

FROM 'CRACKERTOWN' TO THE 'ATL': RACE, URBAN RENEWAL, AND THE RE-MAKING OF
DOWNTOWN ATLANTA, 1945-2000

by

IRENE VALERIE HOLLIMAN

(Under the Direction of PAUL S. SUTTER)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the many ways in which successive waves of postwar urban renewal transformed the city of Atlanta. I contend that each renewal effort was inherently flawed because each attracted opposing interest groups with conflicting visions of how the city of Atlanta should be repaired and what the city of Atlanta, when “fixed,” should look like. Atlanta city planners, elected officials, businessmen, along with housing and Civil Rights advocates sought out federal Urban Renewal funding shortly after the end of the Second World War as a means of eliminating dilapidated housing and stabilizing downtown property values. In the 1960s, as federal renewal funding shifted away from programs that razed and re-built the physical environment towards more comprehensive welfare programs, Atlanta’s governing power coalition of white elites and black middle class resisted incorporating federal antipoverty measures that mandated citizen participation of the poor. The city’s first black elected officials, many of whom had cut their political teeth in Civil Rights Movement protests, came to power just as early urban renewal failures and the end of segregation de jure convinced the city’s affluent tax base (both white and black) to relocate in the suburbs. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the city’s

tenuously reconfigured power coalition, faced with a sharp decline in the availability of federal renewal funding, turned to private and quasi-privately funded downtown redevelopment plans for Atlanta. Through the construction of the Peachtree Center, the Omni, and Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta's black city leaders increasingly conceived of downtown Atlanta as a place to serve tourists and conventioners, a marked shift away from the grassroots-organized, community-led ethos that had brought many of Atlanta's new politicians into office. Finally, Atlanta's participation in the federally sponsored Empowerment Zone revitalization program in the 1990s suggests the extent to which Atlanta city officials and city boosters sought to revitalize the physical space of downtown Atlanta without, once more, fully appreciating how that redevelopment could (and did) negatively affect the city's poorer African American residents living in and near downtown.

INDEX WORDS: American South, New South, Atlanta, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Civil Rights Movement, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Summerhill Riot, Atlanta Fulton County Stadium, Atlanta Civic Center, Peachtree Center, Omni, Georgia World Congress Center, 1996 Olympics, Empowerment Zone, William B. Hartsfield, Ivan Allen Jr., Sam Massell, Maynard Jackson, Andrew Young, Bill Campbell, John Portman, Tom Cousins.

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INTRODUCTION

In November 1989, at an annual meeting for local Atlanta-area developers, new Central Atlanta Progress president Joseph Martin exclaimed, “Underground is a shining example of how downtown redevelopment should work.”¹ Martin was referring to Underground Atlanta, the newly renovated shopping and dining complex located one story below the street level at Five Points, the heart of downtown Atlanta. The entertainment venue had undergone one earlier renovation in the late 1960s, but downtown construction traffic and competing suburban nightlife caused the first incarnation of Underground to shutter its doors in 1981.

Even before the original Underground Atlanta had closed, Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), a pro-business growth organization and mouthpiece for the city Chamber of Commerce, expressed interest in re-developing the venue. In re-making Underground Atlanta, CAP leaders hoped that a new shopping and dining district would stabilize property values in the area immediately south of the central business district. The city tapped into both private and public sources to pay the projected \$227 million cost for Underground’s renovation, including nearly \$17 million in federal urban renewal money.

Shortly after the re-opening of Underground Atlanta, aides to Mayor-Elect Maynard Jackson began considering a proposal to implement a “hospitality zone” to remove

¹ Thonnia Lee, “Martin Lauds Underground at Developers Meeting,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1989, E9.

vagrants, panhandlers, homeless persons from in and around the central business district.²

The proposed zone would include Underground Atlanta, the Georgia World Congress Center, and downtown hotels. The general manager of Atlanta's downtown Ritz-Carlton, frustrated with panhandlers, supported the proposal, stating, "We need to focus on the person coming here from San Francisco or Michigan or Florida. [We want] visitors to experience southern hospitality from the minute they get off MARTA until the minute they get back on the plane." Ted Sprague, president of the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau, agreed with the several downtown hotel managers, saying, "It is essential that the walk between Underground Atlanta and the hotels on Peachtree be a pleasant walk for our visitors. The economic prosperity of the entire area is dependent upon it being pleasant." Advocates for Atlanta's poorer residents, including Jim Beaty, executive director for the Task Force for the Homeless, questioned the wisdom of being hospitable to visitors by discriminating against the city's poor. Rev. Agnes Norfleet, pastor of Central Presbyterian Church, two blocks away from the new Underground, said the proposal reflected the city's misplaced priorities. Norfleet called the city's attempt to "clean up the streets by removing the 'problem' from public vision [was] the worst possible way to address problems of poverty."³

² Maynard H. Jackson had previously served as Atlanta's mayor and the city's first African American mayor from 1973-1981. His election and administration, which reconfigured the city's tenuous governing coalition of white downtown business elites and the black middle class, is highlighted in Chapter Three. For a more detailed treatment of Jackson's mayoral administrations, see Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (London: Verso Press, 1996); and Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996).

³ Mark Sherman, "Jackson Aides Consider Plan to Shield Tourists from Homeless: 'Hospitality Zone' would not Welcome All," *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 December 1989, A1.

These two initiatives, the public-private expansion of downtown business and the removal of poor homeless persons Atlantans from downtown streets, repeated a four-decade old argument about the purpose of urban redevelopment in Atlanta. Since the end of World War II, residents in the city of Atlanta had participated in numerous federally sponsored urban renewal programs designed to arrest blight, eliminate substandard housing, and revitalize decaying central business districts. As historian Brian Robick has argued, “blight provided a way to describe declining conditions, and it also served as a legal term that provided redevelopment authorities with access to the power of eminent domain.”⁴ From Urban Renewal, Community Action, and Model Cities, to Community Development Block Grants, Urban Development Action Grants, and Empowerment Zones, post-war Atlanta had received millions of dollars from the federal government to eradicate slums and eliminate poverty. By 1989, then, why were federal renewal dollars being used to renovate an Atlanta entertainment venue for tourists while homeless Atlanta residents were threatened with arrest for loitering? Why did some in Atlanta seem more interested in the welfare of visitors than its natives? For whom was urban renewal designed, and for what end(s)? This dissertation is an attempt to answer these questions, as well as an attempt to understand more broadly how and why federal urban renewal programs designed to eradicate poverty and revitalize decaying downtowns fell short.

The persistence of poverty in the midst of economic development has a long history in urban America. In *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of Cities*, historian Robert

⁴ For a discussion on the definition of blight, see Brian Robick, “Urban Blight and Community Reaction to the Gateway Center Redevelopment Project, Pittsburgh, PA, 1946-50,” Paper presented at the 2007 Society for American City and Regional Planning History meeting, Portland, ME, in author’s possession. Historian Colin Gordon has added, “Blight is less an objective condition than it is a legal pretext...”. See Colin Gordon, “Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of Blight,” *Fordham Law Journal* 31, no. 2 (2004): 305-337.

Beauregard argued that decay, overcrowding, and filth were not new to cities, but rather had been part of the American urban environment since industrialization. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the public viewed these problems as necessary evils of success. But the representation of urban problems changed from a symptom of success to a harbinger of collapse due to slow economic recovery during the Great Depression and suburban competition after World War II. The shift in the perception of urban problems coincided with the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the Northeast and Midwest, and the move suggested how the concept of blight could be increasingly associated with race. This transformation in the city's image directly affected its physical shape, inspiring both economic and political disinvestment and subsequent attempts at renewal.⁵ Disinvestment came in many forms, including a decline in urban-based manufacturing and its supporting service industries, and the subsequent out-migration of affluent city dwellers to close-in streetcar suburbs, and later, with the advent of the automobile, to suburbs further removed from downtown. By the end of World War II, many cities throughout the nation were already feeling the economic and social effects of the disinvestment.

Nationwide, the push to renew deteriorated urban areas began with the Housing Act of 1949, an act that sought to provide a "decent home and suitable living environment" for

⁵ Robert Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* (New York: Routledge, 1993), in Brian Robick, "Urban Blight and Community Reaction," SACRPH paper, 2007. For an account of the Great Migration, see Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America*, (New York: Vintage, 1991). For early suburbanization, see Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2nd ed., 1978); see also Howard L. Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979). For the shift from early twentieth century suburbs to post-war suburbanization, and for an account of the federal policies that promoted suburbanization, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

every American.⁶ The act that established Urban Renewal was a complex piece of legislation that hoped to eliminate slums and blighted areas, revive downtown business districts, and provide a decent home for every American family. Specifically, Title I of that act gave cities the power of eminent domain to clear slums, and it required that local renewal agencies employ a “feasible method for the temporary relocation of families displaced from the project area and the permanent provision of decent dwellings at prices and rents within the financial means of such families.”⁷ Federal subsidies assisted local redevelopment agencies in clearing land, but the Act did not specify what should happen with land once cleared. After demolition, cities were free to then turn around and sell cleared land at bargain prices to private developers. This early renewal not only removed decaying structures from the heart of American downtowns; it also removed hundreds of thousands of people from their downtown homes, and more often than not, federal renewal program officials watched as city governments removed rundown housing only to replace it with non-residential structures.

Beginning in the 1960s, critics slowly mobilized against early renewal, charging that it not only displaced more people than it housed, but that big box replacement structures often destroyed the very fabric of downtown neighborhoods that renewal purported to save. Subsequent federal programs designed to revitalize American downtowns adapted to emphasize more structural rehabilitation than clearance and adopted antipoverty initiatives. Beginning in the 1960s, revised federal urban redevelopment programs emphasized three new ideas. First, the revised versions of renewal promoted “bottom-up”

⁶ Housing Act of 1949, Public Law no. 81-171. The term ‘urban renewal’ did not surface until the Housing Act of 1954. In its first five years, the program was more commonly called ‘urban redevelopment.’

⁷ Ibid.

planning and implementation, allowing that poor neighborhood residents knew best about their local needs. Second, it sought to establish local centers from which to coordinate the distribution of social services. Third, it focused on economic development in poor neighborhoods, with the understanding that good jobs would improve the overall economic health of the area. No sooner had the federal government enacted revisions to its urban renewal policies than a new round of critics began questioning the entire premise of using federal spending to solve urban ills. In recent decades, revisions to federal urban renewal programs continue to reflect the extent to which criticisms have shaped federal urban policy.

Federal urban renewal in the last decade should be seen as a backlash against many of the antipoverty initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s. Believing that cuts in capital gains taxes would encourage businesses to relocate or start up in the economically depressed areas of downtowns, recent federal urban redevelopment programs offered more tax incentives than actual grant funding. The paucity of federal money available encouraged private initiatives and public-private partnerships to redevelop declining downtowns. While recent urban redevelopment efforts have served to improve the built environment of inner city areas, however, they have not necessarily improved the lives of the residents living within deteriorated downtowns.

This is a study about the many ways in which successive waves of postwar urban renewal transformed the city of Atlanta. This is not primarily an examination of federal urban renewal policy, but rather one that considers how various individuals and groups interpreted and implemented that federal policy to achieve their own, sometimes contradictory goals. A single-case study of a city allows for richer description and more in-

depth analysis of the backroom brokering of urban renewal decision-making processes. This study explores the changes wrought upon the city of Atlanta's built environment, but it examines more closely how various changes to the city's built environment affected city residents, especially the city's African American community.

Atlanta makes a compelling case study for urban renewal because in spite of its pockets of downtown deterioration and impoverished neighborhoods, it has been an extraordinarily successful city economically, and a moderate city in terms of its racial disturbances. It was in many respects the paradigmatic post-war city. Atlanta was headquarters to a number of Fortune 500 companies, including Coca-Cola in particular. Moreover, the city served as headquarters for a number of civil rights organizations, and it had been a center of African American higher education for over a century. The fate of Atlanta mirrored the state of the country in the post-war era. Atlanta's urban renewal should be understood from within the context of ongoing Civil Rights Era campaigns as well as the city's own campaign for the national spotlight as "the City Too Busy to Hate." In the years since the close of the Second World War, Atlanta city and business leaders sought to re-make the city into the region's transportation, distribution, and communications hub. At the same time, the city's governing power coalition of white downtown business elites and professional middle class African Americans crafted a modern, racially moderate image of Atlanta to present to prospective business partners in the Southeast, the nation, and the world. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the city's political and economic leaders remained fiercely protective of the city's image, and this obsession with its image perhaps had the greatest impact in the planning for and implementation of federal renewal programs in the city. Atlanta officials boasted of their ability to win

designation as a city eligible for federal renewal funding, and suggested that this confirmed Atlanta's national importance. However willing Atlanta officials were to accept federal renewal funding, those same city officials were reluctant to admit that the city's designation meant that Atlanta exhibited the same national problems with racially circumscribed poverty. More than once, local government officials responded to complaints about renewal plans only after the criticisms threatened the city's image.

Civil Rights demonstrations in Atlanta often threatened to undermine the city's racially moderate image. Some of the earliest Urban Renewal projects began slum clearance in Atlanta just as Civil Rights organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee turned from rural voter registration campaigns towards urban campaigns for social and economic rights. SNCC organizers in Atlanta gave the city's poor African American communities a platform from which to express their desire that urban renewal be used to increase the availability of affordable housing instead of non-residential, big revenue-generating structures such as Major League stadiums, Civic Centers, and interstate highways.⁸

In this study, I examine the shortcomings of three federally sponsored and two public-private attempts at the urban renewal of downtown Atlanta from 1945-2000. I attempt to understand how the very federal urban policies designed to ameliorate impoverished conditions for downtown dwellers served to reinforce racial and socio-

⁸ For explanations of why Civil Rights organizations shifted their focus towards an urban theatre, see for example, Claiborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Gerald Horne, *The Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement, a Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For a closer reading on how earlier Civil Rights organizing affected Atlanta, see David J. Garrow, *Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989).

economic prejudices and foster urban racial unrest, perpetuating appalling pockets of racially circumscribed poverty and substandard housing. I argue that each renewal effort was inherently flawed because each attracted opposing interest groups with conflicting visions of how the city of Atlanta should be repaired and what the city of Atlanta, when “fixed,” should look like. Renewal programs repeatedly pitted pro-business growth interest groups who sought to redevelop the physical space of downtown against housing advocates and antipoverty activists who sought to revitalize the social and economic opportunities for residents living in and near downtown. It is my hope that this study will not only explain what has been flawed about federal urban renewal policies to date, but will help to explain why, if politicians and constituents continue to maintain different (and competing) objectives for renewal, subsequent efforts will continue to have little success.

The story of Atlanta’s urban renewal is important because it provides a means of bridging many Balkanized historical sub-disciplines. This dissertation is in equal parts a story that describes the end of Jim Crow and the more intransigent problems inherent in de facto segregation, a story that traces the rise of the state and the limits of liberalism, and a story that considers how Atlanta’s admission of national urban problems signaled a decline in its distinctiveness as a Southern city. Urban renewal acts as the thread that ties these stories together.

For too long, urban historians have focused their studies of urban renewal on the Rustbelt, and Civil Rights historians have focused their studies on the Movement in the Jim Crow South. A study of Atlanta’s urban renewal during the Civil Rights Movement reveals how urban renewal projects shaped Civil Rights demonstrations, and vice versa. Renewal transformed downtown Atlanta’s skyline and helped thrust the city into national and

international prominence. Similarly, Civil Rights Era legislation gave many black Atlantans greater social, political, and economic opportunities and helped usher members of the African American community into local political office and positions of business leadership. Yet in spite of these gains, many civil rights victories primarily benefitted the city's middle class African Americans, while many of the city's poorest blacks remained cut-off from political and economic opportunity. At the same time, local Atlanta officials implemented urban renewal in such a way that it transformed the downtown built environment while failing to produce adequate amounts of new low-cost housing. In so doing, it has also refashioned downtown into a space designed more for out-of-town tourists and conventioners than residents.

In recent decades, scholars have added greatly to our understanding of urban renewal, both the federal slum clearance program of the same name, and more broadly as a host of programs and policies that wrought a series of radical changes upon the built environment. Indeed, many of these scholars helped to direct the shape of urban renewal. One of the earliest critics, Jane Jacobs, argued that the physical environment of the city directly affected its social life. Jacobs offered what became the classic critique of big renewal ideas, namely, that living next to a stadium, interstate highway, or skyscraper disrupted community and destroyed the social fabric of city neighborhoods. Another critic, conservative economist Martin Anderson, used early data collected from the Urban Renewal Administration to show where renewal cleared slums to make way for luxury housing, hospitals, libraries, college expansion, and expanded retail districts. Anderson revealed that local renewal agencies often did not take care to relocate slum dwellers into adequate replacement housing prior to demolition. Compounding relocation problems was

the fact that many displaced by renewal were African American, and economic and racial reasons often dictated where they could relocate. In a separate but related criticism, Anderson charged that local renewal agencies selected areas for slum clearance not because of substandard housing, but rather because the sites were seen as the most desirable for upscale residential and/or commercial development. Such analyses helped to shape both the direction of federal urban renewal and the contours of its historiography.⁹

Historians have since fleshed out these early general analyses with more tightly focused local studies of how urban renewal transformed individual cities. Historian Jon Teaford was one of the first urban renewal scholars to move away from a top-down analysis, instead looking at the problems of cities “from the vantage point of city hall.” In his examination of a dozen Northeastern and Midwestern cities, Teaford stressed the impact of technological and demographic change on aging American cities, and argued that postwar renewal constituted a disjointed series of local and federal efforts to overcome the “obsolescence” of the city center by rebuilding to meet the needs of the suburban age.¹⁰ Following Teaford’s example, historians have amassed an impressive amount of scholarship on particular cities to explain the economic, political, and social dimensions of urban renewal. Many of these scholars have adhered to the earlier arguments of critics such as Jacobs and Anderson, but, in focusing on a single city, have been able to tell the

⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964). See also James Q. Wilson, ed., *Urban Renewal: The Record and The Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966); Scott Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965); Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁰ Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990); political scientist John Mollenkopf also took an early local view in *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

story in greater detail. Historians such as Thomas O'Connor and David Schuyler have produced coherent historical narratives of Boston and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, respectively, that recount how urban renewal failures contributed to further public disinvestment and suburbanization. Both O'Connor and Schuyler identified common refrains found in many histories of urban renewal, including the deterioration of housing stock, structural economic shifts, urban political infighting, and changing racial and ethnic neighborhood demographics. Other scholars, like Amanda Seligman, have demonstrated how, for some white West Side Chicagoans, urban renewal was just one of a variety of responses locals employed to preserve the racial and ethnic homogeneity of their working class neighborhoods and keep residential racial integration at bay. Recent urban historians have also begun to frame the story of urban renewal within the context of other national post-war changes. Wendell Pritchett, for example, connected the inadequacies of urban renewal and public housing programs in Brownsville, Brooklyn to the Red Scare, the War on Poverty, and the rise of Black Power. Neither urban renewal nor the concentration of public housing addressed the long-standing urban problems of racism or poverty, Pritchett argued; instead, it was the fear of Communism, a backlash against anti-poverty initiatives, and black militancy that, when combined with flawed federal urban policy, threatened community building in Brownsville.¹¹

¹¹ Thomas O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950-1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993); David Schuyler, *The City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2002); Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Other good case studies include, Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and the Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Baltimore: Johns

In their groundbreaking community studies of Detroit and Chicago, historians Thomas Sugrue and Arnold Hirsch have explored the intersections of race and federal urban policy, though not exclusively urban renewal policy, in the Rustbelt context and have argued that the forces of racial backlash imbedded in the policies of postwar liberalism predated the episodes of racial violence in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, Sugrue and Hirsch have dated the roots of postwar conservatism to the Great Migration in the early twentieth-century, when black and white worlds collided in the North.¹² Sugrue's work is a particularly compelling account of how these earlier demographic changes, when coupled with a decline in Detroit's industrial base, resulted in a reactionary populism that ultimately exploded in white urban working class neighborhoods during the racial riots of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The vast majority of these local case studies of urban decay and decline consider the transformed areas of the de-industrializing "Rustbelt."¹³ To be sure, cities in the Northeast and Midwest decayed in part because declining industries meant massive economic restructuring. The loss of employment possibilities necessarily complicated poor and

Hopkins University Press, 1997); Zane Miller, *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Cincinnati's Over-The-Rhine and Twentieth Century Urbanism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Heather Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Howard Gillette, Jr., *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

¹² Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd Ed, 1998.)

¹³ One notable exception is Christopher McGregor Scribner's study of urban renewal in Alabama, but his scholarship addresses historians of the New South more directly than urban historians. Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001). See also Sarah Hardin Blum, "Race, Housing, and the Making of Twentieth-Century Louisville, Kentucky," (PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2007).

working class Americans' abilities to maintain affordable, decent housing. From the purview of the de-industrializing Rustbelt, however, it has been difficult to determine to what extent racial discrimination and unrest were the products of declining economic conditions versus the direct result of flawed federal urban renewal policy. This over-emphasis on urban renewal in the Rustbelt ignores the impact of renewal in cities like Atlanta—cities that, unlike Thomas Sugrue's Detroit or Howard Gillette's Camden, were economic boom towns in the decades after World War II. I argue that in examining urban renewal in a city such as Atlanta, in a region not historically associated with the same Rustbelt "urban crisis," scholars can more clearly distinguish the ways in which federal urban policies contributed to racial prejudices, racial violence, and a political culture increasingly at odds with the objectives of the federal government. Postwar Atlanta and other Sunbelt cities experienced tremendous, albeit uneven, economic growth and expansion in the first decades after the Second World War. In Atlanta's case, racial tensions and impoverished conditions often worsened rather than improved upon the completion of urban renewal projects, even as the city's elite, benefiting from Civil Rights legislation, continued to make political and economic gains.

Fortunately, there is a vast, growing literature that has explored the political, economic, and demographic changes in late nineteenth and twentieth-century Atlanta, and these studies can help to provide a foundation from which to examine the city's experience with urban renewal since the Second World War. Two recent historical works in particular have examined how and why the city of Atlanta came to have highly segregated residential patterns by the midpoint of the twentieth century. In her study of Atlanta's black women laborers from the end of the Civil War to the Progressive Era, Tera W. Hunter found that

black and white residential communities were not rigidly segregated in the decades following the Civil War. She cited that increasing black political disfranchisement, racial violence, and the establishment of Jim Crow coincided with rising black migration into the city. By the turn of the century, Progressive Era politicians and business leaders in Atlanta conceived of segregation as a “civic reform that would alleviate racial conflicts and improve race relations.”¹⁴

Building on Hunter’s study, historian LeeAnn Lands traced how neighborhoods, housing, and urban space increasingly came to constitute racial and class identity in early twentieth century Atlanta. Lands argued that the creation of exclusive park-neighborhoods, post-World War I homeownership campaigns, and New Deal federal housing programs such as the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, Federal Housing Administration, and Federal Home Loan Bank Board collectively served to help elite white Atlantans create a culture of homeownership. Racial and class segregation persisted throughout the first half of the twentieth-century in part because white homeowners supported it, depending upon segregation to protect their property investment. The “culture of property” became a means by which affluent white Atlantans could secure and maintain political and economic power over the city by the end of World War II.¹⁵ In this dissertation, I argue that Atlanta’s political and business leaders continued to base many of their civic decisions on the assumptions embedded in this culture of property. As they began to consider the use of federal urban renewal money to redevelop downtown urban space, for instance, they did so while espousing that segregation was necessary for order and peace, and that the

¹⁴ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 125.

¹⁵ LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 5-11.

appreciation of their properties (residential or commercial) depended upon segregation's maintenance.

Scholars Floyd Hunter and Clarence Stone have helped to explain Atlanta's economic and political power structure behind these shifting residential patterns. Hunter, a sociologist, became interested in understanding how Atlanta's business leadership engaged local governmental officials to pursue business objectives. In the 1950s, Hunter interviewed a handful of powerful white and black city leaders and diagrammed a vast series of networks that linked political officials in Atlanta City Hall with the Chamber of Commerce. Hunter's findings suggested that the city was not ruled by a single elite, but rather by a "community power structure" that "saw racial progressivism and economic progress as inseparable." Atlanta's ruling coalition stood out at the end of World War II because rather than working to maintain the politics of white supremacy, the city's bi-racial power structure negotiated cautious, moderate calls for African-American civil rights while working together to craft a peaceful, prosperous public image.¹⁶

Political scientist Clarence Stone revisited Atlanta's governing coalition during its first Urban Renewal program in *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent* and revised Hunter's community power structure theory. Stone found that "protests, direct action techniques, and citizen participation structures gave blacks no more influence over redevelopment policy than they had had earlier through the politics of coalition and negotiation," and suggested the limited power sharing from within Atlanta's bi-racial

¹⁶ Floyd Hunter, "Process Recording of Interview: Atlanta Power Structure," Box 16, Floyd Hunter Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953); also see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 20.

governing structure.¹⁷ Stone demonstrated the limits of pluralist political theory, arguing that there was little point in black Atlantans gaining access to the political governing coalition without also pushing for greater economic opportunities. Expounding on these findings in *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*, Stone revealed how, even as black Atlantans assumed greater positions of political leadership, they found it difficult to translate electoral power into policy change. In identifying and following Atlanta's governing coalition, both Hunter and Stone's studies help to clarify how the city's power structure would limit the success of any subsequent urban redevelopment program that did not emphasize the city's economic growth and expansion.¹⁸

Building on studies of Atlanta's power structure, historian Ronald H. Bayor detailed the rise of the city's black middle class to political and economic power in the twentieth-century. Bayor traced the myriad connections between race and public policy formation and demonstrated the ways in which white political and business leaders attempted to contain black gains, spatially, through zoning ordinances, road construction, and the placement of public housing. Bayor's work is particularly instructive because it reminds us that the "removal" of African American neighborhoods during the urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s was actually a continuation of a long effort to restrict and contain black expansion in the city.¹⁹

¹⁷ Clarence Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent; Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 8.

¹⁸ Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

¹⁹ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). For a more detailed study on the dynamism of the political structure in early twentieth-century Atlanta, see Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For additional studies on the intersections of race, class, and politics in late twentieth-century Atlanta, see also Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban*

Nonetheless, more recent scholarship suggests that the increased role of the federal government in urban life after World War II changed local race and class relations in places such as Atlanta. Thomas Sugrue, Arnold Hirsch and others have probed the “racial contradiction at the heart of postwar liberalism,” in which “the promise of equal opportunity for black citizens clashed with a white working class backlash that defined segregated housing in secure neighborhoods as an essential feature of the New Deal social contract.”²⁰ Building on these studies, and shifting the focus to the Sunbelt South, historians Kevin Kruse and Matthew Lassiter have explored the postwar federal programs that expanded the suburbs and caused urban disinvestment and retrenchment, and they contend that the participants in southern white flight were the authors of modern Conservatism. The ideology of the New Right, Kruse argues, arose from the white experience with forced integration and postwar urban politics. Rather than engaging in a prolonged resistance to integration, however, most whites fled to suburban strongholds in a successful effort to maintain spatial segregation. Similarly, Lassiter contends that, in examining those who left the cities for the suburbs, class identity also took on a spatial orientation, and the physical location of one’s home revealed one’s socio-economic status. Looking to Sugrue’s “reactionary populists,” Lassiter stresses how white flight suburbanites in Atlanta, Charlotte, and Richmond, while not rejecting racial prejudices,

Expansion (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Charles Rutherford, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*, (London: Verso Press, 1996). For two outstanding narratives of twentieth-century Atlanta, see Gary Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (New York: Scribner, 1996); and Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996).

²⁰ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

relied upon existing class-based divisions to develop a “color-blind language of consumer rights and meritocratic individualism.”²¹

In focusing their studies on the whites who left American cities in the immediate postwar decades, Kruse and Lassiter have deepened our understanding about the urban crisis, white flight, and the resulting political culture of suburban America. But as Gerald Gamm has argued in his study on Jews and Catholics in 1960s Boston, we can learn as much about the urban crisis from studying people who remained in the city as we can from those who abandoned it.²² Going one step further, I argue that a sustained focus on the inner city suggests how the limits of liberalism shaped the political culture not only of the suburbs, but also that of the inner core. Middle class whites and African Americans living in Atlanta, observing the inability of the more socially oriented renewal programs like Model Cities to lift the city’s poorest residents out of poverty, deemed anti-poverty objectives of urban renewal as unattainable goals. At the same time, Atlanta’s economic and political elites grew increasingly frustrated with federal requirements of citizen participation, which sought to please a broad political constituency that rarely agreed on renewal goals. Such frustration led the city’s biracial power coalition to largely abandon federal programs in favor of public-private partnerships for urban redevelopment, as well as revitalization campaigns that increasingly focused on improvements to the physical built environment over the lives of residents. Urban renewal’s failure to address the human problems of the city soured white and black leadership on the Liberal Consensus of the 1960s, and the resulting privatization of redevelopment at the end of the twentieth century perpetuated

²¹ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 3, 9.

²² Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 13.

the same political, economic, and racial inequalities that had hindered federal urban renewal programs decades earlier.

Chapter One of this study traces how Atlantans first became acquainted with the federal Urban Renewal program. It establishes how city officials and a cadre of white downtown businessmen's associations initially envisioned employing renewal projects to clear slums and bolster property values near the central business district, and it juxtaposes their goals for urban redevelopment against those of the city's professional black middle class, various downtown neighborhood associations, and several local Civil Rights organization chapters. The black middle class cautiously supported City Hall's renewal objectives in exchange for a greater share of local political power, and with the expectation that the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, and the Atlanta Housing Authority would make an effort to find replacement housing for residents who would lose their homes due to slum clearance and interstate highway construction. Chapter One spans the majority of Mayor Bill Hartsfield's mayoral administration, and coincides with carefully orchestrated, relatively peaceful, well-publicized desegregations of public city services. Concerning Urban Renewal projects, Hartsfield walked a racial tightrope: he sought to remove African American residents from the slums that bordered the central business district, while simultaneously appeasing black middle class voters. What is clear from the outset of the Chapter One is that the federal government has left the bulk of urban renewal decision-making up to state and local entities, and the conflicts surrounding urban renewal that ensued in Atlanta and elsewhere concerned the struggle over the distribution of renewal money and the sharing of political power.

In Chapter Two, Hartsfield's successor, Mayor Ivan Allen, finds it increasingly difficult to walk the urban renewal tightrope. By the mid-1960s, two distinct visions for Atlanta's urban renewal came into view. Atlanta's mayor, aldermen, and city planners, along with a few white downtown business associations and some of the city's African American middle class boldly asserted that the purpose of federal urban renewal funding was to ensure economic growth for the city, either by protecting central business district property values from nearby slums, or by constructing new revenue-generating structures. Many of the city's poorer residents rallied alongside housing advocates, neighborhood activists, and more militant Civil Rights organizations, such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, who saw Atlanta as the urban theatre from which to launch a campaign for social and economic equality. Together, these groups believed that federal renewal funding should be used to replace deteriorating housing stock, whether with new public housing or low cost housing built by private developers. This chapter demonstrates how and where leaders expressing these two visions of urban renewal competed for limited funds, site selection, and planning control. It traces how violent events triggered a temporary shift—in 1966, following riots in two renewal neighborhoods, Atlanta city officials momentarily embraced the idea that urban renewal could be used to support neighborhood rehabilitation and citizen participation goals. Unfortunately, the shift in renewal goals only lasted as long as the threat of violence lingered. By the end of the decade, African American leaders and ordinary, working class African Americans came away from the political process with little to show for their cooperation and for the loss of their homes.

Chapter Three opens in the aftermath of the mid-1960s riots and details how the city of Atlanta sought and won designation in Model Cities, a Great Society-era inspired federal urban revitalization program that attempted to address the social and economic as well as physical problems of American slums. This chapter explores the shortcomings of the renewal program, which attempted to incorporate citizen participation and offer social services along with the more traditional urban renewal objectives to clear and rehabilitate substandard housing. It cites several reasons for the federal program's abysmal failure, including the lack of City Hall support, the Model Cities program director's lack of authority, and the Model Cities residents' mistrust of city government. As a result of the failure of Model Cities, Atlanta political and business leaders changed their thinking about federal urban revitalization programs and moved increasingly towards supporting private and public-private partnerships.

Chapter Four attempts to broaden the definition of what is meant by urban renewal to include private and quasi-private downtown redevelopment projects. This chapter examines a few of these developments in downtown Atlanta from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. It traces the objectives that these developers hoped to accomplish with the construction, namely commercial growth and expansion, and it suggests why city planners and developers opted out of federal urban renewal funding. This chapter seeks to understand how and why these public-private developments, in spite of their well-publicized, celebrated openings and expansions, did not spell a rebirth for downtown Atlanta.

Finally, Chapter Five revisits federal urban renewal in Atlanta from the 1990s into the early twenty-first century and examines the city's participation in the most recent

federal urban revitalization program, Empowerment Zones. This chapter traces how the Empowerment Zone concept evolved from a conservative reaction to Great Society programs into a viable method for attacking urban decay, and considers the extent to which Empowerment Zones reflected a conservative shift in federal urban policy. Here, as in earlier chapters, Atlanta provides a case study from which to examine what happened more broadly within the contested federal urban renewal program nationwide. In particular, this chapter focuses on how the planning for and implementation of the Empowerment Zone in Atlanta strained an already tenuous relationship between the city's mayor, city councilmen, city planners, and downtown business associations with the neighborhood residents living within Zone boundaries.

The successive waves of urban renewal that are recounted here take place in the city of Atlanta, but the conflicts that emerged during the various renewal programs there mirrored conflicts across the nation. Atlantans and urban Americans everywhere fought over whether urban renewal should be used to improve the physical built environment or to improve the quality of life for the residents living within renewal project boundaries. Urban renewal advocates continually debated whether the end goal of urban renewal was economic growth and expansion or the increased supply of low and moderate cost housing. Shifts in programmatic content and spikes in violence surrounding renewal conflicts began well before the end of Jim Crow and the simultaneous rise of white flight, as well as with the radicalization and subsequent unraveling of SNCC and Black Power. Similarly, changes in perceptions of urban renewal reflected broader national political shifts away from liberalism and towards a new conservatism.

CHAPTER 1

“BLUEPRINTING FOR SEGREGATION”¹: URBAN RENEWAL IN ATLANTA, 1949-1961

On May 7th, 1945, President Truman officially announced the German surrender. Many Atlantans reserved V-E day for praise and thanksgiving, solemnly crowding into churches to pray and meditate. The lower end of Peachtree Street was one minor exception, however. Peachtree glowed. The street’s downtown theater district included cinemas like Loew’s Grand, where, in 1939, author Margaret Mitchell had attended the movie premiere of *Gone With the Wind* alongside Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh. There, on May 7th, theater marquee lights that had been turned off for more than three years of blackouts once again bathed the entire street in light. The busy downtown thoroughfare was perhaps the closest example to a city center that Atlanta could ever claim. It was as if the illuminated street was preparing to usher a throng of window shoppers and moviegoers into peacetime. After months of darkness and a fear of a German attack, Peachtree Street must have glittered as brightly as the center of Times Square.

By the time the Japanese surrendered in August of 1945, Atlantans celebrated much less cautiously and much more noisily. News of the surrender broke late in the afternoon, as office clerks and shopkeepers prepared to leave for the day. Instead, workers stayed downtown, and were soon joined by a crowd numbering 100,000 that emptied onto Peachtree Street near the downtown theater district and rejoiced well into the evening.

¹ *Atlanta Daily World*, 19 April 1952.

Inside department stores, saleswomen hurriedly dressed their display windows with victory placards that read, "Hallelujah—Victory is here!" Heeding Mayor William B. Hartsfield's advice to "tear the roof off," Atlantans shouted, sang, and danced in the streets. Liquor flowed freely. Moviegoers poured from outside the theaters onto the streets, screaming and crying over the news of the surrender. Soldiers received showers of kisses. Streetcars, packed full, and carrying passengers on top, clanged their bells for the victory. People waved flags, hats, and bottles and beat on washtubs, pots, and pans. Car horns sounded and traffic policemen went mad trying to control the sea of people.²

The jubilant post-war celebration that took place in Atlanta's downtown was deceptive in several ways. It concealed the fact that at the end of World War II, many Atlantans, especially middle class white and black Atlantans, were spending less and less time downtown. In celebrating V-J day downtown, it was as if Atlantans felt nostalgic for a city center that was less and less relevant to their daily lives. The decreasing importance of Atlanta's downtown mirrored the fate of downtowns across the nation. Whereas at the turn of the century downtown had been the primary place where Atlantans worked, shopped, conducted business, and sought entertainment, this was no longer the case by the end of World War II.³ Due in no small part to the rising popularity of the automobile, affluent Atlantans began moving out to the city's first suburbs in the early decades of the twentieth century. New shopping and business districts soon followed affluent shoppers out to the

² "City Thunders into Postwar Era," *Atlanta Journal*, 14 August 1945, 1; Harold H. Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of its People and Events, Vol. 3* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 115.

³ For a clear, concise history of American downtowns and an explanation of how they have changed both as an idea and as a place during the twentieth century, see Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale, 2001). Allison Isenberg also examines the nostalgia for a mythologized downtown in *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

suburbs. In their place, a more ethnically and economically diverse population of renters and owners soon filled vacant homes in Atlanta's downtown neighborhoods. In the old Atlanta streetcar neighborhood of Peoplestown, located just south of the Georgia State Capitol, recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe moved in and subdivided the stately, worn Victorian houses as wealthier whites moved out to points further North.⁴

The lively downtown Atlanta street scene that erupted on V-J day also belied the fact that the city's downtown had been suffering from physical and economic deterioration for a decade and a half. The city's downtown built environment continued along that trajectory after the War, experiencing blight, decay, and decline in a pattern similar to that seen in many older and more established American cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Abandoned factories, run-down neighborhoods, and boarded up downtown businesses became familiar scenes in urban spaces; and poverty and civic neglect became familiar experiences of urban people.

This chapter examines the first of Atlanta's many attempts to deal with this decline through Urban Renewal. It pays particular attention to the attempts of the city's white and black business communities to simultaneously capitalize on increased federal support for urban renewal, while avoiding social upheaval in the racially polarized climate of the postwar years. Specifically, leaders such as Mayor William B. Hartsfield confronted a challenge that was three-fold: to devise a plan that would prevent an affluent tax base from leaving the city limits, to arrest the problems of poverty and substandard housing in the city center, and to encourage growth and expansion of the city's central business district.

⁴ Larry Keating, "Peoplestown: Resilience and Tenacity," 4-5. Unpublished manuscript in the author's possession.

The emergence of new federal urban redevelopment programs created the opportunity for revival, but white and black Atlantans soon learned that defining what a vibrant city should look like would prove to be a difficult business.

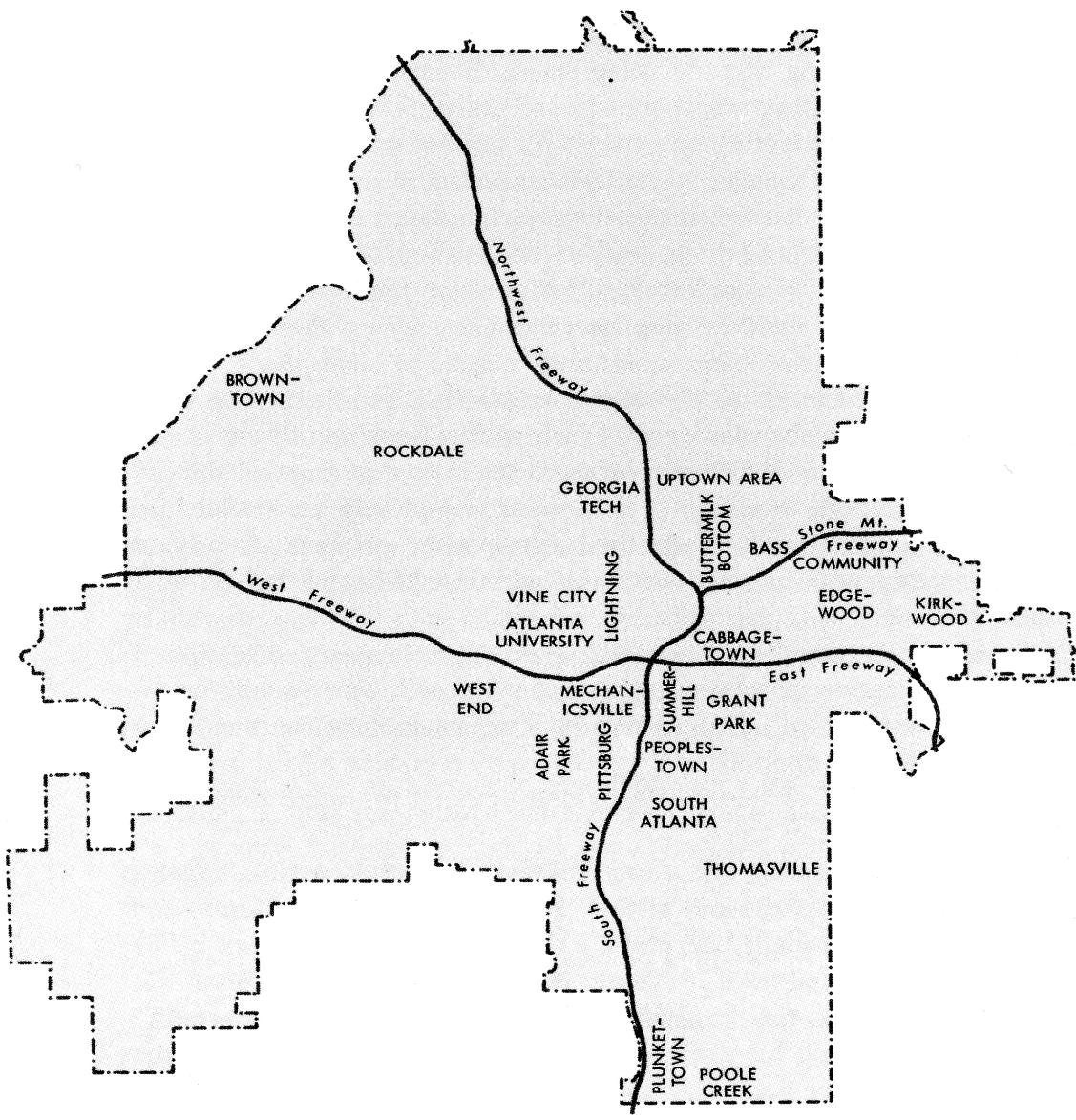


Figure 1.1: Intown Atlanta Neighborhoods, circa 1950. From Clarence Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 120.

The portrait of postwar downtown Atlanta as blighted is accurate, but it also assumes a perspective that views the remaining communities as desolate wastelands sparsely populated with disengaged, disaffected people.⁵ The case of Atlanta tells a different story. If poverty, ramshackle housing, and few public amenities were all measures of “blight,” then many African-American neighborhoods in Atlanta had long suffered from it. As historian Tera Hunter has shown, the city’s alleys and hollows grew to become the underserved neighborhoods of a large class of black laborers during the years around the turn of the century. Residents of such neighborhoods subsisted on a low-wage service economy and rarely saw a public official plod through the muck-filled streets.⁶ Public services expanded as Atlanta entered the interwar years, but the long Depression kept

⁵ The classic account that equates the physical destruction of the built environment with social malaise is Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961). For a more complicated reading of blight, see Herbert Gans, *Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962). Gans examines a poor neighborhood in Boston that was thriving, in spite of its deteriorated physical condition. As historian Brian Robick has argued, blight provided a way to describe declining conditions and served as a legal term that provided redevelopment authorities with access to the power of eminent domain. See Brian Robick, “Urban Blight and Community Reaction to the Gateway Center Redevelopment Project, Pittsburgh, PA, 1946-1950,” Paper presented at the 2007 Society for American City and Regional Planning History meeting, Portland, ME, in author’s possession.

⁶ Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom’: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. Chapter 3; on public services and health in the black community, see Stuart Galishoff, “Germs Know No Color Line: Black Health and Public Policy in Atlanta, 1900-1918” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 40, no. 1 (January 1985): 22-41. Following Atlanta’s Great Fire of 1917, many affluent whites abandoned the charred remains of their homes on the Boulevard Avenue ridge, which ran parallel, just blocks east of Peachtree Street. By some accounts, domestic servants who lived in Buttermilk Bottoms, the community in the floodplain between Boulevard and Peachtree, struggled to find work after Boulevard residents left for suburbs to the north. See Clifford Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of Atlanta, 1914-1948* (Atlanta and Athens: Atlanta Historical Center and University of Georgia Press, 1990).

personal incomes low for most city residents, and public spending on civic improvements remained anemic and uneven.⁷

Similarly, housing production and rehabilitation had languished during the interwar years just as the city experienced an unprecedented influx of newcomers. As in other cities throughout the nation, a combination of urban job growth and a collapsing farm economy sent rural families streaming into Atlanta and contributed to a housing shortage that tested the limits of the urban infrastructure. From 1910 to 1930, the total population of Fulton County (where Atlanta is the county seat) doubled to over 318,000, and the African-American population increased at a similar rate from 57,895 to 101,505. Shortly after World War II, that number increased by just under half again to 145,016 African-American residents, which represented about thirty percent of the total county population, and thirty-seven percent of the total city population.⁸ Working class neighborhoods such as Peoplestown, Mechanicsville, Buttermilk Bottoms, and Summerhill became quickly overcrowded with recently arrived families looking for the promise of fair pay and equitable working conditions. Housing barely kept up with population growth, and neighborhoods turned into a mosaic of single-family homes, houses subdivided into multiple apartments, boarding houses, and other ad hoc arrangements. Just as often, ramshackle structures rose in the hidden corners of alleys, hollows, and other unclaimed

⁷ For a discussion of unequal public services, wages, and for a understanding of black citywide reaction to said inequalities during the interwar years, see Karen J. Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁸ Historical Census Browser. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center:
<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

spaces. City officials had little authority to regulate such developments, and predictably, absentee landlords increasingly failed to improve rental property.⁹

Compounding the housing shortage was the fact that the city's residential areas were rigidly racially segregated. Early twentieth-century segregation ordinances were a part of Progressive era reforms designed to control blacks, politically, economically, and spatially. In the first decades of the century, the Atlanta Board of Aldermen passed a series of zoning ordinances that restricted where African Americans could rent and buy. After the Supreme Court ruled against residential segregation by race outright in 1917, officials in Atlanta's City Hall rewrote zoning ordinances in such a way as to maintain racial residential segregation and limit African American neighborhood expansion. For example, a 1929 zoning ordinance made it illegal for any individual to move into a building on a street in which "the majority of the residences... are occupied by those with whom said person is forbidden to intermarry." As a consequence, Atlanta's African-American community comprised over one-third of the city's population at the end of World War II, but lived on a mere ten percent of the city's residentially zoned land.¹⁰

⁹ Larry Keating, "Peopletown: Resilience and Tenacity," 4-5; Kuhn, Joye, and West, *Living Atlanta*; "Metropolitan Atlanta: A Factual Inventory" (Atlanta: Metropolitan Planning Commission, 1950), 35.

¹⁰ "Metropolitan Atlanta: A Factual Inventory," 35. For more on early twentieth-century housing geography in Atlanta, see Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995). For more specific examples of racial zoning plans, see Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 55; Barbara J. Flint, "Zoning and Residential Segregation: A Social and Physical History, 1910-1940," (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1977); For a more detailed explanation of segregation ordinances and racial zoning in pre-war Atlanta, see John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 13-15; E. Bernard West, "Black Atlanta: Struggle for Development, 1915-1925" (M.A. Thesis, Atlanta University, 1976), 34-36; Dana F. White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 26 (Summer/Fall 1982), 216.

Despite such systematic attempts to preserve racial segregation in the downtown area, many whites became more interested in creating new communities outside of the city. Historian LeeAnn Lands has traced the creation of early twentieth-century Atlanta park-neighborhoods such as Inman Park, Ansley Park, Druid Hills, Morningside, Brookhaven, and Buckhead and argues that affluent white homeowners used exclusive residential enclaves as a means of asserting racial and class identity and imposing order. Following the exodus of white elites from the city, middle and working class whites became alarmed at the growing African American population inside the city limits, feared the end of the privileges accorded to them by racial segregation, and saw a move to the suburbs as a way to preserve a space for whites only. At the end of World War II, a three-bedroom house, a yard with acreage, and a two-car garage were no longer simply aspirations. A confluence of federal policies made home ownership attainable for the growing white middle class, and the construction of federally subsidized multi-lane highways across the nation facilitated easy access between the city and suburb, and suburbia came to represent affluence, safety, and whiteness. While unable to benefit from many of the same federal subsidies as middle class whites, some affluent African Americans, in search of access to the best local education and city services, and equally concerned that the inner city was coming to represent poverty and danger, also fled the city for newly created African American suburbs.¹¹

¹¹ On homeownership as a means of constituting race and class identity and as a negotiation of power, see LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009). On white flight in Atlanta, see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). On the rise of the American suburbs, and in particular for a more detailed discussion of the FHA mortgage programs that helped to drive

Even as middle class white and black Atlantans considered residential relocations to new suburban developments, the city's white political and business establishment maintained firm control over and interest in both City Hall and the central business district throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and they could not ignore the growth of racially inscribed poverty in the city. Mayor Hartsfield, in particular, recognized that the city was steadily losing its white middle class to the suburbs, and that the out-migrants were taking their pocketbooks with them, and he was particularly uneasy with the changing racial and economic character of the city. By the close of the war, Hartsfield had served as Atlanta's mayor for nearly a decade. Born in 1890 to a family of modest means, he taught himself law, passed the bar, opened his own practice, and made a bid for city alderman by the age of 31. After three aldermanic terms and two terms in the state legislature, Hartsfield first took a stab at the mayoral office in 1936. He beat out incumbent James L. Key by promising Atlantans that he would clean up corruption in City Hall and repair the city's budget deficits. Once in office, Hartsfield called upon his former employer and longtime ally, Coca-Cola chairman Robert Woodruff for advice on settling the city's debts, and in so doing, solidified a governing partnership between Atlanta City Hall and the white downtown business elite community that would last for much of the latter half of the twentieth

suburban housing construction, see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); on the rise of African American suburbs, see Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). It should be noted that both the GI Bill and FHA redlining practices limited African American suburban growth. On the creation of the Federal Interstate Act of 1956 and its impact in fueling suburban development, see Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); on the inner city becoming a black space, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

century. Hartsfield showed great deference to the city's white business community, and made few mayoral decisions without consulting the city's business leadership.¹²

Despite the growth of racially inscribed poverty in the city, the mayor also knew that the Atlanta region, paradoxically, was in the midst of a major economic upswing. World War II had transformed much of the South by bringing an influx of soldiers and defense spending from outside the region. Hartsfield, a social moderate by southern standards, hoped this national influence would bring more progressive attitudes towards race relations and open new avenues for economic development. World War II, in the words of one observer, had transformed Atlanta from a "sleepy old little town" into a city of national significance, and the mayor hoped to use that significance to overcome the city's historical racial and economic problems by attracting new business.¹³ Echoing Henry Grady, a southern booster from a previous generation, Hartsfield boasted in the late 1950s that he would "roll out the red carpet for every damn Yankee who comes in here with two strong hands and some money. We'll break our necks to sell him."¹⁴ Much of the "Yankee" money, however, came in the form of federal urban redevelopment subsidies, and few downtown interests could agree about how to use it and toward what ends. As public debate ensued, it became clear that federal policy contained inherent tensions that pitted the goals of downtown business expansion against the expansion of decent low and

¹² On Hartsfield's background, see Harold H. Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield: Mayor of Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1978); Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 25-29; Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 20-21.

¹³ Kuhn, Joye, and West, *Living Atlanta*, 350; Margaret Pugh, *Moving Beyond Sprawl: The Challenge for Metropolitan Atlanta* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2000), 47; also see Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ William Emerson, "Where Paper Clips Jump and M stands for Men, Money, and Millions," *Newsweek*, 19 October 1959.

moderate cost housing. Those tensions would continue to plague downtown Atlanta for the rest of the century.

