc. (EOA) was formed with support from Mayor Allen Jr., and also featured leadership from elite Black Atlantans. Both sides fought over control of the organization and its resources. Meanwhile, "poor Atlantans had little input about jobs, training, or other services designed to benefit them."⁸² These experiences made poor and working-class Black Atlantans recognize the need to organize themselves outside of these middle- and upper-class groups and agencies.⁸³

Some examples of this organizing included the Vine City Improvement Association which successfully lobbied for a playground for Black children. Another important example of their activism lay in rent strikes. Property owners and landlords had long operated in a self-serving manner that often took advantage of their residents. They

⁸⁰ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 41.

⁸¹ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 6.

⁸² LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 65-66.

⁸³ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 66.

raised rents to an unaffordable level, doing little to maintain the physical conditions of the buildings, and threatened eviction. The law even supported them. Tenants could sue, but lawsuits cost money and time, ultimately risking homelessness. By calling a rent strike, residents managed to bring attention to their problems, even if the actual solutions it created were minimal.⁸⁴ In 1979, several residents engaged in a public housing rent strike which resulted in their eviction. Local reporters went to the streets to interview residents to ask their opinion on the strike. One Black woman resident kept it simple by saying, “they should pay their rent, I had to pay mine, they can’t live here without it.”⁸⁵ Others were much more critical. A Black man described the conditions that residents lived under, underscoring the reason for their protests:

The conditions is bad over here now. You take a lot of these buildings over here at times the folks water be too hot at times they don’t have enough hot water. I think they should fix the apartments up before they talk about evicting people because a lot of time people are so cold in the building they get sick they got to take the money to go to the doctor with.⁸⁶

Local organizers of the rent strike included Helen Howard, who organized her community through the Vine City Foundation, and Dorothy Bolden, who would later create the National Domestic Workers Union of America (NDWUA).⁸⁷ These women exhibited the intersection of local and national antipoverty organizing in Atlanta. Bolden

⁸⁴ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 92-93.

⁸⁵ “Showdown is Building Between Atlanta Housing Authority and Tenants,” WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 0013, 53:47/59:46, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁸⁶ “Showdown is Building Between Atlanta Housing Authority and Tenants,” WSB-TV newsfilm collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁸⁷ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 92-93.

particularly embodies the work and activism of working-class Black women in Atlanta. Born in 1924, she spent a large portion of her life working as a domestic servant and dealing with all of the trials and tribulations that went along with it, from poor pay to racist white employers. Arrested in 1940 for refusing the request of the white women she worked for, she took a break from domestic work, but raising a family required that she return to the profession. When she saw Rosa Parks protest in Montgomery, she was inspired to join the SNCC but always knew her heart was in organizing for women in domestic work like herself. She approached Dr. King with the idea of a domestic workers union. He endorsed her leadership of the initiative. She traveled all over the city, speaking to hundreds of women. Seventy women agreed to join the NDWUA, and Bolden was elected the first president in 1968. They mostly helped women in Atlanta, and they created a formal training program that taught other women how to do their work, which increased their professionalism and credibility. Graduates received certificates they could show employers when they finished the program. These women also learned how to better advocate for more desirable hours and larger pay.⁸⁸ The success of an organization like NDWUA was the result of the tireless work done by Bolden. She embodied the activism of the Black female workers who came before her. Without her, domestic work organizing in Atlanta would have looked completely different.

⁸⁸ New York Historical Society, "Life Story: Dorothy Bolden," *Women & the American Story*, November 29, 2022, <https://wams.nyhistory.org/growth-and-turmoil/growing-tensions/dorothy-bolden/>.



Figure Ten: Dorothy Bolden, her colleague, and Andrew Young in 1971. The note is from Young saying “to my good friend, advisor, critic, and supporter Mrs. Dorothy Bolden. May God continue to give you the wisdom and energy to help our people, Love Andrew Young.” Courtesy of Georgia State University Special Collections and A History of Domestic Work Timeline.

1967 saw a surge of activism from mothers on welfare. They organized under the National Welfare Rights Organization, seeking better access to benefits. In this case, it was beneficial to partner with organizations that shared a passion for the cause, so they partnered with Emmaus House to deliver resources to poor families and facilitate meetings for people to better understand their welfare rights. They even started a publication called *The Poor People's Newspaper* to share news. They also partnered with

Atlanta Legal Aid Services in order to take on cases that helped poor families access resources that were paid for by federal funding.⁸⁹

Overall, the activism of poor and working-class Black Atlantans during the 1960s and into the 1970s proved frustrating work. By the late 1960s, poor and working-class activists in the state faced a national turn towards conservatism under Richard Nixon. National support for welfare programs like the War on Poverty began to decline. Conservative voices were on the rise, making it even harder to create lasting change.⁹⁰ Atlanta's antipoverty activism reached its peak in 1971.⁹¹ The mayor before Maynard Jackson, Sam Massell, was no friend to labor, unions, and their organizing.⁹² Atlanta's politics, too, had not changed. The Black and white coalition, despite all their infighting, still made decisions on behalf of the poor without consultation. It was clear that, "there was still a sharp divide between Atlanta's haves and have-nots, including the city's Black sociopolitical elite and the Black poor."⁹³ They learned the lesson felt by their predecessors: nobody understood their experiences better than themselves. The story of poor and working-class Black Atlantans has always featured themes of resilience. Additionally, the limited success of antipoverty work led to the issues that plagued these residents in the 1960s and early 1970s becoming some of the biggest issues that future mayor Maynard Jackson addressed.

⁸⁹ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 153.

⁹⁰ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 118.

⁹¹ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 153.

⁹² LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 203.

⁹³ LeeAnn Lands, *Poor Atlanta*, 93.

Atlanta also entered the 1970s with a new nickname added to its cultural lexicon. In 1971, *Ebony Magazine* dubbed Atlanta as the “Black Mecca.” When speaking about Atlanta reporter Phyl Garland said: “Some say it’s the place where black dreams are most likely to come true, that in Atlanta black folks have more, live better, accomplish more, and deal with whites more effectively than they do anywhere else in the South-or the North.”⁹⁴ Garland also calls Atlanta “an ambitious, acquisitive, and social climbing town on the make.”⁹⁵ Finally Garland points out the myth crafted by Atlanta’s elite, Black and white saying “while much of this highly publicized racial harmony is merely a fabrication encouraged by the Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta blacks (particularly the most advantaged ones) are among the city’s proudest boosters.”⁹⁶ The election of Maynard Jackson only proved these myths to be “true,” without acknowledging citywide racial, social, and economic inequalities.

Over one hundred years of political and social organizing in Atlanta foretold the election of Maynard Jackson and the subsequent era of Black mayors. As a member of Atlanta’s Black elite and the grandson of John Wesley Dobbs, becoming mayor of the city in 1974 might be seen as an unspoken birthright. Yet, his election would not have been possible without the struggles, sometimes in unison, often in tension, of Black Atlantans of all classes. Scholars have detailed the rise of Atlanta’s Black elites and the pitfalls they faced along their unfinished path to achieve Black equality for all. They have accounted for major setbacks like the end of Reconstruction, the Atlanta Race Massacre

⁹⁴ Phyl Garland, “Atlanta Black Mecca of the South,” *Ebony Magazine*, August 1971, 152.

⁹⁵ Phyl Garland, “Atlanta Black Mecca of the South,” 152.

⁹⁶ Phyl Garland, “Atlanta Black Mecca of the South,” 154.

of 1906, and the Great Depression. The historiography tracks the ways in which every new generation of Atlanta's Black elite strove to be different from the previous one, with limited success. The first post-Civil War generation touted respectability politics and a moral code to achieve equality in the eyes of the white community. The next generation, realizing that white Atlantans would never view them as equal, sought to uplift the Black elite through formal political networks and elected positions. While this second generation of Black elites thought they differed from the first, both generations spoke on behalf of poor and working-class Black Atlantans, yet they seldom consulted with these potential political allies. The historiography illustrates the ways in which elite Black Atlantans efforts often proved more harmful than helpful to its poorest residents in their shared goal of Black freedom. But the scholarship also suggests that poor and working-class residents would not be made the victim without a fight. Poor and working-class Black Atlantans defined activism and uplift in their own terms, far from the expectations of Black and white elites. Residents would soon learn that electing a Black mayor would not offer the fix they so ardently sought.

CHAPTER 2

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT: BLACK ATLANTA IN THE ERA OF MAYNARD JACKSON

Atlanta in the late 1960s and 1970s was a city in crisis. White residents fled the city to the suburbs, murder rates soared, and high unemployment led to increasing poverty among poor and working-class Black residents. Atlanta's population also became majority Black--an estimated 54% by 1973.¹ At the same time, Atlanta's white elites continued their path to rebuild Atlanta's reputation as a city of the New South *and* an international city. To do this, they needed an ally in city hall. However, in 1968, their long-running ally, Mayor Ivan Allen Jr., confronted term limits. This left the door open for the election of Sam Massell. Massell was Jewish, to the horror of the white Evangelical elites, and he won his election with the support of the large Black electorate. For the next four years, the white elite dealt with a politician that they did not choose. In 1973, Massell faced a re-election campaign. Massell had the support of the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL), who represented the interests of Atlanta's older generation of Black elites, and the system of bi-racial negotiation that had governed Atlanta in a coalition for the last few decades.”²

¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 63.

² Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 53- 55.

Unbeknownst to Sam Massell and the ANVL, there existed a challenger. Nicknamed “the people’s champion,” Maynard Holbrook Jackson Jr., vice-mayor under Massell, announced his bid for mayor of Atlanta. Jackson was born in Dallas, TX and moved to Atlanta when he was seven when his dad became the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church. He graduated from Morehouse College with a history and political science degree and then earned a law degree from North Carolina Central University.³ When Jackson decided to run for mayor, the ANVL, co-founded by his grandfather, took it as an insult. They were not confident that Jackson was the correct candidate to become Atlanta’s first Black mayor. They also had an informal agreement that they would support Massell for a second term if he helped deliver the first Black mayor in 1978. Jackson did not make his decision lightly. As vice-mayor of Atlanta, he had earned a reputation for advocating for the city’s poor and working-class residents during a sanitation workers strike. But this was not the first time that he went against the wishes of the old guard. In 1969, against the ANVL’s wishes, Jackson ran for Senate (against Herman Talmadge, a notorious segregationist) and for vice-mayor.⁴ The senate campaign hinted at what type of politician Jackson hoped to be: “My candidacy is not a candidacy for one section of the people, it is not a candidacy to represent only one group, my candidacy stands for unity in the state of Georgia.”⁵ As a vote-conscious politician Jackson wanted to help everyone, not just Black Georgians.

³ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 52.

⁴ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 56-59.

⁵ *Maynard: The Man, the Politician, the Gamechanger*, directed by Samuel D. Pollard (Auburn Avenue Films, 2018).



Figure Eleven: Mayor Sam Massell and Vice Mayor Maynard Jackson in a 1973 Debate. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

After polling revealed that Jackson had popular support, the ANVL had no choice but to support his bid.⁶ Throughout the campaign, tensions between Jackson and Massell and between Black and white voters remained heated. Massell's speech given on October 6, 1971, did not help matters, either. While speaking at the Hungry Club, a community forum held at the Butler Street YMCA, Massell told a Black audience to "think white" in order to stop white flight from the city.⁷ In response, Alderman Henry Dodson responded: "He told me I gotta think white to get along in this society and I feel like I can think Black and get along in this society."⁸ Another Black woman who attended the speech spoke with disappointment saying: "I had an overall feeling that we were still

⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 56-59.

⁷ "African Americans reacting negatively to mayor Sam Massell's speech on politics and government Atlanta, Georgia, 1971 October 6," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 1770, 24:23/27:03, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁸ "African Americans reacting negatively to mayor Sam Massell's speech on politics and government Atlanta, Georgia, 1971 October 6," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, UGA Libraries.

proving ourselves as Black people in this city and I thought we had come further than that.”⁹ Massell’s campaign slogan, “Atlanta’s Too Young to Die,” put further stress on his campaign. Its use implied that electing a Black mayor would kill any progress the city of Atlanta had made up to that point.¹⁰ The election on October 3, 1973, revealed Atlanta’s divisive political landscape. In Georgia, candidates needed a 50% majority to be elected. Jackson received 47% of the vote, leading to a runoff.¹¹ On October 16th, Jackson won outright with 63% of the vote. In Black precincts specifically, Jackson won 9 to 1 against Massell.¹² Overall, Jackson won 95% of the Black vote and 21% of the white vote.¹³ Similarly, he won re-election in 1977 with 63% of votes, securing over 90% of the Black vote.¹⁴

In his victory speech, Jackson declared: “Like the phoenix, which is a symbol of our city, today we have arisen from the ashes of a very bitter campaign to build a better life for all Atlantans...today’s victory, and it is a victory, it is a resounding affirmation of the principles of unity and of brotherhood that have helped make Atlanta, truly, a city too

⁹ “African Americans reacting negatively to mayor Sam Massell’s speech on politics and government Atlanta, Georgia, 1971 October 6,” WSB-TV newsfilm collection, UGA Libraries.

¹⁰ “African Americans reacting negatively to mayor Sam Massell’s speech on politics and government Atlanta, Georgia, 1971 October 6,” WSB-TV newsfilm collection, UGA Libraries.

¹¹ Jon Nordheimer, “Jackson, a Black, and Massell Gain Oct. 16 Runoff for Atlanta Mayor,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/03/archives/jackson-a-black-and-massell-gain-oct-16-runoff-for-atlanta-mayor.html>.

¹² Jon Nordheimer, “Atlanta Elects a Black Mayor, First in a Major Southern City,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/17/archives/atlanta-elects-a-black-mayor-first-in-a-major-southern-city-black.html>.

¹³ Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (Penguin Books, 1997), 417-419.

¹⁴ Wayne King, “Jackson to Begin Second Term in Atlanta Amid Optimism,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1977, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/10/06/archives/jackson-to-begin-second-term-in-atlanta-amid-optimism.html>.

busy to hate, and we are, we are that city.”¹⁵ From the start of his terms as mayor, Jackson deployed the mythos of Atlanta’s reputation in pursuit of his agenda. When he assumed office in 1974, Maynard Jackson became not only Atlanta’s first Black mayor, but the first Black mayor of a major Southern city. The ceremony itself was dubbed by two names: “the coronation” and “the people’s inauguration.” Coronation refers to the belief that Jackson’s election occurred as a result of decades of work by his family, the Dobbs, and all Black Atlantans. It was called the people’s inauguration because it was the first to be held at the Civic Center for the city to watch. Previously, the ceremony had been held quietly in the aldermanic chambers.¹⁶ This was an early sign of Jackson’s commitment to governing differently from previous administrations.

The challenge that lay ahead was daunting and the pressure to succeed immense. To be the first at something, especially as a Black man in America, came with an incredible burden. Jackson understood this intimately. In a 1988 interview he said:

Being the first Black mayor is what you wish on your enemy, OK? And I say that with tongue in cheek. A great pride to be mayor of Atlanta, and every Black mayor who's been the first Black mayor of America, I'm sure has felt the same thing. But it truly is, is part hell. You first of all start with exaggerated Black expectations, that overnight, Valhalla will be found, heaven will come on earth, and it's all because the Black mayor's been elected. And things just don't work that way. The obligation that I felt was to try, with everything in my power, in every legal and ethical way that I could, to move things as quickly as possible in that direction. All of a sudden, I became the mayor of not just of Atlanta, but of, for Black people in Georgia and even some neighboring states. That was an extraordinary

¹⁵ “Victory Speech Atlanta’s First Black Mayor, Maynard Jackson, Stressed Togetherness,” WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 1978, 7:36/08:33, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga; *Maynard: The Man, the Politician, the Gamechanger* directed by Samuel Pollard (2018).

¹⁶ “Inauguration Ceremony for Maynard Jackson, Wyche Fowler and 18 New City Council Members will Have a Lot of Pageantry,” WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 2001, 13:36/14:39, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

burden. But in the city of Atlanta alone, we had to deal with that tremendous expectation in the Black community. Now, equally important and equally difficult was what we found in the White community-exaggerated anxiety. That anxiety was, Oh, my God, what are we gonna do? We got a Black mayor. What does this mean? Is this the end of Atlanta?¹⁷

His administration faced the myriad expectations of Atlanta's Black elite, white business elites, and poor and working-class Black Atlantans. Many of Jackson's wants and desires for the city directly conflicted with the desires of at least one of these groups. For example, in his first administration, Jackson filled city jobs with more Black men and women than any mayor had previously; 80% of the hires in his first term were Black.¹⁸ This was perceived as too much, too soon by some and not fast enough by others. Jackson even faced criticism from media across the U.S. and around the world. One year into office, a British journalist wrote: "Fourteen months after taking office the first black mayor of a major southern city, Mr. Maynard Jackson's appetite for bacon and eggs and grits is considerably heartier than his popularity among the citizens of Atlanta."¹⁹

This chapter analyzes the many criticisms of Jackson's administration. I begin from the vantage that Maynard Jackson's political work reflects a long-lasting legacy of Black involvement in both city and state politics. Studying Jackson's administration serves as a ruler to measure how far Black Georgians had progressed in politics. Jackson was a politician who dared to be different from the previous style of coalition politics, yet

¹⁷ "Maynard Jackson, interview by Jacqueline Shearer, Washington University in St. Louis, October 24, 1988, <http://repository.wustl.edu/concern/videos/v692tb34h>.

¹⁸ Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *America's Black Capital: How African Americans Remade Atlanta in the Shadow of the Confederacy* (Basic Books, Hachette Book Group, 2023), 343.

¹⁹ "Crisis Another View: A British Journal Also Takes a Look at Atlanta," *The Economist of London*, March 1975, 1A-2A, Box 17, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

one who often had no choice but to cater to the wants of the coalition. More often than not, this came at the cost of the wellbeing of Atlanta's poor and Black working-class population. His administration also demonstrates long-running tensions between poor and working-class Atlantans (both Black and white), members of the Black elite, and members of the white elite. Although Jackson was mayor for three terms, this chapter will focus on Jackson's first two terms as mayor from 1974 to 1982. His third term from 1990 to 1994 will be the topic of chapter four.

Redeveloping Atlanta's Black Communities and National Housing Policy

In this section, I explore American urban renewal enacted through housing policies, federal organizations, and public housing authorities. This history is deeply connected with issues of race, class, and gender. Poor and working-class Americans, disproportionately Black, were consistently and systematically denied access to fair, affordable, and safe housing conditions. I focus primarily on public housing, but address private homeownership as well. This is because the relationship between the two are both influenced by federal funding making them interconnected struggles in the fight for affordable housing. Most importantly, I explore the impact of these federal policies on the local level in Atlanta.

One major focus of Jackson's administrations was enhancing Atlanta's poor and working-class Black communities, especially those downtown and in the inner city. Many of these communities had fallen into disrepair during the years of the Great Migration, when many of Atlanta's Black residents left for northern cities.²⁰ Public housing was a major issue on the minds of both Atlanta's residents and city hall. It did

²⁰ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 61-62.

not fit the image of racial harmony and uplift that Atlanta's white boosters were trying to sell. They viewed it as a stain to the city's reputation. Jackson's administration hoped to direct city funds to improve public housing communities like Techwood, Grady Homes, Bankhead, and Carver Homes.²¹

The deterioration of public housing during the 1970s was not unique to Atlanta. It was one case of national decay in public housing caused by decades of damaging policies and withdrawals of funding. One of the first instances of racial zoning laws in the country passed in Baltimore in 1910. It was meant to restrict Black people from living in majority white blocks. Other cities quickly followed suit, with similar laws popping up in Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.²² However, in 1917, with the assistance of the NAACP, *Buchanan v. Warley* ruled racial zoning as unconstitutional. It only outlawed explicit racial zoning and said nothing about economic zoning. Economic zoning took the form of enlarging lot size and prohibiting multi-family dwellings. However, in 1926, the Supreme Court case, *Corrigan v. Buckley*, stated that the enforcement of racial covenants by individual property owners did not require state intervention in cases of racial discrimination. Arguing on the principles of the Constitution and the fourteenth amendment, the utilization of racial covenants by real estate agents to keep white neighborhoods segregated remained legal.²³ Laws like this

²¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 77-79.

²² Francesca Russello Ammon, Wendell E. Pritchett, and Marc Morial. "The Long History of Unfair Housing," *Perspectives on Fair Housing*, ed. Wendell E. Pritchett, Vincent J. Reina, and Susan M. Wachter (2021): 11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16qjz07.5>.

²³ Louis Lee Woods, "Almost No Negro Veteran Could Get A Loan: African Americans, The GI Bill, and the NAACP Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1917-1960," *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 3 (2013): 396-397, <https://doi.org/10.5323/jafriamerhist.98.3.0392>.

coincide with some of the worst incidents of racial violence occurring in the forms of race massacres in cities like Atlanta (1906), Springfield (1908), East St. Louis (1917), Chicago (1919), and Tulsa (1921). These race massacres resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Black Americans and reinforced the ideas of Black inferiority and neighborhood segregation.²⁴

In 1933, the Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) was formed in order to refinance mortgages at a time when many could not afford them due to the Great Depression.²⁵ A year later in 1934, the National Housing Act established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The FHA provided mortgages for people to buy homes. However, from the beginning the institution engaged in discriminatory practices. The FHA assisted private lenders in denying African-Americans the necessary loans to buy a home. If not outright denied, they were given higher interest rates which made home ownership for Black residents more financially unstable. Known as redlining, lenders created maps of neighborhoods and outlined them in different colors. The colors represented the likelihood of giving the residents universally-competitive loan rates. African-American neighborhoods were outlined in red, signifying the practice of giving these residents high loan rates or no loan at all.²⁶ One of the most important FHA documents used to spread the practice of redlining across the country was the Underwriting Manual. It began national distribution in 1935, and it was also used to

²⁴ Francesca Russello Ammon, Wendell E. Pritchett, and Marc Morial, "The Long History of Unfair Housing," 12; Gregory Mixon, Stanley Harrold, and Randall M. Miller, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (University Press of Florida, 2008), ix.

²⁵ Mark S. Monmonier, *No Dig, No Fly, No Go: How Maps Restrict and Control* (The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 118.

²⁶ Monmonier, *No Dig, No Fly, No Go: How Maps Restrict and Control*, 117.

appraise risk. The FHA sent copies to realtors across the country. The FHA's system focused on risk assessment for individual mortgages but also included information on the neighborhood, as well as property and borrower ratings. Lenders had little choice but to follow FHA guidelines if they wanted to receive FHA insurance for their loans.²⁷ In other words, the FHA incentivized racial discrimination by allowing lenders to profit off higher mortgage rates for people of color. This practice upheld white supremacy and the idea that the whiter the neighborhood, the better and less risky it was. In Atlanta, surveyors paid special attention to the Atlanta University Center described in a HOLC report as "the best negro area in town."²⁸ Despite this, Atlanta surveyors rated the neighborhood as undesirable for lending. In defiance of the ratings, Black owned banks such as Citizens Trust offered some Black Atlantans loans to purchase their own homes.²⁹

²⁷ Monmonier, *No Dig, No Fly, No Go: How Maps Restrict and Control*, 124-125.

²⁸ Ella Howard, "Redlining Georgia" In *Reassessing the 1930s South*, ed. Karen L. Cox and Sarah E. Gardner (Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 203-205.

²⁹ Ella Howard, "Redlining Georgia" 205-206.

In 1937, President Truman signed the Wagner Steagall Housing Act. It established the United States Housing Authority (USHA) and provided \$500 million to build low-cost public housing projects across the nation. Theoretically, these projects would pay for themselves through a combination of funds collected from tenants, the federal government, and local housing authorities. In theory, the act served the nation's

poorest residents.³⁰ The act allowed for the establishment of Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in major cities. They distributed federal funding for the creation and maintenance of public housing.³¹

Techwood, the country's oldest public housing project was completed in Atlanta in 1936 with funds granted through the New Deal Public Works Administration program. Clarke Howell, built adjacent to Techwood, opened in 1940. Both housed white families, while University Homes, opened in 1937, housed Black families. Atlanta led the way in public housing, constructing 5,000 units across the city between 1936 and 1942, making it the city with the most public housing before WWII in the nation. Public housing in Atlanta remained segregated until 1968.³² Janet Leon Crawl Warner Shortt's parents met working on Auburn Avenue in the 1920s. They decided to move north to New York where Janet was born in 1930, but then the Great Depression hit. Her father managed to secure a job in the maintenance department at University Homes when it opened. Everyone was eager to secure an apartment there, not only because it had steam heat, but because "people moved into university homes trying to better themselves."³³ While living at University Homes, Janet and the other kids attended Oglethorpe Elementary. The

³⁰ "75th Anniversary of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937," FDR Presidential Library & Museum, accessed February 3, 2024, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/housing>; Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream*, 227-232.

³¹ Leland Ware, "Plessy's Legacy: The Government's Role in the Development and Perpetuation of Segregated Neighborhoods," *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2021): 101, <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.1.06>.

³² "Historical Note," Atlanta Housing Authority, University Homes Records Finding Aid, 2015, <https://www.atlantahousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2015.0058-University-Homes-records.pdf>; Akira Drake Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants: The Politics of Atlanta's Public Housing* (University of Georgia Press, 2021), 7-8.

³³ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2015 and 2018.

complex hosted both family and childrens activities. To her, it felt like growing up in the backyard of the AUC. For example, she recalls Hale Woodruff, a famed Harlem Renaissance painter, teaching her class for a week because his wife, Theresa, was out sick. They also attended plays at Spelman College, starting when she was six years old.³⁴ Her fondest memories from living there are “the friends I’ve made, lifelong friends.”³⁵ Whatever intra class debates that took place among Black Atlantans, systemic racism and a lack of housing options meant that at University Homes, class lines were not all that clear. She talks about how “there’s children from the Dobbs family, the bankers children, children whose fathers owned the drugstores, on down to the people like my daddy who was a maintenance man, you had a mixture but you didn’t have such a division in classes at that time.”³⁶ That meant that everyone had to help each other. But the nostalgia of her youth faded over time. By the time Mrs. Shortt moved into Eagen Homes with her own son, she recalls: “I expected it to be like when I was a child and it was not. Not everybody, but there were many who were hateful. I had to watch out for my children. The feeling of family and cohesiveness was no longer there.”³⁷ When asked what the housing authority might do to solve its issues, Mrs. Shortt responded: “have more community activities where families are involved with each other.”³⁸ Capturing a reality of Black life in public housing in its early days, Mrs. Shortt describes it as a beloved

³⁴ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2015.

³⁵ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2018.

³⁶ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2015.

³⁷ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2018.

³⁸ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2018.

community.³⁹ The interview also reveals how decline over time, due to a variety of socioeconomic and systemic issues, affected life in Atlanta's housing projects.



Figure Thirteen: University Homes Dedication Ceremony, May 1, 1937.
Photo Courtesy of Atlanta Housing Authority and Emory University Libraries

From Techwood's opening, the language from officials spoke of paternalism. In his dedication speech, President Roosevelt claimed that

Within sight of us today, stands a tribute to useful work under government supervision- the first slum clearance and low-rent housing project. Here, at the request of citizens of Atlanta, we have cleaned out nine square blocks of antiquated, squalid dwelling for years a detriment to the community. Today these hopeless old houses are gone and in their places we see the bright, cheerful buildings of the Techwood Housing Project. Within a very short time, people who never before could get a decent roof over their heads will live here in reasonable comfort amid healthful, worthwhile surroundings.⁴⁰

³⁹ Janet Crawl Shortt, University Homes Oral History, *Atlanta Housing Authority*, 2018.

⁴⁰ "Historical Background," Folder 1-2, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

The president implied that public housing residents were the kinds of citizens that the government needed to keep an eye on. He also notes the clearing of nine square blocks to do so. Two hundred seventy-nine families were moved out to build Techwood in the name of slum clearance.⁴¹

National Black organizations like the NAACP continued to fight against racial covenants and for Black home loans on the federal level throughout the 1940s.⁴²

The Housing Act of 1949 introduced an official and comprehensive policy of urban renewal in an effort to racially segregate neighborhoods.⁴³ Tenant selection was a disputed process, as housing officials judged families based on biased personal beliefs of who could pay and used a family's "moral of character" as a determinant of whether they would make good community members. As working-class white families gained enough

⁴¹ "Historical Background," Folder 1-2, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁴² In 1948, *Shelley v. Kraemer* outlawed racial covenants. The NAACP celebrated this victory after over a decade of fighting for fair housing practices. Their first battle came in 1940 against the HOLC. To tackle the issue, they sought the counsel of civil rights lawyer and eventual Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. In a letter to the Roosevelt White House, Marshall argued that the HOLC allowed agents to avoid selling homes to Black people throughout the 1930s. HOLC policymakers investigated and responded with a denial, claiming that the denial of Black people had more to do with their economic status than their race. In their second battle, the NAACP did not have the evidence to disprove them, but did have the evidence against the FHA in the Underwriting Manual. Marshall's team demonstrated the clear link between the use of restrictive covenants and the denial of federal mortgage insurance and loans. The FHA publicly admitted to the use of covenants but said the document was "optional," yet required, for mortgage underwriting. They also claimed other targets existed besides Black neighborhoods. After placing persistent public pressure on the FHA, they finally reversed the policies of the manual. The third battle was to assist the over 1.1 million Black veterans after WWII repeatedly denied home loans by dual policies of the FHA and the Veterans Administration (VA). This time, NAACP lawyers disputed the constitutionality of racially restrictive covenants. This resulted in the *Shelley v. Kraemer* victory. Yet three weeks after the ruling, the FHA commissioner openly said that they would not adhere to the court's decision. It took a full two years before the FHA agreed to comply under continual pressure from the NAACP. See Louis Lee Woods, "Almost No Negro Veteran Could Get A Loan: African Americans, The GI Bill, and the NAACP Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1917–1960."

⁴³ Leland Ware, "Plessy's Legacy: The Government's Role in the Development and Perpetuation of Segregated Neighborhoods," 101-102, <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.1.06>; Eduard Goetz, *New Deal Ruins: Race, Economic Justice and Public Housing* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 29.

money to move out of public housing, they were replaced with residents who relied on government assistance and were oftentimes Black. Subsequently, Black people became the face of public housing, and this imagery shaped how public housing functioned. Black residents took the blame for any issues that occurred in public housing.⁴⁴ The 1954 Housing Act allowed for the use of federal funds in building housing on cleared land. Urban renewal became synonymous with “Negro Removal,” as it destroyed pre-established Black communities. Eighty percent of those displaced by urban renewal were Black.⁴⁵

In 1956, the Interstate Highway Act became law, but planning to build expressways and interstates in major cities had been well underway for a decade. After World War II, Congress passed the Federal Highways Act (1944), providing funds to build highways in the three years following the war. City officials and local businessmen hoped to revitalize their downtowns after decline due to employers and people moving to the suburbs. Interstates provided easy access downtown. The 1956 Act required the federal government to provide 90% of the funds allocated to build expressways and interstates. Building interstates and expressways often involved high numbers of displacement, frequently in Black areas. For example, in Detroit, “construction of the John C. Lodge Freeway resulted in the destruction of 2,200 buildings (residences, shops, and factories) on the Lower West Side and largely African American neighborhoods bordering Highland Park. By the end of the 1950s, bulldozers leveled approximately

⁴⁴ Eduard Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 35-37, 40.

⁴⁵ Leland Ware, “Plessy’s Legacy: The Government’s Role in the Development and Perpetuation of Segregated Neighborhoods,” 101-102.

2,800 buildings through the black West Side and the northernmost edge of the city's most infamous ghetto, Paradise Valley, to make way for the Edsel B. Ford Expressway."⁴⁶ This happened in cities and communities all across America. Atlanta's most famous Black neighborhood along Auburn Avenue, nicknamed "Sweet Auburn," faced division during the 1960s when the 75/85 downtown connector was built and 30,000 residents were displaced in the process.⁴⁷ Displacement forced people to uproot their entire lives for the sake of progress, increasing their housing insecurity. Sweet Auburn, home to both the King family and banks like Citizens Trust Bank and Mutual Federal Savings and Loans, was the mecca of Black businesses in Atlanta. During the height of Jim Crow racism, banks like Citizens Trust loaned Black families the money to purchase their own homes and achieve part of the American dream, while white banks denied Black families loans and the government redlined their neighborhoods. Therefore the division of this thriving and influential Black community appeared a direct assault on Black Atlanta's wellbeing.

In 1965, HUD was elevated from its previous level and title, Housing and Home Finance Authority, to a presidential cabinet rank. HUD had several divisions, but their immediate task was the expansion and administering of the 55 programs and the creation of a subdivision called the Federal Housing Administration. But the creation of HUD involved the merging of so many offices and divisions—like the Federal National

⁴⁶ Roger, Biles, "Expressways before the Interstates: The Case of Detroit, 1945–1956," *Journal of Urban History*, 40, no. 5 (2014): 843-850, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144214533294>.

⁴⁷ Danielle, Wiggins, "Remembering Sweet Auburn before the Expressway: What Nostalgia Reveals about the Limits of Postwar Liberalism," *The Metropole*, April 28, 2021, <https://themetropole.blog/2021/04/14/remembering-sweet-auburn-before-the-expressway>.

Mortgage Commission—the specific duties of each remained unclear. The first secretary, Robert C. Weaver, faced a herculean task. He organized HUD into five semi-autonomous regional units with ultimate authority in the hands of the secretary.⁴⁸ At the same time, in the mid to late 1960s, there was massive civil unrest from Watts in Los Angeles to Chicago to downtown Atlanta.⁴⁹ President Johnson formed the Kerner Commission in 1967 to examine the reasons for such unrest. The report released in February 1968 found that America consisted of two unequal societies: one white and one Black. Furthermore, it implicated white society in the perpetuation of Black Americans' existence in the ghetto. The commission called for the federal government to intervene by creating more low- and moderate- income housing outside of the ghetto.⁵⁰ The commission revived Johnson's housing agenda. His first attempt, a bill to ban discrimination in the selling and renting of homes, failed.⁵¹ The next attempt succeeded.

In April 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act after a long battle for Congressional approval. It “prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, handicap

⁴⁸ Dwight A. Ink, “The Department of Housing and Urban Development. Building a New Federal Department,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 32, no. 3 (1967): 375-378, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1191076>.

⁴⁹ Donna Jean Munch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 167; Irene V. Holliman, “From Crackertown to Model City?” *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 3 (2009): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144208330402>.

⁵⁰ Justin P. Steil, Camille Z. Charles, and Marc Morial, “Sociology, Segregation, and the Fair Housing Act,” in *Perspectives on Fair Housing*, eds Vincent J. Reina, Wendell E. Pritchett, and Susan M. Wachter, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 54-55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16qjz07.6>.

⁵¹ Nikole Hannah-Jones, “Living Apart: How the Government Betrayed a Landmark Civil Rights Law,” *ProPublica*, June 25, 2015, <https://www.propublica.org/article/living-apart-how-the-government-betrayed-a-landmark-civil-rights-law>, np.

and family status,” yet would prove inadequate to the task.⁵² HUD oversaw the formal complaints process when someone faced discrimination in housing. It took two years of effort to get the bill passed, but Congress was provoked by the violence rocking America and the words of one of their own. The former: the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. which resulted in riots in 125 cities. The latter: the successful lobbying of Senator Edward Brooke, a Black man and the first to be elected to the Senate by popular vote, who stood in front of his colleagues and told the story of his inability to purchase a home following his return from WWII. Many Vietnam War veterans of color faced a similar fate. The creation of HUD and the passage of the Fair Housing Act were part of Johnson's Great Society program, an updated extension of New Deal Liberalism. Both programs called for large-scale government intervention on behalf of America's underclass. The Fair Housing Act would be one of the last remnants of this era before an era of conservatism swept national politics and undercut support for these programs.⁵³

By the end of 1968, public housing across the country was in steep decline. Subpar construction, mismanagement by PHAs, the failure of federal intervention, and rising violence in inner cities all contributed. Public housing became a negative symbol, synonymous with the welfare state. In 1969, the Brooke Amendment introduced the idea that rental payments had to be proportional to a family's income rather than a fixed sum; nationally, this meant 25% of the resident's income. But this backfired, because it also

⁵² “History of Fair Housing,” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed January 31, 2024, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/aboutfheo/history.

⁵³ John F. Bauman, “Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits,” in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America* eds. John F. Bauman, Roger Biles and Kristin M. Szylvian, (Penn State University Press, 2000) 247, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271072159-016>.

meant that 25% was the new minimum, which led to an increase in rent for the working poor. Local housing officials were also not inclined to reduce rent because Congress consistently failed to provide funds to make up for the lost rent income.⁵⁴

Two forces shaped housing in the 1970s: an economic crisis known as stagflation and the changing presidential administrations from Nixon, to Ford, to Carter. Stagflation meant that the country faced simultaneous high inflation and unemployment, as well as an ongoing energy crisis. An already divided America ruptured further because some were safe in their homes in nice neighborhoods while others lived in failing public housing. The Nixon and Ford administrations found public housing politically abhorrent and did little to address the issue of a dual market of aging housing stock in the city center and well-funded housing in the suburbs. The more centrist Carter found the programs of the Great Society excessive, as well, but his appointment of a Black woman, Patricia Harris, as HUD secretary pushed him further and faster than he anticipated. While Carter focused on balancing the budget, Harris went to work championing poor, inner-city residents.⁵⁵

In 1974, the Housing and Community Investment Act created the Section 8 program and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), both implemented by HUD. Section 8 called for local housing authorities to set aside a certain number of units to be created by the private sector, making it the main tool for the housing of low- and moderate-income authorities. It also inaugurated the era of assigning the onus of low-

⁵⁴ Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 8-9.

⁵⁵ John F. Bauman, "Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits," 246-252.

income housing on the private sector. HUD only stepped into the field for “inspecting units, warranting them acceptable, and paying landlords the difference between 25 percent of the tenants' income and the fair market rent of the unit.”⁵⁶ Public housing residents openly complained that much of Section 8 housing barely met the minimum standards of occupation, but little was done—a consequence of giving power to local authorities with little federal oversight. The CDBG combined the previous Great Society programs into one single grant, meant to give communities more flexibility on how they used federal money. The 1977 Housing Act upheld prior housing acts. It renewed the CDBG for another three years. The renewed grant had a dual focus of aiding otherwise healthy cities with pockets of poverty and cities that faced both infrastructure and population decline. The act also created the Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG), which called for the rehabilitation of 20,000 Section 8 units.⁵⁷ Through HUD, Harris and Carter continued a legacy created by previous administrations that “strengthened an existing public-private partnership and refocused it on neighborhood and downtown revitalization, pumping millions of dollars into downtowns and increasingly fashionable old neighborhoods.”⁵⁸ Yet meant abandoning the Black poor in the name of urban renewal.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ John F. Bauman, “Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits,” 253-254.

⁵⁷ John F. Bauman, “Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits,” 254-255.

⁵⁸ John F. Bauman, “Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits,” 260.

⁵⁹ John F. Bauman, “Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits,” 260.

It was up to Mayor Jackson to figure out how to apply federal housing monies on the local level, while also managing the oftentimes dueling desires of the AHA and its residents throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Jackson thought the first step to understanding what public housing residents faced was to spend time in their shoes. AHA's Board of Commissioners had long been criticized as being out of touch with the needs of the city's poor and working-class residents.⁶⁰ Jackson wanted to appear different by voluntarily staying the weekend at a residence in Bankhead Courts. Opened in 1970 with a price tag of \$10 million, Bankhead Courts featured 500 units, 65 buildings, and 45 acres of land. Aligning with the statistics of other public housing complexes, 93% of households were run by women, 86% were single parent households, and 60% of residents were under the age of 19.⁶¹ Speaking about his motivations before the stay, Mayor Jackson said, "as much as I go into public housing, as much as I work with public housing tenants, even I don't really know what it's like to live in public housing and I'm gonna find out."⁶² During his stay, Jackson reported that the place was filthy, rat-infested, vandalized, and crime-riddled. Many of the public housing units across the city faced similar conditions. Residents complained that their maintenance requests were ignored.⁶³ Social problems from illiteracy, lack of affordable day care, job training, and post-

⁶⁰ "Johnson Criticizes Current Housing Authority Board As Out of Touch With the Situation of Atlanta's Poor," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 1435, 4:06/04:45, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA.

⁶¹ "Bankhead Courts, Profile, Fact Sheet, Problems List," Box 1, Bankhead Court Records, Atlanta Housing Authority, 1998.

