

DESIGNING CONNECTIONS:
JAMES P. BRAWLEY DRIVE &
THE ATLANTA UNIVERSITY CENTER

by

MICHAEL RAYMOND WILLIAMS

(Under the Direction of Marguerite Koepke)

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of a southwest Atlanta street, James P. Brawley Drive, and its sometimes complementary roles as campus destination and urban thoroughfare. There is an historical overview of the street in the context of the surrounding Atlanta University Center campuses, with particular attention given to the relationships which the street has helped foster over time. The decline and subsequent attempts at rehabilitation of the street are discussed, with emphasis given to the results of those attempts. Possible barriers to further rehabilitation are addressed. Finally, the analysis concludes with recommendations for both the immediate and long-term future of James P. Brawley Drive.

INDEX WORDS: Atlanta University Center, James P. Brawley Drive, Urban campus design, Clark Atlanta University, Morris Brown College, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Interdenominational Theological Center, Spelman College

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MICHAEL RAYMOND WILLIAMS

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MICHAEL RAYMOND WILLIAMS

Major Professor: Marguerite Koepke

Committee: Mary Anne Alabanza Akers
Diane Batts Morrow
Bruce Lonnee

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

For Hillary, my beautiful lady, for believing in me and supporting me through these
often trying times. On those days when it seemed no one,
myself included, thought that I could make it,
your encouragement made all the
difference in the world.

I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A Sunday Morning Walk

It was early, the sun having only just risen above the horizon of the hazy Atlanta skyline. As is typical of most Sunday mornings, the campuses of the Atlanta University Center, like the city it nestled within, barely stirred. Certainly in this instance, the homecoming festivities of the previous night played a role in the morning's repose.

A slight chill born along a gentle breeze hinted of fading summer, and greeted two young women as they stepped out of their apartment building on James P. Brawley Drive, in the heart of the Clark Atlanta University campus. Clearly unprepared for the morning chill, and therefore with no collars to turn up against the mild but persistent wind, they nevertheless soldiered on, even smiling and laughing as they recalled the events of the previous night.

Indeed, the evidence of the recently concluded block party was all around them. Strewn about the brick sidewalk-lined streets were discarded plastic cups, scattered leaflets, and streamer half-hanging, half-trailing to the ground. The trash receptacles that were located at regular intervals along the street overflowed, and while the student-sponsored event was technically a campus function, somehow the faint smell of beer still permeated the air. In a few short hours, when the sun had fully awakened and restored a warm glow to the campus, the trash would be gone and the street restored to near-pristine condition by a volunteer student cleanup crew.

At the moment, the women had to avoid the clutter as they made their way down Brawley, crossing the street from the Robert Woodruff Library to the row of two-story attached buildings that lined the east side of the block. The ground floor of the buildings featured a variety of shops - clothing stores, eateries, a barbershop, and a bookstore. The second story contained apartments occupied mostly by faculty of the nearby colleges, with several units leased by the schools as accommodations for visiting speakers or VIP's.

The women stopped at Starbucks to order lattes and croissants, and to await the arrival of two more women, students at Spelman College whom they had just met the previous night. They soon arrived, and with coffee in hand the foursome continued down the street to early services at Rush Memorial Congregational Church; a Sunday morning tradition that each student had observed separately, but which was now enriched by new friendships that had begun at college, on James P. Brawley Drive.



Fig. 1.1. A Sunday morning walk: students walking north along James P. Brawley Drive (photo by author)

This somewhat picturesque scene of college life did actually take place one cool October morning, while I was on James P. Brawley Drive conducting research for this thesis. At least, the basic part of the story – two female students leaving their apartment and walking to church - is based on actual witnessed events. That morning, as I took a brief respite from my work to respectfully admire two of Clark Atlanta University's brightest coeds in their Sunday best, it occurred to me that the main point of my work could be made right there. Not with some high-minded account of how my proposed changes to this street would create an oasis of culture and learning that would shine like a beacon for all to admire, as was my goal at the time (although that would not be a bad thing, if it happened). Rather, I could try to put forth some ideas that would make a Sunday morning walk to church for two students more pleasant, more eventful, than what it presently was.

As previously mentioned, the basic storyline of students walking to church is factual. However, some creative license had to be utilized in describing the details, which themselves are a result of careful analysis of this street; its history, present condition, current uses (and users), and its potential. But before commencing with an at-length discussion of the selected site and its various issues, some information regarding the larger setting of the street should be provided.

The Atlanta University Center, or AUC, is a largely informal coalition of six historically African-American institutions of higher learning. Located in southwest Atlanta approximately one mile from downtown, these schools – Clark Atlanta University, the Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Morris Brown College, and Spelman College - share a bond formed by an adjoining location, a mutual history, and a common struggle to survive and prosper (fig. 1.2).

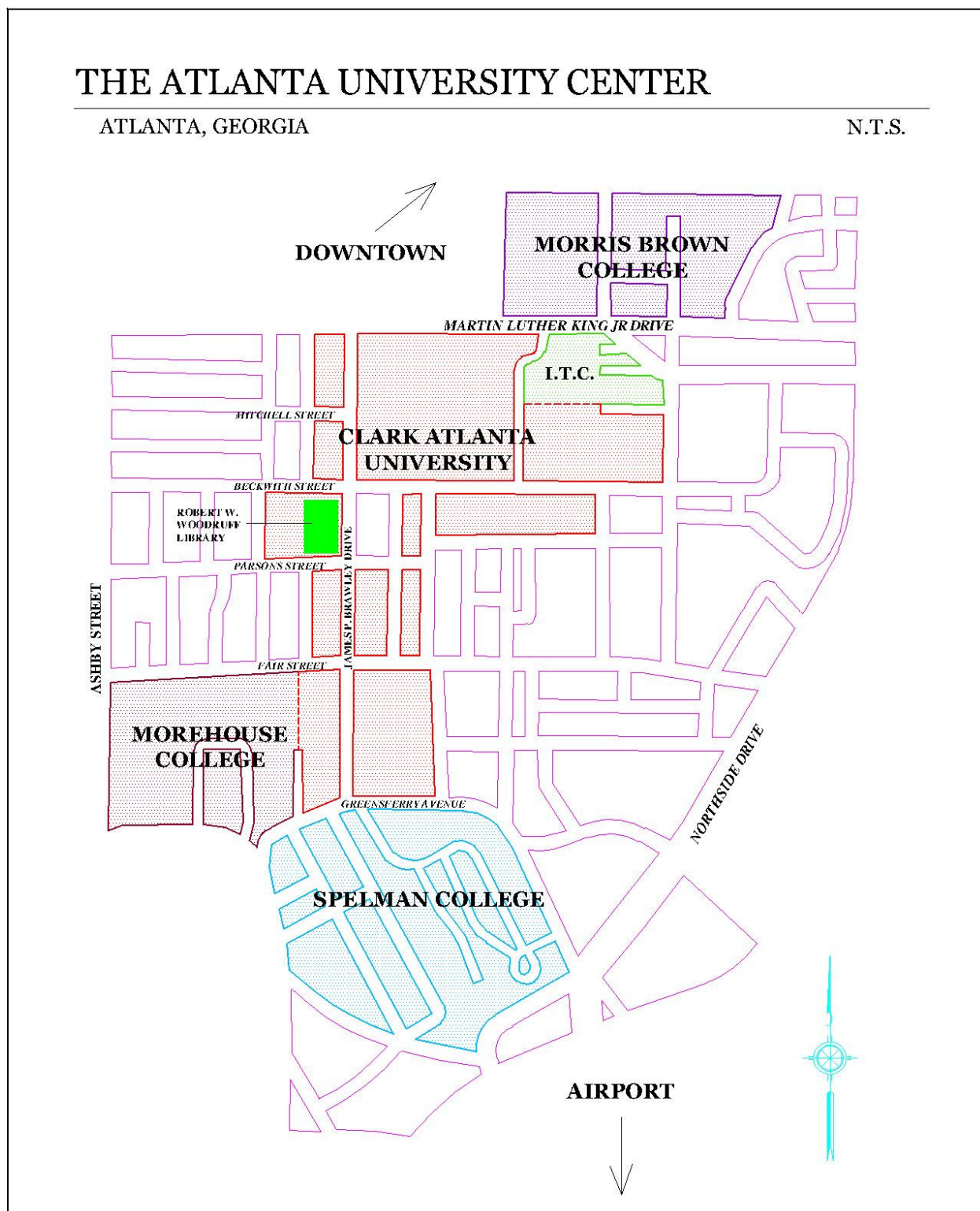


Fig. 1.2. The Atlanta University Center campuses (map by author)