Hartsfield's first major policy of the immediate post-war period was to replenish city coffers. He first sought to re-incorporate the Northside suburbs into the city tax base through annexation. In the late 1940s, he commissioned a study of the price of public services within and outside city limits. Statistics suggested that white Northside residents paid more for water treatment, police protection, and fire stations than did city residents. Annexation, the mayor reasoned, would bring lower utilities rates to Atlanta suburbanites. Hartsfield lobbied for annexation through the newspapers, he met with civic leaders, and he promoted the cause at churches, civic associations, and the Junior League. The mayor found an ally in G. Everett Millican, who was running for state senate for the Buckhead area northwest of the city. Millican assisted City Hall in compiling the statistics on the costs of suburban living. In a letter to *Atlanta Journal* editor Ralph McGill, Millican reasoned, "If we wait for citizens affected to (re-join the city), they will never come. They wish simply to enjoy the benefits of doing business and making money in the city without assuming the responsibilities of citizenship." McGill, a powerful ally, joined the pro-annexation forces, effectively shaming suburbanites into assuming their tax-paying civic duties.¹⁵ In the end, though, race played the most significant role in convincing suburbanites to concede to annexation. Privately, Hartsfield lobbied white residents in Buckhead and Druid Hills that the city needed to annex the suburbs in order to keep a white majority city. Hartsfield reminded white suburbanites, "the federal government [is] insisting on the political recognition of Negroes in local affairs." Without annexation, he continued, the white

¹⁵ G. Everett Millican to Ralph McGill, editor, *Atlanta Journal*, 9 August 1948.

suburbanites would effectively “hand [blacks] political control of Atlanta.”¹⁶ The mayor suggested that a black majority city would not be able to grow and keep pace with other cities. The public and private campaigns paid off, and annexation passed as a part of the city’s 1952 Plan of Improvement. It added 82 square miles of space to the city limits, and more importantly, more than 100,000 citizens to Atlanta’s population. Those citizens became taxpayers, which meant more revenue for its operating fund.¹⁷

Annexation of the Northside was an important victory for Hartsfield, but repairing blighted downtown areas proved a more difficult task than simply increasing city revenues. Cities across the nation were experiencing the same type of physical deterioration as Atlanta, and as urban redevelopment became a topic of national debate, city officials and policy planners increasingly argued that the problems of blight and changing population demography required comprehensive planning for the physical rejuvenation and reconstruction of the city. In Atlanta as elsewhere across the nation, local politicians and city planners looked to the federal government to solve what was ailing American cities and to protect the well being of ordinary Americans. Their belief in the efficacy and responsibility of the federal government to fix urban ills reflected their experience with an activist progressive state as well as a decade and a half of New Deal era reform. In particular, city and state governments looked to and had come to depend upon the federal government to provide relief and recovery programs during the Great Depression. Similarly, local and state officials had become accustomed to federal intervention during

¹⁶ William B. Hartsfield to Buckhead, Druid Hills civic leaders, 7 January 1943, WBH Papers, Box 29, MARBL, Robert Woodruff Library, Emory University, in Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 86.

¹⁷ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 85.

the war effort. Thus, many city officials expressed relief when, at the end of the Second World War, the federal government decided to take a more active role in rebuilding cities.¹⁸

To that end, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949, also known as the Wagner-Ellender-Taft Act. The act was a complex piece of legislation that sought to eliminate slums and blighted areas, revive downtown business districts, and provide a decent home for every American family.¹⁹ Historian Kenneth Jackson has examined how the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and its federally insured home mortgage fueled the expansion of middle class suburbs.²⁰ While the 1949 Housing Act expanded the availability of FHA mortgages, what was more striking about the act was that it defined decent housing as a basic right for those living in the inner city as well, a notion fully grounded in Roosevelt's Economic Bill of Rights.²¹ Within the act, Title I authorized federal grants and loans for cities to clear slums and blighted areas, and it required that local renewal agencies employ a "feasible method for the temporary relocation of families displaced from

¹⁸ On the rise of a more activist federal government during the Depression, see William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Alan Brinkley, *The End Of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage, 1995); on ordinary working-class Americans' push for and response to New Deal policies, see for example Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990). This was not the federal government's initial foray into building publicly assisted housing. During Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Atlanta was the site for the nation's first public housing projects. Techwood Homes and University Homes, for whites and blacks respectively, opened their doors in 1937. But it was not until after the Second World War that the federal government established the concept of clearing slums for private redevelopment.

¹⁹ Housing Act of 1949, Public Law no. 81-171. Under this Act, slum clearance is more commonly referred to as urban redevelopment. The federal program did not become known as urban renewal until the Housing Act was revised in 1954. Urban planner James A. Rouse, who in the 1970s and 1980s would go on to create the "festival marketplace" concept for re-energizing inner cities, coined the term "urban renewal." See Alexander Von Hoffman, "A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949," *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2000).

²⁰ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. Chapter 11.

²¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Economic Bill of Rights," excerpt from the 11 January 1944 message to Congress on the State of the Union, in Samuel Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Vol VIII* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

the project area and the permanent provision of decent dwellings at prices and rents within the financial means of such families.”²² Federal subsidies assisted local redevelopment agencies in clearing land, but the Act did not specify what should happen with land once cleared. After demolition, cities were free to then turn around and sell cleared land at bargain prices to private developers. Federal legislators expected that private developers would build at least some low and moderate income housing for those displaced, and Title III of the Act also made funds available for public housing.

The Housing Act sought to address the goals of disparate interest groups, including urban commercial real estate lobbyists, civic booster organizations, highway planners, housing advocates, and liberal welfare activists. Some groups, like the real estate lobbyists, dealt with physical spaces in cities, and therefore understood blight in terms of how it affected a city’s built environment. These groups wanted federal funding to clear run-down areas in order to fortify property values in downtown business districts and encourage economic growth. More socially-minded “public-houser” groups, on the other hand, understood blight in terms of how it affected people. They argued that blighted areas bred disease, delinquency, and poverty, and they believed that urban redevelopment could eliminate social problems by improving housing conditions. The inherent problem with urban redevelopment was that its supporters espoused different, and sometimes contradictory objectives.²³ It was unclear from its inception whether or not urban redevelopment could revitalize downtown commercial areas and expand housing stock at

²² Housing Act of 1949, Public Law no. 81-171, section 101.

²³ William D. Jenkins, “Before Downtown: Cleveland, Ohio, and Urban Renewal, 1949-1958,” *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 4 (May 2001): 472. Jenkins provides a clear explanation of the conflicting opinions of Housing Act supporters. See also, G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1983), 173-84.

the same time. Could city leaders and downtown business interests renew their city without engendering neighborhood despair or discontent?²⁴

Even before the passage of the 1949 Housing Act, the underlying tensions within federal urban renewal policy consumed Atlanta city leaders, who were debating the best way to facilitate city growth. Wealthy white downtown business leaders, in particular, aspired to transform Atlanta – already a transportation and distribution center – into the economic and financial hub of the Southeast. Atlanta business interests formed a rich and powerful elite. They controlled the Coca-Cola Bottling Company and Georgia Power, owned regional department stores and textile mills, and ran banks, hospitals, and universities. Atlanta’s elite was a tight-knit, well-connected hierarchy composed mostly of natives from the city and state that dined and socialized together, formulating important city policy decisions in the city’s exclusive, prestigious clubs. This business faction sought to renovate and expand the central business district, and advocated clearing slums that surrounded downtown in order to expand and protect real estate values. Business leaders, like Mayor Hartsfield, wished to promote an image of Atlanta as a racially moderate city in part because they did not want racism to discourage outside business from settling in Atlanta.²⁵ Though not a member of the elite himself, Hartsfield frequently consulted with downtown business heads during his administration. In 1937, he had spent his first year in office

²⁴ Clarence N. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program in Atlanta, 1950-1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), xi. Stone has compiled the most thorough account of the urban renewal program in Atlanta to date.

²⁵ For a more detailed description of the city’s white business elite, see Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising* (Atlanta; Longstreet Press, 1996); Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); Gary Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (New York: Penguin, 1997); Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: the Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (London: Verso Books, 1996).

rescuing Atlanta City Hall coffers from bankruptcy, and he succeeded largely due to the backing of Coca-Cola magnate Robert W. Woodruff.²⁶

The elite filled the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, a broad-based, conservative business organization that sought low tax rates for businesses throughout the city. Affluent white business interests also dominated the Central Atlanta Improvement Association, (CAIA) and Uptown Association (UA), smaller groups for businesses with specific vested real estate interests in the central business district and northeastern sector of the city, respectively. The CAIA actively lobbied City Hall to protect downtown property values and stimulate downtown economic growth. Uptown Association members in particular blamed the growth of blight on the continued existence of African American housing near the central business district, and in their group meeting minutes and in aldermanic meetings, UA members rigorously argued for the removal of low-income black housing downtown.²⁷

A second, less wealthy, and less politically connected faction had different ideas about how best to facilitate the city's post-war growth. A loosely organized coalition of housing and welfare advocates and neighborhood associations from older southern and eastern sections of the city understood Atlanta as a conglomeration of neighborhoods and communities, rich and poor, black and white, old and new. This group witnessed suburban out-migration and saw how the decline of center city neighborhoods affected city residents. They sought to use urban renewal to restore existing housing stock, stimulate new housing production, and preserve the city's neighborhoods. They argued that slum clearance was only justified if plans emphasized residential development for low-income families over

²⁶ Harold H. Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield, Mayor of Atlanta* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1978), 23. Roy LeCraw won the mayoral election in 1940 only to leave office within eighteen months to enlist for the war. Hartsfield regained the mayoral title in a special election.

²⁷ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 100.

commercial redevelopment and expansion. As the goals of these competing interests came to light, it was unclear how, in the implementation of urban renewal, Atlanta city officials could embrace the objectives of one interest group without spurning the objectives of another. Since Atlanta's white downtown business elite wielded enormous power and influence over City Hall, it seemed unlikely that urban renewal would be used to satisfy the objectives of housing advocates. From the time urban renewal made its debut in Atlanta, these two factions found themselves competing against one another.

The success of either group would largely hinge on the support of yet another band of powerful Atlantans – the black middle-class. Among the cities of the Southeast, Atlanta possessed an unusually large and politically savvy black middle class. Atlanta had two primary centers of black business in the early twentieth-century. The city's "black downtown," east of the central business district along Auburn Avenue, had been a bustling center of commerce since the turn of the century. Millionaire Alonzo Herndon's Atlanta Life Insurance Company sat on "Sweet Auburn," as did numerous black banks, mortgage companies, and realty offices. The *Atlanta Daily World*, a black-owned and black operated newspaper, had been printed in its Auburn Avenue offices since the 1920s. Middle class blacks also lived west of downtown. The west side housed the Atlanta University complex, a conglomeration of five historically black undergraduate colleges and a seminary.²⁸ With the assistance of a leading black businessman in the 1920s, Heman Perry, the African American community had been able to secure some land on the west side for future

²⁸ The Atlanta University complex included Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, Clark University, and Spelman Seminary for women.

expansion.²⁹ Even so, much of the black population, particularly the newer and poorer migrants, continued to reside in or near the heart of the central business district. By the late 1940s, the city's black working class neighborhoods were bursting at the seams.

When the Housing Act passed in 1949, blacks in Atlanta were gaining significant political strength. Several recent Supreme Court decisions chipped away at Jim Crow era restrictions on voting, including rulings that prohibited the use of the poll tax and the white primary in 1945 and 1946, respectively, which meant that for perhaps the first time in the twentieth century, Atlanta's black community could have a voice in local politics and could choose who represented them on the local, state, and federal level. Atlanta's black community quickly took advantage. Groups such as the NAACP, the Atlanta Urban League, and the Atlanta Negro Voters League mobilized to help tens of thousands of Atlanta blacks register to vote in 1946. In eight weeks alone, the number of registered blacks in Fulton County soared from 6,786 to 21,244. The role of black voters only continued to grow over next several years, largely due to the leadership of the black middle class. Dr. Clarence Bacote of Atlanta University, for instance, used census tracts to determine where blacks lived in the city, and then conducted a vigorous door-to-door campaign that registered 25,000 blacks by 1949.³⁰ Such large numbers of new voters, in turn, gave the city's black constituents a considerable bargaining chip. Indeed, if the city's black community voted as a bloc, it could determine the outcome of city elections.

Mayor Hartsfield and other white leaders recognized that the African American community would quickly become a political force in the city. Though not interested in any

²⁹ On the growth the black middle class, see Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

³⁰ Interview with Dr. Clarence Bacote, Living History Collection, Atlanta History Center. See Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 18, 24.

official repeals of racial segregation, Hartsfield was a pragmatist, and he understood that the black vote could help keep him in or out of office. In a conversation with Herbert Jenkins who later became the Atlanta Police Chief, Hartsfield explained that in abolishing the white primary, “what the courts have done is give the black man the ballot. And for your information, the ballot is a front ticket (sic) for any-damn-where he wants to sit, if he knows how to use it. And Atlanta Negroes know how to use it.”³¹ During the 1949 election, with the help of his political manager, Helen Bullard, Hartsfield contacted Grace Towns Hamilton, a leading civil rights advocate in the city and the executive director of the Urban League. Through her efforts, Hartsfield began secretly meeting with leaders of Atlanta’s black community at the Butler Street YMCA to hear their concerns and needs. As a result of such meetings, Hartsfield won every election after the Second World War until he retired in 1961 because he carried the black vote. Conversely, Hartsfield never received a majority of the white vote after 1945.³²

The vote gave the city’s black constituents leverage to assert their basic civil rights and negotiate for additional areas to expand in the city, and the political shift reflected rising African American political power in cities across the country.³³ Although Atlanta’s black community usually voted as a unified block, they were not a cohesive group on the issue of urban redevelopment. Black Atlantans divided their support for urban redevelopment between the pro-business and pro-housing factions. Many middle class

³¹ See Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century America*, 21.

³² “Bill Hartsfield’s Chickens Are Coming Home to Roost,” *Augusta Courier*, 5 August 1957. Many of Hartsfield’s opponents resented the fact that he courted black votes; they race-baited him in the press during election months as well as when the school desegregation issue heated up.

³³ One could argue that the success Atlanta, Nashville, Greensboro, and other Southern cities had with African American voter registration in the 1940s produced a generation of young civil rights leaders, particularly at the cities’ historically black colleges, and many of these leaders would go on to lead voter registration campaigns in rural Mississippi in the 1960s.

blacks pledged to support the renewal goals of downtown white business elites in exchange for the support of moderate whites in civil rights struggles, such as the peaceful desegregation of city buses. Other members of the black community, who resided in poorer, more run down areas close to downtown, sided with neighborhood preservationists and housing advocates, lobbying that urban redevelopment might be used to repair or rebuild substandard housing without uprooting the communities from their nearby businesses, churches, and schools.

The urban redevelopment program was destined for conflict in Atlanta because these factions and interest groups had different ideas of what urban redevelopment should accomplish. While everyone hoped to rid the inner city of substandard housing, each faction had their own reasons for doing so. The Housing Act did not clearly state how cities could expand their economic districts and increase the availability of quality low-cost housing at the same time. Renewal carried a different set of priorities and objectives for white downtown business leaders, city officials, middle class black professionals, and low-income blacks and whites. Hartsfield understood that as mayor, he would have to mediate between factions with different plans for urban renewal. A consummate politician, he consciously chose not to initiate urban renewal planning himself because he did not want to lose the black vote or the backing of business. The mayor's reluctance to initiate renewal was all the more pronounced because he sought out an active role in planning for transportation projects such as expressway construction and airport development, which were also occasionally contentious topics.³⁴ When it came to developing proposals to

³⁴ Hartsfield advocated road building as the most important improvement in the city's structure, and thus the key to its growth and prosperity in the latter half of the twentieth century. The mayor

redevelop parts of downtown Atlanta, however, Hartsfield instead often consulted with private architectural and engineering firms, many of which had close ties to the white downtown business associations. Publicly, Hartsfield reasoned that there was no sense in spending taxpayer money on redevelopment plans if private outfits had already drawn up similarly-minded proposals, but in reality, the Chamber, CAIA, and UA often solicited private planning firms to draw up pro-business expansion redevelopment proposals for the city. Hartsfield, knowing well that white downtown business leaders continued to control the city's purse strings, would not endorse an urban renewal project unless he knew that it had their support.

Under conditions that gave business boosters a clear planning advantage, the Central Atlanta Improvement Association (CAIA) collaborated with the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) and attempted a small renewal test case on Hemphill Avenue, a lower-income white neighborhood immediately northwest of the Georgia Tech campus.³⁵ In 1950, planners proposed re-zoning the street for light industrial use, clearing the land, and relocating residents into public housing that would be built in a nearby neighborhood.

publicly supported early highway plans even though the plans called for some streets and neighborhoods to relocate. The Chicago traffic engineers at H.W. Lochner and Company won the contract to conduct a highway and transportation study on the Atlanta area in 1944. In 1946, the completed Lochner Plan argued that the north-south highway should run immediately west of the city, elevated over a railroad gulch in what was primarily an industrial area so that the downtown segment would not displace many residents. At the city's instigation, however, the path of the north-south expressway changed. Instead of running west of the city, it looped around the eastern periphery of the city's central business district. The shifted route for the highway would still penetrate downtown while also eliminating black neighborhoods and portions of the black business sector near Auburn Avenue. See H.V. Lochner and Company, and DeLeuw and Company, "Highway and Transportation Plan for Atlanta, Georgia, 1946," Prepared for the State Highway Department of Georgia and the Public Roads Administration, Federal Works Agency, Chicago: January 1946.

³⁵ The Metropolitan Planning Commission was established in March 1947 by an act of the general assembly of Georgia to make and recommend to the local governments a master plan for the orderly growth and development of the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

Despite the modesty of the plan, the Hemphill proposal faced fierce opposition from all sides at a public hearing. Residents did not want to leave their street. Neighborhood businesses feared economic losses that would result from relocated patrons. Real estate owners in the neighboring community complained that public housing would threaten property values. Fearing that the opposition to the Hemphill Avenue project would infect Atlanta's opinion of urban renewal in general, the city quickly dropped the proposal.³⁶

The following year, the CAIA eagerly sought another potential test case for urban renewal, and, learning from the Hemphill Avenue failure, it sought a broad coalition to encourage Atlanta aldermen to pass the initiative. The first hurdle for the CAIA would entail finding a renewal site that middle class black leaders would support, a difficult proposition. Because most blighted areas were in poor black neighborhoods, it was likely that a test case for urban renewal could mean "Negro clearance." The city's black-owned newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, asserted that blacks would resist "by whatever influence...politically, legally, or otherwise" any attempts to clear land near Auburn Avenue, the epicenter of black business life.³⁷ After much deliberation, the CAIA cautiously chose McDaniel Street, in the Mechanicsville neighborhood, just southwest of the State Capitol, as its second test case for renewal. Like Hemphill Avenue, it was a low-income neighborhood that businesses could redevelop for industrial uses.³⁸ Once again, residents of the area

³⁶ *Atlanta Journal*, 20 March 1950; *Atlanta Daily World*, 23 March 1950, 1; *Central Atlanta Newsletter* (the CAIA bulletin), 15 November 1956, Rodney Mims Cook Papers, Series II, Box 5, Folder 1, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

³⁷ *Atlanta Daily World*, 23 March 1950, quoted in Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 61.

³⁸ The suggestion that a residential area could be redeveloped for light industrial uses relates back to the city of Atlanta's racially motivated zoning ordinances. After the Supreme Court overturned segregation ordinances in 1917, the city zoned land in terms of land use, building type, and tenant categories. A majority of black residential areas near the central business district were already

opposed the idea, not wanting to be moved. But the CAIA, pledging to improve housing conditions, was able to persuade the Urban League to back the renewal site.³⁹

The renewal site passed the Board of Aldermen vote, but a legal technicality prevented the project from moving forward. In 1953, in spite of state legislation that read otherwise, the Georgia Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional to invoke the power of eminent domain to acquire land for private use. Consequently, urban renewal could not proceed in Atlanta until state lawmakers revised the state constitution. Although the McDaniel Street case was delayed, it revealed some of the intricacies of compromise and coalition building necessary for urban renewal to occur. The CAIA would have preferred to attempt renewal at a site such as Auburn Avenue, which was closer to the central business district and, hence, more desirable for commercial redevelopment, but it compromised for an outlying area in order to gain support of the black professional class. Moreover, the McDaniel Street case suggested a class tension within the African American community. More affluent blacks seemed willing to overlook the displacement of poorer black families provided that the “black downtown” on Auburn remained intact, and provided that renewal projects guaranteed improved housing elsewhere for displaced families.

In the two years it took state legislators to amend Georgia’s constitution to allow for urban renewal, the CAIA and MPC garnered further support from a diverse array of interest groups. The CAIA fashioned an urban renewal coalition of like-minded supporters who were committed to making Atlanta the economic capital of the Southeast and to developing

zoned industrial, so cleared land would not have to changing zoning in order to be redeveloped for light industry. See Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 54-55.

³⁹ *Atlanta Daily World*, 13 November 1952, 1; *Atlanta Daily World*, 14 November 1952, 1; *Atlanta Daily World*, 16 November 1952, 2; “CAIA Eyes McDaniel Street,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 November 1952, 6; *Central Atlanta Newsletter*, 1 December 1953.

Atlanta as a community with a progressive racial policy.⁴⁰ Throughout the 1950s, the MPC went about conducting studies on areas that needed redevelopment.⁴¹ Then in 1955, the MPC and CAIA jointly drafted the Central Atlanta Plan, which emphasized business-minded objectives, including “protecting property values, expanding the commercial core, and solving traffic and parking difficulties.” The Central Atlanta Plan reiterated many of the same goals the Metropolitan Planning Commission had articulated in its “Up Ahead” prospectus in the early 1950s, including the “desired public improvements in the central business district...and the conservation of existing neighborhoods and improved housing for all groups.”⁴² The “Up Ahead” document called for additional “Negro expansion areas” to compensate for the de-concentration and removal of African American housing near the central business district. In the same vein, the MPC-CAIA’s Central Atlanta Plan spelled out a massive slum clearance program that would remove poor African American housing from the southern and eastern edges of Atlanta’s central business district.⁴³

Within a year, Atlanta’s Chamber of Commerce, representing upper-middle class whites, responded to early planning efforts of the CAIA and began its own Urban Renewal Committee. By 1957, City Hall had created an Urban Renewal Department and oversaw the beginning of the Citizens’ Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal (CACUR), an agency with both private and public-sector leaders that would be involved in renewal planning.

⁴⁰ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 61.

⁴¹ In a 1950 Factual Inventory of the city, the MPC assessed how population trends were affecting traffic patterns and downtown blight. The MPC was one of the chief authors of the 1952 Plan for Improvement for the city that annexed 82 square miles.

⁴² Central Atlanta Plan, 1955, City of Atlanta papers, Bureau of Planning, Box 6, Folder 11, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴³ Ibid.; Atlanta Metropolitan Planning Commission, “Up Ahead: A Regional Land Use Plan for Metropolitan Atlanta,” (Atlanta: Metropolitan Planning Commission, 1952), City of Atlanta papers, Bureau of Planning, Box 6, Folder 11, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

Similarly, the CAIA campaign to build an urban renewal coalition also won over, if only temporarily, the city's two main newspapers, the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution*. The papers ran a series of articles that revealed the extent of poverty in the city's central neighborhoods. The newspapers acknowledged the human dimension to urban renewal, downplayed the commercial business interests for renewal land, and asserted that the true benefactors of the federal urban renewal program were the Atlantans who lived in the deplorable conditions in and around downtown. *Atlanta Journal* reporter Ed Hughes exposed slumlords for ignoring housing code violations and profiting from slum dwellers' misery. In the newspaper series, interviewed slum residents complained of broken steps and foundations, a lack of heat and indoor plumbing, and rats as big as house cats.⁴⁴

Once the city's urban renewal coalition demonstrated that it had the support of affluent white business leaders, Hartsfield gave urban renewal a hearty endorsement. The mayor, who had once consciously avoided initiating urban renewal himself for fear of the conflicts that it would cause, was quoted in the *Atlanta Journal* as praising renewal, saying, "here is a program designed to help Negroes move out of slums."⁴⁵ The newspapers also posited that the only real opponents to downtown renewal were the slumlords who "profited from poverty."⁴⁶ Malcolm Jones, the director of the city's newly formed Urban Renewal Department reiterated newspaper opinion, emphasizing that urban renewal

⁴⁴ Ed Hughes, "Growing Atlanta Slums Mean a Growing Menace," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 May 1959, 1C; "You Feel Dirty in Slums," *Atlanta Journal*, 18 May 1959, 1; "Housing Code Unenforced," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 May 1959, 1; "Death, Disease in Slums," *Atlanta Journal*, 20 May 1959, 1; "Rats Add to Slum Terror," *Atlanta Journal*, 21 May 1959, 1; "Children of the Slums," *Atlanta Journal*, 22 May 1959, 1; "Atlanta's Slum Record Past and Present Review," *Atlanta Journal*, 23 May 1959, 1; "Fire Traps End in Headlines," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 24 May 1959, 1.

⁴⁵ Ed Hughes, "NAACP Act Won't Stop Slum Removals Here: U.S. Office Says Project Free of 'Outside' Influence," *Atlanta Journal*, 8 April 1958, 1.

⁴⁶ "Profits from Poverty" series, *Atlanta Journal*, 19-31 May, 1 June 1959.

would benefit residents of blighted areas. Jones and other city officials made certain that Atlanta included a housing code in its 1957 Workable Program, a new federal urban renewal requirement that forced cities to set comprehensive standards of eligibility for federal aid. Via the Workable Program, Atlanta city officials agreed to enforce housing standards before the city received any federal funding.⁴⁷ The code stipulated that all city dwellings had to have flush toilets and kitchen sinks by the year 1960, and required that landlords provided hot water, a tub or shower, and access to electricity and heat by 1963.⁴⁸

Calls to improve substandard housing conditions caught the attention of the Atlanta chapter of the Urban League, an organization whose chapter dated back to 1920 and counted many of Atlanta's most prominent Auburn Avenue businessmen and Atlanta University faculty as members. In general, the Urban League lobbied for greater black political and economic power in the city. In the late 1940s, when the Supreme Court declared Georgia's white Democratic party primary unconstitutional, the Urban League was instrumental in the drive to register new African American voters in Atlanta. Urban League members were known to be concerned with improving housing conditions in the city. Moreover, many UL members were closely tied to the Atlanta University complex and also sought land there for expansion. Urban League members saw in urban renewal the opportunity to expand the Atlanta University campus while pushing for higher housing standards across the city. The city's NAACP chapter, which for decades had been involved in dozens of civil rights lawsuits to overturn everything from the white primary to racial zoning ordinances, also took interest in the call for improved housing conditions. The

⁴⁷ The National Housing Act of 1954 enacted Workable Programs in an attempt to set more definable redevelopment goals, but federal legislation continued to allow very different renewal objectives to co-exist under the urban renewal category.

⁴⁸ Ed Hughes, "Profits from Poverty: Housing Code Unenforced," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 May 1959.

NAACP voiced a much stronger opposition than the UL to uprooting poorer African Americans from their communities close to downtown. Other citywide black organizations, such as the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL), a political action group established in the mid-1940s to register black voters, viewed urban renewal somewhat more cautiously. ANVL members agreed to support urban renewal as long as the city abided by the 1952 Plan for Improvement, which had allocated outlying areas for the expansion of the black community. The ANVL was particularly concerned that urban renewal would remove voters from Atlanta voting registers and find replacement housing outside the city limits.⁴⁹

Despite the good intentions of housing rehabilitation, the coalition in favor of urban renewal was a tenuous one. The motives of white downtown business leadership – not at all difficult to decipher – were especially troubling to much of the black community. Many white downtown business owners and civic organizations, for instance, associated blight almost exclusively with black neighborhoods, especially those located near the central business district. To these groups, the CAIA made reassurances that urban renewal would remove low-income African American families from downtown, thereby safeguarding downtown commercial property values. The Atlanta Housing Authority, which served as the local clearance and redevelopment agency, further allayed fears of white downtown property owners, secretly promising that it would not permit public housing to be built on renewal land, nor would it initiate requests for any additional public housing.⁵⁰ At the same time, however, the CAIA made certain that it protected black neighborhood expansion

⁴⁹ Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 33; Lorraine Nelson Spritzer and Jean B. Bergmark, *Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 89-143; Kruse, *White Flight*, 34-35.

⁵⁰ Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 92.

needs on the Westside, and it stressed housing improvement concerns of the black community so as not to lose their key support. For the CAIA-led renewal coalition to function, then, all concerned parties had to agree to concessions.⁵¹

Conspicuously excluded from the CAIA-led coalition for urban renewal were the persons who urban renewal would most directly affect: the African American families of low and moderate income who lived in predominantly substandard housing near the central business district. Although changes to federal urban renewal policy in the 1950s, such as the requirement that all cities submit an annual Workable Program, began to provide for citizen participation, the federal government did not have effective means to enforce this provision. Atlanta's business-minded urban renewal coalition had a vision of growth not unlike President Reagan's trickle-down economics that would follow some twenty-odd years later—they believed that an economically healthy city would benefit all Atlantans. To be certain, poorer residents welcomed housing improvements. Nevertheless, the CAIA-led renewal coalition neglected to consult those who best understood dilapidated living conditions. This exclusion caused many impoverished neighborhoods to mistrust urban renewal and City Hall from the outset.

Atlanta's urban renewal coalition was not entirely undeserving of this mistrust. In February 1956, the CAIA chose three renewal sites that would displace thousands of African American families. The first site was a 227-acre tract on Butler Street. Butler sat a mere five blocks east of the city's historical central business district at the Five Points junction, where Peachtree Street, the city's North-South corridor, intersected with Decatur

⁵¹ M.B. Satterfield, Atlanta Housing Authority Executive Director, to Bruce Wedge, regional director of Urban Renewal Administration, 21 August 1958, in Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 64.

and Edgewood Streets from the east, and Marietta Street from the northwest. Butler Street crossed Auburn Avenue a single block from the heart of the black business district. While the project anticipated the rehabilitation of multi-family residences, which were last remnants of an elegant residential section of late nineteenth-century Victorian homes, the site was primarily selected to appeal to nearby businesses that wanted to expand eastward. Butler Street stood blocks northeast of City Hall and the State Capitol, and two blocks east of Georgia State College for Business, which had just joined the University System of Georgia in 1947. The Butler Street renewal project was also slated for an interchange on the North-South expressway, and downtown businesses hoped to attract travelers off the interstate and into downtown hotels, restaurants, and stores.⁵²

South of the central business district, the 598-acre proposed Rawson-Washington project encompassed portions of the Mechanicsville, Summerhill, and Peoplestown communities. These were some of the oldest neighborhoods in Atlanta. Mechanicsville, to the south and west of the city's Five Points downtown hub, was originally a settlement for white industrial laborers and railroad workers, developed soon after the Civil War. Just east of Mechanicsville, Summerhill was the oldest African American community in the city. Summerhill residents often worked as domestic servants in the Victorian houses of their neighbors to the south, in Peoplestown. Peoplestown developed as a relatively affluent streetcar neighborhood in the late nineteenth century, but with the advent of the automobile, affluent whites left for new suburbs to the north, and a community of Eastern European Jews settled in both Peoplestown and Mechanicsville. Planners initially hoped

⁵² Sanford H. Bederman, ed., *Alligators, Souseholes, and a Trek Down Peachtree Street: A Guide to Field Excursions* (Washington D.C.: Association of American Geographers, 1993); Kuhn, Joye, and West, *Living Atlanta*, 32-56.

that the Rawson-Washington project, which would eventually be separated from downtown by both the North-South expressway and East-West expressway, might provide a buffer zone to protect downtown property values from poor black neighborhoods to the south, and planners sought developers to build low-cost housing for poor whites. Large portions of the Rawson-Washington area would also be used to build highway interchanges.⁵³

Finally, planners designated a renewal project in the Atlanta University neighborhood specifically to gain support of the middle class professional blacks. Rehabilitated structures would protect property values of the university facilities as well as the professor's homes on nearby "PhD Row," and cleared land would allow for the university to expand. In all three project areas, urban renewal would be clearing residentially blighted areas and converting the projects for primarily commercial and industrial uses, but planners remained vague about plans to relocate the project area residents.

Even as city leaders drew up plans for additional urban renewal projects, they had not resolved the problem of relocation. The Central Atlanta Plan did not comprehensively address how to handle displaced persons. The urban renewal coalition tacitly agreed that the projects would not include public housing downtown. One member of the Atlanta Housing Authority board, a bank president, suggested that the city would not need to construct any additional public housing as the poor were a transient population and would

⁵³ Keating, "Peopletown, Resilience and Tenacity," 8-9; "December 1967 Status Report on Urban Renewal Progress in Atlanta," prepared by Housing and Redevelopment Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, WBH Papers, Series V, Box 40, Folder 14, MARBL, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University.

“probably move out of the rental area on their own.”⁵⁴ A slightly more realistic City Hall hoped that it could entice private developers to build federally subsidized low-cost “221” housing (for families of moderate income that did not qualify for publically assisted housing) in outlying areas of the city. Yet, private developers shied away from building housing that would bring them little profit. Moreover, working class white neighborhoods protested to local aldermen to prevent “221” houses from being built nearby, as they believed that black neighbors would lower their property values, thereby destroying the only equity they had. Hence, many black families that would be displaced in early renewal projects would be forced to secure replacement housing on their own, often having to move into already existing low-income white neighborhoods because that was all they could afford.⁵⁵

Trying to cool possible racial tensions surrounding residential racial transition, Mayor Hartsfield designed the bi-racial West Side Mutual Development Committee (WSMDC) in late 1952 specifically “to consider the various living, building, and development problems of the west side of the city.”⁵⁶ The WSMDC “represented an effort to facilitate a smooth transition [in neighborhoods] rather than to resist change so that the city’s growing black community would not seek outlets for new housing in any other

⁵⁴ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 69.

⁵⁵ Robert A. Thompson, Hylan Lewis, and Davis McEntire, “Atlanta and Birmingham: A Comparative Study in Negro Housing,” in *Studies in Housing and Minority Groups*, ed. Nathan Glazer and Davis McEntire (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 20.

⁵⁶ West Side Mutual Development Committee (WSMDC) discussion draft, “Policy Proposal of the West Side Mutual Development Committee Regarding the Operation of the Real Estate Market with Respect to Rave of Occupancy,” 20 August 1958, box 3, Atlanta Bureau of Planning Papers, Atlanta History Center; Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 59-69.

direction.”⁵⁷ In every case, the committee sought to safeguard residential segregation. It agreed with business interests’ efforts to “locate new Negro expansion areas,” thinking that this would “take the pressure off of existing white communities.”⁵⁸ In addition, the WSMDC believed that it could address black expansion and neighborhood transition throughout Atlanta and not just on the west side. The committee determined racial occupancy, assessed racial attitudes, and forecast the potential for a neighborhood’s racial transition. The WSMDC actually accelerated racial transition of neighborhoods, specifically the westward migration of blacks from the central city. By the late 1950s, the purpose of the WSMDC had shifted to “neighborhood analysis and planning to assist in the location of future sites for housing for blacks displaced from [highway construction and other] massive urban renewal programs.”⁵⁹ WSMDC surveys foreshadowed racial transition in neighborhoods and struck panic into the minds of working and lower middle class whites, who felt the ripple effects of urban renewal.

In October 1957, the WSMDC conducted a survey in the small Kirkwood neighborhood of southeast Atlanta. The survey asked area residents, who were mostly white and working class, if they believed that blacks would soon be moving into their neighborhood. If residents responded yes, the survey then asked residents how they planned to react. Would they move out? Out of the seventy-nine responses to the questionnaire, most residents confessed confusion and uneasiness over the racial transition of their neighborhood, and over half responded that they would sell their houses

⁵⁷ Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 136.

⁵⁸ Robert C. Stuart to William B. Hartsfield, 10 January 1957, WSMDC papers, Box 3, Atlanta History Center.

⁵⁹ Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*, 144.

if blacks moved on their streets. One resident, Mrs. Clara Killian, answered that she “ha[d] no objection to Negroes as a race or people.” Rather, she objected to blacks being uprooted and allowed to move into her neighborhood, adding that she had already been “forced to move” to get away from encroaching blacks just five years earlier.⁶⁰

Relocation difficulties and the fear of violence that would result from racial neighborhood transition caused a few citywide black leaders to oppose the early urban renewal projects. By early 1958, African American business leaders and Baptist ministers established a “Localities Committee” and attempted to delay the disbursement of federal renewal funding. They charged that the city had not adhered to citizen participation policies clearly delineated in the Federal Housing Act of 1949 and the Urban Renewal Handbook. For example, the Localities Committee cited that a citizens’ advisory committee (CACUR) had not been formed until January 1958, when planning for the first three renewal areas had nearly finished. In addition, the Localities Committee accused the Atlanta Housing Authority and Board of Aldermen of selecting renewal sites based upon their feasibility for business expansion while neglecting some of the most dilapidated slum areas. Furthermore, the Committee asserted that the city building inspector’s office deliberately enforced housing codes only in run-down areas where businesses wanted to develop. By April 1958, the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP had written a resolution to ask that federal officials deny approval of the first three renewal sites. They argued that

⁶⁰ WSMDC questionnaire, October 1957, WSMDC papers, Box 3, Atlanta Bureau of Planning, Atlanta History Center.

renewal should be confined to “the worst areas” and redevelopment should not decrease the amount of close-in housing available to blacks in Atlanta.⁶¹

Because of the volatile reactions brought on by neighborhood transition, and because a business-minded City Hall did not wish to project an image of a racially charged Atlanta, it acted quickly to provide at least some substitute housing for displacees. By November 1958, the Board of Aldermen voted in favor of the planning and construction of an additional 1,000 public housing units.⁶² Yet the reservation of additional housing did not immediately solve the looming housing shortage, as city aldermen had yet to agree upon where these additional 1,000 units would be placed in the city.

The dearth of replacement housing became increasingly important as the city became aware of how many housing units had already been lost to highway construction. In 1957, in the City’s Workable Program, planners estimated that nearly 11,873 black families would lose their homes for the expressway and urban renewal.⁶³ By the end of 1958, Mayor Hartsfield understood that the public at large would not consider urban renewal successful unless the business interests within the urban renewal coalition concerned themselves with the matter of re-housing displaced individuals and families. Even so, renewal steps continued unabated with relocation concerns still unsolved. Aldermen spent a year searching for a location for the 1,000 units of public housing.

⁶¹ Ed Hughes, “NAACP Act Won’t Stop Slum Removals Here: U.S. Office Says Projects Free of ‘Outside’ Influence,” *Atlanta Journal*, 8 April 1958; Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 68.

⁶² *Atlanta Journal*, 29 November 1958.

⁶³ Workable Program, 1957, Atlanta Bureau of Planning Papers, Atlanta History Center Archives. A September 1966 study suggests that the projected figure was underestimated. Eric Hill Associates calculated that nearly 67,000 persons were forced to move for either the freeway or for urban renewal. Eric Hill Associates, “City of Atlanta, Georgia, Report on the Relocation of Individuals, Families, and Businesses: Atlanta Community Improvement Program,” September 1966, in Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 3.

Meanwhile, the Butler Street project entered the execution stage by July 1959, forcing 1261 individuals and 103 businesses to move. Similarly, the Rawson-Washington and Atlanta University projects commenced land clearance in June 1960, displacing 2,131 individuals and 154 businesses.⁶⁴ While the local clearance agency, the Atlanta Housing Authority, provided relocation expenses (usually amounting to one month's rent) for property owners, it could not guarantee that landlords passed relocation funds to their tenants. Consequently, many renters received no compensation and had no channel for recourse. Ethel Mae Matthews, a renter in the Rawson-Washington area, recalled that she received no warning from her landlord, learning about renewal only as "officials came to her home and ordered her to move within weeks."⁶⁵ Relocation frustrated many residents, like Ms. Matthews, because the city had not secured replacement housing before tearing down old housing.

In December 1959, the four-man aldermanic planning and zoning committee announced the two sites selected for the proposed 1,000 units of new public housing. An outlying area to the far northwest of the city would receive 650 units. Aldermen heard few objections from their white constituents with regards to this outlying site. Indeed, many pressed their aldermanic representatives to de-centralize low-income housing for blacks, and believed that dispersing public housing ensured intown property values. The remaining 350-unit site, however, caused an uproar.

City planning engineer Wyont Bean proposed that the city purchase the land near the abandoned Egleston Hospital site, directly north and east of the central business

⁶⁴ "December 1967 Status Report on Urban Renewal Programs," 2. WBH Papers, Series V, Box 40, Folder 14, MARBLE, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶⁵ Larry Keating, "Peoplestown," 9.

district, and rezone it from industrial to residential. Malcolm Jones, the city's urban renewal director, agreed that the Egleston site was an especially logical choice, as "it [was] in a Negro area, surrounded on three sides by Negro residences and on the other by industry." Jones added, "No white families will be affected or displaced by this project."⁶⁶

But nearby white families feared that public housing would affect them. Specifically, they feared that it would accelerate racial transition in the area, and they pressured local Sixth Ward aldermen William T. Sims and T. Wayne Blanchard to oppose the site. Further opposition for the site came from the nearby Georgia Baptist Hospital, a white facility that wanted to use the land to expand. The Board of Aldermen succumbed to opposition of white constituents and voted against rezoning the area for public housing. Cecil Alexander, chairman of the Citizens' Advisory Council for Urban Renewal (CACUR), the semi-publicly funded renewal planning agency with representatives from both the public and private sector, warned the Board of Aldermen that rejecting the Egleston site threatened the urban renewal coalition that the city had with conservative and moderate black leadership across the city. "Atlantans," Alexander said, "must face up to the fact that some parts of urban renewal will be tough to swallow. The [Egleston] area is easier to digest economically and in the existing pattern of our neighborhoods."⁶⁷ Hartsfield contended that if the Egleston rezoning was not approved, it would result in "uncontrolled infiltration [of blacks] all over

⁶⁶ William O. Smith, "City Renewal Plans Await Second Egleston Hearing," *Atlanta Journal*, 21 February 1960, A18.

⁶⁷ William O. Smith, "Aldermen, Housing Group Weigh 'Single-Shot' Peril," *Atlanta Journal*, 18 December 1959; William O. Smith, "City Renewal Plans Await Second Egleston Hearing," *Atlanta Journal*, 21 February 1960, 18 (A).

the city and very largely to the detriment of the people who are fighting this site.”⁶⁸

Alexander, Hartsfield, and other proponents of building replacement public housing at the Egleston site promoted their plans as the best way to control where the city’s poorest African Americans ended up settling.

With the mayor’s help, renewal officials overrode a city ordinance so that the Aldermen could cast another vote on the Egleston site in February. Nevertheless, the Board of Aldermen handed down a second defeat in late February 1960 and created a particularly tense situation between city officials, business organizations, and leaders of the black middle class. While business interests had been able to influence city officials in designating the first renewal sites, black community leaders had not been able to relocate displaced persons into areas of their choosing. The vote against the Egleston site came as student sit-ins and other early civil rights demonstrations were beginning across the Southeast, especially in cities with black university centers such as Nashville, Tennessee and Greensboro, North Carolina. Mayor Hartsfield, fearing similar sit-ins at Atlanta’s historically black colleges, attempted to defuse the situation, and urged blacks not to march over the Egleston issue, as he would gladly meet with anyone who walked into City Hall.⁶⁹ A.T. Walden, editor of the *Atlanta Daily World*, agreed with Hartsfield and urged the African American community not to react violently concerning the Egleston decision, and he

⁶⁸ William O. Smith, “Aldermen, Housing Group Weigh ‘Single-Shot’ Peril,” *Atlanta Journal*, 18 December 1959; also see Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 73.

⁶⁹ “Just Walk Into City Hall—Don’t March, Mayor Says,” *Atlanta Journal*, 9 March 1960; David Garrow, ed., *Atlanta, Georgia 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism* (New York: Carlson Publishing Company, 1989).

persuaded the black middle class organizations to remain in the urban renewal coalition.⁷⁰ They averted a crisis, if only temporarily.

The resolution of the Egleston question revealed the conflicting objectives implicit in urban renewal. On the federal level, urban renewal policy proved incapable of boosting downtown real estate values while simultaneously improving housing conditions for downtown residents. In part, the problem was that federal policy did not specify how displaced persons should move or where they should go. In the case of Atlanta, business-minded renewal supporters simply wielded more power and influence in city governance than any other faction. This imbalance of power became evident as the first round of Atlanta renewal projects succeeded in clearing areas for business expansion while failing to eradicate the most dilapidated housing in the city or to secure replacement housing for those persons renewal had displaced. Despite the rhetoric about improving housing conditions, white business supporters of urban renewal seemed more interested in how the program could generate revenue for the downtown central business district. Yet peace would prevail in Atlanta as long as moderate leaders of the black community believed that the business-led urban renewal coalition provided blacks with more gains than they could earn in opposition to City Hall. The Egleston defeat set a precedent for governance of subsequent urban renewal projects, and foreshadowed the re-housing difficulties in the future.

Hartsfield's successor would have to mediate future re-housing debates, though. By June 1960, some three months following the Egleston debacle, Hartsfield announced that he would not be seeking a seventh term as mayor. After nearly twenty-three years in office,

⁷⁰ *Atlanta Journal*, 9 March 1960.

he would retire at the age of seventy-one.⁷¹ When he left City Hall in January 1962, the problem of re-housing remained the most serious threat to the urban renewal program. However, a second round of renewal projects in Atlanta suggested that the Board of Aldermen considered downtown housing redevelopment of secondary importance to downtown areas for business expansion.

Needless to say, early urban renewal in Atlanta had created an emotionally charged atmosphere. Even as a second wave of renewal projects started, Atlanta aldermen again rejected a proposal for the deteriorating Vine City neighborhood west of the central business district because the neighborhood, which was just north of the Atlanta University complex, was not an area that Atlanta Chamber of Commerce members were interested in redeveloping. Similarly, aldermen defeated a neighborhood-generated proposal to redevelop the lower middle class white neighborhood of Edgewood, east of downtown. Edgewood residents, fearing racial transition in the neighborhood, desired a renewal project to clear out a run down area and establish a clear racial barrier between older white neighborhood residents and newer black migrants that had been displaced from downtown. Two black neighborhoods south and east of the city were experiencing similar neighborhood transition, but aldermen also turned down their requests for renewal assistance. Instead, aldermen approved primarily downtown residential sites for renewal that they could clear and rezone for commercial or industrial purposes. In particular, aldermen eyed a proposed site in the Buttermilk Bottoms “valley” immediately east of the central business district. Much of the housing stock in Buttermilk Bottoms was not up to city code. Many of the subdivided apartments in old houses lacked separate bathroom and

⁷¹ *Atlanta Journal*, 7 June 1960.

kitchen sink facilities, and some houses still lacked indoor plumbing altogether, The neighborhood location made it a high priority for business interests. They sought it as the perfect place into which businesses on the northeastern corner of downtown could expand. Georgia State and Georgia Tech both won relatively small proposals to expand their campuses because the state Regents Board agreed to pay for the local share of renewal costs. Finally, aldermen considered renewal for the older white neighborhood of West End. Although the neighborhood was not densely populated, it counted among its residents several active members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal, (CACUR), as well as many other dominant business and civic organizations.⁷²

The proposed renewal sites added tensions over housing in the city. Following the Egleston defeat, leaders of the black community continued to voice their concerns about displaced persons. A May 1960 editorial in the *Atlanta Daily World* lamented a cutback in the amount of federal "221" housing required for the city would further hurt families displaced by urban renewal.⁷³ Another editorial noted that as there was little low-cost housing available or proposed for the northeastern section of the city near the Butler Street project, displaced people had to "ride long distances [into town] to reach their jobs, churches, and businesses."⁷⁴ Black realtor Q.V. Williamson asserted that residential segregation exacerbated the housing shortage, which he considered to be the "bottleneck" hindering urban renewal in the city. "Efforts should be made to desegregate public housing," he said, in order to accommodate the disproportionate number of black families

⁷² "West End Renewal Gets \$208,724 Shot," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 February 1964; Status Report on Urban Renewal Programs, December 1967. WBH Papers, Series V, Box 40, Folder 14, MARBLE, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁷³ Editorial, *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 May 1960.

⁷⁴ Editorial, *Atlanta Daily World*, 25 February 1961.

displaced by renewal projects.⁷⁵ Editorials in the *Atlanta Constitution* also warned that the city would not be able to continue to clear out blighted areas unless it began finding places to relocate people.⁷⁶

When Ivan Allen, Jr. came to power in January 1962, he inherited a long list of urban renewal problems from his predecessor, including housing. Allen's election attests to the continued existence of the political and economic pro-urban renewal coalition between upper and middle class white business leaders and the moderate black professional class. Allen was a wealthy businessman and a member of the city's elite, and before winning the mayoral seat, he had been president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. It was unclear what would happen to the urban renewal program once a businessman took control of City Hall. Allen would have to balance his own pro-business ideas for a civic center and a major league baseball stadium with the increasingly vocal needs of an impoverished and displaced community of African Americans. When poor black neighborhoods no longer heeded calls for peace and moderation from citywide, middle class black leadership, Allen would have to change his approach to urban renewal. Nevertheless, Allen would remain as politically and economically dependent upon white downtown business leaders as Hartsfield had been. Renewal projects during his tenure in office would again sacrifice the more elusive goals of improving housing standards and stock in favor of more tangible big city projects, just as federal urban renewal policies would be modulating with the changing times of the 1960s to form the more socially conscious Model Cities program. Perhaps Allen, the consummate businessman, understood that he would not realistically be capable

⁷⁵ "Segregation Termed the Main Problem of Urban Renewal," *Atlanta Daily World*, 14 June 1961.

⁷⁶ Editorial, *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 April 1961; Editorial, *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 June 1961.

of eliminating all substandard housing or relocating all displaced persons while in office, and instead, pragmatically, built what revenue generating structures he could. The next chapter will consider how the urban renewal program changed, albeit temporarily, under the Allen administration and how and why the program continued to fall short of the expectations of poor downtown Atlanta residents.

CHAPTER 2

FROM CRACKERTOWN TO MODEL CITY?: URBAN RENEWAL AND COMMUNITY BUILDING
IN ATLANTA, 1963-1966.

On an early September night in 1966, Atlanta Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr. perched atop a patrol car and spoke to an angry crowd through a portable microphone. Braving flying bricks, stones, and bottles, Allen implored the crowd in the downtown Summerhill neighborhood not to riot.¹ One member from the crowd retorted, “Atlanta is just a crackertown.” Others rocked the patrol car, momentarily knocking him to the pavement. Unfazed, Allen climbed back upon the car only to have an angry young black protestor join him on the hood, chanting, “Black Power! Black Power!” The mob repeated the phrase, “Black Power! Black Power,” soon adding “White Devil!” to the refrain. Shortly thereafter, Capitol Avenue was transformed into a war zone of “gunfire, exploding tear gas bombs, and flying bricks, sticks, and soda bottles.”²

This Summerhill Riot, as it would later be called, erupted on September 6th after a white policeman shot a young black man. Police officers had stopped Harold Prather on a

¹ See, for example, Larry Keating, *Atlanta, Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 90, 97; Clarence Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program of Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 120. Summerhill lies immediately southeast of the Central Business District, about six blocks south of the State Capitol, but the east-west Interstate 20 separated the neighborhood from downtown. Similarly, Interstate 75/85, the “Downtown Connector,” ran along the neighborhood’s western border and cut Summerhill off from nearby Mechanicsville and Peoplestown.

² Dick Hebert, “In the Middle of the Mob—the Mayor,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 September 1966, 1(A); Dick Hebert, Keeler McCartney, Michael Davis, Bill Shipp, and Charles Moore, “Defy Allen, Repulsed by Tear Gas,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 September 1966, 1(A).

traffic violation earlier that afternoon and informed him of an open warrant for his arrest.³ Prather had a history of stealing cars, and police suspected him in another auto larceny case. When Prather ran from the police, patrolman Lamar Harris shot him in his right hip and side. Organizing in the neighborhood were several Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members, including Stokely Carmichael, the group's chairman. Only twenty-five years old and already described by opponents as a "militant," Carmichael encouraged those who were "tired of these racist police killing our people" to return to the scene later that day for a demonstration. What had happened in the city that business and political leaders regularly described as "too busy to hate"?⁴ How was it that Allen found himself, midway through his second term as mayor, quelling a riot down the street from the city's brand new major league stadium?

The riot was not merely a protest organized and instigated by radicalized SNCC members, or "outside agitators," as Mayor Allen later claimed to the *Atlanta Constitution*.⁵ Rather, local African American residents protested in Summerhill and elsewhere in Atlanta

³ The Summerhill Riot was undoubtedly tame, by the riot standards of the mid-1960s; there were no burning city blocks, few looted storefronts, and fewer injuries. The action lasted hours, not days. Even so, it was the most racial violence the city had witnessed in a half-century, and the label "riot" largely stuck. The mayor, who hailed from the white establishment, referred to the events in Summerhill that September as a riot, and devoted an entire chapter of his 1971 memoir to it. Ivan Allen Jr. with Paul Hemphill, *Mayor, Notes on the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971). Perhaps in laying claim to the same kinds of violence that other American cities were experiencing, Allen could justify his city's need for the same kinds of federal funding to fix the city. On the other hand, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) leader Andrew Young, who reached out to SNCC protestors and called for a "creative, non-violent force" to work in Atlanta, (and who would later serve as Atlanta's mayor from 1981-1989), argued that the September 1966 event was just a street disturbance. Interview with Andrew Young, 27 May 2007.

⁴ William B. Hartsfield, mayor of Atlanta from 1937-41 and 1942-61, coined the phrase "city too busy to hate" in December 1958 in response to the peaceful desegregation of Atlanta public golf courses. Harold H. Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield*, 142. The Chamber of Commerce, headed by its Chamber President Ivan Allen Jr., adopted the phrase for its 1960 "Forward Atlanta" campaign that encouraged businesses to expand and/or relocate in the city.