⁶² Mayor Jackson Describes Public Housing as "Oppressive Conditions," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 2086, 23:44/24:13, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁶³ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 77.

secondary education plagued residents. There were no support programs for people suffering from addiction or for single parents, teenagers, and children.⁶⁴ AHA's project office also had bars on the window to protect maintenance equipment. In a press conference, Jackson pointed out that he understood why the bars were there, but also realized that the bars sent a clear message to residents: "I raise the question to whether we're going to put more emphasis on protecting property, than we do on protecting persons."⁶⁵ To the AHA, property appeared more important than the wellbeing of its residents.

After the weekend in Bankhead, Jackson recommended building fences and extra lights for security, the creation of a community garden in order to share food throughout the housing units, and additional police patrols in order to "teach people how to live together."⁶⁶ This was clearly a publicist's band aid on a much larger issue of lack of equal access to resources for Atlanta's Black public housing residents. But this aligned with previous language used by Jackson. For example, during a 1970 speech on housing as vice-mayor, Jackson said, "we have a unique chance to show the world that men and women and children of goodwill and courage can share the front yards of hope and the backyards of human understanding."⁶⁷ He used lofty words but this did little to

⁶⁴ Bankhead Courts, Profile, Fact Sheet, Problems List," Box 1, Bankhead Court Records, Atlanta Housing Authority, 1998.

⁶⁵ "After Spending Two Days in a Ghetto, Mayor Jackson Calls for a Round," WSB-TV News film collection, reel 2087, 00:39/50:49, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁶⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 78.

⁶⁷ "Maynard Jackson Says Races Need to Cooperate On Housing 1970-07-24," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

acknowledge the systemic issues that created and perpetuated those substandard conditions.

Jackson made a lot of assumptions about public housing. For one, he seemed insistent that conditions across public housing were the same, when in reality, each community was unique. Additionally, was it everyone's goal to leave public housing and climb the economic ladder? Many Black families had lived in these communities for generations and wanted to improve their homes rather than leave them altogether. He also did not consider how residents might feel about city hall regulating their lives. In this manner, Jackson imposed his elite views of how to be Black in Atlanta on poor and working-class Black Atlantans. In order to combat the idea that he was dominating these neighborhoods without their input, he established Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU) in 1974, which divided the city into 25 citizen advisory councils. These councils made recommendations to city hall on redevelopment plans that best fit their communities.⁶⁸

Another major focus for Jackson was Techwood. Statistical data on residents confirms that over time, Techwood transitioned from all white to majority Black. For example, in 1964, Techwood was 72% Black and 26% white.⁶⁹ Those numbers would only continue to skew in the coming decades. Public housing residents in Techwood and public housing units across the country also suffered constant police presence. One resident, protesting against public housing conditions and the surveillance they lived under in 1968, said,

⁶⁸ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 79.

⁶⁹ "Statistical and Demographic Data," Folder 1-1, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

We're protesting against rents. We're protesting against the conditions of the housing projects and how it's run. We don't think it's run like it should be because we're discriminated against, then our childrens they're not allowed to play on the grass, if they be caught playing on the grass we have to pay a fine then the windows get knocked out, you have to pay for the windows being knocked out, and if you get any kind of raise they go up on your rent, and so they charge you anything they like, so that's what we was protesting today about.⁷⁰

In addition, Techwood was located in the central business district, so the city was overly concerned with controlling crime through police. After all, high crime rates did not fit with the reputation that Atlanta was trying to sell to the world. AHA's solution was to start programs that addressed the social, physical, and economic conditions of public housing residents.⁷¹ But their programs took time and money to establish. No overnight solution existed. AHA also seemed to ignore the larger systemic issues at play.

The rehabilitation of Auburn Avenue provided another project for Jackson. It needed repair after its bisection to build the Downtown Connector. Jackson saw it as paramount to "preserve the unique spirit that was most evident in the area from the early 1900s to the 1950s."⁷² His grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs had been deemed the unofficial mayor of Auburn Avenue because of the influence he held.⁷³ Rehabilitation would reaffirm Auburn Avenue's place in Atlanta's Black history but also Jackson's

⁷⁰ "People demonstrate against unsafe and unclean public housing. Meeting on urban renewal," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 1503, 10:53/13:43, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA.

⁷¹ "Statistical and Demographic Data," Folder 1-1, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁷² "Mayor Announces Sweet Auburn Revitalization Plan," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 2131, 57:00/58:16, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁷³ Matthew Bailey, "John Wesley Dobbs," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Apr 11, 2021. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/john-wesley-dobbs-1882-1961/>.

family history. City Hall partnered with the Inner-City Development Corporation (ICDC), where Coretta Scott King served as director, to spend a \$52 million redevelopment grant, of which 44% had been reserved for inner city development. According to federal guidelines, the money was to be used in seven areas: “elimination of slums, improvement of bad health conditions, conservation of housing stock, expansion of community services, rational use of lands and other resources, reduction of isolation of income groups, and the preservation and restoration of historic sites.”⁷⁴ The ICDC also worked to redevelop Hunter Street, located near the Atlanta University Center. This area was the most populous in the city, and ICDC hoped to add a public transportation hub along with both office and retail space. City hall viewed both projects as relatively easy—they both involved a low amount of demolition and an update of existing structures rather than building from the ground up. Jackson appeased the ambitions of the city’s Black elite. Historian Maurice Hobson argues that “it was clear that Jackson, a native Atlantan, was dedicated to the preservation of areas of Atlanta that boasted a rich black history and were of key importance to the development of Atlanta’s black communities.”⁷⁵

However, Atlanta’s white elites remained critical of these projects and balked at spending of city funds. Jackson also used affirmative action in city hall contracts and hiring, offering the chance for minorities to thrive in business. For example, in his first term as mayor, Jackson awarded 900% more money to Black firms than the previous

⁷⁴ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 73.

⁷⁵ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 74.

mayor.⁷⁶ White businesses worried this took away from their chances at winning city contracts. Jackson's administration also revealed an emphasis on downtown development, rather than the redevelopment of the majority Black south and west sides of the city. This added to the continued neglect of poor and working-class Black Atlanta residents. It is hard to assess the impact of Jackson's urban redevelopment projects. Revitalization of Auburn Avenue reflected Jackson's Atlanta, yet this was not the same Atlanta that poor and working-class Black residents experienced. However, much of the physical landscape of Black development has since been destroyed or left to decay in Atlanta.⁷⁷ Part of Jackson's legacy is that inner city redevelopment remains a constant topic of concern for Atlanta's residents and city hall. This begs the question: did Jackson want to improve the housing conditions of Atlanta's poor and working-class Black residents? At the same time, did he also make decisions for his political gain, as well as the gain of Atlanta's other Black elites? Yes, but ambiguity is part of the legacy of Jackson and all the other Black mayors that follow him. What to "do" with Atlanta's poor and working-class Black residents was a recurring question in the minds of future Black mayors.

Like many cities across America, Atlanta saw a decline in the physical state and occupancy of public housing in the 1980s. The entire city experienced the effects of rising violent crime rates, population stagnation, and a drug epidemic.⁷⁸ In Techwood and

⁷⁶ Ogbar, *America's Black Capital*, 344-345.

⁷⁷ Ernie Suggs, "Saving endangered historic Black structures in Georgia," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 12, 2023, <https://www.ajc.com/things-to-do/efforts-underway-to-save-some-historic-black-structures-while-others-deteriorate/7CBNQAP2TBHTLKLN2XA35I4FAM/>.

⁷⁸ Akira Drake Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 3; Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 142.

Clarke Howell alone, there were over 10,000 code violations.⁷⁹ Jackson secured the city a \$17.4 million revitalization grant through HUD to replace the outdated heating system with a new energy efficient system in 1981.⁸⁰ However, this did little to stem the tide.⁸¹ Residents understood this intimately. By then, Black women, serving as head of households, were commonly welfare recipients. Black women led the charge of grassroots feminist activism through tenant associations, which resulted in positive changes for public housing residents. For example, in December 1966, Josephine Williams, a resident of Perry Homes, faced eviction for having a child while unmarried thus misrepresenting her marital status. She filed a lawsuit for illegal eviction but Georgia law took the side of the landlord, requiring tenants to pay a bond to cover the trial cost of the landlord before filing. The Georgia Supreme Court sided with AHA but in the long term, Williams' activism alongside the tenant association in Perry Homes created a grievance process before landlords could evict residents.⁸² These tenant associations, led by Black women, took matters into their own hands to advocate for themselves and their communities. According to their articles of incorporation, it was their job to

A. Further the wellbeing of residents B. To deal effectively with matters of residents affairs, C. To promote understanding among the residents, manager, and housing authority D. To provide a democratic forum for the expression of concern of the Atlanta Housing Authority Residents E. To promote greater participation of the residents in civil and community

⁷⁹ Akira Drake Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 11-12.

⁸⁰ Pamela Lewis, "Techwood/Clark-Howell Modernization Project," September 28, 1981, Box 8, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁸¹ Eduard Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 101.

⁸² Akira Drake Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 11-12.

affairs and F. Insure maximum influence of the tenants as a body of residents helping to develop the policies and procedures of the AHA.⁸³

Through tenant organizations, residents refused to be ignored by governing bodies. In fact, residents were also unafraid to publicly critique Mayor Jackson. For example, Isarel Green, a member of the Tenant Association at Techwood/Clark Howell, thought the efforts of the mayor's office was lackluster at best. She said the following in a 1981 press release:

First, the City has in the past done nothing positive to aid in what it has negatively condemned, not only at Techwood/Clark Howell but throughout public housing...In a city where the Mayor prides himself in being a champion of the poor, and in times where the Federal Government channel's the bulk of its housing monies through city government, the City has spent comparatively nothing in public housing overall and not one dime of those funds at Techwood/Clark Howell. We demand that the work get on the way in no less than 120 days, and we will be pushing toward that end. We further demand that the City lend all its resources to this end.⁸⁴

For public housing residents, Mayor Jackson was no champion of the poor.

Another point of frustration for Black Atlantans lay with the AHA. Residents publicly challenged housing authority figures. At a public meeting with AHA representatives in 1980 a Black woman, clearly exasperated with the state of public housing, complained, "why wait eight long years before you do something about it before the building fall down? I don't understand that. You could take care of it while you've

⁸³ "Tenant Association Articles of Incorporation," Box 13, Folder 13-8, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁸⁴ "Tenant Records," Series 3, Folder 13-6, Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

got it and then you don't let it get in these conditions."⁸⁵ In reply, the housing authority representative acknowledged that they could not keep all the promises they made residents and that to say so would be lying.⁸⁶ She said, "what we can do immediately, I will put that in writing and we will do it immediately. Those things that the housing authority needs to respond to, we will make sure the housing authority gives you the response. I know that you want to see action."⁸⁷ Action would be slow to come.

⁸⁵ "Senior Citizens Meet to Protest Faulty Public Housing and Poor Construction," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 2504, 27:53/29:28, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁸⁶ "Senior Citizens Meet to Protest Faulty Public Housing and Poor Construction," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁸⁷ "Senior Citizens Meet to Protest Faulty Public Housing and Poor Construction," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.



Figure Fourteen: Photo of a woman and her children patrolling Techwood Homes in March 1981. Crime had gotten so bad that residents of Techwood started a bat patrol to monitor conditions. Techwood were a community who took care of their own. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution and Georgia State University Library.

Those hoping to transition from living in apartments to homes also faced an uphill climb. AHA advertised affordable housing for its citizens, but not enough to go around. A letter to Mayor Jackson from Marsha C. Smith, dated September 28, 1981, expresses Smith's frustrations with her and her family's housing situation. AHA owned and operated a subdivision of homes called Wildwood Homes that had the option of rent to own. Smith hoped that her growing family could move into one of the thirteen unoccupied homes from their current apartment. She rode past those homes for a year, so

she knew they were unoccupied. Yet, when she called AHA to put in an application, they said they were not taking applications. In an appeal to Mayor Jackson, Smith pleaded

We don't have the initial money to purchase a house, but we would like to try this option as a way to buy a house. We always pay our rent on time, we meet our obligations, and would like to get out of the apartment we live in and into someplace with a nice yard and quiet neighbors. The very fact that the Housing Authority is holding onto those houses when there are people like my family who would love to live in one and would pay the rent on time and get into a position to buy one is very annoying. Why not rent to people who can pay, will take care of the property, and really want the house? ⁸⁸

For Atlanta's Black residents, the housing authority was just another authoritarian body that declared their willingness to help but in reality, offered little relief from the day-to-day struggles and frustrations of housing in Atlanta. AHA's 1990s slogan of "helping people help themselves" did nothing to address the imbalance of power.⁸⁹ It implied that it was up to Atlanta residents to fix their housing issues themselves with the benevolent and paternalistic aid of AHA. By the time that Mayor Jackson's first two terms of office came to an end, Atlanta's issues with housing and its Black residents were far from solved. The problem continued to plague Atlanta under Mayor Andrew Young and still existed in Jackson's third term in the lead up to the Olympic Games.

Public Transportation as a Metaphor for Race

Atlanta needed a system of public transportation that connected the suburbs to the city. In 1965, the Georgia General Assembly voted to create the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) that would run from Atlanta to five counties: Cobb,

⁸⁸ Marsha C. Smith "Letter to Mayor Jackson," September 28, 1981, Box 8, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁸⁹ Folder 1-18, Bankhead Court Records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

Clayton, Dekalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett.⁹⁰ It quickly became a clash between the two sides of the coalition that governed Atlanta. In the 1968 plan, two-thirds of the project would be paid for by the federal government and another third by local white private investors. However, the plan was struck down by the Black members of the coalition because nobody consulted had them. They garnered the Black masses to strike down the proposal on the ballot. White business leaders and MARTA officials realized their blunder. They needed the Black vote to get the referendum passed, so they recruited Black people to the directors and staff and hired a community relations director. Another demand the Black leaders had before supporting the referendum was that funding for the system should come from sales tax rather than property taxes. This was because property taxes could hurt poor and working-class Black residents. They also agreed to a reduced fare rate for the first seven years of operation--from forty cents to fifteen--and the creation of a line to more distant Black communities. Once Jackson and the other Black leaders got MARTA to agree to these terms, they got the Black community to pass the referendum unanimously in 1971.⁹¹ During the debates, Jackson represented city hall as vice-mayor, aligning his efforts with Senator Leroy Johnson. The MARTA debate previewed Atlanta's coalition politics that Jackson would negotiate before and after he was elected mayor.

In addition, the initial proposal by MARTA officials did not include plans for stations in southwest Atlanta, south Dekalb county, and north Clayton county. This

⁹⁰ Doug Monroe, "Where It All Went Wrong," *Atlanta Magazine*, August 1, 2012, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/marta-tsplost-transportation/>.

⁹¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 79-80.

presented a problem because, “the populations most likely to use public transit and least likely to be able to afford personal transportation lived overwhelmingly in Southwest Atlanta and were black—they were left unserved by Marta’s plans.”⁹² During negotiations, Jackson made sure to advocate for stations in the east, south, and west sides of the city for Black residents. However, sometimes the expansion of MARTA into Black communities was not beneficial. For example, an expansion of Marta in 1979 displaced Black Atlantans from their neighborhood, Johnstown, in order to build Lenox Square station.⁹³



Figure Fifteen: Maynard Jackson viewing new MARTA cars in 1977. Courtesy of Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library.

MARTA also triggered a debate on Atlanta’s boundaries. White elites were angry because they felt like Black politicians had too much power, which was only reinforced by the large Black voting bloc in the city. Jackson’s election just scared them further.

⁹² Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 80.

⁹³ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 193.

This led to white businessmen and members of the assembly proposing the annexation in 1978, just like in 1950 with Mayor Hartsfield. Jackson appeased white elites by agreeing to work on an annexation proposal over the next few years to be put to the voters in 1980.⁹⁴ This incident not only revealed Jackson's negotiation skills, but also his ability to capture both Black and white votes. Jackson refused to be bullied into doing what the white business community wanted without question. In this case, he tried doing the best for Atlanta's Black voters and the issues affecting their everyday lives. Therefore, he practiced a coalition politics differently than his predecessors.

Ultimately, MARTA represents the classic case where race, class, and economics coincide to the detriment of Atlanta's poor and working-class Black residents. Both Cobb and Gwinnett counties struck down proposals to add MARTA to their areas from the start. They thought that MARTA would lead to the desegregation of their schools and the busing of Black students.⁹⁵ They were also afraid that MARTA provided Black Atlanta residents access to their communities which they believed would increase crime rates. So despite Jackson's efforts to advocate for Atlanta's poor and working-class Blacks, Atlanta's white elite prevented an important aspect of climbing the economic ladder: regular access to transit.

"Maynard's World is Garbage"

As vice-mayor, Jackson had championed the cause of sanitation workers. During Massell's administration in 1970, 1,400 city sanitation workers struck for higher wages.

⁹⁴ Kruse, *White Flight*, 37-39; Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 81-83.

⁹⁵ Kruse, *White Flight*, 248-249.

Massell mishandled the situation, to his political detriment, and to Jackson's political gain. The workers took an extended holiday when Massell refused to grant them increased pay, so he fired them. Jackson publicly called the move wrong and requested their rehiring. He also insisted on being part of negotiations, and eventually the workers were rehired. This offers an example of Jackson's political sharpness. Most of the workers were Black, and by publicly supporting them, Jackson demonstrated his ability to advocate for poor and working-class residents. This was the moment he became the people's champion and disrupted the career trajectory of Massell.⁹⁶



Figure Sixteen: Sanitation workers on strike in 1970 led by Hosea Williams in the front. They are holding signs that say I AM A MAN, a popular phrase used during civil rights protests of the 1960s. Courtesy of Georgia State University Special Collections.

⁹⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 58-59.

Seven years later, strikes by sanitation workers played out differently. One thousand three hundred Black sanitation workers went on strike, once again demanding a raise, but Jackson refused to endorse their terms. He told the strikers that if they did not return to work, they would be fired and replaced. Jackson even had workers lined up to replace them. Jackson became more politically astute and aware of what it took to be a Black politician in Atlanta. By denouncing the strikers, he recaptured the support of white elites, which he needed after years of tension over the use of affirmative action policies. He also cemented the support of Black elites like Martin Luther King Sr. He told Jackson to fire the workers. The city budget needed balancing. Allocating additional funds for these workers would have been viewed as financially irresponsible. Strikers thought this would go the way of 1970, but hundreds lined up to take their jobs, much to their shock. Many of the workers had no choice but to reapply for their old job and ended up rehired at lower rates of pay.⁹⁷

During this debacle, the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials met in Brunswick, GA. Jackson received a special tribute from the other elected officials in honor of his work in the mayor's office. He offered an example of what a Black elected official should look like. They deemed May 7th Maynard Jackson Day. However, others were not so quick to celebrate his success. Outside the venue, Atlanta sanitation workers made their opinions known. Eight strong, wearing green shirts that sported the slogan “Maynard’s world is garbage,” they picketed in the lobby as Mayor Jackson received his

⁹⁷ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 85-89.

award.⁹⁸ While he was being celebrated by Black elites at the conference and the white elites back in Atlanta, sanitation workers and other members of the poor and working-class would not forget Jackson's role in hurting them.

Criticism of Jackson from the Black community represented a continued legacy of the Black community, unafraid to speak their minds about politics. City hall politics are some of the most important because of their impact on everyday life. Jackson did not shy away from criticism, and Black residents did not shy away from offering it. It is in this continued dialogue that the Black community of Atlanta continuously tries to uplift themselves. In this instance, while Jackson displayed political astuteness, he also did not dare to be a different type of Atlanta politician. He was part of the continuing pattern of biracial negotiating and politicking. This was the reality of politics. Tensions within the Black community in Atlanta, in relation to the white elites, continued to develop during Jackson's time in office and with the Black mayors who followed.

Creating an International City through the Airport and Tourism

Atlanta worked to increase tourism and cement its reputation as both a city of the New South and an international city since the 1880s. Jackson continued these pursuits by building a new airport terminal. By 1970, Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport had become the second busiest airport in the world, behind Chicago O'Hare. With nine million passengers per year, there was massive overcrowding. Jackson wanted to alleviate this by building a new terminal on the south side of the city named "midfield" because they

⁹⁸ Ann Marshall Daniels, "At Black Leaders Meet Andrew Young Doing Well, Officials Told," *Savannah Morning News/Savannah Evening Press*, May 8, 1977, Box 57, Series B, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records.

planned to build in the middle of the existing runways.⁹⁹ Choosing the southside was strategic. He hoped that building it there would benefit the primarily Black communities that lived there. In his proposal, he insisted on minority participation in the construction, a choice that showcased his belief in affirmative action and the economic success of Black Atlantans. This was part of his “Atlanta Plan,” which sought to elevate minority-owned businesses in the city and grew into one of the most noticeable minority business enterprises (MBE) in the country evident in the airport construction process.¹⁰⁰

Commentating on the use of affirmative action at Hartsfield, Jackson claimed that “everybody will have a fair chance to participate and compete.”¹⁰¹ He ensured that at least 25% of the business contracts would go to minority-owned businesses. Atlanta’s white elites were shocked by these efforts. Even though white businesses still held the majority of contracts, Atlanta’s white elites believed that Jackson was prioritizing the Black community. Even though this decision further fractured Jackson’s relationship with the white elite, he demonstrated a willingness to govern differently from his predecessors. James and Robert Pascal, two Black brothers, put in bids to build snack lounges and cocktail bars at the airport. Their bid was accepted, and within five years of the airport’s completion, they had earned \$13 million a year from these contracts. Jackson had achieved his dream of creating Black millionaires while simultaneously creating over

⁹⁹ “ATL’s Domestic Terminal turns 40!” Delta Flight Museum (blog), September 21, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Ogbar, *America’s Black Capital*, 346-348.

¹⁰¹ “Mayor Jackson Says There will Always be Problems with Affirmative Action but not at Hartsfield,” WSB-TV newscast collection, reel 2247, 4:43/05:37, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

2,000 new jobs for Atlantans.¹⁰² Now, including minority contracts in airport expansion is the national norm.¹⁰³



Figure Seventeen: Atlanta's new terminal in 1982. Visible in the background is the terminal opened in 1961. Courtesy of the Delta Flight Museum.

Construction of the new terminal began in 1977 to major engineering challenges. For example, they had to adjust the I-85 southbound path to accommodate the new terminal.¹⁰⁴ In 1980, the \$700 million project was completed on time and under budget.¹⁰⁵ Alongside the new terminal, a train, known as the Automated People Mover (APM), was built to transport passengers between terminals. This 24-hour train, which has 44 cars and

¹⁰² Angelo Fuster, "Statement By Mayor Maynard Jackson," *City of Atlanta Office of the Mayor*, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 1978, Box 59, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁰³ Harvey K. Newman, *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta* (University of Alabama Press, 1999), 198-199.

¹⁰⁴ "Aaron Turpeau Interview," *Maynard: The Man, the Politician, the Gamechanger* directed by Samuel Pollard (2018).

¹⁰⁵ Ogbar, *America's Black Capital*, 348-349.

11 trains, moves more than 250,000 passengers per day to their terminal and requires 123 employees to operate.¹⁰⁶ In 2010, the airport hosted a competition to nickname the system, and it is now known as “the plane train.”¹⁰⁷ Jackson had the foresight to rename the airport as an international airport before the international terminal even existed.¹⁰⁸ By 1998, two years after the Centennial Olympic Games, Atlanta earned the title of the world’s busiest airport after seeing 73.5 million passengers that year, a record it maintains to this day.¹⁰⁹

After Shirley Franklin’s election in 2002 (the fourth consecutive Black mayor and mayor until 2010), she met with Mayor Jackson, and he emphasized protecting the airport at all costs. After Jackson passed away in 2003, Mayor Franklin spearheaded the effort to add Jackson’s name to the airport, but race issues quickly became evident. Some did not want William B. Hartsfield’s name removed, so they reached a compromise.¹¹⁰ Atlanta City Council officially passed the legislation to rename the airport as the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in October 2003, “as a testament to two of the city’s

¹⁰⁶ Jennifer Ogunsola, “The Plane Train: Getting You There Since 1980,” Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, September 26, 2018, <https://www.atl.com/the-plane-train-getting-you-there-since-1980/>.

¹⁰⁷ Chuck Miller, “The Plane Train’s Plain Name,” *The Southeastern Railway Museum* (blog), July 29, 2022, <https://www.train-museum.org/2022/07/29/the-plane-trains-plain-name/>.

¹⁰⁸ “Shirley Franklin Interview,” *Maynard: The Man, the Politician, the Gamechanger* directed by Samuel Pollard (2018).

¹⁰⁹ Hannah Palmer, *Flight Path: A Search for Roots beneath the World's Busiest Airport* (Hub City Press, 2017), 33; “History of ATL,” Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, accessed December 1, 2024. <https://www.atl.com/about-atl/history-of-atl/#1458248526374-0f3690b5-d8c3>.

¹¹⁰ Kelly Yamanouchi, “Hartsfield-Jackson’s international terminal turns 10 with turbulence,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 15, 2022, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-airport-blog/hartsfield-jacksons-international-terminal-turns-10-with-turbulence/K4YEA4OJTNAZ3MDF4DOMVHVBL/>.

greatest leaders.”¹¹¹ This move confirmed the airport as part of Jackson’s legacy. To this day, the airport is probably the best metaphor and stage for Atlanta’s biracial coalition politics and Georgia politics as a whole. In 2019, the State attempted to take over control of the airport, which had always been controlled by the City of Atlanta. Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, the sixth consecutive Black mayor, called it theft from the people of Atlanta.¹¹² The airport serves as a symbol of Black power and entrepreneurship in the city, dating back to the opening of airport lounges owned by the Paschal brothers’ in the 1980s. Republican lawmakers justified this attempt by saying they were worried about corruption and misuse of airport revenue and emphasized that it nothing to do with race. This was just another instance of a decades-long battle between Atlanta politicians and Georgia politicians in the form of the governor’s office and state legislature. Georgia’s governor’s office has always been held by white men, while city hall has one Black mayor after another. Oftentimes, the ambitions of these mayors did not match the ambitions of the governors. The airport is just another battlefield in their war for control. In the eyes of Black Atlantans, Mayor Lance Bottoms’ use of the word “theft” to label the State’s bid attempt was completely justified. Journalist Kelly Yamanouchi summarized it well when she said, “to attack the airport, some say, is to attack the underpinnings of the city’s black power structure.”¹¹³ The bid ultimately failed, but the issue of who is really in charge in Atlanta is still up for debate.

¹¹¹ “History of ATL,” Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, accessed November 28, 2024. <https://www.atl.com/about-atl/history-of-atl/#1458248526374-0f3690b5-d8c3>.

¹¹² Kelly Yamanouchi, “Is Race At Play in Atlanta Airport Takeover Bid?,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.ajc.com/news/race-play-atlanta-airport-takeover-bid/54IPY7AvoHczN7FYDvRa8K/>.

¹¹³ Kelly Yamanouchi, “Is Race At Play in Atlanta Airport Takeover Bid?,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 30, 2019.

However, the continuous expansion of the airport comes with consequences most deeply felt by Atlanta's Black and working-class white communities. In her 2017 memoir, *Flight Path: A Search for Roots Beneath the World's Busiest Airport*, white Atlantan Hannah Palmer details her life growing up near the airport. All three of the homes she lived in as a child were torn down for the expansion of the airport.¹¹⁴ She explains they were "transitional neighborhoods" or cities like Forest Park and East Point that had gone from white to majority Black. As renters in Mountain View, her family received \$7,000 to relocate for airport construction in 1980. This represented the experiences of many white middle-class families who lived in the path of the airport. This, of course, fueled white middle-class residents' resentment against Jackson. Palmer writes, "the deposed, white middle class could only look on from the suburbs as Jackson's monumental accomplishments and suspect corruption."¹¹⁵ It comes as no shock that the success of a Black man would be viewed as corruption. So, no matter their class status, it seemed like white Atlantans had one reason or another to be upset at Jackson. At the same time that white residents were displaced in Mountain View, Black residents were pushed out of Funkytown (called Plunkett Town by white residents), a community that dated back to the 1930s. Black or white, both communities were renamed and erased from the record.¹¹⁶

The second home that Palmer lived in on Barnett Road, one mile from the airport, is now Air Logistics Center II, one of the airport's communications towers. Not far from

¹¹⁴ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 51-53.

¹¹⁶ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 180.

there lay a Black community in Forest Park called Rosetown. With the opening of the new terminal in 1980, residents were subject to the constant roar of aviation engines due to double the number of flights arriving and departing from the airport.¹¹⁷ Homes purchased by the airport didn't even go towards "good" uses. For example, in 1984, a Chuck Norris film blew up an entire neighborhood of homes owned by the airport.¹¹⁸ Palmer's third home was a Sargent Home, a type of home built in 1941 for soldiers returning home during WWII. This community of blue-collar workers saw over 700,000 flights arrive and depart out of Atlanta over their homes in Forest Park. The noise was so deafening that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) started a noise mitigation program. By 1989, eligible families could get new doors, windows, and installation installed in their homes in exchange for their air rights. Families had to sign a document stopping them from interfering with aviation by doing something as simple as planting trees or installing lights on their own properties. This ultimately protected the airport from liability.¹¹⁹ Palmer's home was just outside the eligible zone, but she recalls "the oppressive roar of descending jets interrupted phone calls and tv."¹²⁰ She watched as her neighbors sold to commercial developers and opened a Texaco gas station. This changed their address from residential to commercial, an economic benefit for the city. Palmer lived with the gas station lights for six years before moving out to attend Agnes Scott College. When her dad wanted to sell the home, it got no attention, so he had to work

¹¹⁷ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 81.

¹¹⁸ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 126.

¹¹⁹ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 96-97.

¹²⁰ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 97.

with two other homeowners to sell their homes for commercial use. This became home to a CVS pharmacy.¹²¹ In a country where home ownership is revered, Palmer's story tells us that buying is way more complicated than just the purchase; location is everything. It also tells us the little known costs of the world's busiest airport.

The Atlanta airport also contains a public housing story. Blair Village, a majority white public housing project opened in 1951, was even bigger than Techwood and funded by money from the FHA. White, blue-collar workers held jobs in nearby Ford and General Motors plants. But when the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964, white residents refused to integrate and let it deteriorate instead. By 1979, the NPU program, created by Jackson, called for Blair's demolition. Its 1,000 units were 68% vacant. Many residents were driven out due to the constant airport noise. White residents fled to Clayton County and Black residents moved to southwest Atlanta into homes newly empty due to white flight. Another public housing complex called Gilbert Gardens, home to 220 units in the path of the airport, was purchased by AHA in 2004 and demolished.¹²² Historic preservation is one of only the reasons that neighborhoods in the shadows of the airport are not completely and totally destroyed. In 1978, the College Park Historical Society was founded. They managed to get 850 homes and the Main Street corridor registered on the National Register for Historic Places. This is one of the largest historic districts in the state. They also managed to prevent flight vectors that would increase air traffic over those homes.¹²³

¹²¹ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 100-101.

¹²² Palmer, *Flight Path*, 182-187.

¹²³ Palmer, *Flight Path*, 125.

Atlanta's Hartsfield Jackson Airport represents a complicated tale. On the one hand, the airport is the largest employer in the state of Georgia and that many of those employees are Black. The airport represents Black power in the city of Atlanta and has done so for decades. On the other hand, the airport caused hundreds to be displaced from their homes due to a variety of factors: noise levels from constant flights, predatory pressure to sell for commercial purposes, and the changing of neighborhoods from white to Black due to white flight. The airport is also a story complicated by race and class. Thus, there are endless unspoken costs in the name of upholding Atlanta's reputation as an international city. Time and time again, Atlanta valued its reputation over its residents.

The Georgia World Congress Center is another venue that symbolized how tourism worked in Atlanta. From the beginning, white business elites did the best they could to counteract the efforts of the Black elite in tourism. White elites did not think they would get public support to build the convention center, so they circumvented the public and requested \$35 million from city government to build the center. They had to convince state politicians that the investment in Atlanta was worth it, as they were sometimes hostile to the intentions of the capital city. Nonetheless, city government approved the funds in 1974. The convention center opened two years later, and within five years, the venue was hosting over one million visitors per year. Operations were monitored by the state, once again pushing out city government and Black voices. White elites also invested in building the Omni Hotel, which would eventually become part of the CNN Center, one of Atlanta's biggest tourism destinations created by Ted Turner. The Peachtree Westin Plaza (1976) and Hilton Atlanta, which tower over Atlanta's

skyline today, were also built during this time.¹²⁴ Architect John Portman and developer built not only the Westin but the Hyatt Regency (1967) as well.¹²⁵ This began a pattern in which Atlanta's white business elites successfully pushed the needs of Black Atlantans and its leaders to the periphery. They were no longer reliant on the city's Black voters to achieve their goals. All of this culminated in bringing the Olympics to Atlanta in 1996.



Figure Eighteen: The rapidly expanding Atlanta skyline in 1976. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center

Finally, consistent with his cross-racial coalition strategies, Mayor Jackson worked to preserve two of Atlanta's most notable tourist sights: the Fox Theatre and the Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama. Masons built the Fox Theatre on the brink of the Great Depression. They could not afford to operate it, so they decided to sell it to William Fox, who owned a chain of movie theaters. It opened on Christmas Day of 1929. The theatre went bankrupt but managed to survive the Depression after it was purchased by Paramount Pictures in 1935. Over the years the theatre fell into decay, and by 1974,

¹²⁴ Newman, *Southern Hospitality*, 195-196.

¹²⁵ "John Portman: Atlanta in 50 Objects," Atlanta History Center, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/exhibitions/atlanta-in-50-objects/7677-2/>.

Southern Bell offered to purchase it and turn it into their corporate headquarters. Historic preservation advocates could not stand the idea of the theatre's destruction, so they formed the Atlanta Landmarks Inc., which fundraised the money to buy the theater and place it on the National Register of Historic Places. By 1977, it was again a thriving business.¹²⁶

Jackson recalls living in a segregated Atlanta in the 1950s and dating a girl who wanted to see a show at the Fox. As was custom in the Jim Crow South, Black people had to enter from the side of the building and navigate several flights of steps if they wanted to see a show. Jackson, however, came from a family who taught him not to bow to the rules of the segregationist south. Jackson refused to see the movie at the theatre, but he did pick up his date, drop her off to see the show, and then returned her safely back home. Needless to say, their relationship did not work out. But in his first term as mayor, the permit to approve the demolition of the Fox came across his desk. Jackson refused to sign it, saying "this magnificent theatre which we've preserved, and which it fell in my lap, by the way, to save as mayor of Atlanta...there was great pressure on us by the new owners of that property to tear it down. They wanted to build another building there. So, we saved the Fox Theatre."¹²⁷ Thanks to the combined power of historic preservation and a mayor who seemed committed to preserving the city's historic sites, the theatre was

¹²⁶ Ren Davis, "Atlanta's 'Fabulous' Fox Theatre," American Historical Association, December 1, 2006, <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/atlantas-fabulous-fox-theatre/>.

¹²⁷ Interview with Maynard Jackson" by Jacqueline Shearer, Washington University in St. Louis, October 24, 1988), <http://repository.wustl.edu/concern/videos/v692tb34h>.

saved. Today, the theatre sees 750,000 visitors a year and hosts over 300 performances.¹²⁸



Figure Nineteen: The Fox Theatre opened on Christmas Day in 1929. Photo Courtesy of the Fox Theatre Archives.

The Cyclorama, a 360-degree painting depicting the Union victory at the Battle of Atlanta, first debuted in Atlanta in 1892, but with certain notable changes. To appeal to a southern audience, the painting was changed so that the Confederates appeared the victor. Like the Fox Theatre, the painting was costly to maintain and eventually fell into a state of deterioration. Low visitor numbers and lack of a proper display space also proved an issue. Mayor Jackson couldn't stand the idea of the painting wasting away, so he stepped

¹²⁸ "Fabulous Fox Theatre," Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau, June 29, 2024, <https://discoveratlanta.com/things-to-do/arts-culture/fox-theatre/>.

in, saying “it was a battle that helped free my ancestors and I’ll make sure that depiction is saved.”¹²⁹ With donations and funds from the city, \$11 million was spent to restore the painting and retrofit the building to better accommodate its massive size. It reopened in 1982.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, the same issues continued to plague the Cyclorama. Eventually, the Atlanta History Center and Mayor Kasim Reed (Atlanta’s fifth Black mayor) stepped up with a \$35 million fundraising campaign that moved the painting from its Grant Park location to the Atlanta History Center’s Buckhead campus, restoring it to its former glory and offering a fresh interpretation on the history of race and the Civil War in the city of Atlanta. It debuted at AHC in 2019.¹³¹ Visitors start with a 12 minute, 360-view video that tells the true story of the painting before ascending to the painting on an escalator. In this fully immersive experience, visitors hear the echo of Maynard Jackson’s voice as he explains why he worked to save it.¹³²

¹²⁹ Jim Auchmuty, “Redeeming the Cyclorama: Why the Century-Old Attraction Is Anything but a Monument to the Confederacy,” *Atlanta Magazine*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/redeeming-the-cyclorama-why-the-century-old-attraction-is-anything-but-a-monument-to-the-confederacy/>.

¹³⁰ Jim Auchmuty, “Redeeming the Cyclorama,” *Atlanta Magazine*, February 15, 2019.

¹³¹ “Cyclorama: The Big Picture Press Page,” *Atlanta History Center*, February 13, 2024, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/about-us/press-room/cyclorama-the-big-picture-press-page/>.

¹³² This is based on my first visit to the Cyclorama as a first-semester public history graduate student taking museum studies courses at AHC in 2019. I didn’t know at the time that I would end up writing my dissertation on Jackson and Atlanta’s Black mayors, but now, it feels like kismet.



Figure Twenty: The Cyclorama during the restoration process before it reopened to the public in 2019. Photo Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

Jackson's efforts to restore the Fox Theatre and the Cyclorama do raise a few questions. Why would he work to preserve a theatre that, because of his race, he had limited access to as a kid? Why would he care about a painting that for so long showed the Confederacy as the victors? I believe there are several reasons. One, in order to be an international city, there needs to be attractive sights for people to see and do. Both of these attractions offered the city opportunities for tourism revenue. Two, Jackson might have wanted to laugh in the faces of those who tried to control the movement of Black Atlantans through segregation. Every part of the city could be for Black Atlantans. Third, Jackson was a history major at Morehouse.¹³³ He could not just stand by and let historical

¹³³ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 52.

sites across the city get destroyed. In this manner, Jackson acted as a public historian to ensure that history, no matter how flawed, is available to the general public.

Queer Activism in Georgia

In the 1970s, Atlanta saw a burgeoning scene of drag, disco, and gay bars. As vice-mayor, Maynard Jackson approved the license for the opening of the Sweet Gum Head, which soon became one of Atlanta's most notorious drag clubs. The club attracted talent from all over the country, and one of their drag queens even dressed as Jackson.¹³⁴ From the very beginning of his first administration, Jackson was in conversation with the queer community and made it known that his administration wanted equality for all, including queer Atlantans.¹³⁵ Bill Smith was appointed to the Community Relations Commission (CRC) as a representative for the queer community. The job of this commission, which was created in the 1960s to coordinate integration efforts, was to get input from city representatives.¹³⁶ Queer activists worked with Jackson on a number of action items, including training police not to use harmful language in their interactions with gay people, helping strike down Georgia's sodomy laws, and creating a gay rights ordinance. Jackson also worked with Smith and the CRC to stop paddy wagon raids, which rounded up gay men and arrested them in mass at gay clubs.¹³⁷ However, his most striking act was the declaration of Gay Pride Day in 1976.

¹³⁴ Martin Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head: Drag, Drugs, Disco, and Atlanta's Gay Revolution* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2021), 229.

¹³⁵ Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head*, 185.

¹³⁶ Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head*, 135.

¹³⁷ Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head*, 267.

This served as a way for Jackson to garner votes from the queer community simultaneously challenging conservative naysayers. On June 18, 1976, he went on local conservative radio to correct a host who claimed that Jackson had declared Gay Pride Week. He declared Gay Pride Day and then signed the proclamation live on air. In response, a group called The Citizens for a Decent Atlanta, created by seven white businessmen, aired their grievances publicly and created an ad campaign against the proclamation, galvanizing conservatives to flood city hall with hate mail.¹³⁸ A letter sent from the Moreland Avenue Church of Christ said the following: “according to your rational your action was intended to express civil liberties; but we feel that you erred by giving recognition, and in this instance, dignity to sinful and illegal sexual activities. It is our judgement that your action tended to encourage sexual perversion and immorality.”¹³⁹ This was just one of many. Queer Atlantans, however, were celebrating. Jackson refused to take back the proclamation, but he did say that “the city’s proclamation does not condone homosexuality. It supports the rights of a group of Atlanta’s citizens to seek public discussion and legislative action. Georgia law is very specific in prohibiting homosexual acts and the city of Atlanta shall enforce that. Police officials however will not harass gay people who are not engaged in illegal acts.”¹⁴⁰ On June 26th, Gay Pride

¹³⁸ Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head*, 272-273.

