

Centre on
Housing Rights
and Evictions



ATLANTA'S OLYMPIC LEGACY

Background Paper

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Background

This background research paper is part of the COHRE Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights Project. It was prepared as a preliminary independent study of the impact of the Atlanta Olympics on housing rights. Similar studies were done for the cities of Athens, Barcelona, Beijing, London, Seoul and Sydney. The background research papers were used in the preparation of COHRE's *Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights* report, launched in Geneva on 5 June 2007. The contents and opinions of the material available in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily correspond with those of COHRE. All documents published as part of this project are available at: www.cohre.org/mega-events/.

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I. Introduction

What a spectacle! Atlantans certainly know how to put on a show and use that show to sell an image! But the image that drew visitors during the summer of 1996 repelled residents who left the city in droves. As many as 20,000 Atlantans fled the city for the duration, wanting to avoid the traffic, the hype and the heat. And so as a boost to Atlanta's economy, not even the Olympic tourism made an appreciable difference that hot summer. In fact, research economists called it a "normal summer," according to the *Village Voice*.¹ So much for the speculation that Olympic tourists would stuff people's pockets with money.

There is no lack of available information describing Atlanta's 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Books, journals, scholarly articles, pamphlets, magazines and newspaper articles abound. Although there are factual and statistical records to help us tell it, the real story of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games depends on the teller of the story.

Some tell the tragic story of the Centennial Park bombing. Others remember that there were more police and military personnel deployed throughout Atlanta during the Games than anyone had ever seen. Many remember the 1996 Summer Olympic Games as the first hosted by a southern U.S. city, as the largest Olympics in history, with competitors from nearly 200 countries. Those people who got tickets to the events remember the excitement, the competition, the frustration with transportation, and the heat.

Many television viewers remember the most commercial Olympics ever seen, while others remember only the very elaborate spectacle of the opening and closing ceremonies.

For homeless people and local activists, 1995/1996 was the year 9,000 homeless people were arrested in Atlanta, and the City faced a Federal Court Order to "cease and desist" the pattern and practice of arresting homeless people without probable cause.

Human rights and housing activists around the world remember the displacement of thousands of poor families, people forced from their homes by Olympic gentrification, by the demolition of public housing, rental speculation and continuing "urban renewal." Those people evicted from their homes -- to make way for visitors, new construction, and higher cost housing -- remember the Olympics with anger and bitterness.

Having only its reputation and image to recommend it, Atlanta depended on public opinion, often created or at least supported by local media, to win the Olympics, to draw business and visitors. But in early 1988, the year Atlanta hosted the Democratic National Convention, *The Wall Street Journal* predicted: "When the Democrats pick a presidential candidate here in July, delegates will find shanty homes nearly in the shadow of the convention center."² That commentary and prediction haunted the Olympic dreamers as they prepared their bid and gathered members of their tribe to help transform the appearance of the city, by whatever means necessary. And transform it, they did.

¹ Neil deMause, "Athenian Dreams or Trojan Horse?" *The Village Voice* (December 13-19, 2000) 4.

² *The Wall Street Journal*, 2/29/88, quoted in Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising* (Atlanta: Longstreet, 1996), 232.

By the summer of 1988, when the Democrats came to town, highly visible inner-city poverty gave the lie to Atlanta's self-promotion as a "black Mecca". Street sweeps of visibly homeless people were common, and although City officials removed "Hutville," which lay between Underground Atlanta and the new World Congress Center/Omni Complex, there was no hiding the poverty and homelessness apparent throughout the city at the time.

A National Geographic article describing Atlanta as it prepared for the Olympics showed a dramatic photograph of the contrast: a homeless man living on a sidewalk grate, silhouetted against the glittering lights of a new skyscraper. Atlanta is a city of disparities—the mansions of Buckhead and outside-the-perimeter gated communities versus abandoned houses on Simpson Road in southwest Atlanta:

The glistening office towers and glitzy shopping in Midtown and Lenox Square versus the abandoned stores on the Southside; the grocery carts filled with aluminum cans versus the BMWs filled with gray-suited executives; suburban jobs that go wanting versus a city black poverty rate of 35 percent. These contrasts reflect what we call the Atlanta paradox. It is a paradox of substantial racial segregation in a community with a reputation for good race relations and of high inner-city poverty in the face of substantial economic growth.³

In addition to being publicized by the national press as a city divided by racism and poverty, Atlanta would host the Democratic National Convention, and it would be remembered as the dress rehearsal for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Unbeknownst to the public, the bid preparations were already underway.