⁵ Ivan Allen Jr. with Paul Hemphill, *Mayor, Notes on the Sixties*, 183-4.

in frustration with an urban renewal program that had not improved the quality and availability of housing for the city's low-income residents. Atlanta's riots were not unique; the circumstances that led to them mirrored what was happening in deteriorating sections of downtowns across the country. In the mid-1960s, from Watts and Cleveland to Detroit and Newark, poor, urban African American residents protested the lack of city services, lack of affordable housing, and police brutality. Nationwide, these same rioters spoke out against urban renewal that cleared slums but failed to produce adequate replacement housing.

This chapter follows Atlanta's troubled renewal program in the mid-1960s and continues to use Atlanta's experience as a case study to examine what happened more broadly within the contested federal urban renewal program nationwide. Just as they had in the 1950s, city leaders continued to struggle defining the purpose of urban renewal. Mayor Allen, city aldermen, and city planners, in conjunction with a few white downtown business associations and some of the city's African American middle class, continued believe that the purpose of federal urban renewal funding was to insure economic growth for the city. Downtown business leaders, especially Mayor Allen, looked to ballparks, civic centers, and expressways to restore property values, sales, and the tax base in the city's central business district. During the early 1960s, local African American leaders, recognizing that neighborhoods near the central business district were run down and needed improvement, supported a business-oriented renewal program. In return, however, they sought new public housing for residents displaced by renewal projects. By the mid-1960s, many of Atlanta's ordinary residents expressed great dissatisfaction with the direction of the city's growth and spoke out against city renewal that had unilaterally

emphasized white downtown business expansion even as white tourists and shoppers alike continued to abandon downtown.⁶ In Atlanta, as elsewhere in the nation, those who wished to direct urban renewal towards housing and improved city services increasingly fought with those who sought to use urban renewal to expand the downtown business district.

The Summerhill riot marked a climax in Atlanta's urban renewal story. City officials and business leaders momentarily understood that urban renewal could not be used solely for economic growth projects, and they considered emphasizing neighborhood rehabilitation and citizen participation goals found in the new federally-sponsored Model Cities program. Yet not even the maximum feasible participation that Model Cities mandated provided sufficient resources for African American leaders to block or redirect Mayor Allen's central business district growth-oriented renewal. The Mayor and other members of the city's white downtown business elite still retained enough political momentum to see their more business-oriented projects through to conclusion. At the end of the decade, African American leaders and ordinary, working class African Americans came away from the political process with little to show for their cooperation and for the loss of their homes. Local control of federal urban renewal programs perpetuated, and sometimes exacerbated racial inequalities. The story of Atlanta's conflict over its urban

⁶Their exasperation mirrors that which national civil rights organizations found when they tried to move their campaigns from a rural to an urban theatre. For the contrast between rural and urban civil rights movements, see for example, Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003). Urban unrest erupted in cities across the nation after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Acts of 1965 in part because these pieces of legislation seemed unable to rectify serious economic inequality for inner city blacks. To many, it seemed, non-violent strategies had not, and perhaps would not, fix urban poverty.

renewal program helps to reveal the role of federal policy in reinforcing racial prejudices and discrimination and in fostering urban racial unrest.⁷

ALLEN AND URBAN RENEWAL FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

When Ivan Allen Jr. first assumed Atlanta's mayoral seat in January 1962, riots surrounding urban renewal projects were anything but a foregone conclusion. Allen brought to City Hall a plan for economic growth that he had developed as president of the Chamber of Commerce. During his years at the Chamber, Allen joined the city's business and political leaders in expressing concern about downtown Atlanta's declining property values, traffic congestion, and deteriorating buildings. Often, political and business leaders including Allen used the word 'blight' to describe a deterioration that, like cancer, had to be eliminated to protect nearby buildings and Atlanta's central area as a whole.⁸ As mayor, he sought mechanisms to eliminate blight and bolster the pace of Atlanta's growth, especially growth in the central business district and north along its main thoroughfare, Peachtree Street. Allen and other senior business and political leaders in the Chamber of Commerce and on the city's Board of Aldermen believed that public investment in highways, convention centers, and baseball parks was a prerequisite to private investment in new

⁷ See, for example, Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). In examining the causes and course of white flight in Atlanta, Kruse finds the origins of modern Conservatism in urban politics. I wish to build upon Kruse's reappraisal of racial politics in postwar America. Where Kruse focused on whites who were about the politics and business of departing the city, I focus here on the African Americans who remained in the city and who sought improved city services, especially public housing. See also Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Lassiter critiques the "color-blind" language of conservatism. Some affluent and middle class Atlantans, African American and white, first learned how to use a "color-blind" language to maintain race and class privilege through their experiences with urban renewal.

⁸ Brian Robick, "Urban Blight and Community Reaction to the Gateway Center Redevelopment Project, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1946-1950," paper presented at the Bi-Annual Meeting of the Society for American City and Regional Planning History, Portland, Maine, 2007, in author's possession.

hotels and office buildings. Reinvigorated growth, went the reasoning, would boost downtown sales and property values, and would bolster the central business district as a desirable place to invest, shop, and have fun in nearby theaters, restaurants, and clubs.⁹ According to Allen and others, rising property values and rising sales figures would eventually lead to an increase in property taxes, putting cash in the hands of Atlanta politicians to spend on roads, schools, and social services. In turn, Allen reasoned, increases in corporate and public wealth would eventually benefit the city's poorest residents. That planned ballparks, hotels, highways, and other developments would also displace many of these poor, crowded, and mostly African-American residents comprised an indispensable element to Allen's plan.

Yet, rather than fight Allen's plan, many among Atlanta's African-American leaders embraced renewal. Identifying with Allen's concerns about blight and growth, these leaders included Jesse Hill, an Auburn Avenue businessman and leader of the Atlanta Negro Voters League. State Representative Grace Towns Hamilton and Reverend Samuel Williams also embraced Allen's growth proposals. Hamilton had served as executive director of the city's Urban League for the past two decades and was the first African American female to serve in the Georgia legislature. Reverend Williams was pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church as well as the president of the local NAACP chapter. Just as they had with William Hartsfield's renewal plans, less visible Atlantans with long ties to the city and deep ties

⁹ This line of thinking reflected larger national trends, particularly to attract white suburbanites back into the city. See, for example, Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1990). For Atlanta leaders' regional growth strategy in the postwar era, see Margaret Pugh O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

within the African American community supported Allen's plans for eliminating blight and restoring solid growth.

Although Hill and others generally endorsed Allen's urban renewal plans, they also expected construction of public housing to replace buildings demolished to make way for public works such as highways. Lacking a solid foundation in the city's political institutions, Hill, Hamilton, Williams, and other African-American leaders had to rely upon the support of officials at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, who insisted that public housing aimed at the city's large and growing number of low-income residents would go hand-in-hand with spectacular ballparks and convention centers catering to the white middle class composed of tourists, suburbanites, and conventioners. It was a tall order—Allen needed to deliver housing judged inexpensive, modern, and adequate in number to replace those torn down for renewal.

BUTTERMILK BOTTOMS AND EARLY RENEWAL CONFLICT

Allen's first chance to work with urban renewal projects came in 1963, during his second year as mayor, when he expressed interest in clearing the Buttermilk Bottoms area for a new civic center.¹⁰ The proposed center, when built, would contain an auditorium and exhibition hall. The site lay just north of the Butler Street renewal project, and black Atlanta's "Main Street," Auburn Avenue.¹¹ Allen's proposal to locate the civic center in that iconic area attracted the attention of leaders of the Atlanta Negro Voters League and the

¹⁰ Public documents and newspaper reports used Buttermilk Bottom and Buttermilk Bottoms interchangeably. I use the plural form in this text.

¹¹ The Butler Street renewal project commenced in 1959, the year before Ivan Allen was elected Mayor.

Urban League.¹² Yet, according to a study completed by the city's planning department under Allen's predecessor, Buttermilk Bottoms suffered from severe housing deterioration. Poor drainage added to the neighborhood's woes. As its name suggests, the neighborhood lay in an area of low elevation, and acted as a retention basin for runoff from the central business district and surrounding ridge neighborhoods.¹³ By 1963, Allen had decided that the area was ripe for urban renewal. Yet it was not the deplorable living conditions in the area that commanded Allen's attention; it was the area's proximity to the central business district.¹⁴

For more than a decade following World War II, business leaders had been hungrily eyeing the property known as Buttermilk Bottoms. Business and political leaders supported redevelopment of Buttermilk Bottoms because it was walking distance to downtown hotels and shops. Furthermore, many of these same white leaders believed that the civic center in Buttermilk Bottoms would "buffer" downtown from residents of nearby deteriorated neighborhoods. As early as 1955, directors of the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) and the Central Atlanta Improvement Association (CAIA) included the Bottoms in the 1955 Central Atlanta Plan, calling for business expansion. Composed of Atlanta's top business executives, including the future Mayor Allen, CAIA officials argued

¹² The CAIA represented businessmen from the central business district, and the UA represented businessmen in the section immediately northeast of the CBD. Both groups were implicitly whites-only. The UA in particular fretted about encroachment from nearby African American neighborhoods, and repeatedly sought land to expand commercially. The CAIA represented fewer properties near residential areas, and worried less about property value decline and more about how to maintain white suburban shoppers. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 61-6.

¹³ Joseph Gross, "A Survey of Housing Needs for the City of Atlanta," prepared for the Urban Renewal Department of the City of Atlanta, 1958, Atlanta Bureau of Planning Papers, Atlanta History Center.

¹⁴ Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 103-6.

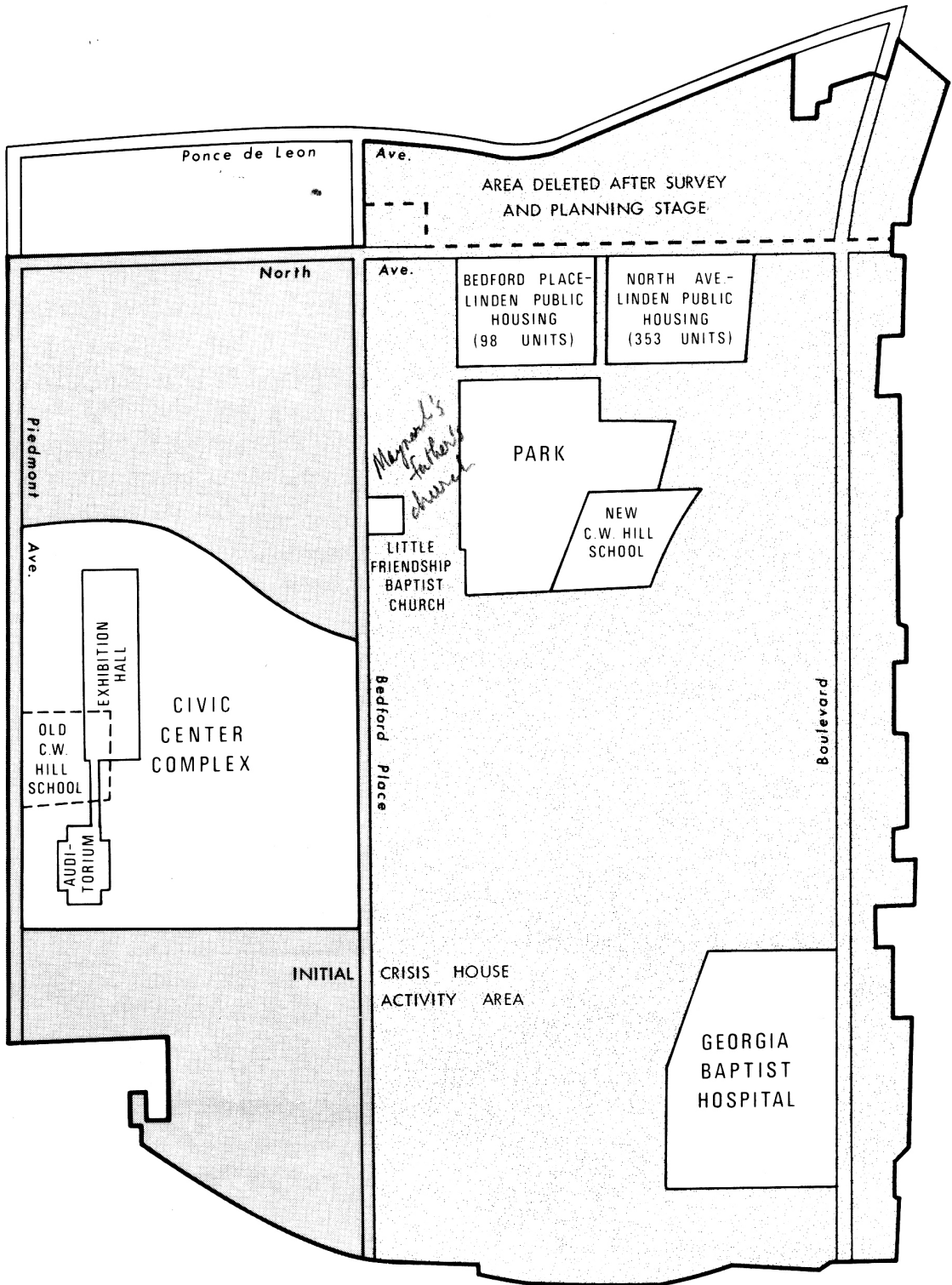


Figure 2.1: Buttermilk Bottoms and Bedford Pine Neighborhoods. From Clarence Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 103.

that renewal of the area would mark the “continued battle against the ring of blight encircling downtown Atlanta.”¹⁵ The area was also conveniently located near the North Avenue expressway interchange for the Interstate 75/85 “Downtown Connector,” which was of particular interest to business-minded politicians and planners, especially the Uptown Association. By the early 1960s, when Allen took office, he and his associates in downtown civic associations like the CAIA had no reason to doubt the potential of Buttermilk Bottoms for accelerating their fight against hated blight and in favor of growth in the form of highways, ballparks, and other public works.

THE FEDS TAKE SIDES, BUT CAN THEY ENFORCE?

Plans to redevelop the primarily residential Buttermilk Bottoms into non-residential space coincided with a new mandate from the federal Urban Renewal Administration, one of the forerunner agencies of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Authors of this new rule told city officials to be more mindful of relocation requirements.¹⁶ This mandate came down after Allen’s predecessor, Mayor William B. Hartsfield and his aldermanic board voted in 1961 against using cleared, intown renewal land to build public housing units for African Americans.¹⁷ As a result of that mandate, in 1963, the regional urban renewal director Bruce Wedge determined that his office would not process additional renewal applications until the city of Atlanta drew up plans for another 1,000 units of housing.¹⁸ Encouraged by Wedge’s call for new housing, Atlanta’s established

¹⁵ *Central Atlanta Newsletter*, 13 June 1963, City of Atlanta Department of Planning and Development Papers, Box 6, Folder 4, Atlanta History Center.

¹⁶ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 95.

¹⁷ “Egleston Hospital Land Up for Housing Vote,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 May 1961.

¹⁸ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 95.

African-American business, religious, and political leaders at this early stage still had faith in both the federal and local government regarding urban renewal.

For a time, federal funds and rules carried weight in local politics. Reliant as he was on federal funds to build the prized civic center, and cognizant of the renewal coalition he needed to maintain that funding, Mayor Allen concluded that the city would have to construct a limited number of public housing units to appease Wedge and other federal urban renewal officials. As a conciliatory gesture, in the summer of 1963 the mayor urged the Board of Aldermen and the Atlanta Housing Authority to abandon their original agreement not to place public housing on renewal land. Allen reasoned that the city could free itself from tracts of otherwise undesirable renewal land by designating them for public housing. The mayor proposed that cleared land on the western portion of the newly designated Rawson-Washington urban renewal project, which was located immediately south of the central business district, could be used to accommodate most of the additional public housing that the city needed.¹⁹ Atlanta's Board of Aldermen approved the request for 1,000 units of public housing on the condition that the city would not be required to build them.²⁰ The Atlanta Housing Authority, which controlled local land acquisition and

¹⁹ The Rawson-Washington project, as was the case with most urban renewal projects, was named for a major intersection within the site boundaries, rather than a neighborhood name. Rawson-Washington roughly comprised portions of the Summerhill, Mechanicsville, and Peoplestown neighborhoods. All were blocks south of the central business district. Mechanicsville and Peoplestown were south of Interstate 20 and cut off from Summerhill. A portion of the project, south of I-20 and east of the I-75/85 downtown connector, as will be explained later, was reserved for stadium construction. Interstate construction developed acreage in the middle. Ironically, the Atlanta Housing Authority selected McDaniel Street within the Rawson-Washington project as the site for future public housing, where Mayor Hartsfield, city aldermen, and the Urban League had attempted to test urban renewal on McDaniel as far back as 1951. By 1966, construction crews had completed the civic center auditorium, but the McDaniel Glenn Homes did not open their doors until November 1968; for opening dates and occupancy capacities of public housing, see <www.atlantahousingauthority.org>.

²⁰ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 99.

clearance, reasoned that as long as existing public housing projects had vacancies, the city would not have to build any more units. In 1963, for example, there were some available units in existing housing projects, but they did not necessarily meet the size or locational requirements of families in need. In addition, vacancies in white public housing projects were not available to black families until Atlanta Housing Authority desegregated its units in late 1963, just before the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Moreover, Allen believed that an economically booming city would best be able to help ameliorate substandard housing conditions for poorer Atlantans. The mayor envisioned that a more prosperous city would mean more prosperous residents, and somehow the city would not need to build as many public housing units. Finally, Allen hoped that a more prosperous real estate market would be willing to develop their own low and moderate cost housing complexes. Unfortunately, homes for the displaced never achieved a lofty place in local imaginations.

In the short run, however, African Americans would have to relocate in favor of civic centers and the like that would serve a mostly-white population. Neither the civic center nor the stadium would be formally, legally segregated spaces. Nonetheless, sporting events, concerts, and exhibits all cost money, and as was evident from the living conditions of many of the city's close-in African American communities, there was little disposable income available for entertainment. Renewal plans for Buttermilk Bottoms revealed the conflicting interests of business expansionists and public housing advocates. Under the leadership of its executive director, Grace Towns Hamilton, Atlanta's Urban League wanted renewal to improve the condition and supply of affordable housing stock throughout the northeastern section of the city, including Buttermilk Bottoms. League officials urged the mayor to designate one large urban renewal project in the northeastern quadrant

exclusively for housing. Yet, despite the Urban League's lobbying, Atlanta's urban renewal director Malcolm Jones deliberately strove to keep the Buttermilk Bottoms renewal area small.²¹

In 1963, Jones sided with downtown business interests, asserting that the civic center complex could encourage further expansion of the central business district to the northeast. Moreover, he did not call for a comprehensive plan for Buttermilk Bottoms because he wanted to minimize opposition to the project. From within the city urban renewal department, Jones understood that a comprehensive plan would detail where the city expected to relocate displaced families, thereby arousing the fears of nearby white neighborhoods. Nor did Jones want black residents in the area to know the number of families that the civic center would displace. Perhaps remembering the opposition to renewal on Hemphill Avenue that had occurred fifteen years earlier, Jones stated, "there is no need at this time to get a large segment of the population in that area exercised and riled up over the possibility of having to move eventually as a result of future developments that could possibly take place in the next five or ten years."²² Mayor Allen also welcomed the idea of keeping the Buttermilk Bottoms area small, as a small site would hold down costs. With the promise to the Urban League that he would consider construction of additional public housing units at a later date, in the fall of 1963 the mayor approved a Buttermilk Bottoms plan that favored business over residential construction.

²¹ For a more detailed description of Grace Towns Hamilton's role in the Urban League, see Lorraine Nelson Spritzer and Jean B. Bergmark, *Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1997). The city established its urban renewal committee in 1957 while planning the first three projects. It was streamlined into the city planning and development department in late 1964. Malcolm Jones then directed housing code enforcement before heading the Housing Resources Committee in late 1966.

²² Malcolm Jones, Memo to Urban Renewal Committee, 9 October 1963, City of Atlanta, Bureau of Planning Papers, Box 6, Folder 14, Atlanta History Center.

When federal urban renewal officials approved Early Land Acquisition for the civic center site in April 1964, the Atlanta Housing Authority acted quickly, clearing out residents within a month.²³ For Buttermilk Bottoms displacees, the Housing Authority set aside 300 units in the brand new 650-unit Bowen Homes. A public housing complex designed five years earlier for families displaced from Butler Street, Atlanta University, and Rawson-Washington projects, Bowen Homes was situated on Atlanta's remote west side, inconveniently located away from downtown jobs, businesses, and churches, and virtually inaccessible to the city except by car. Only thirteen percent of the Buttermilk Bottoms residents who qualified for public housing chose to move there.²⁴

The Buttermilk Bottoms removal and rehousing story was significant for a few reasons. First, it represented the fulfillment of the CAIA-MPC renewal objectives set over a decade earlier. Both the Central Atlanta Improvement Association and the Metropolitan Planning Commission consciously sought to de-concentrate the African American residential population near the central business district. Second, by relocating African American families far from downtown, sometimes even outside city limits, the city was diluting black political power. Third, in building replacement public housing so far from downtown that many displaced families elected not to move there, the city maintained enough public housing unit vacancies that it could postpone having to break ground on

²³ "Early Land Acquisition" was a procedure whereby officials acquired a site for redevelopment before the entire project area has been officially brought into the execution phase of urban renewal. From Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 235. For the April 1964 date and others, see Siân Llewellyn, "An Analysis of Development in the Bedford Pine Neighborhood, 1960-1998," City Planning Program, Georgia Institute of Technology College of Architecture, 3 June 1998, 8, unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

²⁴ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 235.

new units. Finally, the Buttermilk Bottoms story clarifies a few of the gaps between federal urban renewal policy and implementation.

RAWSON-WASHINGTON, A STADIUM, AND UPSET NEIGHBORHOODS

At the same time that Allen oversaw plans to build the civic center on renewal land, he was setting the stage for the construction of the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium in the Rawson-Washington project. Located less than a mile southeast of City Hall, the State Capitol, and the central business district, the new stadium would serve to anchor the southeastern edge of downtown in much the same way that the civic center would buffer the northeastern downtown border. From Allen's days as Chamber of Commerce president, moreover, he had asserted that a major league baseball team would generate substantial revenue and help Atlanta's declining tax base. Like many political and business leaders, Allen believed that a major league baseball team would help raise Atlanta into the "big leagues" among American cities. Once elected, Allen courted major league owners who were interested in relocating their teams. Believing that it would make an ideal stadium site, in 1963 Allen showed Kansas City Athletics owner Charles O. Finley land cleared in the Rawson-Washington project.²⁵

Four years before Finley and Allen surveyed the Rawson-Washington area, Atlanta officials had already leveled most of the buildings on the site, which totaled nearly 600 acres. As part of that effort, those same officials had cleared 3,261 dwelling units in the interracial communities of Mechanicsville and Peoplestown, and had forced more than three thousand families to move out, many temporarily relocating in nearby Summerhill.²⁶

²⁵ Allen, *Mayor, Notes on the Sixties*, 156.

²⁶ "Atlanta Seeks 11th Renewal," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 July 1965. Summerhill was not included in the Rawson-Washington project, but its neighborhood borders shrank and it lost some property for

City planners and the local alderman initially thought the Rawson-Washington project could be redeveloped into a moderate-income residential area for whites, but they could not find interested developers. By 1963, rights-of-way for the north-south downtown connector and east-west expressway utilized a portion of the cleared land, leaving a little more than half of the razed project area undeveloped.²⁷

Meanwhile, regional Urban Renewal Administration director Wedge and other federal renewal officials increased pressure on Atlanta to build public housing to replace razed units. Yet affluent white downtown business interests still sought construction of a buffer that would protect their property values from the poorer black communities to the south. In response, Allen suggested that the city place public housing for whites on unused land in Rawson-Washington. This idea was acceptable to white downtown businessmen, but Atlanta's Urban League vigorously opposed it, arguing that urban renewal had almost exclusively destroyed black neighborhoods, so the city should build public housing for blacks.²⁸ Q.V. Williamson, the city's sole black alderman, had pointed out that while hundreds of vacancies existed in white public housing projects, thousands of black families still waited for an available public housing unit.²⁹ As late as 1961, however, the Atlanta Housing Authority had maintained an agreement with the white downtown business elite and real estate brokers not to place public housing on renewal land.

So it was in 1963 that Allen decided to build his ballpark in the Rawson-Washington project. Since the park was nearly walking distance from downtown, Allen believed it

the creation of a stadium parking lot in 1966. It was included in the Model Cities Program, as well as the Empowerment Zone, which began in 1995.

²⁷ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 74.

²⁸ In spite of the fact that public housing was federally funded, it was racially segregated in Atlanta through 1963. The Housing Act of 1968 outlawed racial segregation in public housing applications.

²⁹ "Segregation termed Main Problem of Urban Renewal," *Atlanta Daily World*, 14 June 1961.

would draw baseball fans to downtown restaurants and shops. Athletics owner Charles O. Finley passed on the site, and Allen had not yet secured another commitment from a major league team owner. Nonetheless, the mayor consulted Mills B. Lane, president of Citizens and Southern Bank, about financing stadium construction. Without approval from the Board of Aldermen or the Fulton County Commission, Allen appointed Lane as treasurer of the city's Recreation Authority. Together, Lane, Allen, and Arthur Montgomery, an executive from the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, diverted half of Atlanta's tax revenue for public parks into building the stadium.³⁰

With construction of the ballpark, Allen and his business associates had effectively abandoned established African American leaders from within the Atlanta Urban League and the Atlanta Negro Voters League who had supported urban renewal. No longer did such visible African Americans support Allen's renewal agenda. Stadium placement also irrevocably severed what remaining trust poorer southside Atlanta African-American neighborhoods had in Allen's administration. Residents of Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, and nearby Summerhill needed replacement housing, but watched as white city leaders cleared land for the construction of a major league baseball stadium—in spite of the fact that the city still had no team. Moreover, as Allen, Montgomery, and staff members of the Recreation Authority planned for the structure, they failed to consider how it would impact the daily lives of neighborhood residents. A 1964 feasibility study, primarily designed as a public relations ploy to sign a major league team for the city, failed to assess how parking

³⁰ Allen, *Mayor, Notes on the Sixties*, 158; Bill Shipp, "The Miracle that is now the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium," *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 January 1969; Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class and Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 96-100; Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 74. The Milwaukee Braves would not file a motion with their local court system to approve their move to Atlanta until July 1965, after Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium was completed.

and traffic would further disrupt the community.³¹ Planners grossly underestimated the amount of parking that would be necessary for the 55,000-seat stadium. Consequently, residents in the surrounding neighborhoods soon had to contend with bottlenecked thoroughfares and the overflow of cars parked on side streets and vacant lots. Moreover, by the time construction of the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium was complete in 1965, two intersecting Interstate highways – I-20 and the I-75/85 connector – isolated the stadium from downtown businesses. Rather than spending money downtown after the games, fans returned to their cars and left the downtown area altogether.³²

THE C.W. HILL SCHOOL AND NEW URBAN RENEWAL OPPOSITION

The civic center and stadium projects reflected Mayor Allen's belief that big structure revenue-generating facilities were more pressing than housing needs. But urban renewal projects also inconvenienced and even burdened residents who did not have to move. As with the ballpark, race stood at the center of this controversy. The mayor's push to complete the civic center necessitated closing the nearby C.W. Hill School, which served black elementary school children in Buttermilk Bottoms, and a conflict surrounding the school closing ensued. When the Atlanta Housing Authority began clearing land for the civic center auditorium in April 1964, Authority officials mentioned in a meeting to city aldermen on the Urban Renewal Committee the possibility of closing the elementary school as well, arguing that clearance in the area would eventually decrease the school population. At no point, however, did leaders of the Housing Authority or Atlanta's Urban Renewal Department present the school closing as an option for debate. Nor did the Housing Authority provide a forum for neighborhood residents to voice their concerns. Instead,

³¹ Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class and Expansion*, 96-100.

³² *Ibid.*

Authority officials dealt exclusively with the all-white Board of Education, which, in February 1965 voted to close the school at the end of the term. The Board decided to set up temporary school facilities for remaining Hill School children at a site further south. The Board's decision caused great consternation among neighborhood residents, as the temporary school did not have adequate lunchroom or sanitation facilities. Many families with children at the Hill School judged it unfair that their children should have to endure hardships to facilitate construction of another whites-only project.³³

In an attempt to delay civic center construction, in mid-1965, Hill School parents launched an organized protest against the renewal project. Led by Auburn Avenue businessman and Atlanta Negro Voters League President Jesse Hill, community activists offered city aldermen several alternatives to the Hill School closing to lessen the hardship visited on the elementary school students and their families. No longer acquiescent to Allen's renewal plans in exchange for an implied promise of better housing, Hill wanted Allen to take concrete actions to benefit local residents. For example, Hill proposed that the city delay the school closing for a year to allow the Board of Education time to find a more suitable site, and he even suggested a few buildings. In response, Mayor Allen gave black neighborhood representatives from Buttermilk Bottoms a few seats on a newly-created advisory committee, but he never broached the subject of slowing construction timetables.³⁴ Meanwhile, regional Urban Renewal Administration director Wedge assured the school PTA that the Hill School would not be closed until the city fashioned a solution satisfactory to the black neighborhood residents. Nevertheless, Jesse Hill and his

³³ "Hill School Must Go, Allen Says," *Atlanta Journal*, 13 April 1965; Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 102-106.

³⁴ Clarence Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 102-106.

supporters found these assurances hollow when construction on the center's auditorium continued unabated and the elementary school closed at the end of the 1965 school year.³⁵ Although Jesse Hill and other established African American leaders in the business and political community had sought to ameliorate school conditions, failure to block construction of the stadium or to achieve even limited goals sought by elementary school parents served to destroy his remaining credibility among area residents. Following the Hill School conflict in mid-1965, grassroots leaders of subsequent urban renewal protests developed more militant resistance.³⁶

THE FORMATION OF U-RESCUE

The first such grassroots resistance to urban renewal projects developed just east of Buttermilk Bottoms in the Bedford Pine project, where city planners had promised to locate the new C.W. Hill School. In late 1965, Bedford Pine became Atlanta's eleventh urban renewal project, comprising 205 acres.³⁷ City planner Howard Openshaw presented the project in July at a Citizens' Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal (CACUR) meeting. He emphasized that only one-third of the area buildings would be razed, while the remainder would be renovated and rehabilitated.³⁸ Bedford Pine, like Buttermilk Bottoms, was a poor and mostly black neighborhood. More than half of the housing stock was substandard. Many residents had only moved there recently to escape earlier urban renewal projects

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 102.

³⁷ Ibid.; Llewellyn, "An Analysis of Development in the Bedford Pine Neighborhood," 8. Llewellyn calculates the total renewal area as 278 acres. Though it is not clear, it seems that Llewellyn includes the Buttermilk Bottoms acreage in his figure. Ironically, Bedford Street (and side street, Forrest) were named for Confederate soldier, Nathan Bedford Forrest, who later established the Ku Klux Klan. The Bedford Pine area, according to the 1960 census, was 98 percent black.

³⁸ "Atlanta Seeks 11th Renewal," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 July 1965; "Bedford Pine Project Offers a Chance to Stress Rehabilitation over Removal," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 December 1965.

and did not want to be uprooted again. But the Bedford Pine neighborhood, abutting the civic center site, struck CAIA and Uptown Association members as an area ripe for business expansion.³⁹

Also in July, a writer for the *Atlanta Constitution* informed Bedford Pine residents that the soon-to-be-approved renewal project would remove 966 families from the area.⁴⁰ Residents of Bedford Pine pointed to earlier incomplete urban renewal projects that had been left undeveloped as well as renewal projects where the Mayor had shelved plans for low and moderate cost housing in favor of non-residential structures. In an effort to protect their homes and neighborhood, Bedford Pine residents, including African-American renters, white merchants, and black ministers created U-Rescue (Urban Renewal Emergency: Stop, Consider, Understand, Evaluate), an organization that challenged the city of Atlanta's business-gearred approach to urban renewal. Led by Reverend J. D. Grier and Reverend R. E. Searcy, U-Rescue members visited local churches to argue that neighborhood residents best understood the needs of the Bedford Pine community and should be able to represent themselves on renewal committees alongside city leaders. They fought to ensure that Bedford Pine would remain primarily residential and that the city would build affordable replacement housing in the area. As a local grassroots protest organization, U-Rescue did not heed calls for moderation from more cautious citywide black organizations such as the local chapter of the National Association for the

³⁹ "Bedford Pine Project Offers a Chance to Stress Rehabilitation over Removal," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 December 1965; Llewellyn, "An Analysis of Development in the Bedford Pine," 8.

⁴⁰ "Atlanta Seeks 11th Renewal," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 July 1965. By March 1966, due to overlap, the Buttermilk Bottoms-Boulevard General Neighborhood Renewal Plan was terminated. See *Environmental Impact Statement for Portions of the Bedford Pine area, 1979*, Georgia Room Vertical Subject Files, Urban Renewal, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

Advancement of Colored Persons (NAACP), the Atlanta Urban League, or even the African-American newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*. Instead, U-Rescue threatened civil disobedience to stop the project.⁴¹

Seeking to avoid an ugly confrontation, Mayor Allen and members of the Board of Aldermen negotiated with U-Rescue leaders during December 1965. The pace of the Civil Rights Movement at the time strongly influenced Allen. In his first term as mayor, Allen presided over daily battles to desegregate city swimming pools, golf courses, parks, and water fountains and he watched as Atlanta hotels and restaurants stubbornly clung to Jim Crow laws. In his memoirs, Allen would later recount with pride how, in the summer of 1963, President Kennedy asked him to testify before the Senate on behalf of the public accommodations bill. When signed, the bill became the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing racial segregation in schools, workplaces, and public facilities. Allen, then, feared the bad press that U-Rescue could bring and what that would mean for Atlanta's image as a city on the move.⁴² Such a threat gave U-Rescue considerable influence in City Hall. The aldermanic urban renewal committee recognized U-Rescue as the official neighborhood representation. In addition, Rodney Cook, the chair for the Aldermanic Urban Renewal Committee, agreed to U-Rescue's demand that the city clear and redevelop the project on a block by block basis to help preserve the residential nature of the area. U-Rescue asserted that the city should build low-income housing units equal in number to the families displaced by renewal. U-Rescue also secured a guarantee from the city urban renewal committee that the Housing Authority would build public housing on site in Bedford Pine

⁴¹ Reverend J. D. Grier, "Resolution," presented at U-Rescue meeting, December 1965, clipping file, Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library; Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 107-112.

⁴² Allen Jr., and Hemphill, *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties*.

for its displaced residents.⁴³ In addition, U-Rescue leaders successfully fended off the Uptown Association, a group of white downtown businessmen interested in converting the northeastern sector for commercial purposes. Finally, U-Rescue succeeded in limiting the amount of land that the Georgia Baptist Hospital would receive to expand in the southeastern corner of Bedford Pine.⁴⁴

By the close of 1965, leaders of U-Rescue had made great strides in bringing local residents into the formal political arena. Yet U-Rescue leaders proved unable to change the way in which business-minded city leaders chose to deal with blighted areas. Despite having made verbal concessions to Grier, Searcy, and other U-Rescue leaders, city officials still maintained that the premise of urban renewal was to “encourage economic expansion, physical planning and development.”⁴⁵ Just as before, Allen placed neighborhood improvement and an increase in low-cost housing stock second. More important, the mayor and ward aldermen retained the power to choose renewal areas, and they did so in areas that prospective developers judged economically appealing.

VINE CITY, OR THE NEIGHBORHOOD THAT RENEWAL FORGOT

At the moment that Bedford Pine residents sought to limit renewal in their neighborhood, leaders in other neighborhoods in the city sought out urban renewal. Residents of Vine City lived across the Downtown Connector and west of the Central Business District, and housing conditions there were some of the worst in Atlanta. City

⁴³ “Bedford Pine Project Offers a Chance to Stress Rehabilitation over Removal,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 December 1965. Federal Urban Renewal policy technically required that cities provide replacement housing for that which it tore down, but it had not been able to enforce the ruling.

⁴⁴ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 111.

⁴⁵ “Atlanta’s Workable Program, Declaration of Policy,” 1965, quoted in Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 128.

officials considered Vine City “bad enough to be included in the original urban renewal [projects] proposed in 1957.”⁴⁶ Because business leaders had made no demands to redevelop the Vine City area, Atlanta aldermen chose not to pursue renewal there. By 1965, Vine City was deteriorating rapidly.

Allen could no longer avoid negative publicity regarding Atlanta, the city “too busy to hate.” With African-American residents expressing frustration and anger about urban renewal, editors of the city’s two newspapers took notice. In late July 1965, editors of the *Atlanta Constitution* launched a series of articles under the heading, “Housing: People, Problems, and Poverty.” For the series, reporters collaborated with the Atlanta Area Community Council, a new social planning agency established in 1964 by the federal government’s Community Renewal Program. This federal program, established in 1964 during the Johnson administration, marked the first significant modification to urban renewal. Community Renewal was designed to increase citizen participation and planning and it placed more emphasis on anti-poverty objectives. Atlanta city officials, business leaders, and neighborhood organizations continued to use the term *urban renewal* well after 1964.⁴⁷

Authors revealed how urban renewal projects had done little to ameliorate poverty surrounding the projects. *Constitution* reporters charged that local elected officials, dependent upon business-oriented and racially prejudiced interests for their positions, were actually resisting the renewal of poor, urban, black areas. According to the series, Mayor Allen and his aldermen had avoided renewal projects that would cause black

⁴⁶ Ted Simmons and Remer Tyson, “Owners of Atlanta’s Worst Slums Get Blanket Exemption from Code,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 July 1965, 1(A).

⁴⁷ “Housing: People, Problems, and Poverty Series,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20-28 July 1965.

families to resettle in all-white neighborhoods. The series sounded a warning for urban unrest, made all the more urgent the following week when violence broke out in the similarly impoverished Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles. Even as he stepped up a campaign to fight Atlanta slums, Allen remarked, "We do not have large areas of poverty and discontent like they do in Los Angeles."⁴⁸

Negative publicity regarding housing and urban renewal increased throughout 1965. Community Improvement Program director George Aldredge had charged, "Urban renewal is just moving slums around."⁴⁹ Aldredge argued that the Atlanta Housing Authority needed to secure adequate amounts of reasonably priced replacement housing. Otherwise, he contended, displaced families crowded into neighborhoods abutting urban renewal projects. According to Aldredge, then, dense living conditions quickly degraded the housing stock, creating new slums. Earl Metzger, director of redevelopment for the Housing Authority, agreed with Aldredge, stating, "Urban renewal is no panacea to the low-cost housing problem. The only answer to that is an abundant supply of low-cost housing."⁵⁰ Mayor Allen had never perceived urban renewal in the same light.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s well-publicized visit to Vine City forced Allen to reconsider how the city approached urban renewal. In January 1966, Atlanta police arrested a white Quaker neighborhood organizer in Vine City, charging him with trespassing. It was cold outside, and the alleged trespasser, Hector Black, had been distributing blankets. Landlords feared that Black was inciting Vine City tenants to a rent

⁴⁸ Bill Shipp, "We Do Not Have Large Areas of Poverty," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 September 1965.

⁴⁹ Gene Simmons, "Urban Renewal 'Human Problems' Discussed by Atlanta Advisory Unit," *Atlanta Times*, 20 November 1964.

⁵⁰ Ted Simmons and Remer Tyson, "Is Renewal Good Or Bad? The Argument Goes On," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 July 1965.

strike, and had him arrested for trespassing. Outraged over his arrest, the Vine City Council, which Black had helped establish, organized a protest and called upon King's Southern Christian Leadership Committee (SCLC) and Stokely Carmichael's Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) for assistance. The neighborhood could not have planned a more effective demonstration. Shortly after Black's arrest, Atlanta native Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. paid a visit to the Lightning settlement, adjacent to Vine City, and his presence attracted national media coverage. King exclaimed that the area contained "the worst housing he had seen." He continued, "I want Mayor Allen to see this. I don't believe he knows such conditions exist in Atlanta."⁵¹

A humiliated Allen answered Dr. King through news reporters. The city, Mayor Allen asserted, was making every effort to eliminate slum conditions that still existed.⁵² Understandably, Vine City residents found little consolation (or truth) in the mayor's remarks. By early 1966, Allen had seen the completion of the stadium, civic center, and Interstates 75, 85, and 20 through the city. Meanwhile, the 650-unit public housing complex on McDaniel Street, approved in 1964, had not yet entered the construction phase. To prevent further city embarrassment following King's visit, the mayor sent out crews to clean up the area. Seeking to focus the blame on negligent landlords, Allen also ordered city inspection officials to Vine City to enforce housing codes. But Allen's actions only increased anxiety levels of Vine City residents. Enforcing the housing code, city inspectors gave notices to families, mostly renters, of substandard dwellings, stating, "this unit does not meet the minimum standards required.... It is a violation for this unit to be occupied.

⁵¹ Bill Shipp, "King Says Slum Here is the Worst He's Seen," *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 February 1966, 1(A).

⁵² Walker Lundy, "Allen Moves to Aid City Slum Dwellers," *Atlanta Journal*, 1 February 1966, 1(A).

Continued occupancy of this dwelling unit will subject you to being summoned to appear before the Municipal Court of the City of Atlanta to answer to the charge of violating said ordinance.”⁵³ Allen had to reassure tenants that they would not be evicted before landlords complied with the housing code. The deplorable (and heavily publicized) housing conditions prompted a few Vine City families to enact a rent strike, ignoring Mayor Allen’s plea that tenants protest through “legal methods.”⁵⁴

SUMMERHILL: RISING TENSIONS AND A POWDER KEG

Fresh from the disastrous publicity on the westside, the mayor turned his attention to the area south of the central business district. In March 1966, the Atlanta Area Community Council released a report about the neighborhoods surrounding the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium.⁵⁵ The report detailed on-going community problems with housing and city services, and confirmed what city officials already suspected—that area residents did not trust City Hall. Residents in Peoplestown and Mechanicsville neighborhoods had lost thousands of homes due to clearance in the Rawson-Washington project, and in 1966, the City leveled additional housing to make way for more stadium parking.

Authors of the community council report expressed particular concern for the nearby Summerhill neighborhood, which, though not a part of an urban renewal project,

⁵³ Bill Shipp, “Slum Dwellers Violating City Law,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 February 1966, 1(A).

⁵⁴ Bill Shipp, “Tenants Open Rent Strike in War on Markham Slums,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 February 1966, 1(A); Julian Bond, information director for SNCC, was also a newly elected State Representative for the district, and he proposed renewal plans for Vine City following the media coverage.

⁵⁵ “City’s Shame in Shadow of its Pride: Atlanta’s Plush Stadium Towers Over Slum’s Poor,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 March 1966. The Atlanta Area Community Council compiled much of the information for the “Housing: People, Poverty, and Profits” series that ran in the two main Atlanta papers in July 1965. The article reprinted a portion of the Community Council’s report.

seemed to be a hotbed for neighborhood discontent.⁵⁶ The city had neglected to address long-standing grievances in the area. Officials had promised Summerhill a park, but instead awarded it a parking lot. Meanwhile, the community lacked housing and its schools were overcrowded. Report authors urged greater access to public services and basic city improvements like streetlights and paved sidewalks.⁵⁷ That July, Summerhill residents blocked traffic and “staged” a football game in the middle of Capitol Avenue, across the street from the stadium, forcing Atlanta’s Department of Recreation to begin construction on a long-awaited playground.⁵⁸ In short, tensions were running high in Summerhill, and the neighborhood was primed for violence. On September 6th, Harold Prather’s shooting kicked off the violent episode.

Yet the police shooting and subsequent riot that occurred in Summerhill should have come as no surprise to Mayor Allen, city aldermen, or any of the local urban renewal committees. The Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta, the local chapter of the Southern Regional Council and a group that had been active in anti-poverty organizing in Vine City, did not blame SNCC for the riot.⁵⁹ In a news release, the council members talked about the city’s failure to deliver services, stating “SNCC members are not responsible for

⁵⁶ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 124-6.

⁵⁷ Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta, news release, 8 September 1966, in Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 140.

⁵⁸ The city placed the neighborhood playground on a tiny patch of grass in the middle of the stadium parking lot. It was an awkwardly chosen site, hardly within walking distance for many Summerhill children, who, during baseball season, had to weave through lanes upon lanes of cars and watch for traffic in order to reach the merry-go-round. As a consequence of its location, the playground got more use from vagrants and junkies than children.

⁵⁹ The Southern Regional Council was founded in 1919 as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. The organization has sought to eradicate racial injustice in the South, and it became well-known for its reports on conditions in the South.

[creating] parking spaces for 4,000 cars [for stadium goers] in the middle of an area which has no parks for children to play in.”⁶⁰

Before the mayor could react to the explosive chain of events in Summerhill, a similar riot erupted four days later in Bedford Pine. A few city officials speculated that a group of more than 200 blacks had gathered on Boulevard Avenue to protest Stokely Carmichael’s arrest for supposedly inciting the Summerhill riot. Others argued that the angry mob was protesting another shooting, this time by an unidentified white gunman.⁶¹ More than likely, however, the melee represented the culmination of numerous events in another highly impoverished and segregated area. Once again, Mayor Allen dodged rocks and firebombs at the riot scene. He implored the crowd to put an end to the violence. Ironically, he added, “My record of doing what I say I am going to do is pretty good,” yet he stood only blocks away from a hundred mobile and modular units of temporary housing that had allowed a small percentage of Buttermilk Bottoms residents to stay near the civic center site.⁶² At the time of the riot, the civic center auditorium had been completed, but construction companies had not yet broken ground for the permanent replacement housing the city had promised to remaining displacees.

A TURNING POINT?

The riots initially appeared to be a watershed moment for housing advocates in Atlanta’s urban renewal program. After the riots, Allen pursued housing with the same gusto he had shown in endorsing interstate highways, the civic center, and a major league

⁶⁰ Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta, news release, 8 September 1966, in Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 140.

⁶¹ Bill Shipp, Dick Hebert, Charles Moore, and Michael Davis, “Fire Bombs Exploded in Boulevard Violence: Allen Posts Reward in Slaying,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 September 1966, 1(A).

⁶² *Ibid.*

sports franchise. Following a recommendation from the Atlanta Area Community Council, in November 1966 Allen held a conference on housing. He placed a moratorium on additional urban renewal projects until the city addressed how to improve the re-housing process. The mayor used the conference setting to introduce Atlanta's modified approach to urban renewal; where the city once valued renewal projects for their economic potential, its Workable Program now emphasized neighborhood improvement, citizen participation, and the expansion of low-cost housing. Allen set an ambitious goal. He proposed that the city would create 16,800 additional low and medium cost standard housing units over the next five years, and promised 9,800 of those units by December 1968. Prominent architect Cecil A. Alexander, who chaired the city's new Housing Resources Committee, confirmed the mayor's promises by reporting that over 9,000 housing units were already in progress.⁶³

In addition to establishing a committee for housing, Allen sought out new federal aid for renewal housing. At the November housing conference, chief city planning engineer Collier Gladin had announced Atlanta's plans to win designation for the Model Cities program. Authors of the program, recently enacted as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, sought to provide cities the means "to plan, develop, and carry out new and imaginative proposals" for social rehabilitation and urban revitalization

⁶³ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent*, 128-9; Collier Gladin, *The Renewer: Newsletter of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal* 4, no. 10 (November 1966), WBH Papers, Box 40, Folder 12, MARBL, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta Georgia; Marion Gaines, "Crash Housing Program is Proposed by the Mayor," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 November 1966, 6.

programs.⁶⁴ The program had not received much press nationally or locally, so Gladin clarified the purpose behind the new federal money. Gladin reported that six neighborhoods surrounding the stadium would be included in the proposed Model Cities site, comprising 3000 acres and affecting 17,000 families.⁶⁵ Half of the area residents lived in extreme poverty, earning less than \$3,000 per year. Seventy-five percent of the housing stock was substandard. The area's estimated 50,000 residents comprised only ten percent of Atlanta's population, but it laid claim to one-third of the city's housing problems and one-quarter of its juvenile delinquents.⁶⁶

Of particular interest to Allen was the program's call for citizen participation. Allen himself would introduce the program to local neighborhoods, and he wanted to solicit the residents' support. City Hall had received outside grant money to help publicize the new federal program—Gladin explained that the money would emphasize social rehabilitation and re-housing people displaced by earlier urban renewal. This new program would execute renewal block by block, if necessary, so as to avoid wholesale relocation problems the city had experienced in the past.

Despite the excitement that the Allen, Gladin, and others expressed for the Model Cities program, still other reports and committee minutes released that same fall should have suggested how difficult it would be to change the course of urban renewal projects in Atlanta. In December 1966, leaders of the Community Improvement Program (CIP), who

⁶⁴ Collier Gladin, *The Renewer: Newsletter of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal* 4, no. 10 (November 1966), WBH Papers, Box 40, Folder 12, MARBL, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶⁵ There were four black neighborhoods: Summerhill, Peopletown, Mechanicsville, and Pittsburg, and two white: Adair Park, and Grant Park.

⁶⁶ Gladin, *The Renewer: Newsletter of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal* 4, no. 10 (November 1966), WBH Papers, Box 40, Folder 12, MARBL, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

had collaborated with the *Atlanta Constitution* on its “Housing: People, Problems, and Poverty” series, conducted workshops on Atlanta’s physical environment. CIP consultants explained that the city contained too many blighted buildings to rebuild all at once, and instead discussed different methods to combat deterioration. Consultants stressed how complicated the definition of urban renewal was, and they predicted that the new Model Cities program’s vague definitions would cause more confusion and strife. Urban renewal, the presenters reasoned, was essentially a physical improvement program. While re-housing those displaced from earlier urban renewal was important, consultants argued, an over-emphasis on immediate housing would limit long-term physical improvements for the city overall. In the future, Atlanta business and political leaders frustrated Model Cities planning by using these reports to justify continued commercial development.⁶⁷

Just as before the Summerhill riot and other demonstrations, however, decisions about the Mayor’s growth agenda or public housing did not rest on consultant reports. In October 1966, city planning engineer Gladin had told Bedford Pine residents that “the major problem facing the city in the overall concept for this entire area is fulfilling...a major need for relocating displaced families.”⁶⁸ Yet good intentions could alter the course of Atlanta’s renewal program. As before, aldermen advocated commercial development in Bedford Pine. Again as before, downtown business leaders such as Uptown Association executive director Bob Bivens continued to argue that new, low-cost residential housing

⁶⁷ Excerpts from “The Physical Environment of Atlanta,” 29 November 1966, “The People of Atlanta,” 6 December 1966, and “Atlanta’s Urban Economy,” 13 December 1966, Workshop Presentations of the Community Improvement Program, in Newsweek Papers, Box 1, MARBL, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶⁸ Minutes, Urban Renewal Policy Committee Meeting, 14 October 1966, Rodney Cook Papers, Series II, Box 2, Folder 1, Richard Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

would impair development of a nearby commercial corridor. Indeed, a majority of white downtown business leaders would support neither a massive re-housing program nor Model Cities' call for increased citizen participation. Just as in the 1950s, local politicians and business leaders triumphed in their contest with federal officials and federal mandates. Local officials happily accepted federal money for highways and housing, and just as readily denounced federal "interference" when it came with stipulations and restrictions.

When Ivan Allen Jr. became Atlanta's mayor in 1962, he inherited an urban renewal program already underway. He sought to bring Atlanta into national prominence, and his business background led him to believe that a successful urban renewal campaign was one that ensured economic growth for the central business district. Allied with downtown business associations and supported by aldermen and city planners, Allen succeeded in using urban renewal projects to build a major league stadium and new civic center and auditorium. As well, interstate highways criss-crossed the near downtown area and created their own buffers against encroachment by low-income neighbors. A few prominent leaders in the city's African American community endorsed Allen's pro-business position on urban renewal, but they had done so with the understanding that the mayor would also build sufficient new units of public housing. African Americans in Atlanta also cooperated in early urban renewal in the hopes of winning needed city services. By the mid-1960s, however, the deficit of replacement public housing in Atlanta had reached a crisis level, and city officials seemed callous. Leaders in the African American community such as Hill, who had supported Allen's renewal plans, lost credibility within their own neighborhoods. Poor African Americans took to the streets to protest an urban renewal program that was

worsening rather than improving their situations. With no political recourse in sight, they rioted. While the Summerhill riot caught Mayor Allen's attention, the protests did not change the balance of power in the city. The city's poor and disfranchised remained unable to wield local political power for themselves. Federal urban renewal policy could not readily control how local officials implemented renewal funding, and as was the case in Atlanta, renewal projects nationwide designed to ameliorate blighted conditions often exacerbated them. Atlanta's experience with urban renewal in the mid-1960s highlights how the very public policy created to secure "decent and safe housing for all" in fact preserved racial inequalities and contributed to urban racial violence.