¹³⁹ Jack Kyle et al, “Letter to Honorable Maynard Jackson,” *Moreland Avenue Church of Christ*, (Atlanta, Georgia, July 21, 1976), Box 56, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁴⁰ John Head, “Statement by Mayor Maynard Jackson,” *City of Atlanta Office of the Mayor*, Atlanta, Georgia, June 25, 1976, Box 56, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

Day went forward with a parade and rally ending in Piedmont Park. There were over 500 participants. Eventually, Jackson realized what an unpopular political move the entire incident had been, so one year later, he renamed Gay Pride Day to Civil Liberties Day. According to his office, it was meant to encompass the “civil rights and liberties of all Atlantans whose idea of race, religion, or lifestyle may differ greatly from those we individually choose.”¹⁴¹



Figure Twenty-One: Atlanta Gay Pride Parade in 1977 led by the Atlanta Gay Rights Alliance. Courtesy of Georgia State University Library

This name change revealed that Jackson was still a politically shrewd, heteronormative man of his times. Journalist and historian Martin Padgett summarizes it well: “too radical for some, not radical enough for others, Jackson practiced pitch-perfect

¹⁴¹ Maynard Jackson, “Proclamation,” *City of Atlanta Office of the Mayor*, Atlanta, Georgia, 1977, Box 56, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

politics.”¹⁴² Jackson built a good relationship with the queer community, but he still needed mainstream white votes in order to be re-elected. Queer activists were thankful for his support, but they were not without their criticisms of him. A journalist from *The Advocate* called Jackson out for abandoning the fight for queer rights in order to get the votes of the white middle class. Jackson felt that he had taken his support as far as possible at the time. For many, this was not far enough.¹⁴³ This situation reveals how difficult it can be to be a positive ally for the queer community. Considering the fact that the city of Atlanta today is one of the queerest places in the south, it’s worth including the story of Atlanta’s queer activists in relation to Jackson.¹⁴⁴ I additionally wanted to deny the notion that queer people do not live in the South and instead choose to leave for more accepting cities. Many make the conscious choice to stay here and not only survive, but thrive. Today, Atlanta is a queer Black Mecca. Jackson deserves credit for ushering forward queer rights in the state.

Black Progress: Myth or Reality?

This was the theme and guiding question of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Official’s (GABEO) June 1997 conference in Brunswick, Georgia. This gathering of Black elected officials felt especially relevant as politicians across the state geared up for the 1980 election cycle. Mayor Jackson sent a letter across the state, urging members to attend the conference, saying “we must unite to be successful in registering

¹⁴² Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head*, 274

¹⁴³ Padgett, *A Night At The Sweet Gum Head*, 242.

¹⁴⁴ “And America’s Gayest City Is ... Atlanta?,” *National Public Radio All Things Considered*, WABE Atlanta, January 22, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/22/122867548/and-americas-gayest-city-is-atlanta>.

the thousands of unregistered black voters in our State; to mobilize and get to the polls all who are registered; to reclaim all the land taken illegally from our people; to stop the Klan; to pressure Government to deliver for Black people and poor people white and black; and to combat attacks on Black Officials where they are unjustly accused.”¹⁴⁵

This question seemed particularly apt in Georgia because Atlanta had a Black mayor, a Black public safety commissioner, and a Black city council president. This was progress, but at the same time, Georgia lost its Black congressman. Also, the number of Black elected officials did not come anywhere close to being representative of the population of Black Georgians. This conference served as an opportunity for elected officials to contemplate methods for continued Black political success and representation in government.¹⁴⁶ This question posed in 1977, of whether Black progress is a myth or reality, is one we are still grappling with today in the twenty-first century U.S., especially in the wake of the election of Barack Obama. Georgia has not yet had a Black governor, and there have only ever been five Black governors in U.S. history.¹⁴⁷ The campaign of Stacey Abrams in 2018 and 2022 seemed surprising to some, but it follows long-running trends in Georgia politics. It encompassed a battle between state and city politics. It demonstrated the attempts of Black politicians in Georgia to make headway in a political climate that keeps rewriting district lines to stop Black people from voting.

¹⁴⁵ Maynard Jackson, Letter to GABEO Member, *City of Atlanta*, Atlanta, Georgia, June 7, 1979, Box 57, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁴⁶ Maynard Jackson, Letter to GABEO Member, *City of Atlanta*, Atlanta, Georgia, June 7, 1979, Box 57, Series B, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁴⁷ Cheyanne Daniels, “Only three Black governors have ever been elected in US history,” *The Hill*, November 23, 2022, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/3747228-only-three-black-governors-have-ever-been-elected-in-us-history/>.

Jackson paved the way for so many politicians, including Andrew Young and Shirley Franklin. At the same time, he had many critics and a lot of groups to appease. He dealt with the expectations of Atlanta's Black elite, white business elites, the white working and middle class, as well as poor and working-class Black Atlantans. He accomplished much in his time as mayor: the expansion of the airport and public transit, the investment in Atlanta as a tourist destination, and the first implementation of solutions to tackle the ongoing problems of public housing. But many of these issues would endure into the administrations of Young and persisted during Jackson's third term. Sometimes he succeeded in being different from the Black leaders of Atlanta who preceded him, and sometimes he failed. Jackson often did what he thought benefited the entire Black community, but many of his decisions were informed by his own elite upbringing. Being mayor meant making decisions on behalf of the poor and working-class residents that did not always benefit them. Reflecting on his experience Jackson says,

As mayor, what I wanted to do was to lead us, not just Black people, but all people, Black and White, into an era where we truly could begin to point at progress, not just for a few people but systemic progress. Some may benefit more than others at first, but after a while, when the system begins to work, large numbers of people are benefited. And that was what I wanted to do. And we did so. But I have the scars, to prove that it was not easy.¹⁴⁸

The unequal access to progress meant that Black Atlantans, across all classes, bared scars, as well.

¹⁴⁸ Maynard Jackson, interview by Jacqueline Shearer, October 24, 1988, Washington University in St. Louis, <http://repository.wustl.edu/concern/videos/v692tb34h>.

CHAPTER 3

THINKING WORLDWIDE: ANDREW YOUNG AND THE LEGACY OF ATLANTA'S MAYORSHIP

When Andrew Young became mayor in 1982, he became the second Black mayor of Atlanta, while Maynard Jackson became the first Black mayor of a major city to pass his office to another Black candidate. However, these men were significantly different in the ways they sought to govern the city. Their approaches to elevating Atlanta's international reputation and its Black residents also differed. Jackson came into office with some government experience, having served as vice-mayor, but Young assumed his office with a decorated resume. A well-known civil rights leader and Christian missionary in his younger years, Young worked alongside people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and had been advocating for equal voting rights for Black Americans since the 1960s. He then served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to 1977, and President Carter appointed him ambassador to the United Nations in recognition of his experience and political skills.

Because of this decorated resume, many Black people doubted Young's decision to run for office. They worried that too much of his attention would be focused abroad rather than at home in Atlanta. While they were able to overcome these hesitations and get him elected, this critique of Young's administration remained. In addition, Young believed that the keys to Black equality laid in changing the demographics of the city and

creating a new Black south. He also “believed that the organic evolving relationships between whites and blacks were essential to changing the South.”¹ However, like Jackson, Young faced a city and decade in transition. The 1980s were a turbulent time across the United States, but especially in Atlanta. Young’s administration faced rising unemployment for Black Atlantans, a drug epidemic, increasing crime rates, a funding crisis, and continued pressure to grow Atlanta’s image on the international stage. Also, like Jackson, Young faced the divided expectations of Atlanta’s white elites and Black Atlantans. Unfortunately, in order to maintain the decades-long alliance between whites and Blacks in city government, Young made decisions to the detriment of Atlanta’s poor and working-class Black people.

For decades, Atlanta politicked under a biracial coalition. Mayor Jackson’s use of affirmative action in city contracts cemented Jackson as the “Black people’s mayor” in the eyes of white Atlantans. They failed to see the many compromises Mayor Jackson made that did not support poor and working-class Black Atlantans. For example, during the sanitation workers strike of 1977, he undercut Black labor priorities.² In order to appease those he angered, Jackson took a more conservative approach and tried to steer off the path of expected collaboration, but still couldn’t take it as far as he might have wanted. Upon election, Young’s administration attempted to right the ship to better reflect decades of politics by adopting the Atlanta style of a biracial coalition.³ And even

¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 13

² Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 85-89.

³ Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight*, 14.

though Young did not use the same terminology, his ideas reflected those of his elders: the notion of respectability and racial uplift as the best way to achieve Black equality.

Andrew Young was born to a rising middle-class family in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1932. His mother was a schoolteacher, and his father was a dentist. They were both committed members of the Congregational Christian churches of New England and raised their kids to be steadfast in their faith.⁴ Young spent summers in the rural south. During their travels, his father taught him not to fear white Southerners.⁵ He preached respectability and lectured Young on presenting the best version of himself through education, community engagement, and religion.⁶ To further instill these beliefs, Young was sent to Gilbert Academy, a prep school in New Orleans for Black children. There, students learned the teachings of Booker T. Washington and were pushed towards a life of service to others. Young recalls being uncomfortable with his separation from poor and working-class Black New Orleanians, many of whom he called friends.⁷ He went on to earn degrees from Howard University and Hartford Seminary, firmly securing his place among the Black bourgeois.⁸ From early on in his life, Young operated from a social position more privileged than his poor and working-class Black counterparts. As a Black man with a lighter complexion, he held even more privilege, as his positions were

⁴ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (Harper Collins, 1996), 9.

⁵ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 15.

⁶ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 26.

⁷ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 30-32.

⁸ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 44.

often more respected than those of his darker counterparts.⁹ Yet, like the majority of Black people living in the Jim Crow South, racism touched his life regardless.¹⁰ These lessons in faith, humanity, class status, and the complicated layers of racism stuck with Young throughout the rest of his life and his entire political career.



Figure Twenty-Two: Andrew Young, his wife Jean, and their daughters Andrea and Lisa in 1955. Photo Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution

Early on in his advocacy work, Young encountered white missionaries who changed his life forever. At a church conference in Texas, he met white missionaries whose religious beliefs transcended racism against Black Americans. This encouraged

⁹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 133.

¹⁰ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 18.

Young to place religion at the center of his advocacy work. He hoped that racial reconciliation was possible through Christianity.¹¹ He realized he was more interested in social action than working to save souls from damnation in the church.¹² With this in mind, in 1961, he decided to move his wife Jean and daughters Andrea, Lisa, and Paula from New York to the front line of the civil rights movement in Atlanta.¹³ The growing family quickly settled in west Atlanta, home of HBCUs and affluent Black Atlantans. As an organizer in the SCLC, Young established citizenship schools which offered adult education courses for rural Black citizens across the South. He worked alongside Black women like Fannie Lou Hammer, Septima Clark, and Vera Pugees, whose “dedication and sacrifices made the Southern civil rights movement possible.”¹⁴ At the same time, he worked with famous Black Baptist preachers in the SCLC like MLK Jr. and Ralph Abernathy.¹⁵ The Birmingham campaign not only cemented the reputation of the SCLC, but the politics and activism of Young.

In December 1962, SCLC leadership began planning a dramatic direct-action protest. Young offered to contact the white business leaders of Birmingham through his church contacts. According to Young, “my idea was that we needed to begin talking early, before the polarization started and to keep talking to speed up the process of reconciliation. My father taught me that putting white people at ease was a survival skill

¹¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 131-132.

¹² Young, *An Easy Burden*, 101.

¹³ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 129.

¹⁴ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 138-143.

¹⁵ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 138, 152, 374.

that signaled my superior intellect rather than inferior social status.”¹⁶ This strategy of working with local white citizens was a hallmark feature of Andrew Young’s politics. His strongest and most radical critics often emphasized how his methods of advocacy put poor Blacks at a disadvantage and called his methods accommodationist. In the eyes of white moderate politicians, Young’s ideas seemed especially amenable. Therefore, when Young organized in small rural Black communities, he operated at a disadvantage. Local residents viewed him as an elitist because of his education, lighter skin, and willingness to work with local white residents. Meanwhile, rural southern Black residents existed in a constant state of fear at the hands of white supremacist violence. They certainly did not have the same access to education that Young had access to throughout his life.¹⁷

Young believed white Birmingham residents were not bad people, but people in a bad situation, and essentially let them off the hook.¹⁸ White residents had two choices: give into the demands of civil rights activism and face the wrath of white supremacists, or do nothing and be subject to the scrutiny of the national press covering the movement.¹⁹ Reflecting on the situation, Young emphasized that “we are not fighting white people, we are fighting the system of segregation. We could kill white people in Birmingham, but the system of segregation would prevail and maybe even be strengthened. But if we dare to love all people, even white people who fear us, what happens? Perhaps we can put an end to the system which is hurting us both-black and white.”²⁰ He continued to harbor

¹⁶ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 190.

¹⁷ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 133.

¹⁸ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 204.

¹⁹ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 242.

²⁰ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 219.

optimism about the reconciliation between Black and white southerners. This belief hallmarks his entire career. By 1963, they achieved the boycott demands: the desegregation of downtown Birmingham, the employment of Black workers at white-only businesses, and the reassurance that Black people registering to vote would not be harassed.²¹ On paper, this seemed like a victory, but in reality, none of these changes occurred overnight, and white resentment had not disappeared.²² The Birmingham campaign cemented Young's brand of activism. At the beginning of his journey, Young operated behind the scenes. He did not love public demonstrations, and although he deeply admired them, he did not go to jail as frequently as King or the future Georgia representative, John Lewis.²³ But as time progressed, Young had no choice but to step out from behind the curtains and into his destiny as a public-facing political figure. He saw working with people as his gift, and he intended to use it through electoral politics.²⁴

²¹ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 242-245.

²² Young, *An Easy Burden*, 248-249.

²³ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 208-211, 520.

²⁴ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 507.



Figure Twenty Three: Andrew Young and Martin Luther King Jr. testify before the Senate in 1966. Courtesy of Georgia Public Broadcasting and the Associated Press

Young's specific vision of Black freedom and equality differed from those of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, the Black Panther Party (BPP), and the infamous slogan of Black Power. In Lowndes County, Alabama, Black residents experienced some of the worst effects of the Jim Crow South throughout the twentieth century, from inadequate educational opportunities, the threat of lynching, and the exploitive experience of being indebted to white Alabamians through sharecropping. In 1965, Lowndes County had over 5,000 eligible Black voters, but not even one person registered because they lived in fear of white retribution. However, by 1966, due to a collaboration between SNCC organizers and brave local activists who refused to have their voices silenced, Lowndes County had over 3,000 registered Black voters.²⁵ In the

²⁵ Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York University Press, 2009), 1, 18, 36.

wake of the Selma voting rights campaign, local white officials did everything they could to discourage Black voters. They even moved voter registration to the county jail. Fed up, Black residents gathered to form the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (LCCMHR). Their goal was to organize Black voters in the county. Soon after, SNCC organizers came to the county with Stokely Carmichael at the helm. SNCC was in search of their next direction, and because of its proximity to Selma, AL, Lowndes County looked like a promising lead.²⁶

One unique part of the Lowndes County movement lay in its utilization of non-traditional leaders. The civil rights movement usually featured Black preachers in the SCLC at the forefront. In Lowndes, Black women like Lillina McGill and outsider youth activists were in charge. They also did not preach nonviolence, but rather embraced armed self-defense. They responded to white violence with their own violence.²⁷ According to historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries, “movement supporters praised the Lord and passed the ammunition without discussion, debate, or the slightest bit of hesitancy.”²⁸ They organized voter registration drives, opened freedom schools, and filed lawsuits to get literacy tests revoked.²⁹ When Carmichael approached local leaders with the idea of putting an independent party on the ballot for the November 1966 general election, they acquiesced and formed LCFO with a Black panther as the logo. This panther, which represented Black strength and dignity and was later co-opted by the Oakland-based

²⁶ Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 44-46, 54.

²⁷ Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 3, 74.

²⁸ Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 103.

²⁹ Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 78, 115.

Black Panther Party, captured worldwide attention.³⁰ In the end, the LCFO got 80% of the Black vote and 42% of the overall vote, signaling their strength.³¹ How did Young respond to all of this? “I found it counterproductive to organize black citizens into a separate political party, particularly one that used a symbol that was certain to frighten and intimidate white people in Lowndes County, just adding insult to injury. Ultimately, blacks and whites in the same community had to be reconciled.”³² Reconciliation was the solution to which Young continuously returned. Also, as much as Young credited the Black women of the movement, he was still a little disgruntled at a movement that focused on non-traditional leaders rather than preachers. Young offered a blistering critique of Black Power:

Black Power was born out of the bitterness and disillusionment that grew from the youth and impatience of SNCC students. Optimistic and naive, they had underestimated the cost and suffering that change required. They truly expected the police, the courts, and the FBI to practice democracy. As ministers who were a few years older, we in SCLC had a more realistic view of the power of sin in individuals and institutions and were more cautious in our struggle and moderate in our expectations. We didn’t expect to change the world with one summer or one campaign, but rather looked to a lifetime of struggle and perhaps losing our lives in the struggle. Martin was uncomfortable with the rhetoric and tone of Black Power, rhetoric with no real pragmatic substance behind it. Black Power was just a chant with no program.³³

Young’s early training in the philosophies of Booker T. Washington are clearly evident. BPP was a step too far for Young. He thought it made Black Americans look worse in the eyes of white America. He worried about the misinterpretation of all of Black America

³⁰ Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 148-153.

³¹ Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 205.

³² Young, *An Easy Burden*, 404.

³³ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 397-398.

because of the actions of a few.³⁴ In his opinion, “the real work of the struggle is not sensational, it does not garner headlines. Black Power was a dead end. It provided emotional release and the illusion of manhood without the content.”³⁵ While this exhibits Young’s more conservative approach to Black freedom, Young also shows his awareness of the myth of the Black monolith. Young’s focus on avoiding the sensational carried throughout his entire political career.

When Young felt ready to leave the SCLC, running for Congress seemed like the next natural step. After all they had done to get the Black vote in the 1960s, he thought that “an active black electorate could preserve the gains the people had won at such a dear price and could become a means for opening up other opportunities, economic especially. In a time of increasing national conservatism, black elected officials could serve as a brake on the tide and become a force for pulling the country back to face the hard realities of oppression, poverty, and racism.”³⁶ His first run for Congress in 1970 offered him lessons that he put toward a second effort in 1972. The first time, Young won the Black vote, becoming the first Black candidate for a congressional seat in the south since Reconstruction, but lost the overall race. He learned he still needed to change his image and reach more voters in between election cycles. For example, under Mayor Massell, Young served as the chair of the Community Relations Commission. They oversaw citizens’ complaints about discrimination and civic issues. Almost immediately, he had to deal with strikes at Nabisco, Sears Roebuck, and the Mead Packing Company over issues

³⁴ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 400.

³⁵ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 404.

³⁶ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 507.

of racial discrimination. He, along with the executive director of the commission, Nat Welch, organized a series of neighborhood hearings for residents to publicly address their concerns. This was Young's test run at dealing with Atlanta-specific issues. This gave him an opportunity to get to know residents on an intimate level, whom he hoped to represent.

The second run almost didn't happen because of Congressional redistricting that affected both Young and Maynard Jackson. Both of their homes had been placed outside of the district. They went to court to ensure that this didn't happen, successfully reincorporating themselves back into the district and pushing conservative white voters to the sixth district. After the case, Black voters accounted for 38% of the vote. This time, they had more data, including a list of every person who voted for Jackson, a list of Democrats, and a list of all the registered Black voters. His campaign also worked to register 20,000 new Black voters.³⁷ Young realized that he needed the people to know more about him. Black and white Atlantans alike saw him as nothing more than "Martin's middle-class assistant,"³⁸ so he spent more time speaking with community leaders. Another essential part of Young's second election was his wife Jean's network of resources.³⁹ Born in Marion, Alabama in 1933 to a mother in education and a father in baking, Jean pursued a career in teaching and children's rights. She received a bachelor's degree in elementary education at Manchester College in 1954 and a master's degree in elementary education from Queens College in 1961. She taught in elementary schools in

³⁷ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 510-514.

³⁸ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 516.

³⁹ Young, *An Easy Burden*, 513-514.

Georgia and Connecticut throughout the 1960s and 1970s. During the height of the civil rights movement, she created educational curriculum for the SCLC Citizenship Schools.⁴⁰ The network Jean had built through her background and extensive personal activist work made a significant difference, and in 1973, Young was elected to the House of Representatives in Georgia's Fifth District by a configuration of older Black elites and white business leaders.



Figure Twenty-Four: U.S. Rep Barbara Jordan and U.S. Rep Andrew Young in March 1975 in Washington D.C. Courtesy of Texas Southern University.

⁴⁰ Cheryl Oestreicher, "Jean Childs Young," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Aug 3, 2020. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/jean-childs-young-1933-1994/>.

In office, Young continued to promote cross-racial solidarity as a means of achieving Black equality. He also got used to the isolation of being a rarity, as he was one of just two Black politicians from the south. He and Texas's Barbara Jordan were the first Black politicians to be elected to Congress since Reconstruction. He became known as a "flip flopper," as he worked with conservative white Republicans in the Georgia caucus in order to better understand their thinking, rather than aligning with the Congressional Black caucus.⁴¹ It seemed Young was making more enemies than friends among Black political thinkers, and at the core of their debate was a lack of agreement on how to achieve Black equality. However, Young did accomplish a lot during his few years in Congress. He obtained funds to build the Chattahoochee Recreation Area, which consisted of parks and recreation areas along the Chattahoochee River.⁴² Many of his accomplishments were adjacent to Jackson's agenda as mayor. He backed Jackson's plans to expand the airport by securing funds for the relocation of I-85. He obtained a \$69.5 million grant for MARTA, which, at the time, was the largest grant ever received by a mass transit system. In the process, he created the subcommittee on Urban Mass Transportation. In a harbinger of his future as mayor, he authored an amendment that called for a public/private partnership to ensure that development happened along transit corridors.⁴³ In theory, these funds helped the areas surrounding MARTA stations thrive.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 136.

⁴² Andrew Young, Harvey Newman, and Andrea Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta* (Mercer University Press, 2016), 62.

⁴³ "Member of Congress, 5th Congressional District of Columbia," Box 211, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁴⁴ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 62.

In reality, supporting the expansion of MARTA and the airport shifted the goal away from aiding local residents and supporting accessibility and towards creating a city for tourists.⁴⁵ For Young and the politicians that preceded him, the ultimate goal always ended up prioritizing how to make Atlanta suitable for outsiders. One more recreation area did not solve the ever-pressing struggles of Black Atlantans.

The presidential election of Georgian Jimmy Carter provided Young an opportunity to work on behalf of Georgia and the U.S. as the ambassador to the United Nations. Carter's administration found strength in advocating for international human rights and bold moves of foreign policy. As ambassador, Young traveled the world from China to England and networked with African leaders. He became known for his ability to strike deals with leaders from all over. This international reputation stuck with him.⁴⁶ Working with an annual budget of \$8 million, he managed U.N. programs for food/agriculture, health, the environment, air safety, and humanitarian assistance.⁴⁷ Young's time as ambassador was cut short after he held an unauthorized meeting with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) observer to the U.N., Zehbi Labib Terzi, in the apartment of the Kuwait ambassador, Abdulla Bishara. President Carter had no choice but to accept Young's resignation, as he was faced with external pressures from Israel who was worried that this was a sign that the U.S. supported the actions of the PLO.

⁴⁵ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 62.

⁴⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 137-139.

⁴⁷ "United States Ambassador to the United Nations," Box 211, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

After a public apology, Young returned to D.C. to start Young Ideas Inc, a non-profit that championed studies and conferences to examine the positionality of the “third world.”⁴⁸ They also championed relationships between the U.S. and developing nations to grow Atlanta’s relationship with the rest of the world.⁴⁹ All of this allowed Young the opportunity to view different conceptions of Blackness abroad. This demonstrates that even before he was mayor, Young’s eyes were turned towards the rest of the world.



Figure Twenty-Five: Ambassador Andrew Young at a UN Press Conference, 1977.
Courtesy of Getty Images.

Is Andy Too Big For the Job?

⁴⁸ “A Secret Meeting And a Very Public Exit at the U.N.,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/08/19/archives/a-secret-meeting-and-a-very-public-exit-at-the-un.html>; Paul Liberman, “Mayor Has World Vision,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 13, 1983, Box 213, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁴⁹ “President, Young Ideas, Inc,” Box 211, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

Why did Andrew Young want to be mayor of Atlanta after serving in such a prominent role at the U.N.? Before the end of Jackson's term, Coretta Scott King (wife of the late MLK Jr.) and Susie LaBord (antipoverty and housing activist) approached Young and encouraged him to run for mayor. They argued that he owed Atlanta's residents for all they had done for him. He trusted both women deeply after their work on his previous campaigns and ultimately decided to run. Despite receiving an endorsement from President Carter, Young still had to overcome many preconceptions before he could be elected.⁵⁰ In September 1980, a little over a year before the election campaign, staffers worried about Andrew Young's reputation. The number one item on an internal memo titled, "Damaging Perceptions to Overcome," looked to dispel rumors of Young working at Urban League:

That Andy is too big for the job; doesn't want it, doesn't care, won't be Atlanta minded, is using the Mayoralty as a stepping stone to something else. Many Blacks reportedly still resent Andy for "abandoning" them when he left Atlanta to assume the U.N. post. His public disclaiming of any interest in the U.L. position may be necessary to prevent the reopening of wounds, as well as the lending of any credence to the perception that Andy is using the Mayoralty to reach something else.⁵¹

Their strategy to combat this perception involved filming a commercial called *Team Atlanta* in order to "play against the damaging perceptions, thereby convincing undecided voters that Andy has more to offer than the press has given him credit for."⁵² This memo

⁵⁰ Jimmy Carter, "Endorsement for Andrew Young As Mayor," Box 211, Series 5, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁵¹ Kelli Questrom, "Damaging Perceptions To Be Overcome," *Andrew Young for Mayor Campaign*, September 19, 1980, Box 211, Series 5, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library Archives.

⁵² Kelli Questrom, "Damaging Perceptions To Be Overcome," *Andrew Young for Mayor Campaign*, September 19, 1980.

reveals that both Young and his staffers knew they were battling to regain the trust of Atlanta's Black voters, especially the poor and working-class voters, who outnumbered members of the Black elite.

In that same memo, the second and fourth items on the list concerned Atlanta's white business community. Item two stated "that Andy can't/won't be able to work with the white dominated downtown business community to bring jobs, improve services."⁵³ Item four stated "that Andy will be the Black people's Mayor, and disregard the needs and presence of the white community."⁵⁴ So, on the one hand, the campaign tried to distance itself from the efforts of Jackson's administration. On the other hand, they worked to satisfy the white elites of Atlanta "in order to facilitate the building of all-city unity and a coalition with business post-election."⁵⁵ With the commercial, Young recommitted to the long running coalition between elite Black and white Atlantans. This embodied his gradual approach to Black equality, just as he had as a U.S. representative. It also continued his Christian missionary-based brand of activism he had practiced since his days at Howard. It reveals how Andrew Young embodied the legacy of the ANVL and other Black elite thought-leaders before him.

The election, which again went to a runoff, revealed racial tensions among Black Atlantans. During the first election on October 6, 1981, Young received 41% of the vote, while his white opponent and State Representative Sidney Marcus received 38% of the

⁵³ Kelli Questrom, "Damaging Perceptions To Be Overcome," *Andrew Young for Mayor Campaign*, September 19, 1980.

⁵⁴ Kelli Questrom, "Damaging Perceptions To Be Overcome," *Andrew Young For Mayor Campaign*, September 19, 1980.

⁵⁵ Kelli Questrom, "Damaging Perceptions To Be Overcome," *Andrew Young For Mayor Campaign*, September 19, 1980.

vote. Just as with Maynard Jackson and Sam Massell, neither candidate reached the 50% threshold.⁵⁶ At the time, Jackson had only increased tensions by calling Black Atlantans working for the Marcus campaign “grinning and shuffling Negroes.” He likely viewed them as traitors, stuck in the ways of the past when Black voters had no choice but white candidates. During the October 28th runoff, Young received 55% of the overall vote.⁵⁷ He received 88% of the Black vote and 10% of the white vote.⁵⁸ Four years later in 1985, voters showed that they trusted Mayor Young by giving him 83% of the vote.⁵⁹ Regardless of the many ways we can critique Young, the Atlanta of today owes a lot to Young’s time in office.

1980s Atlanta and America

Andrew Young came to office at an interesting time economically for both Atlanta and the U.S. Crime was at an all-time high nationwide, and Atlanta regularly reached the top spot on the country’s violent crimes list. The cocaine epidemic aided in driving up crime in Atlanta and across the country. By 1986, the worst of its effects reached Atlanta, disproportionately and painfully affecting the city’s poor Black residents.⁶⁰ Sitting at the heart of the problem was President Reagan’s economic policy,

⁵⁶ Reginald Stuart “Andrew Young Leads Mayoral Vote in Atlanta, Gains Spot in Runoff,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/07/us/andrew-young-leads-mayoral-vote-in-atlanta-gaining-spot-in-a-runoff.html>.

⁵⁷ Reginald Stuart, “Young Elected Mayor of Atlanta,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/28/us/young-is-elected-mayor-of-atlanta.html>.

⁵⁸ Renee Huie, “Press Release: A Study of the 1981 Municipal Election,” Voter Education Project, November 4, 1981, <https://radar.auctr.edu/vep-press-release-november-4-1981>.

⁵⁹ Associated Press, “Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta Wins Easily Over 3 Challenges,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/09/us/mayor-andrew-young-of-atlanta-wins-easily-over-3-challenges.html>.

⁶⁰ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 142.

nicknamed Reaganomics, which called for the use of supply side economics, smaller government, budget cuts, and less interventions into American lives. Theoretically, stagflation can lead to growth in the economy and upward economic mobility for America's poorest residents.⁶¹ In reality, Reaganomics had a negative impact on the nation's poor, especially Black Americans. One year into Reaganomics, more than 9 million Black Americans lived below the poverty line. This represented 35% of all Black Americans. Just a few years prior in 1979, only 7.8 million Black Americans lived below the poverty line. Black politicians and activists, especially the Urban League and the Congressional Black Caucus, vocally protested against the policy. In the words of Urban League president Vernon Jordan, Reaganomics "will ensure that some poor people will go under."⁶² Without job prospects, some of Atlanta's poor Black residents turned to petty crime in order to survive and drugs as a means of escape.⁶³

Black politicians did not know how to respond to the drug epidemic. They worried that speaking about it could paint Black people in a negative light. This debate about what to do did, ironically, solidify the lines between the rising Black middle class and poor Black Americans. The former sought to separate themselves from the positions of the poor, denoting them as the drug users, which harkened back to ideas of racial uplift and respectability. While politicians debated what to do and the Black middle class ignored them all together, poor Black residents dealt with the consequences. Raids in poor Black neighborhoods in Atlanta like the McDaniel-Glenn Housing Project led to

⁶¹ Arthur Tolson and Q. R. Hand, "Reaganomics and Black Americans," *The Black Scholar* 16, no. 5 (1985): 37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41067205>.

⁶² Arthur Tolson and Q. R. Hand, "Reaganomics and Black Americans," 39-43.

⁶³ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 143.

increased arrests and the evictions of whole families if someone was suspected of drug dealing. Poor Black people even believed drugs were purposefully funneled into their communities. Cracking down on drugs in the city led to Atlanta's jails eventually running out of space.⁶⁴ Young spent his entire administration addressing these issues while also dealing with a shortage in city funding. City funding went from \$39 million in 1983 to \$9 million by the time Young left office. In order to make up the difference, Young traveled abroad to secure investment in Atlanta. Although it was a move designed to aid the city, critics complained that Young was too big for the city.⁶⁵ While the city needed funding, citizens also needed their mayor. Young faced criticism either way.

Reaganomics was not the only challenge the country faced. In 1981, the first five cases of AIDS were reported in Los Angeles, and by the end of the year, there were 121 reported deaths. In 1983, scientists learned that AIDS was caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Because the disease had initially spread rapidly through the gay male community, the media sensationalized the virus and nicknamed it the "gay disease." This marginalization and stigmatization meant that people sick with the virus could not get the healthcare they needed without being demonized.⁶⁶ In Atlanta, the news media was determined to make AIDS a national issue and not a southern or local issue.⁶⁷ However, by 1985, the local paper continued to refer to it as "the gay disease." When Lester Maddox, a white straight man and one of the most well-known segregationist

⁶⁴ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 148.

⁶⁵ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 145.

⁶⁶ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2011), 224-225.

⁶⁷ John Howard, ed., *Carryin On in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York University Press, 1997), 333-335.

governors in state history, faced the possibility of testing positive for the virus, the news suddenly paid attention. From there, the newspaper showed the white faces of the disease, ignoring the Black gay men impacted at an alarmingly higher rate.⁶⁸ Finally, organizations started to form on the state and national levels to begin to address the lack of both federal and local help. The group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which had an Atlanta chapter, marched to “demand the basic health care, civil rights, legal protections, and respect that Americans were guaranteed under the Constitution.”⁶⁹ As a result, Young’s administration began to deal with ensuring proper healthcare networks, the constraints of budgets, prejudices coming from a variety of voices, and the demands of activists pleading for the entire country to do more.

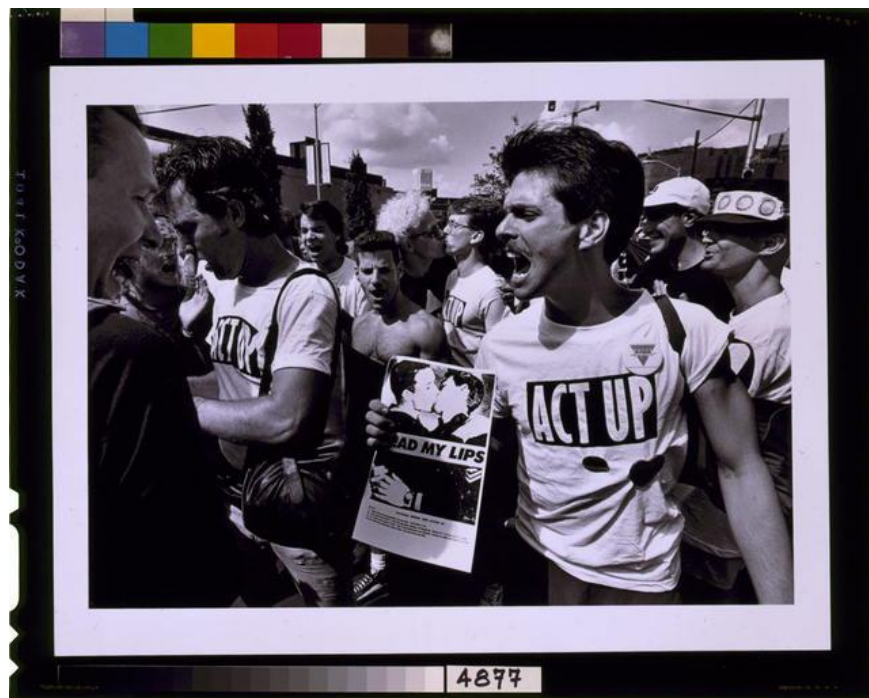


Figure Twenty-Six: ACT UP Protest Atlanta, 1988. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

⁶⁸ John Howard, ed., *Carryin On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, 354-356.

⁶⁹ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 231.

Young also tackled prostitution head-on. Prostitution represented the culmination of city and countrywide issues, including drugs, the AIDS epidemic, homosexuality, and the overcriminalization of Black neighborhoods. In the eyes of the city, prostitution was linked to rampant drugs and robbery. Framing prostitution as a civil rights issue, Young formed an official Task Force on Prostitution in 1986. They created a report of recommendations that suggested “that the City direct its resources towards enforcing the laws on prostitution in a manner that is efficient and yields the greatest public good.”⁷⁰ Surprising some, Young made sure at least one sex worker was on the task force.⁷¹ While the task force itself could be viewed as radical for its time, some people like Dolores French and members of the group, I’m For H.E.R.E. (Hooking Is Real Employment), believed the group's recommendations needed some work. The task force recommended that sex workers choose the area they worked in; French responded that they were often pushed into certain areas by law enforcement. She also made the valid point that pushing prostitution to one section of the city would not stop it from spreading into other areas. This also begged the question of what “picking and choosing” certain neighborhoods said about the city’s opinion on those neighborhoods. The task force also suggested the enforcement of prostitution laws, specifically on those working the streets as opposed to the bars. The majority of those workers were Black. Dolores accused the task force of spreading misinformation, as they tried to link prostitution to the spread of AIDS in

⁷⁰ Mayor’s Task Force on Prostitution, “Summary: Recommendations of the Mayor’s Task Force on Prostitution,” March 15, 1986, Box 277, Folder 12, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁷¹ Dolores French, “Re: Mayor’s Task Force on Prostitution,” *Letter to the Office of the Mayor*, March 19, 1986, Box 277, Folder 12, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

homosexual communities, when no such evidence existed. Ultimately, French recommended statewide decriminalization of prostitution.⁷² Ultimately, Young's office tried to make progress towards something truly change worthy, at the expense of the lives of the city's poorest Black residents.

Black Americans At Home and Abroad

In the pursuit of making Atlanta an international city and bringing in outsiders, Jackson sought to build up the physical infrastructure of the city by remodeling housing developments, building new hotels, and updating the airport. Young's approach was different. He wanted to use his office to bring Atlanta directly to the rest of the world. As mayor, Young traveled to different countries and "sold" the idea of Atlanta. He even proposed Atlanta develop its own foreign policy.⁷³ In his own words,

Why be an ordinary mayor and look at Atlanta as a local government with no international significance? Since I have traveled to more than 70 countries I have personal friends all over the world. Now these personal friends need the technology that is introduced in the United States and Atlanta. If I can help Atlanta businesses to provide that technology that my friends need, then I would do it.⁷⁴

In this pursuit, Young distanced himself from the work of Jackson and established his own mayoral path. While traveling, Young encountered African dignitaries whom he hoped to convince to invest their ample funds in Atlanta. However, leaving so often left citizens feeling abandoned. As mayor, was his job not to attend to the needs of Black

⁷² Dolores French, "A Brief Written Position That Clearly Defines My Position For Those I Expect Will Ask," March 19, 1986.

⁷³ "Young's Task: Proving He Wants To Run Atlanta," *The Miami Herald*, September 13, 1981, Box 213, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁷⁴ Paul Liberman, "Mayor Has World Vision," Box 213, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

Atlantans at home in America? The crux of this problem served as fodder for the media throughout Young's administrations. Reporter Nathan McCall summarized it well: "Young's zeal for establishing international business ties has been so consuming that he finds it difficult to give much attention to the business of administering a city."⁷⁵ Young tried to defend himself by saying that "there are no problems to speak of in the running of the city. Our streets are paved, we picked up the garbage. It is hard to find a city run better than Atlanta."⁷⁶ Defenders of the administration also argued that Young continued Jackson's efforts of creating more Black millionaires by awarding over \$152 million in business contracts, but that did little to help the poor and homeless Black Atlantans.⁷⁷

Young's comments speak to an administration blind to the needs of those it claimed to aid—the same constituency that elected Young in the first place. Paved streets, free of garbage that was likely picked up by a majority Black sanitation force, was the bare minimum that the mayor's office should be facilitating. This speaks to the idea of Black equality for the select and chosen few; poor and working-class Black Atlantans needn't bother trying. An *Atlanta Journal* article in 1982, appropriately titled, *Stay Home Mayor Young*, said the following: "the mayor ought to reconsider his priorities. His talents are needed here at home."⁷⁸ In 1983, Young led a nine-day expedition to the United Arab Emirates to address their Foreign Ministry. They treated

⁷⁵ Nathan McCall, "Young: Atlanta's Best Traveling Salesman," Box 212, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁷⁶ Nathan McCall, "Young: Atlanta's Best Traveling Salesman," nd.

⁷⁷ Nathan McCall, "Young: Atlanta's Best Traveling Salesman," nd.

⁷⁸ Durwood McCallister, "Stay Home Mayor Young," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 16, 1982, Box 213, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

him with the celebrity status he had achieved as a U.N. ambassador. This marked his sixth trip abroad in the fifteen months he had been in office.⁷⁹ His plan of attracting foreign businesses to Atlanta worked. An article written by Neil Shister, titled “Who Owns Atlanta?” revealed that “Atlanta has become a city owned largely by absentee landlords. With several notable exceptions, most of the prime properties in town are controlled by interests headquartered elsewhere.”⁸⁰ While members of Atlanta’s elite did own real estate, it was hard to keep up with international buyers who could afford \$7 million deals.⁸¹ In addition, during his time in office, Mayor Young facilitated the addition of 33 national and international banks in the city worth \$800 million dollars.⁸²

⁷⁹ Paul Liberman, “Mayor Has World Vision,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 13, 1983.