The Historically Black College and University: A Very Brief History

We know that the formation of what is today the Atlanta University Center had its genesis in the mid-19th century, when the first establishments of higher education for blacks were created. However, there are some conflicting accounts concerning exactly which institution was the first to exist with that particular mission. Some assign that distinction to a school funded by a Quaker philanthropist named Richard Humphreys, who designated a tenth of his estate (about \$10,000) to establish the Institute for Colored Youth in 1837. Founded in Philadelphia as a school “for the descendants of the African race”¹, the Institute (today known as Cheyney University of Pennsylvania) started as a high school, but is said to have begun offering its first degrees in the 1930s.²

Other sources credit John Miller Dickey with creating “the first institution found anywhere in the world to provide a higher education in the arts and sciences for male youth of African descent.”³ Chartered in 1854 as the Ashmun Institute in southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, Lincoln University (renamed for President Abraham Lincoln in 1866) is considered by some as the first of what today are known as historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs. Two years later, the Methodist Episcopal Church founded Wilberforce University in Ohio, “the nation’s oldest private, historically black university”⁴, and “the first co-educational college for blacks”.⁵

For blacks in mid-18th century America, these developments obviously would have been a welcome sign of significant progress. The legally sanctioned institution of slavery, and the

¹ Wikipedia www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheyney_University_of_Pennsylvania

² www.soulofamerica.com/colleges/overview

³ Horace Mann Bond Education for Freedom: A History of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania (Lincoln University, Pa.: Lincoln University, 1976)

⁴ Wilberforce University website www.wilberforce.edu (Wilberforce, Ohio: Wilberforce University, 2004)

⁵ www.soulofamerica.com/colleges/overview

devices employed to ensure the vitality of that institution, had nearly eradicated the psyche of the black man and woman in America, slave and free. Of the nearly 4.5 million blacks in America in 1860, 89% were in bondage, considered to be someone's property and nothing else.⁶ For an individual who was either born or captured into that 89%, he or she quickly discovered that they would never see a penny from their lifetime of backbreaking labor, that their family could be torn apart on a whim, that it was punishable by death to try to learn to read and write.

Most of the remaining 11% were scarcely better off than those in bondage. The same ridiculous arguments for racial supremacy that whites used to justify the enslavement of millions of men, women and children, also served to keep the relatively few blacks who were "free" solidly entrenched beneath the white population in class and status. Free blacks could gain a level of education and employment that was deemed "acceptable" by society. While true that they did not bear the much heavier burden of being a slave, one can only imagine the psychological toll of a life lived as an "inferior" being. There was also the danger of being kidnapped into slavery by bounty hunters seeking "escaped slaves"

In this environment, it is remarkable that any institution of higher learning was able to be founded for the purpose of educating black people. Of course, it is no accident that both Ashmun and the Institute for Colored Youth were established in northern "free" states. Before the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, people might have reacted to the idea of such institutions in the South in the same manner as if they had been told a story about flying saucers. But with Appomattox and Reconstruction, there finally opened a window of educational and social opportunity for blacks in the South.

⁶ Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research "1860 Census Data" Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan (April 30, 2006)

EARLY HISTORY OF BLACK COLLEGES IN ATLANTA			
1865-1875	1875-1885	1885-1900	1900-1920
<p>1865-1871 Reconstruction in GA</p> <p>Storrs School founded 1865, American Missionary Association</p> <p>chartered as Atlanta University 1867</p> <p>Clark University founded 1869, Freedmen's Aid Society, Methodist Church originally located in downtown Atlanta</p> <p>1872 Moved south of city limits</p> <p>Augusta Institute founded 1867, American Baptist Home Mission Society of the Northern States</p> <p>1865 Lincoln assassinated</p> <p>"Black Codes" enacted in southern states</p> <p>1st Ku Klux Klan founded in Pulaski, TN</p> <p>1868 14th Amendment ratified</p> <p>1870 15th Amendment ratified</p>	<p>1880 <i>Uncle Remus</i> Joel Chandler Harris</p> <p>1879 moved to Atlanta, incorporated as Atlanta Baptist Seminary</p> <p>Morris Brown College founded 1881, A.M.E. Church of Georgia "Only Atlanta college founded by blacks, for blacks"</p> <p>Spelman Seminary founded 1881 named for Laura Spelman Rockefeller</p>	<p>c. 1890s Jim Crow legislation begins</p> <p>1896 Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court ruling "separate but equal"</p> <p>1890 moved to present location</p> <p>1897 renamed Atlanta Baptist College</p>	<p>1915 <i>Birth of A Nation</i> D.W. Griffith</p> <p>2nd Ku Klux Klan founded in Atlanta, GA (Stone Mountain)</p> <p>1913 renamed Morehouse College</p> <p>1913 changed name to Morris Brown University</p>

Fig. 1.3. Timeline of early development of Atlanta black colleges, amid the turbulent post-Civil War South (figure by author)

The Beginnings of the Atlanta University Center

The push for higher education for African-Americans reached Atlanta in 1865 with the establishment of Storrs School, the result of a merger between two smaller schools.⁷ In 1867 it was chartered as Atlanta University. Over the next 20 years, a flurry of activity and development took place. Morehouse College (1867), Clark University (1869), Morris Brown College (1881) and Spelman College (1881) were all founded, and in 1876 Atlanta University conferred six bachelor's degrees, the first to be awarded to African-Americans in the state of Georgia.

At this point, the schools were relatively scattered in terms of location; only Spelman occupied its present-day site. Clark University's campus was south of the city limits, and until 1879 Morehouse was located in Augusta, Georgia. Despite the distance, there was a great deal of cooperation and mutual support between them. Given the level of financial and social difficulty they faced, cooperation was essential to their survival. The harsh social climate in particular helped forge the beginnings of the strong relationships that the schools enjoy today.

The social climate is of particular importance when discussing the history and development of these schools, given that they are institutions intended to serve African-American students in the post-Civil War, racist, dangerous South. This thesis will not delve into the specific details, or even general accounts, of the numerous events that surrounded and impacted the development of these schools. But certainly what transpired in the movement toward higher education was an element of "progress under camouflage"⁸; these institutions had to be wary of appearing too successful, lest they attract unwanted attention from white supremacists (fig. 1.3).

⁷ Established by the American Missionary Association

⁸ Kenrick Ian Grandison "Negotiated Space: The Black College Campus as a Cultural Record of Postbellum America." *American Quarterly* 51.3 (1999): 529-579. "Progress under camouflage" was a statement made by Grandison in reference to the development and growth of HBCU's in Alabama

The first formal affiliation of schools took place in 1929. By this time, Morehouse had moved to its present-day location adjacent to Spelman. Along with Atlanta University, they formed the Atlanta University System, in which Morehouse handled all undergraduate activity for men, Spelman for women, and Atlanta University discontinued all undergraduate work and became a graduate school. This alliance enabled the three schools to combine their resources in a more meaningful fashion (fig. 1.4).

By the end of 1941, Morris Brown College (1932), Atlanta University (1932) and Clark College⁹ (1941) had moved to their present day sites. For Atlanta University the move was



Fig. 1.4. Signing the agreement to create the Atlanta University System¹⁰ Atlanta University, in affiliation with Morehouse College for men and Spelman College for women. Leadership: the Heart of the Race Problem. (Atlanta University: Atlanta, 1931) 5.