CHAPTER 3

TRIALS OF A MODEL CITY: THE SHIFT AWAY FROM FEDERALLY SPONSORED DOWNTOWN RENEWAL, 1966-1974

On the morning of October 14th, 1966, the City of Atlanta Urban Renewal Policy Committee met at the Atlanta Housing Authority, which was then headquartered on the eighth floor of the Hurt Building. They were there to discuss, among other things, the fate of the Bedford-Pine Project Area, an Urban Renewal area from the previous year. Earl Metzger, director of redevelopment for the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA), reported that the U.S. Postal Service requested land in the northeastern project corner for a new post office. Along the southeastern edge, planners for the nearby Georgia Baptist Hospital also sought land for expansion. Meanwhile, AHA's executive director M.B. Satterfield, and Robert Sommerville, Atlanta Transit Company director and head of the Citizen's Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal (CACUR), each called for an emphasis on residential redevelopment. Reverend J.D. Grier, who represented local African American residents and members of the newly-formed Bedford Pine Project Committee, communicated that his group favored public housing placement within the project area. Bob Bivens, head of the pro-business Uptown Association, opined that to allow the Bedford-Pine area south of North Avenue to go towards low cost residential housing would impair the redevelopment and rehabilitation of Ponce de Leon Avenue. The Uptown Association sought developments that would inspire commercial expansion along the Ponce corridor and believed that it was critical to create new low cost residential areas for replacement housing outside of the

downtown corridor. In a heated exchange, committee chair Rodney Cook snapped, “the clearing of residential property and redevelopment for commercial use has reached its limit—this four and one-half blocks could ‘break the camel’s back.’”¹ Cook was well aware of the difficulties and delays the AHA was already having in attracting contractors to bid on building public housing units near the new stadium.² Atlanta city planning engineer Collier Gladin summed up the emotional tone and sense of urgency some felt at the aldermanic committee meeting, saying,

the major problem facing the city in the overall concept for this entire area is fulfilling what is becoming a major need for relocating displaced families...the relocation problem has become paramount, even to the point of curtailing the expansion of our urban renewal program.³

Gladin hinted that the ongoing conflicting visions of renewal, revitalization, and redevelopment in downtown Atlanta threatened to bring the program to its knees. The decisions they made in that room would define what renewal was supposed to accomplish and whom it was supposed to benefit.

For every city block the committee discussed that day, members squabbled over what to put where, and how it would affect the future direction of the block, neighborhood, and city. What was perhaps most striking, however, was not the tenor of the committee’s disagreements, but that there was any arguing at all. Less than a month earlier, the city endured two riots, during which local African American residents spoke out against, among other things, what they saw as racial discrimination in renewal projects. The many

¹ Minutes, Urban Renewal Policy Committee Meeting, 14 October 1966, Rodney Cook Papers, Series II, Box 2, Folder 1, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

² M.B. Satterfield to Alderman Rodney Cook, 10 August 1966, Rodney Cook Papers, Series II, Box 6, Folder 5, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

³ Minutes, Urban Renewal Policy Committee Meeting, 14 October 1966, Rodney Cook Papers, Series II, Box 2, Folder 1, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

thousands who initially bought into an Urban Renewal program that promised to clear slums and build decent, safe housing, came to witness the city renege on the promise of relocation; construction on replacement housing had not commenced, yet the City had already finished a stadium and a civic center. The resulting riots were no doubt fresh in the minds of the thirteen men assembled to discuss the state of urban renewal.

Despite the continuing threat of such violence, renewal leaders did little to reach a compromise between business and community interests. This chapter continues to chart this civic schism through the Model Cities program, a Great Society era inspired federal urban revitalization program of the late 1960s and early 1970s designed to improve the quality of life in American slums. It first studies what Model Cities proposed to accomplish, and then traces the ways in which the program failed in Atlanta. Finally, by relating how Model Cities' shortcomings dissuaded those in the city's power structure from supporting it, this chapter uses Atlanta's experience to help explain why Model Cities was not successful on the national level.

Atlanta's participation in the Model Cities program commenced during Mayor Ivan Allen's second mayoral term in late 1966, continued through Sam Massell's tenure in City Hall, and ended shortly after Massell lost the office in 1973. Under Allen and Massell, Atlanta applied for, won, and implemented the five-year Model Cities program. Initially, Atlanta city officials heartily endorsed this new federal program as a vastly improved version of federal Urban Renewal. Model Cities promised to address social and economic as well as physical problems of American slums, and it called for citizen participation in its planning and implementation, believing that poor people, if given the chance, could devise unique solutions to the problems in their neighborhoods. Much has already been written

about President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs, and the general consensus about the Model Cities program is that it failed because it was spread too thin, oversold, and under-funded.⁴ New scholarship on the Great Society and Model Cities scholarship has just begun to expand our understanding of what went wrong on the local level.⁵ The bungled implementation and operation of Model Cities not only resulted in a failed federal program; it led local political and business leaders to turn away from the liberal state and towards private and public-private development opportunities.

In this chapter, I argue that Model Cities failed for a few key reasons. First, the mayor, aldermen, and city planners, after winning Model Cities designation, were not consistently committed to or involved in the program's administration. City Hall officials treated the Model Cities program as a separate agency instead of as an arm of city government, essentially wishing that the program would function on its own. Second, Model Cities as an operation failed because it could not function independently of City Hall. Atlanta's Model Cities executive director had all of the responsibility, for instance, but he held no autonomous authority to implement the program. The director had no means to enforce contracts made with agencies to provide Model Cities programs, and he had to seek aldermanic committee approval for all expenditures. Third, the local Atlanta Model Cities residents' mistrust of city government, spawned by decades of racial discrimination and their unhappy experiences with earlier Urban Renewal, meant that many in Atlanta's

⁴ For a thorough synthesis on Great Society accomplishments and shortcomings, see for example Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

⁵ See, for example, Andrew R. Highsmith, "Demolition Means Progress: Urban Renewal, Local Politics, and State-Sanctioned Ghetto Formation in Flint, Michigan," and Guian A. McKee, "'I've Never Dealt with a Government Agency Before': Philadelphia's Somerset Knitting Mills Project, the Local State, and the Missed Opportunities of Urban Renewal," *Journal of Urban History* 35, no.3 (2009) 348-368, 387-409.

impoverished neighborhoods never gave the new federal program a chance. Other Model Cities residents, misunderstanding the “citizen participation” aspect of the federal program, found little ground for compromise, thereby slowing decisions and funding. Finally, communication between federal officials, Atlanta City Hall, and Atlanta’s Model Cities staff was deplorable, which exacerbated the federal program’s poorly designed administration. Model Cities marked a culmination of Atlanta’s participation in federal Urban Renewal, and its failure would eventually lead to different style of urban renewal altogether.

Observers called Mayor Ivan Allen a man reformed in the wake of Atlanta’s 1966 summer riots.⁶ The riots persuaded the mayor that the city’s urban renewal needed to incorporate housing goals in order to be deemed a success. Allen’s Housing Conference in the wake of the riots, which convened soon after the heated October meeting of the Urban Renewal Committee, seemed a good first step toward defining housing goals. Cecil Alexander, chairman of the Housing Resources Committee, reported on the number of projects in development or near completion, thus giving the public a clear idea of what the City planned to do.⁷

Shortly after the Housing Conference, the Community Improvement Program (CIP), a War on Poverty fact-finding group, held a series of presentations highlighting the perception(s) of renewal in the city. In a workshop on Atlanta’s physical environment, CIP consultants first determined that the city had too much blight to be tackled all at once; instead, they discussed different methods to combat blight on a case-by-case basis rather

⁶ Joe Cumming, Telex, Newsweek Papers, Box 1, MARBL, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁷ See Chapter 2.

than as a whole. A core problem of Urban Renewal until this point, they argued, was a matter of definition. Was it a program of physical improvement or one of social improvement? The CIP reasoned that it was essentially a physical improvement program that was sometimes socially oriented. When city officials used it to assist areas with severe social problems, however, the public often viewed it as a substitute for other social programs. Consultants warned city officials, in other words, not to pitch Urban Renewal as a social program. Too heavy an emphasis on immediate social goals would limit the improvement of the long-term physical environment.⁸

The CIP's findings foreshadowed the confusion that Atlantans faced when Allen subsequently sought out new federal aid for renewal housing from the new Model Cities program, an effort that attempted to solve both social and physical problems. In January 1967, at the city's first Planning and Development Committee meeting for the year, planning engineer Collier Gladin unveiled the city's plans to apply for aid from the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Area Redevelopment Act, which President Lyndon B. Johnson had just signed into law.⁹ Gladin explained that Atlanta was under consideration to receive federal aid from the already-dubbed "Model Cities" Program, and that his office had received official guidelines from the federal government on how to prepare an application. He anticipated that the city would submit its application by early March, and if accepted, Atlanta could have twelve million dollars in planning grants within the fiscal year.

⁸Excerpts from "The Physical Environment of Atlanta," 11 November 1966, "The People of Atlanta," 6 December 1966, and "Atlanta's Urban Economy," 13 December 1966, Workshop Presentations of the Community Improvement Program, in Newsweek Collection, Box 1, MARBL, Robert Woodruff Library, Emory University.

⁹ Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, Public Law 89-754, Title I.

Following nine to twelve months of preparing a final application, the city would receive implementation funds, and they would require five years to complete the program.

But just what was Model Cities? Model Cities marked an effort to improve upon the earlier Urban Renewal programs of 1949 and 1954, as well as the first War on Poverty programs of 1964.¹⁰ In some ways, it attempted to combine the approaches of both Urban Renewal and the War on Poverty. Critics had attacked federal Urban Renewal, which primarily dealt with the physical or built environment, for ignoring the plight of slum dwellers while enhancing central business districts and the lives of the people who worked in them. War on Poverty programs, which loosely administered out of the Office of Economic Opportunity, addressed social issues not covered under Urban Renewal. War on Poverty programs, which included Community Action, Head Start, and VISTA, were also innovative because they attempted to incorporate citizen participation into their administration, but, as a rule, these programs lacked coordination. Specifically, then, Model Cities marked an attempt to pull together a profusion of federal, state, and private programs that dealt with the physical, social, and economic uplift of poor urban areas, and called for residents of these areas to play a key role in the planning process. Federal legislators designed Model Cities to give local impoverished communities the chance to find unique solutions to their own problems. Like the War on Poverty programs that preceded it, Model Cities would emphasize more socially oriented programs. The majority of the money and projects came from existing programs, but Model Cities tied all of the programs together. The cornerstone of Model Cities was the creation of a Community Development

¹⁰ For early critiques of urban renewal, see for example, Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1964); James Q. Wilson, ed., *Urban Renewal* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1966); and Jewel Bellush and Murray Hausknecht, eds., *Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Urban Planning* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

Agency in every participating city. This Model Cities headquarters would work with both City Hall and target neighborhoods to channel money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and various other departments to the local level.

The introduction of new federal money to alleviate urban ills dovetailed Allen's renewed concern for the availability of low-cost housing. City Planning Engineer Collier Gladin scheduled two neighborhood meetings to present this new program to the residents of the proposed project areas. Allen himself signed up to introduce the program to local neighborhoods, and he wanted to solicit the residents' support. City Hall received outside grant money to help publicize the new federal program—Gladin stressed that money from the Demonstration Cities Act would emphasize social rehabilitation and re-housing people displaced by earlier urban renewal. This new program would execute renewal block by block, if necessary, so as to avoid wholesale relocation problems the city had experienced in the past.

With that, city planners focused on completing the application. Atlanta's proposed Model Cities site would contain 3,035 acres. Situated on the south side of the city from West End through to Grant Park, the site was comprised of six neighborhoods: Summerhill, Mechanicsville, Adair Park, Peoplestown, Grant Park, and Pittsburg. The program would affect 48,000 Atlanta residents, 70% of whom were black, and 70% of whom lived in substandard housing. Forty percent of the families there had incomes of less than \$3,000 per year, and unemployment in the area ran as high as 15%, compared to 2% in the rest of Atlanta. In between the time it took for the city to file its Model Cities application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to win Model Cities designation, to receive its planning grant seed money, and finally to begin its first-year implementation,

several conflicts over housing and ongoing urban renewal threatened to impede the new federal program's progress.¹¹

In mid-March, Allen and Gladin presented Ed Baxter, regional director of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, with the Model Cities application, asking for half a million in planning funding. The mayor and city planner also handed in the city's application for \$2 million in urban renewal funding to build a neighborhood community center in the Nash-Washington project area, in Vine City. The center was to be built in conjunction with the new Central Junior High School and would house educational and recreation facilities as well provide office space for several social agencies.¹² Problems were already brewing, even as the applications were turned in.

That same evening, at the regular monthly meeting of the Atlanta Board of Education, members of the Vine City Citizens' Committee and Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference protested the site chosen for the Central Junior High and proposed Nash-Washington Neighborhood Community Center.¹³ Critics called for a return to the original 1964 plan, in which the new Central Junior High was located in the heart of the slum area. In 1966, against the wishes of Vine City residents, and without their consultation, School Superintendent John W. Letson recommended that the Board move the new school site to an "up-graded, stable [part of the] community. Reverend Amos Holmes of the Vine City Citizens' Committee argued that the new site would tear down the "best residential,

¹¹ Margaret Hurst, "City Applies for \$2.5 Million Model Neighborhood Fund," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 March 1967, p.13.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ While the Board of Education was not in charge of urban renewal per se, the city included the school site in the Nash-Washington project in order to maximize noncash credits and lower the city's costs of participating in the urban renewal program. Noncash credits were a way in which localities could use their expenditures on project area facilities for matching purposes to cover their one-third share of net renewal costs.

privately owned homes” in the neighborhood, while the dilapidated rental property was being conserved for the redevelopment by slumlords. Fellow member W.H. Borders warned the Board that locals were frustrated and desperate to be heard, that they would not stop at the Board, but that they would “investigate, expose, delay, and fight” for the school site they wanted. Jesse Hill, representing the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, renewed charges of racial discrimination against the Atlanta Board of Education, suggesting that the school site selection was just one of many slights the African American community had endured.¹⁴ The frustration that Vine City residents felt was reminiscent of the troubles that Bedford Pine project residents experienced two years earlier, when they fought and lost a local elementary school site for the new Atlanta Civic Center and Auditorium. The similarity between the two school construction site stories no doubt made Vine City residents skeptical that either the new Model Cities program or the continuation of urban renewal projects were becoming any more responsive to local needs and wishes.

The school site protest was but one reflection of the general tension that persisted between various African American neighborhood groups and City Hall after the 1966 summer riots. About a week after hot tempers flared at the Board of Education meeting, Summerhill residents expressed many of the same frustrations over racial discrimination before a Community Relations Commission (hereafter CRC) session in Summerhill. When CRC members asked residents of Summerhill and nearby Peoplestown to identify the neighborhood’s most pressing needs, one man replied, “We can’t say...We’ve gone without for so long.” Another resident likened the neglected state of her neighborhood to an unwanted stepchild, saying “Why can’t they just tell us we’re illegitimate and stop asking us

¹⁴ Foster Davis, “City Plans School 4 Blocks West of First Vine City Site,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 March 1967, p.3.

for taxes?”¹⁵ Residents questioned why bond money, approved for nearby undeveloped Stanton Park in 1963, had been used elsewhere. They spoke of unfinished streets with 50-foot drop-offs and street resurfacing that had been delayed for ten years. Residents seemed most apprehensive about the new Model Cities program, fearing that it, like stadium construction, would force more people to move away. The CRC, however, was relatively powerless to act on Summerhill’s complaints. The Commission, which Mayor Allen created by ordinance in the wake of the previous summer’s riots, sought to foster understanding and education among the city’s different economic, social, and racial groups. And while certain members, including CRC Executive Director Eliza Paschall, thought that the Commission should serve as chief advocate for the disadvantaged, pressing their needs through the right channels and working to change official policies in their interest, much of the Commission’s Executive Committee thought the group should primarily serve as a fact-finding agency. As a result, the organization could do little more than have the meeting published in the paper, and this certainly frustrated poor Summerhill residents even more.¹⁶

Hector Black, white director of the Vine City Council and two-year resident of Vine City echoed Summerhill sentiments at a symposium on the city.¹⁷ Referring to the implementation of urban renewal and anti-poverty measures in Atlanta, Black charged, “this city has been acting as though thousands of its citizens are not here.” He stressed that

¹⁵ Dick Hebert, “Summerhill Asks ‘When?’,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 March 1967, p.3.

¹⁶ Gary Chuse, “Relations Committee Ousts Eliza Paschall: Underhanded Move to Sustain Racism,” *The Great Speckled Bird* 1, no. 1 (15-28 March 1968): p.3.

¹⁷ Vine City Council became Vine City Foundation in the summer of 1967, about the same time black residents pushed the white Hector Black out of the neighborhood organization. Residents criticized Black for being able to obtain a federal grant, while local residents could not. See *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 March 1968. Also see, Kathryn Nasstrom, “Women and Community Organizing in Vine City in the 1960s,” *Atlanta History* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 28-45.

Atlanta's poor, frustrated and angry from dealing with those in power and with money, needed to have a say in what needs to be done."¹⁸

Throughout 1967 and 1968, there were countless other charges of racial discrimination concerning neighborhood improvement, anti-poverty funding, and public housing placement. But a key event sealed the split between white downtown business elites and the citywide black community and made it a near certainty that Model Cities would be unable to function. In the spring of 1967, the AHA awarded a white-owned developer the bid to build low-cost multi-family housing for predominantly poor African Americans, angering a coalition of city-wide black leaders, including members of CACUR and the Metropolitan Atlanta Summit Leadership Committee (MASLC), who wanted a black-owned competitor to win the contract. The Rockdale Urban Renewal Project, northwest of Georgia Tech, was one of the city's earliest designated urban renewal projects, but neither City Hall nor the Housing Authority could find an interested developer to build FHA 221 single family housing.¹⁹ After a decade without development, the AHA designated the 157 acres, which sat adjacent to the existing Perry Homes public housing project, for

¹⁸ Tom Sherwood, "Slum Fighter Calls for Envolvement [sic]: Says Poverty Progressing, People with Ideas Needed," *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 March 1967, p.16.

¹⁹ Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Development*, 63. The 221 program consisted of single-family housing without direct subsidy. Under this program, houses could be built in outlying areas on small lots and under relaxed FHA standards. Persons displaced by government action would be eligible for no-down-payment, long-term FHA mortgages. Inexpensive land and small monthly payments, it was hoped, would make home ownership feasible for many families of modest means. The annexation of 1952 provided undeveloped land in outlying areas of the city. Thus the program was feasible for Atlanta, and it was politically palatable to the urban renewal coalition. Real estate companies and developers could realize profits, conservative businessmen would be undisturbed ideologically, and the CAIA would receive an added dividend in that low-income families would be moved away from the business district.

221(d)3 multi-family housing.²⁰ About a week following the fight over site selection for Vine City's new school, Les Persells, assistant director of the Housing Authority, explained in a CACUR meeting that he had "four good proposals from responsible developers" to build 1,500 housing units for low income families. Housing Authority officials felt additional pressure because the call for bids came even as Department of Housing and Urban development officials issued a one-paragraph amendment to its low-rent housing manual, ordering local housing agencies to "disperse public housing around cities, rather than build it in areas where ghettos already exist..." which included areas like Rockdale.²¹ In late April, the Aldermanic Planning and Development Committee reviewed the four proposals and recommended the bid go to the David L. Rosen group of New York, but for undisclosed reasons, they did not make their decision known to the public for another two weeks.²²

The AHA met in mid-May and voted to award the construction bid to Rosen on the same day that aldermen on the city's Urban Renewal Policy Committee recommended the same. State Senator Leroy Johnson, Alderman Q. V. Williamson, and Reverend Sam Williams, all present at the Housing Authority's board meeting, argued that the contract award process was rife with "racial discrimination." First criticizing the Authority's sloppy apartment management, Williamson then accused the board of choosing the Rosen proposal because it came from a predominantly white firm. He questioned why the Rosen proposal, which had been set aside due to some "disabilities," was then chosen over the

²⁰ Urban Renewal Projects in Progress, December 1966, Rodney Cook Papers, Series II, Subseries B, Box 5, Folder 6, Richard Russell Library, UGA; Frank Wells, "Developers Estimate Housing in Rockdale at 1,500 Units," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 March 1967, p.9.

²¹ Robert B. Semple, "Dispersal Ordered in Public Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 March 1967, p.14.

²² Minutes, Planning and Development Committee, April 28, 1967, Rodney Cook Papers, Series II, Subseries B, Box 5, Folder 6, Richard Russell Library, UGA.

black-organized proposal from the Douglas Development Corporation and Arlen Properties Corporation. Senator Leroy Johnson fumed when he discovered that the Rosen proposal had already been submitted to the Federal Housing Administration, prior to both the AHA board and Urban Renewal Policy Committee votes. Upset that the earlier Planning and Development Committee's recommendation was "tantamount to a decision, but we were not told that a decision had been made," Johnson explained that one inside official had told him that the "Douglas-Arlen proposal didn't stand a chance because it was Negro and couldn't handle a project that large."²³ Alderman Rodney Cook and AHA Urban Renewal director Les Persells countered that the word "Negro" was never mentioned and race was not a factor, but Rev. Williams, representing the MASLC, said that "Negro—or nigra I sometimes hear—doesn't have to be mentioned. But race controls every decision."²⁴ Alderman Williamson vowed to ask the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to reject the city's workable program for Rockdale due to discrimination. While the discrimination charges were neither disproved nor settled following the AHA board meeting, the incident, coming on the heels of the city's Model Cities grant application, damaged relations between city-wide black community organizations and City Hall and the AHA. Indeed, some City Hall observers feared that the Rockdale housing bid ruined chances for black support of the Model Cities program.²⁵

Amidst charges of racial discrimination and mistrust of city government, City Hall officials and poor Atlanta residents alike struggled harder than ever while waiting for

²³ Alex Coffin, "Rockdale Project Pact Called Discrimination," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May 1967, p.18.

²⁴ Alex Coffin, "Race Bias Complaints Stir Rockdale Housing Storm," *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 May 1967, p.7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

notification of the coveted Model Cities designation. Starting in April 1967, CRC executive director Eliza Paschall sought to allay fears about Model Cities through a series of mass information meetings on Atlanta's south side. Residents were most concerned about housing. Homeowners worried in particular that they would have to spend money to bring their houses up to city code only to have them demolished once the Model Neighborhood Plan took effect.²⁶ At a meeting in Summerhill, Paschall found it hard to convince residents that they would be allowed to participate in the program planning, since the city had already sent off a "thick volume" to Washington.²⁷

Not to be outdone by the CRC, Mayor Allen announced that City Hall would conduct its own series of information meetings on Model Cities. Promoting his meetings through Economic Opportunity Atlanta, an umbrella anti-poverty organization, Allen sent J.H. Robinson, an African American mayoral aide, to explain the model neighborhood program to all interested south side Atlantans. At a meeting in Pittsburg, Robinson reiterated the promise of citizen participation, saying, "You will be heard and what you say considered."²⁸ While Robinson seemed to know the needs of the neighborhood well, the reassurances, coming from a mayor's aide, no doubt rang hollow.

The city waited, sometimes patiently, throughout the long, hot summer of 1967, for word from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development about Model Cities designation. Finally, in November 1967, Mayor Allen received the news: Atlanta would participate in the federal program. Unfortunately, federal budget cuts slashed the money available for planning grants, and an unprecedented number of cities applied for aid.

²⁶ Editorial, *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 April 1967.

²⁷ "Planners to Discuss Model Area Details," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 April 1967, p.31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Together, this meant that Atlanta would only receive \$152,000 in planning funds, one-third of what the city had anticipated. City departments and outside area agencies contributed funds and volunteered services, HUD awarded Atlanta separate grants for housing and economic development, and Atlanta city officials proceeded into 1968 as the planning year for Model Cities.²⁹

One of the first instances in which city officials could have foreseen governance problems with the new federal program occurred before HUD offices announced that Atlanta had won Model Cities designation. Dan Sweat and the city planning department had proposed that the Atlanta Model Cities program would be run by an Executive Board of seven, which would include the Mayor as chairman, two aldermen, the president of the Atlanta Board of Education, the Fulton County Commissioner, and a Governor's appointee. The original proposed Model Cities Executive Board (MCEB) gave Mayor Allen the power to appoint a single African American representative from the citywide black leadership, a representative who more than likely would not be a resident of the Model Cities area. Almost immediately, the city's black middle class called for more representation on the board. By September 1967, the Board of Aldermen passed a resolution for the Mayor to appoint two black representatives. Shortly after hearing that Atlanta would participate in Model Cities, however, prominent African American Atlantans pushed Allen to name as many blacks as possible to the board. A few weeks following the November announcement from HUD, local residents of the six Model Cities neighborhoods gathered for the inaugural Model Cities Mass Convention. The first meeting, more like another information session than anything else, produced a resolution for the Board of Aldermen, asking that the MCEB

²⁹ Raleigh Bryans, "Model City Site is Historical," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 19 November 1967, p.6A.

be expanded to include an elected representative from each of the six neighborhoods. While some aldermen grumbled that a board with more private citizens than officials would hamper the board's efficacy, the motion passed in mid-December.³⁰

Slowly, those in City Hall began to surmise that residents living within the Model Cities boundaries had heard the message about citizen participation in the new program. Model Cities residents exerted pressure on City Hall, wanting a say in the selection of an executive director for the new program. Since the MCEB would have the final decision in choosing an executive director, local residents reasoned, they convinced the city to put off the hiring decision until the six MC neighborhoods elected their representatives to the board. Their efforts to attain more racially balanced representation on the board helped Johnny C. Johnson, an African American city planner and real estate broker, secure the executive director position.³¹

Johnson took office in late January 1968 and hit the ground running. He quickly moved into the Cities Demonstration Agency, usually referred to in Atlanta as the Model Cities headquarters, which were temporarily housed in the Hoke Smith High School gymnasium, and he set about forming a staff. Johnson remarked that he was excited about what the program had to offer Atlanta, how it could provide "an attack on the urban slum

³⁰ Raleigh Bryans, "Aldermen Squabble over Seats on New Model Cities Board," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 November 1967, p.2A; Alex Coffin, "2 Negroes on Model City Panel," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 November 1967, p.7A; Lorraine M. Bennett, "Aldermen Elect 2 to Model City Body," *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 December 1967, p.5A; Alex Coffin, "City's Poor Demand Bigger Project Role," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 December 1967, p.3.

³¹ Don Winter, "Model City Asks 6 Seats on Council," *Atlanta Journal*, 11 December 1967, p.9A; Lorraine M. Bennett, "Participation Plan Ok'd In Model Cities Areas," *Atlanta Journal*, 15 December 1967, p.2A; David Nordan, "5 Added to Board on Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 December 1967, p.2A; Raleigh Bryans, "Model Cities Rule on Chief Delayed," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 January 1968, p.2A; Lorraine Bennett and Don Winter, "Model Cities Name Johnson Director," *Atlanta Journal*, 22 January 1968, p.6A.

problems and problems of the poor.” He explained how his office would serve as a clearing house “by which other agencies and programs designed to benefit slum residents can be coordinated into one major effort, which can then concentrate on getting at the root of these problems.”³² Johnson’s only problem, at first, was in putting together a staff with little available planning grant money. In February, as Mayor Allen signed the contract with HUD that officially qualified the city for planning funding, Johnson worried aloud that he was “having extreme difficulty staffing [the] program, due to the normal process of getting new positions created, and due to the temporary nature of the job,” adding that he could not hire the top qualified people he needed to complete the five-year plan before it was due back to HUD in mid-November.³³ The pressure, both to hire staff, and to complete plans, was immense. In a key bulletin that spring, regional HUD administrators had announced that cities could have more time to prepare their five-year plans, but Atlanta city officials, and particularly Mayor Allen, were dead set on submitting the nation’s first Model Cities plan, and continued planning at a breakneck pace.

Johnson settled on hiring a core staff of four, including a secretary, physical and social planning coordinators, and an economic development coordinator, and the city agreed to pay their salaries during the planning year. To save what little planning money was available, Johnson brought in on-loan specialists from the state, county, and city, including at least one employee from the AHA, the Atlanta Board of Education, the Georgia State Employment Services, the Fulton County Medical Society, the Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services, and the City of Atlanta Planning Department.

³² Junie Brown, “Model Cities to Give Tools Instead of Dole, Chief Says,” *Atlanta Journal*, 24 January 1968, p.20C.

³³ Lorraine M. Bennett, “Model Cities Pact Signed By Mayor,” *Atlanta Journal*, 20 February 1968, p.2A.

One consequence of “hiring” these borrowed employees, however, was that they prepared his/her own part of the plans in relative isolation, making the overall plan less orderly, sequential, and clear than anyone wanted. Even more significant was the fact that a tight submission deadline ruled out allowing residential input during the planning process. When the Model Cities staff delivered Part I of its five-year plan to HUD on July 31, it did so without offering any city agency or citizen group an opportunity to comment, much less sign off.³⁴

By September 1968, the new Model Cities staff busied themselves with the final draft, Parts II and III, of their five-year implementation plan for HUD, which was due in late November. Johnson reasoned that the major problem his staff confronted between winning program designation and beginning program implementation was “keeping up community interest and support [in the program] when nothing concrete could be offered or promised.”³⁵ Johnson used the local newspapers to broadcast goals of the program to the city at large, specifically on the south side. He emphasized that the program plans were flexible and could be changed during the five-year implementation. Housing was the most pressing need for residents within the Model Cities site, so Johnson explained that one of the staff’s first tasks was to establish a housing development center. He envisioned a center that would provide city code enforcement information, home improvement loan officers, and relocation assistance officials. Next, Johnson spoke of plans for an educational park on the present Hoke Smith Technical School site in Mechanicsville, which also incidentally housed the Model Cities headquarters. The \$21 million dollar high school and middle

³⁴ “Public Session to Outline Plans for Model City,” *Atlanta Journal*, 18 July 1968, p.8A.

³⁵ Alex Coffin, “Model Cities Program at Crossroads: Planners Awaiting Results,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 September 1968, p.6.

school campus was slated to include auditorium and gymnasium facilities for the entire neighborhood. Other, more preliminary plans for the six neighborhoods included experimental housing projects, expanded day care facilities, and improved public transportation. Model Cities social planning coordinator Jim Shimkus explained how, with training, local residents could visit their neighbors and teach them how to access various program services. The program's community affairs coordinator Xerona Clayton said that, beginning in October, the staff would begin discussing specific block by block plans for the Model Cities site, but she stressed that these plans would be made "with, rather than... for the residents."³⁶

That same fall, residents living within the 3,000 acre Model Cities site voiced all sorts of concerns with the new federal program. Joe Whitley, a white Grant Park resident and newly elected representative for the Model Cities Executive Board remarked that his neighborhood, initially excited for the program, had lost enthusiasm as time has passed. Fellow board member and black Summerhill resident Mattie Ansley said that her neighborhood needed the program explained in plain talk, without the bureaucratic language preferred by administrators. State Representative and Pittsburg resident John Hood, who was also a member of the Model Cities board, said that it was necessary to remind people that 1968 was only a planning year for the program.³⁷ Worried area residents had little choice but to wait for final HUD approval and program implementation funding. Residents attended quarterly Model Cities Mass Conventions, but other than electing the executive board members, the conventions had no real power; the convention

³⁶ Ibid; Xerona Clayton with Hal Gulliver, *I've Been Marching all the Time* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1991).

³⁷ Bob Hurt, "City Officials Happy Over Doubts, Spats," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 September 1968, p.6.

neither saw nor voted on the final draft of the city's five-year implementation plan.³⁸

Meanwhile, the program's fourteen-member executive board, comprised of eight private citizens and six public officials, including two aldermen and the mayor, reviewed various land use proposals for the six neighborhoods and approved the 1969 administrative budget for Model Cities. The program's physical planning coordinator James Wright told the board that approximately 1,000 housing units would be demolished during first year of clearance.³⁹

While in yet another holding pattern for final HUD approval in late 1968, a few incidents around the city cast a shadow on the promise of racial harmony and civic goodwill promised in Model Cities. City Hall ran out of funding for its summer recreation programs and its satellite City Halls in Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods.⁴⁰ Samuel A. Battle, who had found summer employment as a city services coordinator for the Perry Homes public housing project, regretted the city's decision, saying that the progress he made during the summer would dissipate over fall and winter. Battle remarked, "people out here are going to say, 'well, you don't care about us but five months of the year.'" Franklin Thomas, executive secretary of the Butler Street YMCA explained further how stopping these programs hurt black relations with City Hall, stating, "the gap still remains wide in terms of what is needed [here] and what the needs are."⁴¹ Poor Atlantans, desperate for city services and programs, increasingly sought out the help that Model Cities could deliver, even as they trusted the city government's ability to provide services less and less.

³⁸ "Model Cities Votes Nominating Report," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 October 1968, p.7.

³⁹ "Model Cities Budget Adopted," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 October 1968, p.13.

⁴⁰ Alex Coffin, "City's Summer Projects End," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 September 1968, p.6.

⁴¹ Raleigh Bryans and Harmon Perry, "Slums Stay Cool, Calm, and Converted," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 6 October 1968, p.1.

Also complicating Atlanta's delicate race relations in the fall of 1968 was the bond referendum to fund the proposed Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, locally known as MARTA. Members of the Model Cities Executive Board found themselves on opposing sides of the MARTA bond issue, which was scheduled for a vote in November. Dr. Otis W. Smith of the Metropolitan Atlanta Summit Leadership Congress (MASLC) charged that the proposed rapid transit "is basically designed for business and industry." MARTA did not have enough black representation on its board, its construction would demolish black neighborhoods, and its proposed routes would not adequately serve the city's black population, Smith argued.⁴² In particular, citywide black community organizations wanted MARTA to guarantee a northwest rail line to the Perry Homes as well as an east-west rail line through Model Cities. Rawson Haverty, furniture magnate and member of the Mayor's Interim Study Committee on Rapid Transit, met to negotiate with a south side neighborhood advisory council. When he attempted to explain that routes to Perry and Model Cities neighborhoods were not feasible, one woman in the audience exclaimed, "Why is it that if it costs a little more to help the Negro, you say it's not feasible?" Rev. Sam Williams, CRC chairman, sat in on the meeting and concluded, "It's just plain sinful not to serve the city's disadvantaged areas."⁴³ The CRC publicly opposed the MARTA bond issue, stating that the proposed system would not serve the city's poorest residents.⁴⁴ Five other citywide black civic and religious organizations, including the local NAACP chapter, MASLC, SCLC's Operation Breadbasket, the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Alliance, and the Lemuel Civic League all joined the CRC in their opposition, stating that they would support MARTA when

⁴² Dick Herbert, "Negroes Hit School and Transit Bonds: Metropolitan Summit Group Issues Stinging Declaration," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 October 1968, p.18.

⁴³ "Transit Ignores Them, Negroes Say," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 October 1968, p.31.

⁴⁴ "CRC Backs School Bonds, Declines Transit Support," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 October 1968, p.46.

it could provide better inner city service and when it could guarantee black employment on its construction.⁴⁵ The MARTA bond issue was defeated at the polls in November, due in no small part to a black bloc vote against it.

Model Cities executive director Johnny C. Johnson, chief city planner Collier Gladin, and their respective staffs had little time to speculate on whether the MARTA defeat would lessen white business support for, or poor blacks' faith in the new federally sponsored renewal program. Johnson, Gladin, and their staffs made final revisions on Parts II and III of the Model Cities implementation plan, which they submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in late November. Meanwhile, administrators at HUD's southeastern regional office criticized how the city of Atlanta was handling its existing code enforcement and housing relocation assistance. In a letter to Mayor Allen, Frederick Smith, assistant regional administrator for HUD, said that one study found some ten thousand additional substandard dwellings in Atlanta, and he urged the city to revise its housing code compliance to take additional deterioration into account. Smith reported that another study found many of Atlanta houses listed as "rehabilitated" were still not in compliance with the city code and stressed that the city needed "sufficient staff time...to properly enforce the building, plumbing, and electrical codes." Finally, Smith questioned the "completeness" of housing relocation figures, doubting that the 12,071 units demolished during the 1967-1968 year could have only displaced 264 families, as the Atlanta Housing Authority listed. Implicit in Smith's letter was the suggestion that failure to comply with HUD's recommendations could result in a delay or denial of funding from many federal programs, particularly the ongoing Urban Renewal program, but certainly the new Model

⁴⁵ "5 Negro Groups Join in Bond Fight," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1968, p.5.

Cities program as well.⁴⁶ The pressure was on the city's planning department as well as the Model Cities staff. Expectations for Model Cities were rising all around.

The anticipation for the first year of Model Cities funding escalated that same fall, just weeks after HUD's criticisms of city code enforcement came out. At a joint aldermanic meeting for both the Urban Renewal Policy Committee and the Planning and Development Committee, when aldermen designated two new neighborhoods for urban renewal planning, they also explained that existing project areas with Urban Renewal funding already committed would be converted to a faster, more streamlined form of rehabilitation and clearance process called the Neighborhood Development Program. Alderman chair Rodney Cook perhaps sensed the apprehension of many residents in the Model Cities area. The program had yet to begin, so many were unsure how a faster clearance process would affect them. Cook allowed time for the public to question Model Cities officials about their individual properties. The decision to speed up clearance upset Norris Curington, a Model Cities resident of Pittsburg, who pleaded with the aldermen that no land acquisition or clearance take place in his neighborhood until residents had a chance to rehabilitate housing on their own. "Give us a chance to rehabilitate it ourselves," Curington urged. "Give us a chance to show what black people can do."⁴⁷ Deacon Lewis Peters, chairman of the Model Cities Mass Convention, reassured Curington and others that they would not be cheated under the Model Cities program. Within a few days, both the MCEB and Board of Aldermen approved the final five-year implementation plans and submitted them to HUD for review.

⁴⁶ "U.S. Raps City on Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 October 1968, p.37.

⁴⁷ Alex Coffin, "Vine City, East Atlanta Chosen," 27 November 1968, *Atlanta Constitution*, p.10.

By mid-December, HUD officials on the regional and national level conducted four rushed reviews of Atlanta's final plans and announced their approval for Atlanta's first year implementation grant. In early January, word came through the offices of Senators Richard B. Russell and Herman E. Talmadge that Atlanta would receive \$15.7 million from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to be directed in part towards further urban renewal in the 3,000 acre Model Cities site. In addition to HUD funding, the Atlanta Model Cities program garnered federal grants amounting to \$1.2 million from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare for improving health conditions, social services and educational activities; \$3.3 million from the Department of Labor for a Concentrated Employment Program involving work training; and \$3.1 million from the Office of Economic Opportunity to continue anti-poverty programs within Model Cities boundaries. These rushed announcements reflected some political gamesmanship, as Johnson's outgoing administration wanted their party's imprimatur on the federal grants. Yet it was unclear how soon those federal funds would become available. Republican President-elect Richard Nixon wanted his advisors to review the program before dispensing funds, and left unclear when first year funding would be available. Rumors abounded that Nixon's economic counselor Arthur Burns was urging Nixon to abandon Model Cities, fearing it would cost over \$27 billion. Special presidential assistant and fellow economist Martin Anderson stated that while the program was not in danger of being scrapped, Nixon's advisors were questioning "how Model Cities would be operated, what kind of programs have been proposed, and what Model Cities was trying to do."⁴⁸ In separate reviews of the Model Cities program, Nixon's incoming Secretary of Housing and

⁴⁸ Ken Hartnett, "Model Cities Under Attack: \$27 Billion Projection for 5 years Splits Cabinet Level Nixon Aides," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, p.2A.

Urban Development George Romney proposed expanding the boundaries of the program to include entire cities, and he foresaw employing Model Cities as the federal government's chief delivery system for social services.⁴⁹ The added delay on the federal level could not have been a comfort to those who had rushed to submit plans early or to those residents ready to benefit from federal funding.

Mayor Allen, however, was one Atlantan who seemed to take the added delay in stride. While making closing comments on the year, Mayor Allen reflected positively, "the city's [making] efforts to operate in a new area—showing concern for the disadvantaged... changes like Model Cities are the result of the recognizing the Negro as a citizen of the city."⁵⁰ Allen's cool demeanor may have stemmed from the fact that he was not planning to run again for mayor. In February, Allen speculated on why it would be hard to pick a new mayor, remarking, "although problems are plentiful, [I'd] have a difficult time coming up with a concrete program that could be implanted [sic] in the next four years."⁵¹ It was an odd statement to make since his city planners had just finished preparing the five-year Model Cities plan. Unable to move forward immediately on Model Cities projects, Allen instead pushed aldermen to find more sites for low and moderate cost housing, and pledged renewed summer recreation programs in Atlanta slums.⁵²

While waiting for the first year of implementation funds, tensions arose in Atlanta's Model Cities program over the question of governance. Executive director Johnny Johnson,

⁴⁹ "Model Cities Update Urged: Vastly Expanded Program Is Advocated by Romney," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 6 April 1969, p.14A.

⁵⁰ Alex Coffin, "Cities Can Improve Without Aid," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1968, p.1.

⁵¹ Alex Coffin, "Problems Need Ideas, Guidance," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1969, p.42.

⁵² Alex Coffin, "Allen Prods Fulton on Public Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 January 1969, p.19; Alex Coffin, "More Slum Help Pledged By Allen," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 February 1969, p.2; Statement on Assessment of National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Ivan Allen papers, Box 6, Folder 9, Atlanta Public Library.

in a speech before the Resurgens Atlanta civic club in February, remarked that he saw “little willingness on the part of City Hall officials to share power with the residents in his program,” adding that “confrontation [was] possible.”⁵³ At a Model Cities Executive Board meeting that same month, members discussed whether they or the Board of Aldermen would have a final say on Model Cities activities. Board members amended an older ordinance that gave them powers over the planning phase of the program; the new ordinance gave the MCEB powers over the *implementation* phase of the program. Model Cities area residents felt that they had a greater voice with the executive board, but many in City Hall, uncertain of the final impact of the federal program, wanted to be able to keep a hand in the decision making process.⁵⁴

Unsure of when federal funds would become available as well as who ultimately governed the Model Cities program, executive director Johnny Johnson did what he could to get projects underway. By mid-March, the AHA, which handled urban renewal property acquisition for the city, had begun amassing land for some 400 housing units as well as sites for two new schools. Johnson predicted that housing construction would not begin until September and the first units would be complete by March 1970. The Atlanta Transit System waited on Model Cities money to buy buses for an intra-neighborhood route. The Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services were prepared to offer extended family counseling in the area, and the Senior Citizen’s Services of Metropolitan Atlanta was ready to establish day care centers in each of the Model Cities neighborhoods.

⁵³ “Problems Need Ideas, Guidance,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1969, p.42.

⁵⁴ Alex Coffin, “Model City Conflict Flares Openly,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 February 1969, p.3.

Johnson also had street and park improvement plans set to execute, and was prepared to double the size of his staff—all as soon as the federal money rolled in.⁵⁵

By April, Allen went on record as saying that while he anticipated that the Nixon administration would want to make changes in the Model Cities program, he was disappointed that the funds approved in January had not yet arrived. That same month, at a MCEB meeting, Allen ruffled feathers when he got authorization to create a committee that would review agencies under contract to provide some seventy-eight Model Cities programs. The mayor reassured board members that his request was a routine one, and that he only wished “to explore whether the agencies to whom (sic) the city had planned to contract out work had the capabilities expected of them.” But City Hall officials related that Allen was concerned about some of the agencies Johnson had recommended. The move smacked of a challenge to Johnny Johnson’s authority.⁵⁶

Johnson had little time to worry whether the mayor was undermining his authority. After over four months of review, the Nixon administration finally announced in early May that it would be dispersing first year implementation funds to Atlanta. At a press conference, HUD Secretary George Romney outlined some of the changes to the Model Cities program. The Nixon administration wanted to encourage more participation from private industry and wanted to issue program funding to states in block grants for dispersal rather than directly to cities. Taking a not so subtle dig at the citizen participation concept behind the federal program, Romney also reasserted that local officials were in

⁵⁵ Alex Coffin, “Troubled Model Cities Finally Moving Ahead,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 March 1969, p.22.

⁵⁶ “Committee to Review Model Cities Programs,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 April 1969, p.10; “Atlanta Plans to Reassess Model Cities,” *Atlanta Journal*, 16 April 1969, p.28D.

charge of Model Cities.⁵⁷ The following week, in another political power play, this time from the Republican camp, U.S. Representative Fletcher Thompson, from Georgia's 4th Congressional District, received word from Washington that Atlanta's long-awaited implementation funding was on its way, and Floyd Hyde, HUD administrator in charge of the Model Cities program, notified Mayor Allen of the same.⁵⁸ When the MCEB held its regularly scheduled monthly meeting on the second Tuesday in May, it was finally able to accept \$7.2 million in Model Cities grants. The board also reviewed a preliminary report on reducing housing costs. A timely report from the Eric Hill and Associates consulting firm focused on ways for the Model Cities program to reduce housing costs. In the report, consultants suggested that Model Cities staff "remove existing zoning and building code provisions...which arbitrarily raise costs and discourage innovation and new methods...set up housing assistance program...cut governmental red tape...[and] make use of labor from the Model Cities area with assistance from labor unions."⁵⁹ The report from Eric Hill Associates foreshadowed several of the problems that would soon trouble the Model Cities program in Atlanta.

Allen mugged for cameras alongside HUD regional administrator Ed Baxter in mid-May as he signed the contract that released Model Cities money to the city of Atlanta. The mayor, who jokingly referred to Baxter as his "favorite banker," beamed upon hearing that Atlanta was the first city in the nation to receive Model Cities funding.⁶⁰ Johnny Johnson, if

⁵⁷ "Nixon to Overhaul Model Cities Plans," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 April 1969, 2; Raleigh Bryans, "Officials in the Dark Over Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 29 April 1969, p.3C.

⁵⁸ Telex from HUD Secretary George Romney to Rep. Fletcher Thompson, May 9, 1969; Letter from Floyd Hyde to Mayor Allen, May 9, 1969, RG 57, Box 17 Folder 2, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland; Duane Riner, "Model Cities Funds on Way," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 May 1969, p.1.

⁵⁹ "Model Cities Board Accepts \$7.2 Million Grant," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 May 1969, p.31.

⁶⁰ Raleigh Bryans, "Allen, HUD sign for 'Cities' Money," *Atlanta Journal*, 20 May 1969, p.2A.

present at the contract-signing, was certainly not the one receiving the press' attention. Similarly, it was Allen who commanded the press the following week at Model Cities headquarters when he signed the first of many contracts covering work for the 3,000 acre site. The mayor's signature authorized the Atlanta Transit System to purchase four buses and begin its intra-neighborhood Model Cities route. After signing the buses into operation, Allen, with the Board of Aldermen, were taking one of the buses on a tour around the area. Johnson scheduled Allen's signing to coincide with a Model Cities press conference, but it seemed clear in both of these signings that Allen claimed responsibility for and authority over the fledgling program, and was equally eager to take credit for any of its early successes.⁶¹

Once the intra-neighborhood bus system was underway, Model Cities staff and executive board began work on bringing slightly more complicated programs into operation. Johnson's staff asked Model Cities residents at the quarterly mass convention meeting in June if they would be willing to combine a proposed job training program, tentatively named Stadium Heights, Inc., with an existing program running out of Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc., (EOA), the local anti-poverty agency. Johnson suggested that a combined job training program would receive twice as much federal funding. Worth noting in this instance is that Johnson, unlike Allen, was not yet able to sign a contract and quickly will a program into existence, but that he had to bring proposed changes before the residents for their approval or rejection. Johnson also had to contend with racial tensions between the white and black neighborhoods in Model Cities boundaries. Representatives

⁶¹ Raleigh Bryans, "Mayor to Join in Ceremony On Initial Model Cities Pact," *Atlanta Journal*, 28 May 1969, p.2A; Raleigh Bryans, "Buses for Model Cities Start Rolling Wednesday," *Atlanta Journal*, 30 May 1969, p.11A.

from the white neighborhoods of Grant Park and Adair Park bitterly resented any proposal that would require them to use EOA facilities, as the anti-poverty program was widely regarded throughout the city as a “blacks-only” program. When the motion passed, and Model Cities combined its job training program with the EOA, residents of both Grant and Adair Park protested the ‘stigma’ that an EOA center would bring to their neighborhood.⁶²

That same month, Johnson had difficulty settling a squabble over giving hiring preferences to Model Cities residents. O.D. Fulp, an official from the Georgia Department of Labor, as well as the program’s economic development coordinator, stated before MCEB members that Model Cities residents were not qualified for certain positions, and his remarks raised the ire of a couple of board members. Johnson asked that the board revise policy so that agencies contracting to do Model Cities projects in general give area residents a preference in hiring, rather than having to do so on a job-by-job basis. As chairman of the MCEB, however, it was Allen who made the motion that the board encourage, whenever possible, “the hiring of Model Cities residents,” adding “I recognize that you aren’t always going to find qualified people in the area, but I feel it is high time we take drastic action to emphasize that we want these people hired wherever possible.”⁶³ Once again, Allen asserted himself as the man in charge of Model Cities, and his actions in the first few months made it increasingly difficult for Johnson to carry out Model Cities programming without mayoral, or at least City Hall, engagement.

While the Model Cities executive director was experiencing his first power struggles with the mayor, Model Cities residents were grappling with the term “citizen participation.”

⁶² “Model Cities Training Plan Meeting Slated,” *Atlanta Journal*, 9 June 1969, p.3B; Raleigh Burns, “Grant Parkers Differ on Center: Unneeded, White Leader Says, Riles Negro Members of the Board,” *Atlanta Journal*, 1 July 1969, p.2A.

⁶³ Raleigh Burns, “Model Cities Firm on Local Hiring,” *Atlanta Journal*, 10 June 1969, p.8A.

While Johnson emphasized that “the program is more socially oriented than it is physically oriented,” Model Cities residents stubbornly remained more interested in housing than anything else. Many residents of the area first became involved in Model Cities out of the fear that it was another round of urban renewal and displacement. Johnson’s community affairs coordinator Xernona Clayton related how she and the staff were still in the process of explaining residents’ roles in the planning process, yet many Model Cities residents mistakenly believed that the program “[wasn’t] supposed to do anything they object to.”⁶⁴ Adding to residents’ confusion behind the citizen participation concept was the fear that City Hall could use Model Cities to condone racial discrimination. Late that summer, the MCEB voted against granting Model Cities funding to Mechanicsville resident Ed Moody for his neighborhood economic development corporation. Allen led the motion to deny funding, stating that Moody “was unqualified, based on his past record and his failure to follow through.”⁶⁵ Moody, who had already lost two other jobs with the city and had a police record as well, charged the mayor and the city with racism, arguing that Allen “was playing the old white man’s game of excluding Negroes from government largess.” On the defensive, Allen replied that he “wanted Negroes to share in the Model Cities program, but [he] wanted to be sure that those who do so can produce and acquit themselves well,” concluding that he “did not want to invite the criticism that will inevitably come if Negro contracts are performed badly.”⁶⁶ The MCEB struck a compromise—Allen agreed to support funding for Moody’s group once Moody agreed to step down as his group’s

⁶⁴ Margaret Shannon, “Model Cities: A Program to Rescue Perishing Areas,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution Magazine*, June 29, 1969, p.6.

⁶⁵ “Negro Leader Gets Censure; Pacts Delayed,” *Atlanta Journal*, 2 July 1969, p.10A.

⁶⁶ Raleigh Burns, “Mayor Thwarts a Contract and Faces ‘Racist’ Jibe,” *Atlanta Journal*, 7 August 1969, p.2A.

chairman. Moody, sitting in the back of the executive board meeting, remarked, “the city would have been embarrassed had they not taken favorable action on our behalf.” A spokesman for his group, Model Neighborhood Inc., said more positively, “Mayor Allen put himself back in the good graces of a large segment of the black community.”⁶⁷ But the experience exasperated Allen, who subsequently began distancing himself from Model Cities administration. Privately, the mayor was more candid and began referring to the Model Cities program as a “can of worms.”⁶⁸

Mayor Allen became less engaged in and committed to his Model Cities responsibilities in the closing months of 1969, but unfortunately for Johnny Johnson, Allen did not bestow any additional decision-making authority on the executive director. Johnson found himself caught in the middle of fights between Model Cities residents, the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA), a railroad company, local medical society, and the city building department, and in no case did Johnson possess the authority to settle the disputes. In late October, at a special MCEB meeting, the Model Cities housing committee argued with the AHA over the issue of temporary mobile housing. The housing authority proposed to use the temporary prefabricated units to replace housing lost by urban renewal. Residents from Summerhill, Pittsburg, and Mechanicsville complained that they had not been consulted about the replacement housing. Model Cities Mass Convention chairman Deacon Peters found the temporary units “completely unsuitable.” State Representative and Summerhill resident John Hood called on the AHA “to stop thinking traditionally and start thinking innovatively.” Residents threatened to seek an injunction. In response, the AHA

⁶⁷ Larry Woods, “Model Cities to Add 6 Negroes to MNI,” *Atlanta Journal*, p.2A.