⁸⁰ Neil Shister, “Who Owns Atlanta?,” Box 211, Series 5, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁸¹ Neil Shister, “Who Owns Atlanta?,” Box 211, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁸² “Why Does Andy Get Such Bad Press?” Box 212, Series 5, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

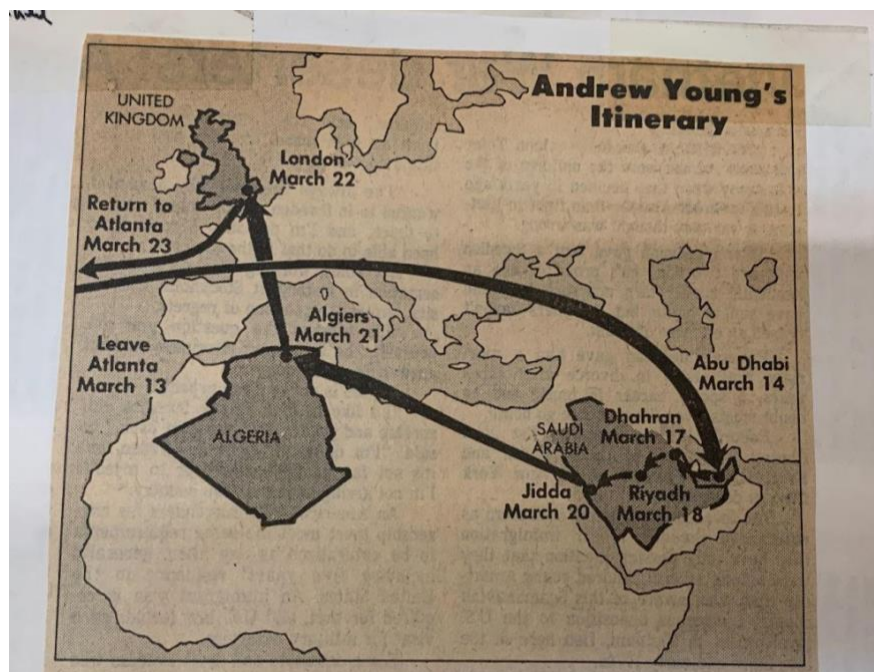


Figure Twenty-Seven: An example of Andrew Young's travels where he leaves Atlanta for a nine day trip abroad in 1983. Photo taken by me and courtesy of the Andrew J. Young Papers at the Auburn Avenue Research Library.

Every time critics used the “gone too much” attack against his administration, Young defended himself with numbers. According to his office, “the city has issued 3,500 licenses for new businesses in the past five years, creating more than 43,000 new jobs within the city limits. At the same time, more than \$52 million has been spent to rehabilitate 6,856 housing units in the city.”⁸³ Young also noted that in a three-year period, “the city has done \$106 million worth of business with more than 378 minority and female-owned businesses representing 30% of the dollar value of all city business conducted during this period.”⁸⁴ Young invested in Atlanta's Black communities for

⁸³ Andrew Young, “The Editors: Draft,” Box 212, Series 5, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁸⁴ Andrew Young, “Response to the Atlanta Journal's Editorial Page of March 21, 1985,” *Office of the Mayor*, March 31, 1985, Box 212, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

altruistic reasons, while simultaneously expecting it to yield political benefits. Historian Andy Newnan argues that “minority business participation and job creation for African Americans were essential factors in allowing Young to support economic development while also retaining political support in the African American community.”⁸⁵ Moves like these ensured Young’s continued success and long-lasting legacy as one of Atlanta’s greatest leaders. Under Young’s leadership, Atlanta was becoming the international city its white and Black boosters dreamed of, but the balance of advocating for an international reputation while working to uplift Black Atlantans was almost impossible to achieve.

Even with this array of criticism about Young’s frequent travels, I would be remiss not to mention the role that racism played in the media coverage of Young. At the end of the day, Young was an example of a Black man in America who achieved the highest levels of political power, previously unreachable for Black Americans. Was his negative media perception by a still majority white news media a matter of jealousy over his well-decorated resume? Young achieved more than some white Americans would accomplish in their lifetime. But how did Young view his southern American Blackness in relation to the perceptions of Blackness that he witnessed abroad? His actions tell us a lot. As U.N. ambassador, Young was a staunch supporter of ending apartheid in South Africa.⁸⁶ One news outlet noted that, as ambassador, he took frequent “swipes at white-controlled governments in black majority African nations.”⁸⁷ Additionally, the creation of

⁸⁵ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 183.

⁸⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 137.

⁸⁷ Ann Marshall Daniels, “At Black Leaders Meet Andrew Young Doing Well, Officials Told,” *Savannah Morning News/Savannah Evening Press*, May 8, 1977, Box 57, Series B, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records.

Young Ideas Inc., which he designed to specifically discuss issues faced by third world countries, speaks to his desire to create change on the continent. It uniquely shows how his eyes often turned toward the diaspora rather than his home.

Young was not the first one to attempt to define American Blackness in relation to the rest of the world. In *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War*, historian Louis Menand discusses the convening of “Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs” in 1956. The fifth gathering of its kind, Black people from around the diaspora, from Europe, the Caribbean, and the African continent, used it as an opportunity to discuss the positions of Blacks across the world. Famous writers such as W.E.B. DuBois, Franz Fanon, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin attended. Unfortunately, the Americans in attendance had a hard time finding their place, as African Americans had never been colonial subjects. Menand points out that for African American delegates, “the difficulty of manifesting solidarity with the delegates from other countries without sacrificing their conviction that their own history and conditions were distinct. For them freedom did not mean independence. It meant full citizenship in the existing political system. They were for integration, not separation. Separation they had.”⁸⁸ Thus, they were forced to ask what it meant to be African American and what their differing experiences meant for their place globally. They had no answer for the meaning of African in African American. Young grappled with this question as ambassador and mayor. It continues to be a question on the minds of African Americans today.

Achievements At Home: Housing and Job Creation

⁸⁸ Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 656.

Although Young's travels were a key focus of the media, at home in Atlanta, he advocated heavily for job creation, maintenance of affordable housing options, and investment into minority businesses, all to the benefit of Atlanta's Black residents. Using job creation as a step towards Black freedom and equality harkened back to Young's days working with MLK Jr.⁸⁹ But these goals could not be funded solely by city money; they were a much bigger problem. Young sought to solve these issues through what he denoted as "public purpose capitalism." In his words,

I call what we do public purpose capitalism. Our public purpose was the airport, the sewer system, Underground Atlanta, the Olympics, and once we define the public purpose then we go to the capitalists who get money, and we work out a deal where they fund what we want. But now we let them not only fund it but we let private contractors build it and manage it-but we set it up. You can do almost anything.⁹⁰

This is how Young justified both his international travels and his need to maintain a relationship between Black elites and the white business community.

What did Young's public purpose capitalism look like on the local level, and did it actually succeed in helping Atlanta's poor Black residents? The answer to this question can be found by looking at the case of Bankhead Courts. Near Bankhead, Young's administration used federal funds and tax incentives for local and international investors to create an industrial park. This park became home to several distribution and light manufacturing companies and created 2,000 new jobs for the community.⁹¹ Young's administration used this model all around the city. But like Jackson, Young could do little

⁸⁹ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 176.

⁹⁰ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 168.

⁹¹ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 177.

to stop national trends in public housing. The transition of the presidency from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election did not favor the conditions of fair housing in this country. Reagan continued policies that limited urban aid and aggressively increased aid for downtown revitalization. Leading the way were major corporations. By 1985, Reagan had cut the Section 8 budget in half and the overall HUD budget by two-thirds. Two years earlier, the Reagan administration passed the Urban and Rural Renewal Act, which halted the construction of both new and rehabilitated Section 8 housing. This left “local housing authorities with a downscaled Section 8 and aging housing projects where refrigerators failed, gas lines still leaked, and vermin reigned.”⁹² In Reagan’s America, the rising tide of conservatism and the New Right meant that a liberal vision of safe and affordable housing for everyone changed to a vision where the responsibility for the conditions of public housing were placed squarely on the fragile shoulders of its residents. In 1986, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) established financial incentives for developers to invest in low-income housing. Therefore, Young’s treatment of Bankhead, where he focused on a public/private partnership between federal funds and private investors, fits into trends from the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁹³

In public, Young aligned his administration with the goals of the AHA. In a January 1988 letter, Young praised them on their 50th anniversary, saying, “the Atlanta Housing Authority has made an extensive investment in the public housing system and continues to strive to remain steadfast and dedicated to its goals of providing safe, decent,

⁹² John F. Bauman, “Jimmy Carter, Patricia Roberts Harris, and Housing Policy in the Age of Limits,” 261.

⁹³ Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise: "Section 8" and the Fate of an American Neighborhood*, (Princeton University Press, 2022), 16.

and sanitary housing. Although the Authority has been plagued by critics of the concept of public housing, its administration, and implementation of new ideas, it has withstood the test of time and is an integral part of the Atlanta community. It merits recognition.”⁹⁴

This letter reads as insensitive. It celebrates a housing authority that was clearly not serving its residents to the best of its abilities. Never giving up on their advocacy, no matter how much the odds (or authorities) were not on their side, various tenant association presidents came together on December 15, 1989. They testified in front of Governor Joe Harris and the Georgia Legislature to the violent crime rates and how close the crime occurred to public housing. This attracted national attention that Mayor Jackson would need to tackle during his third administration.⁹⁵

However, Young did leave a plan in place for Jackson. In July 1989, Young’s office released a report in partnership with the Bureau of Planning and the Department of City Development entitled, “Mayor’s Proposed Citywide Housing Plan.” This report offered suggestions for improving the city’s housing over the next fifteen years. It hoped to encourage affordable homeownership, fair housing laws, mixed income housing, and a plan to rehabilitate public housing.⁹⁶ According to the report, “the implementation of this Citywide Housing Plan will result in the construction of 42,500 and rehabilitation of 36,400 housing units. The units are estimated to cost \$3,123 million all private.”⁹⁷ In

⁹⁴ Andrew J. Young Papers, “A Message from the Mayor,” January 1988, Box 257, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁹⁵ Akira Drake Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 172.

⁹⁶ Andrew Young, “Mayor’s Proposed Citywide Housing Plan,” *Office of the Mayor*, July 1989, 142- 146. Box 277, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁹⁷ Andrew Young, “Mayor’s Proposed Citywide Housing Plan,” *Office of the Mayor*, July 1989.

order for the plan to succeed, it needed “the commitment of those involved in its development, as well as many other City agencies, the private sector and the non-profit housing and service providers.”⁹⁸ Young believed in the ways public and private partnerships might work to uplift the city’s poorest residents. He also clearly believed in the use of federal funds to solve Atlanta’s problems, saying in his memoir, “there was no area of life in Atlanta that couldn’t be improved by the right federal grant.”⁹⁹ Many would call public housing a plague, but the real disease lay in the issues with which poor and working-class Black residents were faced, with little to no on-the-ground help from local or national authorities. Throwing money at the problem cannot and will not solve systemic issues.

Achievements At Home: Hospitality and Tourism

With the successful refurbishment and expansion of Hartsfield Airport under Mayor Jackson, Atlanta was fully open for tourism and hospitality business. Visitors navigated the city on newly expanded MARTA lines and attended events at the Georgia World Congress Center, another of Jackson’s achievements.¹⁰⁰ Also during Mayor Jackson’s administration, local white boosters oversaw a major expansion of the hotel industry through the construction of the Omni Hotel, the Peachtree Westin Plaza, and Hilton Atlanta. Today, those hotels all tower over Atlanta’s skyline.¹⁰¹ This expansion

⁹⁸ Andrew Young, “Mayor’s Proposed Citywide Housing Plan,” *Office of the Mayor*, July 1989.

⁹⁹ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 516.

¹⁰⁰ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 155-157.

¹⁰¹ Harvey K. Newman, *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta* (University of Alabama Press, 1999), 195-196.

continued under Mayor Young with the opening of the Ritz-Carlton hotel in 1983.¹⁰² John Portman continued to add to the skyline with the Marriot Marquis in 1985.¹⁰³ Also in 1985, Ted Turner purchased the Omni after years of financial struggle, and turned it into another tourist attraction called the Omni Center.¹⁰⁴ Atlanta led the region in hotel rooms available for tourists, adding 16,000 new rooms between 1982 and 1987, and hosted millions of visitors a year. However, hotel rooms do not automatically fill with visitors, and Mayor Young was determined to find ways to attract more tourists to the city.¹⁰⁵



Figure Twenty-Eight: Downtown Atlanta's rapidly expanding skyline in 1985. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

¹⁰² Ernie Suggs, "Andrew Young in exclusive interview on turning 90," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 12, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0iS1QmeYjw>.

¹⁰³ "John Portman: Atlanta in 50 Objects," Atlanta History Center, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/exhibitions/atlanta-in-50-objects/7677-2/>.

¹⁰⁴ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 158.

¹⁰⁵ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 162-163.

Mayor Young sought to build on Jackson's success in tourism and hospitality. Atlanta's white business elite also trusted Young more than Jackson. According to Newnan, "business leaders found that Mayor Andrew Young was someone who listened to them and was willing to move forward with them in partnership."¹⁰⁶ Their first suggestion for Young was the revitalization of Underground Atlanta. The site was originally home to the line depot of the Western and Atlantic Railroads in the 1830s. The park outside of it, called Plaza Place, was added in 1943. In 1967, with money from a private investment firm, they began building an underground retail district. In 1969, it opened for business. Over the years, it had fallen into a state of disrepair and was shut down.¹⁰⁷ In response to critics who claimed he was not moving fast enough to move along economic development, Young responded that, with his partnership with white business elites, he had successfully acquired a Urban Development and Action Grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$20 million in city funds, and an investment from the Rouse Company.¹⁰⁸ Young showed willingness to work with the city's white business leaders, but he also found a way to help Black Atlantans by requiring 35% minority business participation in all phases of the revitalization project. Ultimately, Underground Atlanta reopened in 1989, and within one year of reopening, it saw thirteen million visitors.¹⁰⁹ This entire situation begs the question: why were white

¹⁰⁶ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 159.

¹⁰⁷ "Our Story," Underground Atlanta, September 18, 2021, <https://undergroundatl.com/our-story/>.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Young, "Response to the Atlanta Journal's Editorial Page of March 21, 1985," Box 212, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

¹⁰⁹ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 160.

business elites angry at Jackson for including a stipulation of prioritizing minority contracts, but not angry at Young for doing the exact same thing? Young's minority participation percentage was even higher than Jackson's had been. There's a possibility that it was due to Young's reputation, which preceded him from his days in Congress. The answer ultimately remains unclear, but does speak to the struggle of Black politicians who face double the expectations and have to balance the needs of their Black constituents with the protests that inevitably come from their white voters.

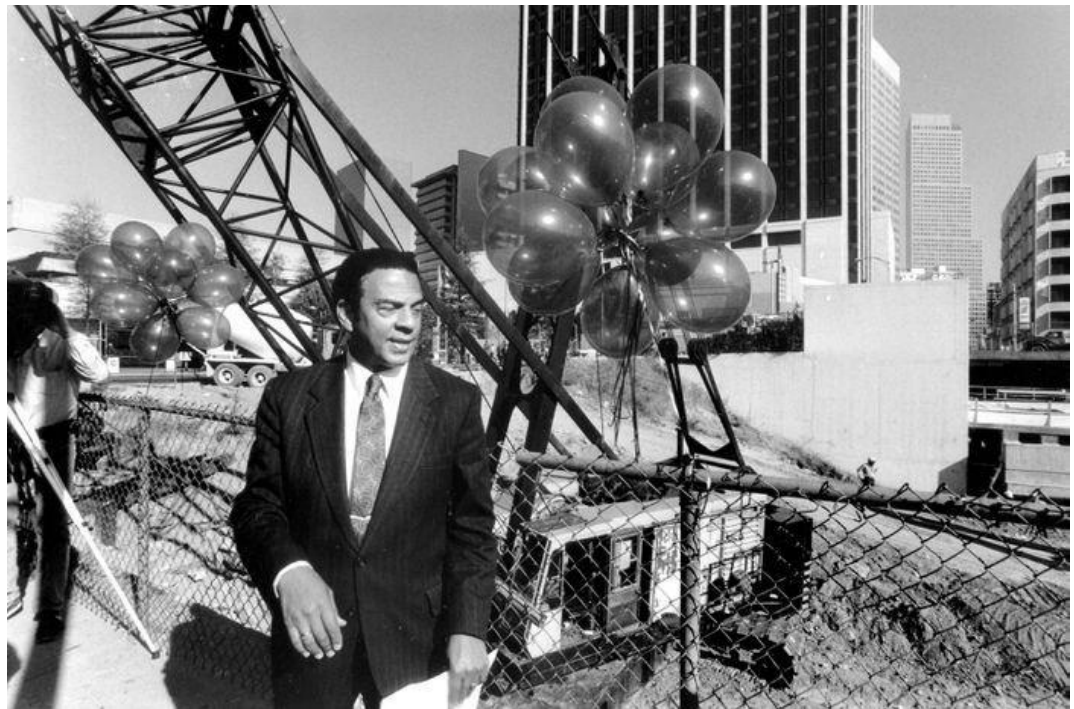


Figure Twenty-Nine: Andrew Young at a ceremony celebrating phase two of the reconstruction of Underground Atlanta in 1987. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution

The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, also known as the Carter Center, was constructed in conjunction with the National Archives and Emory University and was another successful venture that uplifted Atlanta's hospitality and tourism industry. Andrew Young served as a board member and founding member of the Carter

Center.¹¹⁰ When the search for the library's location began, it remained unclear if it would end up in Atlanta, as Carter's only directive had been to build someplace in Georgia. Atlanta's Freedom Parkway was ultimately chosen; ironically, this land was in state hands because in 1972, then-Governor Carter had blocked the construction of an interstate highway to preserve it. Previously, this 219 acres of land had contained 600 housing units and other commercial spaces, but was cleared in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹¹ Once again, in response to the *Atlanta Journal*'s critique that he was not moving quick enough with economic development, Young pointed out that three years previously, no one had known where the library was going to be. Now it was under construction, and it was thanks to the approval of every level of government (including the mayor's office).¹¹² Construction of the library on the property's 35 acres began in 1984 and was completed in 1986. The library and center now serve as one of Atlanta's biggest tourist attractions, but also as a hub of academic research and human rights activism.

¹¹⁰ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 215.

¹¹¹ The Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, "About Us," *National Archives*, <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/about>; Cathy Bradshaw, "We Stopped the Road," Inman Park Neighborhood Association, May 22, 2016, <https://candlerpark.org/caution-roadbusters-25-years/>.

¹¹² Andrew Young, "Response to the Atlanta Journal's Editorial Page of March 21, 1985," *Office of the Mayor*, March 31, 1985.

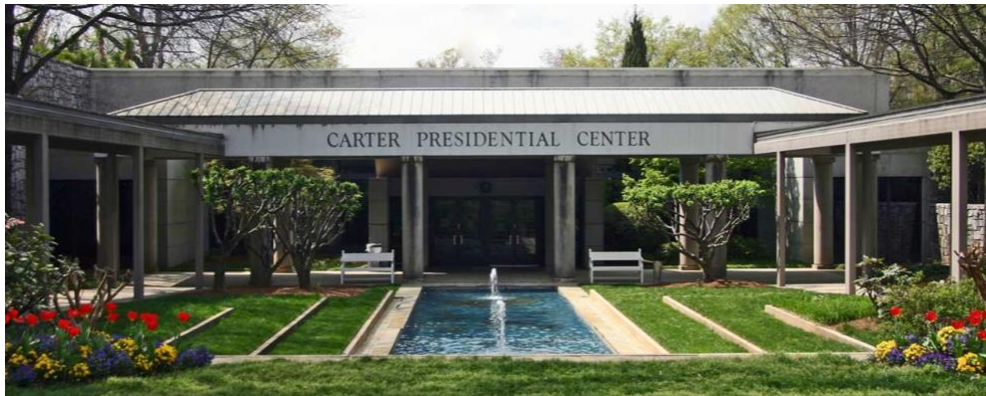


Figure Thirty: The exterior of the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum/The Carter Center. Courtesy of North Carolina State University.

The buildout of the Freedom Parkway adjacent to the Carter Library did not come without hiccups, as local activities fought against Mayor Young, President Carter, and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). Formed in 1981, Citizens Against Unnecessary Throughfares in Older Neighborhoods (CAUTION, Inc) constituted residents from the neighborhoods of Inman Park, Poncey-Highland, Candler Park, Druid Hills, Lake Claire, Virginia Highland, East Lake, and the city of Decatur. They wanted to interrupt the building of Freedom Parkway and began litigating, lobbying, and demonstrating to do so. Mobilizing their communities, members phone banked and handed out fliers for the cause. At one protest, thousands of anti-parkway protesters gathered at the Civic Center to let their opposition be known. This came after a GDOT report claimed that the project would have no environmental impact on the neighborhoods. A second group called the Roadbusters also joined in to protest. Roadbusters used more active forms of protest, including climbing trees marked for demolition and blocking bulldozers. During Young's time in office, no solution came about. It was up to Jackson to reach a settlement during his third term.¹¹³

¹¹³ Cathy Bradshaw, "We Stopped the Road," Inman Park Neighborhood Association, May 22, 2016, <https://candlerpark.org/caution-roadbusters-25-years/>.

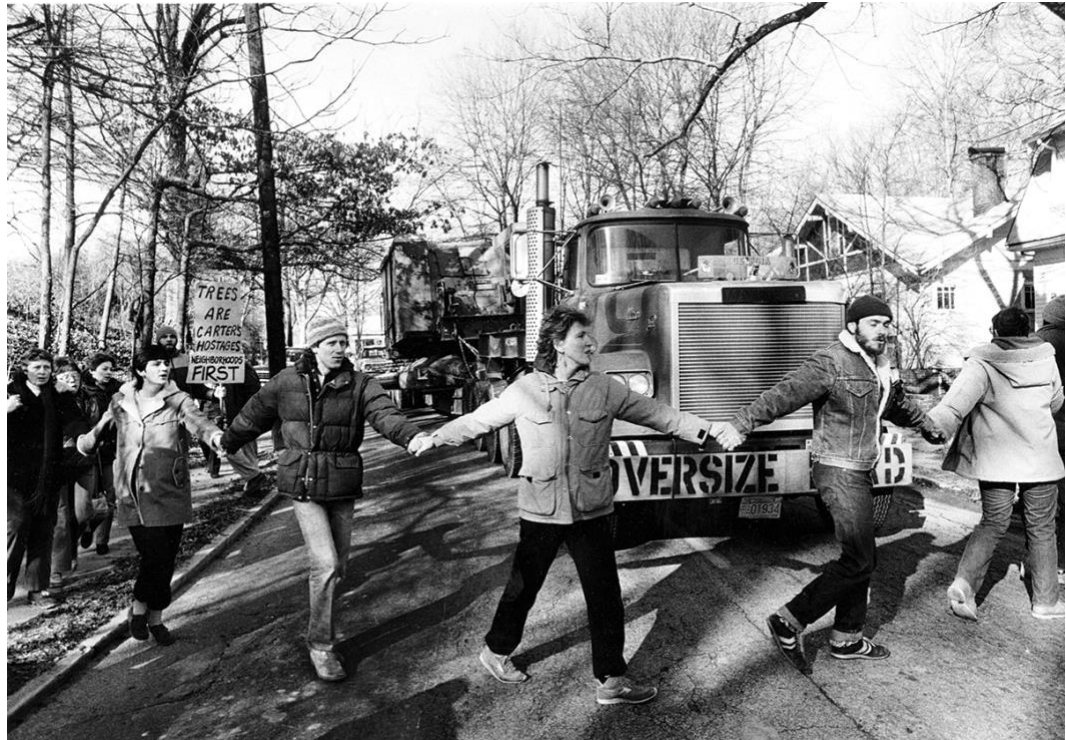


Figure Thirty-One: Freedom Parkway Protestors in 1985. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution

The expansion of Atlanta's airport was one of Jackson's biggest achievements and continued during Young's time in office. In 1984, Young dedicated the opening of a fourth runway measuring 9,000 feet. Another project, which was already underway, included the 12,000-foot expansion of one runway to accommodate the increased traffic of international flights in jumbo airplanes. This \$187 million project, funded through the use of revenue bonds, differed from previous projects that were paid through a combination of state and federal funds. The airport had begun self-sustaining through various means such as concession monies and rental fees.¹¹⁴ Yet, by 1987, things were not going as well as advertised for minority airport vendors. The problem lay with the agreement of many of the Black-owned businesses to act as sub-concessionaries of Dobbs-Paschal Midfield Corporation, the primary holder of the airport concessions

¹¹⁴ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 98.

contract. Their predatory behavior ensured that no business could survive. For example, one minority-owned business paid 39% of their revenue to rent. Another business called Babs Edible, owned by Barbara McGhee, only lasted three years at the airport. When asked about her experience with Dobbs, McGhee called it a “real life horror story. I liken the airport’s business system to modern day slavery.”¹¹⁵ Another former ice cream shop owner in the airport named Lyndon Wade regretted his decision to open a business there, saying “there is just a trail of tears left by former airport minority sub concessionaires.”¹¹⁶ 62% of minority-owned businesses failed, and without Young’s swift intervention, the number could quickly reach 90%.¹¹⁷ Both Atlanta City Council—with members like Councilman Jabari Simama—and Mayor Young recognized the issue and formulated a plan to coordinate a buyout of Dobbs. Young also hoped to create a marketplace in an unused space between the north and south terminals. He wanted to imitate more successful European airports like Copenhagen, Denmark, where passengers could shop in an expansive market designed after famous city landmarks while they waited for their flights.¹¹⁸ Young brokered a deal with the Marriott Corporation, agreed upon by both Eastern and Delta Airlines, which resulted in the purchase of primary airport concessions from Dobbs in 1989.¹¹⁹ Easton said, “Young has long weathered complaints that he has

¹¹⁵ Maynard Easton, “Airport Concession Controversy,” *Southline*, July 22, 1987, Box 256, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library, 1-2.

¹¹⁶ Maynard Easton, “Airport Concession Controversy,” 1.

¹¹⁷ Maynard Easton, “Airport Concession Controversy,” 2.

¹¹⁸ Harold Evans, “Airports for People,” *Conde Nast’s Traveler*, March 1, 1988, Box 257, Series 5, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library. Attached to the printed article is the mayor’s stationery with a note that says, “this is what I’ve been trying to say about our airport” and signed Andy.

¹¹⁹ “Marriott Corporate History,” Marriot International INC, <https://marriott.gcs-web.com/static-files/3b2157>; Maynard Easton, “Airport Concessions Controversy,” 2.

done little to help the city's small Black business owners. And, maybe that Young sees the airport controversy as a way to silence those critics while also putting his stamp of success on that facilities business operations."¹²⁰ Nothing about airport management is simple, and Black business owners in Atlanta suffered for it. While we can view the expansion of the airport as a success for the mayor's office, the underlying costs of failed Black businesses haunt narratives of Atlanta's airport.

Freeway and expressway negotiations were another important aspect of Young's time in office. Using his honed negotiation skills, Young brokered deals between local resident groups, state and city planners, and international investors over two large-scale projects. The first project connected Georgia Highway 400 with I-85. The second project constructed the Freedom Parkway. Conversations regarding these projects had been ongoing for the last twenty years, as the white neighborhoods that were primarily affected used their collective power to block these proposals. Once Young secured the support of resident groups and city council, his next target was to get federal support.¹²¹ Around the same time, Atlanta became the next host for the Democratic National Convention, to be held in 1988. Mayor Young saw a double opportunity. He went to Congressman Tim Howard, whom he had previously campaigned for, got him a room at the Ritz, and took him on a helicopter tour of the city to show him the state of transportation. After his visit, Congressman Howard granted \$900 million to complete the expressways as they planned for the 1988 DNC.¹²² Young simultaneously got the money he needed for local expansion

¹²⁰ Maynard Easton, "Airport Concession Controversy," 2.

¹²¹ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 99.

¹²² Andrew Young, performed by Harvey K. Newman, November 22, 2011 in *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 99.

and ensured that the construction of reliable transportation corridors, required to host large-scale tourism events, was underway. Combined with the ever-growing airport, Atlanta was an international city, indeed. The 1988 DNC hosted 5,300 delegates, 13,500 journalists, and 10,000 other prominent figures in politics and corporate America.¹²³ Many praised Atlanta, but just as many, including the press, critiqued both the host venue of the Omni and Atlanta as a whole, citing an absence of cultural sites and nightlife.¹²⁴ In the aftermath, the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau had to figure out how to keep up the kind of momentum they had during the DNC to maintain increased hotel occupancy.¹²⁵ In many ways, hosting the DNC was the test for hosting the biggest event in the world, the Olympic Games. Undoubtedly, Young's biggest achievement in growing Atlanta's tourism and hospitality industry was the hosting of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games.

¹²³ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 163.

¹²⁴ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 165-166.

¹²⁵ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 164.

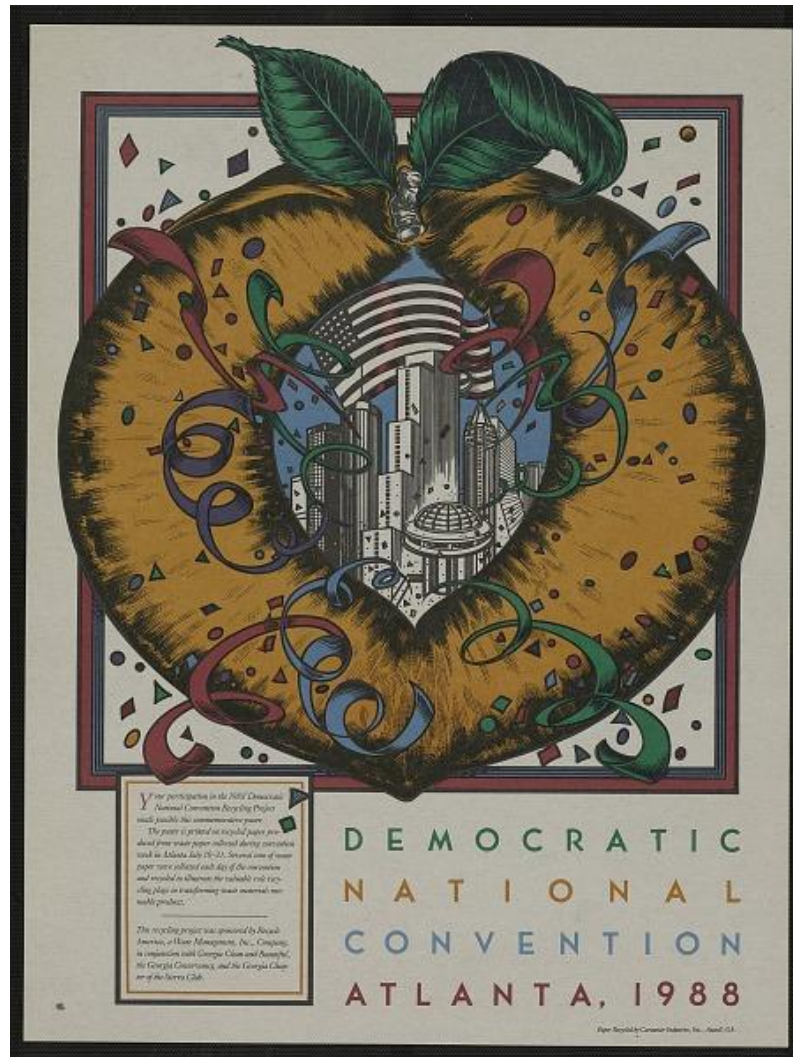


Figure Thirty-Two: Poster for the 1988 DNC in Atlanta. Photo Courtesy of the National Museum of American History

No one can deny what Andrew Young accomplished in his lifetime. From civil rights activist in the SCLC, to U.S. representative, to U.N. ambassador, to Atlanta mayor and Olympic booster, he achieved more than most. In many ways, Young was a forward thinker. He realized that Atlanta could not just be known as a city in the southern U.S.—it had to be known all around the world as an international hub. He put boots on the ground and pitched Atlanta to the world, from China, to England, to the United Arab Emirates. Back at home in Atlanta, he accomplished a lot as well. He worked to improve the conditions of housing across the city. He assisted in the redevelopment of

Underground Atlanta and helped bring the Carter Library to Atlanta. His public purpose capitalism ensured an ongoing relationship between Atlanta's white and Black elites.

However, that capitalistic drive was not always beneficial to Atlanta's poor and working-class Black residents. Many even had no choice but to leave the city altogether. This all demonstrates the multifaceted political persona of Andrew Young and the ways in which the steps towards Black equality in America are not linear. This is why I am both critical of Young and accepting that he could not do everything, despite all the pressure to do so. Andrew Young reflects more than a century of work by Atlanta's Black politicians and activists to achieve Black equality and freedom in America. At the same time, there is Andrew Young the man, not just the politician. The way that he governed as mayor of Atlanta was a direct reflection on his Louisiana roots and the lessons his mother and father instilled in him. He was committed to being wholly himself, no matter the role—a man with a deep belief in his faith and the greater power of humanity saying, “I knew that I would not change. I would be the same Andrew Young I was the day before, or the year before.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 120.

CHAPTER 4

THIRD TERM DEBATES

In 1990, Mayor Young stepped down after two terms in office. To many people's surprise, Maynard Jackson decided to run for a third term in office. Why? According to his wife, Valerie, he felt that his work in Atlanta was not done. He saw two ways forward: go back into politics or go into the ministry.¹ He ultimately chose to run for a third term, easily winning re-election in 1989 with 89% of the vote.² What did Mayor Jackson hope to achieve in his curtain call administration as mayor? Eight years later, however, the political terrain felt different impacting the success of his mayoral agenda. Black Atlanta had changed. Many of those who voted for Jackson in his first two terms had either matured or passed away. This left their children to ask: what had Jackson done for them? According to Shirley Franklin, "Maynard hated the third term. He talked about it, but didn't show it. He'd call me in his office and say why did I do this? It just wasn't the glory days of his early terms."³ Like Young in 1982, he faced a city plagued by both the AIDS epidemic and the crack epidemic. Public housing conditions had only worsened in the eight years he had been away, despite his efforts in the 1970s to secure federal funding to improve conditions. How would the mayor's office answer the problem of

¹ *Maynard: The Man, the Politician, the Gamechanger* directed by Samuel Pollard (2018).

² "Maynard Jackson Is Elected Mayor of Atlanta in Landslide," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/04/us/maynard-jackson-is-elected-mayor-of-atlanta-in-landslide.html>.

³ *Maynard: The Man, the Politician, the Gamechanger* directed by Samuel Pollard (2018).

public housing in the 1990s? Jackson's third administration faced countless issues and projects, including the expansion of MARTA into metropolitan counties and the possibility of building a second airport. Other projects under consideration during Jackson's third administration included. Counties outside the city, including Cobb and Gwinnett, continued to resist the expansion of MARTA into their counties, citing a variety of reasons that reveals both racial and class tensions in the metro Atlanta area. No one could agree on the location of the second airport, and ultimately, the project was scrapped. Instead, Atlanta's attention refocused on the ongoing expansion of the airport. The 1996 Centennial Olympic Games also loomed in the distance. This chapter tells the story of Jackson's third mayoral term and how it led to Atlanta's hosting of the 1996 Games. In many ways, his third term in office became the story of aspirations unfulfilled, rather than a story of success.

Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

As we saw in chapter two, Jackson devoted his first two administrations to ensuring that his legacy was cemented. He accomplished this through the expansion of Hartsfield airport. Could adding a second airport support Atlanta's never-ending quest for expansion? Where would it be located? Who would oversee operations? How would it affect the current airport? How would it affect city and state politics? The debate that unfolded revealed the long-running tensions between the needs of Atlanta and the needs of the rest of Georgia. The biggest supporters of the airport were businesses who resided below the fall line—the natural boundary that divides the north and south of the state and runs from Columbus to Augusta. Atlanta sits in the north of the Piedmont region. Other

cities, like Valdosta, sit in the southern region, on the coastal plains.⁴ One advocacy group—the Mid-South Georgia Surface and Air Transportation Association—proposed that the airport be located somewhere among a list of 34 counties in middle and south Georgia. At an October 1990 Department of Transportation meeting, State House majority leader Larry Walker, a representative out of Perry, expressed how although Atlanta’s per capita income was 95% of the national average, it failed to address the realities of the cities in mid and south Georgia. Walker argued that adding a second airport in one of those cities could improve the lives of more Georgians, if only Atlanta was willing to share the market. Journalist Chuck Reece said the following of the debate: “it’s an emotional clash between two Georgias—Atlanta against Georgia below the Fall Line, urban against rural, the haves against the have-nots.”⁵

Mayor Jackson, Transportation Commissioner Hal Rives, and governor candidates Johnny Isakson and Zell Miller all added their voices to the debate. Regardless, with 85% of potential passengers living on the northside, it seemed likely that the north would prove the place for a second airport, even one that only accepted flights that began and ended in Atlanta (also known as Origin and Destination traffic or O&D). Urgent questions remained unanswered as Hartsfield air traffic increased year by year. Passenger numbers were projected to increase by 70% by 2000. The Atlanta Regional Commission narrowed down the search area to four northern and two southern locations. This did not please Jackson, who proposed that a southern location be linked to

⁴ Mack Ducan, “Fall Line,” in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Jul 23, 2018. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/geography-environment/fall-line/>.

⁵ Chuck Reece, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, Box 15, Series C, Atlanta University Center, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, 34.

Hartsfield by rail since the current design was “biased to passenger needs of the north of Atlanta area.”⁶ What reason would Atlantans who lived in the north have to bypass Hartsfield to fly out of the southern airport? The only place this solution worked was in Washington D.C. at Dulles, rather than the closer to D.C. Ronald Reagan Washington National, only because it was assisted by the federal government. A 1988 survey of 531 passengers showed that 44% came from counties above Fulton, 18% from counties around Gwinnett and Dekalb, 23% from counties around Cobb, and 8% from counties around Clayton. While the pool here is limited, it does corroborate that a majority of passengers were coming from north of the airport.⁷

⁶ Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 35-36.

⁷ “Peat Mrwick survey of enplaning passengers, Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport, January 1988,” Box 76, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.



Figure Thirty-Three: The Georgia Fall Line. Courtesy of Southern Research

Yet where would funding arise for the new airport? The project was estimated to cost a minimum of \$1 billion, which would have to come from the sale of revenue bonds. This is where airlines proved crucial. Airlines pay landing fees and gate leases, which in turn support building costs. But Delta Airlines was one of the first airlines to say that they would not support a southern airport.⁸ Few wanted to anger the airline that employed

⁸ Chuck Reese, "North vs. South," *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 36-37.

23,000 Georgians.⁹ This new airport required at least 10,000 acres, which made mid-South Georgia even more favorable of a location, as land was cheaper there. And still, no one had decided whose job it would be to build the airport. Commissioner Rives planned to build a magnetic levitation or maglev train system that would connect both airports to each other and the southern-most airport to Macon and Columbus.¹⁰ This system would use super conducting magnets to suspend a train on a U-shaped guideway made of concrete. But this would come at a massive cost; the trains alone cost \$8 billion.¹¹ That was more than the entire state budget at the time. The mid-South-location supporters loved this idea.¹²

Jackson preferred to expand the existing airport. Reese argues, “Mayor Jackson doesn’t want to play the bad guy in this battle, but he says that any airport plan that doesn’t allow Atlanta to meet its future demand and protect the dominance of the hub at Hartsfield ‘will have us to compete with.’”¹³ Jackson proposed that passengers check in at Hartsfield before continuing on via the train. He was realistic about the fact that the city could not complete the project alone and needed partners. Regarding the matter, he

⁹ Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 39; By 2023, the number of Delta employees had grown to 42, 300, Atlanta Business Chronicle, “Delta returns to the top of Atlanta’s 25 largest employers list,” *11 Alive*, July 18, 2023, <https://www.11alive.com/article/travel/delta-returns-atlanta-25-largest-employers-list/85-ee623b09-c2dc->.

¹⁰ Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 37-38.

¹¹ “How Maglev Works,” U.S. Department of Energy, June 14, 2016, <https://www.energy.gov/articles/how-maglev-works>; Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 37-38.

¹² Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 37-38.

¹³ Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 38.

said, “we’re not going to go in there like the big bad folks from Atlanta, those old meanies coming in here to make us take this airport. We either go in with an open door, with an invitation, or we’re not going.”¹⁴ He had clearly learned from the Hartsfield expansion in his first two terms.