⁹ Clark University changed its name to Clark College in 1940

¹⁰ Shown are Florence M. Read, Spelman College President; John Hope, Morehouse College President; Myron W. Adams, Atlanta University President

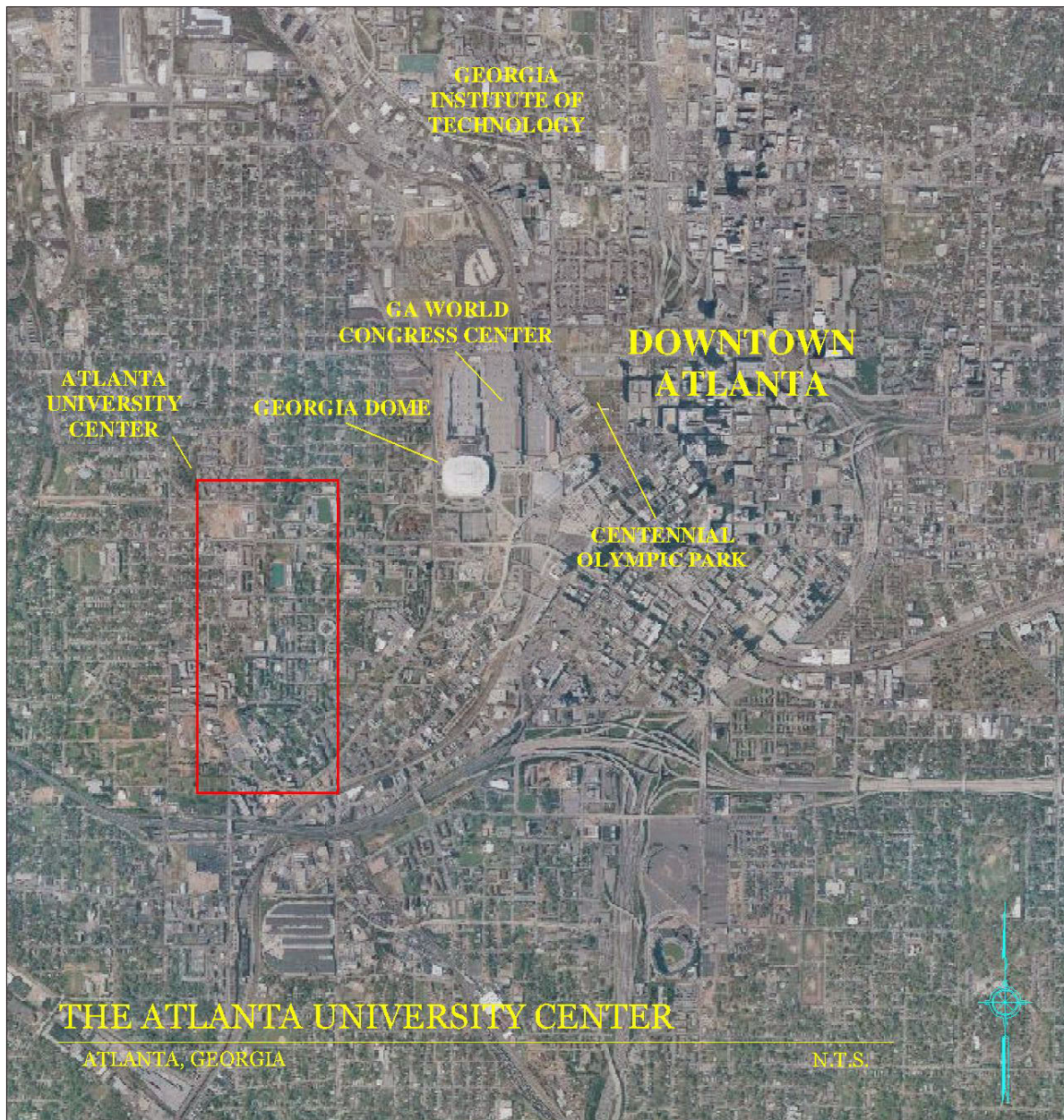


Fig. 1.5. A 2002 aerial photo of downtown Atlanta from Fulton County, Georgia.
(20 Mar. 2006.) <<http://www.co.fulton.ga.us/>>



Fig. 1.6. The University Library, c. 1935 from Rodney T. Cohen, The Black Colleges of Atlanta. (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2000) 15.

necessitated by its Atlanta University System affiliation; for Clark and Morris Brown, there was a different, yet extremely alluring reason. In 1932 the finishing touches were put on a grand new library, built with money donated by the Rockefeller family, for the use of the Atlanta University System members. Designed by architect James Gambrell Rogers, the University Library was the third largest in the state among college libraries, after Emory and the University of Georgia, and the second in the nation only to Howard University among African-American college holdings. The University Library¹¹ was located in a pivotal spot on the southeast corner of the Atlanta University campus – on the corner of Greensferry Avenue and Chestnut Street (Fig. 1.6).

With the five schools now all within close physical proximity, and sharing many of the same resources, it was only a matter of time before a formal alliance between all of the schools

¹¹ In 1949, the library was rededicated as the Trevor Arnett Library, in honor of the former chairman of Spelman College's Board of Trustees



Fig. 1.7. Atlanta University System campuses, c. 1942. (Cohen 18-19. Photo by Griffith Davis)¹²

would be formed. That alliance was realized in 1957 with the formation of the Atlanta University Center. As a separate entity, the Atlanta University Center was “organized to implement and manage all center-wide collaborative efforts” of its member institutions.¹³ The five original schools, plus the newly formed Interdenominational Theological Seminary¹⁴, each had equal stake and membership within the agreement (Fig. 1.8).

¹² View looking southeast, with Atlanta University campus in center, Clark College campus to the left, Morehouse College campus to the far right, and Spelman College campus at the top. The street in the center of the photo running north to south is Chestnut Street.

¹³ Atlanta University Center, Inc. www.aucenter.edu (Atlanta: 2002)



Fig. 1.8. Campus map of Atlanta University, after formation of AUC (Cohen 21.)¹⁵

In 1982, the Robert W. Woodruff Library replaced the Trevor Arnett Library. Woodruff Library was built on the corner of Chestnut and Fair Streets, one block north of the previous

¹⁴ In 1956, Gammon Theological Seminary, which had evolved out of Clark University's Theological School, merged with Morris Brown College's Turner Theological Seminary and Morehouse College's theological department to form the Interdenominational Theological Seminary

¹⁵ The Trevor Arnett Library is building 'D' on the map.

library's location. By this time, the Atlanta University Center had expanded to include another member, the Morehouse School of Medicine.¹⁶ Several years later, another significant event took place when Atlanta University and Clark College merged into one institution, becoming Clark Atlanta University in 1988. Prior to the formation of the new university, James P. Brawley Drive had served as a sort of no-man's land between the campuses. It was of course significant because of the presence of the library, and the other various buildings that bordered it, but no single school really had a claim on the street as part of its campus. Now with the merger of the two campuses on either side of the street into one institution, Brawley became the physical center of the new university, and an integral part of its campus.

The Atlanta University Center Today

While having much in common in terms of history, each institution is also strikingly diverse in terms of organization and student body composition. Morehouse College is an all-male liberal arts college of approximately 3,000 students; neighboring Spelman College is an all-female institution of 2,100. Spelman is considered to be among the top liberal arts colleges in the nation¹⁷, while Morehouse, with such high-profile graduates as Martin Luther King Jr., former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson, and actor Samuel L. Jackson, enjoys a reputation as a training center for future prominent African-American men. Both schools claim a student body representing at least 40 states and fifteen countries.

With perhaps a less "upper-crust" status, Clark Atlanta University nonetheless boasts a co-ed student body of 5,000 students, over half of which hail from outside the state of Georgia.