⁶⁸ Allen and Hemphill, *A Mayor: Notes on the Sixties*, 91; Sam Hopkins, “Citizens Disappointed: Model Cities a Colossal Flop,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 27 September 1970, p.12C.

halted all urban renewal activity. In this instance, Johnson's only recourse was to ask the MCEB to recommend possible changes in temporary replacement housing that would be amenable to both Model Cities residents and housing authority officials.⁶⁹

The following month, the Southern Railways announced that it wished to expand its South Yard, a move that would displace between 100-150 families living in the Pittsburg and Peoplestown neighborhoods, within Model Cities boundaries. Johnson was concerned that the railroad would be displacing families at the same time that ongoing urban renewal activity was already creating a housing shortage. Yet Johnson did not have the authority to reject Southern's plans. The MCEB voted to ask the railway to delay its expansion program, but Southern possessed the power of eminent domain, which meant that it could acquire property it wanted through condemnation. By mid-December, when the railway agreed to negotiations, railway representatives sat down with the city attorney, and not with the Model Cities executive board.⁷⁰ Once again, Johnson, hamstrung to mediate, was at the mercy of city officials.

All involved with the Model Cities program waited anxiously to see how actively Atlanta's incoming mayor, Sam Massell, was going to participate. Not the candidate of the white downtown business elite, Massell won the election with a coalition of liberal whites, labor unions, and citywide African American support. The new mayor sought construction of a city coliseum as well as airport expansion, but it was unclear how committed he would be as the new chairman of the Model Cities executive board. Massell's introduction to the federal program came in March 1970, when the Atlanta Housing Authority argued once

⁶⁹ Bill Collins, "Renewal Session Heats Up As Friction Flares Again," *Atlanta Journal*, 31 October 1969, p.6A.

⁷⁰ "Railway, City to Talk Model City Plot Future," *Atlanta Journal*, 12 December 1969, p.12A.

again with aldermen and the city building department over permits for temporary Model Cities mobile housing, a continuation of the earlier squabble under Allen's administration. After negotiations in the fall, the housing authority made plans to order oversized mobile homes as requested. In December, when the larger units did not pass city building code, the Planning and Development Committee had drafted a resolution waiving code requirements, and forwarded it to the city building department for review. Bill Wofford, head of the building department, neglected to pass the resolution along to either the aldermanic building committee or full Board. Instead, Wofford pocketed the resolution until March, stating, "I didn't think it was necessary." Four months later, upon learning that the oversized mobile units could not be installed without a waiver, Wofford thrust the resolution into the hands of the aldermanic building committee chair, adding only, "I don't think the AHA knows too much about what they're getting down there."⁷¹ The Aldermanic Building Committee and Board of Aldermen scrambled to approve the resolution, and the AHA authorized the purchase of 200 temporary mobile units by the end of the month.

The delay in temporary housing no doubt frustrated Johnny Johnson, who had predicted the first permanent new Model Cities housing would be available by March 1970. These were the same temporary units that Model Cities residents protested nearly six months earlier; if urban renewal land acquisition and clearance had been ongoing, it is unclear how many families had already been displaced and had to move elsewhere because no temporary replacement housing was available in the neighborhoods. More striking here, however, was Sam Massell's absence. Massell made no comment on the delay in ordering temporary housing, and he put no pressure on the housing authority to refrain from

⁷¹ Michael Wright, "AHA needs Okay to Locate Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 March 1970, p.7A.

further land acquisition and clearance until replacement housing arrived. The new mayor's lack of action signaled to many on the Model Cities staff that Massell was uninterested in shepherding the program.

By May 1970, the year-old Model Cities program in Atlanta was beginning to look troubled. Residents in the mostly white Adair Park wanted to withdraw from the Model Cities program, charging that the housing rehabilitation standards in their neighborhood were more stringent than in the rest of the city. Calvin Craig, Adair Park representative and former Grand Dragon for the Ku Klux Klan, argued that many homeowners, unable to qualify for grants or low-interest loans, were forced to go into debt in order to make necessary repairs to their homes. The strict building codes were keeping many residents in Adair Park when they wished to move. Johnson, unable to determine if it was the Federal Housing Administration or the Atlanta Housing Authority that had imposed the tighter rehabilitation standards, felt the brunt of the Adair Park ire. Craig embarrassed Model Cities staff further when he invited a newspaper reporter to Adair Park for a housing tour. The reporter found several residents in the neighborhood who either did not know anything about the program, or else thought it had to do with public housing. One Adair Park woman, clearly confused about what Model Cities was, explained that she wanted to move because she "didn't believe in mixing with Negroes." Johnson, exasperated, suggested that Craig might not have put his Klan hood and bedsheet in mothballs.⁷²

Adair Park was not the only neighborhood registering dissatisfaction with the first year of Model Cities implementation. In Summerhill, neighborhood residents complained

⁷² "Model Cities Probe Eyed in Hassle," *Atlanta Journal*, 27 April 1970, p.12A; Alex Coffin, "Many Dissatisfied: Atlanta's Model Cities—Is it Serving the People?" *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 3 May 1970, p.1A; Hugh Nations, "Model Cities on Maddox Pick: Rescind or Give Up Power," *Atlanta Journal*, 29 May 1970, p. 5A.

that little had changed in their neighborhood since the 1966 summer riots, and as was the case in Adair Park, locals in Summerhill focused their complaints on housing. State Representative John Hood remarked, "They (Model Cities) have been here several years and yet there is no physical evidence of the program except the buildings that they are in." Hood, chairman of the Model Cities housing committee, stated that some form of housing was supposed to be implemented in 1969, but "there are no physical structures," and as for the 300 families that had been displaced to make way for new housing, "nothing has been done." Summerhill residents were increasingly frustrated to see vacant land with no housing construction underway. Clarence Ezzard, Sr., a state representative for the neighborhood, remarked, "the mood of the people is bad. There are no jobs and housing is getting worse."⁷³

The complaints stung Johnson, who, when asked if he was aware of the criticism coming from Model Cities neighborhoods, responded, "You damn right I am." The executive director understood that much of the criticism was directed towards him, and admitted that the housing program had been, as yet, a complete failure. Yet he reminded his critics that Model Cities itself was not in the housing business, saying, "we couldn't run a public housing project if we wanted to." Nor was he running a poverty program, Johnson added, but "rather...a program that addresses itself to the conditions of poverty." He reiterated that one of the key goals of Model Cities was to coordinate existing city and state programs to "adjust and relate to the problems...of depressed areas." Johnson explained that many of the disappointments in his program thus far were because agencies under contract with Model Cities had failed to follow through. For example, he berated the AHA for its inability

⁷³ Morris Shelton and Harmon Perry, "Disappointment Simmers at Slow Ghetto Change," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 21 June 1970, p.1A.

“to assemble one piece of land on which a public housing project could be built.” Because of the sagging national economy, he said, the housing program has had to contend with higher land and construction costs, as well as rising interest rates. In his defense, Johnson concluded, “if there is any area in which we have failed the community, it has been that we have not bitched enough about the things that the community needs,” a statement that revealed what little power he had to administer Model Cities. Indeed, Johnson could not penalize agencies or withhold funding any more than he could authorize spending or fire board members; instead, he could bitch. And thirteen months into the Model Cities program, Johnson started bitching.⁷⁴

In July, the national offices of the Department of Housing and Urban Development announced that Atlanta would receive an additional \$2 million to go towards urban renewal projects. Georgia Representative Fletcher Thompson sent Johnny Johnson a telegram informing him that the \$2 million surplus was for the Model Cities area, but in a similar telegram to Atlanta City Hall, Thompson’s office stated that the supplemental funds were for the Neighborhood Development Program (formerly known as Urban Renewal) projects throughout the city. Johnson, panicked that Model Cities could gain and lose the \$2 million so quickly, flew to Washington and made a plea for the funds. In a decision that could not have pleased Johnson, the regional HUD office in Atlanta decided that all of the supplement would go to the AHA, the office in charge of all urban renewal land acquisition

⁷⁴ Morris Shelton and Harmony Perry, “35 Agencies Complicate Job in Model City,” *Atlanta Journal*, 22 June 1970, p.1A.

and clearance, with a recommendation that the money be used in Model Cities “to the extent possible.”⁷⁵

Johnson and the year-old Model Cities program faced intensified criticism throughout the summer. At a Model Cities Executive Board meeting in June, Fulton County Commissioner Jim Aldredge remarked, “I feel Model Cities is making headway, but what I’ve seen appears to be more of a temporary nature.” Fellow board member and Governor Maddox-appointee Frank Blankenship said he didn’t “think that the city was getting its money’s worth out of Model Cities.”⁷⁶ Speaking before the Model Cities Mass Convention in July, Johnson reminded Model Cities residents of the seven neighborhood schools and three child-care centers that were operating, albeit out of the Atlanta School Board, but with Model Cities money. Johnson suffered further embarrassment when Alderman Joel Stokes, chairman of the aldermanic Finance Committee, attempted to create an Advisory Board of Program and Finances to oversee the Model Cities executive director. Stokes said, “I’m tired of hearing about [Model Cities] accomplishments....I want to see some.” Referring to a letter from HUD that identified shortcomings in the Model Cities program, Stokes suggested that the federal government would withdraw its funding from a failing program and leave the city in a financial lurch – thus the need for an oversight committee.⁷⁷ No sooner had Johnson made the case that the MCEB already served as an oversight committee, Adair Park residents petitioned to be dropped from the Model Cities program. Adair Parkers gathered nearly 500 signatures on a petition in support of removal from the program, and then voted similarly at a neighborhood meeting. They argued that the Atlanta Housing Authority

⁷⁵ “Urban Renewal Fund Hiked Here By \$2 Million,” *Atlanta Journal*, 13 July 1970, p.7B; Hugh Nations, “Model Cities Chief Here Finds \$2 Million Mixup,” *Atlanta Journal*, 15 July 1970, p.10A.

⁷⁶ Harmon Perry, “Model City Chiefs Seek More Action,” *Atlanta Journal*, 23 June 1970, p.7B.

⁷⁷ Jeff Tucker, “Model Cities Chief Defends Plan Here,” *Atlanta Journal*, 20 July 1970, p.4B.

had not lived up to promises that it made to residents of the area. In many cases, the AHA required property owners in Adair Park to repair homes in excess of the standards set by city building codes, which put many families into debt.⁷⁸

And so it was that, in late August of 1970, Mayor Sam Massell decided to intervene more publicly in the Model Cities machinations. Though no doubt concerned by the Adair Park removal petition as well as the debate about Alderman Stokes' proposed oversight committee, it was heightened racial tensions in Summerhill that moved Massell to action. Earlier that month, two white policemen investigating a robbery had killed a black teenager from the community. Massell, alarmed about the possibility of violence in Summerhill, enacted an emergency ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages in the neighborhood and adjacent areas. In a televised press conference, the mayor promised "residents of the troubled Summerhill area...that Model Cities funds [would] be better spent thereafter." The mayor guaranteed, among other things, immediate implementation of a 20-point program through Model Cities, with special attention to Summerhill.⁷⁹ Privately, Massell expressed great confidence in Model Cities director Johnny Johnson, but Massell's press conference remarks implied that Johnson was to blame for the lack of progress.⁸⁰ Several representatives from the Model Cities Mass Convention, including Mrs. Mattie Ansley Jackson of Summerhill and Deacon Lewis Peters of Mechanicsville were among those who prepared a response to Massell's televised address, which stated:

⁷⁸ "Model Cities Foes Get Thompson Aid," *Atlanta Journal*, 21 August 1970, p.2A; "Adair Park Votes Out of Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 23 August 1970, p.2A.

⁷⁹ Hugh Nations, "Help for Summerhill Pledged by Mayor," *Atlanta Journal*, 24 August 1970, p.1A; Mayor Sam Massell speech, 24 August 1970, Sam Massell Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, Atlanta History Center.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; Alex Coffin, "Plans Hinge on Land Swap," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 September 1970, p.12.

the failure of the AHA, the employment services, the Board of Education, the Parks and Recreation Department, and the Health and Welfare departments to do their jobs in this community, which they are by law established to do and for which they are receiving supplemental funds from the EOA and Model Cities, is the fault of the mayor and the board of aldermen of this city, not the administration of EOA and Model Cities.

Johnson, even if relieved to have public support from community representatives, admitted in a question and answer session following the press conference that the federal program was “behind in every area.”⁸¹

Weeks later, Atlanta’s Model Cities program faced more negative press when the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* followed up on events in Summerhill and the other five Model Cities neighborhoods and deemed the program a colossal flop. Dan Sweat, who had prepared the Model Cities application under Mayor Allen, and who was serving as chief administrative officer for Mayor Massell, argued to newspaper reporters that “the most condemning failure” of the local project has been the staff’s “inability to coordinate the agencies and activities” in the area. Sweat charged that City Hall had been incorrect to consider “Model Cities as a separate agency instead of an important arm of the government.” Similarly, Sweat reasoned, Model Cities staffers had not thought of themselves as members of city government, but instead saw themselves “as advocate planners for a designated area of the city.” Sweat then criticized the individual agencies under contract to provide Model Cities programs for accepting federal funding but resisting coordination and control. Even Allen himself did not escape criticism, as Sweat suggested that the former mayor was more interested in attaining “Model Cities” status than in taking responsibility for the program’s direction, noting in particular that Allen could have done more to encourage local business support. Finally, Sweat cited the difficulty implementing

⁸¹ Hugh Nations, “Help for Summerhill Pledged by Mayor,” *Atlanta Journal*, 24 August 1970, p.1A.

the citizen participation concept, which “involved neighborhood politics, power struggles, personal interests and all the other traits of human beings” as another reason for the lack of Model Cities progress.⁸²

However grim the newspaper account on Model Cities was, it deflected some of the criticism away from executive director Johnson. Moreover, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution's* findings revealed some persistent misunderstandings local Atlantans had about the federal program—misunderstandings which, once cleared up, could have done much to improve neighborhood morale and citizen participation. Rev. Austin Ford from the Emmaus House shelter in Mechanicsville, for example, was still under the impression that the main thrust of Model Cities was to provide housing. Criticism against Johnny Johnson abated later that week as the Nixon administration announced changes to the Model Cities program. George Romney, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, explained a few new approaches to the federal program, all of which would serve to reaffirm the power of local City Halls. HUD would select cities to experiment with these new approaches, and if it deemed them successful, HUD would extend Model Cities revisions to all participating cities.⁸³ Unfortunately for Atlanta, these proposed changes came at a very tense time.

Meanwhile Johnny Johnson scarcely gave city officials time to take in the Nixon Administration's revisions when he re-visited an ongoing debate over the city's temporary replacement housing trailers. In March, the AHA ordered some 200 temporary mobile home units to re-house residents displaced by Model Cities clearance, installing forty four

⁸² Sam Hopkins, “Model Cities Idea a Colossal Flop,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 27 September 1970, 12C.

⁸³ John Herbert, “Nixon Revamping Model Cities,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 September 1970, 4A.

when they arrived in June. The remainder sat idle on two vacant lots south of the city. At a press conference that his own staff had organized to combat the recent negative publicity, Johnson remarked that while “initially the idea of temporary housing was good,” the remaining trailers were not needed. The mobile units, which carried a price tag of \$1,938,066 for construction and installation, had not been ready in time to accommodate displaced Model Cities residents, said Johnson, who added that most of those displaced had already left the neighborhood. Johnson worried aloud that the temporary housing, which had been bought with Model Cities funding, would be used in other areas of the city instead.⁸⁴

The press conference embarrassed the Atlanta Housing Authority and city aldermen alike, prompting one disgruntled alderman to say, “If I had anything to do with it, those units would rot where they are.” Shamed into action, the aldermanic planning and development committee voted to install all remaining mobile units immediately, dividing the units between the Model Cities site and four other neighborhood redevelopment (urban renewal) projects. But their immediate installation precluded citizen input. AHA assistant executive director Jim Henley, who had referred to citizen approval measures as “cumbersome,” stated, “the quickest method to get the mobile homes installed was to bypass the Model Cities Executive Board and various citizens groups.” Henley suggested that all units could be in place within four months. With a cursory nod to resident involvement, the housing authority agreed to clear the proposed trailer locations with the Model Cities Mass Convention, with the convention’s housing committee, as well as with individual neighborhood advisory councils. In response, Johnson repeated his opposition,

⁸⁴ Hugh Nations, “Idle Trailers Not Needed Now, Model Cities Says,” *Atlanta Journal*, 1 October 1970, p.1A.

arguing that he would prefer to fund permanent housing construction rather than receive temporary housing that was no longer needed nor wanted. Instead, the Board of Aldermen ignored Johnson and approved the remaining mobile units for installation.⁸⁵

The board further raised Johnson's ire when it refused to vote on a proposal that required construction contractors working on Model Cities projects to train area residents. Alderman Charlie Leftwich charged that such a policy would double the cost of construction in Model Cities. Aldermen John Flanigen, who called the proposed employment policy guidelines "childish," added that it would cause further delay on Model Cities programs. Alderman Hugh Pierce, who also served on the Model Cities Executive Board, concurred that such a move would slow up construction in the federal program, but insisted that one of the aims of Model Cities was to upgrade the residents' job potential and supported any policy that would help employ and train Model Cities residents in housing development. Deadlocked, the Board of Aldermen sent the proposed policy back to the Model Cities executive board for revision.⁸⁶

In support of a City Hall more engaged with, and not pitted against Model Cities, regional HUD administrator Ed Baxter encouraged the Atlanta mayor and aldermen to play a larger role in Model Cities affairs, reporting that HUD officials had recently "uncovered some irregularities in connection with [Atlanta's] rehabilitation program." A HUD investigation examined the Atlanta Housing Authority in particular. Model Cities residents filed numerous complaints that AHA housing inspectors had ordered them to make repairs not required by city housing code. Baxter stressed that the HUD study should not be taken

⁸⁵ Hugh Nations, "Planning Unit OKs 129 Mobile Homes," *Atlanta Journal*, 3 October 1970, p.1A.

⁸⁶ Hugh Nations, "Training Issue Bumped Back to Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 October 1970, p.5A.

as a criticism of Johnson's leadership, noting that any program that contracts with at least 35 separate agencies would be difficult to manage.⁸⁷ Following disclosure of the HUD probe, the MCEB voted to launch its own investigation into the agencies under contract with the federal program. Opposing the measure, Frank Blankenship, Governor Maddox's board appointee, argued it was Johnny Johnson's job "to assess the effectiveness of the contracting agencies," and suggested that the director should be replaced if he could not perform his duties, stating, "Johnson should crack the whip over the AHA for not properly administering its neighborhood development project." Fellow board member, State Rep. John Hood, who proposed the MCEB investigation, was quick to divert criticism away from Model Cities staff. Hood advocated telling agencies not in compliance with Model Cities contracts, "Baby, you've failed miserably."⁸⁸ Noticeably absent once again at the MCEB meeting was the board chairman, Mayor Massell.

Events the following month forced Massell to intervene more regularly in the Model Cities program. Mrs. Ethel Matthews, chairwoman of the National Welfare Rights Organization, led a 26-hour sleep-in at the Model Cities offices to protest the lack of new permanent housing in the area. The mayor put an end to the sleep-in only after meeting with protesters. Massell agreed to sign a Model Cities press release that outlined steps to create 500 units of permanent housing within the year and supported the immediate installation of the remaining temporary replacement housing inside the Model Cities boundaries. Matthews told the mayor, "Housing, this is what it's all about. We didn't want to put all the pressure on (Johnson) and [we] felt that it was your duty to give us your

⁸⁷ "Irregularities Hit in Model Cities: HUD Hands Case Over to FBI, Urges Closer Watch by Officials," *Atlanta Journal*, 7 October 1970, p. 2A.

⁸⁸ Morris Shelton, "Model Cities to Probe Own Poverty Program," *Atlanta Journal*, 14 October 1970, p.10A.

commitment.” In reality, little was gained from Massell’s signature. The protesters’ demands ranged from the vague (“Model Cities should be made a program to help people instead of a program to clear land”) to the poorly written (“Instead of trying to persuade Model Cities residents to leave the community and move into public housing, residents should be persuaded to stay. It should be explained that if they leave this community they will sacrifice the services which the Model Cities program is suppose (sic) to provide.”). Participants in the sleep-in gave no indication that they understood how difficult it would be to implement, much less enforce their demands.⁸⁹

That same November, the Urban Observatory, a Georgia State University think tank, conducted a study on Atlanta’s Model Cities program. The think-tank found that Model Cities residents and staff alike remained confused about the concept of citizen participation. The study determined, however, that many of the federal program’s shortcomings in Atlanta were due to the difficulty in controlling and coordinating the varied public and private agencies under contract to provide services in the model neighborhood area. Earlier in the fall, Dan Sweat, the City Hall’s chief administrative officer, had drawn similar conclusions about problems with the Model Cities program. Yet as the Urban Observatory made its findings public, Sweat reasserted in an op-ed that misinterpretations of the citizen participation concept hindered what progress the federal program was trying to make in the city. Sweat threatened an uneasy peace between the

⁸⁹ Harmon Perry and Hugh Nations, “Massell Backs Housing Vow to Model Cities Protesters,” *Atlanta Journal*, 11 November 1970, p.7A; Ethel Matthews Papers, Box 4, Folder 2, MARBL, Robert Woodruff Library, Emory University.

sleep-in protesters and City Hall when he insisted, “the ultimate responsibility and authority for [Model Cities] decisions rested with the officials of local government.”⁹⁰

Following the Urban Observatory study, Model Cities’ Johnny Johnson found himself under increasing pressure to produce tangible results in the model neighborhood area or risk losing his post. And so it was with profound disappointment at the November MCEB meeting, that Johnson announced that the proposed site for the first major housing project in Model Cities contained a water table. Board member Frank Blankenship blasted the AHA for not doing the proper site screening and implicitly criticized Johnson for not controlling the AHA.⁹¹ The discovery would slow construction and possibly reduce the total number of housing units that could be built. One month later, Johnson learned that the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration no longer wished to fund the city of Atlanta’s four Model Cities buses. The news was a particular blow for Johnson because bus service had been one of the early visible successes of the program.⁹² Then, in early January, Massell expressed “absolute shock” to discover that nearly 150 temporary mobile housing units still sat idle on a lot south of the city, despite the fact that three months earlier Massell had ordered them to be installed within Model Cities. Massell’s deputy administrative officer George Berry, unable to determine who was at fault for not installing the trailers, concluded, “It’s like dancing in a room full of marshmallows.” Massell called a closed-door meeting that included mayoral staff, Johnny Johnson, the city building department head,

⁹⁰ Frank X. Steggert, “Urban Observatory Study Finds No ‘Best Answer’,” *Atlanta Journal*, 14 November 1970, p.2A; Dan E. Sweat, Jr. “Government Has Final Say,” *Atlanta Journal*, 14 November 1970, p.2A; Jack B. Schmitt, “Hear Voice of Public At All Decision Levels,” *Atlanta Journal*, 14 November 1970, p.2A.

⁹¹ “Water Discovery Perils Model Cities Project,” *Atlanta Journal*, 17 November 1970, p.9B.

⁹² “Model Cities Buses in Doubt After Jan. 1, Thompson says,” *Atlanta Journal*, 22 December 1970, p. 2A.

the city planning director, and AHA redevelopment director Les Persells, who eventually took the blame for the delay. An AHA official later questioned whether the mayor should have been shocked to learn of the idle trailers, stating that Massell had been receiving weekly reports from the AHA since November.⁹³ One City Hall staffer concluded, “nobody at City Hall was assigned to bird-dog the project.”⁹⁴ While Persells promised to have the first 16 units ready for occupancy within two weeks and the remainder available by April, what Massell, Persells and others continued to miss was that nearly two years had passed from the time temporary replacement housing was ordered.

Fresh from the trailer debacle, Johnson turned his attention to Adair Park residents who renewed their calls to be removed from Model Cities. Nearly ninety percent of the neighborhood’s 2,000 residents petitioned to be dropped from the federal program, and Adair Park homeowners complained that it was more difficult to secure home improvement loans while living within the federal program’s boundaries.⁹⁵ In January 1971, at Johnson’s recommendation, MCEB members asked the Board of Aldermen to remove Adair Park from Model Cities and seek out suitable replacement neighborhood(s). Several aldermen fought the recommendation, however, including the relatively new planning and development committee chair Wyche Fowler. Alderman Fowler asked for data that would explain what Model Cities had done for Adair Parkers, with the hopes that a public hearing could persuade residents to remain with the program. Aldermen Leftwich and Griggs were less optimistic about convincing Adair Park to stay, but opposed the

⁹³ Michael Wright, “AHA Mobile Homes Get First Tenants,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 January 1971, p.3A.

⁹⁴ Alex Coffin, “Trailers Still Vacant, Mayor is Shocked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 January 1971, p.1.

⁹⁵ MCEB minutes, 13 January 1971; “Adair Park Removed from Model Cities,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 January 1971, p.14A.

neighborhoods suggested to replace Adair Park.⁹⁶ A month later, members of the aldermanic planning and development committee devised a compromise: Adair Park would remain in the federal program, but in name only. In so doing, the city of Atlanta would fulfill the federal requirement that stated that Model Cities served 10% of the city's population, and Adair Parkers could discontinue any unpopular programs in the predominantly white area.⁹⁷ Aldermen reached the compromise at the same time that they passed an ordinance that redefined areas of responsibility for the MCEB to "reviewing the plans and progress of the program and recommending to the mayor and Board of Aldermen its views on proposed actions." Thus, even if Johnson, his staff, or his executive board were displeased with the Adair Park compromise, the aldermen had taken away their power to dispute it.⁹⁸

The general mood in Atlanta's Model Cities neighborhoods grew increasingly cynical in 1971. U.S. Senator Fred Harris (OK) and former New York City Mayor John Lindsay, co-chairmen of the National Urban Coalition's Commission on the Cities, toured Atlanta's Summerhill neighborhood as part of a mission to check "the status of the urban crisis...and find ways to dramatize it to the public." While touring a pool hall, Harris and Lindsay encountered one Summerhill youth who complained, "There's lots of promises when it's hot. But things are worse now. The programs are nothing but a joke—like you're doing now." Another chimed in, "when I say something, you say I'm a Black Panther. Hell, I'm just a man. You dig?"⁹⁹ The young African American men in Summerhill quickly equated the National Urban Coalition's fact-finding mission with their impressions of the ongoing

⁹⁶ Alex Coffin, "Adair Park Pullout Fought," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1971, p.9A.

⁹⁷ Board of Aldermen meeting minutes, 24 February 1971; Bill Seddon, "Adair In, Out of Program," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 February 1971, p.6B.

⁹⁸ "Board of Model Cities Bucks Area Redefining," *Atlanta Journal*, 9 February 1971, p.2C.

⁹⁹ Alex Coffin, "Harris Tours Slums in Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 February 1971, p.16A.

Model Cities, and were equally quick to point out condescension they had come to expect from federal urban “improvement” programs.

Johnson fielded a growing number of complaints from other Model Cities neighborhoods as well. Some residents of Grant Park protested the proposed location of a Model Cities-funded swimming pool and argued that Johnson had not given their organization, the Grant Park Model Neighborhood Advisory Council, “the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process”; the group threatened to seek an injunction.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, in early March the U.S. district court in Atlanta received a petition from nine Model Cities residents for their own federal court injunction—seeking, in their case, to stop condemnation proceedings against their properties. The suit, which listed the Atlanta Housing Authority, HUD Secretary George Romney, Model Cities director Johnny Johnson, Mayor Sam Massell, and the Atlanta Board of Aldermen as defendants, charged that the City of Atlanta had not provided relocation housing within the area for residents displaced by the urban renewal effort. The plaintiffs accused the AHA of not having a well-defined program of relocation allowances for displaced families and charged the housing authority of not providing adequate advisory services to families that had to move. The AHA’s actions ran counter to the agreement Johnson and Massell had signed with Model Cities’ residents that ended the sleep-in for housing protest the previous November and counter as well to HUD’s Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. Of the suit, Johnson remarked, “I certainly feel we should not displace people who have no place to go. We hope to arrive at a solution before any more families are displaced. My whole staff is working...towards devising a staging system for relocation of displaced

¹⁰⁰ Bill Seddon, “Swimming Pool Set for Park,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 March 1971, p.14A.

families.”¹⁰¹ Johnson seemed to sympathize with the suit plaintiffs, but it was becoming clear that he possessed little authority to force the AHA to comply with HUD regulations.

The aldermanic planning and development committee, unlike Johnson, however, could discipline an out-of-line AHA. At its March meeting, the committee rejected the AHA’s proposed work budget for the 1971-1972 fiscal year, complaining that the housing authority had not completed projects from the past two years. City aldermen ordered the housing authority to work on existing urban renewal projects and report back with its proposed budget in June. City Planning engineer Collier Gladin suggested that the AHA’s 1971-1972 work program consist almost exclusively of leftover projects. Pleading for budget approval, AHA director Les Persells explained that under President Nixon’s proposed revenue-sharing, HUD officials would soon be allocating funds to cities in block grants instead of earmarking funds for specific programs, such as Model Cities. Atlanta’s future share of federal funding was to be determined by averaging the city’s expenditures during the immediately previous years, Persells continued. The AHA needed funding approval, or the city of Atlanta risked losing over \$10 million in urban redevelopment funding. Johnson, desperate not to lose any federal funding, also recommended approval of the AHA budget, even though the housing authority had not yet been able to create any new permanent housing.¹⁰² In a follow-up meeting, aldermen on the planning and development committee relented; committee members unanimously agreed to allow the AHA to prepare a funding application for new urban renewal activities. Chair Wyche Fowler insisted, however, that his committee would not recommend full aldermanic support of the new

¹⁰¹ Charles Wheeler, “Model Cities Area People Sue for Sites,” *Atlanta Journal*, 12 March 1971, p.1B.

¹⁰² Planning and Development Committee meeting minutes, 24 March 1971; Hugh Nations, “City Housing Officials Told to Resubmit Work Plans,” *Atlanta Journal*, 24 March 1971, p.2D.

funding request until the housing authority demonstrated progress with its existing urban renewal projects, exclaiming, “We need housing, not promises!”¹⁰³

The aldermanic Ordinance and Legislation committee followed Fowler’s lead and took additional measures to support the beleaguered Model Cities program. Committee chair Wade Mitchell asked his fellow committee members to seek out new ways to meet the federal requirements on hiring preferences. A new HUD directive instructed cities participating in the federal program to attempt to recruit residents of the area for job vacancies whenever possible and ordered private firms under contract with Model Cities agencies to do the same. Johnny Johnson commented that while 60% of the 700 Model Cities-related jobs have gone to the area residents, only 20% of his office’s 54 employees hail from within the program’s boundaries. Carl Paul, the City of Atlanta’s acting personnel chief, balked at advertising jobs exclusively in the Model Cities area first. Paul also fought against having to place two Model Cities residents on a three-candidate job “register” and was reluctant to mandate on-the-job training for higher-skilled positions, complaining, “such steps could wreck civil service.” Mitchell, who had tried to reassure Paul that any unqualified hires would only reflect poorly on Johnson, eventually snapped, “Damn it, Carl, we’ve got to show preference.”¹⁰⁴ The Ordinance and Legislation committee drafted a job preference resolution for aldermanic approval. While the full Board of Aldermen understood that failure to comply with the HUD directive could threaten federal funding, some aldermen questioned the constitutionality of the order and fought to study the implications of the directive. During a heated debate, Aldermen Cecil Turner asked if the

¹⁰³ Planning and Development Committee meeting minutes, 31 March 1971; Hugh Nations, “City Again Cools New AHA Plans,” *Atlanta Journal*, 31 March 1971, p.3C.

¹⁰⁴ Ordinance and Legislation Committee meeting minutes, 9 April 1971; “Hiring to Help in Model Cities,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 April 1971, p.10A.

directive was not in fact “discrimination in reverse.” Vice Mayor Maynard Jackson, who served as president of the aldermanic board, forcefully shut down debate and postponed the vote until the following day, during which time, Jackson suggested, the city attorney could research the constitutionality of the HUD directive. Upon reconvening, Vice Mayor Jackson asserted, “all discrimination is not unconstitutional,” and the Board voted 10-1 to give “preference for jobs on federally-funded projects to residents of the project’s neighborhood.”¹⁰⁵ While aldermen were at odds over whether or not to allow job preferences, the aldermanic support did little to encourage, much less ensure, job creation within Model Cities.

That a vote for preferential job hiring did not guarantee job availability was a point not lost on Model Cities residents. That same week, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), up for a bond issue vote again in the fall, convened a public forum to acquaint Model Cities residents with improvements it had proposed since its failed 1968 bond referendum. Several leaders from Model Cities neighborhoods commandeered the forum, and pleas for improved public transportation quickly devolved into complaints with virtually every level of government. Summerhill representative Mrs. Mattie Ansley Jackson told MARTA officials, “I’m for rapid transit if it’s going to help us, but it seems like everything they say is going to help us doesn’t help us.” Joe Whitley, from Grant Park, asked “if MARTA planned to run trains into the area simply to serve the Atlanta Stadium and thus destroy homes and otherwise disrupt the community.” William Farrell of Summerhill, among others, used the public forum to vent his frustration over the lack of housing in

¹⁰⁵ “Model Cities Job Plan Approved,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 April 1971, p.6A; “Unit Approves Jobs In Model Cities,” *Atlanta Journal*, 16 April 1971, p. 4C; Maurice Fleiss, “Aldermen Ponder Model Cities Jobs,” *Atlanta Journal*, 20 April 1971, p.8A; Gregory Jaynes, “U.S. Projects to Hire Area Residents,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 April 1971, p.7B.

Model Cities. Farrell repeated the oft-heard complaint that the “improving” being done in the area amounted to “people removal,” stating, “in another few months, you won’t need any transit, rapid or slow.” Reminding the crowd that the mayor had reneged on his promise for new housing starts by January 1st, Farrell proposed another sleep-in. MARTA’s general manager Terrell Hill and community relations director Morris Dillard could do little but sit through the meeting that had run away from them.¹⁰⁶

Using the MARTA forum to talk about housing highlighted just how disconnected many residents living within Model Cities boundaries continued to be from the administration of the federal program. Even Mrs. Jackson, who sat on the Model Cities Executive Board, was unable to communicate to her neighbors that the MARTA officials had nothing to do with Model Cities. The same afternoon that Farrell threatened a new sleep-in, the *Atlanta Journal* revealed that “approximately 100 of the controversial mobile homes destined for Urban Renewal projects—primarily Model Cities—still sat idle on a vacant lot near the federal prison.” Mayor Massell, reassured that the units would be installed without further delay, seemed confident about the housing authority’s progress and called no press conferences on the subject.¹⁰⁷

Days later, Georgia Representative Fletcher Thompson was the first to publicly call for the program to end. “It’s been a mess from the word go,” said Thompson. “It has not been administered properly, and there’ve been too many tales of misuse of funds.” Thompson’s primary complaint was not with the lack of new permanent housing under Model Cities, however, but with the city of Atlanta’s “dishonest” refusal to let the Adair Park

¹⁰⁶ Raleigh Bryans, “Model Cities Area Tired of Inaction, MARTA Told,” *Atlanta Journal*, 23 April 1971, p.4A.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh Nations, *Deadline Passes on Trailer Shift*,” *Atlanta Journal*, 23 April 1971, p.2A.

neighborhood out of the program. After meeting with Adair Park representatives, including former Georgia Ku Klux Klan grand dragon Calvin Craig, Thompson decried a program that would “use [Adair Park’s] population to get money from the federal government without giving the people there any of the benefits.”¹⁰⁸ It is difficult to tell whether the residents of Adair Park had a genuine aversion to federal intrusion, or they simply did not want to be included in what many thought of as a black-oriented program. Either way, the conflict over Adair Park demonstrates a growing hostility among working class whites to a federal government that only seemed concerned with the problems of the black community.¹⁰⁹

With criticism mounting on all sides, Model Cities director Johnny Johnson welcomed some sorely needed good news the following month. At the May aldermanic planning and development committee meeting, the Model Cities’ planning development manager Cliff Hendrix announced “ground [would] be broken shortly” on the first permanent housing within the Model Cities area. Mt. Nebo Baptist Church in Peoplestown was sponsoring townhouse construction on a six-acre site in the neighborhood. The church, with FHA-insured loans, agreed to build the units and turn the keys over to the Atlanta Housing Authority to manage the properties. Hendrix also stated that plans and drawings for additional housing units were underway in various stages for the Mechanicsville, Summerhill, and Pittsburg neighborhoods.¹¹⁰ P & D chairman Fowler remarked that he would not press Model Cities staff for housing completion dates because “we’ve never met

¹⁰⁸ David Norman, “Model Cities End Gets Nod By Thompson: Program Here Not Administered Properly, He Says,” *Atlanta Journal*, 26 April 1971, p.2A.

¹⁰⁹ On the national backlash to liberal federal policy, see Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); on the South, see Numan V. Bartley, *The New South: 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁰ Maurice Fliess, “Work to Start Soon on Turnkey Units,” *Atlanta Journal*, p.4C.

a deadline yet anyway.”¹¹¹ On the heels of that news, Johnson learned that Atlanta’s Model Cities program could anticipate a \$1.3 million surplus for the year. Some of the agencies under contract with Model Cities had not used all of their appropriated funds, and HUD did not carry funds over into the next fiscal year. Johnson asked the MCEB to re-distribute additional funds for existing projects. The executive director happily reported that \$150,000 had already been allocated for a summer youth employment program, for the Model Cities bus service, and for a neighborhood medical center.¹¹²

But despite Johnson’s attempts to accentuate the positive in Model Cities, bad news seemed to overwhelm the good. In May, the full Board of Aldermen voted 9-to-5 to reject a rezoning request on a 2.3 acre site that would have permitted construction of a 16-story, 180-unit high-rise in Mechanicsville. Speaking for the majority, Alderman Charlie Leftwich reasoned, “high-density living would generate a great increase in crime,” an opinion that the Zoning committee shared. Alderman Ira Jackson, the lone black alderman to vote against the rezoning added, “people in Model Cities are diabolically opposed” to the proposed 90 units-per-acre density. Nonetheless, the Board’s decision ran counter to recommendations from the Planning and Development committee, the Atlanta-Fulton County Joint Planning Board, and the Model Cities housing committee. P & D chair Wyche Fowler, explaining his vote to approve rezoning for the high-rise, stating what residents displaced by slum clearance already knew well: “the housing needs in Atlanta are great now.” The debate revealed how some Model Cities residents had learned to specify the type of housing they sought, and channeled their grievances through Jackson, a sympathetic alderman. Moreover, while it seems clear that most aldermen were not voting on behalf of

¹¹¹ Alex Coffin, “Start Seen on Housing by November,” *Atlanta Constitution*, p.16B.

¹¹² Bill Seddon, “HUD Unit Rebudgets 1.3 Million,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May 1971, p.16B.

the Model Cities residents, they also seemed clearly divided about what constituted satisfactory housing.¹¹³

Despite some residents' increasingly sophisticated use of aldermanic lobbying to prevent high-density housing, there were still plenty of protesters who just added to the clamor of complaints, convincing more in City Hall that the Model Cities program was not worth dealing with. One such protestor was Lloyd Jackson, vice president of the Free For All Community Organization, Inc., a religious group loosely affiliated with three Atlanta area churches. In mid-May, Jackson called a press conference and summarized the shortcomings of the Model Cities program to date. Labeling the federal program "the poverty crap game," Jackson presented a list of unreasonable demands, including immediate housing and guaranteed jobs for Model Cities residents. Jackson wanted an all-black aldermanic committee, headed by Vice Mayor Maynard Jackson, to investigate the lack of progress in the federal program, and he called upon Massell and the Board of Aldermen to the fire Johnny Johnson.¹¹⁴

Perhaps to head off another sleep-in, at the end of May Massell scheduled a conference on housing on behalf of the Model Cities Executive Board, whom he described as "vitally interested" in resolving the problems that had prohibited the development of permanent housing units. Massell asked federal and local officials involved in Model Cities housing to attend and asked them to "outline the specific problems they are confronting."¹¹⁵ The scheduled conference did little to appease housing protestors, in part because the meeting nearly coincided with another troubling study on the federal program

¹¹³ Alex Coffin, "Start Seen on Housing by November," *Atlanta Constitution*, p.16B.

¹¹⁴ Alex Coffin, "Halt Studies; Build Houses, Model Cities Leaders Told," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 May 1971, p.12A.

¹¹⁵ "Mayor Calls Model Cities Conference," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 May 1971, p.12A.

in Atlanta. In his analysis on Model Cities, Emory sociology professor Alvin Boskoff found “considerable confusion, lack of decisiveness, the dominance of modest levels of motivation and of middling competence” abounded in a “largely inadequate [program] administration.” While the Emory study criticized participating agencies for not cooperating and City Hall officials for not supporting Johnny Johnson and his staff, the study placed most of the blame for the failing federal program squarely on the shoulders of the Model Cities staff.¹¹⁶

Atlanta *Constitution* reporter Duane Riner followed up on the Emory study findings in a week-long series entitled, “Model Cities: Is Anybody Home?” Riner enumerated the same program failures and shortcomings, but seemed more sympathetic towards Johnson. An unnamed official from the Department of Housing and Urban Development described Johnson as having nothing but a “well of goodwill” with which to coordinate the nearly 30 public and private agencies under contract to provide housing, educational opportunities, transportation, jobs training—the whole bag of services. Massell asserted that he and the Board of Aldermen were taking greater control of Model Cities because “it wasn’t fair for Model Cities residents to be saddled with the failures,” yet Massell never acknowledged that his lack of involvement in the program up to 1971 might have contributed to its failure. Similarly, some aldermen continued to profess ignorance that they had any responsibilities in administering Model Cities. “Hell, you’ve (aldermen) got all the authority,” Sweat remarked. Opening the housing conference, Johnson attempted to stress the fragile state of affairs in Model Cities neighborhoods, stating, “housing is the most important decision this city has to make, because the failure to deliver on that promise is

¹¹⁶ “Abolish Model Cities?” *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 June 1971, p.4A; “Model Cities, A Study on Housing,” Alvin Boskoff Papers, Robert Woodruff Library, Emory University.

going to bust this community wide open. The only thing keeping the temperament of the community down is that promise, and once that hope disappears, this city's got a real problem on its hands and it's going to know about it." Johnson concluded, "unless some housing gets off the ground soon, somebody's head is going to roll and it may be mine."¹¹⁷

Accusations flew at Massell's conference on housing. MCEB vice chairman Clarence Coleman blasted regional HUD officials for not showing up. Former MCEB member Frank Blankenship charged that the AHA had displaced far more families than it claimed, and suggested that the temporary mobile homes would remain until they were in worse shape than the permanent housing they replaced. Johnson stressed that total community support was needed to make the Model Cities housing program successful, but the prospects of such support looked increasingly unlikely. Johnson projected that 527 units of housing could be ready for occupancy by January 1973, a far cry from his initial goal to build 700 new and 500 rehabilitated homes each year.¹¹⁸ Newspaper sympathy for the struggling program director proved fickle, however, and soon thereafter, an *Atlanta Constitution* editorial compared Johnson's program to a poorly administered Boy Scout troop.¹¹⁹ But almost every other Model Cities program in the country was having the same housing problem. Johnson traveled to Washington to speak at the third National Model Cities directors' meeting and explained that his agency and others like it around the country [were] about to lose their credibility."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Duane Riner, "\$14 Million Spent; No New Houses Yet," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 30 May 1971, p.2A; Duane Riner, "Question is Who's In Charge Here?" *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 June 1971, p.1A.

¹¹⁸ Alex Coffin, "527 Units: Model Cities? Not Until '73," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 June 1971, p.1A.

¹¹⁹ "Model Cities (Again)," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 June 1971, p.4A.

¹²⁰ Don Winter, "Credibility Feared Model Cities Loss," *Atlanta Journal*, 3 June 1971, p.2A.

Following the mayor's housing conference, the AHA, duly reprimanded for its inability to build a single Model Cities house, immediately signed a contract to have seven miles of sidewalks repaved within the federal program's boundaries. The move puzzled Jack Jackson, chief engineer with the sidewalk division of the city's street department. Jackson estimated that "some 20% of the [sidewalks] to be torn up are in 'good' condition and don't need to be replaced." The civil engineer added that the housing authority did not take bids for the project and would subsequently have to pay approximately \$32,000 more than the city usually pays for comparable work. In spite of the sidewalks, the Board of Aldermen reluctantly agreed to submit the AHA's budget application to HUD for the 1971-1972 fiscal year, but not before demanding that the housing authority finish leftover projects from the two previous years first. If the AHA did not comply, P & D chair Wyche Fowler threatened to have federal funding cut off. Responding to the threat to cut off funding, Alderman George Cotsakis stated, "such an action would be the best damn thing that's ever happened. It'd get those guys [at AHA] off their cans."¹²¹ The housing authority responded to its critics at its board of directors meeting through its chairman, Ed Sterne. While offering no excuses for the AHA, Sterne suggested that the citizen participation mandate proved "most difficult and time-consuming" and caused significant slow-downs. Sterne acknowledged that the AHA was the agency responsible for land acquisition, clearance, and the development of low-cost housing, but suggested that the housing authority played only a minor, albeit highly visible role in Model Cities. Sterne re-raised the concern: Model Cities residents had been misled to believe that the federal program was

¹²¹ Sam Hopkins, "Model Cities Starts Sidewalk Job," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 June 1971, p.2A; Alex Coffin, "City Warns Housing Agency," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 June 1971, p.2A; Board of Aldermen meeting minutes, 7 June 1971; Raleigh Bryans, "Housing Body Takes Blame But Spurns Harsh Criticism," *Atlanta Journal*, 16 June 1971, p.16D.

primarily about physical redevelopment. Davey Gibson, Model Cities' relatively new deputy director, declared that the Model Cities program had made "substantial progress in social fields, but he admitted [that] it had proved difficult to identify these programs in peoples' minds."¹²²

What's striking about AHA chairman Ed Sterne's remarks is that he identified a key flaw in the Model Cities program. On the federal level, Model Cities purported to be an anti-poverty program that would improve deteriorated urban areas through the physical redevelopment of downtown city neighborhoods as well as through the implementation of social programs. On the local level, however, Model Cities administrators in designated cities found that they had considerable autonomy to decide the extent to which the program would address physical redevelopment or the implementation of social services. In the case of Atlanta, elected city officials involved in Model Cities governance chose to steer Model Cities away from re-building housing they feared that opposition to housing would prevent their re-election and/or re-appointment. Instead of attempting to devote equal time and funding to housing within Model Cities boundaries, Massell, city aldermen, and the Model Cities Executive Board hurried to make a concerted, coordinated effort to redefine the two-year old federal program to the public. Yet neither the latest newspaper expose on Model Cities nor Massell's housing conference brought about a greater spirit of cooperation regarding the federal program. Instead, officials from inside City Hall seemed all the more hell-bent against allowing Johnny Johnson the authority to enforce Model Cities contracts. City aldermen were back at Johnson's throat less than a month after

¹²² Raleigh Bryans, "Housing Body Takes Blame But Spurns Harsh Criticism," *Atlanta Journal*, 16 June 1971, p. 16D; Diane Stepp, "Model Cities Delays Laid to 'People-Decision' Problems," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 June 1971, p. 11A.

Massell's conference on housing, having learned they would have to pay an additional \$50,000 to build a Model Cities neighborhood center. Aldermen on the city's Purchasing Committee had received bids for a proposed Model Cities multipurpose facility back in April, but had rejected them upon recommendation of both Johnny Johnson and Dan Sweat. Johnson thought that the U.I.C. Construction Company Inc., a predominantly black construction firm, could build the center at a considerably lower cost if given the chance to submit a bid. So the aldermen re-advertised the project. Much to their chagrin, when the city purchasing agent collected new construction bids in July, not only had the U.I.C. Construction Company not submitted an offer, but the lone new bidder, Bankhead West Contractors, projected construction costs \$48,071 higher than the April bids. Johnson, unable to explain why U.I.C. had not prepared a bid, only remarked that Model Cities could juggle its supplemental and surplus funds to cover the cost overruns. The rebidding results were particularly disappointing because the city had already delayed groundbreaking by several months, and the Finance Committee and MCEB needed to study the Bankhead West bid before taking any action on it. The newly named Dunbar Neighborhood Center, designed to serve Mechanicsville, Adair Park, and Pittsburg, would not be completed for at least two years, far short of its projected March 1972 opening.¹²³

The cost overruns on the Dunbar Center bids made Atlanta aldermen less confident in supporting Johnny Johnson at the very moment he needed to prove he was an indispensable component of the federal program. At the July MCEB meeting, Johnson announced that his staff would be establishing its own housing development corporation to develop new public and reduced-rent housing. Johnson reasoned that a housing arm

¹²³ Maurice Fliess, "Cost-Cutting Plan Backfires on City," *Atlanta Journal*, 13 July 1971, p.2A; Bill Seddon, "Dunbar Center Costs Leap," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 July 1971, p.8A.

running out of his office would be easier to control than the AHA.¹²⁴ Johnson's announcement came one day after AHA officials admitted that nearly half of their temporary trailer replacement housing still remained vacant, and over a dozen units were not ready for occupancy, an admission that might have won Johnson some sympathy.¹²⁵ Those hoping to stimulate new Model Cities housing development in 1972 received grim news from the Planning and Development committee. Chairman Wyche Fowler explained that the federal government was cutting the total funding available for Model Cities. Of particular concern was the projected drop in urban renewal funding from \$4.7 to \$3 million, which would directly affect future Model Cities housing development.¹²⁶ Perhaps in anticipation of those cuts, the Model Cities staff staged a public ground breaking ceremony in August for the area's first permanent housing, a 35-unit apartment complex in Peoplestown, sponsored by Mt. Nebo Baptist Church. Vice Mayor Maynard Jackson, present at the groundbreaking, praised Johnson "for having stood up under fire in doing a job nobody else could have done."¹²⁷

Not many officials in City Hall shared Jackson's sentiments for the Model Cities director. The Finance Committee picked over the proposed 1972 Model Cities budget and questioned whether or not to fund the newly organized housing development corporation as well as a proposed small business league. Meanwhile, the Planning and Development Committee grilled Johnson about money he wanted to acquire land for a business park.

¹²⁴ "Model Cities Plans Own Housing Unit," *Atlanta Journal*, 22 July 1971, p. 19A.

¹²⁵ Alex Coffin, "Half of Mobile Units Vacant In Model Cities Housing Area," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 July 1971, p.6A.

¹²⁶ "Model Cities Housing Fund to Dip in '72," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 July 1971, p.14B.

¹²⁷ "Model Cities Starting Rites Due Sunday," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 August 1971, p.21; Bill Seddon, "Model Cities New Housing Construction to Start Sunday," *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 August 1971, p.10A; "Model Cities Housing," *Atlanta Journal*, 23 August 1971, p.12A; "Model Cities," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 August 1971, p.4A.

Chairman Fowler added that he needed to know how successful job training programs had been before he would agree to continue funding them. It was ironic that the aldermen proved far more attentive to reining in the Model Cities budget than to administering the program itself.¹²⁸ While aldermen stewed over various budget items, the city's chief administrative officer Dan Sweat argued with Johnny Johnson over the stalled Dunbar Neighborhood Center. Furious that Johnson had not solicited bidders the second time City Hall advertised the project, Sweat charged, "this entire situation has been unfortunate, embarrassing, and invites further criticism of the Model Cities Program—criticism that we certainly don't need." Ignoring Johnson's suggestion to have the mayor negotiate a contract, Sweat recommended that the Model Cities staff re-evaluate the "need, design, and size" of the proposed facility and put the project up for a third round of bids.¹²⁹ At a meeting between City Hall and Model Cities staffs the following week, Johnson reported that he had received a commitment from the city, and "the building is going to be built." As part of a compromise between Model Cities and City Hall staffs, however, an architectural firm was drawing plans for a scaled-down facility that would keep construction costs down. Once new plans were complete, deputy chief administrative office George Berry said the project would be re-opened for bids.¹³⁰

Mayor Sam Massell, who refrained from commenting publicly on the Dunbar Center, angered Johnson when he vetoed the Model Cities 1972 budget. Massell's veto came at the

¹²⁸ Maurice Fliess, "Finance Aldermen Question \$500,000 for Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 25 August 1971, p.2A; Hugh Nations, "Model Cities Chief Grilled on '72 Plans," *Atlanta Journal*, 1 September 1971, p.7A.

¹²⁹ Maurice Fliess, "Bickering Bogs Down Model Cities Center," *Atlanta Journal*, 14 September 1971, p.2A.