A third opinion ignored the north versus south debate altogether. In a 1990 report, Jackson’s transition team wrote:

The city of Atlanta does not need a “second” airport. The some 435,000 people living within the corporate limits of the City of Atlanta are very well served by one of the great airports of the world, and by some of the world’s greatest airlines, led by Delta. The same can be said for most of Dekalb, Fulton, Henry, Clayton, Fayette, Coweta, Butts, Spalding, Newton and other counties in the Atlanta region. A case can even be made that the cities of Columbus and Macon with access to Hartsfield through brief connecting flights or a relatively congestion-free drive of an hour or so are also extremely well served and have no need of additional facilities. If this is so, then who does need commercial airport services other than that available at Hartsfield? ¹⁵

In their opinion, the appropriate strategy would focus on sub-regional airports that would serve originating and deplaning (O&D) passengers. Other places like South Florida and Los Angeles had already done it successfully. This also cost the least of all the plans pitched. The two proposed sub-regions were Marietta/Roswell/Cartersville and Gwinnett/Athens/Gainesville. The transition team also suggested that the mayor should focus on improving Hartsfield’s facilities.¹⁶ This argument was very Atlanta-centric and a

¹⁴ Chuck Reese, “North vs. South,” *Georgia Trend*, October 1990, 38.

¹⁵ “The Atlanta Airport Issue: A Subregional Approach,” Transition Task Force, February 26, 1990, Box 76, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁶ “The Atlanta Airport Issue: A Subregional Approach,” Transition Task Force, 1990.

bit egotistical.¹⁷ Regardless, this debate was not new, and it's one that prevails to this day: Atlanta versus the rest of the state, the governor's office versus the mayor's office, and who's really in charge in the city and in the state.

While the debate raged on, a solution was still needed for the overwhelming air traffic, as Atlanta did not want to risk losing travelers and flights to other airports. In September 1991, Airport Commissioner Ira Jackson and the Department of Aviation proposed an ordinance which allowed Mayor Jackson to negotiate a deal with Delta. This deal led to the construction and use of Concourse E as an international terminal. The mayor had to move quickly, however, to complete the project by 1994.¹⁸ Another project that began under Mayor Jackson's third administration was the addition of a fifth runway. This process proved difficult, as the project required several contracts, from land acquisition to dirt haul and fill, to complete. But larger economic and world issues affected how quickly these projects could be completed. From 1990 to 1991, the nation experienced another recession which resulted in high unemployment that expanded into

¹⁷ Where do I sit in this entire debate? I grew up in Newton County, one of the counties the report mentions are sufficiently served by Hartsfield. After flying in and out of that airport my entire life, I would have to agree with this sentiment. I never had any issues coming or going from the airport. But I also empathize with mid and south Georgia. Rural counties and cities deserve access to state services and resources just like the residents of the city of Georgia. Ultimately, the second airport did not happen. Did it cost too much? Was the might of Delta too much for anyone to be willing to take on? Could it be that this was Mayor Jackson's final term in office and the next mayor, Bill Campbell had different priorities for his mayoral agenda? I did not find the exact reason for that in the archives, especially because there is no home repository of Bill Campbell's mayoral papers. I am not sure when this will happen because after he left office he served prison time for tax evasion. This is also the reason I could not focus on him in this project. For more information on Bill Campbell: Douglas Blackmon, "Bill Campbell: He Could Have Been the One," *Atlanta Magazine*, March 5, 2015, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/90s/bill-campbell-one/>.

¹⁸ Commissioner Ira Jackson, "Memo to Mayor Maynard Jackson, Subject: Emergency Action Required for Approval of Ordinance Dealing with Agreement for Design and Construction of Concourse E," September 16, 1991, Box 18, Series C, Atlanta University Center, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

unemployment until 1993.¹⁹ In addition, one of the largest airlines, Eastern Airlines, folded in early 1991.²⁰ The airport was also under increased security restrictions due to the Gulf War which began in January 1991.²¹ All of this meant that the fifth runway project traveled into future mayoral administrations. Regardless, Concourse E was completed on time and opened in September 1994. At the time, it was the largest international facility in the country. In addition, as part of the \$250 million Hartsfield Improvement Program, the three-story shopping atrium between the north and south terminals that Mayor Young had negotiated for during his tenure in office was completed in May 1996. All these projects strengthened the mayor's office and the city's vision for the rapidly approaching Olympic Games.²²

Maynard Jackson's third term also featured ongoing discussions about the expansion of MARTA. It was clear that expansion was possible, but it came with mixed results. In 1988, Atlanta residents gained easy and direct access to the airport through the opening of Airport Station.²³ Many hoped it would expand into Gwinnett County next. On July 18, 1990, MARTA unveiled their Gwinnett Extension Plan along the northeast

¹⁹ Jeffrey Frankel and Peter R. Orszag, "Retrospective on American Economic Policy in the 1990s," *Brookings Institute*, November 2, 2001, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/retrospective-on-american-economic-policy-in-the-1990s/>.

²⁰ Ira Jackson, "Six Month Status Report of Significant Airport Matters," April 23, 1991, Box 18, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

²¹ "Ch. 30 The Recent Past," *The American Yawp*, Stanford University Press, <https://www.americanyawp.com/text/30-the-recent-past/>.

²² "History of ATL," Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, accessed November 8, 2024. <https://www.atl.com/about-atl/history-of-atl/#1458248526374-0f3690b5-d8c3>.

²³ "History of ATL," Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, accessed November 8, 2024. <https://www.atl.com/about-atl/history-of-atl/#1458248526374-0f3690b5-d8c3>.

line. The plan included three new stations, the first of which would be finished in 1996, and the second two by 1998. They also planned to add park-and-ride areas and a shuttle bus service along the route. This followed a poll of residents that revealed that 47.2% favored adding MARTA to their county. Negotiations between the Gwinnett Board of Commissioners and MARTA were set to begin, but Atlanta city officials and Dekalb and Fulton Counties clearly needed to be involved, as well.²⁴ Negotiations involved picking a name, and the choices included Norcross Peachtree Corners, Indian Trail, and Gwinnett Place.²⁵

²⁴ MARTA “Details of Transit Plan for Gwinnett County Released,” July 18, 1990, Box 94, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

²⁵ MARTA “Northeast Line Plan Indian Trail to Gwinnett Place,” July 1990.

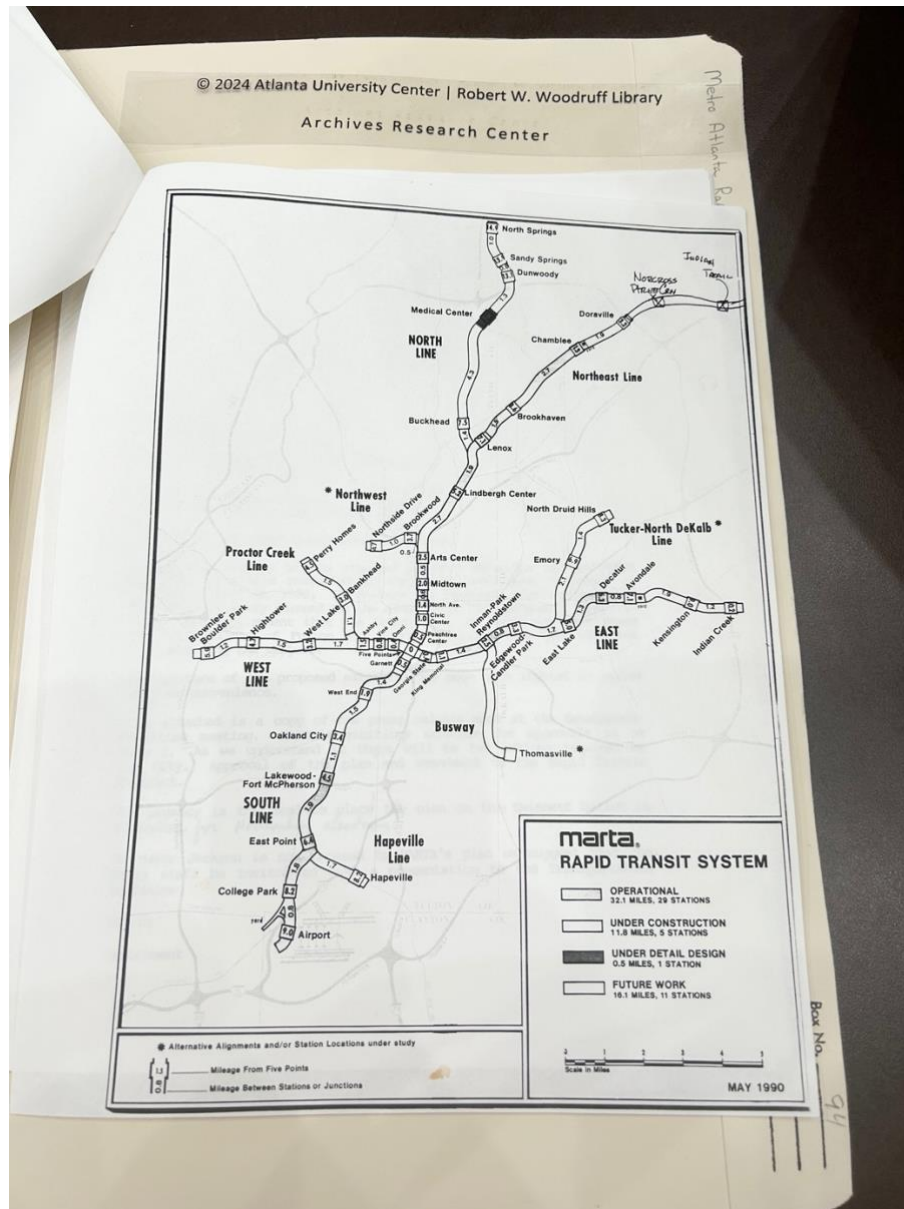


Figure Thirty-Four: Proposed MARTA expanded map in 1990 with new lines along the northeast line. Photo courtesy of the AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library

You can actually watch the debate unfold in the archives. In a document sent to Shirley Franklin by Fernando Costa, Director of Planning entitled, “Gwinnett Extension Issues,” a pros and cons list details environmental, economic development, legal, and financial issues. Among the environmental pros of expanding into Gwinnett, Costa lists a reduction in air noise pollution, energy conservation, and the protection of Atlanta’s

freeway system. The one con, however, proved to be a big one—the displacement of residents currently occupying the land needed to build out the system. While the Gwinnett expansion did not come to pass, Black communities had been displaced in the past to build MARTA stations. Costa’s economic development category features a very long pro list: increased accessibility to jobs, increased business attraction to the region, a more competitive Atlanta, an increased likelihood of counties (like Cobb) seeking MARTA expansion, increases in development, and increased job availability within construction and MARTA itself. Ironically, some worried that once the system was complete, Atlanta would actually *lose* any competitive edge that it had previously had over other cities.²⁶ One pro in the legal reasons category listed a positive re-definition of metro Atlanta due to the increased opportunity for jobs. But the cons listed were big: the planned fare structure would make travelers pay per mile, which meant that Atlanta residents looking to go to Gwinnett would pay more, which was decidedly unfair to poor and working-class residents.²⁷ The financial category featured an equal number of pros and cons. For the pros: a reduced tax burden on all Atlantans, the equalization of sales tax in Gwinnett, and no offers of financial advantage for Gwinnett. For the cons: high costs, Atlanta’s liability for expenses not covered by the Gwinnett sales tax, and no guarantee of a project completion date. Overall, it seems like the positive reasons for expanding into Gwinnett outweighed the negative. Mayor Jackson weighed in:

²⁶ This kind of mindset makes me think this is the reason Atlanta will never stop expanding the airport. The moment we slow down and declare ourselves finished, another city will do something exciting and innovative to theirs and we will have to start again. In their minds, the same can be said about public transit.

²⁷ Fernando Costa, “MARTA Gwinnett Extension Advantages, Disadvantages,” August 4, 1990, Box 94, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

We wholeheartedly endorse Gwinnett's entry into MARTA for the good of the region. This would be a vital step towards the regional mass transit system we envisioned when the original referendum was approved 19 years ago. Our citizens and those of Dekalb County, built and paid for MARTA; as their elected representatives we are stewards of the system, with a responsibility to protect their charter investment as MARTA continues to develop. However, at this point, and on very limited notice, we are being asked to approve a plan which would set the precedent for the future entry of any other jurisdictions into MARTA. A step as far-reaching as this one demands that we take more time to review more fully the issues raised by this plan. We owe this to our citizens, and we owe that to MARTA.²⁸

Those concerns included a more realistic timeline in both cost and revenue, the need to restructure the MARTA board to make sure that Dekalb county was fairly treated, and "fair fairness," which did not seem possible with the pay per mile system. As long as those issues were addressed, the mayor's office, the board of commissioners, and city council would have been willing to work with officials from MARTA and Gwinnett.²⁹ Therefore, the plan appeared to be set in place, which promised exciting possibilities along with the reality of a large-scale extension.

A public meeting held for residents in the summer of 1990 revealed that the earlier poll that had shown support for MARTA's expansion failed to reflect the opinion held by many of the residents of this majority county. One resident said in reference to Atlanta: it "has a reputation for murder and rape-the wrong people. We don't need'em, we don't want'em." Another asked: "do we really want a direct line for the drug dealers at

²⁸ Maynard Jackson, "Joint Statement By Mayor Maynard Jackson, Fulton County Commission Chairman Michael Lomax and Councilman D.L. "Buddy" Fowlkes. Statement Delivered by Mayor Jackson," August 17, 1990, Box 94, August 4, 1990.

²⁹ Maynard Jackson, "Joint Statement By Mayor Maynard Jackson, Fulton County Commission Chairman Michael Lomax and Councilman D.L. "Buddy" Fowlkes. Statement Delivered by Mayor Jackson," August 1990.

Five Points to get new markets among our fourth and fifth graders?”³⁰ These comments revealed that much more than public transportation was on the minds of these residents; issues of race and class prevailed. Middle class and elite white suburban residents did not want poor and working-class Black Atlantans in their county. The influence of Atlanta city government clearly had limits when encountering the wants and desires of Georgia residents who lived outside of the city. Once again, the struggle of city versus state persisted. Later that year, Gwinnett voted a resounding “no” to MARTA expansion. No other opportunity would present itself for another thirty years.³¹ Yet even then, would it be different than earlier interactions? Ironically, while Gwinnett and Cobb continued to vote no to MARTA expansion, their county transit was connected with MARTA—first with Cobb Community Transit (now CobbLinc) in 1989 and then Gwinnett County transit in 2001.³²

Finally, in Jackson’s third administration, the freeway debates that had been ongoing for decades came to a head. CAUTION, Inc, the local neighborhood organization that plagued Mayor Young, continued their dogged campaign against the plan for Freedom Parkway, a four-lane expressway that would bring increased traffic and noise. In 1991, a settlement agreement between the city and CAUTION, Inc resulted in a

³⁰ Tyler Estep, “Gwinnett and Marta: Lessons from Failed 1990 Referendum,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-govt--politics/bruising-lessons-from-gwinnett-1990-marta-vote-linger-today/SxklzWbxAlvNIkRSpO53IN/>.

³¹ Tyler Estep, “Gwinnett and Marta: Lessons from Failed 1990 Referendum,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 18, 2019.

³² John Toon, “Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority,” in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Apr 14, 2021. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/metropolitan-atlanta-rapid-transit-authority-marta/>.

more understated parkway that ended at the Carter Center.³³ It ran north from Moreland Avenue and east from Ponce de Leon Avenue; the extra 200 acres of land served as a public park. In the place of CAUTION, Inc, a new organization stepped in to protect communities: the Freedom Park Conservancy. The park was dedicated as Freedom Park in September 2000.³⁴ In 2018, it was re-dedicated as the John Lewis Freedom Parkway.³⁵ This shows how the power of organizing in local communities can save land from the clutches of larger powers, but only when it is done in white neighborhoods. When organizing comes from Black communities, it is viewed as disruptive or unwarranted. In this case, white neighborhoods were saved. The same cannot be said of Black communities in Atlanta and across the country that were destroyed in the name of progress throughout the twentieth century.

Shirley Franklin

Shirley Franklin was a key figure in the administrations of Jackson and Young. Her importance is especially clear during Jackson's third administration, when she served as Chief Administrative Officer. What did her job entail? According to the Executive Team Vision laid out in 1990, it was her job to "free up the Mayor from the minutia of government allowing him to assume urban leadership on National issues using Atlanta as

³³ Cathy Bradshaw, "We Stopped the Road," Inman Park Neighborhood Association, May 22, 2016, <https://candlerpark.org/caution-roadbusters-25-years/>.

³⁴ "Freedom Park," Candler Park Neighborhood Association, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://candlerpark.org/freedom-park/#:~:text=The%202007%2Dacre%20>.

³⁵ Becca JG Godwin, "Freedom Parkway Renamed for Civil Rights Leader John Lewis," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/freedom-parkway-renamed-for-civil-rights-activist-john-lewis/TzZ8hpUNliJA5UfOTSIJzK/>.

a model.”³⁶ The Executive Vision Team harped upon the importance of the Chief Administrative Officer being efficient, focused, responsive, and resilient in order “for the city to achieve greatness.”³⁷ In action, this looked like screening items before sending them off to the mayor for final approval. For example, in one letter from City Councilmember Mary Davis that congratulated Jackson on the establishment of a citywide recycling program, Franklin made a few notes on the page to Jackson saying, “only if you approve.”³⁸ Another time, potentially controversially, Franklin pre-approved the purchase of training for new police officers and 200 9MM guns (at \$360 each).³⁹ This seemed one answer to Mayor Jackson’s ambition of lowering crime rates and speaks to the connection between the mayor’s office and the police department.⁴⁰ Other times, Franklin kept Jackson aware of City Council’s agenda, such as renaming a street to Abernathy Avenue after the famed civil rights leader, Ralph D. Abernathy.⁴¹ This plan

³⁶ “Our Vision for the Executive Team,” Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

³⁷ “Our Vision for the Executive Team,” Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

³⁸ “Letter to Maynard Jackson from Mary Davis, Councilmember, District 6,” April 11, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

³⁹ “Memorandum to Mayor Jackson from Shirley Franklin, Subject: 9MM Weapons and Training,” February 6, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁴⁰ “Letter to Honorable Maynard Jackson, Re: Atlanta Crime,” April 12, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁴¹ “Memorandum: City Council Retreat Issue (5/4/90) to Commissioner Chester Funnys from Shirley Clarke Franklin,” May 22, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

reached fruition with the rededication of the street in April 1991.⁴² And for a city deeply concerned with their reputation, especially in tourism, they treated the discovery of asbestos in the Civic Center with the utmost urgency.⁴³ First opened in 1968, this 4,600 seat auditorium was the largest stage in the southeast. All types of performances took place, including rock concerts, symphonies, and Broadway shows.⁴⁴ It also served as the venue for Mayor Jackson's first inauguration.⁴⁵ Jackson asked Franklin for a written report accounting for a clean bill of health for the center.⁴⁶ Noticing even the tiniest things, Mayor Jackson saw that a park sign was in disrepair and asked Franklin to contact the Bureau of Parks.⁴⁷ He also tasked Franklin with the coordination of the cleanup of various streets across the city, including Ralph McGill, Felton, Angier, Briarcliff, and St. Charles.⁴⁸ Finally, Franklin was in charge of staffing, which included hiring an interim

⁴² Courtney Kueppers, "These streets in Atlanta are named for civil rights leaders," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/lifestyles/these-streets-atlanta-are-named-for-civil-rights-leaders/XmerGajodwYCTQ8VmT91FP/>.

⁴³ "Memorandum: City Council Retreat Issue (5/4/90) Acting Commissioner Del Corbin from Shirley Clarke Franklin," May 22, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁴⁴ Rachel Garbus, "What's next for Atlanta Civic Center?" *Atlanta Magazine*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/news-culture-articles/whats-next-for-atlanta-civic-center/>.

⁴⁵ "Inauguration Ceremony for Maynard Jackson, Wyche Fowler and 18 New City Council Members will Have a Lot of Pageantry," WSB-TV News Film Collection, January 6, 1974.

⁴⁶ "Memorandum: City Council Retreat Issue (5/4/90) Acting Commissioner Del Corbin from Shirley Clarke Franklin," May 22, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁴⁷ "John A. White Park/Tennis Center Sign Memorandum," February 5, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁴⁸ "Letter titled Street Clean Up to Shirley Franklin from Pat Allen," July 9, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

and permanent chief of staff for Jackson.⁴⁹ Serving as chief administrative officer meant juggling a variety of roles with varying degrees of urgency at the discretion of the mayor. These documents clearly show that Franklin was talented at handling people with different personality types and personal and professional agendas, a skill needed in politics. But when looking at Franklin's previous experience, we might wonder if she wanted more for herself. Maybe there were better ways she could have been of service to Atlantans. Of course, this was Jackson's final term as mayor, so she needed another role, regardless. Perhaps this was what enticed her to seek out a major role in planning the 1996 Games and eventually, the mayor's office.



Figure Thirty-Five: Andrew Young and Shirley Franklin in 1986. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution

⁴⁹ "Inter Office Memorandum, Re: Interim Chief of Staff from Maynard Jackson to Shirley Franklin," July 17, 1990, Box 4, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

Public Housing in the 1990s

1992 proved to be an important year in the history of housing and national housing trends. Congress established the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (NCSDPH) to assess the state of public housing across the country. The commission found that “about 86,000, or around 6 percent, of the 1.3 million public housing units nationwide were in fact severely distressed.”⁵⁰ This led to the creation of the HOPE VI program and the revamp of the Section 8 program. The HOPE VI Program granted permission for the demolition of large-scale public housing and its redevelopment into mixed-income developments. Yet it was not a one-to-one replacement system: tearing down one unit would not guarantee its replacement.⁵¹ A good portion of this replacement happened in Atlanta during the leadup to the Olympics.

In 1994, a social experiment called the Moving to Opportunity Program (MTO) was created to understand how moving to a new neighborhood improved the lives of public housing residents. The program offered housing vouchers to 5,000 families living in public housing across five cities that allowed them to rent a house in the private rental market. Program organizers hoped to understand how neighborhood choice influenced life outcomes. Social scientists tracked these families to their new neighborhoods, observing the impact moving had on their jobs, education, and health.⁵² In 1996, the age of mass incarceration, the creation of the One Strike Rule had massive effects on poor public housing residents. The rule decreed that if someone in a family was convicted of a

⁵⁰ Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise*, 12.

⁵¹ Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise*, 14.

⁵² Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise*, vii-viii.

crime, the entire family would be evicted. This rule pushed public housing residents even further into the margins of society, with little acknowledgement of how decades of housing-based systemic racism landed them in that position. Finally, in 1998, Section 8 was renamed and expanded into the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program through the use of federal funds. The goal of the program, similar to the experimental MTO program, was to promote geographic opportunities through residential choice. By the end of the 1990s, the voucher program was the largest housing assistance program in the country, as people moved out of public housing. The voucher program, combined with the LIHTC, meant that the “burden of housing the poor has been transferred to the private market.”⁵³ Because of the programs of the late 1980s and 1990s, America is now in a “race blind” era of housing policy, as it no longer designates those in need of housing assistance based on race.⁵⁴ The 2010 Choice Neighborhoods Initiatives (CNI) is another program of importance. It is an updated version of the HOPE VI program that stresses one-for-one replacement and mixed-income communities.⁵⁵

Back in Atlanta during the 1980s and into the early 1990s, tenant associations advocated for residents of public housing like Techwood and Bankhead, but many of their problems went unsolved. Crime remained a large problem. In January 1990, the tenant association presidents requested 200 additional police officers to be assigned to their community. Jackson agreed, saying, “it has really made a difference. Our children

⁵³ Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise*, 14-15.

⁵⁴ Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise*, 16.

⁵⁵ Eduard Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 186.

can now play outside, seniors can go out for walks, and we are able to sit on our porches and enjoy the cool breeze.”⁵⁶ However, this quickly backfired on residents. Atlanta Police occupied public housing communities across the city for sixty days. In that brief time, they arrested 6,918 people and imprisoned 2,005. Residents' sense of trust in the police, the AHA, and the mayor's office only worsened when it was revealed that housing managers were providing police with master keys to units. Police then used those keys to get no knock warrants and forcibly entered people's homes. The police and the housing authority were willing partners.⁵⁷

This was not the first confrontation between Atlanta police and public housing residents, and instead, just one example of decades of mistreatment and mistrust. For example, during Jackson's first administration, a confrontation between East Lake Meadows residents and police rocked a community. East Lake Meadows, opened by the AHA in 1970, existed on the edge of Atlanta city limits.⁵⁸ Because of this, there was confusion over whether Dekalb County or Fulton County police departments had jurisdiction. On March 12, 1973, on the authority of Dekalb County Sheriff Ray Bonner, police entered the housing complex to execute welfare fraud warrants. According to Bonner, they only busted down one door, but regardless, police arrived armed with shotguns, intimidating and scaring residents. Speaking to news reporters, activist and resident Eva Meadows addressed residents' many frustrations:

⁵⁶ Atlanta Housing Authority Tenant Presidents, “Letter to the Honorable Maynard H. Jackson, Mayor, January 23, 1990,” Box 23, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library. Sent to the editors of the Atlanta Journal & Constitution.

⁵⁷ Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 172-173.

⁵⁸ *East Lake Meadows: A Public Housing Story*, directed by Sarah Burns and David McMahon (Florentine Films and WETA, 2020).

We call them quite often when we are being robbed, our senior citizens are being knocked down and pocketbooks took away from them, and our doors being broken into and our homes, and we'll call them, you know what they'll ask us? Where do you live? We say East Lake Meadows. They sell well I'm sorry you have to call the police from Atlanta and then we call the police department from Atlanta. It take them an hour to get out here sometimes they don't come at all. So if they can't come to East Lake Meadows when we call them, when we are in deadly need, our lives are at stake! What in the hell did they come out yesterday doing us like they did? They can't come out here to protect us, why come out here and harass and scare us to death?⁵⁹



Figure Thirty-Six: Public housing resident and activist Eva Davis at East Lake Meadows in 1973. She was also the head of the tenants association at East Lake Meadows. Reverend Joseph E. Boone, a pastor and civil rights activist is pictured next to her. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

East Lake Meadows eventually shared the fate of the rest of Atlanta's public housing: demolition and redevelopment utilizing the mixed income model, beginning in the late

⁵⁹ "Activist Eva Davis and DeKalb County Sheriff Ray Bonner discussing the way that welfare fraud warrants were served in the public housing community of East Lake Meadows two days previously, Atlanta, Georgia, March 14, 1973," WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 1918, 2:21/03:54, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia.

1990s.⁶⁰ At Bankhead Courts, crime was so bad that Suzuki Motor Corporation sent a letter to Jackson stating plans to relocate because of the “continuous illegal drug activity and violent crime at and around the Bankhead Court Apartments, our employees’ safety is of major concern.”⁶¹ In another letter in September of 1993, they threatened to move once again once their lease ended in October 1994.⁶²

It didn’t help matters that the Atlanta Housing Authority was officially ruled as a “troubled agency” by HUD in July of 1991. Their occupancy numbers were down, inspections did not meet minimum standards, apartments were vacant for 116 days of the year, operating profits were down, and rent collections decreased. To solve these issues, HUD leadership suggested they build better relationships between themselves, the city, residents, and the private sector.⁶³ The Olympics provided an opportunity to test this model of collaboration as mixed-income communities took hold across the nation, paid for through HOPE VI. The first step in this partnership with the city was Jackson’s establishment of the Olympic Neighborhood Redevelopment Task Force. Meanwhile, the AHA took the lead to coordinate the Techwood/Clark Howell redevelopment.⁶⁴ For an

⁶⁰ Sarah Burns and David McMahon, “East Lake Meadows,” Florentine Films, 2020.

⁶¹ Hideaki Tanaka and the Suzuki Motor Corporation, “Letter to The Honorable Maynard Jackson, February 1, 1993,” Box 1, Folder 1-12, Bankhead Court Records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁶² Hideaki Tanaka and the Suzuki Motor Corporation, “Letter to The Honorable Maynard Jackson, September 24, 1993,” Box 1, Folder 1-12, Bankhead Court Records, Atlanta Housing Authority. A handwritten note is at the top of the letter that says “Just for your information. We need to stay on course! Signed by ED. I question what they mean by “stay the course,” focus on their partnership with AHA to revitalize public housing on their timeline and not listen to corporate threats? This is my best guess.

⁶³ Robert Herbert, “HUD/AHA Memorandum of Understanding,” Inter-Office Memorandum to Mayor Maynard Jackson from special counsel to the Mayor, July 12, 1991, Box 23, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁶⁴ “Letter to Honorable Maynard H. Jackson from the Atlanta Housing Authority,” June 18, 1991,” Box 23, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

agency that was supposed to be creating a better relationship with its residents, their continued ties with the police served to undermine their progress. Their use of paternalistic language, evident on the task force documents, also continues. An AHA document from June 1991 reveals the slogan: “Invest In Your Future...Save the Children.”⁶⁵ This provokes a few thoughts and questions. Did AHA imply that public housing residents were not currently invested in the future of themselves and their children? They once again blamed residents for circumstances that were brought about by systemic issues. Also, what exactly qualifies as “saving the children?”

So why Techwood? Why was it a target of Olympification in the first place? The answer lay in location. It was so close to Atlanta’s business district that developers feared that it harmed the image they were trying to sell. Lawyer William J. Diehl explains, “many city and business leaders believed the concentration of low income families, high crime rates within the public housing project, and its central location created public image concerns.”⁶⁶ The AHA, in collaboration with ACOG, approached residents as early as 1990, promising to secure \$25,000 per unit for renovations. However, according to Lawrence Vale and Annemarie Gray in their article, “The Displacement Decathlon: Atlanta 1996 to Rio 2016,” in *Places*: “the residents were suspicious; they redirected the

⁶⁵ Letter from the “Letter to Honorable Maynard H. Jackson from the Atlanta Housing Authority,” June 18, 1991.

⁶⁶ William J. Diehl, “An Olympic Relay Race: Passing Atlanta’s Public Housing to Public-Private Partnerships from the 1996 Olympic Games to Today,” *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law* 26, no. 3 (2018): 575-612.

conversation to unmet maintenance and security needs, and above all they wanted to know: Where were you before the Olympics?”⁶⁷ Their motivations were suspect.

The first plan drawn up by the AHA for the redevelopment of Techwood raised red flags for the regional HUD office. A 1992 AJC article revealed that “HUD issued a letter expressing considerable dissatisfaction with the redevelopment plan drawn up by the AHA. HUD was particularly concerned that the plan failed to ensure long-term housing for poor people. HUD also made clear it wanted other interested parties—including the city, Coca-Cola, and ACOG—to pony up.”⁶⁸ In other words, they needed both public and private funding to pull off this project. ACOG’s revised plan included the caveat that the subsidized housing units would be locked in as public housing for 40 years.⁶⁹

Residents were determined that their voices be included in the debate and joined in the efforts to create a HOPE VI application. This was their final attempt to demonstrate what Akira Drake Rodriguez terms, “Black participatory geographies,” which in turn created Black participatory communities.⁷⁰ These geographies demonstrate how “public housing developments through their tenant associations, have the potential to diverge the space of the development to engage with the democratic process on multiple scales:

⁶⁷ Lawrence Vale and Annemarie Gray, “The Displacement Decathlon: Atlanta 1996 to Rio 2016,” *Places Journal*, (April 1, 2013): <https://placesjournal.org/article/the-displacement-decathlon/?cn-reloaded=1>.

⁶⁸ “Techwood plan looks up” Atlanta Journal/Atlanta Constitution, January 5, 1992, Box 106, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, C-6.

⁶⁹ “Techwood plan looks up” Atlanta Journal/Atlanta Constitution, January 5, 1992, C-6.

⁷⁰ Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 13.

community, local, state, and federal.”⁷¹ Working with the housing authority and the Integral Partnership of Atlanta (TIPA), the Techwood/Clark Howell Resident Task Force or Techwood Redevelopment Area Resident Planning Task came up with a plan for community and supportive services in the future housing development. They wanted to provide services in education, daycare, job training and employment, mental health and counseling, retail space development, safety and security, and community and recreation activity. Offering these services would help meet the needs of residents of all ages, especially the youth in the community.⁷²

The one proposed supportive service that I question is education. It’s amazing that this was one of the areas of suggested aid, but would it actually help residents in the long run? For one renter/resident, it did not. A letter written by V. Sledge to Mayor Jackson, sent sometime in 1990, represented a concern:

You and I have talked a few times at various functions, but my name will mean very little to you. My problem is that I have followed all of the societal rules, yet I find myself in the position of joining the homeless soon if someone does not take an immediate interest and come to my aid. My rent will be four months behind on 11/1/90 and I cannot find a solution. I did work-study at Clark Atlanta University for 2 ½ years until June 1990, when I received my masters in Career Counseling. Now, I am the trained counselor who cannot find a niche. I have been to all of the traditional places of employment and the only hiring activity seems to be with temporary agencies, where they expect you to type or do data entry at a rate of at least 40 wpm. I have good clerical skills but I cannot pass the test. One of the major hotels downtown hired me as a floor manager but after 4 days of cleaning rooms, my back felt like it was on fire and going to break. I had to quit that \$6 p/hr job because it was physically impossible for me to handle.

⁷¹ Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants*, 11.

⁷² “Community and Supportive Services Program” in Techwood/Clark Howell Revitalization: A proposal for H.U.D./HOPE VI from the Techwood/Clark Howell Resident Task Force and the Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta for Community and Supportive Services: Meeting the Needs of a Revitalized Community, March 1995, Box 1, Olympic Legacy Program records, Atlanta Housing Authority, 1-2.

I am registered with state employment, state, federal and county governments, hospitals, schools, and private agencies. My training and experience allows me to fit perfectly in personal, public relations, and counseling, however, I will take whatever I can get. My landlord called during the writing of this letter, stopping short of demanding her house. The fear is mounting and I am afraid. The only solution to my problem is to find a job. Mayor, someone in this town must have a position for me. Please help me at this critical hour. Thank you.⁷³

This letter reflects the voices and experiences of Black women, past and present, forced to do back-breaking domestic work in order to support their families, much like the laundresses who struck for better wages in the 1880s. Sledge asserts how she played into the respectability game; she got her education and thought this would be the key to a successful future. Learning otherwise was intensely difficult, just as it had been for many of the Black middle and elite classes that date back to the late nineteenth century when Atlanta's Black higher education institutions were founded. Education could not save us or lift us up in the eyes of white society. Mayor Jackson received Sledge's letter.⁷⁴ Today, there are two notes attached. The first one says, "refer to appropriate person." The second, a note to future Mayor Shirley Franklin, asks her to "please send it to John Calhoun, Director, Personnel Administration."⁷⁵ I hope that Sledge found that job for herself and for her daughter, whose picture with Mayor Jackson she attached to the letter. This letter puts into perspective the role that a mayor has with their constituents. We tend

⁷³ "Letter to Mayor Maynard Jackson from V. Sledge, 1990," Box 57, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁷⁴ Do not get me wrong, I do not question the power of education but I question how the politics of respectability plays a factor in its applicability to the overall wellbeing of Black American lives. I should also acknowledge my own educational privileges. Upon completion of my doctoral degree, I will have five higher education degrees/certificates. But reading this letter was a stark reminder of the continued challenges I and other Black women in America face, in career and in life.

⁷⁵ "Letter to Mayor Maynard Jackson from V. Sledge, 1990," Box 57, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

to think of what mayors can do on a larger, systemic level, but sometimes, they work on the level of the individual.

In Techwood, residents formed a subcommittee to address the planned reconstruction of already-existing units on the property and the planned construction of 500 new units.⁷⁶ They even managed to get the support of former President Jimmy Carter, who, in a letter to HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros wrote, “I understand that it to be a comprehensive approach to revitalizing public housing communities. Further, the program will incorporate the principles which have been embraced by the Atlanta project and ones that bear the greatest promise for true community transformation.”⁷⁷ Once HUD approved the funds, Jackson celebrated, saying, “this is a great day for Atlanta, the AHA and all of its residents. We now have in place the key component that allows us to move forward to construct the Olympic Village and more importantly to create better housing for the residents of Techwood/Clark Howell.”⁷⁸ The plan to transform Atlanta’s public housing in the leadup to the Olympic Games officially commenced.

The plan included the demolition of almost all of the 60 buildings. They planned to leave one building as a museum and cultural center. The current units would be replaced with 900 mixed-income units—360 units would be reserved for housing

⁷⁶ “Project Records, “Box 1, Folder 11, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁷⁷ “Letter of Support from Jimmy Carter to Secretary Henry Cisneros supporting the AHA’s application to the HUD for an Urban Revitalization Demonstration Grant, May 7, 1993” in Project Records, Folder 11, Box 1, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁷⁸ “HUD approves relocation portion of Techwood land sale,” Box 1, Folder 11, Series 1a: Development Records of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, Atlanta Housing Authority.

replacements, 140 units would be reserved for HOPE VI, 150 units would be reserved for Section 8, and 431 units would be designated for everyone else.⁷⁹ At least \$7 million would go to the community and supportive services.⁸⁰ The Techwood/Clark Howell Revitalization was part of a larger Olympic Legacy Program that began in 1994 and was planned for completion by 1999 or 2000. It included the East Lake Meadows community, the John Hope Homes, and the John Eagan Homes. This made up 20% of the AHA's properties, redeveloping 2,935 units, and totaling \$100 million through HUD and state and local funding.⁸¹ Once funding was secured, the city commenced relocating residents. Residents were given a 90-day notice to vacate and were offered either temporary Section 8 housing or the choice of another public housing complex. They offered residents counseling and advisory services to help them make their decision, and if they chose Section 8, they covered application fees and other moving expenses. Residents could also choose to move in with a family member, but only if the residence met safety and sanitary conditions.⁸² Everyone remained a member of the residents association after they moved, which allowed them to continue to be eligible for community services.⁸³ In the

⁷⁹ "From the New Deal, to the New Covenant: Revitalization Efforts Underway in Techwood/Clark Howell," May 18, 1995, Box 14, Folder 14-7, Series 4: Tenant Association Records, Techwood-Clark Howell Homes and Centennial Place records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁸⁰ "Community and Supportive Services Program" in Techwood/Clark Howell Revitalization. Box 1, Urban Renewal Program records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁸¹ "Olympic Legacy Program Fact Sheet," Box 2, Folder 2-12, Olympic Legacy Program records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁸² This also paternalistic but I do acknowledge their efforts to make sure people lived in safe housing; "Ninety (90) Day Letter Temporary Move to Section 8 Housing," Box 1, Folder 4, Urban Renewal Program records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁸³ "Corrections," Techwood/Clark Howell Planning Committee Journal, Vol 1, No. 2. February 1996, Box 1, Urban Renewal Program records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

AHA's resident relocation FAQ, there is a slide called "Satisfaction Indicators" that contains several positive quotes from residents. For example, D. Newell said, "no problems with relocation. It works for you." M. Lollis said, "have a little patience. The relocation team will treat you right. I give them a grade of A. I love my new house in Centennial Place. It was worth the wait."⁸⁴ However, two positive quotes from residents hardly makes a consensus on how residents actually felt about being relocated out of their long-time homes with, despite all the talk from AHA, no real guarantee that they would be back.

⁸⁴ "Residents Relocation FAQ Satisfaction Indicators," Box 1, Folder 6, Urban Renewal Program records, Atlanta Housing Authority.



Figure Thirty-Seven: Proposed Site Plan for Centennial Place. Courtesy of the Atlanta Housing Authority.

The AHA also had plans to sell the community to outsiders in order to fill all of their planned units. In an ad for the new community, the future was forecast in rosy terms:

Simplify your lifestyle. Move in town and into Centennial Place, Atlanta's premier master-planned community. Less than a five-minute walk from Atlanta's international business district and the world famous Peachtree

Street, Centennial Place is the most extraordinary address to have in the city. Sprawled across nearly 60 acres of wooded landscaping with a touch of southern charm, Centennial Place garden apartments, and townhouses feature spacious floor plans, built in energy efficiencies and very attractive amenities...While most commuters are wading through traffic after work, you could already be relaxing at home...⁸⁵

The language here repeats a long-running strategy meant to draw outsiders to the south and remake the imagery of the south's racist past. Mentioning the location confirms that developers always wanted this address back for their own business interests. The ad for Centennial Place harkens back to Atlanta's past, reading:

It is quite proper that a mythical bird, the Phoenix, which rose from ashes to be born again, should be chosen to represent the city of Atlanta. Of course the original metaphor was used to celebrate the city's rebound after being torched by the infamous General Sherman. But it is still appropriate today as the city continues to rebuild on scarred ground. A case in point is Centennial Place, a private development put in place with government assistance...Centennial Place, scheduled to be finished by the year 2000, is a \$100 million instant neighborhood with a great diversity of citizens sitting at the edge of Georgia Tech. "We intend to rebuild the old urban fabric in Centennial Place to bring people of means back into the community to live side by side with different income groups, just like it used to be," said Valerie Edwards, a principal in The Integral Group, LLC, co-developer of Centennial Place.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ "Centennial Place-An Exciting New Intown Community," Downtown Atlanta Magazine, 1997, Box 4, Folder 4-22, Olympic Legacy Records, Atlanta Housing Authority, 8.