¹⁶ The Morehouse School of Medicine was founded as a two-year medical school at Morehouse College in 1975. In 1981, the School of Medicine became independent of Morehouse College, and in 1985 expanded to become a four-year M.D. granting institution

Clark Atlanta is also the only AUC school which offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Morris Brown College, in keeping with its original mission to primarily serve less-affluent students, traditionally accepts those students who are considered to be less academically prepared, but possess the determination to earn a college degree.¹⁸ The Morehouse School of Medicine (not formally affiliated with Morehouse College) is the first 20th century predominantly African-American medical school to be established in the United States.¹⁹ The Interdenominational Theological Center is one of several historically African-American theological graduate schools in the country.

As mentioned, most interaction between the schools is informal. Each institution is self-governing, and makes independent decisions regarding day-to-day operations and long-term planning. There are opportunities for students and faculty to intermingle on an academic level, as many classes are opened to students from neighboring schools and students are encouraged to “cross-register” for these. Indeed, these classes are quite popular, as evidenced by their tendency to fill up rapidly. In addition to cross-registration, AUC students and faculty interact regularly at the Robert W. Woodruff Library, which houses most of the research and archival materials of the AUC schools within one building. Administration of the Woodruff library is conducted by the single formal institutional link between the AUC schools; the Atlanta University Center, Consortium. In addition to conducting library operations, this institution also manages career planning and placement services and the dual-degree engineering program, which partners AUC students with eleven other engineering institutions on the east coast.

¹⁷ U.S. News & World Report, 2005 Edition. (7 Apr. 2005.)
<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex_brief.php>

¹⁸ African American Registry. (12 Dec. 2005).
<http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1218/Morris_Brown_College_founded>

¹⁹ MSM factbook Morehouse School of Medicine (5 May 2005) <<http://www.msm.edu/>>

Choosing a Location

This thesis is largely about the physical and cultural bond between the AUC schools and students, and how that bond might be further enhanced by design. By now it is evident that from the time of their various inceptions up to the present, the schools of the AUC have continued to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that this relationship will be discontinued at any time in the foreseeable future. As stated in the opening paragraph, the Sunday morning walk we witnessed illustrates one important goal for this project; to improve the overall experience of a basic activity. The goal is not necessarily to create something grand through design, but to accomplish something as “simple” as enhancing a walk for a few students, helping to nurture existing relationships while beginning new ones.

At the same time, there is room to think bigger. What if the same thought process that led to an improved Sunday morning walk, could also produce the aforementioned “shining beacon” that would capture the attention and admiration of a larger audience? Such an idea is certainly worth exploring, and this project will attempt to push that idea to its desired conclusion. So now there are two different but complementary goals for the area that combine to form a general intent; find a means through design to reinforce and complement those existing features that typify the positive relations between the AUC institutions, and magnify those features to the greater community.

Any good house requires a strong foundation; such is the case with this particular endeavor. In this instance, the foundation is the location at which a design may be implemented. In examining the whole of the campuses of the AUC schools, from a physical standpoint, there could be any number of design locations and solutions that would at least partially achieve the stated objectives. There are probably several locations within each campus that are prime for

selection, as they already serve as gathering spots for students and faculty from all of the AUC institutions; any of one these could likely be “redesigned” to fulfill the goals stated above. The task of identifying, evaluating and designing all of the possible target areas is not one that could be satisfactorily achieved within the scope of a thesis. Fortunately that’s okay, because I believe the stated objectives can be achieved by targeting one specific street: James P. Brawley Drive.

Based not only on some preliminary research but on first-hand knowledge of the Atlanta University Center, it is evident that the physical and historic qualities of James P. Brawley Drive make it an ideal location for this project. Specifically there are three factors. First and foremost it is the location of Robert W. Woodruff Library, which houses the vast majority of the combined library resources and materials of the Atlanta University Center schools. This fact alone guarantees that Brawley, more than any other location in the AUC, will be visited by students and faculty from every single campus. Second, there exists on Brawley tremendous potential for growth and development due to its location and orientation. Finally, but not insignificantly, there have been some recent redevelopment efforts on the street that indicate a desire to realize that potential. All of these factors will be discussed in greater detail later.

Also to be discussed in greater detail are some potential stumbling blocks to the proposed design of Brawley. Two of these issues are 1) the fact that most of Brawley is a part of the Clark Atlanta University campus, and 2) that the other portions are privately owned by people or institutions not necessarily affiliated in any way with any AUC school, and therefore not necessarily inclined to participate in a campus-focused “revitalization” effort.

Establishing portions of James P. Brawley Drive as an institutionally neutral campus is a tangible means for the Atlanta University Center schools and adjoining community to combine resources and ally themselves in a more meaningful way. An AUC “commons” will raise the

profile of the AUC in Atlanta, enhance the image of the member schools and surrounding neighborhood, and provide the basis for the generation of revenue for both the schools and the community.

CHAPTER TWO

AN ANALYSIS OF JAMES P. BRAWLEY DRIVE



Fig. 2.1. Clark College President Dr. James P. Brawley (Cohen 45.)

Historical Significance

One of the more important events of James P. Brawley's tenure as president of Clark College took place in late 1941, when he oversaw the relocation of the college to its present day site. The move made Clark College the last of the AUC schools to relocate to the area. The school settled onto a small tract of land in close proximity to each of the other institutions,

particularly to Atlanta University, which directly adjoined Clark to the north and east. Serving as the east/west boundary between Clark and AU was Chestnut Street, at that time a largely nondescript street beginning at Greensferry Avenue and running north past Hunter Street and the Morris Brown campus.



Fig. 2.2. Merner Hall, a female dormitory on the Clark College campus, c.1942 (Cohen 33.)²⁰

Little is recorded regarding exactly what role or significance Chestnut Street might have had up to that time, within the context of the Atlanta University System. It certainly could have been a preferred route to the downtown Atlanta area from the schools. One can envision scenarios where, given the prevalent codes governing conduct between young men and women at the time, Chestnut Street could have served as a neutral meeting place for students to court. After 1932, when the University Library was established, Chestnut Street would have seen quite

²⁰The large building in the background is Giles Hall on the Spelman College campus. This photo illustrates the close proximity of the Atlanta University System campuses.

a bit of foot traffic, particularly from Morris Brown students who would have to walk south along Chestnut to reach the library.

With the Clark College relocation adding yet another school to the area, the visibility of the street undoubtedly increased. Again, the extent to which Chestnut Street was utilized or the exact role it played in the overall scheme of the Atlanta University Center has been difficult to determine. Very few direct historical references to the street exist, even within the archives of Woodruff Library. However, it is probably safe to assume that the arrival of Clark College boosted the street's importance over the next forty years.



Fig. 2.3. Looking down Chestnut Street, from the Chestnut-Fair Street intersection, c.1960 (Cohen 33.)

The completion of the Robert W. Woodruff Library in 1982 was a significant event for the Atlanta University Center (Fig. 2.4). The need for a larger, more modern library signaled continued growth, prosperity and success for the colleges, for whom financial survival was often a year-to-year struggle. Woodruff Library reinforced the commitment of the schools to working together for mutual benefit, and served to maintain the close ties that the student populations had shared for so long.



Fig. 2.4. Robert W. Woodruff Library (photo by author).

The construction of the new library was significant for Chestnut Street as well. Consider the importance of a library to any college or university, and how that importance is often

reflected in the building's physical location and orientation. The library, and the site it occupies, is often the centerpiece of a campus, a destination not only for students and faculty but for visitors and alumni. In this instance, the Woodruff library was to serve and represent not one, but seven separate institutions. Students and faculty from seven institutions would access the new library through its grand entrance facing Chestnut Street. Visitors and alumni from seven different schools would admire the stately façade of the library, framed by the surrounding street. Were there any other locations in or around the Atlanta University Center better equipped to serve as the “neutral” site of the brand new, collective main library?

There was undoubtedly an evaluation process to determine the ideal location for the new library. Certainly a number of sites in the AUC were considered as possibilities. Naturally the process leading to the selection of the site would be guided by practicality. Affordability, availability, and convenience were likely factors in the decision. Whatever the criteria used by the powers-that-be, the construction of the new library at the corner of Chestnut and Parsons served to reinforce the growing stature of Chestnut Street in the AUC.