¹³⁰ "Top Officials to Meet On Model City Center," *Atlanta Journal*, 16 September 1971, p.4B; Raleigh Bryans, "Size-Cut Asked on Dunbar Center," *Atlanta Journal*, 12 October 1971, p.8C.

behest of Finance Committee chair Wade Mitchell, who questioned Model Cities' plans for a business park. City Planning Engineer Collier Gladin and Parks Manager Jack Delius scrapped plans for Johnson's proposed business park altogether, stating that they would support funding for recreational parks only. Making an emotional plea before the entire Planning and Development Committee, Johnson explained that the park was a sorely needed incentive for economic development, a point that even Gladin conceded, adding, "just designate an area for 'urban renewal' or 'Model Cities' and developers stay out." Nonetheless, when the Board of Aldermen reconvened in mid-October, it approved a 1972 Model Cities budget that allocated \$808,000 in federal and city park funds to go towards five recreational parks.¹³¹

Johnson was vetoed again in November, when the Model Cities executive board attempted to allocate its leftover 1971 funds towards its new housing development corporation. The aldermanic Finance Committee rejected the MCEB allocations and decided instead to funnel leftover funds into a street-widening project. Johnson argued in vain against the street improvements, which he said would displace more Model Cities residents.¹³² Outside City Hall, an angry throng of Model Cities residents protested the street-widening, and its spokesman, Model Cities board member and State Rep. John Hood, exclaimed, "we don't need asphalt, we need housing!" When pressed, the Finance Committee contradicted its own meeting transcripts and denied that it had reached any

¹³¹ "Massell Vetoes Model Cities Budget for 1971 (sic)," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 October 1971, p.10A; "Park Bid Downed for Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 13 October 1971, p.4B; "Fund Allotment for Model Cities Continues to Be City Hall Headache," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 October 1971, p.1C; "Model Cities Fund, Work Plan Okayed," *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 October 1971, p.3A.

¹³² "Model Cities Plans \$1,350,000 Spending," *Atlanta Journal*, 9 November 1971, p.2D; "Model Cities Allocates \$1.3 Million for Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 November 1971, p.2A; Hugh Nations, "Atlanta Panel Vetoes Model Cities Plan," *Atlanta Journal*, 18 November 1971, p.7B; Alex Coffin, "Street Project to Get \$1.3 Million Surplus," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 November 1971, p.21B.

decision on the Model Cities surplus. Adding to the drama, the Planning and Development Committee, upon re-evaluating the Model Cities anticipated surplus, reversed the Finance Committee's recommendation and recommended Model Cities use their leftover funding for its own housing development corporation.¹³³ The aldermanic decisions as to how allocate surplus Model Cities funding signaled that City Hall was exercising more responsibility for the troubled federal program, but what was increasingly missing from the aldermanic "taking-the-reins" attitude was support for and commitment to the core concepts of the Model Cities program, particularly that of citizen participation. By the close of 1971, city aldermen were becoming accustomed to treating Model Cities issues with impatience and condescension, unsure of and uncommitted to the program's survival, much less success. In December, Johnson delivered a glowing report on Model Cities year-end achievements and suggested that his program had only slightly missed his projection to have 500 new housing units under construction by the year's end. Alderman Hugh Pierce attacked Johnson, exclaiming, "Anyway you cut it, only 35 units are under construction. So far we really haven't done anything."¹³⁴

The relationship between the Model Cities and City Hall staffs was tenuous at best as 1972 began. Within a year, Atlanta's Model Cities program would be nearly defunct. In mid-January, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce volunteered to spearhead a drive to solve the lingering housing problems in the Model Cities area. Mayor Massell encouraged the Chamber to reactivate its Greater Atlanta Housing Development Corporation after Johnny

¹³³ Alex Coffin, "Aldermen Aim Funds At Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 November 1971, p.9A.

¹³⁴ Alex Coffin, "Model City Speedup Promised," *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 December 1971, p.8A; Sam Hopkins, "Model Cities Report on '71 is Attacked," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1971, p.3A; Hugh Nations, "Model Cities Report Called Too Rosy by Board Critics," *Atlanta Journal*, 15 December 1971, p.2A.

Johnson admitted to the aldermanic Finance Committee that his staff had “no plans on what types of housing should be built where.”¹³⁵ Weeks later, the Finance Committee tentatively approved an \$800,000 contract for the Chamber’s housing development corporation, a move which infuriated Johnson, since the same committee had recently denied funding for a Model Cities-run housing development corporation. When the Finance Committee, heeding planning engineer Collier Gladin’s advice, also delayed a vote to fund a Model Cities housing needs study, Johnson stormed out of the room in anger, exclaiming, “Damn it, if it (the city planning department) was so smart, we wouldn’t be in this mess to start with.”¹³⁶ Alderman Hugh Pierce defended the aldermanic committee’s delay of vote, stating that the \$775,000 in studies already funded for Model Cities “haven’t produced anything,” adding, “we’ve studied and consulted and folks are still living in broken-down houses with no hope for anything better at the moment.”¹³⁷

The aldermanic Finance Committee was not the only group scrutinizing Atlanta’s Model Cities program more critically. That same month, a special Congressional investigatory panel toured Atlanta’s six Model Cities neighborhoods in an attempt to discover how effective federal funding had been in creating new, permanent, low-cost housing. The panel, which included two representatives from Georgia, came away troubled over the lack of new permanent housing construction underway and the amount of money

¹³⁵ Cecil Alexander and his Housing Resources Committee established the GAHDC in the wake of the 1966 Summerhill Riots and was credited with getting some of the Model Cities housing projects underway. Alex Coffin, “Model Cities Role Suggested By Chamber,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1972, p.14A; Finance Committee meeting minutes, 14 January 1972.

¹³⁶ Finance Committee meeting minutes, 4 January 1972; Alex Coffin, “Model Cities Contract Is Tentatively Okayed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 February 1972, p.7B.

¹³⁷ Alex Coffin, “Model Cities Seeks \$50,000 Evaluation Study,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 February 1972, p.2A; Alex Coffin, “Model Cities Studies a Costly Failure—Pierce,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1972, p.20A.

spent on consulting fees. Weeks after the tour, panel member and Georgia Rep. Ben Blackburn struck another blow when he announced results of a HUD audit on Atlanta's Model Cities program. HUD investigators found that the Model Cities program had followed improper bookkeeping procedures and kept inadequate financial records.¹³⁸ Adding to the general din of criticism surrounding the federal program was E. Lamar Seals, the Atlanta-area director for HUD. Seals complained that planners of Atlanta's Model Cities housing had repeatedly proposed apartment projects that failed to meet government requirements and were too expensive for poor people to rent, and he blamed housing delays on uncooperative architects and consultants. "We have bent over backwards to get Model Cities housing off the ground...[but] we have a responsibility to make a viable, feasible project." Seals' criticism took some of the direct heat off of Johnny Johnson but implied, once more, that Johnson had not been able to control the agencies under contract with his office.¹³⁹

By May, forced to respond to a growing number of critics and unable to demonstrate the efficacy of the federal program, Johnson surely sensed that his days as Model Cities executive director were numbered. Desperate, the Model Cities Executive Board approved a highly-publicized ribbon-cutting ceremony for the nearly completed 35-unit Azalea Gardens apartment complex in Peoplestown, during which Johnson explained to the press how nearly 40% of the apartments, would be rented as either public housing or as rent-

¹³⁸ Ron Taylor, "Congressmen See, Hit Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 28 January 1972, p.2A; "Blackburn Says Audit Hit Model Cities Bookkeeping," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 February 1972, p.16A.

¹³⁹ Nick Taylor, "HUD Explains Delays: Model Cities Proposals Too Costly," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 March 1971, p.2A.

subsidized housing.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the ribbon-cutting ceremony would prove to be Johnson's downfall. In planning the ceremony, Johnson ignored comments from J.W. Robinson, architect for Azalea Gardens, who remarked that at least two of the complex buildings had not passed city inspection and would not be ready for occupancy in May. Nor did Johnson consult with leaders of Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, the housing development sponsors. Johnson confessed that he "got carried away" in promoting the apartments, adding, "I guess I should have checked it out with [Mt. Nebo]." State HUD director E. Lamar Seals called the ceremony "premature," but sympathized with Johnson and the pressure he faced in producing new low-cost housing.¹⁴¹ When the apartment units remained incomplete and unoccupied over six weeks after the ceremony, however, the embattled executive director found no one willing to accept blame for the delay. The Model Cities staff attacked the sponsoring church for not renting out the few completed units in May. Earl Weems of Mt. Nebo Baptist Church accused the contractor of moving too slowly. Architect J.W. Robinson remarked, "any delay has been primarily because the contractor has had to use Model City workers, including some of the future tenants themselves, on the job," adding "you just can't expect quickly trained people to work very fast." Johnson lambasted the press, saying, "we've never gotten anything but a negative press reaction since this program started....Why can't the newspapers find something good about this program?" Johnson made a valid point. Stories on Model Cities in the local press had emphasized the program's coordination and communication flaws almost exclusively from its

¹⁴⁰ Maurice Fliess, "Model Cities Units Near Completion," *Atlanta Journal*, 9 May 1972, p.2A; Tom Linthicum, "Model Cities Homes Ready," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 May 1972, p.14A; "Hope for Model Cities," *Atlanta Journal*, 15 May 1972, p.18A; "Azalea Gardens Apartments Dedicated Today," *Atlanta Journal*, 21 May 1972, p.20A.

¹⁴¹ "Model Cities Unit Opening Seen for Aug. 1," *Atlanta Journal*, 7 July 1972, p.2A; Alex Coffin, "Model Cities Units Still Unoccupied," *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 July 1972, p.16A.

implementation. Once more, the executive director reminded reporters, “through stimulus from us (Model Cities), schools have been opened, swimming pools built, and countless, other services have been performed [for] the poor of the city.” But Johnson’s problem was timing. It was true in the case of Azalea Gardens as it had been true so many times before that Johnson, for all his failings, simply lacked the power to order around any of the federal, city, and private agencies under contract to finish the new housing development. That said, citywide leadership determined that the time for Johnson to protest being put in the “almost impossible position of responsibility without authority” was not on the eve of Atlanta’s five-year anniversary of the Summerhill Riots. Mayor Massell, his staff, local HUD officials, and others in citywide leadership were looking for a scapegoat.¹⁴²

Johnny Johnson was at a breaking point by late summer. The MCEB scolded the Atlanta Board of Aldermen for awarding a parking lot concession to a nonresident firm. Architect Leon Allain demanded the city pay him for drawings he completed for a Model Cities facility, even though aldermen never awarded the architect a contract. Mechanicsville residents protested the lack of funding budgeted for citizen participation and threatened to withdraw from the federal program. The Aldermanic Planning and Development Committee once again denied funding for a business park in Summerhill.¹⁴³ The bad news became too much to handle. Even as Johnson announced plans of an expanded summer

¹⁴² Jim Stewart, “Model Cities Units Ready, Empty Here,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 July 1972, p.1A; “Cutting Red Tape,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 July 1972, p.4A.

¹⁴³ Raleigh Bryans, “Contractor to Outsider Draws Fire of Model Cities Board,” *Atlanta Journal*, 11 July 1972, p.2A; “Model Cities Seeks Lot Award Shift,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 July 1972, p.8D; Finance Committee meeting minutes, 4 August 1972; Tom Linthicum, “Architect Demands City Pay for His Model Cities Plans,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 August 1972, p.10A; Ken Willis, “Model Cities Told To Promote Resident Participation,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 August 1972, p.7A; Chuck Bell, “Model City Pullout Threatened,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 August 1972, p.7B; Hank Ezell, “Model Cities Park Scrapped,” *Atlanta Journal*, 1 September 1972, p. 1A.

youth employment program and approved a draft plan calling for more than 16,500 new and rehabilitated Model Cities homes for the decade, the executive director quietly prepared his resignation.¹⁴⁴ Shortly after aldermen approved the 1973 Model Cities budget, Johnny Johnson announced that he was leaving his position with the federal program to begin work as the land acquisition and relocation director for MARTA. Mayor Massell, away from the city, issued a bland statement through his staff in which he expressed “his appreciation to Mr. Johnson for his efforts in dealing with the new and difficult problems in the Model Cities program.”¹⁴⁵

Massell appointed Davey Gibson, Johnson’s planning and development director, to succeed as executive director, but it was clear to City Hall and Model Cities staff as well as to Model Cities residents that the program was on its way out. The Model Cities Executive Board had begun efforts to make sure that social programs could continue when federal funding ended, and they formed a subcommittee to find alternative funding. The Urban Observatory research group proposed a study to determine how the program could best be phased out. Model Cities staff anticipated a loss of funding for the 1973 budget year, but additional cuts forced the MCEB to shift budgetary needs. Cuts in February alone forced Model Cities staffers to end seven programs, cut 450 jobs, and freeze all 235/236 housing. When the LeFlagi consultants finally released their long-delayed housing needs study on Model Cities neighborhoods, it reiterated the same program shortcomings about which staff at City Hall and Model Cities were already well aware. The final blow to the federal program came in March, when the city of Atlanta did not receive Model Cities funding for

¹⁴⁴ “Youth Job Program Gains Cited,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 July 1972, p.11B; Steve Stewart, “Model Cities Aim is 16,500 Homes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 July 1972, p.7A.

¹⁴⁵ Raleigh Bryans, “Model Cities Chief Resigns,” *Atlanta Journal*, 6 September 1972, p.2A.

1974. Model Cities staff was told to stretch out the already reduced 1973 funding for 18 months, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development would end the program in June 1974 rather than December.

This was a program that, like the month of March, began like a lion and left like a lamb. For all of its promise, and in part perhaps because of the heavy expectations put upon it, Model Cities fell short. The city leadership never engaged in its administration. The executive director had all of the responsibility to see the programs through, but no power to order negligent agencies into compliance. Citizens and city leaders alike struggled with the concept of citizen participation. As a result of these failures in the Model Cities, Atlanta political and business leaders changed their thinking about federal urban redevelopment programs, and moved increasingly towards supporting private and public-private partnership redevelopment opportunities – in particular, the Peachtree Center, the Omni, and the Georgia World Congress Center. In failing to provide support to Model Cities, many of the Atlanta's political and business leaders perpetuated a system that Urban Renewal policy had established in the 1950s and early 1960s, namely, to reinforce racial prejudices, discrimination and inequalities in urban redevelopment.

CHAPTER 4

“WE HAVE BUILT A CITY FOR OTHERS”: ATLANTA’S PRIVATE URBAN RENEWAL, JOHN C. PORTMAN, THOMAS G. COUSINS, AND THE BATTLE FOR A NEW DOWNTOWN, 1961-1985.

In January 1975, an orange, human-sized dragon puppet named H.R. Pufnstuf posed for pictures atop a steel-railed fence at a downtown Atlanta construction site. The dragon, a creation of Hollywood puppeteers Sid and Marty Krofft, was in town to promote the upcoming “World of Sid and Marty Krofft,” an eight-story, \$14 million dollar indoor amusement theme park. Krofft World was just one of many attractions that developer Thomas G. Cousins had planned for his \$70 million dollar Omni International, a complex which, when completed, would house hotel rooms, office space, upscale shopping, restaurants, movie theaters, and an indoor ice rink. The park, Marty Krofft explained, would combine elements from their nightclub puppet shows with illusory effects and park rides. The puppeteers were well aware of the financial risk inherent in building an amusement park in the middle of a big city. As Krofft reasoned, with missionary-like zeal, downtown was the best place for a theme park because “developing a place downtown where families can come will have many ramifications. City problems are the same throughout the world and I believe that if the cities can live, the world can survive. The upward benefits of this kind of thing far outweigh the business benefits.”¹

¹ Gene Tharpe, “Pufnstuf Bets on Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution* 17 October 1974, 5A; Colleen Teasley, “\$14 Million Fun World Rising,” *Atlanta Constitution* 29 January 1975, 4C; Helen C. Smith, “You Can be Pinball Machine in ’76,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 January 1975, 6B.

Krofft's vision for the future of downtowns such as Atlanta's was striking; perhaps most because he, though neither an urban planner nor a housing activist, acknowledged that inner downtown cores had some "city problems." While he prescribed no detailed formula to revitalize cities, he insisted that family-friendly places were key to a city's health. The Krofft brothers decided to build an amusement park in the heart of downtown Atlanta just as urban planner-turned-developer James W. Rouse began promoting the "festival marketplace" concept as a means of revitalizing declining urban areas.² In the mid 1970s, Rouse began renovating historic inner city structures on the East Coast. Buildings such as Boston's Faneuil Hall market had suffered decay in the postwar decades and Americans perceived many inner city areas as dirty and dangerous. Rouse renovated the market to include upscale restaurants, specialty retail shops, and a bustling nightlife, arguing that a clean, well-lit, historic intown space would become a destination that suburbanites and tourists alike would want to visit. Krofft was implicitly espousing Rouse's "festival marketplace" concept through the construction of his amusement park so close to Atlanta's central business district.³

² Nicolas Dagen Bloom, *Merchant of Illusion: James Rouse, America's Salesman of the Businessmen's Utopia* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2004); Joshua Olsen, *Better Places, Better Lives: A Biography of James Rouse* (Washington, D.C. : Urban Land Institute, 2004).

³ One can find similarly planned "festival marketplace" styled redevelopments across the eastern United States in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly near waterfronts. The best-known examples of festival marketplace revitalization include places such as South Street Seaport in New York City, Renaissance Plaza in Detroit, and Harborplace in Baltimore. Much of the existing scholarship on such developments has generally compared the areas to nodes of suburban retail development, notably the enclosed, air-conditioned mall. See for example, Kent A. Robertson, "Downtown Retail Revitalization: A Review of American Development Strategies," *Planning Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (1997): 383-401. More recently, scholars have begun to examine the festival marketplace concept within the historical context of other urban renewal programs. See, for instance, John T. Metzger, "The Failed Promise of a Festival Marketplace: South Street Seaport in Lower Manhattan," *Planning Perspectives* 16, no. 1 (2001): 25-46.

Krofft's intown amusement park was just one of a myriad of ongoing construction projects in downtown Atlanta in the mid-1970s. In 1974, architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable remarked, somewhat acerbically, about the construction boom in the heart of Atlanta: "this is Instant City. Downtown Atlanta has been built in the last 10 years. What you see in the mile-and-a-half of Atlanta's business here is what you get: a concentration of totally new office towers, hotels, shipping facilities, landscaped streets, plazas and parks that are a product of the '60s and '70s—an incredibly unified achievement in an unbelievably short time, when other cities were struggling with piecemeal renewal."⁴ Huxtable was talking not only about the pace and intensity of development in downtown Atlanta, but about the form that that development had taken as well. Downtown Atlanta development had predominantly come in the form of large, privately financed, multi-use complexes. While city officials, white elite downtown businessmen, the city's professional African American middle class, and intown neighborhood housing advocates butted heads over how to define, implement, and control federally sponsored urban renewal, a cadre of architects and real estate developers eschewed federal money and instead saw through the construction of several "cities within the city," proudly exclaiming that "they hadn't had a cent of federal money."⁵ These designer-developers believed that the city of Atlanta had adopted a "hodgepodge" approach to urban renewal, and many publicly referred to the city's renewal projects as failures.⁶

⁴ "Learning from Atlanta," *AIA Journal* 63 (April 1975); Ada Louise Huxtable, "Energized Atlanta: City on The Move," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 5 May 1974, 12A.

⁵ "Atlanta, the Hopeful City," *Fortune* 74 (August 1966): 155-56, 160, 162.

⁶ Rodney Cook to John Portman, 22 June 1967. Rodney Cook papers, Series II, Subseries B, Box 5, Folder 8, Richard Russell Library, University of Georgia.

In this chapter, I seek to broaden the definition of what is meant by urban renewal to include private and quasi-private downtown redevelopment projects. This chapter examines a few of these developments in downtown Atlanta from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. It traces the objectives that these developers hoped to accomplish with the construction of their complexes and suggests why they opted out of federal renewal funding. Finally, this chapter attempts to explain how and why these developments, in spite of their publicized and celebrated openings and expansions, did not spell a rebirth for downtown Atlanta.

This chapter focuses in particular on two projects that epitomized this private trend in urban development: John Portman's Peachtree Center and Tom Cousins' Omni International. On the northeastern edge of downtown, Atlanta developer/architect John Portman envisioned that his Peachtree Center would become a new "city within a city." On the southwestern edge of downtown, developer Tom Cousins envisioned his Omni International project as the complex that would bring affluent suburbanites "back to the city." From the early 1970s through the mid-1980s, Portman and Cousins fought over the placement and development of everything from the state's World Congress Center and the city's rapid rail stations to its retail space and traffic patterns.

Portman and Cousins fought just as the city witnessed a massive out-migration of affluent whites and blacks to the suburbs on the Northside and to the south and west, respectively. Well-to-do white Atlantans had been fleeing to new, racially homogenous neighborhoods on the Northside even before civil rights legislation dismantled segregation by law in the mid-1960s. This out-migration continued apace in the early 1970s, especially after the city reached a compromise on how to go about integrating the Atlanta public

school system. Affluent white Atlantans, fearing that an integrated school system would lower the quality of education, fled to new neighborhoods on the Northside in the hopes of maintaining the all-white school experience. At the same time, affluent members of the African American community in Atlanta had been in search of new areas for residential expansion for decades, and civil rights legislation had helped to break down racial residential barriers. Many leaders in the Atlanta's African American professional class pointed to their stately suburban homes south and west of the city as proof that the civil rights movement had succeeded in bringing a more equitable measure of economic prosperity to blacks in the South, even though the experience of the city's poorer African Americans living in or near urban renewal projects suggested otherwise. Thus, plans for both Peachtree Center and the Omni International arrived in Atlanta at a crucial moment of out-migration of the city's middle class. The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and Central Atlanta Progress supported both developer's projects simultaneously, hoping that both complexes would stem the flight of affluent whites and blacks from the city limits in the post-Jim Crow era.

PORTMAN: CREATING A CITY WITHIN A CITY⁷

When John Calvin Portman graduated from the architecture program at nearby Georgia Tech in the 1950s, he believed that architectural design could make the world a better place. Interning with the design firm of Ketchum, Gina, and Sharp in New York City, Portman learned to think about how people reacted to their built environments. Early on, he sought control over all aspects of his projects, convinced that his designs would have

⁷ John Portman and Jonathan Barnett, *The Architect as Developer*. (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976).

more lasting impact (not to mention more opportunities to be built) when he was able to manage the real estate development end of things as well.⁸

The Georgia Tech architecture school graduate made his initial foray into downtown Atlanta development in the mid-1950s, just as Atlanta's aldermen and downtown business associations were beginning to consider how and where to use federal urban renewal funding. Portman found an abandoned parking garage at the corner of Peachtree and Harris Streets, and he sought to convert it into an exhibition space. He envisioned a wholesale market for retailers. Furniture manufacturers and interior design firms would have the space to showcase their latest pieces, and retail storeowners could place orders for wares to fill their stores. In Portman's vision, Atlanta maintained its status as a regional distribution center, and storeowners from throughout the southeast would converge upon the city annually or bi-annually to order stock.⁹

Together with three partners, he renovated the 240,000 sq. ft garage into a furniture mart, one floor at a time. Within the first year, Portman oversaw the renovation of every garage floor into mart space. Gauging by foot traffic, the venture proved so successful that the young architect believed that the city could support a much larger showroom. Although the mart sat on what many Atlantans in the 1950s would have considered to be a dead end stretch of Peachtree Street, Portman reasoned that its location had in no small part contributed to its success. The old garage was within walking distance to all of the city's major downtown hotels. Portman and his associates emphasized its proximity to said hotels and began fighting to ensure that an expanded Atlanta Merchandise Mart could be built downtown. Competing developers, seeing the mart's success and envisioning the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

expansion possibilities, sought to move the mart out to cheaper land in Gwinnett County. In particular, developer Robert Holder emphasized the deterioration in downtown Atlanta, and he pointed out that the proposed mart expansion was within walking distance of a couple of proposed Urban Renewal project sites. Holder lobbied state legislators for public money to build a state-owned mart and Holder argued for a Gwinnett County site. Portman won the battle for the mart largely over the issue of financing. C&S bank president Mills Lane intervened on Portman's behalf and convinced key legislators that the mart could be built with private funding.¹⁰ Subsequent to Lane's helpful introduction, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company agreed to an eight million dollar construction loan, and fellow Atlanta developer Ben Massell (no relation to the mayor) bought Portman the land for mart construction. The Mart group broke ground in 1959, and by July 1961, they opened a 23-storied, one million square foot Mart. The Mart did well enough during its first two years of operation that Portman and his partners were able to buy out Ben Massell with a down payment and a second mortgage.¹¹

The story of the Atlanta Merchandise Mart was important for a few reasons. First, the mart's location caused Portman to be thereafter invested in determining nearby future developments. The architect explained:

We could not allow just anything to happen up and down the block and across the street....so we started assembling land. We gained control of the plots next door to the Mart and parcels in other key locations, with the specific aim of creating a new

¹⁰ Ibid. Lane was an odd advocate for the use of private funding here. In the late 1960s, during Mayor Allen's administration, the same Mills Lane had the mayor create the Atlanta-Fulton County Recreation Authority and Lane orchestrated the use of city (i.e. public) recreation authority tax funds to pay for the city's major league stadium construction. For more on Mills Lane and earlier stadium urban renewal, see Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*, 98-99.

¹¹ Portman and Barnett, *The Architect as Developer*, 25-6; Jonathan Barnett, "John Portman: Atlanta's One Man Urban Renewal Program," *Architectural Record*, January 1966, 133-140.

environment that followed a master development plan, and would add to, not obliterate, the life, the vitality, and the interest of the existing city.¹²

The story behind the Mart's making was also remarkable because it demonstrated the relative ease and speed with which Portman, acting as designer, financier, planner, and builder, could move from vision to execution, and could develop in a "dead end" area of the city. The success of the Mart persuaded Portman of the possibility of undertaking his own private urban renewal program.

Portman began to conceive of a larger, coordinated development, complete with offices, apartments, shops, hotels, and parking garages that all related to one another, and one in which the Merchandise Mart would become the keystone of the development. Portman named his plan the Peachtree Center, and he envisioned that he could build a "city within a city" that could keep downtown Atlanta bustling and vital. The architect envisioned that the various structures within the Peachtree Center complex would resemble one another, repeating architectural features and motifs from one building and courtyard to the next, and that they could function as a single cohesive unit. To begin, Portman suggested, Peachtree Center would be built on a "scale determined by how far a man will walk on foot before he thinks about looking around for some wheels."¹³ Portman then began formulating a consistent architectural theme for his complex. He described a complex that he would build from conventional materials, such as concrete, but by using unconventional building methods. With a vision in place, the architect and developer

¹² John Portman, "Architecture for People, and Not for Things," *Architectural Record*, January 1977, 133.

¹³ Walter McQuade, "Atlanta, the Hopeful City," *Fortune*, August 1966, 160, 162; William Martin, "Urban Growth: Atlanta Does It Right," *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 May 1975, 14-15. The answer: on average, man will walk about seven minutes, maybe 10, depending upon environmental conditions. That's about the distance between Peachtree Center and Five Points.

started looking for money. Shortly after the mart opened, Portman formed a partnership with Dallas developer Trammell Crow. Together, Crow and Portman bought out the mart group partners. They then acquired control of two properties along Peachtree Street directly south of the mart, bounded by Harris Street to the north, Ivy Street to the East, and Cain Street to the south. They bought one land parcel outright, and they settled for a ninety-nine year lease on the second, with the option to buy. Construction ensued uneventfully, and the first Peachtree Center office building, an unremarkable twenty-one story rectangular structure, partially constructed from pre-fabricated concrete slabs, opened in January 1966.¹⁴

In part because of the popularity of the Mart, Portman next sought to add a hotel to the complex of buildings he was planning. As was the case with Mart construction, Portman assembled a handful of partners for the hotel. With the help of the Atlanta-owned Phoenix Investment Company and Dallas development partners Trammell Crow and Fritz Hahn, Portman obtained a lease on a property diagonally northeast of the Merchandise Mart and across Peachtree Street. John O. Chiles, president of Adams-Cates, a local real estate company, helped secure a mortgage commitment from Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. Chiles also supported Portman's unconventional hotel design.¹⁵ Said Portman,

I didn't want the hotel to be just another set of bedrooms. The typical central-city hotel had always been a cramped thing with a narrow entranceway, a dull and dreary lobby for registration, elevators over in a corner, a closed elevator cab, a dimly lighted corridor, a non-descript doorway, and a hotel room with a bed, a chair, and a hole in the outside wall. That was the central-city hotel. I wanted to do something in total opposition to all this. I wanted to explode the hotel; to open it up,

¹⁴ Bernard Leitner, "John Portman: Architecture is Not a Building," *Art in America* 61 (March/April 1973): 80-82; "Learning from Atlanta," *AIA Journal* 63 (April 1975): 37.

¹⁵ Portman and Barnett, *The Architect as Developer*, 28.

to create (sic) a grandeur of space, almost a resort, in the center of the city. The whole idea was to open everything up; take the hotel from its closed, tight position and explode it; take the elevators and literally pull them out of the walls and let them become an experience within themselves, let them become a giant kinetic sculpture. "¹⁶

Portman and his hotel partners had an incredibly bad run of luck once hotel construction began, however. They endured seven separate labor strikes, which altogether added a year to the construction time and over \$1 million in interest charges to the construction financing.¹⁷ Then, when the building was about four stories up, one of Portman's primary investors, the Phoenix Company, gained a new president and subsequently wanted out of the hotel business. Portman was unable to buy out Phoenix' share, so he invited several hoteliers to Atlanta in the hopes that they, upon viewing his building-in-progress, would become interested buyers. On one such visit, Portman organized a big luncheon on the Merchandise Mart rooftop for hotelier Conrad Hilton. At the luncheon, in front of all of all of the hotel investors, Hilton stared down at the building in progress and exclaimed, "that concrete monster will never fly," a statement that made all of Portman's other investors feel like dumping their shares. Hotel executives with Hilton, Sheraton, Loews, and Western were not interested in the project. In December 1965, Portman finally sold the structure for \$16.5 million to Donald Pritzker of the Hyatt House

¹⁶ Ibid; Jonathan Barnett, "John Portman: Atlanta's One Man Urban Renewal Program," *Architectural Record*, January 1966, 137.

¹⁷ Ibid. The strikes here primarily concerned wages. Cousins would endure several strikes and threats to strike as well, but in Cousins' case, the strikes had to do with ensuring adequate levels of minority employment on the worksite.

Corporation. Portman's hotel, renamed the Regency Hyatt House, opened to great fanfare in January 1967.¹⁸

The Regency Hyatt House was the first major hotel to be built in downtown Atlanta since the 1920s. The twenty-three-story hotel contained 826 guest rooms and had a parking garage for 500 cars.¹⁹ But it was its design, and not its size, that turned heads. The interior of the Regency Hyatt House was an atrium that brought the outside indoors. The atrium spanned some 140 feet across and 220 feet high, and it was surrounded on all four sides by balcony-like corridors and guest rooms, with mature trees, fountains, a sidewalk café, and real parrots on the ground floor. Portman sought to recreate the same spatial experience that he had had upon first viewing St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Sunlight from the hotel's blue glass dome ceiling fell onto the upper guest room balconies in a way that, Portman hoped, resembled how sunlight poured in from the opening of the Pantheon's cupola in Rome. The highlight of Portman's hotel was the elevator. Portman turned the functional hotel room lift into an amusement park ride. The elevator lobby stood in the middle of the hotel atrium, and the elevators themselves resembled glass birdcages, with lighted steel parasol tops. The ride itself became an opportunity to see and be seen.²⁰

Portman's Hyatt project was remarkable for a couple of reasons. First, while his building borrowed modernist motifs and used similar industrial materials that recalled Le Corbusier and Mies Van der Rohe, and while his design mirrored certain elements in the relatively new United Nations headquarters in Manhattan, Portman's vision to incorporate

¹⁸ Portman and Barnett, *The Architect as Developer*, 30.

¹⁹ Jonathan Barnett, "John Portman: Atlanta's One Man Urban Renewal Program," *Architectural Record*, January 1966, 136.

²⁰ Portman and Barnett, *The Architect as Developer*, 28; *Atlanta Constitution*; "Architecture is Not a Building," Bernard Leitner, *Art in America*, (March/April 1973): 81; Interview with Andrew Young, 05/30/07.

those modernist elements into a hotel was unique and innovative, all of which gave Atlanta business boosters a novel building to brag about.²¹ Second, in drawing up plans for the Hyatt, Portman borrowed design elements from nearby public housing. Portman found few contemporaries engaged in re-thinking the design, particularly the concept of an open atrium for modern downtown hotels, so the developer instead borrowed more from his own past design. Portman had first attempted his open atrium feature in 1961 when he won a commission to design the Antoine Graves Homes, a public housing project for elderly African Americans. For the Graves Homes as elsewhere, Portman argued that his design was fundamentally about people, and that in the case of the Graves homes, he sought to provide refuge “from the congestion of urban life.” The atrium at Graves provided better ventilation as well as an effective interior public courtyard space.²² What was striking was that Portman could recognize that Graves Homes residents needed such a refuge, but it was his first and last work on public housing in the city. The remainder of Portman’s work, particularly in the Peachtree Center complex, would be in many ways also a relief “from the congestion of urban life,” but Peachtree Center, when completed, would primarily serve either out-of-town guests or else Atlanta working suburbanites, in either case populations with easy escapes from congested urban life already.

Both of Portman’s early atrium buildings were well received, both locally and in the national press. Patrons at the Hyatt raved about the open atrium and wide, expansive interior courtyard. Said one Graves resident, of the atrium design, “I can be by myself when

²¹ Portman and Barnett, *The Architect as Developer*, 26; “Portman: A New Force for Rebuilding the Cities,” *Business Week*, 17 February 1973, 58, 60.

²² Maria Saporta, “Portman’s first atrium building to be torn down,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 9 October 2009; Jonathan Barnett, “John Portman: Atlanta’s One Man Urban Renewal Program,” *Architectural Record*, January 1966, 133.

I want to be by myself, and I can be with others when I want to be with others.”²³ With a few completed buildings under his belt, Portman began to assert that his chief professional concern was the “reorganizing of the central city.”²⁴ Once Portman found a buyer for his hotel, he then moved to acquire the city block immediately south of the Regency Hyatt and along Peachtree Street. The two-acre property provided enough room to create four more office buildings around a central exterior courtyard and shopping gallery. Portman borrowed heavily from the architectural elements in his first office building and was able to create a consistent design. Portman envisioned his Peachtree Center complex as the Atlanta equivalent of the Rockefeller Center in New York City. Portman kept a big model of his “city within a city” in his offices and announced proudly to any who would listen that he “hadn’t had a cent of federal money in [Peachtree Center].” He posited that Atlanta could have the greatest downtown in the U.S. if only more private businesses joined in Peachtree Center-type complexes.²⁵

One cannot help but compare the early progress of Portman’s Peachtree Center with nearby urban renewal projects, especially the Bedford-Pine project, which sat three blocks to the east and two blocks to the north, and was where the controversial civic center was under construction. First, Portman was able to assemble financing for his project much more easily, as he did not have to submit plans to the federal urban renewal administration for approval. Neither did Portman have to answer to the mayor, Board of Aldermen, or various neighborhood advisory councils. In addition, Portman did not have to submit a bid and design, but rather, as developer and architect, he knew from the outset he could

²³ Saporta, “Portman’s first atrium building to be torn down,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 9 October 2009.

²⁴ “Portman: A New Force for Rebuilding the Cities,” *Business Week*, 17 February 1973, 58-64.

²⁵ “Atlanta, the Hopeful City,” *Fortune*, August 1966, 74.

implement the design of his choosing. Moreover, the time that elapsed between announcing plans for the Peachtree Center and completing the complex's first buildings was relatively short and uneventful. Nonetheless, Portman's prescription for revitalizing the inner city was not without problems either. For starters, Portman's goals were somewhat different from those espoused in the 1949 Housing Act. While it was clear from his work with the Antoine Graves homes that Portman understood that all Atlanta residents were affected by the "congestion of urban life," it was also quite clear from the time Portman began acquiring land near his Mart that his goals were not to improve housing, but rather to reinvigorate the downtown business district.

Portman attributed "the discovery of the wheel (i.e. the automobile)...to the breakdown of cities." In order to fix cities, he argued, a coalition of private entrepreneurs and local politicians needed to support redevelopment plans that could take people out of their cars in the suburbs, bring them back to the city, and back onto their own two feet.²⁶ The architect-developer was right to emphasize cars and traffic as reasons why affluent Atlantans, white and black, had been leaving downtown Atlanta. Yet he neglected to explain how race, racial tensions, and the ongoing desegregation of the mid 1960s had more significantly contributed to suburban sprawl and the depopulation and decline of downtown Atlanta. Portman was arguing that a healthy and revitalized downtown would have a balanced mix of incomes and classes, yet his Peachtree Center, when complete, would cater almost exclusively to affluent white-collar suburbanites and well-to-do out-of-towners. Implicit in its "city within a city" design was the notion that the city streets

²⁶ Rex Granum, "Portman: Asks City Show Way," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 May 1973, 8B.

outside (and the people that populated them) were dirty and unsafe—hardly reassuring characteristics of a revitalizing city.

Portman was not the lone pioneer in devising the insular urban office park concept. Across the nation, investments were pouring into similar developments in the hopes of maintaining and/or revitalizing the economic and social vitality of declining downtowns. Many of these new downtown redevelopment ventures were entirely private undertakings, including some built by large corporations. In Houston, Texas, a city with neither zoning nor federal urban renewal funding, no fewer than three privately financed mega-complexes were under construction by the mid-1960s. In Atlanta, just blocks away from the Peachtree Center, Portman found a rival private urban renewal developer in a man named Tom Cousins, a man with similar visions of how a large, multi-use complex could lure tourists, conventioners, and Atlanta suburbanites back into the city.

COUSINS: BRINGING PEOPLE BACK TO THE CITY

Tom Cousins was in many ways the opposite of John Portman. The square-jawed, soft-spoken developer was as conventional in appearance as Portman was flamboyant. Cousins started in Atlanta residential real estate in late 1950s with a \$13,000 investment in pre-fabricated houses. By 1966, Cousins was moving away from the home construction business. That year, his friend, lawyer Robert Troutman, approached him with a curious proposal concerning a vacant downtown lot—a proposal that propelled Cousins into downtown Atlanta redevelopment. Back around the turn of the century, Atlanta civic engineers had built a layer of viaducts over the railroad tracks that ran through downtown, a move which had raised the downtown street level an entire story for several blocks. Where the viaducts dropped off at the southwest corner of downtown, they left a twelve-

acre gulch, desolate except for rail lines and overgrown weeds. In 1956, the Georgia General Assembly had granted Troutman air rights over the railroad gulch on the condition that he complete a \$5 million dollar improvement to the property within ten years' time. In 1966, Troutman, running out of time and unable to find an investor willing to make improvements in the gulch, asked Cousins for help. Cousins built a sturdy if unremarkable steel and concrete parking garage twenty-three feet above the rail lines below, and, in so doing, gained the air rights to the twelve-acre tract. The problem was that Cousins was not sure what to do with the property once he got control of it.²⁷

Shortly thereafter, in 1968, former Georgia Governor Carl Sanders partnered with Tom Cousins to buy the St. Louis Hawks and bring the basketball franchise to Atlanta. Before purchasing the team, Cousins asked Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. if the city would build a basketball coliseum. Allen, remembering the fiasco of committing to construction of a major league baseball stadium before the city had a baseball team, told Cousins to secure a franchise first. Cousins and Sanders brought the Hawks to Atlanta in time for the 1970-1971 season, and the Atlanta Hawks played their first two seasons in the Georgia Tech Alexander Memorial Coliseum.²⁸

Negotiations for a professional basketball arena proceeded with Sam Massell, Allen's successor. In December 1970, Massell signed a letter of intent to build the Atlanta coliseum. The Atlanta-Fulton County Recreational Authority agreed to float the \$17 million dollar revenue bond, and both the city of Atlanta and Fulton County agreed to underwrite the bonds. Coliseum construction would differ from that of the Atlanta-Fulton County

²⁷ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 154-55.

²⁸ Ivan Allen, with Paul Hemphill. *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties*, 240; Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 168.

Stadium, because the coliseum tenants, rather than taxpayers, would re-pay construction costs. By January 1971, both the Fulton County Commissioners and the Board of Aldermen had met to discuss the coliseum. A few aldermen pressed to ensure that coliseum construction included a minority labor clause, and they stressed the need for taxi and bus access to the new arena, but nonetheless, the full Board of Aldermen approved the project by a vote of 12-3. The coliseum would be located between the Techwood Viaduct and Magnolia Street.²⁹ Cousins began to imagine that the new arena could be the key to stimulating development in the area over the railroad gulch—he envisioned creating a new heart of the city, complete with public and private facilities that would not only attract tourists and conventioners, but would also bring affluent suburbanites back to the downtown.

Construction on the coliseum, because it involved bond financing and approval from both city and county politicians, was slightly more complicated than that for the Peachtree Center. Mayor Massell, for one, caused public rows with Cousins whenever he felt that he, as mayor, was not receiving adequate credit for the coliseum. Massell forced Cousins to cancel his formal, invitation-only ground-breaking ceremony so that the city could stage its own open-to-the-public coliseum ground-breaking and “site souvenir celebration.”

Alderman Ira Jackson threatened an injunction on coliseum construction until five Atlanta

²⁹ Frank Hyland, “The Best Takes Longer: Coliseum to be First for Atlanta,” *Atlanta Journal*, 19 December 1970; Hugh Nations, “Trust, Hopes Involved: Coliseum Deal No String Free Dream,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 27 December 1970, 1A; Alex Coffin, “Okay Needed for Coliseum,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 January 1971, 1A; “Coliseum Approval Expected by Cousins,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1971, 1A; Michael Wright, “Aldermen Approve Coliseum Plans By Vote of 13 to 3,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 January 1971, 1A; Frank Wells, “Coliseum Adds to City’s Big League Image,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 January 1971, 12C; Nat Sheppard, “County to Back Coliseum,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 January 1971, 1A; “Coliseum Wins County Okay,” Margaret Hurst, *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 January 1971, 1A; Alex Coffin, “Bond Sale Okayed, Coliseum Start in Two Weeks Possible: Project Almost Scuttled,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 January 1971, 1A.

unions guaranteed to put a percentage of black apprentices to work on the project.³⁰ But the disagreements over coliseum construction were minor in comparison to the many setbacks that the city's Urban Renewal director and Model Cities director were facing.

Atlantans primarily disagreed over what to name the coliseum. The Atlanta-Fulton County Recreation Authority hired an advertising agency to suggest a name for the coliseum. In March 1972, the McDonald and Little firm recommended the name "The Omni" to a stunned Authority audience, and few seemed happy with the suggestion. Banker and Authority Vice Chairman Mills B. Lane cracked that an "Omni sounded like something at a zoo," and he lobbied to hear other name choices. Mayor Massell was reportedly behind the name, but refused to comment until public opinion was behind it. Several city aldermen, including vice mayor Maynard Jackson, argued that the aldermen, and not the Recreation Authority, should decide the name by vote.³¹ Construction continued unabated while business boosters and politicians alike argued over the name for another five months. By the fall of 1971, builders had completed much of the arena's square framework, and workers had begun securing the trapezoidal roof pods atop the coliseum's skeleton. The multi-pyramided rooftop resembled an egg carton. The following winter, construction workers began fastening huge sections of weathering steel to the building façade. The steel,

³⁰ Alex Coffin, "Massell, Cousins Get Together on Coliseum Event," *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 March 1971, 2A; Alex Coffin, "Massell Plays Ball at Coliseum Site," *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 April 1971, 1A; Charles Lambeth, "Jackson says Blacks not Hired at Coliseum," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 April 1971.

³¹ Alex Coffin, "Authority Approves 'The Omni' name for Coliseum Here," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 March 1972, 2A; Alex Coffin, "Omni? It's Not Faring Very Well," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 March 1972, 3A; "Vice Mayor is Miffed At Omni Approval," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 March 1972 20A; "Commission Frowns Upon 'Omni' as Name for Coliseum," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 March 1972, 6A; "By Any Other Name Perhaps—Not Omni," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 March 1972, 16A; "'Coliseum' Gains as 'Omni' Fails," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 March 1972, 6A; Tom Linthicum, "Omni, Taradome—or What?" *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 June 1972, 12B; Tom Linthicum, "Omni's Out—It's the Atlanta Coliseum," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 June 1972; Tom Linthicum, "'The Omni' is Back—Sort of," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 July 1972, 3B; Tom Linthicum, "The Omni Makes a Comeback," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 August 1972, 32C.

which was not painted, would gradually change color until it reached a dark brown hue. As a result, Atlantans soon began calling the coliseum the “rusty egg carton.” Beautiful or not, The Omni opened in October 1972 to 15,000 fans for a hockey match between the Atlanta Flames and the Buffalo Sabres.³²

To celebrate the grand opening, Cousins took out a full-page ad in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and thanked all of the individuals and groups that made the building possible. “The Omni exists,” Cousins’ ad read, “because the forces of government and private enterprise united to provide Atlanta with a facility that neither of them could provide alone.”³³ What was most striking in Cousins’ public thank you note was his articulation of the coliseum success as a joint private-public effort. It was no doubt an example of the kind of coordinated effort between private enterprise and local government for which Portman had called. What was unclear at the time of The Omni opening was whether Cousins would also embrace an insular “city within a city” design concept for development around coliseum.³⁴

Cousins’ vision for the southwestern corner of downtown brought him squarely into competition with John Portman and his Peachtree Center development along Peachtree Street. Both developers sought to re-center the heart of Atlanta from the Five Points intersection, where Peachtree Street met Decatur, Edgewood, and Marietta Streets, and the crux of their rivalry would center on the construction of a giant exhibition hall, to be built by the state, that would seek to place Atlanta on an equal footing with New York and Chicago. The construction of this World Congress Center, as it would be called, would be

³² *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 15 October 1972.

³³ *Ibid*, 11A.

³⁴ “Learning From Atlanta,” *AIA Journal* (April 1975): 33, 43.

significant for several reasons. First, its design and location would determine the future shape of downtown Atlanta. Second, because its successful construction would require state funding and legislative approval, it could serve to strengthen the tenuous relationship between moderate Atlanta business and political leaders and their more conservative state counterparts.³⁵ And perhaps most importantly, it would further demonstrate, on a large scale, the strengths as well as limits of a joint public-private venture in urban redevelopment.

THE GEORGIA WORLD CONGRESS CENTER: CREATING A CITY FOR OTHERS

Crucial to both Portman's and Cousins' plans for a new downtown core was the construction of a new convention center. Luckily, neither developer had to initiate the call to build it. Shortly after the St. Louis Hawks re-located to Atlanta in 1970, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) financed a feasibility report for a new convention center. The Chamber related that the state of Georgia had lost over \$750,000 in convention revenue in recent years because Atlanta simply did not have adequate space for larger national and international conventions. The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and ACVB then formed an ad hoc committee. They asked the Georgia General Assembly for \$175,000 in planning funds for the proposed center. Charles F. Palmer, who in the 1930s had directed the construction of Techwood Homes, the nation's first public housing units, chaired the ad hoc committee. Palmer stated that the State of Georgia would finance construction on the proposed \$20 million dollar state-of-the-art

³⁵ For a detailed understanding of the tensions between Atlanta and state of Georgia politicians, see for example, James C. Cobb, *Georgia Odyssey: A Short History of the State* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2nd edition, 2008); Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2nd edition, 1991). For a more thorough discussion of how and where Atlanta politics overlapped and clashed with politics on the state level, see for example Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

exhibition hall. Palmer envisioned 270,000 square feet of floor space and a 4,600 seat auditorium, and he explained that several of its meeting facilities would offer simultaneous language translation equipment.³⁶

In the earliest convention center plans, developer John Portman had a slight edge over his competition. The 1971 Georgia Legislature commissioned John Portman to design an architectural model for the proposed convention center. Portman proposed “burying” the World Congress Center underground, and lighting it from the ground level with a large square skylight. Building the structure underground would allow for a big, green open space above ground. Not surprisingly, Portman argued for the new center to be built on a two-city block area directly to the west of the existing civic center, which was, not coincidentally, within walking distance of his own Peachtree Center complex.³⁷ His initial proposed site seemed a little callous. Portman was calling for a big open green space when the area in recent years had endured protests and a riot over the large numbers of housing units and local school that were demolished to make way the civic center. Nonetheless, the state legislature took little initial notice of where Portman proposed to place the convention center, and instead focused their attentions on how to lobby for convention center funding.

In January 1972, Georgia Senator Gene Holley of Augusta sponsored the bill that would finance the development of the Georgia World Congress Center. Holley explained that a statewide 1-cent excise tax on food and lodging in hotels, motels, and restaurants

³⁶ Diane Stepp, “\$20 Million International Facility Here: Convention Center Planned,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 March 1971, p.1A; Alex Coffin, “International Center’s Backers Hunt Funds,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 19 December 1971, p.14A.

³⁷ John Pennington, “Can We Bring the World to Georgia: Georgia World Congress Center will be covered over with grass and trees to create green space in the city,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution Magazine*, 9 January 1972, 16-18, 20, 22.

would pay off construction bonds for the center construction. Other bill provisions expanded the total amount in bonds issued to \$35 million, and created a fourteen-member executive board to select the Congress Center site. While a few senators opposed collecting tax revenue across the state to finance a center built in Atlanta, the state senate passed the bill passed handily in late January and sent it to the House.³⁸

House members, on the other hand, initially protested the bill and argued that all tax-raising measures must originate with them rather than in the Senate. Representatives voted to increase the Georgia Building Authority's bonding capacity to \$35 million, enlarged the site selecting executive board to seventeen members, and amended the Senate bill to read that the excise tax for the center would be collected in Atlanta only. By the end of the legislative session, the General Assembly approved the idea of the center, and authorized more than \$100,000 in planning funds for the World Congress Center executive board, but refused to approve a statewide excise tax to pay for it, effectively killing the center for the year.³⁹

At the crux of early debates for the state convention center was a statewide jealousy of and disdain for Atlanta. State legislators from the middle and southern regions of the state bitterly contested the idea that Atlanta should get to receive state funding and reap the benefits of convention traffic.⁴⁰ Indeed, the slow pace to passing a bill for convention

³⁸ Bill Jordan, "Bills Filed to Finance Trade Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 January 1972, p.1A; Bill Linthicum, "Senate Okays Trade Center Here," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1972, p.1A; "International City?" *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 February 1972, p.4A.

³⁹ Milo Dakin, "Trade Center Officials Expect Tax Approval," *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 February 1972, p.7C; Milo Dakin, "Melton Raps Changes in Center Plan," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1972, p.16A; "Paying for the World Trade Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 February 1972, p.4A; Bill Seddon, "3 World Center Bills Passed," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 March 1972, p.18A.

⁴⁰ Bill Jordan, "World Trade Center Bill Sent Back," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 March 1972, p.19A.

center funding should have suggested that a public-private joint venture would not necessarily be a quicker process than regular federal urban redevelopment.

By mid-March, Palmer's ad-hoc committee for the Congress Center transitioned into the new Executive Board and began examining possible sites. From early on, board members focused on three possible sites: on the northeastern corner of the central business district, near the Atlanta Civic Center; on the southwestern corner of downtown, near the railroad gulch and the Coliseum, then under construction; and just south of downtown, near the airport. Members of the site selection committee studied the proximity of each site to hotels, restaurants, and nightlife. By mid-summer, the site selection committee had discovered a hitch to Portman's preferred site near the Civic Center—the site had several owners, which would make land acquisition there more difficult and expensive. Cousins, realizing an opportunity, offered to donate six acres of land adjacent to the Atlanta Coliseum, valued at an estimated \$6 million dollars. Not to be outdone, supporters of the airport site pointed out that land acquisition costs would be cheapest south of downtown.⁴¹

By October 1972, the site selection date neared. Both Cousins and Portman announced future developments near the coliseum and civic center, respectively, in the hopes of attracting enough votes to place the prospective World Congress Center sites near their existing complexes. After Cousins issued a press release in which he hinted that he would be making a big development announcement on October 11th, Portman then pre-

⁴¹ Alex Coffin, "City World Center Board Prepares for Panel Switch," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 March 1972, p.13A; "Massell Sees World Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 March 1972, p.16A; Gene Tharpe, "World Center Eyes Downtown Site," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 June 1972, p.19D; Gene Tharpe, "World Congress Center of Future is Planned," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 July 1972, p.8D; Nick Taylor, "Site Near Omni Offered for Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 August 1972, p.8D.

empted Cousins and scheduled a luncheon for October 10th, at which he revealed plans for his own big development. With Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter and Mayor Sam Massell in attendance, Portman announced that he would be building a \$50 million dollar Peachtree Plaza hotel two blocks south of Peachtree Center. The building would serve as the RCA-like tower in Portman's southern Rockefeller Center, effectively capping off the southern end of his "city within a city." Cousins, with the wind taken out of his sails, unveiled plans the following day that for the construction of a \$65 million dollar hotel, trade pavilion, and entertainment center adjacent to the coliseum that he called the Omni International Complex. Later that same week, the World Congress Center executive board heard formal proposals for all prospective convention hall sites. Along side Cousins and a handful of other developers, Portman and fellow developer Ewell Pope presented their case, explaining how they wished to place the World Congress Center on Piedmont Avenue, across from the Civic Center. Portman claimed that, as a participant in the preliminary study, he had been neutral as to the World Congress Center site early on. He decided to support placing the convention hall space next to the Civic Center with particularly circular reasoning, stating, "it's the best location for the center....no one who is professional can justify a better site." Portman's remarks came across as haughty and arrogant to several members of the center executive board, who resented Portman's condescension and bullying.⁴²

⁴² Gene Tharpe, "Omni International: \$65 Million Dollar Center Coming," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 October 1972, p.14D; Alex Coffin, "Airport Area is Proposed as Congress Center Site," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 October 1972, p.5A; Gene Tharpe, "Portman, Cousins Woo Congress Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 October 1972, p.18D; Gene Tharpe, "World Congress Site Dispute Building Up," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 October 1972, 13D.