During the decade before the 1996 Olympics, Atlanta's metropolitan area family income grew at a rate that was double the national income growth rate. At the same time, inside the city, incomes for families declined. Most of the growth in population, housing, and income, as well as in jobs occurred in the northern suburbs, near or outside the perimeter and outside the city limits. And so for the local governments inside the perimeter, one major goal for the hosting of the Games was to begin to reinvigorate the city itself – to reverse the "white flight" that began in the sixties and to bring wealthy suburban whites back into the city. There was, however, no intent to include the indigenous, majority black and poor residents of the inner city in that planned gentrification of a city that had already lost 20% of its population. In fact in 1990 the poverty rate for blacks in the city had increased from 29% in 1970 to 35%.⁴

The city that marketed itself as the "seat of the civil rights movement," and "the City too busy to hate," where all are welcome and share equally in the southern bounty, was a mirage. This was the city, which in 1960, six long years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision, was still segregated. "The city that called itself too busy to hate seemed (in 1960) too busy to integrate."⁵

³ David L. Sjoquist, ed. *The Atlanta Paradox: Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000) 1.

⁴ Sjoquist, 2.

⁵ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising* (Atlanta: Longstreet, 1996), 93, 94.

And so by 1996, the story of the development of Atlanta as an Olympic city includes the shame of revelation since boosting a false image practically guarantees exposure to reality. The real Atlanta was revealed to the world press and to visitors who saw the poverty behind the facades and outside the fences. The city that is today poorer than New Orleans was, in 1996, among the poorest in the nation. And Atlanta's reality lay waiting just behind the new homes that lined the main streets of poor, black inner city neighborhoods like Summerhill, spotlighted by being the site of the Olympic Stadium. The residents of the most visible, front rows of Summerhill received the brand new homes, becoming living advertisements for how well Atlanta treated its poor neighborhoods. And those new houses just happened to line the way to the stadium. Just behind the shiny facades and new streetlights and benches, homeless people slept outside and tried their best to avoid arrest.

In order to limit visible poverty, planners and developers used the city government to control the apparent need for additional low-cost housing by convincing the public that the visible poor, un-housed people in the city were not deserving of housing but were social deviants, even criminals who would be better off in jail.

From the moment Atlanta became the site for the 1996 Games, the world's media sought stories "outside the fences", even outside the Olympic Games themselves.⁶ Bored with covering athletes and their preparations, the press found activists who had tried to work with planners and the city to protect the human and civil rights of poor and homeless people. Reporters who saw through the hype and the warnings not to venture outside the fences were eager to cover the real stories. The arrests of homeless people, displacement of thousands more from their housing, destruction of public housing, and the frantic attempts of the City and the planners to hide these realities interested reporters and filmmakers more than the glitz and the tightly controlled access to the acceptable story.

It is those realities that this paper addresses. The goal of this chapter is to address the housing displacement and criminalization of Atlanta's poor and homeless people -- both motivated and generated by the Olympic Games. The reader will understand that Atlanta is a city with a single political agenda -- the determination to eliminate whatever is deemed detrimental to business. The Olympic Games of 1996 gave that business/political power elite the excuse they had longed for to tighten their grip on Atlanta's development. They meant to use the most public of events to demonstrate and cement their hold on the city and its future development. If they could take the city "just for the Games," they could keep it for their own profit. If they could test the political leadership, neo-liberal and conservative, as they needed that leadership to promote and produce the Olympics, they would discover which ones to support for City Hall in the future. The Olympic venture was a test for Atlanta's business and power elite -- an opportunity to find out how far they could go in their control over the city's future and who could be depended upon to assist them.