“It’s Atlanta!”

The 1996 Olympic Games was a boon for much of Atlanta, and the Atlanta University Center was not overlooked. Several campus sites were chosen to serve as venues for the Games, and in the mid-1990s preparations were in full swing. In addition to a number of campus-specific projects and additions, plans were implemented to create a five-mile pedestrian corridor that would link the AUC to downtown Atlanta. The project was “envisioned... as a bridge – physically and symbolically – providing access to the AUC for millions of Olympic visitors, and

²¹ The awarding of the 1996 Olympic Games to Atlanta provided opportunities for the Atlanta University Center to raise its profile.

²¹ The awarding of the 1996 Olympic Games to Atlanta provided opportunities for the Atlanta University Center to raise its profile.

a ‘stage’ where the six historically black colleges could showcase their achievements.”²² The practical purpose of creating a corridor of “elegant walkways, safer streetscapes and ornate gatehouses” – named the Atlanta University Center/West Side Pedestrian Corridor System – was to enhance pedestrian access from downtown and the Georgia Dome to the sports events being staged in newly constructed AUC facilities.²³

Funds for the \$16 million project were to have initially come from a roughly equal combination of public and private sources. However, difficulties arose when private contributions did not meet expectations. While more than half of the necessary funds were acquired from public sources, no public money could be used for those portions of the corridor that were on-campus, because the schools were privately owned. Ultimately, \$3 million was secured to enhance campus portions of the corridor. One of the areas selected for improvement was James P. Brawley Drive, formerly Chestnut Street.²⁴

Like many inner-city areas throughout the nation, James P. Brawley Drive had fallen on hard times during the late 1980s and early 1990s. During orientation week, incoming freshmen and new students at all of the AUC schools were cautioned against traveling to and from the library alone at night.²⁵ Robberies and beatings, though infrequent, happened often enough to impart an unsavory reputation to the street. Each college had its own security force to patrol their respective campuses, including Brawley. However, given the fact that the schools were all located in the heart of urban southwest Atlanta, a location more commonly associated with gunshots and police sirens than with safety and security, and the open, unsecured nature of the

²² Lyle V. Harris. “AUC Scrambles for Corridor Funding” The Atlanta Journal and Constitution. (October 11, 1994 Section C) Page 2.

²³ Harris.

²⁴ The street was renamed in 1990 or 1991 for the former Clark College president

²⁵ I experienced this firsthand as a student at Morehouse College, 1991-93.

street, campus security was insufficient to provide a wholly safe environment. Indeed it was Brawley's connectivity to Atlanta - one of the very qualities that made the street so ideal both in the past for students and administrators and in the future for Olympic organizers - that was contributing to its status as unsafe.

On a Sunday evening in November 1994, Morehouse College student Oronde K. Allie was shot in the back and killed as he walked alone along Brawley. An ensuing article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution described the setting where Allie died:

Reggae music blasts from storefronts and cars cruising along the strip that connect the [Atlanta University Center's] six campuses to the library, dormitories and classroom buildings. It's a vibrant street where students socialize on the library steps and sample herbal oils from street vendors. On the edges, though, some of Atlanta's urban decay spills over into the lives of students attending the private colleges. There are abandoned apartment units, some men in the neighborhood stand around drinking, and residents say gunshots aren't uncommon at night. Many students complain that Brawley Drive and other streets that run through the center are not very well lit...²⁶

AUC administrators and city officials – who now had a vested interest in the welfare of the street due to the impending Olympics - responded to the tragedy by increasing the thin ranks of the campus police forces. One of the stated mandates of the beefed up security team was “keeping strangers off campus”.²⁷ As these new measures were implemented, however, those officials who were working to prepare the AUC area for the Olympics were faced with a suddenly glaring dilemma. Clearly, the killing of a student on campus magnified the need to screen, and sometimes prevent, visitors from entering campus areas. But the decision to limit who could gain access to what was still largely a public street was unwieldy, and potentially onerous.

²⁶ Riche Daniel and Gail Hagans. “The Death Of Oronde Allie” The Atlanta Journal and Constitution November 23, 1994 Section C, Page 5

²⁷ Daniel and Hagans 5.

The Atlanta University Center was at a crossroads. With the Olympics, it was likely to experience the highest concentration of visitors in its history. Never before had the AUC had an opportunity to showcase the history, accomplishments and success of its member institutions to an international audience of the magnitude that was expected. But the murder of Oronde Allie required action on the part of campus officials to safeguard their students. If one of the stated goals of the increased security forces was to prevent “strangers” from entering campus, i.e. Brawley, then the ability to showcase the AUC campuses to anyone, including a worldwide Olympic audience, would have to be curtailed.

Brawley Promenade

Physically, the changes made to James P. Brawley Drive were far less controversial. Beginning at Greensferry Avenue and extending north past the Woodruff Library to Martin Luther King Drive²⁸, Brawley was redone as part of the Olympic pedestrian corridor (Fig. 2.6). The most significant alteration of the street was the transformation of the lower portion of Brawley – from Greensferry Avenue to Parsons Street – into a pedestrian promenade. Bollards were placed at either end of this stretch to prevent vehicular traffic from entering. The promenade surface was redone in a colored brick pattern, and new lampposts and street trees were added to enhance the new pedestrian quality of the street (Fig. 2.7).

Perhaps because a lack of available funds prevented its completion, the pedestrian-only portion of the promenade stops at Parsons Street. Vehicular access resumes, along with some of the visual evidence of the street’s earlier character. Grey asphalt picks up where colored,

²⁸ Formerly Hunter Street

patterned brick leaves off (Fig. 2.9). The brick pattern does continue in the sidewalks along the street, first along both sides, then along only one side, until it joins the intersection at Brawley and Martin Luther King. There, as at Greensferry and Brawley where the promenade begins, the brick pattern engulfs the intersection, marking the extents of the streetscape project.

The promenade project was successful in terms of improving the visual quality of Brawley, particularly in light of what was there previously. In addition, establishing a pedestrian-only portion of the street added a certain campus feel to Brawley that, at least in recent years, did not exist there. But now, there exists an aura of disconnection or incompleteness associated with the appearance and usefulness of Brawley. In short, whether intentional or not, the project wasn't completed.

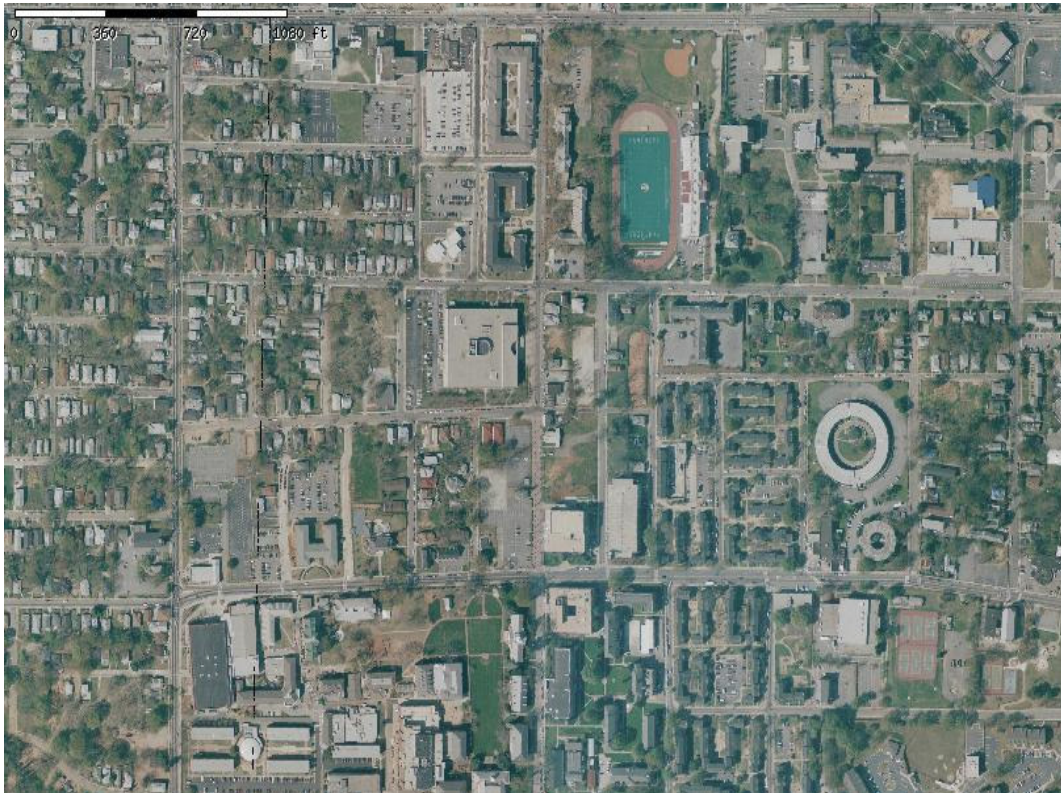


Fig. 2.6. 2002 aerial photo of James P. Brawley Drive (Fulton County)