Three weeks later, the seven-man site selection committee announced that they were leaning towards building the World Congress Center on a site near the existing Civic Center and that they had three possible properties in mind. There was some speculation that Portman's comments to the newspapers in the previous weeks had pressured committee members. The full WCC executive board awarded the design job to a joint-venture architectural firm, abbreviated as Finch, Heery, & Ellis. The board decided on the FHE firm in part because its partners agreed to design for whatever site the executive board chose. The firm's first task was to conduct traffic studies and analyze soil samples from all of the possible sites. The executive board planned to make a final site recommendation shortly before the beginning of the 1973 Georgia Legislature.⁴³

In a surprise move, when the site selection committee reconvened in December, they recommended The Omni site in a 5-4 vote, relating that the properties available near the Civic Center were all cost-prohibitive. The executive board re-affirmed the site selection the following week by a vote of 10-6. Public Service Commission member Ford Spinks added that it would be easier to sell the Georgia Legislature on building the WCC near the Coliseum in part because the state owned the nearby railroad property. Dissenting members of the executive board issued a minority opinion on the WCC site. Quoting from an independent study, dissenting board members stressed that the area surrounding the Civic Center was the best site for a future World Congress Center in terms of "hotel availability, adequacy of acreage, appearance, character, safety of the area, pedestrian and

⁴³ Gene Tharpe, "World Congress Mulls Site Near Civic Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 November 1972, p.10C; Gene Tharpe, "Congress Design job Awarded FHE Firm," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 November 1972, p.8D; Gene Tharpe, "World Congress Decision Nears," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 December 1972, p.8D

vehicular access, parking, availability of restaurants, shopping and entertainment facilities, flexibility of usage in coordination with adjoining facilities, and visibility.”⁴⁴

Calls to reconsider the Civic Center site continued into the beginning of 1973.

Senator A.G. Holloway, Governor Jimmy Carter’s administrative floor leader, suggested that too few individuals had been consulted in recommending the WCC site. Others charged that special interests had intervened to secure the Omni site. Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell, who had refrained from making any site endorsements until the WCC executive board had made its recommendation, warned that a prolonged dispute over the site selection could “kill” the WCC funding for another year, costing Atlanta millions. The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce urged the General Assembly to pass WCC funding regardless of the final site chosen. Local developer Ewell Pope was one such supporter eager to place the WCC next to the Civic Center, which was not coincidentally near his own Atlanta Hilton Center complex. In late January, well after the legislative session had started for the year, Pope offered to buy twelve acres of Atlanta Housing Authority-owned urban renewal property on Forrest Avenue, adjacent to the Civic Center. Pope offered to donate the land for construction of the World Congress Center there. The WCC executive board rejected Pope’s offer and reaffirmed their recommendation for the Omni site.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sam Hopkins, “Center Site Urged Just West of Omni,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 December 1972, p.1A; Sam Hopkins, “Omni Site is Affirmed for the World Center,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 December 1972, p.1A.

⁴⁵ David Morrison, “Center Decision Up to Assembly?” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 January 1973, p.6B; “Mayor Backs Center Site,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 December 1972, p.18A; Tom Linthicum, “Center Funding is Given Priority,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 January 1973, p.8A; Gene Tharpe, “12 Acres Offered for World Congress Center,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 January 1973, p.8D; Gene Tharpe, “C of C Prods Assembly on Center Funds,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 February 1973, p.6D; Hal Gulliver, “Congress Center,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 February 1973, p.4A; Gene Tharpe, “Early Congress Site is Backed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 February 1973, p.8D.

State Representative Matthew Mulherin then introduced a house bill that would re-open the site selection decision. Fearing that board members chose the Omni site for the future WCC because they were “subjected to too many economic pressures,” Mulherin proposed that the General Assembly should hold the power to decide where to build the structure. Mulherin suggested that the executive board could present the top two WCC sites to the legislature, who would vote to decide the final site. Additional bills proposed that the state attorney general, rather than private attorneys, should be appointed to handle the future Congress Center’s legal matters, including land acquisition, and that WCC executive board members should abstain from becoming employees and/or agents for the future center.⁴⁶

As soon as Mulherin’s bill passed, Governor Carter demanded an amendment that would delay disbursing appropriations until November 1st. Carter stated that he wished to give private enterprise ample opportunity to develop their own plans for a Georgia World Congress Center. In reality, the call for private development of the GWCC was a continuation of the debate over where to build the structure. Supporters of the Civic Center site, realizing that state support was for the GWCC to be built near the Omni coliseum, argued that they could build the center privately at a site of their choosing. In a move to make the Omni site less palatable, Civic Center site lobbyists questioned whether Tom Cousins’ lease agreement for the air rights above the rail lines gave Cousins an unfair financial advantages—sympathetic House members asked the State Institutions and Properties Committee to raise Cousins’ rent by 800%. By the end of the legislative session,

⁴⁶ “Bill Asks State Pick Trade Site,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 March 1973, p.11A; Beau Cutts, “Two Bills Called Peril to World Center Here,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 March 1973, p.2A; Beau Cutts, “Trade Center Bill Okayed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 March 1973, p.14A.

Carter would soon sign a bill stipulating that all WCC budgets would be approved by the General Assembly. While no bill officially re-opened the site selection process for the WCC, the delayed appropriations prevented the World Congress Center's executive board from commissioning a design or soliciting bids from builders.⁴⁷

The political infighting that ensued throughout 1973 nearly derailed the Georgia World Congress Center altogether. What is worth repeating here is that businessmen were vying, even clamoring to see that the World Congress Center was placed in their preferred neck of the woods. In the same way, these same business associations and local politicians fought hard to keep federally sponsored Urban Renewal and Model Cities projects out of their neck of the woods. Their efforts reveal what has been suggested in earlier chapters, namely, that business interests believed that the best way to redevelop or renew the downtown core was through the expansion and growth of the business district. In the case of the Georgia World Congress Center, we can see how supporters' fight for construction in their "neighborhood" near the Central Business District shaped the development and outcome of their area just as drastically as did similarly timed fights to keep low-income housing out of these same areas.

By late August, Governor Carter announced that local developer James Cushman, who had built the Colony Square multi-use facility in Ansley Park, had expressed an interest in developing the World Congress Center.⁴⁸ Cushman envisioned building a World

⁴⁷ Jeff Nesmith, "Carter Threatens to Veto Congress Center Funding," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 March 1973, p.15A; Celestine Sibley, "House Speaker Helps Save Omni Land Bill," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 March 1973, p.10A; "Congress Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1973, p.4A; Milo Dakin, "Bill on Center Control Waits Carter Signing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 March 1973, p.11A.

⁴⁸ Ansley Park is an affluent intown Northside neighborhood, located near the intersection of Peachtree and 16th Streets, just north of Midtown. Ansley Park dated back to the first decade of the twentieth century. While many close-in streetcar suburbs of the streetcar era suffered from white

Congress Center that would serve as a base for a larger commercial and residential development, and he was considering sites near the Civic Center as well as further north on Peachtree, in Midtown, near his own Colony Square complex. Carter stated that he would prefer developing the center with private funds, if possible. Unfortunately, private development would prove more costly. The State of Georgia could sell bonds at 5% interest, whereas private financing would incur a 9% interest rate, and the private developer would have to contend with ad valorem taxes.⁴⁹

The WCC executive board, following Carter's mandated appropriations restriction, understood that the General Assembly had set aside \$3.04 million to start construction on the World Congress Center. The state would withdraw that funding if, and only if, a private developer had plans approved by the state Properties Commission before the legislative-mandated October 1st deadline. The board sensed that Governor Carter was attempting to delay appropriations in order to give Cushman time to put together financing and planning, and the board publicly called for no further delays. Their pleas went unheeded. State Attorney Arthur Bolton, at Carter's behest, had examined Carter's own appropriations restriction and found it to be invalid. The state Properties Commission did not have the

flight in the 1950s and 1960s, Ansley Park remained one of the city's most prestigious addresses throughout the post-war era. Colony Square, at Peachtree and 14th Streets, was a mixed residential, retail, and office space development built during the go-go 1960s, and while many offices relocated there, it never caught on as a residential space. See Rick Beard, "From Suburb to Defended Neighborhood: The Evolution of Inman Park and Ansley Park, 1890-1980," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 30 (Summer/Fall 1982).

⁴⁹ Gene Tharpe and Howell Raines, "Cushman May Bid on World Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 August 1973, p.1A; Gene Tharpe, "Congress Center Profit Set Low," *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 September 1973, p.8D.

power to approve development plans for the WCC, said Bolton. Therefore, private developers did not have to abide by the October 1st deadline.⁵⁰

In a joint statement, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Atlanta Hotel and Motel Association pressed the governor to end the delay in WCC construction. They explained that more than ten thousand new downtown hotel rooms would be ready for occupancy by late 1976, and these new hotels were depending upon World Congress Center traffic. Further delays, they warned, would result in rising construction costs and would mean a loss in convention revenue.⁵¹ In an attempt to get construction going, WCC board members announced that they would listen to proposals from private developers on September 28th. If developers did not have financing plans set by that date, the board would recommend that the state proceed with plans for the publicly financed WCC, as scheduled. James Cushman, the sole private developer who had publicly expressed interest in building the WCC, refused to present his proposal before the board. Citing the attorney general's finding, Cushman believed that the board had no authority to decide on privately financed proposals. Cushman had Jimmy Carter's ear, and the governor stubbornly stated that he would not support public funding for the GWCC until it became clear who had the authority to decide when and by whom the center would be built. When the Colony Square developer finally agreed to meet privately and informally with members of the WCC executive board, board members learned what

⁵⁰ Gene Tharpe, "Don't Delay World Center, Members of Board Urge," "Cushman Proposal Seen," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 September 1973, 4E; Gene Tharpe "Developers Get Delay on World Center Bids," *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 September 1973, p.1A.

⁵¹ Gene Tharpe, "Groups Warn Delay in Congress Center Costly," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 September 1973, p.7D; Gene Tharpe, "Public Funds for Center Threatened," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 September 1973, p.16C.

they had long expected—Cushman had neither settled on a site for his proposed center, nor had he secured any firm financing.⁵²

In early October 1973, the WCC board moved to ask state agencies for construction money. The ACVB called for immediate meetings of the Georgia State Finance & Investment Commission (SFIC) and the Georgia State Building Authority (GSBA) so the state could commence selling bonds. Several conventions scheduled for Atlanta in early 1977 threatened to cancel unless WCC construction began within the month. At the same time, the governor sought the attorney general's help to block public funding for the WCC. Bolton ruled that all state agencies were ineligible to decide how and where the Congress Center would be built. The SFIC, chaired by none other than Governor Carter, stated that it could not issue general obligation bonds for WCC construction until both the Fulton County Superior court and Georgia Supreme Court validated the sale of bonds in test cases. As neither court could hear a case until 1974, the commission's ruling gave private developers a couple more months to find financing for WCC proposals.⁵³

By the time the Georgia General Assembly reconvened in January 1974, members of the SFIC realized that it was unlikely any private developer could secure financing for the Congress Center. Franklin Haney, a developer from Chattanooga, Tennessee, had initiated a lawsuit against the Atlanta Housing Authority, but he had little hope to gain land in the Bedford-Pine urban renewal project near the Civic Center. Jim Cushman, who had already

⁵² Gene Tharpe, "Final Plans May Be Delayed on Congress Center Building," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 September 1973, p.12A; Gene Tharpe, "World Center Plans Up in the Air," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 October 1973, 13A; Howell Raines, "Carter's Stand on Center Hit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 October 1973, p.1A; David Morrison, "City to Lose 80 Million if Center Slows," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 October 1973, p.1A.

⁵³ Sam Hopkins, "World Center Will Be Built, Carter Vows," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 October 1973, p.5A; Howell Raines, "Carter Delays World Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 October 1973, p.14A.

determined land near the Civic Center to be cost prohibitive, found himself unable to acquire the Atlantic Steel property on the Westside as well. Cushman inquired after land near the old Progressive Club at Tenth Street and Techwood Drive, as well as near his Colony Square development, but he admitted that a privately developed Congress Center could cost well over \$100 million.⁵⁴

Facing such grim reports from private developers, Carter, the SFIC chair, reluctantly asked State Representative Denmark Groover to re-introduce a House bill to authorize financing the WCC with \$35 million in bonds. A separate House bill proposed to abolish the WCC executive board and give the State Department of Community Affairs the power over the new center. By the end of February, legislators had once again decided that the state's World Congress Center would be built on a site next to Tom Cousin's Omni coliseum. Weeks later, Governor Carter signed bills authorizing construction of the World Congress Center, and a new, larger twenty-member executive board began taking bids from contractors.⁵⁵

With legislative approval out of the way, construction could begin as soon as the local and state courts validated the use of general obligation bonds. The newly-expanded board quickly approved the use of a fast-track construction method. Fast-tracking permitted contractors to begin building before final architectural designs were completed.

⁵⁴ Sallye Salter, "New Test Suit to be Filed on World Center Financing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 January 1974, p.8D; Howell Raines, "Bonds Okayed for Trade Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 January 1974, p.2A; Sharon Bailey, "Bill Could Deny Center Its Tax-Exempt Status," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 February 1974, p.8A; Cliff Green, "New Delay Seen for Trade Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 February 1974, p.1A.

⁵⁵ Howell Raines, "Center: Compromise Possible at Last Minute," *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 February 1974, p.1A; Celestine Sibley, "Assembly OKs World Center Bill," *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 February 1974, p.1A; Howell Raines, "WCC Certain for Omni Site," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 February 1974, p. 24A; Howell Raines, "Carter Signature Opens Way for World Center," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 March 1974, p.1A.

With relatively little controversy, the board listened to contractor proposals and by mid-May, it chose the Ira H. Hardin firm to build the Congress Center. In a minor hiccup, the Finch, Heery, and Ellis joint architectural firm wanted 6% of construction costs, instead of the agreed upon 4% figure, and the SFIC became concerned that the firm wanted more authority over the project. But by August, the SFIC had dismissed FHE and had hired the Thompson, Ventulett, Stainback, Inc., (TVS) firm in its place, and the construction process continued apace.⁵⁶

EVALUATING URBAN REVITALIZATION

Cousins may have won the battle to locate the Georgia World Congress Center, but it was a pyrrhic victory. Even before the exhibition hall was ready to open, His Omni International mega-structure was hemorrhaging money. Tom Cousins and investing partner Maurice Alpert had announced plans for the \$65 million dollar massive multi-use complex during the fight for Congress Center placement, in the fall of 1972. The Omni International, slated for the intersection of Marietta Street and Techwood Drive, was to be built adjacent to The Omni coliseum. Unveiling their plans for the complex, Cousins and Alpert envisioned creating a “new kind of urban environment that would bring together many different kinds of people with many different cultural backgrounds.” Cousins explained how his development could help complete a triangle of people-centered activity

⁵⁶ Rex Granum, “2 More Firms Bid on Center,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 March 1974, p.8D; Rex Granum, “Fast Track WCC Construction Picked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 March 1974, p.6A; Howell Raines, “World Congress Center Developers’ Plans OK’d,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 April 1974, p.12A; Rex Granum, “WCC Developer Choice Due in May,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 April 1974, p.10A; Rex Granum, “3 Builders Plead Cases for WCC,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 May 1974, p.7A; Rex Granum, “Hardin Co. Named to Build World Congress Center,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 May 1974, p.1A; Leslie Thornton, “WCC Contracts for Sites Asked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1974, p.3A; Frederick Allen, “Officials Blast Architect on Center Pact,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 July 1974, p.2C; David Morrison, “Design Team’s Dismissal Upheld,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 July 1974, p.2A.

in downtown Atlanta, one that would help stabilize activity to the east near Five Points and the State Capitol as well as to the northeast, near Portman's Peachtree Center. With cool, calm zeal, Cousins presented plans for a complex that, when completed, would include 500 luxury hotel rooms, two eight-story office towers, ten 350-seat movie theaters, an indoor ice rink, and close to one million square feet of high-end retail and restaurant space. Cousins boldly promised that his complex, a re-invention of the town square, would "revitalize the central city both economically (through an increased tax base) and socially, by bringing people back to downtown." Developing partner Alpert echoed Cousins' sentiments, stating, "We're changing the downtown environment to make it an exciting place to visit—and eventually to live."⁵⁷

There are at least two points worth noting in the developers' comments. The developers' remark that the Omni International would be bringing people back to downtown belied the fact that there were already a good many Atlantans that lived within a mile of the complex. The difference is that the neighborhoods surrounding the Omni to the south, east, and west were predominantly poor, and predominantly black. Implicit in their remarks was that the Omni would be for people of affluence, and a revitalized downtown would be one that was, and was for, those richer and whiter.

After the state legislature finalized plans to locate the Georgia World Congress Center next to The Omni site, Cousins and Alpert no longer needed the 14-story, 500,000 square foot trade pavilion space in the original Omni International plans. In a daring move, Cousins found new tenants in puppeteers Sid and Marty Krofft. The brothers partnered

⁵⁷ "A New World Downtown," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 31 August 1975, 1F; Bruce Galphin, "Omni Omnia Vincit," *Atlanta Magazine*, November 1972, 60-63, 116-7; "High Rise, High Fashion, High Hopes, High Stakes," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, 8 February 1976, 8-12, 22-25.

with Omni International developers to create the country's first high-rise indoor amusement park. The \$14 million dollar "World of Sid and Marty Krofft" would feature a combination of show productions and park rides. Guests would take a 205-foot single span escalator, the world's longest, to the park entrance, where they would be greeted by 18-foot, 500-pound mimes. Near the entrance, continuous live puppet shows played from circus wagons. Down one flight of stairs, patrons found a carousel filled with mythical creatures and a clown stage. On the floor below, guests took a ride on the human pinball machine. The ride deposited guests on the terrace level, which housed a 1,000-seat theatre, as well as Lidsville, a village of "hat" inhabitants. The crown jewel of the amusement park was a free-fall mineshaft park ride that dropped patrons 50 feet to embark upon a battle between good and evil. The Kroffts were building on sheer faith. Because this type of downtown, indoor, interactive amusement park was the first of its kind, no one had a clue how Atlantans would feel about the park. Some questioned whether it could entice sufficient foot traffic, especially repeat foot traffic, to keep the endeavor afloat.⁵⁸

Much of the design behind Cousins' Omni International was impractical and not well-thought out, starting with the giant atrium skylight that stretched over the ice skating rink—sunlight streaming in melted the ice. From the opening of Krofft World, Omni patrons complained about the noise from the amusement park. At Mimi's, the upscale French restaurant located at the opposite end of the complex, diners complained about the distorted singing, clapping, and the occasional oompah-pah from the Krofft Magical Music

⁵⁸ Helen C. Smith, "Visit to a Fantasy World: A Land of Monsters, Mimes, and Thrills is Being Created By Sid and Marty Krofft," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 March 1976; Gene Tharpe, "Pufnstuf Bets on Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 October 1974, p.5A; Colleen Teasley, "\$14 Million Fun World Rising," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 January 1975, p.4C; Helen C. Smith, "You Can Be Pinball in Machine in '76," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 January, 1975, p.6B.

Machine. Bank tellers at the Omni branch of First National, which sat directly across from the entertainment center, complained that they heard the human pinball machine rattle every time the bank door opened.⁵⁹

But beyond the design flaws and conceptual problems with an indoor amusement park, noise was the least of Cousins' problems with the Omni International. Cousins was woefully in debt. In part, this was a consequence of bad economic timing. The Omni International was under construction as the nation was in the midst of one of the worst economic recessions since the 1930s. Heavily leveraged, the Omni International opened at a time when fewer Atlantans had disposable income for shopping and entertainment. By the time the hotel, retail shops, and amusement park had all opened to the public, in mid-1976, cost overruns brought the price tag for the Omni International to nearly \$100 million. The complex could not come close to paying off its loans even if it was fully leased, and it never was. The office towers remained only one-third occupied, and only 50% of the retail space had been leased.⁶⁰ Moreover, retail stores that had opened at the Omni struggled to make a profit. Neither Omni office secretaries nor out-of-town conventioners, it seemed, had any interest in shopping at Hermes, Pucci, Lanvin, or Christie Brothers Furriers. Affluent suburbanites found it much easier to do their upscale shopping out in the suburbs. Furthermore, attendance at Krofft World was low. Some Atlantans visited the entertainment center once for the sake of curiosity, but they did not make return trips. The World of Sid and Marty Krofft, bereft of visitors and bleeding cash, closed in October 1976, less than six months after opening. The Omni International was in financial dire straits

⁵⁹ Ed John, "Joyful Noise Not So Amusing," *Atlanta Journal*, 2 June 1976.

⁶⁰ Tom Henderson, "Third of Omni Complex Rented," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 20 April 1975, 20C.

even before it opened its doors, and *Business Week* dubbed Cousins' new town square the "Worst Real Estate Disaster in History" in 1978.⁶¹

Across town, just months after the Omni International hotel, ice rink, and shops opened their doors to the public, John Portman was faring slightly better. In March 1976, Portman celebrated the grand opening for his \$50 million dollar, 70-story glassed, cylindrical marvel of a hotel, the Westin Peachtree Plaza. The hotel stood at the corner of Peachtree and Cain (later renamed International Boulevard), on the site of the old Henry Grady hotel, which was a famous hang out for Georgia politicians. The lobby of Portman's latest endeavor featured a seven-story atrium with a half-acre lake. Small lobby seating areas jutted out over the lobby lake like gondolas on the canals of Venice.⁶² As if to distinguish his recent opening from Cousins' Omni International debut, Portman emphasized his joint role as architect and developer, stating that he began plans for the Peachtree Plaza, the eighth building in his Peachtree Center complex, as he always did—"by examining the over-all studies of Atlanta's needs."⁶³ Portman reiterated the insularity of the Plaza as a part of the "city within a city." Planned and insulated though the Plaza may have been in comparison to the open to the public layout and structure of the Omni International, Portman also found himself heavily in debt by the mid-1970s.

Some of the circumstances that contributed to the Omni International and Peachtree Center debt were outside of Cousins' or Portman's control. First, beginning in 1973 and continuing through the mid-1970s, the city, state, and nation was experiencing the worst recession since the Great Depression. Cousins broke ground on the Omni International

⁶¹ *Business Week*, 27 February 1978.

⁶² Bruce Galphin, "John Portman's Encore," *Atlanta Magazine*, November 1972.

⁶³ "High Rise, High Fashion," *Atlanta Journal Constitution Magazine*, 8 February 1976.

mere months before the recession started—with debts to investors accruing interest, Cousins had no choice but to forge ahead with construction. Second, when the Omni International office and hotel space came on the market, they entered an Atlanta market that was not only slowed by recession but also one that was incredibly overbuilt, as was evident by the low occupancy rates in many of the city's newer office buildings.⁶⁴ Unfortunately for Cousins, Portman, and a number of other developers, the 1970s market was not expanding as rapidly as it had in the previous decade.

In addition to a slowed economy and a glut of office space, members of the white downtown business elite, which included both Cousins and Portman, worried aloud about the future of private and public-private revitalization efforts in downtown Atlanta following the 1973 election of the city's first black mayor, Maynard Jackson. Cousins and Portman had to contend with how affluent white suburbanites perceived downtown. Many white suburbanites within the city's power structure feared that Jackson's election signaled the end to a shared power coalition between white downtown businessmen and the city's professional black middle class.⁶⁵ In their early dealings with the new mayor, members of Central Atlanta Progress and the Atlanta Chamber reportedly found Jackson to be inaccessible and unwilling to compromise. Relations between City Hall and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce deteriorated rapidly, which troubled Cousins and Portman greatly, as they insisted that the secret to a successful revitalized inner city lay in the cooperative efforts of private enterprise and local politicians, and that a successfully revitalized

⁶⁴ *National Real Estate Investor*, May 1978, entire issue.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 85-95; Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (London: Verso Press, 1996,) 172; Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996).

downtown area would be one that attracted affluent suburbanites back to downtown.⁶⁶ In a series entitled, "The City in Crisis," *Atlanta Constitution* editor Jack Tarver fanned the flames of white suburban anxiety and reinforced suburban perceptions of an increasingly black downtown as dirty, dangerous, and unsafe.⁶⁷ Both developers became concerned that misperceptions of downtown would reach a critical mass, after which point no amount of clever advertising and boosterish marketing would be able to woo affluent Atlanta suburbanites back into the city.

Miraculously, Cousins saved the Omni International from foreclosure with mortgage holder Morgan Guaranty Trust twice in 1978 and 1979. By 1981, he had restructured his debt and was able to repay his loans to his creditors.⁶⁸ The coliseum remained financially viable, as home to the Atlanta Hawks (the hockey team, the Flames, moved to Calgary in 1980, frustrated with a city that could not financially or otherwise support the sport), and the venue became the city's most popular arena for rock concerts. Because of the complex's relationship with and proximity to the Georgia World Congress Center, the Omni International Hotel had a steady stream of convention and tourist traffic. Nonetheless, the success of the Omni complex as a whole was less clear. The Omni International eventually did attract regular local patrons, though not the ones Cousins had hoped for or anticipated. The Omni became a popular hang out for African American teenagers from nearby neighborhoods. Teens would cut school and spend their afternoons in the video arcade. Its

⁶⁶ Tom Cousins, "Business-Political Accord Necessary," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 October 1974, 1A; John Portman, "Growth Potential to Remain Strong," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 October 1974, 1A.

⁶⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, 15-25 March 1975.

⁶⁸ DeWitt Rogers and Sallye Salter, "Banks Try Takeover of Omni," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 February 1978, 1A; Tom Walker, "Dream Alive Again," *Atlanta Journal*, 23 June 1978, 24A; Colleen Teasley, "Frustration Nags Banks, Omni Shops," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 25 February 1979, 1J; Tom Walker, "Omni International restructuring give Cousins' vision new life," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 January 1981, 2A.

multiple entrances and openings also gave the city's homeless easy access to escape the elements, to loiter, and to panhandle.⁶⁹ But the Omni's very openness to the public may have persuaded affluent white suburbanites to stay away. In the post-Civil Rights era Atlanta, where white Atlantans had felt like they had lost their exclusive rights to walk downtown streets, enjoy city parks, and patronize its retail shops, affluent whites (and affluent blacks, for that matter) preferred the privileges and conveniences of suburban malls. A return to downtown and the Omni was a reminder to whites that the color line, with all of its privileges it had conferred, had been dismantled. While affluent African Americans did not share a nostalgia for the days of Jim Crow downtown, perhaps it was simply uncomfortable to have to rub shoulders with youth from poorer intown neighborhoods. Perhaps in frequenting the Omni, middle class blacks were confronted with the shortcomings of the very civil rights movement that had helped them to move out to the suburbs. Moreover, perhaps middle class suburbanites could celebrate the desegregated South by driving to their own suburban malls. In avoiding the Omni, affluent Atlantans could avoid the poorer, darker Atlantans as well.

Unlike Cousins' Omni, with its open come-one, come-all layout and design, and multiple means of entrance and egress, Portman's Peachtree Center did succeed in insulating and isolating itself from the rest of the city. The Center's office buildings, if a little reminiscent of the architecture described in George Orwell's *1984*, clearly denoted the confines of the complex. The four office towers became the city's new prestigious business address. That said, if one did not have an occasion to work or entertain inside Peachtree

⁶⁹ Colleen Teasley, "Frustration Nags Banks, Omni Shops: Pullout of Leasing Agent Casts Still More Doubt on Complex," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 25 February 1979, 1J; Tom Walker, "Omni International Restructuring gives Cousins' vision new life," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 January 1981; see also Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 217-218.

Center, the complex was a confusing and intimidating maze to navigate. Portman proudly boasted that it was possible to travel the length and width of the entire Center without ever stepping on a sidewalk or crossing a street. The architect-developer had designed over a dozen pedestrian sky bridges that connected each of the Peachtree Center buildings to one another. Portman's critics, pointing to his sky bridges, accused him of creating "fortress architecture," which avoided the streets outside and implied that downtown itself was "congested and polluted at best, and unsafe from criminal elements at worst—a sentiment generally regarded as a code word for blacks."⁷⁰ The pedestrian sky bridges reinforced a two-class society in which white-collar workers, tourists, and conventioners walked the bridges and the urban poor, who had no reason to venture inside the Center, took to the streets. Critics questioned how effective Portman was at revitalizing the city, as it was entirely possible that Peachtree Center patrons could enter and leave without ever coming into contact with the city streets outside.⁷¹

In spite of the many shortcomings and criticisms leveled upon both Cousins' Omni complex and Portman's Peachtree Center, it bears repeating that, in comparison to the lack of structures built under either the federal Urban Renewal program or the Model Cities program, the private developers enjoyed far greater success, at least in terms of the construction of buildings and complexes. What remained to be seen was an attempt at urban revitalization—public, private, or some combination of the two that successfully attracted white and black, affluent and impoverished Atlantans. Cousins and Portman demonstrated with private urban renewal just as city officials, downtown business

⁷⁰ Tom Walker, "Skybridges High, Dry, Debatable," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 September 1988 1B; "Learning From Atlanta," *AIA Journal* 63 (April 1975): 38.; Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 162;

⁷¹ Walker, "Skybridges, High, Dry, Debatable," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 September 1988.

boosters, and neighborhood housing advocates demonstrated with federal urban renewal, which was that different groups in the city had vastly different visions of what a revitalized city of Atlanta should look like, and who should be living, working, and playing near the central business district. Even as late as the mid-1980s, there were still conflicting visions about how to “fix” Atlanta, and who belonged on its downtown streets, and in its downtown neighborhoods. In the case of Cousins, the cash-strapped developer made an important connection in 1977 when he sold the Atlanta Hawks to cable television upstart Ted Turner. Turner’s investment in the Hawks drew him into the Omni arena and the economically unsteady Omni International. By 1985, when Turner’s Cable News Network needed larger headquarters, he turned to Cousins for office space. Turner’s CNN bought the old Krofft World amusement park and renovated it into its television studio headquarters.⁷² As CNN grew in national and international importance following its coverage of the fall of Eastern European Communism in the late 1980s and the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the Omni International, renamed the CNN Center, finally became a significant place. It did so, however, as a television studio, which meant that the physical space of the Omni International was in and of itself pretty irrelevant. Cousins had originally envisioned his complex as the new heart of downtown Atlanta, but instead of creating a destination that people wanted to go to, people watched the news that came out of Cousins’ building from the comfort of their own couches. Portman’s Peachtree Center remained intact in the 1980s, but may have fared worse. By the late 1980s, many of the very same businesses that Portman attracted away from Five Points into Peachtree Center offices moved once again to newer office complexes further north along Peachtree, or else to outlying suburban

⁷² Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 230.

complexes. Neither Portman nor Cousins ever managed to complete upscale housing in their centers, and the lack of permanent residents made their respective centers feel like ghost towns after five p.m. Massive debts forced Portman to sell the entire development to Japanese investors, raising the question, “could the Peachtree Center still be considered successful private urban renewal if Atlantans no longer owned it?”

Affluent suburban Atlanta businessmen would revisit these same downtown blocks in the late-1980s and early 1990s and envision bringing both the Olympics as well as business reinvestment to the inner city, feats which would require a reprisal of public/private partnerships as well as re-imagined forms of urban renewal in order to ready the city for the world. Much like Turner’s cable news studio, the renewal that would occur under the Empowerment Zone would be superficial and made for television audiences.

CHAPTER 5

“YOU CAN’T HAVE A CITY WITHOUT PEOPLE”¹: URBAN RENEWAL REVISITED IN
ATLANTA’S EMPOWERMENT ZONE, 1995-2000

Near the intersection of Cooper Street and Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard in Atlanta’s Mechanicsville neighborhood, residents of aging brick apartment buildings offer their yards of red clay and pine straw as parking lots during the Braves’ season. From Cooper Street, it is an easy quarter-mile walk down RDA Boulevard (formerly Georgia Avenue) and under the interstate overpass to Turner Field, the new Atlanta Braves stadium. Though the short walk down this stretch of the boulevard does not bisect Mechanicsville, it reveals the neighborhood’s housing situation and hints at available job opportunities and upcoming business developments.²

In contrast to the aging apartments that face Cooper Street, RDA Boulevard received a fresh layer of asphalt and new, widened sidewalks just before the city hosted the Centennial Olympic Games in 1996. New lampposts, designed to resemble the city’s Victorian-era gas streetlights, dot Mechanicsville’s street corners and sidewalks. Between Cooper and Formwalt Streets, the north side of RDA Boulevard boasts a row of new, stately two-story townhouses “priced from the low \$300s” that look out across the boulevard onto weedy vacant lots. Heading east, a lone auto repair shop on the corner of Formwalt and RDA recently closed its doors and painted out its windows. A block further, the boulevard

¹ Cathy Busby, Atlanta Housing Committee Hearing, 26 March 1973, Panke Bradley Papers, Box 1, MARBL, Robert Woodruff Library, Emory University.

² The following several paragraphs are in part based on the author’s personal observations of the neighborhood in the summers of 1995 and 1996 and again in the Spring and Fall of 2000.

crosses one-way Pryor Street, which funnels game traffic from the Downtown Connector's Fulton Street exit. More residents of Mechanicsville and nearby neighborhoods operate the vacant lots on Pryor, working as makeshift parking attendants, and ameliorating the parking shortage for Turner Field spectators. Pryor Street houses a funeral home, Methodist church, a YMCA, and a few single-building businesses. On the west side of the street, approximately ten brand-new Victorian-styled houses, priced in the low \$200s, loom opposite ball game parking lots, perched on tiny, well-groomed lots and barricaded in with wrought-iron security fences.³

The Georgia Avenue BP gas station, located opposite St. Stephens Missionary Baptist Church on Ralph David Abernathy, represents one of the only places where residents can buy bread and milk within a radius of a few miles. On that same block, on an island in the middle of RDA, the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games erected an iron monument to commemorate the industrial railroad workers who first settled in the area in the decades immediately following the Civil War. Further down the boulevard, neighborhood teenagers spend the baseball season on the sidewalks hawking bags of boiled peanuts, soft drinks and bottled water out of sun-bleached coolers. Rows of tables also line the sidewalks, where street vendors proffer "genuine" Braves caps for only five dollars. Further downhill, scalpers attempt to buy and sell seats to the day's game. The boulevard passes underneath Interstate 75/85 just before reaching Turner Field, and street buskers, making good use of the tunnel acoustics, set up drum kits (or plastic five gallon buckets) and play for passers-

³ H.M. Cauley, "Neighborhood of the Week: Mechanicsville—Community groups, influx of buyers re-energize area south of downtown," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 29 March 1998, 8HF.

by. In stark contrast to the neighborhood in which it is situated, Turner Field looks new, well-maintained, and moneyed.⁴

Since 1997, this is the scene that any Braves fan might have observed when in town to catch a game. But residents of Mechanicsville have called these same city blocks home 365 days a year. Since construction began on the first Braves stadium in 1965, Mechanicsville residents have endured the traffic and noise that has accompanied the eighty or so home games each year. They have realized some economic benefits from game day traffic, but they also know that game day traffic has not created a sustainable economy for the immediate neighborhood. Cash flows during the baseball season, but dries up from October until next season opener. Old-timers remember Mechanicsville and its immediate environs as vibrant, bustling interracial working class communities with an industrial economic base and a full array of services and community organizations. That was before renewal plans following the Second World War systematically decimated the neighborhood's structure.⁵ The Downtown Connector (i.e. Interstate 75/85), Interstate 20, Atlanta Fulton County Stadium, and now Turner Field have all isolated the neighborhood from the Central Business District as well as from surrounding communities; renewal projects have razed blocks of housing and shops, displaced thousands of families and left acres of vacant lots to nature. Mechanicsville as a community has been struggling and

⁴Alma E. Hill, "Olympic Weekly: Corporate Lease will Mean New Life for Empty Church," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 November 1995, 4D.

⁵"Years Before Urban Renewal Recalled as Full of Vitality," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 26 December 1992, D4; Ken Foskett, "Olympic Stadium reaps suspicions planted 30 years ago 'Urban Renewal' left community resentful," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 March 1993, A14; Jennifer French Parker, "Peoplestown looks to its vibrant past as model for future," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 2 June 1994.

residents find themselves simultaneously frustrated by and dependent upon the baseball season to subsidize its existence.⁶

By the 1990s, residents of Mechanicsville knew well that it still needed some sort of outside assistance to help prop up its economy and solve its social problems. Yet the question of how best to implement programs that would revitalize America's downtown areas such as Mechanicsville remained unanswered. Mechanicsville residents believed that they had already sacrificed so much of what makes up a community in the name of 'progress' and 'renewal.' Thus, in 1993, when the Clinton administration proposed plans for urban revitalization called the Empowerment Zone, inner city residents were understandably wary.

This chapter revisits Atlanta's and Mechanicsville's experience with urban renewal from the 1990s into the early twenty-first century by examining the city's participation in the most recent federal urban revitalization program, Empowerment Zones (EZ). It traces how the Empowerment Zone concept evolved from a conservative reaction to Great Society programs into a viable method for attacking urban decay, and considers the extent to which Empowerment Zones represented a shift in federal urban policy. Here, as in earlier chapters, Atlanta provides a case study from which to examine what happened more broadly within the contested federal urban renewal program nationwide. In particular, this chapter focuses on how the planning for and implementation of the Empowerment Zone in

⁶ In recent years, residents of Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, and Summerhill have worked with scholars to chronicle their experiences of living with decades of urban renewal. See, for example, Larry Keating and Maxwell Creighton, "Olympic Impact Neighborhoods: Planning Assessments of Human Services, Housing and Transportation Issues in Six Neighborhood Areas," (Atlanta: Community Design Center of Atlanta, 1992); Larry Keating, "Peoplestown: Resilience and Tenacity," 1999, unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

Atlanta strained an already tenuous relationship between city leaders and the neighborhood residents living within Zone boundaries.

What is most striking about this most recent round of urban renewal conflict in Atlanta is that the majority of the players on both sides of the conflict were African American. Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell, along with other middle class African American city councilmen and leading black developers and businessmen argued that the EZ program could be successful because it would stimulate housing construction within the Zone and because it would entice businesses to relocate to the inner city. Campbell and his supporters pointed to improvements in the outward, physical appearance of the Zone. But members of Zone neighborhoods disagreed, arguing that the litmus test for Zone success was the quality of life for those already living in the impoverished area. Community representatives conceded that the Zone created housing and business gentrification opportunities for middle and upper class suburbanites to return to in-town living, but these improvements did not fit the needs of “original” Zone residents, who sorely needed affordable housing, access to adequate education, and ample job training to prepare for the relocating businesses.

Conflicts between City Hall and community activists over the Empowerment Zone were heightened in part because this round of urban renewal would play out against a backdrop of the city’s preparations for the Centennial Olympic Games. Residents living within Zone boundaries could not contain their frustration with a City Hall that fast-tracked approval for construction projects totaling hundreds of millions of dollars for new stadiums and Olympic athlete housing, all the while completely stalling on long-overdue housing projects within Zone neighborhoods. Even if Empowerment Zones represented in

theory an innovative approach to addressing urban poverty and physical deterioration, Zone residents insisted that the local control of the Empowerment Zone remained just as closed off as it had been during Urban Renewal and Model Cities, with a governing board that worked to perpetuate racial inequalities and contribute to the growing disparity of wealth, power, and education amongst African Americans in the city of Atlanta.

ORIGINS OF THE EMPOWERMENT ZONE

During the 1960s, federal legislators witnessed a backlash against Urban Renewal in cities across the nation.⁷ Acknowledging basic design flaws in the initial attempt to revitalize decaying downtowns, subsequent administrations began to rethink the way they dealt with blight and inner city problems. Beginning in the early 1960s, politicians and city planners agreed upon three basic ideas that have shaped most of the last four decades of public policy development. First, politicians reasoned that inner city residents understood the needs of their communities better than legislators on Capitol Hill, so the most effective revitalization program would be one that impoverished citizens designed and implemented themselves. Second, anti-poverty measures would best serve the inner city if they operated within the neighborhoods in need, coordinated their services under one roof, and provided a comprehensive range of services. Finally, politicians and planners alike believed that the

⁷ The seminal early critiques on Urban Renewal include Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961); Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962); Scott Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965); James Q. Wilson, ed., *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966). These critiques helped to shape the revisions to federal urban policy in the mid-to-late 1960s.

key to improving inner city neighborhoods rested upon revitalizing the economic base of the downtown community. Simply put, inner city residents needed good jobs.⁸

The urban redevelopment plans of subsequent administrations were all based on these fundamental strategies. Yet, most critics have agreed that these programs have all failed abysmally because the poor have remained poor. The War on Poverty program directed its funds to communities, which meant that it deprived local politicians of their influence and caused them to divert their support. Model Cities tried to correct this problem in governance by including local politicians in the management of program funds, but the program spread its money too thinly over too many cities to have had much impact.⁹

During the 1970s, in the wake of the failed Model Cities program, American cities such as Atlanta saw the succession of anti-poverty programs like the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) under the Ford administration and the Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG) under the Carter administration. In each case, federal legislators sold these programs as being fundamentally different from the failed systems of the past. CDBG funding, enacted under the Housing and Development Act of 1974, replaced categorical, single-purpose programs with a broad grant that local governments could

⁸ Nicholas Lemann, "The Myth of Community Development," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 January 1994, 27; Richard P. Nathan, *A New Agenda for Cities* (Columbus: Ohio Municipal League, 1992).

⁹ Lemann, "The Myth of Community Development." For a thorough synthesis on Great Society accomplishments and shortcomings, see for example Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). For a clearer understanding of the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in Great Society programs, see Sidney Milkis and Jerome Milheur, eds., *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005). For a more in-depth study of President Johnson's role in the passage of Great Society programs, see John A. Andrew III, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).

allocate as they chose across an array of acceptable housing, infrastructure, and economic developments. UDAG funding, enacted into law as part of the Housing and Development Act of 1977, directed federal money for the economic revitalization of disadvantaged urban areas in the hopes that federal investment would encourage further private sector investment. The CDBG funding survived the 1970s, and exists in a smaller form today, but critics have charged that funding decisions made by local officials did not always direct funding exclusively to the most extreme need, and that local officials did not distribute funding proportionately with respect to need. Congress terminated UDAG funding in 1988 largely over issues of political infighting; it was a program created in a Democratic administration to promote inner city economic development that by the 1980s was responsible primarily for funding luxury hotels and festival marketplaces in the Northeast and Midwest. In spite of legislators' protestations that CDBG and UDAG funding represented fresh, new approaches to combating urban blight, their programs promoted the same bottom-up planning, coordination of programs, and neighborhood redevelopment that Johnson had implemented in the Model Cities program.¹⁰

A CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE TO THE GREAT SOCIETY

¹⁰ For a more thorough discussion of the ways in UDAGs fell short as a national urban policy, see Douglas J. Watson, John G. Heilman, and Robert S. Montjoy, eds., *The Politics of Redistributing Urban Aid* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); Ingrid W. Reed, "The Life and Death of UDAG: An Assessment Based on Eight Projects in Five New Jersey Cities," *Publius* 19, no. 3, (Summer 1989), 93-109; Timothy Conlan, *From New Federalism to Devolution: Twenty-Five Years of Intergovernmental Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998). The Department of Housing and Urban Development has continued to administer CDBG funding almost unabated since the passage of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-383). For a more thorough explanation of CDBG shortcomings, see for example Dennis W. Gleiber and Mary Ann Steger, "Decentralization, Local Priorities, and the Community Development Block Grant Program in Milwaukee," *Publius* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1983), 39-55.

In 1980, Jack Kemp, a Republican Congressman from Buffalo, New York, proposed a fundamentally new line of thinking for anti-poverty legislation. Kemp advocated that poor inner city areas possessed a “spirit of entrepreneurship,” and that new businesses could flourish and grow in blighted inner cities if the federal government eliminated taxes and removed regulatory obstacles. Throughout the 1980s, first as congressman, and later as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development for George H.W. Bush, Kemp pushed to give businesses capital gains tax breaks in the inner city. Kemp’s concept, which he named Enterprise Zones, represented the opposite of what he deemed “governmental-micromanaged re-development.” Instead of tearing down and replacing buildings, or authorizing which social services would be funded within a economically impoverished area, Kemp stressed that with Enterprise Zones, the government’s primary role was to remove high taxes, licensing fees, and cumbersome federal, state, and local regulations. Kemp’s proposal fit seamlessly into President-elect Reagan’s plans to cut spending on social welfare and reduce federal income taxes. Both Kemp and Reagan endorsed supply-side economic theory, believing that cutting taxes would enable Americans, especially employers and investors, to retain more income, which would in turn give businesses the resources and incentive to reinvest for greater profit. Kemp reasoned that greater entrepreneurial activity in blighted downtowns would spur economic growth, which would trickle down in the form of wages to newly hired employees. Enterprise Zones looked like a great bargain.¹¹

¹¹ Jack Kemp, *An American Renaissance: Strategy for the 1980s*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Jack Kemp and Michael Harrington, “Tax Policy and the Economy: A Debate between Michael Harrington and Representative Jack Kemp,” (New York: Institute for Democratic Socialism, 1979); James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Legislators proposed Enterprise Zone bills numerous times during the Reagan administration, but the federal initiative never made it to a vote. Dozens of states enacted local enterprise zones, but states lacked the power to cut taxes on capital—the key investment incentive. Then, while Kemp served as HUD Secretary for George H.W. Bush, Enterprise Zones nearly became the national anti-poverty policy. In 1992, in the wake of Rodney King and the Los Angeles Riots, stunned federal legislators sought a fresh approach to fixing the enduring cycle of poverty and violence that seemed to plague American cities—and Enterprise Zones were one of the only programs yet to have been tried. Both the House and Senate passed a hastily drawn-up Enterprise Zone bill, but because the legislation included a small provision that would change the tax-accounting procedure for securities dealers, President Bush vetoed it so as to avoid any accusations that he was introducing new taxes before the 1992 election.¹²

Just as Bush decided to veto the bill, his opponent Bill Clinton, revealing the new Democrats' social conservatism, quietly endorsed the Republican Enterprise Zone idea during the 1992 campaign. Shortly after Clinton's inauguration in January 1993, his administration introduced Enterprise Zones into his first budget proposal. On the whole, politicians on both sides of the political fence found Clinton's Enterprise Zone legislation easy to support because it operated primarily on tax cuts and did not call for tax increases. Yet many champions of Kemp's Enterprise Zone concept recoiled at the Clinton administration's amended version. First, rather than calling for capital gains tax breaks, Clinton's version called for wage credits, wherein businesses that employed residents living within the Zone received breaks in payroll taxes. Zone planners asserted that this

¹² Lemann, "The Myth of Community Development," p.5.

approach emphasized job creation rather than capital formation, which would more directly benefit Zone residents. Second, remembering that the Model Cities program spread its funding too thinly over too many jurisdictions, Clinton proposed a very small program that would heavily subsidize just ten proposed Empowerment Zones, with only six Zones operating in urban areas. To insure enough legislative support for the bill's passage, Clinton's program offered modest subsidies for an additional 100 Enterprise Communities. Next, Clinton insisted upon the creation of a federal "Enterprise Board" in Washington to oversee Zone designation and implementation. While the general consensus behind planning for Clinton's Zones was that "community development efforts would be best run locally," the federal Enterprise Board, headed by Vice President Al Gore, would require from interested cities a highly detailed application and plan that "coordinated economic, human, community and physical development."¹³

Kemp publicly denounced Clinton's Zone plan as "anemic" and one that would give the federal government too large of a role. Connecticut Senator and fellow Democrat Joseph Lieberman remarked that Clinton's Zone idea represented a "fundamental misunderstanding of the enterprise zone concept."¹⁴ Supporters of Clinton's amended plan, such as White House domestic policy adviser Bruce Reed, argued that the proposed Zone

¹³ Congressional House Committee on Small Business, The Administration's Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community proposal: Hearing before the Committee on Small Business. 103rd Congress, 1st session, 27 May and 8 June 1993, 3; Robert A. Taylor, "Clinton Saddles up GOP Warhorse: Enterprise Zone concept renewed to help Struggling Cities, rural areas," *Washington Times*, 5 May 1993, A4; Guy Gugliotta, "Clinton Sets Enterprise Zone Plan: New Panel would add 110 Local Initiatives," *Washington Post*, 5 May 1993, A1; Jason De Parle, "Clinton Proposes Assistance to Troubled Neighborhoods," *New York Times*, 5 May 1993, B9.

¹⁴ Donald Lambro, "Hardly the Same Enterprise," *The Washington Times*, 24 May 1993, E-3; Guy Gugliotta, "Cities Putting Enterprise Zones to Work; With More Than Tax Breaks, Planners Turn Concept into Reality," *The Washington Post*, 1 June 1993, A1; Jack Kemp, "Feeding on Fears, Delusion, and Swag," *The Washington Times*, 16 July 1993, F1. After leaving as Secretary of HUD, Jack Kemp became co-director of the aptly-named Empower America, a grass-roots conservative organization.

legislation was a comprehensive program that included tax cuts for conservatives and targeted spending on development for liberals. Republican and Democrats alike generally found Clinton's amended Enterprise Zone plan appealing in that it "promoted the work ethic as the solution to poverty, rather than welfare and government programs of the 'throwing money at problems' variety," repeating a common criticism of the War On Poverty and Model Cities programs. Yet the very rhetoric used in Clinton's version of the Zone concept, such as "empowerment," and "not a handout, but a hand-up," suggested that the 1993 proposal had more in common with the anti-poverty initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s than it did with Kemp's original concept.¹⁵

Clinton pushed the legislation through Congress in August 1993 before Republicans swept mid-term elections the next year. Title VIII of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act created the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Initiative, the biggest new federal program designed to bring prosperity to blighted urban and rural areas in over a decade. Congress sold the \$3.5 billion dollar, decade-long initiative as a means of "empowering" impoverished inner city neighborhood residents to fix their own problems. The problem was, no one in Congress or in the Clinton administration seemed very enthusiastic about the new national urban policy initiative. For example, Representative Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL), of the House Ways and Means Committee, and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), of the Senate Finance Committee, did not believe in the very Empowerment Zone bill they helped bring to a vote.¹⁶ Publicly, HUD Assistant Secretary

¹⁵ Lemann, "The Myth of Community Development," p. 8; Ernest Holsendolph, "Patience Empowers a Program in the Long Run," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1995, R1; Michael Wine, "Clinton Looks to Conference Panel to Restore Budget to His Liking," *New York Times*, 22 June 1993, A20.

¹⁶ Eric Pianin and David Hilzenrath, "Democratic Senators Warn that Clinton Budget Plan Needs Changes," *Washington Post*, 18 June 1993; Daniel P. Moynihan, "Response to The Myth of

Andrew Cuomo boasted that Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities would help America “meet the challenge to reclaim broken lives and rebuild neighborhoods that were bypassed by the American Dream.”¹⁷ Privately, Cuomo had much more modest expectations for the program, stating, “if you expect to see Harlem gentrified and mixed-income, it’s not going to happen.... if you look at people who moved out, it can be [viewed] as a success.”¹⁸ Harlem Representative Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) admitted that he had rejected the entire Empowerment Zone premise when it was first proposed during the Reagan administration. Rangel reluctantly supported Clinton’s modified Zone proposal, admitting that as the nation’s urban policy that Zones were inadequate.¹⁹ Clinton officially introduced his Empowerment Zone program from a parking lot in Cleveland, Ohio, a venue that did little to inspire confidence in the program.²⁰ Despite such lukewarm support on the federal level though, local leaders immediately began jockeying for funds.