⁸⁶ "Centennial Place-An Exciting New Intown Community," Downtown Atlanta, 1997, 9.

Reference to the Civil War as evidence of Atlanta's rise is a legacy of the New South imagery employed since the days of Henry Grady. Calling it an instant neighborhood erases Techwood, the community that existed in its place. Why call it scarred ground? It somehow simultaneously acknowledges and erases that history. Regardless of the problems in Techwood throughout the years, it was still very much a community. Valerie Edwards' language is even more problematic. When she mentions bringing "people of means" back into the community, she might as well have said, "bring wealthy white residents into the community and not the majority Black community that long resided there." Likewise, "just like it used to be" speaks to a lack of knowledge on the history of Techwood, as well as how Atlanta's neighborhood fabric changed throughout the twentieth century. This entire ad makes it clear who Centennial Place was built for, and it was not the Black residents being forced to relocate.

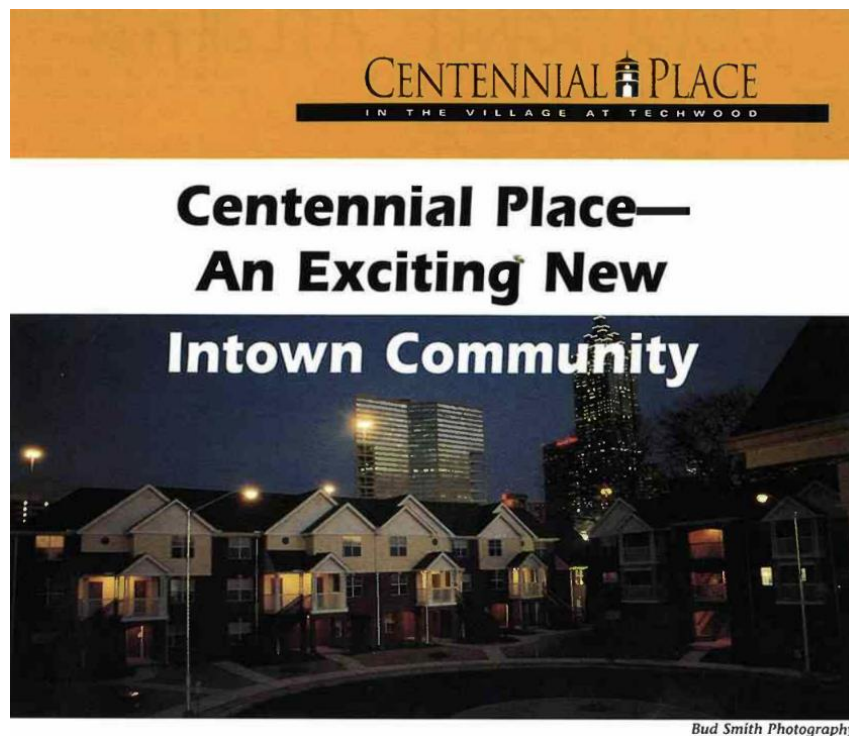


Figure Thirty-Eight: An ad for Centennial Place. Courtesy of the Atlanta Housing Authority

Once Centennial Place was completed, the reality for current and former residents hit home. Now under private management, residents faced stricter requirements for living at Centennial Place.⁸⁷ In reality, according to Renee Glover, the director of the Atlanta Housing Authority during the Olympics, “there would never have been enough room for all of the Techwood residents at Centennial Place. By design, no more than 40 percent of units are reserved for public housing.”⁸⁸ After the Games, it was revealed that only 78 families were able to return to Techwood after the Games, a slim 7% of the previous residents.⁸⁹ Many former Techwood residents left the city altogether for Dekalb County and Clayton County.⁹⁰ For those allowed to return, their neighborhood and sense of community vanished. Margie Smith, a former resident of Techwood and current resident of Centennial Place, found Centennial a nice place to live, but said that at Techwood, “we was family, even though we were public housing, we were a neighborhood, like any other neighborhood is.”⁹¹ Another person, referred to as a “concerned resident,” addressed what it was like to live in Centennial Place at a community meeting about new management: “these people are doing everything they can to give all based on income residents a hard time. They hound us about the littlest things, and they are forever threatening to evict our children and us.”⁹² What happened, people wondered, to the housing authority that was concerned about saving the children and its adult residents? For Black families, life in Centennial Place was not the paradise that had been advertised to white residents.

⁸⁷ Lawrence Vale and Annemarie Gray, “The Displacement Decathlon: Atlanta 1996 to Rio 2016,” np.

⁸⁸ Stephannie Stokes, “The ’96 Olympics: Techwood And The New Face Of Public Housing,” *WABE*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.wabe.org/96-olympics-techwood-and-new-face-public-housing>.

In 2016, the Atlanta Housing Authority openly talked about the challenge of displacement. In an oral history, Rob Rumley, chairman of the board of the commissioners, who grew up in public housing in the neighborhood of Vine City in the 1980s, said, “I think there’s been a good amount of displacement they [low income residents] haven’t been able to come back and that’s really concerning...so it’s a goal of mine to see if we can really step up to that challenge and address that need.”⁹³ With a better understanding of Atlanta in the 1990s, we can explore the larger story of the Centennial Olympic Games.

⁸⁹ Lawrence Vale and Annemarie Gray, “The Displacement Decathlon: Atlanta 1996 to Rio 2016,” np.

⁹⁰ Keith Jennings, “The Politics of Race, Class, and Gentrification in the ATL,” *Trotter Review* 23, no. 1 (September 22, 2016): 1-38, https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=trotter_review, 16-17.

⁹¹ Stokes, “The ’96 Olympics: Techwood And The New Face Of Public Housing,” *WABE*, July 19, 2016.

⁹² “Community Center Meeting regarding new management,” Series 4: Tenant Association Records, Box 14, Folder 6, 2000, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁹³ Robert Rumley, interview by Atlanta Housing Authority, 2017.

CHAPTER 5

THE CENTENNIAL OLYMPIC GAMES

As a historian, it is always important to talk about my why. Why do I love the Olympics, and why did I choose to research them? I have loved the Olympics my entire life. Growing up in the suburbs of post-1996 Atlanta means I grew up in the shadows of the Games. When I was a child, my mom took my childhood best friend and I to Centennial Olympic Park to play in the fountain. This tradition continues today for other Atlanta kids; when I went to conduct research for this project in the summer of 2024, I sat down in the park and saw kids playing just like I had. In 2008, my seventh-grade social studies teacher assigned my class the task to watch the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Games. As I watched, I immediately fell in love. When the next summer Games came around in London in 2012, I glued myself to the television to watch the Fierce Five win team gold in gymnastics. In 2014, I watched the winter Games in Sochi for the first time, becoming obsessed again, especially with figure skating. During those two weeks, I watched as many sports as possible. During my master's program, I talked so much about the Olympics that my classmates suggested I write about the Atlanta Games. It made perfect sense. But the more I learned about the Olympic Games, the more I came to critique them. In many ways, the Olympics cause more harm than good. But I do believe that the Games have the possibility to enact good. I firmly advocate for Olympic reform in the ways we select host cities, requiring cities to benefit their residents and create a plan that is wholly sustainable so that venues are not created for one-time use. While I am

not sure how I as an individual can effectively advocate for that reform, it is my hope that by writing about the Olympics, more people will better understand the process and rise up for change. As this chapter makes evident, Olympification is not an overnight process. It is a dream, a vision—one that we need to make more realistic for all.

In 1987, Atlanta's journey to light the Olympic flame began. Billy Payne, a local lawyer and businessman, dreamed that Atlanta would one day host the Olympics. He initially faced doubters, but he persisted and eventually got the support of other businessmen and city government officials like Mayor Andrew Young. That year, Payne created the Georgia Amateur Athlete Foundation to stir up traction for Atlanta's bid; members included Charlie Battle, Horace Sibley, Ginger Watkins, Linda Stephenson, Cindy Fowler, Tim Christian, Charlie Shaffer, Jack Pinkerton, and Enoch Prow. They were nicknamed "The Crazy Atlanta Nine" because of how much influence they had in city affairs.¹ As members of Atlanta's white elite, they worked in business, banking, corporate law, and fundraising.² The Atlanta Nine and other members of the white business elite hoped that the Games would solidify their social and economic position in the city. They wanted to show that Atlanta was a city worthy of international attention—a city that could host the Games with grandiosity and pride. Atlanta had started to decline in the 1980s, and with this decline, white elites began losing their power. The Games was their chance to turn Atlanta into the international city of their dreams and regain that power. Anthropologist Charles Rutheiser asserts that, "the corporate imagineers at

¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 171-173.

² Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 173.

Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and Central Atlanta Progress, dream of the billions of dollars in new investments that will flow their way as a result of the unprecedented publicity that will prove Atlanta to be the truly world class city they had tirelessly claimed it to be.”³ In order to sell Atlanta to the rest of the world, the Georgia Amateur Athlete Foundation borrowed and rebooted the legacy of Atlanta as the “city too busy to hate.” First started by Mayor Hartsfield in the 1950s, it was a legacy of Henry Grady’s vision of the New South that hid the ugly truth of inequality. Atlanta was haunted by its racist past, and hosting the Olympics offered white elites a chance to rewrite Atlanta’s past and cement their own wealth and class status. In their vision, Atlanta had been and always would be the leading New South city. *The Washington Post* questioned this motivation. In the article, “Atlanta Still Isn’t Athens: If the City Can Snag the Olympics, Why Can’t It Deal with Its Problems?” Bill Deadman argued that Atlanta wanted the Games to distract from the past, gain recognition, and get a winning sports record.⁴ He noted that “Atlanta needs distraction. The leaders of the many New Souths that have risen and faded have always sought distraction from Reconstruction, distraction from Ku Kluxry, and now distraction from recession.”⁵

³ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 227.

⁴ Bill Deadman, “Atlanta Still Isn’t Athens: If the City Can Snag the Olympics, Why Can’t It Deal with Its Problems?” *The Washington Post*, October 7, 1990, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center, 25.

⁵ Deadman, “Atlanta Still Isn’t Athens,” 25.



Figure Thirty-Nine: Atlanta Olympic Committee (AOC) members in 1988, Ginger Watkins, Cindy Fowler, Linda Stephenson, Charlie Shaffer, Billy Payne, Mayor Andrew Young, Tim Christian, Horace Sibley. Mayor Young is the only Black member shown. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution and Georgia State University Special Collections

Payne formed the Atlanta Organizing Committee (AOC) to submit a bid to the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), outlining why Atlanta was a good choice for the American bid city. In April 1988, Atlanta won over thirteen other American cities, including Nashville, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and San Francisco.⁶ The next step was to sell Atlanta to the rest of the world. The AOC depended on the international reputation of Mayor Young that he had cultivated in his years as a U.S. representative, U.N. ambassador, and mayor. As chairman of the AOC, Young traveled to Nigeria, Egypt,

⁶ Sarah Dylla, "How Atlanta Became A Host City," *Atlanta History Center* (blog), May 4, 2020, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/how-atlanta-became-a-host-city/>; "Chronology of Atlanta's Olympic Bid," Box 341, Series 7, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and other West African countries to secure critical votes for the bid.⁷ In one pitch speech Young claims: “Atlanta symbolizes the partial fulfillment of the Olympic Dream. We have brought together peoples from the farthest corners of this planet and learned to live together in an amazing degree of harmony in spite of enormous diversity... In Atlanta the Olympic spirit will soar the highest.”⁸ Ironically, before Young ran for mayor many accused him of being too big for the job but it was those same international contacts he cultivated that allowed Atlanta to gain traction for the bid. Melissa Harris in *Atlanta Magazine* acknowledges Young’s role saying: “It is difficult to say and probably pointless to wonder whether Payne could have done what he did without Andrew Young. The fact of the matter is that Young, another dreamer of the highest order, was perhaps the sharpest weapon in Payne’s amazing coup.”⁹

Atlanta hosted multiple international sporting events in volleyball, polo, and basketball, with teams from Japan, the USSR, West Germany, South Korean, Canada, Cuba, and Sweden throughout 1988 and 1989. AOC representatives also traveled to other international events like the 1988 Seoul Games and the 1990 Commonwealth Games in New Zealand to both observe and secure support for their own efforts.¹⁰ It was not until 1990 that white elites included the general public in the bid process. By then, the

⁷ R. Lalide, “Vote Atlanta, Andy Young Tells NOC,” *The Guardian*, August 23, 1990, Box 341, Series 7, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library, 19.

⁸ Andrew Young, “Speeches given by Andrew Young,” Box 347, Folder 1, Series 7, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

⁹ Melissa Harris, “A City of Dreams,” *Atlanta Magazine*, December 1990, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center, 63.

¹⁰ “Chronology of Atlanta’s Bid for the 1996 Olympic Games February 1987 to September 1990,” Box 344, Series 7, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

“machine was at full throttle and there was no stopping it.”¹¹ They went so far as to commission a song called, “The World Has One Dream,” featuring lyrics like:

The world has one dream, to play as one team, against all odds, let all men see humanity, the world has one dream, the flame must survive, one people as one team, the world has one dream. In Atlanta, the dream is coming, the dream is still the same, the playing of the Games, in Atlanta the dream is coming true, the team is coming through.¹²

The flowery and overly optimistic language worked. On September 18, 1990, Atlanta’s dreams came true when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) granted them the bid to host the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games.¹³ Georgians were gathered at Underground Atlanta when the news was announced. As the camera panned to the crowd, a local report announced, “Those people are happy! There’s no doubt about that. There’s hugs everywhere, cheers everywhere. It is a dynamic moment for the city of Atlanta.”¹⁴

Choosing Atlanta was a surprise. Many people thought the Games would go to Greece, as it was the one-hundredth anniversary of the Games, and Greece was the country where the Games had originated.¹⁵ Other cities like Manchester, Toronto, and Belgrade had also competed for the bid.¹⁶ However, now that Atlanta had been chosen, the preparation work

¹¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 176.

¹² Sarah Dylla, “How Atlanta Became A Host City,” Atlanta History Center; “Lyrics for Final Video Segment,” Box 346, Series 7, Andrew J. Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library.

¹³ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City 1946-1996* (Longstreet Press, 1996), 237-240.

¹⁴ “It’s Atlanta! 25 years ago, Atlanta hosted the 1996 Olympic Games,” posted by The Atlanta Journal Constitution, July 18, 2021, video, 1:00, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10159606136717299>.

¹⁵ Alfred E. Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games: A History of the Power Brokers, Events, and Controversies That Shaped the Games* (Human Kinetics, 1999), 250-251.

¹⁶ Sarah Dylla, “How Atlanta Became A Host City,” Atlanta History Center.

began: building Olympic venues, working with the international press, garnering support from local companies such as Delta and Coca Cola, and creating programs that included Atlanta residents in the planning process and the Games themselves. Preparation for the Games occurred through the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG). Melissa Harris summarized the challenge: “six years and more than \$1 billion worth of unshaped concrete and steel stand between Payne and his place of honor in the story of Atlanta. He will be remembered kindly as long as the Games are a success.”¹⁷ Going forward, Billy Payne and the ACOG worked endlessly to earn their place in Georgia history.



Figure Forty: Mayor Andrew Young and his wife Jean Young at Atlanta's celebratory parade after winning the Olympic bid in 1990. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution and Georgia State University Special Collections

¹⁷ Melissa Harris, “A City of Dreams,” *Atlanta Magazine*, 63.

However, like the Olympics elsewhere, the Atlanta Games had a huge social and economic impact on the city's residents. The initial excitement felt by many would fade as preparation work became more financially and socially difficult. The Games were sold to the public as positive and beneficial for all, but in the end, this did not prove to be accurate. Many poor and working-class Black residents were displaced to build Olympic venues. Homeless people suffered arrest and confinement in the city's goal to "clean up" the streets. The ideas from elite Black city leaders, who tried to create Olympic programs designed for Black Atlantans, were ignored by white ACOG members. Both groups ignored the opinions of poor and working-class Black Atlantans. At the end of the Atlanta Games, ACOG organizers judged them to be a social and economic success. To consider the validity of this judgment, I consider the experiences of both the Games' organizers and Atlanta's residents.

Scholars have long explored the many intersections of race, economics, and class in the Atlanta Games. The Olympic Games are championed for their positive economic impact on their host cities. However, the host cities seldom shine a light on the negative impact that the Games often have on communities of color who are not given the same chance to socially and economically benefit.¹⁸ The Atlanta Games resulted in the displacement of poor and working-class Atlantans in Summerhill and Techwood and the jailing of the homeless to clear the streets for the Games.¹⁹ Other scholarship on the

¹⁸ Tuna Batuhan, "Olympic Strategy of Downtown Atlanta Business Elites: A Case Study of the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics," (PhD dissertation, Florida State University, 2015); Harvey K. Newman, "Atlanta's Olympics and the Business of Tourism," in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, ed. Richard D. Starnes (University of Alabama Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Alison Hopkins, "Come Celebrate Our Dream-But Don't Look Past the Silt

Atlanta Games focuses on analyzing the memories and commemoration of the Games. The effects of the Games can be felt on its host city and residents for years afterward. The public's perception of Atlanta changed from positive to negative throughout the Olympic cycle.²⁰ Researchers question the idea of memory and what it means to commemorate an event. Rutheiser's *Imagineering Atlanta* offers the classic critique. By analyzing the Games from the bidding process to the final product, Rutheiser hoped to, "describe some of the ways in which the 1996 Olympic Games reinforced, revised, and transcended both the dimensions of the status quo and to provoke discussion of what Atlanta has been and can be."²¹ He questions how Atlanta contributes to the status quo and who Atlanta can be as a city; I find these questions particularly useful. Ultimately, we must question the economic and social costs of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics on its residents.

The 1996 bid was not the first attempt to bring the Games to Atlanta. Efforts made in 1920 and 1984 had ultimately failed.²² Urban planner Tuna Batuhan argues the following about this desire: "the Olympics was part of a long dated strategy of downtown business elites that has been envisioned for decades, thus the Olympics served as a maintaining event for Atlanta's regime."²³ However, the drive to bring tourism to Atlanta

Fence: The Olympics Come to Summerhill," *Onyx Review* 3 (2018): <http://onyxreview.agnesscott.org/spring-2018/come-celebrate-our-dream>; Seth Gustafson, "Displacement and the Racial State in Olympic Atlanta 1990–1996," *Southeastern Geographer* 53, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 198-213, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26229061>.

²⁰ Drew Whitelegg, "Going for Gold: Atlanta's Bid for Fame," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 4 (December 2000): 801-817, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00279>; Alfred E. Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games: A History of the Power Brokers, Events, and Controversies That Shaped the Games* (Human Kinetics, 1999).

²¹ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 287.

²² Batuhan, "Olympic Strategy of Downtown Atlanta Business Elites," 90-94.

²³ Batuhan, "Olympic Strategy of Downtown Atlanta Business Elites," 135.

in service of white elites is even older than Batuhan argues. Similar debates occurred during the planning and staging of the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition. The Exposition also demonstrates Black Atlantans' attempts to use public history to insert their voices into the narrative of the city on a worldwide stage, as evidenced by the tale of the Negro Building. The 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition was organized by members of the city's white elite, which included businessmen, journalists, and politicians like Henry Grady. During the planning process, white boosters assembled well-known Black leaders to organize an exhibit that showed the thirty years of the progress, real or imaginary, that African Americans had achieved since emancipation. This exhibition would be staged in a separate area called the Negro Building.²⁴ This opportunity came as a surprise to Atlanta's Black community, and they relished at the chance to tell their own stories. They also wondered about the motivations of the white boosters and what message would be implied by having a separate building for Black stories. Regardless, they seized the opportunity to showcase the city with the largest Black population in the region to the world. Atlanta's Black enclaves, located along Auburn Avenue to the east and around Atlanta's Black universities to the west, were home to a steadily growing Black elite and offered a wealth of resources.²⁵ Samuel Inman, head of the finance committee, agreed to the Black section of the fair and paid for the building. While he hoped it would showcase the goodwill of white Atlantans, he also

²⁴ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 31.

²⁵ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 33-35.

believed in the inferiority of Black people and thought their exhibits would not have much to showcase, ultimately proving their inferiority to whites.²⁶

Expo planners hired Irvine Garland Penn, a businessman, educator, and journalist from Virginia, to gather items from across the South to be displayed in the Negro building. Ironically, planners constructed the buildings for the fair using Black convict labor, one of the most exploitative systems in existence after the abolition of slavery. After two years of gathering items, the Negro building came to life.²⁷ Using the tone of followers of Booker T. Washington and invoking the imagery of Frederick Douglass, “Penn chose to focus the key message of the exhibition on the establishment and successful outcome of industrial education programs. The resounding tale told to Atlanta Cotton States Exposition's visitors was one in which the manual trades of the dutiful maid, seamstress, mason, and wheelwright best suited the current abilities, and possibly the future ones, of blacks in America.”²⁸ Penn focused on the manual labor and skill-training achievements of Black people rather than their artistic achievements.²⁹

²⁶ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 49.

²⁷ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 54-56.

²⁸ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 62-64.

²⁹ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 68.

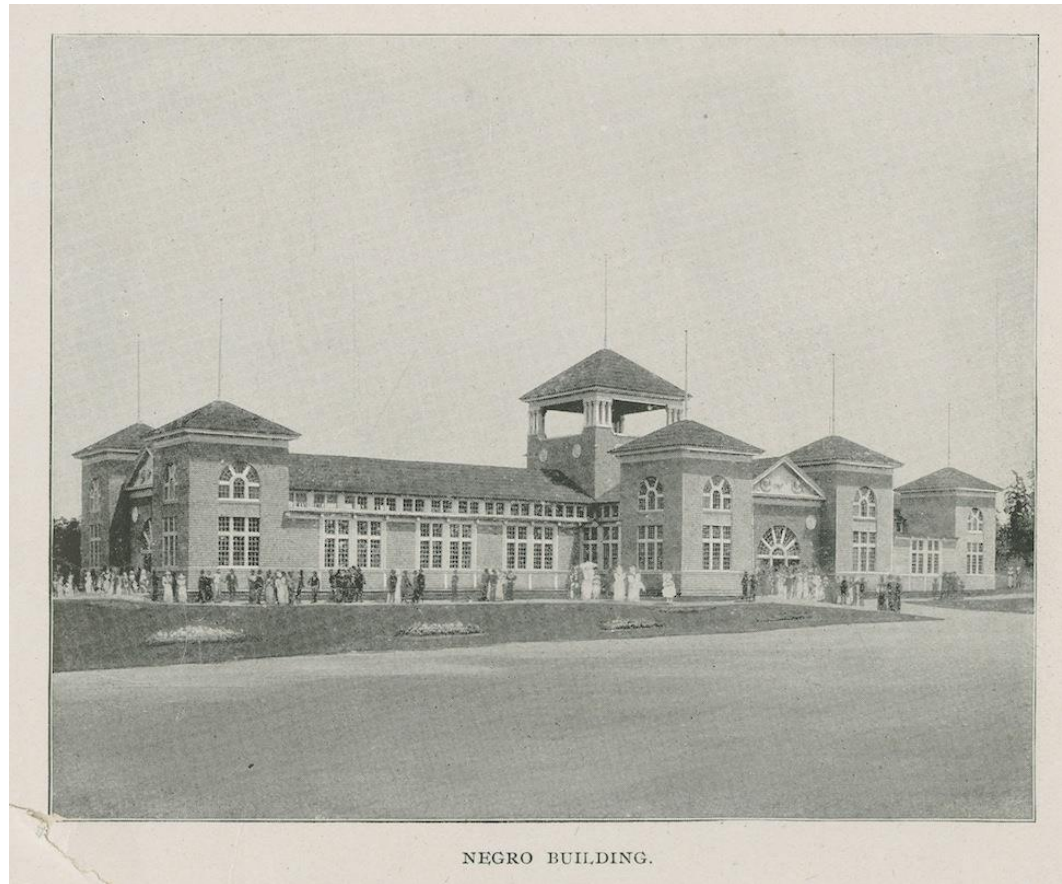


Figure Forty-One: The outside of the Negro Building. Photo courtesy of Atlanta Magazine.

During the fair, Black visitors could not stay in the white hotels in town, so Penn and other Black boosters built a new hotel and arranged personal home stays.³⁰ They also couldn't eat in the white food halls, so a food hall was built inside the Negro building.³¹ The Negro Building's importance is evidenced in the events that it inspired. The building served as a counter-public sphere in which to host forums on topics such as education,

³⁰ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 69.

³¹ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 73.

medical care, religion, and women's issues.³² The building also served as the venue to debate the pace of Black progress, as Booker T. Washington did in his Atlanta Exposition Speech, also known as the “Atlanta Compromise.” In this speech, Washington welcomed the world to the Negro Building and famously called for slow and steady progress towards Black equality rather than immediate equality. He also asked Black people to cooperate with whites to build the south’s prosperity. Historian Mabel Wilson argues that this speech “both validated the rise of a segregationist mentality and acknowledged the Negro's place as a handworker in the New South's economic order.”³³ This message did not go undebated among Black Americans. Many called this tactic accommodationist, and Washington received critiques in Black newspapers like *The Washington Bee*. They were disappointed that the speech seemed to accept the inferiority of Black Americans; others were upset that Washington moved the focus away from the fight for civil rights and towards the continuation of Black labor for whites.³⁴ Regardless, even though the rest of the fair continued serving up caricatures of Black people, the very existence of the Negro Building showed that Black Atlantans had created their own opportunities to tell their stories.

A century later, Black elite city leaders Andrew Young and Maynard Jackson were motivated to bring the Games to Atlanta and hoped that the Games could benefit both the Black community and their political positions.³⁵ Jackson originally supported the

³² Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 75.

³³ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 71.

³⁴ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 73.

³⁵ Kruse, *White Flight*, 28.

Games because he hoped to restore fifteen Atlanta neighborhoods with the help of business leaders. He also hoped that the Olympics would serve as an opportunity to create more Black millionaires.³⁶ After all, he worked tirelessly during his time as mayor to expand wealth-building opportunities for Black Atlantans. Young hoped the Games would help him follow in the footsteps of other successful Black mayors in the country.³⁷ As mayor, Young worked to rebuild the Black and white coalition.³⁸ One way to reaffirm this relationship between white business elites and Black city hall was to support bringing the Games to Atlanta. However, class differentials among Black Atlantans would disrupt these plans and cause tension throughout the Olympic cycle. Although these mayors originally intended to help poor Black Atlantans, most of their efforts failed. Meanwhile, poor and working-class Black residents were never asked if they wanted the Olympic Games in the first place, as “the ‘Atlanta style’ of biracial negotiation allowed for black upper and middle classes to broker deals on behalf of Atlanta’s black working classes and poor, without discussion with the latter.”³⁹ This was the case throughout the mayoral administrations of both Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young.

Tensions between Maynard Jackson and Billy Payne occurred early on during the formation of ACOG. These arguments did not go unnoticed by the media. Jackson tried to alleviate media perception by promising that “there is not a power struggle between

³⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 180.

³⁷ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 237.

³⁸ Kruse, *White Flight*, 240.

³⁹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 181.

Billy Payne and me, and any suggestion that there is pure foolishness.”⁴⁰ In reality, Jackson and Payne went back and forth on how much representation the city should have in the ACOG. They also questioned the funding of the Olympic stadium and argued over the use of public or private money. Jackson wanted confirmation of the usage of affirmative action. He also requested the creation of community impact plans, which studied how building venues would affect different neighborhoods.⁴¹ Jackson was, in fact, thinking of the communities he was elected to serve. Payne, on the other hand, focused on what best benefited him and the ACOG. He even contradicted himself at one point, when in accordance with IOC policies, Payne proposed “taking the city off the financial hook.”⁴² However, he also asked the city to pay for any cost overruns that they had while building the Olympic stadium.⁴³ From early on in the planning process, Black and white elites grappled for power. It reveals a difference in the treatments of Maynard Jackson versus Andrew Young. Payne and the ACOG treated Young like a hero, while never letting Jackson forget his past of working against the desires of the white elite.

As Olympics planning proceeded, Jackson tried to raise funds for redevelopment through a committee called The Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA). Their board members included Shirley Franklin as president and representatives from Atlanta City Council, the Department of Housing, Parks and

⁴⁰ Bert Roughton Jr and Mark Sherman, “Mayor denies Payne rift but positions are at odds” and or newspaper but likely the Atlanta Journal/Constitution based on the authors, Box 106, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, A1.

⁴¹ Bert Roughton Jr and Mark Sherman, “Mayor denies Payne rift but positions are at odds,” A5.

⁴² Bert Roughton Jr and Mark Sherman, “Mayor denies Payne rift but positions are at odds” A5.

⁴³ Bert Roughton Jr and Mark Sherman, “Mayor denies Payne rift but positions are at odds” A5.

Recreation, the AJC, and Trees Atlanta.⁴⁴ CODA's efforts ultimately failed. In *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-Events on Local Politics*, political scientists Matthew Burbank and Gregory Andranovich, along with the urban planner Charles H. Heying, argue that "in comparison with ACOG the city was reactive, undercapitalized and unable to mount a coordinated effort to match ACOG's initiatives."⁴⁵ The few funds raised were taken by the ACOG, who used it for their business plan. Faced with this failure and his own declining health, Jackson did not seek reelection in 1993. His successor, Bill Campbell, was much friendlier to the business community and the ACOG's efforts to focus on building venues rather than revitalizing communities.⁴⁶ Thus, Newman argues, "the white business leadership supported [Billy] Payne, isolating the city's mayors from trying to use the Games as an economic development strategy to help Atlanta's largely black low income residents."⁴⁷ Ultimately, after failing to help improve Atlanta's neighborhoods in any substantive ways, CODA focused their modest funds on infrastructure such as sidewalks, lighting, and signage.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ "May 18, 1993, CODA Board Meeting Attendees," Box 107, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

⁴⁵ Matthew J. Burbank, Gregory D. Andranovich, and Charles H. Heying, *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-Events on Local Politics* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 88.

⁴⁶ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 89-91.

⁴⁷ Newman, "Atlanta's Olympics and the Business of Tourism," 224.

⁴⁸ Young, Newman, and Young, *Andrew Young and the Making of Modern Atlanta*, 241.

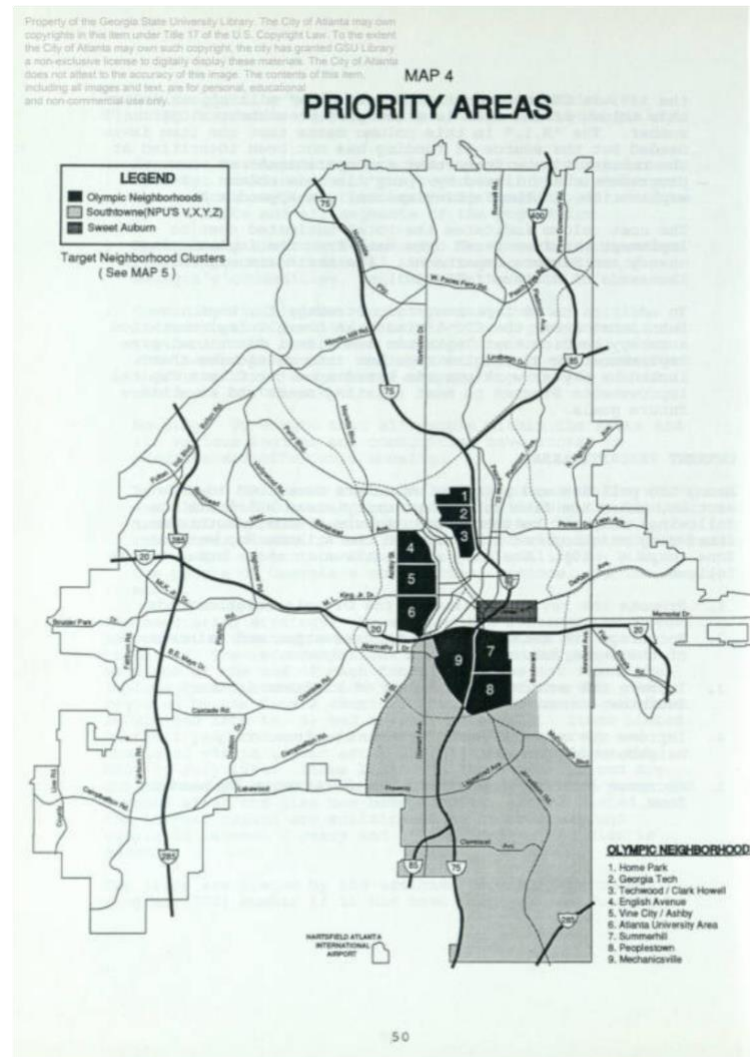


Figure Forty-Two: This 1995 map by the Atlanta Department of Budget and Planning shows the neighborhoods that were priority areas in the Olympic zone, and thus up for redevelopment. Courtesy of Atlanta History Center, Kenan Research Center and Atlanta Department of Budget and Planning

Building the Olympic Stadium revealed the very different motivations of white elites and Black elites. Those who hoped the Games would help to redevelop

neighborhoods of color saw the Olympic Stadium as one of their biggest challenges.⁴⁹

According to Richard Yarbrough, a white employee of the ACOG:

The issue of race wasn't long in making its mark on the stadium negotiations. At the time of the stadium, most of the senior management was white and lived in the more affluent northside of Atlanta. This led to charges that we were insensitive to the needs of the inner city poor and to minorities in general. It all came to a head when Martin Luther King III, the eldest son of the famed civil rights leader, and a member of the Fulton County commission, condemned our stadium agreement and blistered us publicly. We acceded to his demand that a top black administrator report directly to Billy Payne. Happily, for all of us that turned out to be Shirley Franklin, an outstanding individual. The AUC ended up with \$51 million and we pledged to spend \$150,000 on a job training program for residents of the neighborhoods around the stadium. With that, Mr. King went back to a remarkably undistinguished career, but he had made a lasting mark on the Atlanta Committee. So, the stadium was finally approved but the resentment and mistrust on both sides—ACOG and the local governments—continued through the rest of the planning period and the Games themselves. They thought us arrogant, and we thought them incompetent.⁵⁰

The ACOG and Black city leaders were motivated to get their stadiums built no matter the individual or group they had to undermine to make it happen. Black city leaders continued their efforts to improve their communities' neighborhoods and their own positions, but the ACOG was determined to ignore them. Even more complicated is Yarbrough's favoritism of one Black leader over another. He was happy to work with future Mayor Shirley Franklin because she was more compliant with the ACOG's ambitions than Martin Luther King III. The ACOG seemed to credit the opinions of Black Atlantans who agreed with them.

⁴⁹ Bert Roughton Jr., "Will the City Be Ready in 1996?" *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 28, 1994, Sally F White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

⁵⁰ Richard Yarbrough, *And They Call Them Games: An Inside View of the 1996 Olympics* (Mercer University Press, 2000), 73.



Figure Forty-Three: The Olympic Stadium under construction on June 28, 1995.
Courtesy of WBUR and John Bazemore, Associated Press

Overall, the planning process for the Games excluded elite Black city leadership, letting the social and economic benefits of the game fall on the city's white elites. These white elites openly stopped Black leaders from redeveloping neighborhoods of color by undermining their authority. The ACOG only listened to the opinions of Black Atlantans who they saw as compliant with their views, such as Shirley Franklin and Bill Campbell. The fact that Jackson and Young's efforts to ensure that poor and working-class Black Atlantans benefited from the Games were thwarted is absurd, especially because without these leaders, the Games might never have come to the city. In a 1990 *Atlanta Magazine*, Melissa Harris argues: "it is probably pointless to wonder whether Payne could have done what he did without Andrew Young. The fact of the matter is that Young was perhaps the sharpest weapon in Payne's amazing coup. With Young at his side, Payne

showed the guardians of Olympia a city of racial partnership.”⁵¹ When Black Americans gained positions of power, it did not necessarily mean their communities would reap the benefits.

The audience viewing the Games on television saw the final product, but not the underlying work to get there—particularly the fundraising required. The construction of Olympic venues took up a large portion of Atlanta’s budget. Atlanta built multiple venues from the ground up, including the Olympic Stadium, the horse park in Conyers, the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center, and Centennial Olympic Park, among others. According to ACOG member, Richard Yarbrough, the total cost for building all of these venues was over \$500 million. The most expensive of these venues was the Olympic Stadium, which took up half of the entire budget.⁵² The Official Report of the Centennial Olympic Games revealed that the ACOG made multiple offers to site owners to keep pricing competitive, which speaks to the purely economic nature of these Games.⁵³ In the specific case of building Olympic venues, everything was about profit; minimal thought was given to the people who would be displaced in the process. This economic mindset and disregard for the lives being interrupted was also demonstrated in 1995 when the ACOG began to make plans on how to remove locals from the Olympic zone. Alma Hill at *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (AJC) reported: “Atlanta Olympic organizers will begin making

⁵¹ Melissa Harris, “A City of Dreams,” 63.

⁵² Yarbrough, *And They Call Them Games*, 67.

⁵³ Summer Olympic Games Organizing Committee, *The Official Report of the Centennial Olympic Games*, (Peachtree Publishers, 1997), 114-116.

personal pitches to more than 200 downtown businesses urging them to give employers flexible work schedules during the Games. Businesses would not be offered any incentives in exchange for their cooperation.”⁵⁴ At this point in the planning process, organizers made the Games a priority over the wellbeing of the city’s residents, which disproportionately and negatively impacted poor and working-class Black residents.

Security and transportation were two other huge costs of planning the Games. These issues were still underfunded two years out from the Games. Cities were particularly concerned about the bill for these essential services, as well as the lack of leadership and direction on the part of the ACOG. Then Dekalb County CEO, Liane Levetan, stated in an *AJC* article in 1994: “there definitely hasn’t been any understanding of where the money is going to come from to pay for the overtime and such. The time has come to have a closer working relationship so that we can address the financial ramifications and where we fit in this whole scenario.”⁵⁵ Clearly, the ACOG was disorganized, and organizers did not consider the full economic costs to put on the Games. They were more focused on the dream than the reality.

By 1994, the ACOG was in danger of not raising enough funds to complete all of their goals. The ACOG still had venues to finish building, which required additional fundraising campaigns. They also needed a plan to manage the 15,000 journalists and

⁵⁴ Alma E. Hill, “ACOG Pushing Its Plan to Clear Streets for Games,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 5, 1995, Sally F White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

⁵⁵ Lucy Solo and Kathey Alexander, “Suburbs Nervous over Games Planning,” *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*, September 24, 1994, Sally F White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

over 70,000 volunteers who were expected to arrive. If leaders did not raise the money needed in time, they would fall short of their \$1.6 billion revenue goal. However, organizers expressed no concern to the public. Bert Roughton Jr. reported in the *AJC*: “Despite the breathtaking scope of these numbers, ACOG executives express confidence that they will succeed—so much confidence, in fact, that it seems in their heart of hearts that their official numbers are low.”⁵⁶ A year later, in 1995—exactly one year out from the Games—fundraising efforts continued. According to Lyle V. Harris in the *AJC*: “The once bleak balance sheet is looking rosier but the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) nevertheless has an aggressive fund raising program that includes marketing Olympic barbies and Cabbage Patch dolls—even quiz shows—to rake in millions in revenues.”⁵⁷ Roughton’s observation shows just how determined the ACOG was to put on the best Games yet. But it also shows just how much the ACOG underestimated the financial costs of hosting an Olympic Games. To achieve its own economic and social goals, the ACOG ignored the social and economic goals of other organizations like CODA.

Through CODA, Black elite city leaders claimed to represent the concerns of poor and working-class Black Atlantans regarding the Olympics. CODA had elaborate plans to redevelop Black neighborhoods including Summerhill, Vince City/Ashby, AUC, Auburn Avenue, and Mechanicsville/Peoplestown. Their revival plans for these neighborhoods

⁵⁶ Bert Roughton Jr., “Will the City Be Ready in 1996?” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 28, 1994.