Consider the library as an example of incompleteness. The pedestrian promenade terminates at the south corner of Parsons and Brawley, short of where the library sits on the north corner. Why would the builders of the promenade decide not to extend the pedestrian portion of the street to one of the most likely pedestrian destinations? Parking or vehicular access to the



Fig. 2.7. James P. Brawley Drive after Olympic revitalization (photo by author)

library would not seem to be the issue, since both can be achieved at the rear of the building. Even with the street open to vehicles, parking in front of the library is prohibited regardless. As another example, the student housing that now sits at the northern end of the promenade was not originally intended for direct vehicular access from Brawley. Rather, parking is available either at the rear of these buildings, or more recently across the street. This is not only true of the



Fig. 2.8. Beginning of the pedestrian promenade at Greensferry Avenue (photo by author).

building constructed during preparation for the Olympics, but of the apartment complex built well after the games were over.²⁹

The renovation of James P. Brawley Drive, while a dramatic improvement, does not appear to have been completed in accordance with its initial intent. As a result, it may have fallen short of the original purpose behind the work. The physical and symbolic “bridge” to

²⁹ A dormitory was constructed for use as athletic housing during the Games, after which it was turned over to Clark Atlanta University. Between 2000 and 2002, an apartment complex was also built on Brawley. Neither building allows for vehicular access from Brawley Drive.

downtown Atlanta that Brawley was to become barely extends to Morris Brown College's campus at Martin Luther King Drive. Perhaps it managed to serve the purpose of Olympic organizers and campus officials of bringing visitors to the Atlanta University Center; perhaps not. Regardless, the Games are long over, and despite the improvements, some of the issues that plagued Brawley are still there. The question is, can the original vision that was put forth for James P. Brawley Drive still be realized? How can the work that was begun on the street be continued in manner that would most benefit those who use it?



Fig. 2.9. The pedestrian promenade terminates at Parsons Street (photo by author)



Fig. 2.10. 2002 aerial photo of James P. Brawley Drive and Robert Woodruff Library (Fulton County)³⁰



Fig. 2.11. 2002 aerial photo of student housing complex on James P. Brawley Drive (Fulton County)³¹

³⁰ Note that the pedestrian promenade ends before reaching the library, although most foot traffic will continue

³¹ Note that the vast majority of parking for the building is located to the rear; also note the pedestrian courtyard framed by the building, a space that would tie in nicely with a pedestrian promenade

CHAPTER THREE

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

In developing this project from its early conceptual stages to the (hopefully) finished product, two issues keep emerging that I believe could adversely affect any revitalization attempts. Before diving headlong into ideas for realizing Brawley's potential, I feel it necessary to mention these potentially significant obstacles as part of the evaluation and solution development process. It should be noted here that I do not propose solutions to these issues, as doing so would require a great deal of speculation on my part regarding the individual motivations, prejudices, control questions, and other issues of those involved, areas in which I have very little insight or expertise.

Potential Obstacle #1 – Clark Atlanta University

The guiding purpose statement of this project posits the idea that establishing James P. Brawley Drive as an “institutionally neutral campus” would benefit the institutions of the Atlanta University Center and the neighborhoods that adjoin it. Simply put, institutionally neutral means that no single AUC institution would hold a unilateral sway over the street; it would belong to all of the schools as part of their respective campuses. This would be a historically faithful role for the street to play, since for most of the history of the Atlanta University Center, Brawley existed simultaneously as a boundary and a link between the AUC campuses.

Brawley's role in the AUC changed in 1988, when Atlanta University and Clark College merged into a single institution, Clark Atlanta University. Although perhaps a minor detail at the time, given the other ramifications typical of such a major occurrence, one effect of the merger was the physical joining of the two campuses on either side of James P. Brawley Drive into a single campus. Brawley, in as much as it was affiliated with the AUC, was now wholly contained within the campus of the new university. This of course included the still-new Robert W. Woodruff Library.

Up to this point, only two of the AUC member institutions had ever really had any direct frontage on the street, so the argument might be made that no real change occurred when those two schools merged. However, the effects of enclosing the street within a single campus were immediate. As long as at least two schools had their campuses along the street, it remained a neutral territory; no single institution could make a unilateral decision regarding the street. It was owned by all of the schools and none of the schools at once. That situation changed when the street became part of a single campus. Now, buildings on either side of Chestnut Street that had belonged to different institutions were all part of the same institution. The library still existed to serve all of the AUC schools, but now those students would be studying on Clark Atlanta's campus. James P. Brawley Drive was no longer an institutionally neutral site.

In fact, very little has changed in the role that Brawley has played for the AUC. The Woodruff library continues to be managed by the AUC, Consortium, for the use of all AUC students and faculty. In theory, however, any proposed changes to the street would be managed largely by Clark Atlanta, since the street is a part of the CAU campus. Would Clark Atlanta University be open to the idea of giving up its almost complete control over Brawley Drive, in order to facilitate a neutral, common area to be used and managed by all of the AUC institutions?

Potential Obstacle #2 – Adjoining Communities

The very location of the Atlanta University Center schools creates some fundamental challenges to having a portion of the campus that is open and accessible. Issues that are commonly identified with economically depressed, urban neighborhoods - poverty, violent crime and urban blight – all exist in close proximity to the classrooms and dormitories inhabited by AUC students. For the most part, walls and security guards limit access to all but those who have business on campus grounds. But while Brawley's status as a campus destination has been well established, the street would be very difficult if not impossible to close off.³² Consequently, as long as the main library and student housing exist on Brawley, there will be continual interaction between town and gown.

My belief is that the majority of these encounters are probably positive in nature. After all, even with the secluded nature of the schools' physical campuses, students are immersed heavily in the ambiance and flavor of Atlanta. Many mutually beneficial economic and cultural relationships exist between local citizens and students. The problems arise when those few bad encounters do take place. Incoming students, who are warned upon arrival about walking alone off-campus, become immediately distrustful of their surroundings. Rumors about vandalism and muggings generally serve to exacerbate feelings of insecurity. At a more extreme level, an event like the Oronde Allie murder can quickly eliminate any feelings of trust and friendship, replacing them with distrust and fear.

Any successful attempt to completely realize the potential of James P. Brawley Drive would depend upon on a successful resolution of these and other issues that may arise. It is difficult to identify all of the possible barriers, and once identified, more difficult still to attempt

³² I spoke to a Clark Atlanta campus grounds superintendent, who unofficially told me that the university would very much like to close off Brawley (as it has the rest of its campus), but that it would basically be a logistical nightmare.

to solve them. The bottom line is that success depends upon a high level of communication and cooperation between all concerned parties; something that should be attainable, given the long history of cooperation in this area.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following ideas for improving James P. Brawley Drive were conceived out of an acknowledgement of all of the issues that have been discussed here; the history of the site in its campus context, more recent Olympic developments, current needs and issues, and a vision of the street's potential. The proposals might best be summarized by the following headings:

- Reinforce the Positive
- Complement the Existing
- Carry the Torch
- Magnify the Results

Each of these headings contains ideas and suggestions that I believe are easily attainable, provided that all involved parties understand and can agree upon the desired results.