There are several resources that are invaluable to any effort to recapture this history, and Dr. Larry Keating of Georgia Tech has produced by far the most thoroughly researched and

⁶ "Outside the fences referred to any place outside the official boundaries of the Olympic venues; in other words, the areas of the city and the region that were impacted by the Games but were not accepted by the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games as the responsibility of ACOG.

comprehensive work on the subjects of housing and development, controlled as they have been by race and business interests. Also extremely helpful is Clarence Stone's 1988 *Regime Politics*, and subsequent comments, describing the city's power structure and systems for managing development and growth. Dr. Charles Rutheiser's *Imagineering Atlanta* is required reading for anyone interested in Atlanta and its quest for an image. And journalist and political pundit Frederick (Rick) Allen's *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City*, published just before the Games in 1996, takes us through the political history up to that event. Dozens of articles and other publications helped document the experiences that are summarized in this paper, and for all of the information, I am grateful.

An old friend of the Task Force and advocate for poor people who read a draft of this paper said, "Not much changes in the power structure, but the stakes get higher and higher." Shelters are closed to make way for loft development. Public housing is finally decimated to give way to "mixed income housing" as the newest development project, a "beltway" around and through the city, boosts resurgent gentrification. Minimum-wage earners, whose labor fuels this service-industry economy, live where they can because Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Atlanta requires 2 and 1/2 full-time jobs.⁷

The hope for this paper and this work is to shed light on the machinations of racism, classicism and private control of our communities, on those who used the excuse of hosting the Olympic Games to accelerate, and even complete the gentrification of our neighborhoods, grab downtown property that the developers had always wanted to control, and incarcerate homeless people who dared to be visible or ask for help. The demonizing of poor and homeless Atlantans by the moneyed power elite did not begin with the Olympics, but hosting the 1996 Summer Olympic Games gave that practice the adrenaline it needed to become the city's prevailing, even blatant, public policy.

⁷ Fair Market Rent, A term designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to indicate

II. Background on Olympic Games and housing

1. A little history

The Olympic dream materialized in Atlanta after decades of urban renewal and expressway developments had caused the displacement (forced removal) of 68,000 people representing 22,000 households. “Nineteen out of every twenty people displaced were black.”⁸

Redevelopment in Atlanta had produced housing displacement for thousands of poor, black Atlantans. The suburbs were outgrowing the city, and corporations were moving out of the Central Business District or at least complaining that remaining inside the City was becoming difficult, unless. ... And the “unless” meant removing poor people, overwhelmingly black, from the downtown area.

The difficulty faced by those same business people whose aim was driving poor blacks out of the central business district was then how to draw the wealthy, younger, white professionals down town to live, work and play. They had so thoroughly demonized the poor, black males who were showing up on the streets homeless that young professionals were reluctant to live inside the city. What better way to draw those suburbanites to the downtown area than to host the mega event being imagined?

The downtown Atlanta business community, represented, at a policy-making level, by Central Atlanta Progress, had paved the way for the removal of visibly poor people as early as the mid-nineteen eighties. By the 1980’s the most dramatic symptom of inner city poverty was the newly documented and visible number of homeless people on the streets.

During the winter of 1981 seventeen people froze to death on the streets of Atlanta. Advocates from the faith community, homeless people, and community leaders mobilized an immediate response, prompting Mayor Andrew Young to create the Task Force for the Homeless, which also included leaders from the business community.

That ad hoc group incorporated in 1986 and became the Metropolitan Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, serving as the linkage for homeless people to emergency housing and support services as well as resource support to groups serving those people who were already homeless or at risk of losing their housing.

Also in 1986 Central Atlanta Progress decided to address the “homeless problem.” The growing numbers of people living on the streets and in church basements sparked the studies of downtown paid for by CAP, the Central Area Studies I and II. Those studies described the Central Business District as a “vagrant-free zone” and “a sanitized corridor,” categorizing homelessness as a public safety issue.

⁸ Keating 93.