THE OLYMPIC CITY SEEKS EMPOWERMENT

Atlanta began the application process in October 1993. Since legislation only authorized six urban Empowerment Zones, the funding would be highly competitive. Cities had to submit a detailed strategic plan to show how it would promote “bottom-up, community-based revitalization,” and to demonstrate the ability to create a business-

Community Development,” *New York Times*, 30 January 1994, F6; David Hilzenrath, “House Passes Clinton’s Tax Plan; Bill to Affect Most Americans,” *The Washington Post*, 14 May 1993, A1; David Rosenbaum, “On Budget Razor’s Edge, Opposites March in Step,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1993, A1.

¹⁷ Andrew Cuomo, EZ/EC page, accessed 9 October 2000, <<http://www.5hud.gov/urban/welcom/welcome.asp>>

¹⁸ Lemann, “The Myth of Community Development,” 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Clinton Unveils Empowerment Zones Plan to Rebuild Cities,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 September 1994, 1A.

friendly atmosphere.²¹ In this regard, Atlanta found itself with an important advantage over other cities. The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) had recently completed an extensive planning study of the city, as had former President Carter's "The Atlanta Project," a private, local, non-profit community development organization dedicated to many of the same anti-poverty goals as the Empowerment Zone legislation.²² City leaders in Atlanta, then, used these ongoing projects as evidence that Atlanta already had the kind of organizational infrastructure necessary for the Empowerment Zones. ACOG was particularly interested in tapping the federal program. Neighborhoods like Mechanicsville surrounded what was to be the center of the Olympic experience—the Olympic stadium (what would eventually become Turner Field)—and the sight of urban blight had the potential to be an internationally televised embarrassment. Revamping neighborhoods whole cloth was beyond the capacity of ACOG, but via Empowerment Zone funding, the city's Olympic officials saw an opportunity to give the Olympic Ring neighborhoods a sorely needed face-lift.²³

The prospect of Empowerment Zone funding did not just attract the attention of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. It also drew in many of Atlanta's inner city residents, who, while leery of urban renewal, became convinced once again that their participation in this effort might be more than a mere conciliatory gesture. Those living

²¹ Elizabeth Ross, "American Cities Gear up to Apply for Aid," *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 January 1994, A1; Maria Saporta, "Federal Grant Could Inject \$100 Million into City's Poorest Areas," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 December 1993 D13; "Atlanta Empowerment Zone Q & A," 1995, 2, Ivan Allen Public Documents Department, Atlanta Fulton County Public Library, Fairlie-Poplar branch.

²² Michael W. Giles, *The Atlanta Project: A Community Based Approach to Solving Urban Problems* (Washington D.C.: National Civic Review, 1993); Ira Cutler, *Learning Together: Reflections on The Atlanta Project* (Atlanta: The Carter Center, 1996); Joan Walsh, *Stories of Renewal: Community Building and the Future of Urban America* (New York: The Rockefeller Center, 1997).

²³ Kristine F. Anderson, "Olympics Rush at Atlanta's New Mayor," *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 November 1994, 2.

within the proposed Zone boundaries actively took part in approximately seventy meetings over a three-month period. Residents voiced their concerns about “economic development, human services, community development, and public safety.” They lived in neighborhoods with a 57% poverty rate, and where 38% of the adult population did not have adequate work, numbers that seemed unbelievable in what was supposed to be the South’s most progressive city.²⁴

The participation of Zone residents in the project seemed different this time. Not only were they included in the discussions leading up to the application process, but the city’s general information brochure actually credited over 3,000 residents as contributing authors to Atlanta’s Strategic Plan. Mayor Bill Campbell, who headed the application process, applauded residents for their efforts as well as those of “over 300 governmental agencies, community groups, businesses, and institutions.”²⁵ During the application process Atlanta boasted the greatest city-community partnership of any EZ applicant city. Because city and private interests welcomed the input of inner city residents, Zone residents considered themselves to be key Zone planners. This level of participation inspired many inner city residents to believe that the EZ differed from earlier renewal programs.

Certainly, city leaders over-emphasized their valuation of residents’ input for the press. In reality, the application process reflected more of a formality than a genuine

²⁴ Darryl Fears, Douglas A. Blackmon, “Empowerment Zone: Atlanta’s Bid for \$100 Million, Neighborhoods betting on a Federal Jackpot,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 June 1994, B4; Darryl Fears, “Panel Signs off on Bid to for Grant; Anti-Poverty Funds are at Stake,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 June 1994, B4; Darryl Fears, “A New Life For Inner Cities,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 June 1994, E6; Darryl Fears, “Atlanta Submits Bid Today for \$100 Million Dollar Federal Grant,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 June 1994, E4; Darryl Fears, “Empowerment Zone Application Board Promising More Neighborhood Involvement,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 September 1994, C4; “Strategic Plan for Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone,” unpaginated, Ivan Allen Public Documents, Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library, Fairlie-Poplar Branch.

²⁵ “Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone Q & A,” 3, Ivan Allen Public Documents.

incentive to create a truly collaborative atmosphere. Journalists widely reported that some zones had already been chosen prior to the submission of applications. Congressmen Charles B. Rangel and Dan Rostenkowski, who represented Harlem and Chicago, respectively, were instrumental in getting the initiative passed, and they each sought to have their districts chosen for Zone funding. A close reading of specific Zone by-laws further revealed that certain cities, such as Baltimore and the Philadelphia/Camden area, would find it easier to apply for and win Zone designation. For example, one stipulation mandated that at least one Zone city must have an urban population under 500,000; another by-law called for a Zone city that existed across a state line. These specifications indicated that politicians had some cities in mind.²⁶ But Atlanta had a good chance of winning Zone status because it had already proven its ability to organize when it secured the spot to host the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. The city desperately needed to prepare for the Olympics, and the extra federal funding would aid an area that would soon be broadcast to the world.

On December 21, 1994, both Georgia Governor Zell Miller and President Clinton telephoned Mayor Bill Campbell at City Hall to offer their congratulations: after reviewing hundreds of applications, the Department of Housing and Urban Development accepted Atlanta as one of the nation's six Empowerment Zones.²⁷ Along with New York, Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, Atlanta received \$100 million in federal grants (called

²⁶ Public Law 103-66, Part VIII.

²⁷ Darryl Fears, "City Expecting Empowerment Designation," *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 December 1994, C1; Darryl Fears, "City Hall aglow over expected \$100 million dollar gift," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 December 1994, A1; Darryl Fears, "Atlanta gets \$100 million for troubled intown areas," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 December 1994, A18; Final report of the APCO associates, "Review of Atlanta Empowerment Zone," December 1997, Empowerment Zone Office Files, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Atlanta, GA.

Social Service Block Grants) and an additional \$150 million in federal tax credits. Atlanta's Zone would comprise a 9.29 square mile radius, and it would affect 49,998 residents in thirty neighborhoods. The Zone would not form a perfect circle around the city center. Instead, it roughly resembled a horseshoe. It would be concentrated south of the downtown Central Business District below Interstate 20 and north of downtown on either side of the Downtown Connector, I-75/85. Excluded from the Zone were the Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and the downtown financial district.²⁸

Atlanta's winning application, called the Strategic Plan, outlined four major objectives whose implementation would hopefully provide the answers to economically ailing inner city neighborhoods. Of the plan's four components, the first objective, entitled "Expanding Employment and Investment Opportunities," most clearly resembled former HUD secretary Jack Kemp's Enterprise Zone concept. Each theme identified key community needs and labeled them as priorities. From these priorities, the planners then set benchmarks or objectives for the Zone to meet, and predicted the anticipated pace and level of empowerment that the Zone could expect to see by the end of the first year, second year, and so on. For example, under the first theme, planners identified the following five categories of need: Zone residents lacked access to meaningful jobs, needed increased control of financial resources on the grassroots level, ran few community development corporations, underutilized already scarce revolving loan money, and lacked job training.²⁹

²⁸ Darryl Fears and Douglas A. Blackmon, "Empowerment Zones: A Means to a Far Better End," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 December 1994, C2.

²⁹ Darryl Fears, "A Cornucopia of Projects," *Atlanta Constitution*, C3; "President Empowers City For Change," *Atlanta Constitution*, A1; "One-Stop Shop on Way for Small Businesses," *Atlanta Constitution*, C3; "No Instant Fixes," *Atlanta Constitution*, A13; "Bleakest Areas May Bloom: Plan Fosters Public-Private Investment and Gives Community a Stake in the Outcome," *Atlanta Constitution*, C3; "Atlanta Gets Empowered," *Atlanta Constitution*, A18; "Atlanta Gets SBA One-Stop

Other themes in Atlanta’s strategic plan addressed the need to create safe, livable communities; to lift youth and families out of poverty; and to provide adequate housing for all. Under each of these themes, planners prioritized needs and set goals. As was the case with Urban Renewal and Model Cities, local Atlanta officials oversold the program’s capabilities. Nonetheless, the Atlanta Empowerment Zone showed signs—indeed, had the potential—to become a successful urban revitalization because the Zone seemed to correctly identify the problems facing the inner city neighborhoods. However, a short walking tour through Mechanicsville in 2000 suggested that five years of EZ programming did little to ameliorate poverty for area residents.³⁰

The optimistic, albeit unrealistic objectives of the Strategic Plan did not account for the fact that the city leaders and members of the private business sector never reached an agreement with Zone residents as to what would constitute a program success—an improved physical appearance, or the improved quality of life for Zone residents.³¹ “The differing perspectives,” remarked the Zone’s first Executive Director, Paul White, “have clearly been problematic.”³² The Empowerment Zone’s strategic plan seemed like an empowering document, but its governing administration was set up in such a way that it actually denied community leaders much of a voice in its governance. This lack of access to

Shop,” A13, *Atlanta Constitution*, all articles from 22 December 1994; “Strategic Plan for Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone,” 1st section, unpaginated, Ivan Allen Public Documents, Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library, Farlie-Poplar Branch.

³⁰ Final Report of the APCO associates, “Review of Atlanta Empowerment Zone,” 3-7.

³¹ David Sawicki, “Focus on People, Not Place,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 January 1995, A13.

³² Alfred Charles, “From a Powerhouse to a Zone of Contention: the Shake-Up at Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone is Meant to End a Pattern of Heavy Spending and Make the Area what it was Seen to be at the Beginning—an Example for Zones around the Nation,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 21 August 1997, C2. This statement was White’s own swan song. Mayor Campbell did not renew White’s contract in December 1997.

EZ decision-making sessions led many to argue, “the program was no different than any other urban renewal.”³³ Mayor Campbell inexplicably ended the heavily publicized city-community coalition after the planning stage, and philosophical differences between city officials and Zone residents did not improve with the introduction of the EZ government.

To administer EZ funding, Mayor Campbell established the Atlanta Empowerment Zone Corporation (AEZC) in February 1995. He maintained that the governing board represented a “partnership between public, private, and community leaders.”³⁴ Campbell chaired the AEZC board and appointed the initiative’s Executive Director. In addition, Campbell appointed ten of the board members: three from the state, three from Fulton County, three from Atlanta Public Schools, and the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) director. Zone residents elected the remaining six board seats from a thirty-six member Community Empowerment Advisory Board (CEAB), a larger body that represented the thirty Zone neighborhoods and six adjoining linkage communities. The AEZC community representatives felt outnumbered from the beginning and soon felt powerless. Moreover, the community representatives sat for one-year terms and then faced re-election, unlike mayoral appointees. The different board terms and uneven city-community numbers on the board undermined the sort of coalition that the Zone was supposed to engender.

“Relationship?” remarked Peggy Harper, the Mechanicsville representative on the AEZC board, about the Mayor and his appointees. “There [was] no relationship.”³⁵

³³ Interview with Peggy Harper, 7 November 2000.

³⁴ Mayor Bill Campbell, “State of the City Address,” January 18, 1994, reprinted in *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 January 1995, A13; “Atlanta Empowerment Zone Q & A,” 3.

³⁵ Interview with Peggy Harper, 7 November 2000; Darryl Fears, “Empowerment Zones: Here We Go Again—Clinton Plan Just Another War on Poverty?” *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 December 1994, A10; Douglas A. Blackmon, “Invest in Human Capital,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 December 1994, A8; Darryl Fears, “Response to Federal Zone Grant is Mixed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 December 1994,

The board structure perpetuated an imbalance of power in the EZ that favored the city leaders and private business interests. Community activists also complained about having to work with an EZ administration rife with corruption and ineptitude on all sides. “The primary weakness of the EZ was its leadership,” stated Fred Van Dyck, from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA).³⁶ Van Dyck served as a “pass-through mechanism for the Empowerment Zone funds and ensured the City’s compliance with all applicable laws and regulations with respect to the initiative.”³⁷ His function with the Zone was primarily regulatory, and because he was not as emotionally involved in the program in the same capacity as the community activists, he offered an insightful outsider’s view. “Once the initiative money arrived,” Van Dyck stated, “The AEZC turned political, and the community leaders were powerless to stop the corruption and petty politicking.”³⁸

Poor leadership from the AEZC facilitated the gross mismanagement of funds and made a bungling mess of operating procedures. As a consequence, Zone neighborhoods saw five executive directors in as many years. When asked how the EZ leadership operated, most community leaders pointed to the case of Paul White, who was the EZ’s first Executive Director from January 1996 to December 1997. Using Zone funds, White ran up thousand-dollar phone bills, bought first-class plane tickets, and footed the bill for office “happy hour” meetings and lunches. These mistakes were made known to the public through a

D13; Darryl Fears and Douglas A. Blackmon, “Early Action on Empowerment Zone is Critical,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 January 1995, E3.

³⁶ Interview with Fred Van Dyck, 22 November 2000.

³⁷ *Ibid.* The responsibilities for the Georgia Department of Community Affairs are outlined in the grant award from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the City of Atlanta and DCA. In addition, the DCA provides HUD an annual narrative to describe the progress made and obstacles encountered by the City in carrying out the approved Strategic Plan and benchmarks.

³⁸ Interview with Fred Van Dyck, 22 November 2000.

series of audits from several public and private institutions, as well as through the monitoring reviews from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. But perhaps most frustrating for community representatives of the Zone was that they were unable to fire White. When Mayor Campbell finally removed White, he did so largely in reaction to audits that threatened to take away Atlanta's Zone status and money. Of the community, Campbell responded, "Everything we are supposed to be doing, we are doing. But we are doing it with a vocal minority constantly screaming in our ear the community has not been consulted."³⁹ Community leaders found little comfort (or truth) in Campbell's remarks just before he let White go, when he stated, "We've done some very good things. Now it's time to move on to a different level."⁴⁰ Campbell appointed Joseph Reid, the city's deputy chief operating officer, to replace White as Empowerment Zone executive director. Reid later pled guilty to accepting bribes, including nearly \$20,000 in payments from a computer company seeking business incentives in the Empowerment Zone.⁴¹

EMPOWERED HOUSING, BUT FOR WHOM?

In spite of the Zone's troubled leadership, a few Zone neighborhoods began to see some aesthetic improvements to their built environment, particularly in the area of housing, but these improvements were not the ones that Zone residents had envisioned, requested, or needed. Zone representatives, outnumbered on the AEZC board, repeatedly vocalized their frustrations at their inability to redirect housing improvements to better suit Zone residents. Marie Cowser, the CEAB representative for the Old Fourth Ward and

³⁹ Cynthia Tucker, "'Empowerment Zone' Petty Politics put urban revival at risk," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 28 February 1996, A10.

⁴⁰ Darryl Fears, "The Empowerment Zone: What Went Wrong?," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 August 1997, G4.

⁴¹ "Former Atlanta Deputy COO, Spectronics Principal Get Prison Time and Fines," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 22 May 2003.

one of the six AEZC board members from the community, said that the fighting between the city and community became so pervasive that she often contemplated quitting. Her community re-elected her to serve on the Zone board because, Cowser thought, she “stayed in trouble.”⁴² Cowser lived across the interstate, to the east from Peggy Harper’s neighborhood in Mechanicsville, and Cowser’s house was a mere three traffic lights away from the downtown connector. In the decades since construction of the interstate through downtown Atlanta, residents in Cowser’s neighborhood had had to contend with drug dealers and the violence that followed their trade. Cowser acknowledged that with EZ-supported gentrification, her neighborhood had become a safer place. She counted professionals and executives as her neighbors. Yet, she argued that it was her new upper middle class neighbors who benefitted most from Empowerment Zone incentives, when the program was designed to help the Atlanta neighborhood’s poorer constituents.

To encourage new homeownership in the Zone, for example, Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan proposed the development of the Mortgage Assistance Program (MAP), to provide up to \$8,000 towards a down payment on a house located within the Zone. MAP goals forecasted assistance to 900 homebuyers by the end of the EZ initiative in 2005. City Hall heralded the program a success in numerous press releases. However, at the end of the Zone’s fifth year of operation in Atlanta, the poorly publicized program had only contributed towards the purchase of sixty homes within the Zone. Moreover, MAP did not direct mortgage aid to its intended recipients, nor did MAP staff keep adequate documentation regarding family size and income on those families who received mortgage assistance, and before structuring its procedures in mid-1998, the

⁴² Interview with Marie Cowser, 26 November 2000.

program permitted citizens from outside the Zone to apply for, and in many cases, receive aid. Undoubtedly, residents living outside the Zone had more sufficient means to purchase a house in the first place. As such, outsiders saw a move into the Zone as a way to buy more house for less money. Developers, such as those on Pryor and Ralph David Abernathy near the stadium, followed prospective buyers back into the city. Residents already living within the Zone charged that few in their neighborhoods could afford a down payment on the new kinds of housing being built in their communities.⁴³

Mayor Campbell seemed to ignore the fact that the new housing construction within the Zone was economically out of reach for the majority of Zone residents, and he seemed to equate the gentrifying street blocks with a successful Zone. Remarking on the Old Fourth Ward, Campbell encouraged this new housing development, stating, "We're seeing a very positive mix of different economic ranges that make for a very diverse neighborhood. Luckily, it's all been done on vacant property, so there's not been any...moving people out to build. We're improving the city's tax base and getting new residents intown...all positive objectives."⁴⁴ Campbell was right to a degree; gentrification can bring positive changes to economically depressed neighborhoods. But his comments also overlooked a few facts. First, these newer, more expensive residential properties drove up the once affordable prices of older homes and raised the property taxes and rental prices nearby, which forced some Zone residents living on modest fixed incomes to have to move to more affordable housing. Second, these new Zone homeowners predominantly hailed either from the

⁴³ Fred Van Dyck, DCA, Georgia Department of Community Affairs Monitoring Report, to Mayor Bill Campbell, chair of the AEZC Board, April 2000, copy of report available at GDCA, in Empowerment Zone files; Interview with Marie Cowser, 26 November 2000.

⁴⁴ Thonnia Lee, "Bedford Pine's Progress Worries Longtime Residents," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 April 1991, 1E.

Atlanta suburbs or else from out-of-state. Many of them would have identified as young urban professionals looking for a more urban, cosmopolitan lifestyle than could be found in the suburbs. Many saw the Zone neighborhoods as a desirable intown location. These new Zone homeowners were also on the whole substantially more affluent than their established Zone resident neighbors. By allowing more affluent homebuyers to take advantage of Zone-subsidized mortgages, the city and the EZ's mortgage assistance program did more to push impoverished residents out of the Zone and into surrounding areas than it did to bring Zone residents out of poverty and/or into homeownership.

According to HUD guidelines, the working poor in the Zone who wished to buy a house needed to earn a salary of no less than \$19,500 in order to qualify for loans. EZ Board neighborhood representatives argued that many Zone residents did not earn at that level, and even if they did, they could not afford a house with a \$150,000-\$200,000 price tag. Leaders of the CEAB stressed that Zone residents needed programs that would slowly prepare them, through asset building, to move from public housing, to market value renting, to buying an affordable home. From a very practical standpoint, Zone residents who earned \$20,000 a year could only reasonably afford a home three times their salaries. Yet home prices skyrocketed because home shoppers outside the Zone could, and did, pay for more expensive homes. Independent developers willingly built more expensive homes because there was a market for them. Thus by the end of the decade-long Empowerment Zone, housing construction within the area inhibited many residents from moving towards home ownership. EZ board representative Cowser believed that each neighborhood within

the Zone could have managed its own branch of asset building and could have run its own micro loan offices.⁴⁵

BETTER HOUSING FOR THE POOR, BUT LESS OF IT

The state of public housing in Atlanta cast an even darker shadow on purported Empowerment Zone successes. EZ board representative Peggy Harper explained that the Zone encouraged the conversion of public housing complexes into mixed-income developments. This conversion cosmetically improved at least two blighted neighborhoods, but in so doing it created a net loss in the number of public housing units, which displaced many low-income Zone residents and forced them into substandard housing, in temporary shelters, or else onto the streets.⁴⁶

During the preparation for the Olympics, the city proved indifferent towards the needs of poor Zone residents in a redevelopment project that converted the Techwood and Clark Howell public housing project first into an Olympic dorm for athletes, and then into mixed-income housing. The Atlanta Housing Authority promised its residents that it would find replacement housing for any families displaced by the conversion, but through a tightening of its regulations and enforcement of already existing rules, it evicted many low-income residents just before the Summer Games and absolved itself of any responsibility to relocate them. Renee Glover, the executive director of the Housing Authority, defended her

⁴⁵ Interview with Marie Cowser, 26 November 2000.

⁴⁶ Interview with Peggy Harper, 7 November 2000; Jerry J. Salama, "The Redevelopment of Distressed Public Housing: Early Results from HOPE VI Projects in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Antonio," *Open Society Institute*, 1 January 1999, 96-7. In 1992, Congress created the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program, known as HOPE VI, to transform distressed public housing developments. HOPE VI eliminated federal preferences that emphasized public housing only for the lowest incomes in favor of creating more mixed income communities. HOPE VI also stimulated public housing renovation by taking away the provision that any unit demolished had to already have a replacement unit prepared.

actions, saying she [did] “not think that just because you [were] poor you should not be expected to keep your house clean or meet the basic terms of a lease agreement,” adding “that it [was] insulting to treat adults like children just because they were poor.”⁴⁷ Halfway into the ten-year Empowerment Zone project, the AHA had not created any additional housing to counteract the low-income units it lost when it converted the 1,000-unit Techwood and Clark Howell Homes complex into Centennial Place.⁴⁸ The transformed complex looked stunning, and became home for professors at Georgia Tech and Georgia State, Coca-Cola executives, and some low-income families. But the renovated Centennial Place created a net loss of 100 units, and of the 900 remaining, only 40% of the units were to be allocated for public housing tenants.⁴⁹

Following the successful conversion of public housing units into mixed-income communities at Techwood, the AHA committed to renovating other public housing complexes inside (and soon thereafter outside) EZ boundaries. Beginning in 1996, the AHA began converting the John Egan and Herndon Homes in the Vine City/English Avenue neighborhood, just south and west of Georgia Tech campus and the former Techwood Homes site. Vivian Pollard, CEAB representative for the English Avenue/Vine City

⁴⁷ Jeff Dickerson, “Real Urban Renewal,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 March 1999, 8 (A).

⁴⁸ Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 144-5.

⁴⁹ *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12 September 1992; *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 18 April 1993; *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 31 October 1994; Florence Fleming Corley, “Atlanta’s Techwood and University Home Projects: The Nation’s Laboratory for Public Housing,” *Atlanta History* (Winter 1987-1988), 17-36; Larry Keating and Carol A. Flores, “Sixty and Out: Techwood Homes Transformed by Enemies and Friends,” *Journal of Urban History* 26 (March 2000): 275-311; Frank Ruechel, “New Deal Public Housing, Urban Poverty, and Jim Crow: Techwood and University Homes in Atlanta,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 81 (Winter 1997): 915-937. What’s significant here was that while the AHA was converting units with HOPE VI funds, Zone gentrification was pushing people out of affordable housing. Hence the city experienced an overall drop in available housing units for the poor when many, pushed out of their neighborhoods, found themselves in need of assistance. So both EZ’s MAP funding and HOPE VI funding contributed to a net loss in low and moderate housing—the opposite of the intended goals for both programs.

neighborhoods, stressed that renovations for public housing in her community were a long time coming. Repeating what neighborhood activists had said a generation earlier, Pollard remarked that her community was one of the poorest and most desperate—she thought it was in the worst shape of all thirty Zone neighborhoods. It had poor housing stock, high crime rates, and it lacked many social services, and educational and job opportunities. Remarked Pollard, outside interest in her neighborhood came as “a welcome relief.”⁵⁰ When the Housing Authority completed renovations at Egan Homes, it changed the name of the housing complex to Magnolia Park, a name rife with almost antebellum nostalgia that suggested a break from the complex’s poorer, blacker past. Pollard added, however, that she was disappointed that outside interest came in the form of gentrification and subsequent removal. Pollard lamented that there was not more of a compassionate partnership with parties outside the Zone asking how residents living in the neighborhood needed help and what could be done to re-create a viable community again.⁵¹

Unfortunately, as was the case during the Techwood renovations, when the AHA converted Egan Homes into the mixed-income Magnolia Park community, it displaced nearly half of Egan’s former residents. Pollard believed that many of the displaced families had been relegated to even more substandard living conditions. While they could not point

⁵⁰ Interview with Vivian Pollard, 26 November 2000; Lyle V. Harris, “Urban Renewal: Land Bank Lags in Revitalization,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 August 1993, E1; Melissa Turner, “The Community is Cautious, but it’s supporting a business-government plan to put the Herndon Homes area...on the fast track to Urban Renewal,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 June 1998, E1. Indeed, Vine City, the site of SNCC demonstrations in the mid-1960s, was so destitute that it eagerly sought out the Urban Renewal wrecking ball even as other neighborhoods fought against the demolition of city blocks. Protests at Vine City may have prompted then Mayor Ivan Allen to solicit federal Model Cities funding. See also Kathryn Nasstrom, “Women and Community Organizing in Vine City in the 1960s,” *Atlanta History Journal* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 29-42.

⁵¹ Interview with Vivian Pollard, 26 November 2000; Harris, “Urban Renewal: Land Bank Lags in Revitalization,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 August 1993.

to any documentation of the exodus, Pollard and fellow EZ board representative Marie Cowser believed that many families displaced by Zone renovations had migrated to the Bluff, a decayed neighborhood abutting Vine City, and one with a reputation for flagrant drug activity and violent crime. “The Bluff is rough,” Pollard simply stated. She agreed that Zone residents who lived in public housing should be expected to live by the terms of their lease agreements. But she questioned the timing of the Atlanta Housing Authority’s decision to evict delinquent tenants—the Authority had not consistently enforced its policies for decades, and it seemed unreasonable to enforce them suddenly and threaten tenants with eviction. In so doing, the housing authority had not eliminated poverty by evicting its more problematic tenants, as transients living in the Bluff affirmed. Rather, the housing authority’s evictions only removed poverty further from public view.⁵²

The Herndon Homes public housing units provided a similar story. The housing complex sat just north of the Georgia Dome, the World Congress Center, and the Centennial Olympic Park. Developers of the Centennial Olympic Park area (COPA) argued that Herndon Homes was a blighted, drug-ridden neighborhood and fought to buy rights to half of the complex—part of which had already been condemned—so that they could tear it down and build an \$86 million dollar business park called North Yards. COPA won a \$5 million dollar grant from the EZ in March 1998, and the AHA gave the project several acres in return for promised mixed-income housing.⁵³ Developers were right to argue that the business park would improve the physical appearance of the devastated neighborhood, a

⁵² Interview with Vivian Pollard, 26 November 2000.

⁵³ Julie Hairston, “Renee Glover, Two Years Later,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 12 July 1996, 2; *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 September 1992; Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta* (London: Verso Books, 1996), 239-40.

“seedy swath... of mostly empty warehouses, parking lots, and rundown houses.”⁵⁴ Yet it remained to be seen whether the business park would benefit the residents of nearby Herndon Homes. To begin with, the complex lost land that it could have used to create new public housing. Laura Lawson, president of the Herndon Homes Residents Association, was hopeful about the park, but cautiously so. She understood that the proposal for the North Yards park passed largely because it promised jobs to her neighbors. Lawson was skeptical about the type of jobs her neighbors would be offered. She feared that Herndon Homes residents would only be offered minimum wage janitorial positions, or temporary clean-up crew jobs around the construction site. Lawson hoped that the business park developers would launch a job qualification-training program for residents of Herndon Homes and the surrounding English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods, but she suspected that Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone officials had neither adequate monitoring procedures in place to check the progress and standards of the business park, nor the leverage to insist upon job training programs.⁵⁵

The Zone employed no such standard measures for monitoring itself, much less the projects that it had approved, according to Fred Van Dyck, the city’s Empowerment Zone manager. Van Dyck argued that the Zone’s inability to follow a single set of policies and procedures further weakened an organization already plagued by poor leadership.⁵⁶ The Zone needed rules because it represented “an experiment in governance for which no model existed, which posed many questions about the specific assignment of roles, duties, and responsibilities.” Furthermore, the EZ initiative needed rules in place because it was

⁵⁴ Melissa Turner, “The community is cautious...on the fast track to urban renewal,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 1 June 1998, E1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Interview with Fred Van Dyck, 22 November 2000.

“considerably more complex than normal federal grant programs because of its comprehensive approach...[and] the EZ award of \$100 million [was] substantially larger than past grant awards.”⁵⁷ Perhaps most importantly, without any oversight in place, EZ community representatives could not hold the Board accountable for its actions.

Even after the Zone completed a set of governing policies and procedures in October 1996, nearly two years after the city of Atlanta had won EZ designation, the AEZC board “resisted [their] adoption, ...frequently changed or inconsistently applied those it had adopted, or simply did not adhere to them.”⁵⁸ To make matters worse, Zone officials could produce little documentation to explain how program participants were selected, or how business loan recipients, consultants, and service providers were chosen. EZ community representative Marie Cowser remarked that as a board member, she should have been able to tell her constituents how much money the initiative had disbursed on particular programs or how far along specific projects were, but she could not because the Zone kept such haphazard, random records. The Zone’s secrecy understandably angered community leaders, who felt increasingly shut out. “Did they think we didn’t know what they were doing?” asked Pollard. Cowser was even more blunt: “Were they just crooks?”⁵⁹

JOBS? WHAT JOBS?

⁵⁷ Fred Van Dyck, Georgia Department of Community Affairs Monitoring Report, to Mayor Bill Campbell, chair of the Atlanta Empowerment Zone Corporation Board, April 2000, copy of report in Empowerment Zone Office Files, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Interview with Marie Cowser and Vivian Pollard, 26 November 2000; “Former Atlanta deputy COO, Spectronics principal get prison time and fines,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 22 May 1993; C. Richard Yarbrough, “Mr. Mayor, This Isn’t Racism; It’s Called Caring about Atlanta,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 14 August 1996; John Sherman, “Empowerment Zone: Boondoggle or Aid to Poor,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 3 November 2000; Ryan Mahoney, “Campbell lawyer: Corruption not Mayor’s Fault,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 24 March 2006.

As was the case with Empowerment Zone-facilitated housing, Zone community representatives complained that the AEZC had limited and dubious success in creating new jobs within the program's boundaries for Zone residents. Instead, representatives felt that the EZ board sought to move in businesses whose presence inside the Zone boundaries improved the physical appearance and built environment of the area. The board's emphasis on the aesthetic appearance of the Zone neighborhoods came at the expense of Zone residents' employment needs. The board did not require any new business development to hire Zone residents; rather, it only requested that businesses make every effort to ensure that residents were considered for jobs. The Zone did not require that new businesses implement any job training, educational programs, or day care facilities, even though these were the inhibiting factors between many Zone residents and good jobs. By August 1997, the only jobs the Zone had created were twenty staff positions within its own office, and the mayor cut those jobs after four separate audits on the Zone revealed that Atlanta's EZ staff had already spent almost \$4 million, the administrative budget for the entire duration of the initiative.⁶⁰

Rather than recruiting businesses into the Zone to beautify the area, Marie Cowser countered that the EZ should have re-focused its efforts on the people; it should have met Zone residents on their educational and employment level and provided them the necessary "mechanisms to bridge them to the next level."⁶¹ She proposed that neighborhood units should have been able to approve and disburse EZ micro-loans for residents; if authority was invested on the local level, Cowser stated that neighborhoods

⁶⁰ Alfred Charles, "Report: Zone is a Mess," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 August 1997, 2C; Alfred Charles, "From a Powerhouse to a Zone of Contention," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 August 1997, 2C.

⁶¹ Interview with Marie Cowser, 26 November 2000.

could have nurtured residents' business ventures in a "cottage industry" setting for a few years. Thus, residents interested in business could have used Zone funds to take business classes, learn bookkeeping skills, and develop marketing strategies while their business ideas "incubated" on a small-scale. Cowser concluded that in an area with such a high poverty rate, unemployment rate, and high school dropout rate, Zone residents needed a hands-on approach to germinate rich future business ventures.⁶² While the micro-loan concept might not have been a panacea for what ailed the Zone neighborhoods economically, such loans would have been a good-faith effort to at least show residents that the EZ board was interested in fostering locally-based enterprise.

Instead, the EZ board actively recruited businesses from outside the Zone and encouraged them through employee wage tax credits and temporary property tax abatements to re-locate within the Zone. Some relocated businesses did not find their transition altogether pleasant, and charged that the Zone acted deceitfully. For example, in 1996, EZ officials encouraged Mallie Sharafat, owner of the suburban Gwinnett County decorative ornament shop, Creative Fine Arts, into relocating within the Zone. She envisioned creating up to 100 jobs for Zone residents, but she failed to receive the loan she claimed she was promised. As a result, her company nearly went bankrupt. Paul White, then the EZ executive director, promised Sharafat a \$1.5 million dollar loan package. Two-thirds of her loan would come in the form of income-generating bonds. Unfortunately, White did not have the authority to offer the loan that he did.⁶³

⁶² Elizabeth Drachman, "For Some Women, Micro Businesses Pave Route to Financial Independence," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 19 February 1999.

⁶³ Fears, "The Empowerment Zone: What went Wrong?"

The EZ agreement with the Department of Community Affairs stated that no Zone funds could be used towards “mortgages, bonds, or other debt instruments.” White vehemently denied making any such promise. Sharafat’s case is but one example of how Zone officials, by acting fraudulently, ignored the impact that their actions would have on the Zone residents—who, by late 1996, were anxiously anticipating at least some type of employment to come from the initiative. Unfortunately, even businesses that did not find themselves suspiciously encouraged to relocate within the Zone had little more than minimum wage work to offer Zone residents, which further suggested that the Zone board was more concerned with attracting business, no matter what kind, to the Zone than with finding meaningful job opportunities for Zone residents.⁶⁴

One final area of contention between community activists and the EZ Board concerned the component of the Strategic Plan entitled, “Lifting Youth and Families out of Poverty.” This program proposed to increase educational opportunity, stimulate food production and distribution capacity, and emphasize substance abuse education and rehabilitation. This program also most closely resembled welfare assistance, which by the late 1990s had become an extremely unpopular topic among politicians and taxpayers. As of January 2000, the Zone had only allocated \$1.2 million in award money to this anti-poverty initiative, compared to the \$46.9 million dollars allocated to programs under the “Expanding Business” objective.⁶⁵ As of April 2000, none of the anti-poverty programs had even commenced.⁶⁶ Perhaps that was in part because the goals of this program did not

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Final Report of the APCO Associates, “Review of the Atlanta Empowerment Zone.”

⁶⁶ Fred Van Dyck, Georgia Department of Community Affairs Monitoring Report, to Mayor Bill Campbell, chair of the Atlanta Empowerment Zone Corporation Board, April 2000, copy of report in Empowerment Zone Office Files, Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

produce quick, tangible results as did the other objectives of Atlanta's Strategic Plan. No doubt it was easier for Mayor Campbell to show off a renovated warehouse that had been converted into loft condominiums or an aesthetically appealing business park. It was more difficult, however, for Campbell to credit Zone-subsidized after-school care for creating immediate, substantial reductions in teen pregnancy, truancy, or drug trafficking. These intangible achievements were more modest and certainly did not generate income for the city, at least not in the short term. But the rehabilitation of impoverished people did not have a quick and easy solution. Politicians who tried to define current urban revitalization as an improvement of physical space suffered from selective amnesia, forgetting the long and complicated history of earlier failed programs. Constituents living in a poor neighborhood needed more than a re-paved street if they were ever to break out of the cycle of poverty.

Yet, in Mechanicsville, this was exactly what politicians did. They re-paved Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard and its major arteries, and as a result the neighborhood today wears a thin veneer of improvement. This cosmetic improvement was in stark contrast to the condition of the houses on side streets and alleyways. Residents in Mechanicsville were no richer, better educated, or better employed as the result of a newly paved street. The new asphalt did not create any new sense of community or draw on existing community connections. What the neighborhood was missing was what it had been missing since Urban Renewal brought the interstate—hundreds of amenities that make up a living, breathing community. Residents of Mechanicsville and nearby Summerhill and Peoplestown once owned and operated a grocery, barbershop, shoe store, newsstand, diner, drug store, and ice cream parlor, and all of these were within easy walking distance

to the rest of the community. By the late 1990s, most residents living in Mechanicsville had neither the resources nor the skills to start-up a local business. Nor did the Empowerment Zone encourage these types of businesses, as they would not bring about the same potential levels of employment as a warehouse or business park.

And so it was that at the turn of the century, Mechanicsville was in a state of flux. It became increasingly difficult to determine what the words “Zone Resident” meant. Adventurous, affluent “urban pioneers” returned from the suburbs to re-settle the inner city. The neighborhood did not offer much in the way of ordinary neighborhood amenities like shops, and more likely than not, newcomers to the neighborhood would find themselves living next to other transplants rather than veteran residents of Mechanicsville, which meant it would become more and more difficult for newcomers to discern that the neighborhood’s history and culture. Nonetheless, it did provide quick access to the highway, which in the end was the most important amenity to many Atlanta residents. As urban pioneers continued to move into Mechanicsville, the neighborhood increasingly appeared wealthier, younger, and whiter. The EZ was not explicitly designed to facilitate gentrification, nor was it set-up to remove poverty from public view, although this was what happened in many Zone neighborhoods. Though demographic change in the neighborhoods suggested that the standard of living for the average resident improved, demographic data did not take into account this new type of Zone resident. A closer examination of Mechanicsville, or any Zone neighborhood, for that matter, would have revealed that the poor remained poor, and while Campbell and the EZ Board acknowledged the flaw in the EZ bylaws, the Board instead looked for other Zone successes. By focusing

on place instead of people, city leaders could point to an improved built environment, but one that still bore the scars from decades of urban renewal abuse.

This examination of EZ housing, business, and employment programs reveals just a few of the complexities in Atlanta's most recent urban revitalization. Though by no means a comprehensive analysis, the planning for and implementation of Atlanta's Empowerment Zone demonstrates how difficult it was to determine how to improve the quality of life for poorer residents living within the Zone. In the eyes of Zone residents as well as many of the city's downtown business elites, the EZ was a failure because the poor African Americans living within Zone boundaries remained poor. Unlike the 1996 Olympic Games organizers, the EZ staff could not point to many actual accomplishments, either on the balance sheet or in terms of physical structures. Officials inside City Hall and EZ administrative staff were the only ones who continued to insist that the EZ was working, and many of them, including the Mayor, his chief and deputy chief operating officers, and two EZ executive directors would be convicted and sentenced to jail for bribery, embezzlement, and tax evasion before the Zone program ended in Atlanta.⁶⁷ What is certain is that the Empowerment Zone failed to reach any sort of consensus with community representatives, and it failed to establish a partnership between city leaders and inner city neighborhoods. Without this coalition, as previous federal attempts at revitalizing the city have shown, conflicting visions of urban renewal impede the efficacy of the program altogether. As such, the Empowerment Zone did more to contribute to the growing disparity of wealth, power, and education amongst the poorest African Americans in the city of Atlanta.

⁶⁷ "Former Atlanta deputy COO, Spectronics principal get prison time and fines," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, 22 May 1993

CONCLUSION

This dissertation, like many, has been as much an exercise in self-discovery as in archival research. In choosing to write about Atlanta, my hometown (in as much as Atlanta can be called a town, and in as much as I can claim it, as I grew up in its suburbs), I have been trying to figure out how and why the city has come to look and function as it does. I initially approached this project wanting to know why Atlanta, a relatively affluent postwar city, contained so many in-town areas of deep, racially circumscribed poverty. I became interested in examining the several federal attempts to renew and revitalize the city, and I wanted to know why, after all that time and money, renewal had not worked.

One goal of this dissertation, then, has been to tell the combined story of all urban renewal programs in Atlanta in the hopes of understanding more clearly how and why renewal fell short. Federal urban renewal programs repeatedly pitted competing interest groups against one another. These competing interest groups held conflicting ideas as to how best to revitalize Atlanta, and what the city, once renewed, should look like. In as much as local officials controlled and administered federal urban renewal programs, Atlanta's urban renewal goals ended up reflecting the visions of local affluent white and middle class African American politicians and the businessmen who most heavily influenced them. In the case of public-private attempts at redeveloping downtown Atlanta, the goals of downtown revitalization almost exclusively reflected the goals of the developers with the money and political power to see their plans put into action.

A second goal of this dissertation has been to suggest the lasting effects that federal urban renewal's failure has had on both the physical space and political culture of downtown Atlanta, as well as the entire metropolitan area. The failure of federal urban renewal represented a loss of faith in the capacity of the federal government to repair cities and on a larger national context, reflected a growing distrust with the federal government overall. Moreover, the failure of federal renewal programs produced a shift towards private and public-private redevelopment projects, specifically projects that emphasized the built environment. The privatization of downtown redevelopment has been, by its very nature, exclusive, not answerable to the needs of a broad and diverse constituency. Private redevelopment has not only weakened the efficacy of concurrent federal renewal programs, but its emphasis on economic growth and commercial expansion have served to privatize what was once public space.

Throughout this project, exploring how and why each successive wave of urban renewal fell short, I have continually asked myself, "What would have made for good urban renewal? What should a revitalized Atlanta look like?" There is no single answer to these questions, as there are undoubtedly as many urban renewal objectives, methods and goals as there are city dwellers. A more constructive question might be, "What can a study of urban renewal in Atlanta teach us?" The trajectory of urban renewal programs in Atlanta is instructive because it reveals the limits of or challenges inherent in postwar liberalism. Federal officials found it difficult to write legislation that could simultaneously ameliorate racial inequalities, provide decent and safe housing, clear slums, expand central business districts, and insure downtown commercial property values. Federal renewal legislation had to appeal to a broad constituency that often had contradictory goals in mind, and the

broad constituency represented a tenuous coalition at best. In Atlanta, when renewal reflected the economic growth interests of the city's political and business elite, the city's power structure participated in renewal enthusiastically. Conversely, when federal renewal programs pushed for a more balanced emphasis on social and human revitalization, the city's governing coalition largely abandoned federal programs in favor of privately run redevelopment instead. Until recently, notions of what a well-executed urban renewal program might look like in Atlanta remained in the abstract. Recent federal renewal programs, like the Empowerment Zone, have been called anemic, corrupt, and ineffectual, unable to produce either economic growth or human revitalization, while private redevelopment programs had primarily succeeded in closing off public downtown space from the homeless.

But a current project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation provides a concrete example of how urban renewal could function better. As the Empowerment Zone program came to a close in December 2005, it was curious that downtown Atlanta residents were not completely despondent over their lack of neighborhood revitalization. Residents of Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Summerhill, and Pittsburg—the neighborhoods immediately south of downtown that had taken part in nearly every form of federal urban renewal since the end of the Second World War—had lost between half and two-thirds of their population in the name of slum clearance and interstate and stadium construction. Yet in the early twenty-first century, remaining residents in these same neighborhoods saw a new chance to revitalize their communities through the work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization established by one of the founders of the United Parcel Service (UPS). Founder Jim Casey dedicated his organization to building better futures for

disadvantaged children in the United States, and his foundation sought to influence public policy, encourage social service reforms, and develop community structures that would strengthen poor American families. When UPS moved its headquarters to Atlanta in the fall of 1991, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey) began to take a greater interest the city of Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods.¹

Beginning in 2001, Casey designated Atlanta as one of its three "civic sites" and established a long-term commitment to improving the futures of Atlanta's most at-risk children. Staff members at the Atlanta Civic Site sought to ensure that the city's poorest children had access to the same opportunities as kids throughout Atlanta. Borrowing neighborhood data from the Atlanta Housing Authority, Atlanta Public School System, and various aid agencies such as the local United Way and Salvation Army chapters, Casey determined that property disinvestment, depopulation, and general economic decline had most severely affected Atlanta neighborhoods just south of the central business district. The foundation decided to focus its efforts in Adair Park, Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Summerhill, and Pittsburg, all former Model Cities and/or Empowerment Zone neighborhoods. Casey's Atlanta Civic Site staff sought to work alongside existing metro-area organizations to create neighborhood-scale programs that would contribute to strengthening families and communities.²

The Casey staff organized their goals to improve these neighborhoods into categories relating to educational achievement, family economic success, and neighborhood transformation. Concerning education, the Atlanta Civic Site staff partnered

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation Civic Sites Initiative, www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/CivicSites.aspx, accessed 12 January 2010; "U.P.S. to move to Atlanta Area," *New York Times*, 9 May 1991.

² Atlanta Civic Site, www.atlantacivicsite.org, accessed 12 January 2010.

with local child care centers to ensure that neighborhood children were prepared to begin school. Once in school, Casey staff checked with local elementary, middle, and high schools to see that students had adequate tutoring in place and monitored annual test scores in No Child Left Behind reports to determine what percentage of students were performing on grade level. Casey staff encouraged students to graduate from high school in order to apply for college and seek better-paying jobs.³

To encourage family economic success, the Atlanta Civic Site partnered with The Center for Working Families, Inc., a local organization created to assist families in search of employment, careers, and homeownership. Together, they worked with local neighborhood associations and taught how to help low-literacy adults gain employment as well as how to locate federal funding for adult education. The Casey Foundation published a quarterly *Family Economic Success* newsletter with tips on how to avoid predatory lending as well as advice on how a community could help successfully return a former prisoner to the neighborhood and the workforce. The newsletter emphasized practical ways for parents to enter and advance in the working world, to increase their income, and to build and maintain their assets from within a low-income community.⁴

Finally, the Casey Atlanta Civic Site staff joined with neighborhood associations to find ways to maintain adequate levels of quality affordable housing, and Casey staff concentrated their efforts on the Pittsburg neighborhood. Beginning in 2006, the

³ Sarah Torian, "Beating the Odds at Parks Middle School," in *The Atlanta Civic Site Diarist Project*, (Atlanta: Annie E. Casey Foundation, December 2007). The author kindly shared her report with me.

⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Family Economic Success Newsletter*, February 2008, May 2008, September 2008, December 2008, and March 2009, www.aecf.org/Newsroom/Newsletters/FESNewsletters.aspx, accessed 15 January 2010; Elizabeth Gaynes, *Re-Entry: Helping Former Prisoners Return to Communities* (Atlanta: Technical Resource Center of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005).

foundation bought 31 acres of land along the southern edge of Pittsburg's boundaries. Casey staff members scheduled a series of meetings with the Pittsburg Community Improvement Association to discuss how the land could be developed for affordable housing. By 2008, it became clear to foundation staff that the Pittsburg community was being particularly hard hit by the mortgage crisis. Of the neighborhood's 1800 land parcels, more than 800 homes were in the process of foreclosure. Many houses stood vacant. Remaining homeowners lost home equity, and some renters faced eviction as their landlords fell into foreclosure. In response, Atlanta Casey staff worked with other civic site partners to launch the Sustainable Neighborhood Development Strategies, Inc. (SNDSI). The SNDSI joined with the Pittsburg Community Improvement Association to form the Partnership for the Preservation of Pittsburgh (PPoP).⁵

Presently, the PPoP is seeking to control enough neighborhood property with the hope of turning the housing market around. The partnership has acquired property through foreclosure purchase and market purchase as well as through donated bank-owned assets. PPoP has transferred acquired properties to the Atlanta-Fulton County Land Bank Authority, and has met with the neighborhood residents to devise a master redevelopment plan that meets the Casey Foundation's desire to strengthen families and build a safe, stable, and diverse community. Through The Center for Working Families, Inc., PPoP has hired residents to maintain the land bank properties and is preparing prospective residents for upcoming rental and homeownership opportunities. By December 2009, the

⁵ Minutes, The Annie E. Casey Foundation Atlanta Civic Site Team Meeting, 4 December 2007, www.atlantacivicsite.org/showdoc.html?id=122951, accessed 15 January 2010; "Together We Can: Partnering for Kids, Families, and Communities in NPU-V," minutes from Casey Foundation Atlanta Civic Site 8 February 2007, www.atlantacivicsite.org/showdoc.html?id=27971, accessed 15 January 2010.

PPoP secured more than \$2 million in Casey Foundation funding, acquired 57 Pittsburg properties and transferred them to the land bank, connected eight residents to employment and journeyman training to maintain the properties, and identified five families to rent and/or buy move-in ready homes.⁶

Casey staff members have made slow, but steady gains in the eight years they have focused on Atlanta. Indeed, it is sobering to remember that as the PPoP prepared five families to move into affordable housing in the Pittsburg neighborhood, another 800 neighborhood homes stood at or near foreclosure. Nevertheless, the foundation's progress at its Atlanta Civic Site is remarkable and merits further examination.

The Casey Foundation has found success in Atlanta where all other federal and public-private renewal attempts have struggled for a few key reasons. First, in stating that the Atlanta Civic Site mission is to strengthen and stabilize economically disadvantaged families, the Casey Foundation makes clear that their vision for a revitalized downtown Atlanta is one that seeks to improve the lives of economically disadvantaged people, and not just the built environment. Second, in the case of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's involvement in Atlanta, there are no competing renewal interest groups, as the foundation represents "business interests" as well as the interests of housing advocates. Finally, because the foundation is not administered by an elected official, it can afford to make very modest gains without worrying about going up for re-election or bowing to pressures from various interest groups.

⁶ Sarah Torian, "The Partnership for the Preservation of Pittsburgh: An Innovative Philanthropic Approach to the Foreclosure Crisis," (Atlanta: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009). The author kindly shared this report with me. The Casey Foundation spells the Pittsburgh neighborhood with an "h" at the end, but earlier accounts of this Atlanta neighborhood omit the "h." I use the older neighborhood spelling except when discussing PPoP plans.

I have argued that the story of Atlanta's conflict over its urban renewal helps to reveal the role of federal policy in reinforcing racial prejudices and in fostering urban racial unrest. Because the Casey Foundation has found a way to execute a people-oriented urban renewal project outside of City Hall, it has thus far managed to avoid the conflicts of over five decades of renewal in Atlanta.

In telling the combined story of all successive waves of urban renewal in Atlanta, I have highlighted common renewal program weaknesses in part to explain how and why renewal failed to eliminate or ameliorate impoverished conditions for residents living in depressed areas in and near downtown. In spite of the fact that urban renewal fell short in Atlanta, this half-century long story of renewal also helps to demonstrate what lasting impacts these failed renewal programs have had and continue to have on city residents. Despite the failures of federal renewal policy, its programs created and left an infrastructure of people and places downtown that have made subsequent renewal efforts run more smoothly. In fact, many of the Casey Foundation's successes rest upon the work of the failed renewal programs that came before it. If we assess the results of, say, the Model Cities program over a forty-year period instead of the eight years in which the program took place, then it is easier to understand how Model Cities community organizing contributed to the Casey Foundation's efforts to improve the educational, employment, and housing opportunities in Atlanta. Casey staff emphasized their partnership with local neighborhood associations. Many of these associations met in community centers built during Model Cities. Casey community participants like Douglas Dean, from the Summerhill Neighborhood Development Corporation, Columbus Ward, from Peoplestown's Emmaus House, and Peggy Harper, from Mechanicsville were longtime local residents who had cut

their political teeth back in earlier renewal programs in the 1960s. One could even argue that their very presence at the development “table” with Casey Atlanta Civic Site staff represented a Model Cities success, albeit many decades later.

In spite of the strides that Casey has been making in Atlanta, there is much work to be done in securing greater social and economic opportunities for poor residents living in and near downtown Atlanta. Unfortunately, for every neighborhood representative that has learned from earlier urban renewal programs and become active in Casey’s initiatives, there are dozens more neighborhood residents so scarred by previous revitalization attempts that they remain unconvinced that change can ever come to the city’s economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. But I am hopeful that other organizations, either public or private, can follow Casey’s lead and implement similar clearly defined people-centered redevelopment plans that are not tied to the time span of any political administration, and I am hopeful that subsequent organizations can employ these same local Atlanta residents with five decades of lived urban renewal experience. It is doubtful that later historical interpretations of Urban Renewal or Model Cities will ever see these programs as having succeeded, but perhaps over time our evaluations of them, in the long term, will focus less and less on their failings per se, and more on the lasting impacts, positive and negative, that renewal has made and still makes upon American downtowns and upon the residents that have called downtown home.

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