Reinforce the Positive

The relationships between the AUC institutions, and between town and gown, have been overwhelmingly positive in nature from the very beginning; James P. Brawley Drive has been a nexus for much of this positive energy. The library has and will continue to bring students from all of the schools together on the street. The presence of student housing means that there is a strong, round-the-clock residential sense of ownership on the street. From a neighboring

community standpoint, the businesses and community organizations that exist on and around Brawley benefit not just the students, but the neighborhood as a whole.

Use and connectivity are two very important aspects to the vitality of Brawley. Reinforcing these already existing positive features will improve the street and the neighborhoods around it. As both a city street and campus destination, Brawley thrives on use by people. In that regard, Olympic organizers were correct in attempting to open up Brawley to a larger audience. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to try to limit or prevent use by a larger audience in the name of safety; such an action would make Brawley less desirable and less safe. Community interest (outside of the AUC) in the street should be encouraged, not prevented. There would be less incentive for community investment and interest in Brawley if people were closed out. What would happen to the businesses on the street if Brawley suddenly became less accessible to non-students? What would then happen to Brawley when those businesses closed?



Fig. 4.1. An example of what can happen to local businesses if Brawley were to be closed off from the surrounding community (photo by author).

Connecting Brawley to its surroundings and encouraging use by a variety of people, students and non-students alike, should be a goal for the street. To that end, the ideas and involvement of the AUC and neighborhood communities should be solicited for the purpose of developing the street to serve those interests. Encouraging active involvement on the part of the street's users would generate a sense of ownership among students and non-students, increasing their interest in and use of the street. Think of what could be accomplished if a group of students, faculty, business owners, pastors, and citizens were invited to a forum to discuss ideas for Brawley's future development. There could be meaningful dialogue concerning what kind of businesses would best serve the local community, or whether there is enough lighting at night, or parking issues. Perhaps some students would stand up and express a desire for a small park or green space, where they could play Ultimate Frisbee. A deacon of a local church, envisioning church barbeques after Sunday service, would stand and second the motion. The store owners, picturing a park full of people on a sunny Sunday afternoon, immediately consider whether they should stock up on ice cream. Whatever the actual outcome, the point is that the users of the street have and continue to exemplify what is positive about Brawley, and should play a key part in its growth and development.

Complement the Existing

There are other positives about Brawley Drive, aside from the relationships between its users. Proponents for change on the street should strive to complement these features as much as possible. The library has long been a positive fixture on the street; perhaps there are ways to further enhance its stature while simultaneously addressing other issues. For example, it has been mentioned previously that the pedestrian-only portion of the promenade does not quite

extend to the library. While it may not be necessary from a use standpoint to close off the street in front of the library from vehicular access, doing so could provide more of a traditional campus feel to that specific area, and might improve the overall quality of the street.

Another proposal to enhance the stature of the library while adding another element to Brawley is to create a green space nearby, perhaps in the block directly south of the library between Parsons and Fair streets.³³ A green space, or commons, or park, or quad in that location would add an element of natural beauty to the street, and serve as a gathering place for students, alumni, and nearby residents to enjoy. Visualize a retired couple, alumni of one of the schools, returning to campus for homecoming. They tailgate on the cool green grass and watch the parade roll along Brawley toward the nearby stadium, have their picture taken against the backdrop of Woodruff Library, remarking all the while on the wondrous changes that have taken place on the street.

The locally owned businesses along Brawley are worthy of special attention as well. They are fixtures in the community at a level equal to that of the colleges, and are vested as much as anyone in the well-being of the street.³⁴ Any ideas for improvements on the street should certainly strive to incorporate them. Certainly, some architectural improvements would have to be made, since the current structures fail to meet the desired visual standard for the new and improved Brawley. Additional streetscaping around the entrances would enhance visual appeal and encourage passers-by to linger. For those businesses located in a pedestrian-only

³³ This area is currently a parking lot, and the site of the AUC Career Planning and Placement offices, which operate out of portable trailers.

³⁴ While conducting research for this project, I walked into one of the local shops which I had frequented while a student at Morehouse in the early 1990s. The proprietor recognized me almost immediately, although it had been more than ten years since I had been there.

section, attractive café-style seating could be added. Additional space along the street would be established for new businesses, which would be required to blend visually and functionally into the fabric of the street. The idea is to showcase businesses along Brawley in such a way that they will thrive while adding to the desired quality of the street.

Carry the Torch

In planning Brawley's renaissance, it would be unnecessary and impractical to throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is no need to start from scratch when so much has already been accomplished to move the street in the right direction. The work done in preparation for the Olympics began two very important enterprises. It established the desire for connectivity to the rest of the city, and it started the physical groundwork for that connection.

Brawley works very well as a pedestrian promenade. All of the structures and uses on the street are most suitable for approach and entry by pedestrians rather than vehicles. There is also a certain charm about an urban campus that requires one to approach it on foot via a tree lined avenue, rather than the more common approach of driving up to and through a gate. Of course, requiring the pedestrian approach should mean that the avenue in question is attractive and comfortable for walking. Any further design of the street should keep this fact in mind.

The original Olympic vision of elegant walkways and safer streetscapes would require businesses along the street to be pedestrian oriented, nighttime lighting to be functional and attractive, and traffic calming devices for those portions of the promenade that allowed vehicular access.³⁵ The promenade would be clearly indicated by a continuation of the brick pattern

³⁵ It is not proposed at this time to convert any more of the street into a pedestrian-only promenade. Traffic patterns and other relevant issues have not been researched sufficiently to conclude whether such a measure is feasible.

already existing in certain areas of the street.³⁶ Street lamps would be functional and well-maintained, and street trees would be attractive and healthy. Seating must be available at regular intervals, along with trash receptacles. Streets designed for walking rather than driving receive a greater degree of scrutiny, since those who travel them are moving at a much slower pace. Therefore, the Brawley promenade would require more frequent maintenance to preserve its attractiveness. This could be easily achieved by those who have a vested interest in the street. Imagine if student groups such as fraternities or sports clubs “adopted” sections of the promenade, like many organizations do with state roads, and pledged to maintain those sections. Brawley could remain almost pristine with little or no cost to the city or the AUC.

This study is meant to examine a specific, relatively small portion of Brawley. However, the ideas put forth here could ultimately be extended into something more in keeping with the original intent of the promenade. Recall that the original objective was for a five-mile link to Atlanta. While five miles may be a bit much, the promenade as envisioned here could certainly extend beyond the Brawley Drive-Martin Luther King Drive boundary. It could easily reach beyond the Morris Brown campus³⁷ to Northside Drive, past the Georgia Dome, the Georgia World Congress Center, and the CNN Center, all the way to Centennial Olympic Park. Such an avenue would certainly fulfill the goal of having a “bridge” to link the AUC to the rest of Atlanta.

³⁶ The brick pattern would continue on the sidewalk along those portions of the street that permitted vehicular circulation. For traffic-calming purposes, the surface of the street in those areas would feature a different material than the asphalt which is commonly used, such as a rough aggregate mix.

³⁷ At the very least, the promenade should extend to Morris Brown’s campus, one of the earliest AUC schools to occupy its current site.

BRAWLEY PROMENADE PHASE I (PROPOSED)

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

N.T.S.