⁵⁷ Lyle V. Harris, “A Year From Today, The Opening Ceremonies of the Centennial Olympics Will Begin Atlanta Olympics-Come What May,” *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1995, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

included demolishing abandoned buildings, cleaning up vacant lots and planting grass and flowers, and painting and fixing up houses in the Olympic ring to make it look more orderly. In their plan, CODA emphasized that “clearance will be kept to a minimum. The emphasis is on preserving the character of the neighborhood through rehabilitation. There will be very little family displacement. Family relocation will only occur with community approval and when relocation housing in the same neighborhood is available.”⁵⁸ This makes it clear that CODA was actually concerned with the welfare of Black communities and not harming them in the process of Olympic preparation. This was a concern that the ACOG did not share—completing all venues and pulling off a successful Olympics was their only concern. It’s no wonder, then, that the ACOG felt the need to undermine CODA at every turn. An October 1993 memo to Mayor Jackson from Clara reveals that the organization was already in danger, saying “I am concerned about our budget. We have managed to squeeze considerable blood from the proverbial turnip, but we continue to spend without commitments to replace revenue.”⁵⁹ It was already the end of 1993, and the Games were rapidly approaching. CODA was out of time.

CODA strove to meet their mission for as long as they could, but without the funds to back them up, their large-scale projects, like the rehabilitation of homes, schools,

⁵⁸ Ed Logue, “CODA: The Olympic Ring Neighborhoods- a program for community revival, a new beginning- Preparation of Neighborhood Revival Plans,” April 20, 1993, Box 10, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, 7.

⁵⁹ Clara H. Azam, “Confidential Memorandum to Maynard Jackson from Clara H. Axam October 18, 1993” CODA, Box 108, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

parks, and playgrounds, became impossible.⁶⁰ Bert Roughton Jr summed up CODA's struggles well in 1995:

The financial rug was pulled from under CODA's \$238 million redevelopment plan last week when a drive for an increase in the temporary sales tax stalled and perhaps died. CODA has asked for emergency aid to keep alive \$37 million worth of top priority projects but thus far has found no takers. They are breaking the CODA program into bite-sized chunks in hopes of finding patrons for individual projects. The troubled corporation expects to scrape together \$2 million from the city to qualify for a federal grant to make no frills improvements to sidewalks and streets between Marta stations and Olympic venues. Beyond that, the future is dim. And if the money is not found shortly—as in weeks, not months—it will be a practical impossibility to complete much in the time remaining until the games.⁶¹

Notably, the ACOG did not see CODA's failure as its own failure. In fact, ACOG leaders were okay with the number of uncompleted projects that were addressed in the media.

One year before the Games, Billy Payne said in an *AJC* article: "We're not going to be missing anything. It would have been unrealistic to think you are going to get another million dollars to plant more flowers or build more houses. I think we are going to be just right."⁶² Payne explained that ACOG's first and foremost concern was finishing its plans for the Games, rather than working in conjunction with other organizations who were concerned with how Games preparation impacted poor Black residents. In fact, the ACOG used other groups—such as the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, who agreed with

⁶⁰ Ed Logue, "CODA: The Olympic Ring Neighborhoods- a program for community revival," 8.

⁶¹ Bert Roughton Jr., "Will the City Be Ready in 1996?" *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 28, 1994.

⁶² Lyle V. Harris, "A Year From Today, The Opening Ceremonies of the Centennial Olympics Will Begin Atlanta Olympics-Come What May," *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1995, , Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

their views—to reiterate their positions to the press. The then-president of the Chamber of Commerce, Gerald Bartels, said to the *AJC* in an article addressing CODA’s lack of funds in 1994: “All this hand wringing urgency is misplaced. The city was good enough for the International Olympic Committee when it picked Atlanta in 1990, and it’s good enough now.”⁶³ The ACOG knew how to collaborate with other groups, but they picked and chose which groups to work with depending on how supportive those groups were of their initiatives. Ultimately, both CODA and the ACOG were stakeholders in the Atlanta Olympic Games, but CODA was treated as lesser than its counterparts. This behavior follows a preexisting pattern of ignoring the needs of the Black community in Atlanta, and displacing poor and working-class African Americans.⁶⁴

Displacement has proved to be a widespread downside of all Olympic Games, no matter the host city or nation. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, there are several types of displacement that can happen: “Direct displacement, in which residents are forced to move out because of rent increases, building rehabilitation, or a combination of both; exclusionary displacement, in which housing choices for low-income residents are limited; and finally displacement pressures, when the entire neighborhood changes and the services and support system that low income families relied on are no longer available to them.”⁶⁵ Black Atlantans experienced

⁶³ Lyle Haris Harris, “A Year From Today, The Opening Ceremonies of the Centennial Olympics Will Begin Atlanta Olympics-Come What May,” *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1995.

⁶⁴ Alison Hopkins, “Come Celebrate Our Dream-But Don’t Look Past the Silt Fence,” 2-3.

⁶⁵ “Displacement of Lower-Income Families in Urban Areas Report,” United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research, 2018 <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/DisplacementReport.pdf>, 4-5.

all three types of displacement throughout the 20th century; during the 1996 Olympics, they experienced the first two most heavily.

When referring to the Olympic Games, the ACOG had an entirely different definition regarding what displacement meant. In a report compiled by a group of University of Georgia professors and economists, *The Economic Impact on the State of Georgia of Hosting the 1996 Olympic Games*, the ACOG outlined its ideas of how the Olympics would impact the Georgia economy. In the displacement effects section, leaders believed that: “Visitation that is unrelated to the Olympics will be almost entirely displaced during the game period but will be enhanced before and after the Games. Many area residents will adjust their usual vacation plans to accommodate the Olympic Games.”⁶⁶ This approach and definition did not address Black Atlantans who were removed from their homes to build Olympic venues. It did not account for human experiences—only the numbers.

On the contrary, when CODA wrote reports to assess the neighborhoods in the Olympic zone that were up for redevelopment for the Games, they were more considerate of how their projects would impact the neighborhoods’ residents. According to the report, “overall structural conditions were classified in one of five categories, each implying a particular level of action to protect the health and safety of the occupants and property values in their neighborhoods.”⁶⁷ CODA hoped its projects would improve the lives of the people in these neighborhoods. They thought more about residents’ livelihoods than

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Humphreys and Michael Plummer, *The Economic Impact on the State of Georgia of Hosting the 1996 Olympic Games* (University of Georgia, 1995), 62.

⁶⁷ Corporation of Olympic Development in Atlanta, “Neighborhood Reports,” 1993, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

about how improving those neighborhoods helped Atlanta's Olympic image in the eyes of the world.

The displacement of Black Atlantans during the Olympic Games was not a new event in Atlanta history. It followed the historic pattern of destroying the composition of Black neighborhoods in order to serve the agenda of white elites. Displacement allowed Olympic organizers the opportunity to make Atlanta appear whiter and more prosperous than it was by displacing residents of color from the city center. Nineteen out of every twentieth person displaced were Black.⁶⁸ In the six years leading up to the Games, organizers attempted to clean up the streets by placing homeless people in jail. According to Lynn Minnaert, an expert in tourism and hospitality, "some of the construction programs such as Centennial Olympic Park, destroyed more than 10% of shelter space for the homeless."⁶⁹ Atlanta police officers were charged to arrest homeless Black Atlantans. According to Hobson, "the Atlanta police wrote an overwhelming number of citations that were preprinted with 'African American Male, Homeless.' Information identifying the arresting officer, charge, and date was left blank."⁷⁰ Leaders promised that the Olympic Games would lead to improved housing and city services for lower-class Black people, but they ended up causing people more harm than good. Meanwhile, members of the Black elite experienced the opposite. Historian Ronald Bayor argues that "the Olympic site development became part of a larger story in which segments of the black

⁶⁸ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 184.

⁶⁹ Lynn Minnaert and Charles Rutheiser, "An Olympic Legacy for All? The Non-Infrastructural Outcomes of the Olympic Games for Socially Excluded Groups (Atlanta 1996–Beijing 2008)," *Tourism Management* 33, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 366 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2011.04.005>.

⁷⁰ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 198.

community benefited more than others from black empowerment.”⁷¹ Thus, an unexpected consequence of the Atlanta Olympics is that it assisted in furthering class animosity within the Black community in Atlanta.

Black residents were displaced in the Summerhill neighborhood and other historically Black communities like Peoplestown and Mechanicville well before the Olympic Games. Summerhill is a historically Black community with a complicated history of urban renewal in Atlanta’s endless efforts to improve their image. Summerhill famously gained national attention during a riot in the summer of 1966. A year prior, in 1965, the \$18 million Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium was completed. Mayor Ivan Allen championed the stadium and other urban renewal efforts, but Black community leaders whose interests continued to represent those of the Black elite with little consideration of poor and working-class Black Atlantans—like Jesse Hill, president of the ANVL—aided in the process. Black leaders quickly realized their mistake, but it was too late. To build the stadium, the city displaced 3,000 residents and emptied 3,261 units from Mechanicsville and Peoplestown. Many residents ended up in Summerhill. Tax revenue meant for public parks were diverted to build the stadium.⁷² Tensions already ran high between the city and its residents, and those tensions came to a head in September 1966. Encouraged to protest by the head of the SNCC, Stokely Carmichael, the uprising broke out after an unarmed Black man named Harold Prather was shot by police.⁷³ It quickly

⁷¹ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 257.

⁷² Irene V. Holliman, “From Crackertown to Model City?” *Journal of Urban History* 35, 3 (2009): 371-374, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144208330402>.

⁷³ Irene V. Holliman, “From Crackertown to Model City?” 368; “Summerhill Uprising September 6, 1966,” Atlanta History Center, 2006, <https://album.atlantahistorycenter.com/digital/collection/Jenkins/id/29>.

devolved into chaos with the use of Molotov cocktails. Chants of “Black Power” could be heard from the protestors. Anxious to get the situation under control before it ruined Atlanta’s imagery, Mayor Allen ordered the use of teargas on protestors. In the aftermath, white politicians, the police, and Black leadership did everything they could to blame the SNCC.⁷⁴ The whole affair revealed “further evidence of tensions among older activists, younger activists, and community members regarding appropriate protest strategies, an issue that first came to the fore during the sit-in movement of the early 1960s.”⁷⁵ Therefore, the 1996 Olympic Games were not the first time Summerhill got caught up in debates over stadium negotiations and the stadium’s relationship to Black renters and communities. Nor was it the first time that class issues among Black Atlantans made themselves known in debates on Black geographies.

During the leadup to the Games, neighborhoods did not automatically accept the building of Olympic venues in their backyards. Organizations like the Olympic Conscience Coalition (OCC) and the Atlanta Neighbors United for Fairness (ANUFF) fought against the Games and the building of Olympic venues.⁷⁶ OCC’s membership included the clergy, poor and working-class residents, the unhoused, and activists. Both organizations staged demonstrations and protests against the Games. ANUFF was led by Ethel Mae Matthews, a poverty rights activist in charge of Emmaus House, an

⁷⁴ Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Duke University Press, 2006), 118-120.

⁷⁵ Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*, 120.

⁷⁶ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 186; Hopkins, “Come Celebrate Our Dream-But Don’t Look Past the Silt Fence,” 10.

organization working to provide economic and social assistance to residents of Peoplestown and other affected communities in Atlanta since 1967. Matthews was displaced during the building of Atlanta Fulton County Stadium and wanted to prevent other people from sharing the same fate. In her words, “I had no faith in the Olympics helping us because I was bulldozed by the first stadium.”⁷⁷ Their tactics included erecting a tent city at the site of the future Olympic stadium and hosting sit down talks with Olympic organizers in hopes of moving the stadium's location.⁷⁸ Another protestor and member of ANUFF, Columbus Ward spoke about his worries for building the Olympic stadium in his community: “we knew at that time it was not the best thing for the neighborhood... Something is not right about this. We studied what was going on in other cities before that had hosted Olympics and found out through history that they had did a lot of negative development in neighborhoods where the neighborhood ending up being worse off than what they was before the Olympics.”⁷⁹ Protesters refused to stand by while such a massive change occurred to their homes and neighborhoods.

⁷⁷“Sites and Venues of ’96,” Atlanta History Center, October 7, 2021, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/programs-events/public-programs/olympic-paralympic-games-celebration/sites-and-venues-of-96/>.

⁷⁸ Sarah Dylla and Langston Leake, “Direct Action: Voices of Dissent & Social Activism in Atlanta’s Olympic History,” Atlanta History Center (blog), November 12, 2020, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/direct-action-voice-of-dissent-and-social-activism-in-atlantas-olympic-history/>; “About Emmaus House,” Emmaus House, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://www.emmaushouseatlanta.org/about-emmaus-house>.

⁷⁹Columbus Ward, interview by Brennan Collins, Atlanta Studies, Stadiumville: Deep Mapping Turner Field, November 3, 2015, <https://atlantastudies.org/2015/11/03/stadiumville-deep-mapping-turner-field/>.



Figure Forty-Four: An ANUFF (Atlanta Neighbors United for Fairness) protest building the Olympic stadium. One sign says, “Don’t forget about people in the planning” and another says “No Olympic Stadium in Summerhill/Peoplestown.” Courtesy of The Atlanta Journal Constitution.

However, the ACOG could not let these protests gain traction, so they delegated ACOG employees to reason with members of the neighborhoods individually, undermining group efforts.⁸⁰ Hobson points out that “activists grew frustrated, feeling that their organizing against Olympic development would only dictate what individual neighborhoods received from the Games, but would not stop them all together.”⁸¹ Neighborhoods had no choice but to deal with Olympification on their own, and eventually these group efforts failed as well; it came down to the individual to decide where to relocate. For example, in Summerhill, at least 60 households were displaced and

⁸⁰ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 186-187.

⁸¹ Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 188.

replaced with single family homes and townhouses which ironically, sat empty during the Games themselves.⁸² In the end, the Olympic stadium was built on paved parking lots located next to Atlanta Fulton County Stadium and was funded by a public/private agreement between the city, the Atlanta Braves, and Olympic planners. After the Games ended, the Braves used the stadium for baseball.⁸³ This public/private partnership is just a continuation of how Atlanta has governed for the last century—under the leadership of mayors like Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young. This meant that instead of helping poor Black Atlantans stay in their neighborhoods, Olympic organizers pushed them out of the city and on to other counties in their effort to create the perfect Olympic image.

⁸² Seth Gustafson, “Displacement and the Racial State in Olympic Atlanta 1990–1996,” 208.

⁸³ Sites and Venues of '96,” Atlanta History Center, October 7, 2021.



Figure Forty-Five: Houses being cleared away in Summerhill in preparation for building the Olympic stadium. Courtesy of John Bazemore, Associated Press and WBUR

Atlanta promised social sustainability to its residents and failed to deliver. They promised jobs, updated infrastructure, and access to the Games for local low-income residents. The focus turned to businesses and how to make the city, and its rich white residents, more money. The Olympics are meant to be a celebration of sport, but poor people of color end up bearing the costs of that celebration. When Atlanta's Olympic cycle came to an end, "in all, roughly 30,000 Atlantans were evicted or displaced by other means between 1990 and 1996, and approximately 9,000 illegal arrests of homeless

people occurred in 1995 and 1996.”⁸⁴ It’s impossible to properly analyze modern Games without looking at their urban impact.



Figure Forty-Six : Techwood in 1993 covered in graffiti. Quotes include “I knew I hated history” and “What historic monument.” You can also see “I Guess Decided...Parking...Our Lives.” This likely refers to residents being forced out. Courtesy of the Historic American Buildings Survey, the Library of Congress, and Places Journal

The Legacy of 1996

Before the Centennial Olympic Games came to an end, many already questioned its legacy. The foreign press enjoyed the Opening Ceremonies, but immediately began to take aim at the ACOG. According to an *AJC* article, “at a morning briefing Tuesday, reporters fired questions at ACOG press officers forced to field complaints about ongoing

⁸⁴ Seth Gustafson, “Displacement and the Racial State in Olympic Atlanta 1990–1996,” 199.

transportation screwups, computer glitches, and security lapses.”⁸⁵ This anger from the foreign press persisted for the entirety of the Olympics, with reporters later calling it one of the most disorganized Games of all time. Drew Whitelegg asserted that “the Atlanta Games were often presented in the world’s media as something approaching a disaster.”⁸⁶ Though all national press operate with bias, the fact that the reports of multiple countries aligned together speaks to the validity of their statements, as well as collective anger. Historian Alfred Senn argues that, after the Games were over, while “Atlantans congratulated themselves on having put on a good show, foreign critics called the Games poorly organized, focusing on traffic problems, computer glitches, and over commercialization.”⁸⁷ So while Atlanta’s goal to improve its image on the international stage was a failure in the eyes of the press, organizers seemed content to ignore the critiques coming from around the world.

⁸⁵ Lyle V. Harris, “The Honeymoon’s over; Press Takes Aim at ACOG.” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 24, 1996, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center, 36.

⁸⁶ Drew Whitelegg, “Going for Gold: Atlanta’s Bid for Fame,” 804.

⁸⁷ Alfred E. Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games*, 257.



Figure Forty-Seven: The Centennial Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies.
Courtesy of WSBTV Atlanta

One of the biggest issues of the Games was transportation—specifically, MARTA. Trains were overcrowded and did not run fast enough to get Olympic visitors from place to place on a timely basis.⁸⁸ This failure of public transit was inevitable when one considers the continual vote against MARTA’s expansion into Cobb and Gwinnett counties.⁸⁹ When it came time for the Olympics, the system was underdeveloped, and it could never handle the influx of international visitors. Venues also proved to be too far from MARTA stations like Ashby and Vine City.⁹⁰ The question of MARTA expansion

⁸⁸ Kevin Sack, “Atlanta: DAY 6; Atlanta Bristles at All the Criticism,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/25/sports/atlanta-day-6-atlanta-bristles-at-all-the-criticism.html>.

⁸⁹ Kruse, *White Flight*, 248-249.

⁹⁰ “Olympics and Atlanta University Center,” 1992, Box 106, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

into Gwinnett County rose again in 2020. In January 2020, Gwinnett County once again voted no to expanding MARTA into their county, despite being one of the biggest counties in the state and desperately in need of traffic relief.⁹¹ Thus, the history of MARTA and the continued discussions of its expansions are a legacy of white flight and the 1996 Olympics. After the Games came to an end, the ACOG made its documents available, but not without struggle. Billy Payne and other ACOG members fought in court to keep the records secret. This secrecy led to talks of corruption. Colin Campbell, an *AJC* reporter, was a firm believer in this corruption. In one of his articles, he argues: “Corruption isn’t limited to crimes and bribes. It can refer to all types of good things that go bad. Think of personal influence and the corruption of power. I think the Olympics exposed Atlanta to this danger.”⁹² The influence and power of Atlanta’s white elites is one of the main reasons that the Olympics came to Atlanta in the first place. Once again, they were concerned with the consolidation of their power, no matter the cost. Releasing ACOG documents put that in jeopardy.

⁹¹ Amanda C. Coyne and Tyler Estep, “Gwinnett’s MARTA Referendum Has Failed,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 3, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-govt--politics/gwinnett-marta-referendum-has-failed/fzmvZ0KPZAOzGw7rL9NPJ/>.

⁹² Colin Campbell, “We’re All Tainted by Games Corruption,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 19, 1999, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.



Figure Forty Eight: Marta train at Peachtree Station during the Games. Courtesy of Tannen Maury, Associated Press, and the Atlanta Business Chronicle

When looking at the 1996 Olympic Games, researchers emphasize the legacy of the infrastructure that was built for the Games and its uses afterwards. For example, in alignment with the public/private partnership created in the lead up to the Games, the Olympic Stadium was renamed Turner Field and was used by the Braves for almost 20 years. The Olympic Village, built on the former site of Techwood and Clark Howell Homes, was turned into dorms for Georgia State and eventually Georgia Tech. Centennial Olympic Park was turned into a public park, the first one of its size in 25 years in any major U.S. city.⁹³

⁹³ "Olympic Village Dormitories: Sites and Venues of '96," Atlanta History Center, <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/programs-events/public-programs/olympic-paralympic-games-celebration/sites-and-venues-of-96/olympic-village-dormitories>; Ambrose, *Atlanta: An Illustrated History*, 199-200.



Figure Forty-Nine: The Olympic Village under construction. Courtesy of Atlanta History Center

However, the positive impact depended on a person's neighborhood and social class. According to Lyle Harris in the *AJC*: "Less upbeat, is the Olympic legacy that will be left in the city's chockablock landscape of economically distressed communities. Although Techwood Homes and a handful of other neighborhoods will get some much-needed fixups and new houses, dozens more are left off the list."⁹⁴ Those left off the list had to cope with seeing improvements in other areas of the city while their own neighborhoods remained unchanged. Atlanta's pattern of abandoning or repurposing areas deemed too Black, like those in Techwood, continued after the Games. In 2013, the

⁹⁴ Lyle V. Harris, "A Year From Today, The Opening Ceremonies of the Centennial Olympics Will Begin Atlanta Olympics-Come What May," *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1995.

Braves announced their move to a new stadium in Cobb County, citing lack of mass transit to the stadium as the reason for the move. Many people immediately questioned this motivation. Erin Brown at the *International Business Times* argued: “For many white, suburban Braves fans, the neighborhood surrounding Turner Field has never been particularly appealing, even though Summerhill boasts a lower crime rate than most of urban Atlanta. In the end, the move is about placating white suburban Braves fans who feel uncomfortable in a black neighborhood.”⁹⁵ Cobb County offered a majority white space for the franchise to continue operations.

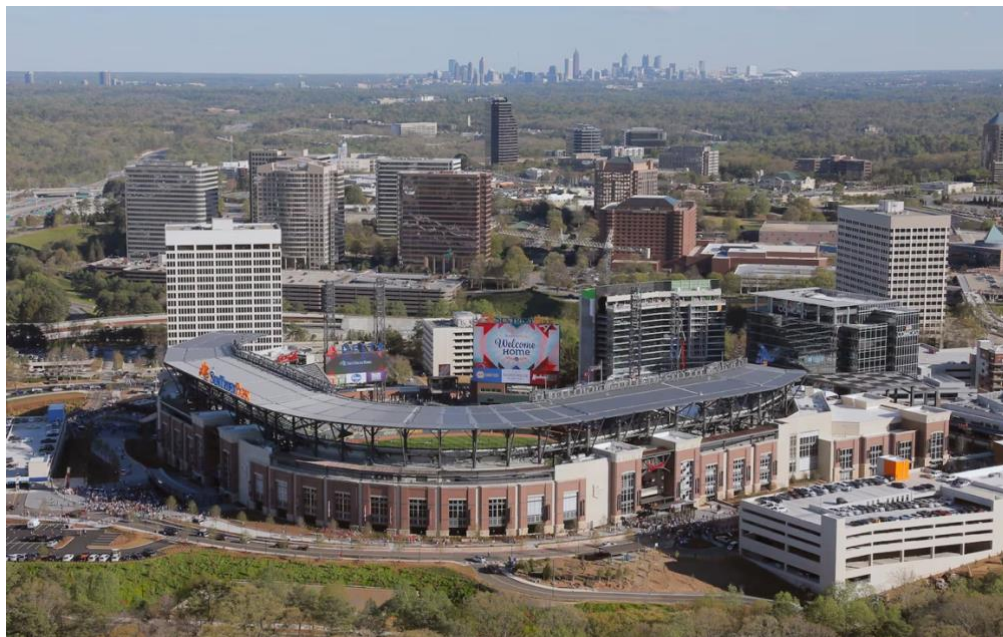


Figure Fifty: SunTrust Park (now Truist) on Opening Day in March 2017. Downtown Atlanta is visible in the background. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

⁹⁵ Eric Brown, “The Atlanta Braves’ Move To Cobb County Is About Race, Not Transportation,” *International Business Times*, November 14, 2013, <https://www.ibtimes.com/atlanta-braves-move-cobb-county-about-race-not-transportation-1470814>.

But it seems that the Braves might have moved away too soon, without ever investing in the historically Black neighborhood of Summerhill where the stadium sat. In recent years, Summerhill has undergone a major revitalization effort. First, student apartments for Georgia State University students were built and the university's bought Turner Field, the former baseball stadium, which has been renamed Center Parc Stadium and now hosts football games. Additionally, new shops and restaurants are opening along Georgia Avenue.⁹⁶ In 2023, a Publix grocery store opened after decades without easy access to fresh food.⁹⁷ And in the works are plans for high-end apartments, named after Atlanta baseball legend Hank Aaron, and the conversion of the former Ramada Hotel into affordable housing.⁹⁸ This all sounds great in theory, but are the Black residents, whom Summerhill was originally home to, benefiting from these changes?

Former president of Organized Summerhill Neighborhoods (ONS) and current Georgia State Representative Phil Olaleye expressed why this answer is complicated, saying that while many residents feel recognized after so many decades of being ignored “all of the new development means an increase in property tax and increase in rent. What does it mean for working families? Are they going to be able to stick around and feel

⁹⁶ “About Summerhill,” Summerhill Atlanta, May 15, 2024, <https://summerhillatl.com/>; Scott Trubey, “Turner Field Sale: Georgia State Purchases Stadium for \$30 Million,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 5, 2017, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-govt--politics/turner-field-officially-belongs-georgia-state-and-development-team/cvqKfHTDwebn35nvNyrS5K/#:~:text=Georgia%20State%20University%20and%20a,and%20the%20neighborhoods%20around%20it>.

⁹⁷ 11Alive Staff, “Long-Awaited Publix Opens in Atlanta’s Summerhill Neighborhood,” 11Alive, June 21, 2023, <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/community/publix-opens-atlanta-summerhill-neighborhood/85-808f2381-4800-45b2-bcc5-4c2f40270607>.

⁹⁸ “About Summerhill,” Summerhill Atlanta, May 15, 2024; Collin Kelley, “Old Ramada Hotel in Summerhill Set for Apartment Conversion,” *Rough Draft Atlanta*, November 8, 2021, <https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2021/11/05/old-ramada-hotel-in-summerhill-set-for-apartment-conversion/>.

connected to place?”⁹⁹ While we can praise the sustainable practices of converting and reusing a stadium following an Olympic Games, it does not take away how complicated it is to make sure that Summerhill’s Black residents are included in deciding the future of their community. Only time will tell if Summerhill remains a prominent historic Black community, or if it turns into a community full of white Atlantans unaware of its storied past. However, Summerhill is not the only neighborhood in the conversation.

In 2017, the Stadium Neighborhoods Community Trust Fund Committee (SNCTF) was formed following the sale of Turner Field with support from the city of Atlanta. The eleven-member committee, tasked with the creation of projects that benefited all of the stadium communities (Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, Summerhill, and part of Grant Park), were initially granted \$5 million, with more funds promised.¹⁰⁰ Roughly \$2.9 million has gone to community development, \$1 million towards affordable housing, \$350,000 to job training, and \$450,000 in emergency assistance grants (for rent and utilities) to organizations such as ONS, Mechanicsville Civic Association, Peoplestown Neighborhood Association, Summerhill Neighborhood Development Corporation, and Pittsburgh Neighborhood Association.¹⁰¹ The creation of this fund underlines simple facts. One: historic Black communities, through community

⁹⁹ Collin Kelley, “Rediscovering Summerhill: Community is undergoing a dramatic renaissance after decades of being ignored,” *Rough Draft Atlanta*, July 1, 2021, <https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2021/07/01/rediscovering-summerhill-community-is-undergoing-a-d>.

¹⁰⁰ “Atlanta’s Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, Summerhill & Grant Park Fact Sheet,” Stadium Neighborhoods Community Trust Fund Committee, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://snctrustatl.org/fact-sheet>.

¹⁰¹ “The Trust Awards Legacy Grants” SNCTFC, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://snctrustatl.org/news> ; “SNCTF Impact Book,” SNCTF, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/7c71a33b-d273-4f82-9b90-d9d2b23a547b/downloads/SNCTF%20IMPACT%20FINAL%20-%20SPREAD.pdf?ver=1729726755706>, 6.

organizations and organizing in Atlanta in the past and present, have fought to save their neighborhoods, just like historically white neighborhood organizations like CAUTION.

Two: it shows that city funds can have a positive impact on communities of color while also demonstrating that the paternalistic oversight evident in the treatment of communities through organizations like the Atlanta Housing Authority is antiquated. Communities know their own needs and should be allowed to manage the money granted to them for their priorities. It's clear that historically Black communities will go down swinging before they let the history and needs of the communities be erased.

One community that managed to see a positive impact during the Olympic Games was the Atlanta University Center. Yet even this was not without internal self-advocacy and assistance from Mayor Jackson. The AUC was initially ignored in the years prior to the Games. According to an article in *The Spelman Spotlight* in 1996: "The buzz around the Spelman campus is that our college, together with other AUC schools, have not benefited from the Olympic preparations in comparison to other institutions such as Georgia Tech and Georgia State. AUC institutions were not originally considered for as many Olympic venues as Georgia State and Georgia Tech. It was not until the AUC presidents lobbied for more involvement of their institutions that ACOG reconsidered the situation."¹⁰² A 1992 letter sent to Mayor Jackson from the AUC Council of Presidents detailed their experience working with the ACOG, saying:

A proposal of a Master Plan from the six member institutions for participation in the games was submitted to ACOG in 1991. This proposal has not yet received a complete and formal response... Quarterly visits take place between ACOG representatives and the COP. It is the last

¹⁰² Cara Grayer, "Let the Games Begin," *Spelman Spotlight* L, 7 (May 7, 1996): 6-7, <https://radar.auctr.edu/islandora/object/sc.001%3Asc.001.1996.04?search=olympics>.

arrangement that bothers us most-the visits with ACOG representatives. Nothing of significance has taken place in almost a year's time... The end of the Barcelona Games was the reference point after which decisive movement would take place. None has. I am, therefore, requesting your assistance in arranging a summit meeting.¹⁰³

Because of this pressure, three campuses ended up with new dorms, sports facilities, parking, and landscaping. AUC students also got a chance to participate in the Host Broadcasting Program, which allowed students to receive training through communication and technology courses in preparation for careers in broadcasting.¹⁰⁴ Morehouse College hosted the water polo events while Clark Atlanta and Morris Brown put on the field hockey events.¹⁰⁵ The AUC also used the Olympics as an opportunity to showcase Black arts and culture. Clark Atlanta hosted an art exhibit called "From Rearguard to Vanguard" that exhibited works from Clark Atlanta's African American Art permanent collection.¹⁰⁶ Spelman College hosted a special program called "Olympic Women: Winners in Motion" in conjunction with the Smithsonian that contained photos and objects related to women in the Olympics.¹⁰⁷ Though the Olympic planning process had been taken over by white Olympic organizers, both the students and the

¹⁰³ Leroy Keith, "Letter to Maynard Jackson AUC Council of Presidents," Morehouse College Office of the President, November 9, 1992, Box 106, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁰⁴ Grayer, "Let the Games Begin," 6-7.

¹⁰⁵ "Olympics and Atlanta University Center," Box 106, Series C, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library.

¹⁰⁶ "The Panther 1996," Clarke College, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, <https://radar.auctr.edu/islandora/object/cau.yearbooks%3A1996?search=1996%2520olympics>, 91.

¹⁰⁷ Kiini Ibura Salaam, "Women Bring Home the Gold," *The Spelman Spotlight* 38, March 10, 1993: 2, <https://radar.auctr.edu/islandora/object/sc.001%3Asc.001.1993.05?search=olympics>.

administrations of the AUC exercised their autonomy and showcased themselves to the world.

One other aspect of the Olympic legacy is how the Games ultimately impact the host city's local economy. The city of Atlanta and every county that had a venue for the Games were impacted. Economists Julie Hotchkiss, Robert Moore, and Stephanie Zobay argue in their article, "The Impact of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games on Employment and Wages in Georgia," that the economic and employment benefits for the city is one of the biggest reasons organizers wanted to bring the Games to Atlanta.¹⁰⁸ They found evidence that the level of employment increased in the venue and near-venue Georgia counties due to the Olympics. Employment increased by 17% percent. They also estimated that wages went up by 7% in counties with venues in them, but this was harder to track. Additionally, the Olympics did not just impact the Atlanta metropolitan area. It affected northern-venue counties, as well. Employment in these counties went up 11% during and after the Games.¹⁰⁹ However, these increases, though magnified by the Olympic Games, paralleled a national decrease in the unemployment rate that occurred from 1995 through 2000. In particular, the African American unemployment rate fell to 7.6% nationally, the closest it had ever been to the white unemployment rate.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Julie L. Hotchkiss, Robert E. Moore, and Stephanie M. Zobay, "Impact of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games on Employment and Wages in Georgia, 691.

¹⁰⁹ Julie L. Hotchkiss, Robert E. Moore, and Stephanie M. Zobay, "Impact of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games on Employment and Wages in Georgia, 692-693.

¹¹⁰ Valerie Wilson, "The Impact of Full Employment on African American Employment and Wages," *Economic Policy Institute Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, March 30, 2015, <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-impact-of-full-employment-on-african-american-employment-and-wages/>.

Therefore, the Atlanta Olympic Games cannot take all the credit for increased employment opportunities.

Housing prices were also impacted throughout the city. Before and after the Atlanta Olympics, rent prices in the city decreased by 8% to 11% due to an increase in the supply of rental units. This might be interpreted as a positive impact, but it had negative implications for poor people of color. Economists Victor A. Matheson and Dennis Coates argue that “the Olympics led to the destruction of many public housing arenas and its residents were too poor to bid up rents in the new units.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, they believe that these results indicate why local residents do not care about the privilege of hosting big sporting events.¹¹² They are aware that they will be the ones disproportionately negatively affected when the big sporting events conclude. Black Atlantans were not only displaced by the Games, but they had no opportunity to return to their original homes after the Games because of high prices. Therefore, those who argue that the lives of Atlantans were improved by the Games must acknowledge that this does not apply to poor and working-class Black Atlantans.

Urban planners Steven P. French and Mike E. Disher’s article, “Atlanta and the Olympics: A One-Year Retrospective,” suggests that the Games fell more than a billion dollars short of their pregame projections. This happened because of three crucial reasons: locals started spending their money on Olympic activities rather than on other

¹¹¹ Dennis A. Coates and Victor A. Matheson, “Mega-Events and Housing Costs: Raising the Rent While Raising the Roof,” *Annals of Regional Science* 46, no. 1 (February 2011): 127-129, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00168-009-0340-5>.

¹¹² Coates and Matheson, “Mega-Events and Housing Costs: Raising the Rent While Raising the Roof,” 133.

forms of entertainment, other activities that made money were lessened in preparation for the Games, and visitors spent less on food and hotels than projected. They ended up with a fiscal surplus, but not as much as they had hoped. Businesses were reporting fewer customers because visitors were afraid of price gouging and congestion caused by such a monumental event.¹¹³ After all the planning done by organizers and the negative tactics used to push people out of this planning process, they still did not reach their goal. The Olympics were a much bigger project than the organizers thought it would be six years prior.

The Atlanta Games also changed the Olympic movement as a whole. Due to the criticism of the foreign press, along with a scandal in the bid process for the 1998 Games, the IOC was forced to look back at Atlanta's bid and adjust its policy for bidding for the Games. Atlanta's Games ended up creating fundamental change on what it meant to host an Olympic Games.¹¹⁴ Overall, according to French and Disher, "the 1996 Olympics were successful in creating three of the four types of benefits that can come from such an event: short term economic stimulus, a legacy of sports facilities and urban design amenities and business relocation."¹¹⁵ They also succeeded in growing their image as an international city and a place worth investing in. Additionally, the Olympics offered Atlanta the chance to move beyond its Confederate image and paint a picture of the new,

¹¹³ Steven P. French and Mike E. Disher, "Atlanta and the Olympics: A One-Year Retrospective," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 63, 3 (1997): 379-392, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369708975930>.

¹¹⁴ Andy Ambrose, *Atlanta: An Illustrated History*, 199-200.

¹¹⁵ Steven P. French and Mike E. Disher, "Atlanta and the Olympics: A One-Year Retrospective," np.

modern South, much to the relief of Atlanta's white elites. In the end, regarding Atlanta's Olympic legacy, "the hosting of the Olympics had little impact on the longstanding problems of poverty, unemployment, crime, and poor housing which affect large numbers of Atlanta's residents."¹¹⁶ Thus, the Games improved the lives of a select few Atlantans, while leaving the majority on their own to improve their socioeconomic status.

The Olympics are one of the biggest sporting events in the world. Every two years, nations from across the planet briefly put their differences aside to support their country's athletes. For the athletes, winning a medal for their nation is one of the most patriotic ways to give back to their country. However, the Games are about much more than just the actual sporting events themselves. For Atlanta, the Olympics offered the city the chance to make history and create a new legacy. Organizers wanted to shed the legacy of the Old South and become a player on the domestic and world stage. This was evident in the reflections of Mayor Young:

The Olympics was the announcement to the world that this is a world class city that you have never heard of. And the legacy is that we fulfilled what Henry Grady said a long time ago that "Atlanta is a brave and beautiful city." We used to say in the '60s we were a "city too busy to hate." And nobody believed us because they said, "You're just like everybody else," which was true. Until they came here and they realized we were working together. And were a city that was ethnically diverse, male and female, and we were all in it together as volunteers. And that was unusual: people remarked that we went about this different than anybody had ever done it before.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Harvey K. Newman, *Southern Hospitality*, 286-287.

¹¹⁷ Lisa George, "Andrew Young on 1996 Olympics: 'We Were Working Together'," *WABE*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.wabe.org/andrew-young-1996-olympics-we-were-working-together/>.

Young's attempt to invoke the spirit of Henry Grady speaks to his beliefs about what was best for Black Atlantans. Grady's Atlanta never included the concerns and needs of Black Atlantans. In addition, only some Atlantans worked together to pull off the Games. In the typical style of Atlanta politics, it was a select few group of Atlantans, composed of white and Black elites, who completed a project on behalf of poor and working-class residents without consulting them.¹¹⁸ Leroy Walker, the first Black president of the United States Olympic Committee, said, "the Olympics is about people, thousands of people working together to make history."¹¹⁹ Ultimately, if the Olympics are really about people, and they negatively impact a large group of the city's population, then the Games are not worth the cost, and Atlanta is not deserving of a progressive and international reputation.

¹¹⁸ This quote is from. 2016. It is hard not to look back at events of that scale with rose colored glasses after so much time has passed. Even if Young had regrets hosting the Olympics, speaking of the drawbacks now would only serve to hurt his legacy so maybe we can ascertain that he wisely remains silent.

¹¹⁹ Headrick, Scott, and Harris, "Olympics One Year Away: The Countdown Begins, Volunteers Party during the Today Broadcast," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 19, 1995, Sally F. White Papers, Atlanta History Center Kenan Research Center.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCHING 21ST CENTURY ATLANTA

As historians, how do we decide what qualifies as history rather than current events or journalism? When looking at the historiography of the city of Atlanta, the answer might seem clear, as much of the literature stops in the aftermath of the 1996 Games. But every day that goes by, we move closer to the thirty-year anniversary of Atlanta hosting the Games. Although much has changed in the city, a lot still remains the same. This dissertation strives to push the historiography forward into the twenty-first century. At the same time, my work on Mayor Franklin in this final chapter is limited by the lack of archival resources available to me. I pieced together Shirley Franklin's story by reading in between the lines of the archival records that already exist, mostly from Jackson's administrations. I also depend on journalists, whose work is considered to take place in real time, while historians offer contextualized reflection. We await access to Mayor Franklin's mayoral papers, which were donated to the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library and will be available to the public in the fall of 2025. Once available to scholars, I hope to contextualize a forthcoming interview with Mayor Franklin. Atlanta may be a major city, yet it remains home-town-small-town in some respects. I recently visited a special exhibition at the High Museum of Art. As I looked around at the other guests, I noticed someone who looked a lot like Shirley Franklin. I thought to myself, no way! What are the odds that I would run into her on a random Saturday visit to the High? My friends encouraged me to go over and introduce myself. It took me a few minutes to

work up the courage to do so, but I knew I could not let the opportunity slip by. I walked up and introduced myself. We had a brief conversation in which I requested an interview. Of course, she was hesitant to agree on the spot, but she did share her cell phone number with me. I hope a personal interview with Mayor Franklin will provide new perspectives for my work. I also intend to take to the streets and interview Black Atlantans. The story of Atlanta in the twenty-first century revisits themes that were trod by Black Atlantans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These paths often prioritize the needs of the Black elite and their white coalition partners, as well as the needs of tourists, over the needs of poor and working-class Black Atlantans.