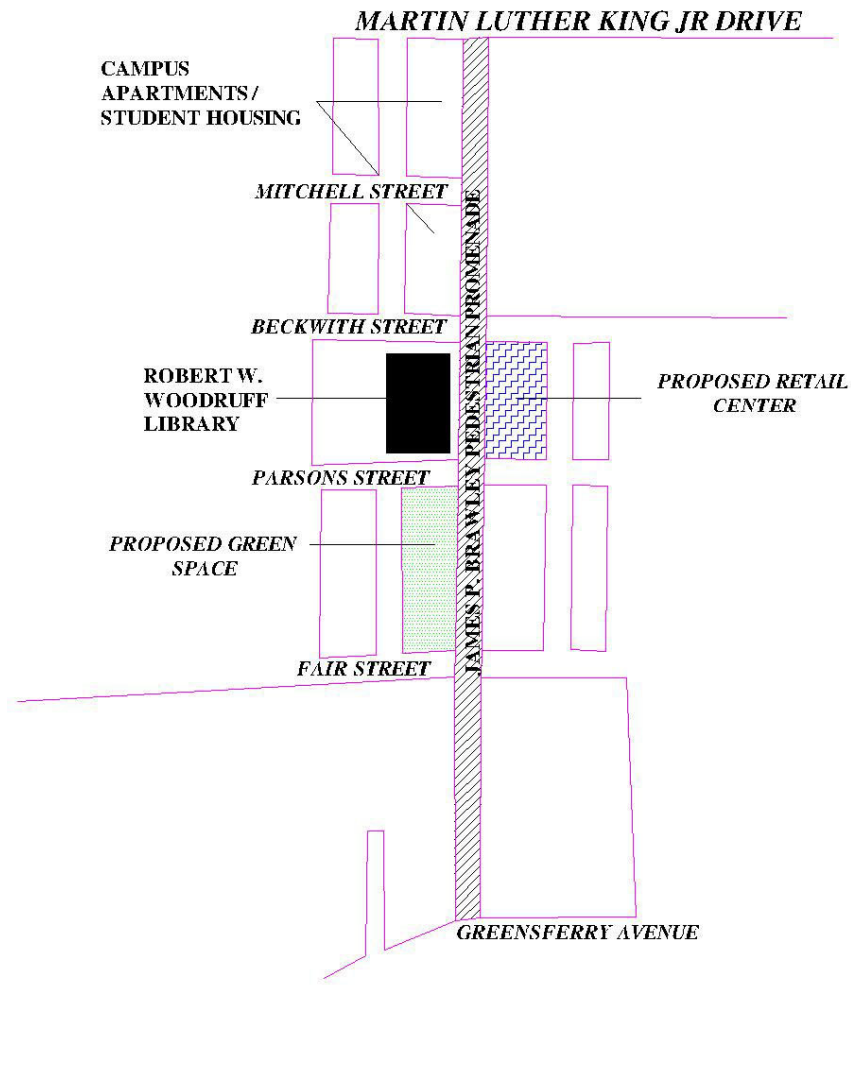


Fig. 4.2. Overview of proposed changes to Brawley (by author)



Fig. 4.3. Existing pedestrian promenade between Fair St. and Parsons St., just south of the library (photo: Fulton County) Note the large, nearly empty parking lot to the west of the promenade; for a pedestrian oriented area, quite a bit of space seems to be dedicated to parking .



Fig. 4.4 Converting the parking lot into a green space would enhance the appearance of the space while tying the promenade into the neighboring community to the west of the space



Fig. 4.5. Aerial photo of target area for proposed retail, across from library
(photo: Fulton County)

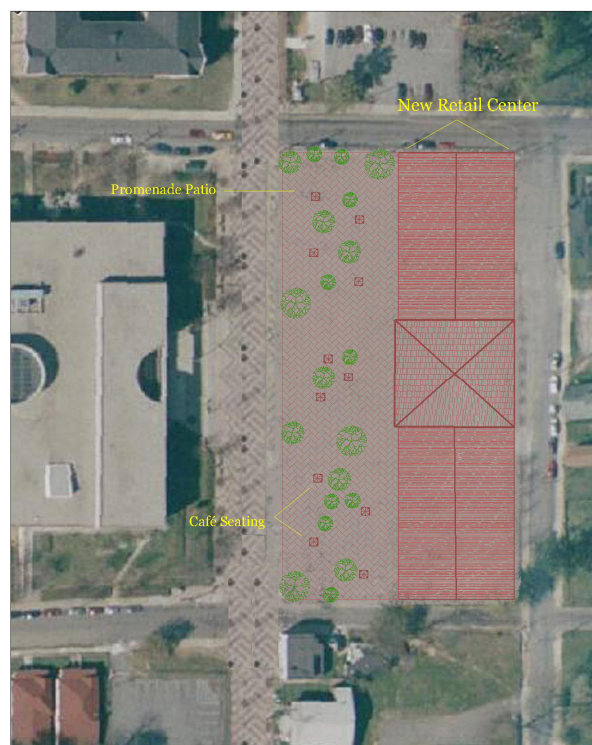


Fig. 4.6. Proposed retail center with patio and seating

Magnify the Results

Remember the movie “Field of Dreams”? “If you build it, they will come”³⁸ is one of the most enduring lines in Hollywood film history. In the context of this project, ideally the same scenario would apply. Develop and utilize the support and ideas of the street’s users, implement those ideas in the ongoing development of the street, and voila! People will come to Brawley. There is always a possibility that everything could happen in just that way, but in the event that word is a little slow in getting out, it might be best to consider ways to advertise the street to a larger audience.

If, for the time being, the limits of the promenade remain as they are, then it would be a good idea to establish clear, inviting entrances at either end of the street. People driving or walking along Martin Luther King Drive or Greensferry Avenue should be aware when they reach Brawley that they are approaching something special. Attractive signage might inform them that they’ve arrived at the entrance to “The Village at Brawley” or “Brawley City Centre”, or something along those lines. The change in street surface at the intersection, from grey asphalt to ornate brick, would simultaneously mark the beginning of a new experience. At the corner, a stately gatehouse would spring from the attractive brick-paved sidewalk, serving as both information kiosk and sentry post. The uniformed security officer/concierge within would stand ready to assist with directions or recommend an eatery on Brawley, all while providing an extra set of eyes on the street.

While the entrance to the promenade catches the attention of those who happen by, there are others throughout Atlanta who already know that Brawley is their destination. That’s

³⁸ Field of Dreams, dir. Phil Alden Robinson, perf. Kevin Costner, Amy Madigan, Gaby Hoffmann, Ray Liotta, and James Earl Jones, Gordon, 1989.



Fig. 4.7. A gatehouse such as this (but perhaps better) would greet visitors as they arrived at the promenade (photo by author)

because an aggressive campaign to host and promote a wide range of special events is beginning to reach fruition. From the weekly “Jazz on the Green” performances on the new library quad (held every Thursday evening), to the 4th of July street festival, to the art shows and academic lectures that take place periodically, the new Brawley Drive is a hub of social, cultural and intellectual activity.

The large amount of activity on Brawley would also bring attention to the schools of the AUC. Functions and events on campus that could otherwise have gone largely unnoticed might now draw larger audiences. Existing and potential donors to the schools, corporate and

individual, might see more reasons to increase their level of involvement with the AUC. What might a few more corporate partnerships and large financial contributions mean for the schools? New buildings and facilities, more student scholarships, additional funds for faculty research, perhaps an unprecedented level of financial stability and security for the historically struggling private schools... the list goes on.

Some of the proposals that have been made here are basic, even somewhat generic in nature. They could be applied to any of hundreds of streets throughout the country, as tools to revitalize and improve depressed urban areas. In the case of James P. Brawley Drive, I believe that these measures, if applied in stand-alone fashion, lose much of their effectiveness if there is no attempt to understand and utilize the existing connections between the AUC schools, the surrounding communities, and the city of Atlanta.

In moving forward, there must be a complete study and understanding of the unique history of this place, the people who helped build it, and the difficulties and dangers that were faced in the process. There must also be a thorough consideration of all of the pertinent issues that exist today in relation to the street, such as ownership, safety, community needs and desires, as well those persistent, murky problems that continue to affect so much of what transpires in Atlanta and the South. Do racist ideologies and motives continue to play a role in what gets improved, and what doesn't? Are the AUC schools still struggling against the same obstacles that faced them during Reconstruction? These questions must be answered truthfully in order to facilitate progress; doing so is essential to effecting a true establishment of Brawley, long an important street in the history of the AUC, to a role as key link to the rest of the world.

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