Election 2000

What would come next for the city of Atlanta after achieving their biggest dream of hosting an Olympic Games? Jackson and Young approached Shirley Franklin and asked her to run for the mayor's office. At first, she hesitated to run. She was intimately familiar with the arduous details of the job, but also feared that should she not run, she could not continue telling young women that they could chase their dreams if she did not risk pursuing her own. So, despite her fear, she placed her name on the ballot. Although this was her first election, in many ways she had been training to serve the city of Atlanta for decades.¹ She worked in the administrations of both Jackson and Young. Under Mayor Jackson, she served as the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. Under Mayor Young, she served as Chief Administrative Officer and City Manager, the first woman in the nation to do so. In 1991, she became the senior vice president for external relations at

¹ Neima Abdulahi, "Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service," posted by 11Alive, March 25, 2023, 20:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AP8AgtoB32Y&ab_channel=11Alive.

the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG). Her efforts were essential to the preparation of Atlanta in the leadup to the Olympic Games in 1996. In 1997, after the Olympic Games, she formed her own public affairs consulting firm, Shirley Clarke Franklin and Associates.

So, on November 6, 2001, Shirley Franklin celebrated her election as the fourth consecutive Black mayor of Atlanta and the first female mayor of the city. She was also the first Black woman to serve as mayor of a major Southern city.² The election was close; Franklin reached the required 50% threshold by only 191 votes.³ As a graduate of Howard University and the University of Pennsylvania, she, too, could be considered a member of Atlanta's Black elite.⁴ Would her administration differ from past Black mayors? Could her office have a positive impact on poor and working-class Black Atlantans? After all, her "experience had largely been largely behind the scenes, really on the operational side of government, and on the policy making side," which left questions about her ability to actualize a vision on-the-streets.⁵ What would Atlanta look like with Mayor Franklin in charge, front and center? Clearly, she did something to make Atlanta's voters trust her, because her re-election in 2005 differed entirely from the first one, as she

² "Shirley Franklin," Archives of Women's Political Communication, Iowa State University, accessed March 8, 2024, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/directory/shirley-franklin>.

³ Neima Abdulahi, "Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service," 11Alive; Kevin Sack, "Black Woman Elected Mayor Of Atlanta In Close Vote," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/08/us/black-woman-elected-mayor-of-atlanta-in-close-vote.html>.

⁴ "Shirley Franklin," Archives of Women's Political Communication, Iowa State University, accessed March 8, 2024, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/directory/shirley-franklin>.

⁵ Neima Abdulahi, "Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service," 11Alive

won 90% of the vote.⁶ In many ways, her politics in the mayor's office continued in a similar fashion to her male predecessors. However, Franklin chose a few issues that stood out.



Figure Fifty-One: Shirley Franklin in front of the Atlanta skyline. Courtesy of the Black Past

The Plan for the 2000s

As we entered a new century, Atlanta planned for the future. The 2000 Comprehensive Development Plan created by the city laid out a vision for the new millennium. Atlantans declared that, thanks to their work for the last 35 years, they were

⁶ Jeremy A. Peters, "The 2005 Elections: Cities; A Democrat Who Backed Bush in '04 Is Ousted," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/09/us/the-2005-elections-cities-a-democrat-who-backed-bush-in-04-is-ousted.html>.

“the major regional center for the southeastern United States.”⁷ But the work could not stop there. Atlanta is forever in the pursuit of both national and international recognition, evident in their mission statement for the twenty-first century:

The vision for Atlanta is a picture of an international City and hub of the region. It is a dream of a City that seizes the unique opportunity and shapes itself for the next generation of residents, workers and guests and prepares for the challenges it will face in the 21st century as it assumes global responsibilities.⁸

The mention of both residents and guests demonstrates that the city prioritized tourism. But all three themes of this project (housing, transportation, and tourism) remained priorities for the city. For housing, the report said that the city planned to “preserve and increase decent, secure affordable housing for all citizens.”⁹ In order to achieve this, the city planned to continue doing the same as they had for the past few decades. Since at least 1970, the city had worked to update its aging housing stock (built before 1939). The city went from 47.6% aged housing stock in 1970 to 8.1% by the 1990s.¹⁰ In addition, the work with the Atlanta Housing Authority continued. In the last eight years of the 1990s, the number of mixed-income units built by the AHA was 4,098. The city’s partnership with HUD would also continue through a program called the Empowerment Zone. This program, available to first time home buyers, supports not only their mortgage but the rehabilitation of their homes.¹¹ So, in the avenue of housing, Atlanta followed the

⁷ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” Box 3, Urban Renewal Records, Atlanta Housing Authority.

⁸ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 1-1.

⁹ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 1-2.

¹⁰ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 7-9.

¹¹ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 7-2.

pathway they previously walked but also aligned with national housing trends of the 1990s and 2000s. Mayor Bill Campbell appointed Renee Glover as the director of the AHA in 1993. A corporate finance attorney, Glover did not support rehabilitation, but rather the demolition of public housing. Glover redirected the goals of the AHA away from social service. Instead, the authority focused on public/private partnerships to build mixed-income communities. In these mixed-income communities, tenant selection and behavior standards were selective, perhaps discriminatory. In 2008, the city announced that all public housing would be demolished.¹² The AHA followed through on their word with the destruction of all public housing by 2011.¹³ Today, Atlanta has become the national model of the switch from focusing on public housing to the mixed-income model. This model features residents who are both low income as well as middle income. It also features the privatization of the housing authority and its management practices. HUD uses the blueprint laid out by Glover which is nicknamed the “Atlanta model.”¹⁴

The transportation goal in the report seeks to “establish integrated, multi-modal transportation Systems that would move people and goods in an efficient and environmentally sensitive manner.”¹⁵ One way to achieve this was by encouraging people to use their vehicles less and seek other modes of transit “by increasing pedestrian and

¹² Eduard Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 102-108.

¹³ Stephanie Garlock, “By 2011, Atlanta Had Demolished All of Its Public Housing Projects. Where Did All Those People Go?,” *Bloomberg*, May 8, 2014, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-05-08/by-2011-atlanta-had-demolished-all-of-its-public-housing-projects-where-did-all-those-people-go>.

¹⁴ Eduard Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 12.

¹⁵ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 1-2.

bicycle linkages that support mass transit ridership.”¹⁶ Mayor Franklin did this by focusing her efforts on championing the creation of the Atlanta Beltline.¹⁷ The plan for this project included the redevelopment of twenty-two miles of unused rail line into parks, trails, and a light rail surrounding the city.¹⁸ There were also plans for affordable housing units along the route.¹⁹ Much like previous projects involving the mayor’s office, this project was imagined as a public-private partnership.²⁰ Mayor Franklin worked with the Atlanta Committee for Progress (ACP) to get the project started. In July 2005, she, along with the ACP, established the Beltline Partnership to coordinate the variety of partner organizations. They worked to secure funds from some of Atlanta’s best-known investors like the James M. Cox Foundation, the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation, and the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. The project officially began in December 2005 with the creation of the Beltline Tax Allocation District (TAD), which would pay for the project. This plan was approved by Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta City Council, and Fulton County. In 2006, Atlanta Beltline, INC. took over the management of the project.²¹

¹⁶ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 9-1.

¹⁷ “Shirley Franklin: Former Mayor of Atlanta and Civic Leader,” Georgia Historical Society, <https://www.georgiahistory.com/bio/shirley-franklin/>.

¹⁸ Robert Hickey, “City of Atlanta,” in *The Role of Community Land Trusts in Fostering Equitable, Transit-Oriented Development: Case Studies from Atlanta, Denver, and the Twin Cities* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep18399.6>, 6.

¹⁹ “Timeline of Atlanta Beltline History, Milestones, and Progress,” Atlanta Beltline, INC., accessed November 27, 2024, <https://beltline.org/about-us/history/>.

²⁰ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty-First Century Atlanta* (University of California Press, 2022), 59.

²¹ “Timeline of Atlanta Beltline History, Milestones, and Progress,” Atlanta Beltline, INC.

On paper, this project sounds positive for Atlanta residents, but reality differed. Black neighborhoods along the Beltline like Pittsburgh and the West End saw a spike in property values and rent prices from the very inception of the project.²² Speculators also immediately began buying properties and pursuing high-market development.²³ Thus, from the start, low-income families along the Beltline faced displacement. In addition, actually building out the Beltline hit immediate barriers because of a lawsuit against them and the onset of the Great Recession, an economic upheaval that rocked the country from 2007-2009.²⁴ TAD lost the lawsuit, but Mayor Franklin and other wealthy city boosters stepped in to get a constitutional amendment on the ballot that would protect the project's finances.²⁵ The first portion of the project opened up in 2008 with the completion of the West End Trail and the first tree planting by Trees Atlanta, beginning the Beltline arboretum.²⁶ The debates about the Beltline also seemed to never end, like how to involve MARTA. MARTA officials called for buses to be used along the route, but transit experts from Georgia Tech advocated for the light rail option, and not because it was cheaper, but because it would attract more tourists.²⁷

²² Robert Hickey, "City of Atlanta," 8.

²³ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 60.

²⁴ "Timeline of Atlanta Beltline History, Milestones, and Progress," Atlanta Beltline, INC.; "The Great Recession and Its Aftermath," Federal Reserve, November 22, 2013, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/great-recession-and-its-aftermath>.

²⁵ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 72.

²⁶ "Timeline of Atlanta Beltline History, Milestones, and Progress," *Atlanta Beltline, INC.*

²⁷ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 74-75.

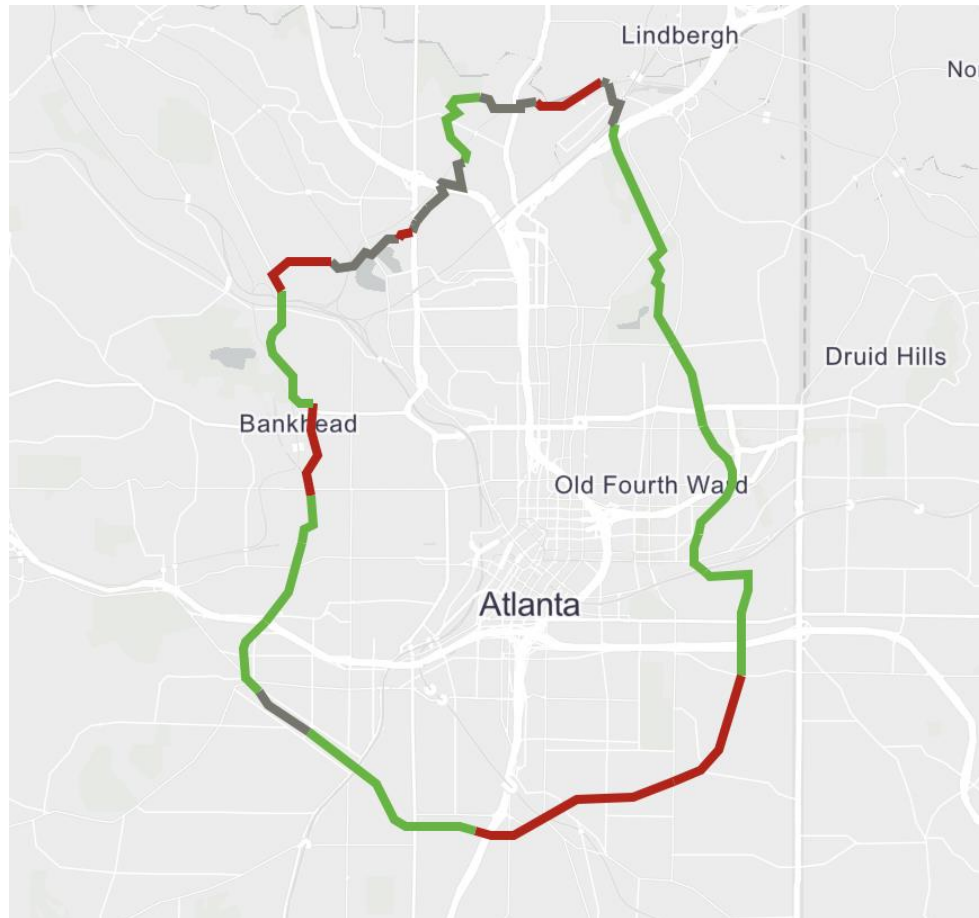


Figure Fifty-Two: Map of the Beltline. Courtesy of Atlanta Beltline

But once again, Black Atlantans did not stand by and watch their communities change. Founded in 2004, Georgia Stand Up is a group which sees itself as a “as a visionary agent of change, fighting to promote civic engagement, economic justice, affordable housing, transit equity, and health equity for Black and working-class communities.”²⁸ Not only did they sponsor an official study along with federal data on mortgage lending that proved the Beltline was gentrifying their neighborhoods, but they also publicly called for accountability from officials to the Black communities affected.

²⁸ “About Georgia Stand Up,” Georgia Stand Up, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.georgiastandup.org/about>.

They also created a policy list for ways their communities could benefit from the Beltline.²⁹ The cost of the project had also skyrocketed. In 2005, the number was estimated at \$2.8 billion but increased to \$4.7 billion.³⁰ Also, progress on the affordable housing units was slow going, only building 600 units by 2017.³¹ It was not until 2020 that Beltline officials dedicated substantial funding for affordable housing in the amount of \$11.9 million.³² For now, the Beltline has kept their word. By the end of 2024, they will reach 70% of their goal of building 5,000 affordable housing units by 2030.³³

At the same time, other Beltline neighborhoods like the Old Fourth Ward, home to the Black public housing project Grady Homes until it was redeveloped under HOPE VI in 2005, are quickly gentrifying into majority white communities. This feels especially charged as the neighborhood borders Sweet Auburn and the birth home of Martin Luther King Jr. Ponce City Market, a shopping and apartment complex that opened in 2014 along the Beltline, also followed a similar pattern. It sits on the grounds of a former Black community, Buttermilk Bottoms, destroyed during the initial urban renewal in the 1960s. With the building of the market, the neighborhood went from 76% Black in 2000 to 38% in 2017.³⁴ Thus, “while the Beltline was not the only cause of gentrification and racial exclusion in the city, it was a key contributor and was a highly political project

²⁹ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 78-80.

³⁰ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 64.

³¹ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 84.

³² Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 87.

³³ Eric Mock, “Atlanta Beltline Surpasses Affordable Housing Goals, Eyes 7,500-Unit Milestone,” *FOX 5 Atlanta*, November 16, 2024, <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/atlanta-beltline-surpasses-affordable-housing-goals-eyes-7500-unit-milestone>.

³⁴ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 89-93.

emblematic of a city obsessed with the next big thing.”³⁵ Overall, the Beltline offers additional evidence for the issues that Atlanta has dealt with for decades: displacement of Black communities, affordable housing, where and what public transportation exists in Atlanta, and the whims and desires of a Black city hall and their white investment partners versus the needs of working-class Black Atlantans.

Another portion of the transportation plan laid out in the 2000 plan emphasized the use of MARTA and improving airport operations and efficiency.³⁶ For Marta, this meant the opening of two new stations in 2000, North Springs and Sandy Springs. The system also implemented Breeze, an all-smartcard for fares, the first transportation system in the country to do so. At the same time, they struggled throughout the 2000s as a result of the Great Recession which led to reduced services and increased fares.³⁷ At the height of the Great Recession, MARTA trains ran thirty minutes apart, and more than fifty percent of their bus services were suspended.³⁸ Usually, trains run between ten and twelve minutes apart.³⁹ They also had to cut 700 jobs.⁴⁰ In 2009, \$110 million in recovery

³⁵ Daniel Immergluck, *Red Hot City*, 94.

³⁶ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 1-3.

³⁷ “A Brief History of Public Transit in Atlanta,” MARTA, August 7, 2024, [https://www.itsmarta.com/uploadedFiles/More/About MARTA/MARTA%20History%20Overview.pdf](https://www.itsmarta.com/uploadedFiles/More/About_MARTA/MARTA%20History%20Overview.pdf), 32-34.

³⁸ “MARTA Joins National Public Transit Agencies Urging Congress To Provide Immediate Financial Assistance,” MARTA, March 20, 2024, <https://www.itsmarta.com/marta-joins-public-transit-agencies-urging-congress.aspx>.

³⁹ “MARTA Service Changes,” December 14, 2024, <https://itsmarta.com/servicechanges.aspx#:~:text=MARTA%20will%20increase%20rail%20frequency,road%20configuration%20in%20Sandy%20Springs>.

⁴⁰ Ariel Hart, “MARTA plan contributed to financial woes,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 13, 2010, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/marta-plan-contributed-financial-woes/P5DZDBQ6lNfdceofuXF62N/>.

funds from the Federal Transportation Administration were allocated to the system.⁴¹ Thus, in the 2010s, the system focused on rebounding. For example, in 2014, the majority Black Clayton County voted approval in a referendum to extend MARTA and link to downtown. Because of repeated no votes by Gwinnett and Cobb to join the system, the addition of Clayton made it the first new county other than Fulton and Dekalb since 1971.⁴² This came after Clayton's transit system, C-Tran, which was formed in 2001, failed due to money issues in 2010.⁴³ Thus far, the focus of the 2020s is once again surviving a crisis—this time the global COVID-19 pandemic—with MARTA calling on the need for federal funds to survive, followed by rebounding.⁴⁴ In this case, rebounding looks like the announcement of four new stations within the existing MARTA railways and the renovation of Airport Station.⁴⁵ In 2024, MARTA also announced the renovation of the Five Points station. The original plan would shut down bus and pedestrian access until 2028. Built into the plan was the reopening of the station for tourists during the

⁴¹ Hank Johnson, "Rep. Johnson: Transit Funds Headed to Georgia." Office of Hank Johnson, June 16, 2009, <https://hankjohnson.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-johnson-transit-funds-headed-georgia>.

⁴² Andria Simmons, "Clayton voters embrace MARTA," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 5, 2014, <https://www.ajc.com/news/transportation/clayton-voters-embrace-marta/zw2QmL6FuxXhAehAOxAbHJ/>.

⁴³ John Toon, "Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Apr 14, 2021. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/metropolitan-atlanta-rapid-transit-authority-marta/>.

⁴⁴ "MARTA Joins National Public Transit Agencies Urging Congress To Provide Immediate Financial Assistance," MARTA, March 20, 2024.

⁴⁵ Zachary Hansen, "Atlanta mayor announces 4 new MARTA rail stations, including near Beltline," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 25, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/breaking-mayor-announces-4-new-marta-stations-including-near-beltline/4IFBOQEV2JGYZH2UGVY73X6GCI/>; Kelly Yamanouchi, "See new changes at Atlanta airport MARTA station," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/news/business/marta-station-at-hartsfield-jackson-reopens-after-renovations/IPWQZ3RL2JEOFB3N7P7IL77SSU/>.

2026 World Cup, followed by its immediate re-closure at the end of the cup.⁴⁶ Transit and disability activists immediately scorned the idea for several reasons, but their main concern was rider accessibility.⁴⁷ Mayor Andre Dickens stepped into the debate, calling the plan unacceptable, so MARTA put the plan on hold for several months. In November 2024, the go ahead for the plan was given after MARTA agreed that they would leave one station entrance open for buses and passengers.⁴⁸ MARTA's future remains unclear, but one thing can be for certain: Atlanta's transit system will likely never reach the level of the other "international" cities they are in competition with, as race, class, economics, and politics make themselves known in Atlanta transit debates. The question of who does and does not deserve access to transit also remains unclear. But maybe, Atlanta needs to stop comparing itself to other cities and focus inward.

⁴⁶ Dave Wickert, "MARTA to close Atlanta Five Points station entrances in July. Here's why," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 24, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/marta-to-close-street-access-to-five-points-station-this-summer/WA7SJVV24ZBVJJY7GOQYLXTRB4/>.

⁴⁷ "MARTA: Don't shut down pedestrian and bus access to Five Points station," *New Disabled South, et al.*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.letspropelatl.org/keep-fivepoints-open>.

⁴⁸ Sara Gregory, "MARTA, Dickens say renovation of Five Points transit station can proceed," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 14, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/marta-dickens-say-five-points-renovation-can-proceed/5NRKYO22KBCGBD4A4QOIWHHI54/#:~:text=The%20project%20was%20put%20on,be%20to%20significant%20for%20riders>.



Figure Fifty-Three: In January 2025, MARTA unveiled the new CQ400 car and the CEO Collie Greenwood saying it will “revolutionize MARTA.” Courtesy of Atlanta News First

Airport transformation continued in the 2000s. Along with the name change in 2003, Jackson’s vision of the fifth runway finally saw air traffic in May 2006. At a cost of \$1.28 billion, it was nicknamed the “Most Important Runway in America” because it would relieve congested runways up and down the east coast. This massive 9,000-foot runway crosses Interstate I-285 on two bridges. In typical Atlanta fashion, airport officials claimed that this would be the final runway.⁴⁹ Yet a sixth runway remains a possibility under the 2016 master plan that envisions airport projects through 2042.⁵⁰ Another major achievement for the airport came in the 2010s. In May 2012, the Maynard

⁴⁹ Kelly Yamanouchi, “Hartsfield-Jackson’s fifth runway hits 10th birthday,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 27, 2016, <https://www.ajc.com/blog/airport/hartsfield-jackson-fifth-runway-hits-10th-birthday/l4AB3RuqYSzpGgF8oGEa9N/>.

⁵⁰ Kelly Yamanouchi, “Hartsfield-Jackson expands capital improvement plan to \$10.8 billion,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 29, 2022, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-airport-blog/hartsfield-jackson-expands-capital-improvement-plan-to-108-billion/Z54QQO3ZQFFRTEXLQDIZ4Y5HNY/>.

H. Jackson Jr. International Terminal opened.⁵¹ This project did not come without delays, as it opened six years after its initial planned roll out date at a cost of \$1.4 billion (originally projected at \$688 million). It also came with plenty of controversy, from the firing of the original designer in 2006, to Delta's 2009 threat to move their flights to other hubs if the cost of the project did not stop climbing. Uproar from businesses not picked for the new terminal also caused delays. Some businesses would not begin operating until months after the grand opening. In terms of its benefits, it made travel for international passengers much easier by streamlining the customs and baggage checks processes. This project also added a sixth concourse, F, with twelve international gates.⁵² However, since the new terminal opened, the projected number of international passengers have not met expectations due to a variety of factors, from economic shifts to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also not connected to MARTA's Airport Station, therefore requiring a lengthy commute for local passengers. Luxury concessions have also struggled, and food options are limited. This struggle is not unique to Atlanta, but to other international hub airports as well.⁵³ One thing appears to be true, however: Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport is resilient and will likely find a way to recover.

⁵¹ "History of ATL," Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, accessed December 1, 2024. <https://www.atl.com/about-atl/history-of-atl/#1458248526374-0f3690b5-d8c3>.

⁵² Kelly Yamanouchi, "Atlanta airport's 'new front door' to open in spring," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 27, 2011, <https://www.ajc.com/business/atlanta-airport-new-front-door-open-spring/lus7LGEI4TyTE2QiJAKAmO/>.

⁵³ Kelly Yamanouchi, "Hartsfield-Jackson's international terminal turns 10 with turbulence," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 15, 2022, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-airport-blog/hartsfield-jacksons-international-terminal-turns-10-with-turbulence/K4YEA4OJTNAZ3MDF4DOMVHVBLY/>.



Figure Fifty-Four: The fifth runway opens in 2006. Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal Constitution

The final goal in the report related to the city’s tourism vision was to “secure the City’s irreplaceable historic heritage and cultural life.”⁵⁴ The city did this by supporting the building of one cultural attraction after another in the 2000s and 2010s. First came the World of Coke, which first opened its doors at Underground Atlanta in August of 1990. During the Games, they hosted visitors at a temporary popup named Coca-Cola Olympic City. But Coke had dreams of a bigger, world-class space. So, in 2002, Coke, along with the Marcus Foundation, committed to build a new World of Coke on twenty acres of land adjacent to Centennial Olympic Park. In the words of Jackson Kelly, then Vice President of Marketing Operations: “for the people of Atlanta, we want to create a new gathering place that will be a powerful catalyst for even more urban renewal. For out-of-town

⁵⁴ City of Atlanta, “2000 Comprehensive Development Plan,” 1-2.

guests, we want to create a vibrant, exciting destination that will encourage them to stay longer and bring their families.”⁵⁵ The outright use of the term urban renewal to refer to the acquisition of land aimed to expand the benefits for tourists is transparently predatory. Yes, they claim that this is the people of Atlanta, but did the people of Atlanta ask for it? And in what capacity could they deliver on their promise to be a gathering place? What’s the purpose of it as a gathering place? Tied up in this story is the Georgia Aquarium. The Marcus Foundation also committed land and money for it to be built next to the World of Coke. It opened in November 2005.⁵⁶ It is the largest aquarium in the Western hemisphere, containing 11 million gallons of water.⁵⁷ The aquarium draws between two and three million visitors a year.⁵⁸ In March 2007, the World of Coke at Underground Atlanta welcomed its final visitors. Finally, in May 2007, the new World of Coke opened.⁵⁹ They average a little over a million visitors per year.⁶⁰ The third attraction to sit on that land would be the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. Coke donated the land in 2006, and the center officially opened in June 2014.⁶¹ Home to the papers of

⁵⁵ “About Us,” The Coca Cola Company, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.worldofcoca-cola.com/about-us>

⁵⁶ “About Us,” The Coca Cola Company, , <https://www.worldofcoca-cola.com/about-us>.

⁵⁷ “A Complete Guide to Visiting Georgia Aquarium,” Georgia Aquarium, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.georgiaaquarium.org/resource-center/deep-dive/how-to-visit-georgia-aquarium/#:~:text=With%20over%2011%20million%20gallons,largest%20in%20the%20Western%20Hemisphere>.

⁵⁸ Shannon McCaffrey, “Georgia Aquarium faces challenges to its image as it marks 10 years,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 15, 2015, <https://www.ajc.com/news/georgia-aquarium-faces-challenges-its-image-marks-years/>.

⁵⁹ “About Us,” The Coca Cola Company, <https://www.worldofcoca-cola.com/about-us>.

⁶⁰ “Turning the Coca-Cola Origin Story Into a Themed Attraction,” Razorfish, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.razorfish.com/work/world-of-coca-cola/>.

⁶¹ “About Us,” The Coca Cola Company, <https://www.worldofcoca-cola.com/about-us>.

Martin Luther King Jr., the NCCHR works not only to interpret the American civil rights movement, but the fight for human rights around the world.⁶² Every year, they receive around 200,000 visitors, 50,000 of which come from schools.⁶³ In celebration of their ten-year anniversary, the NCCHR is undergoing a \$56 million renovation that will double its size.⁶⁴ Finally, there is The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (The King Center) operated by the King Family and the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park & Preservation District, operated by the National Park Service. The King Center was first imagined by Coretta Scott King in 1968. Additional changes over time included adding the King's crypt in 1970, the reflecting pool in 1977, the Freedom Walkway in 1978, and the exhibition space in 1982. The Center welcomes 500,000 visitors a year. Now five decades old, the King Center is in desperate need of a refresh. With this in mind, CEO Bernice King recently announced a \$100 million, five-year (2025-2029) capital campaign project to update the center in celebration of King's 100th birthday in 2029. Meanwhile, the MLK National Historic Park, seeing 400,000 visitors a year, has closed King's birth home and the visitor center for two years for renovations.⁶⁵ These cultural institutions built and renovated in Atlanta in the twenty-first

⁶² "About The National Center for Civil and Human Rights," The National Center for Civil and Human Rights, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.civilandhumanrights.org/about-the-center/>.

⁶³ Glenn Eskew, "National Center for Civil and Human Rights," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Jun 12, 2019. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/education/national-center-for-civil-and-human-rights/>.

⁶⁴ Ernie Suggs, "King Center embarks on \$100 million reinvention plan," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 26, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/uatl/exclusive-king-center-embarks-on-100-million-reinvention-plan/VXXW5C63YJBEZKOPE7JSCIQUGY/>.

⁶⁵ Ernie Suggs, "King Center embarks on \$100 million reinvention plan," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 26, 2024.

century show a commitment to a cultural mythos that simultaneously supports Atlanta's never ending global vision while paying tribute to its storied past.



Figure Fifty Five: The National Center for Civil and Human Rights which is built at Pemberton Place next to the World of Coke and the Georgia Aquarium. Courtesy of the Civil Rights Trail

Since 1996, hosting large-scale tourism is a larger part of Atlanta's cultural mythos. What was set forth in 1996 cannot be stopped. Atlanta has hosted the Super Bowl three times (1994, 2000, 2019) and will again in 2028.⁶⁶ In 2026, the city will host the men's World Cup.⁶⁷ The city knocked down one stadium (The Georgia Dome) to

⁶⁶ D. Orlando Ledbetter, "A look back at the two previous Atlanta Super Bowls," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 24, 2016, <https://www.ajc.com/sports/football/look-back-the-two-previous-atlanta-super-bowls/M7ttwXB5om2MdrCAaieEL>; "Atlanta to Host Super Bowl LXII in 2028," National Football Association, October 16, 2024, <https://operations.nfl.com/updates/the-game/atlanta-to-host-super-bowl-lxii-in-2028/#:~:text=The%20NFL%20announced%20that%20Super,a%20vote%20by%20full%20ownership>.

⁶⁷ "Atlanta to host eight FIFA World Cup 26 matches," Fédération Internationale de Football Association, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/canadamexicousa2026/articles/atlanta-host-eight-matches-usa-stadium>.

build another (Mercedes Benz Stadium).⁶⁸ In 2024, the city opened the 976-room Signia by Hilton Hotel next to the stadium, the first hotel to be built downtown in forty years.⁶⁹ In that time, Atlanta politics has not changed drastically. The mayor's office is still the seat of Black power. The city's white business leaders still stand to benefit from the hosting of these events economically. The question is not really who and what will Atlanta host next. It is more about whether the perceived short-term benefits of tourism dollars can be turned into long term investments advantageous to all Atlantans. Also, are there other revenue models not based in tourism?

Mayor Franklin's Legacy

Mayor Franklin inherited a city experiencing a \$82 million budget deficit. In order to make up the costs, she did a few key things: raised property taxes 50%, cut 1,000 city jobs, and eliminated costly city services.⁷⁰ This did not make her popular at the time, but one reporter called her courageous for making bold moves. Franklin responded by saying, "the job is hard enough when you have money, it's impossible if you're absolutely broke and you're trying to figure out how to pay for services or employees. So I didn't think I had a choice...At some point you just have to make it work and I believe that the city has to operate in the Black."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Chris Starrs, "Georgia Dome," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified May 10, 2019. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/sports-outdoor-recreation/georgia-dome/>.

⁶⁹ Zachary Hansen, "Tallest Atlanta hotel built in 40 years is open. Take a look inside," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 11, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/news/tallest-atlanta-hotel-built-in-40-years-is-open-take-a-look-inside/YTXYHXQO2NH5FAKO37D3SVHE2Q/>.

⁷⁰ "Shirley Franklin Profile in Courage Recipient," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, 2005, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/events-and-awards/profile-in-courage-award/award-recipients/shirley-franklin-2005>.

⁷¹ "Shirley Franklin: A Conversation," posted by Georgia Public Broadcasting, May 11, 2023, video 28:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od4XUKIfFEc>.

Other achievements by Mayor Franklin included addressing homelessness in the city. In 2002, she asked for advice from United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta on how to tackle the issue. From there, she aided in the creation of the Regional Commission on Homelessness. Another public/private partnership, this commission features key voices in government, business, and religious organizations. By 2011, the commission oversaw the creation of 2,800 housing units to support people experiencing homelessness.⁷² In addition, her efforts made Morehouse College a repository of Martin Luther King Jr's personal papers.⁷³ In doing so, she not only ensured MLK's legacy, but the larger story of Black Atlanta in the archive.

She also advocated for the update of Atlanta's water infrastructure. When she entered office, the city faced millions in fines for not meeting clean water standards. Domestic water infrastructure went untouched for fifty years.⁷⁴ Nicknaming herself the "sewer mayor," her administration spent \$2 billion on sewer issues and \$1 billion on ensuring safe drinking water. They built water treatment facilities, lined pipes, and a reservoir.⁷⁵ During her time in office, Atlanta also reversed past patterns in the city's demographics and housing trends. The city went from 61% Black to 53% Black over the course of the decade. During the 1990s, the annual income gap between Black and white

⁷² Jack Hardin, "We seek to end homelessness," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 25, 2011, <https://www.ajc.com/news/opinion/seek-end-homelessness/MgZva3AysxjeAiMlpgKI0H/>.

⁷³ "Shirley Franklin: Former Mayor of Atlanta and Civic Leader," Georgia Historical Society, accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.georgiahistory.com/bio/shirley-franklin/>.

⁷⁴ Neima Abdulahi, "Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service," 11Alive.

⁷⁵ Michelle Baruchman, "Atlanta 'Sewer Mayor' Shirley Franklin's advice to Andre Dickens: 'Dig Deep,'" *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/sewer-mayor-shirley-franklins-advice-to-andre-dickens-dig-deep/CBLKZM2U3NHLVOJ77SAQG5TA6I/>.

city residents reached \$38,000.⁷⁶ Many Black residents moved south of the city as a result. Meanwhile, Atlanta's number of white residents increased, reversing the white flight out of the city from previous decades. The city also saw an increased number of Asian and Hispanic residents.⁷⁷ Therefore, one criticism of Mayor Franklin's administration was that it did not do enough to keep poor and working-class Black Atlantans in the city.⁷⁸ Mayor Franklin was very aware that she did not do enough, saying in 2014:

I regret that I didn't do more. What I could have done is been a stronger advocate. The first and easiest thing to do would have been to use the bully pulpit to talk about the importance of reaching back and helping people at the lowest end. I know that I offered alternatives in city government. For instance, we increased the minimum wage that was being paid to city employees. That seems like a small thing, but there were city employees who were earning less than \$20,000 a year working 40 hours a week when I came into office. As soon as there was money, we raised that, and we took seasonal employees and moved them into full-time positions. That was an effort to raise the level of income for working men and women who were doing a good job, but who were vastly underpaid. We raised the floor, but I should have been talking to everyone and making the wage rate in the state of Georgia and in the city of Atlanta, beyond City Hall, an issue.⁷⁹

Doing "more" would be up to the next mayor, but if the pattern remained consistent, not much would actually change. In terms of how her gender both impacted her experience

⁷⁶ "Atlanta in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000," *The Brookings Institute*, November 1, 2003, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/atlanta-in-focus-a-profile-from-census-2000/>.

⁷⁷ Jim Galloway, "A Census Speeds Atlanta Toward Racially Neutral Ground," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 23, 2011, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/politics-blog/a-census-speeds-atlanta-toward-racially-neutral-ground/52AG4EFMIBARFCUHPNRKXAMWSE/>; "Atlanta in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000," *The Brookings Institute*, November 1, 2003.

⁷⁸ Shaila Dewan, "Gentrification Changing Face of New Atlanta," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/11/us/gentrification-changing-face-of-new-atlanta.html>.

⁷⁹ Rebecca Burns, "Shirley Franklin: 'I regret that I didn't do more,'" *Atlanta Magazine*, March 25, 2014, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/news-culture-articles/shirley-franklin-i-regret-that-i-didnt-do-more/>.

and differentiated her from past leadership, in a 2023 interview, Franklin said, “that’s a big question and I don’t really know the answer to that.”⁸⁰ The interviewer also asked Franklin how she balanced motherhood/family with the job. She was very candid in her response saying, “being mayor was the job, it was not life. So that I could not allow myself to be completely absorbed by the day to day operations of the city. On the other hand, I am the worst person to ask about balance. I don’t do that very well. I never have...I really had to have family and friends pull my coat tail the whole time.”⁸¹ How women balance home and family is not only tough to navigate, but her retrospection reveals that there is no perfect answer. Mayor Franklin’s family was able to keep her balanced and stepped in to support her when she needed it, but every woman’s situation is different. If a woman’s job of choice is a political office, there are even more eyes on them, analyzing their every move. So, it seems fair that the answer from Franklin is somewhat of a non-answer. And although she does not specifically say Black women, she does say that “women serve in leadership roles all through our community...we don’t often serve in executive positions. Although we have all the qualities. We are able to galvanize communities, right? We are able to galvanize our family around a unified approach to things. There’s something in the air, in the water, in the history, probably mostly in the history that makes others and us think that we are not the right leaders. We have to fight that feeling.”⁸² Black women have taken on this role in this country for

⁸⁰ Neima Abdulahi, “Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service,” 11Alive.

⁸¹ Neima Abdulahi, “Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service,” 11Alive.

⁸² Neima Abdulahi, “Former ATL Mayor Shirley Franklin discusses her continued passion for service,” 11Alive.

more than a century, and Franklin's time in office has only spurred on more Black women to run for the office in cities across the U.S. For example, in 2021, Black women served as mayor in eight major cities, including Boston, New Orleans, and Washington D.C.⁸³

Conclusion

Atlanta has a storied and rich Black history. From the end of the Civil War to the 1950s, early Black activists of varied classes in Atlanta, including the Black women of the Washing Amazons, W.E.B. DuBois, Alonzo Herndon, Lugenia Burns Hopes, and John Wesley Dobbs, worked to ensure Black Americans had equal access to their freedom rights as American citizens. They certainly did not agree on technique, from protesting by mass quitting their jobs to protesting with pen and paper through their writing, but their voices would be heard. Along the way, some chose to work with white allies as a method of uplift, while others turned inwards to organizing in their own communities. Either way, they defined the Black freedom struggle for themselves. Regardless of whether these organizers and activists experienced freedom in their lifetime, they set up a clear pathway for the movement to continue on after them, from the people they mentored to the organizations they created. Black Atlanta activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Andrew Young, and Roslyn Pope continued earlier generations' work during the civil rights movement in the 1960s by engaging in direct action protests through organizations like the SCLC and the SNCC. Their generation ensured the next step of the Black freedom struggle through the passage of

⁸³ Jennifer Harlan and Giulia McDonnell Nieto del Rio, "A Record Number of Black Women Run Some of the Biggest U.S. Cities," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/us/black-women-mayor-us-cities.html>.

national legislation including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many of these voices represented those of the Black elite, but working-class Black Atlantans also organized, evident in the work of people like Dorothy Bolden and later, Ethel Mae Matthews.

After more than a century of work, Atlanta finally succeeded in electing Black politicians to the mayor's office, beginning with Maynard Jackson in 1973 and continuing to this day. Andre Dickens' election in 2022 marked the sixth consecutive decade of Black city leadership. Some worry when the streak will end, but only time can answer that question.⁸⁴ Regardless, all of Atlanta's Black mayors have worked to ensure Atlanta's place on the world stage. Their legacy is evident in hotels, sporting venues, the airport, mixed-income housing, and public transportation. Also part of their legacy is the poor and working-class Black Atlantans whose voices have long gone ignored, despite being impacted the most by the agenda of the mayor's office. For example, a 2019 report revealed Atlanta as the fifth most gentrified city in the U.S.⁸⁵ In addition, as of 2020, Atlanta is no longer a majority Black city. Concurrently, the metro area running from the Alabama state line to Athens, GA is majority-nonwhite.⁸⁶ How does Atlanta come to terms with this as the purported Black Mecca? As Black Atlantans are pushed out of

⁸⁴ Max Blau, "Will America's 'Black Mecca' Elect a White Mayor?," *Politico*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/05/atlanta-white-mayor-black-mecca-215681/>.

⁸⁵ Lauren Favre, "Cities With the Highest Intensity of Gentrification," *U.S. News & World Report*, August 2, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/slideshows/cities-with-the-highest-percentage-of-gentrified-neighbo>.

⁸⁶ Patricia Murphy, Greg Bluestein and Tia Mitchell, "The Jolt: For the first time, Metro Atlanta is now majority-nonwhite," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/politics-blog/the-jolt-for-the-first-time-metro-atlanta-is-now-majority-nonwhite/VRYNX467VBHQBAPLUDDMK4RK5U/>.

Atlanta city limits, what communities have they created in metro Atlanta suburbs? How can the mayor's office ensure that Black Atlantans are not continuously pushed out of their homes and have even the slightest chance to climb up the socioeconomic ladder? Or has this project shown that it is up to the residents themselves? Spelman College 2024 Founders Day Convocation speaker, sociologist, and professor of African American Studies at Princeton, Ruha Benjamin, summarized the debate well, saying, "Black faces in high places are not going to save us."⁸⁷ For too long we have relied on the work of individual Black political figures to solve the problems that plague Black America. But that will never be enough. Black freedom is a group effort dependent upon organizing by Black people of all classes— in local communities, regionally, nationally, and internationally. We must simultaneously look inward to ourselves and outward towards the daily work of liberation from systems of oppression.

⁸⁷ "Speech by Ruha Benjamin: Black faces in high places are not going to save us," posted by Al Jazeera English, April 17, 2024, video, 0:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=javaZtuESR4>.

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