As each study was released, advocates and homeless people responded with outrage at the descriptions of what was already known as a housing crisis – there was insufficient housing for people to afford on minimum wages, and public funding for housing support had been cut by 74% between 1974 and 1984. Those people trying to live on fixed incomes or no income competed for the shrinking stock of public or social housing.

Developers in downtown Atlanta had to negotiate with Mayors Andrew Young and Maynard Jackson, whose political agendas still included a determination to revitalize inner city poor and majority black neighborhoods. The negotiations and compromises necessary to include those communities and constituencies took a dramatic turn as the Olympic bid process began dominating the agenda.

But the “Atlanta way” had long been the way of the business elites who looked for new means of holding onto the city’s public resources to ensure their own private interests. Historically, those private interests were business interests. Those interests did not include planning for decent housing for families living on fixed incomes or for minimum-wage-earning workers. Those interests had been most evident, prior to the Olympics, in the development of the baseball stadium and the acquisition of a professional team in the 1960’s. Dr. Larry Keating recounts the entire history of that private business deal in his invaluable resource, *Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*, summarizing it in this way:

Downtown Atlanta remained largely unpopulated at night, and the partial destruction of two downtown neighborhoods further depopulated the area. The stadium actually diminished downtown commercial activity . . . ⁹

It would be those very downtown neighborhoods that would be disrupted, once again, in some cases nearly destroyed, by that same power structure as they planned for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games.

Summerhill had been divided from Peoplestown and Mechanicsville, first by the super highway, then the development in the 1960’s of the Braves’ stadium, which would remain and be used for the Olympics. The new Olympic Stadium would be built just across the Interstate in Summerhill and across the street from the old stadium. As a result, for a year or more there would be two stadiums in the middle of these neighborhoods as well as parking for each. After the summer of 1996, the old stadium would be torn down and turned into parking for the Olympic Stadium, which would be called Turner Field, for Ted Turner, the owner of the Braves Baseball Team. And about one-third of that Olympic Stadium would be taken down because it wasn’t necessary for housing baseball after the Games. Two stadiums in one tiny, inner city black community!

Atlanta’s inner city neighborhoods had long been plagued by growing poverty and racism. The “white flight” into the suburbs beginning in the 1960’s increased throughout the seventies and eighties. By the mid-1980’s, inner city public housing had been allowed to deteriorate to the point that the valuable land it sat on then waited to be “rescued” by developers and investors. This deliberate, systematic displacement became the development strategy of choice, because it set the stage for the Olympics to “redeem” public properties

⁹ Keating 102.

and turn them into housing for athletes and finally for students. The plan to replace publicly subsidized, low- and no-income family units with new housing for Olympic athletes, and, after the games, for students and the working poor, is called “gentrification,” a euphemism for displacement of poor people and their housing.

“White flight’ and highway construction encouraged the unprecedented development of suburban communities that competed with the downtown central business district. Revitalizing that downtown became not only a dream but also an urgent necessity to the old Atlanta power elite, the City’s political and business interests that had long served each other, to the detriment of poor and disenfranchised residents. And so it would see the hosting of the 1988 Democratic National Convention as an opportunity to put Atlanta in the public eye. And publicity Atlanta got, but not the kind the business and political power structure had envisioned:

Even so, some of the coverage of the city in the period leading up to the Democratic convention made a point of Atlanta’s failure to live up to its reputation as a ‘black Mecca . . .’¹⁰

Allen goes on to report that Atlanta was observed as a city with such a gulf between black and white that it appeared to be two cities. A third city, he describes, was the World Congress Center, where the 1988 convention was held:

The key to a successful Democratic convention was to tuck the delegates safely into this third city (The World Congress Center, one of Georgia’s 10 largest cities) while limiting their contact with the other two. The Democrats were in town to use the Omni as a big TV studio and to stage a smooth show in nominating Michael Dukakis for president. They had not come for sightseeing or slumming.¹¹

Allen also says “Atlanta’s hospitality industry, its city within a city, earned a gleaming gold star in front of a national audience.”¹² The strategy worked to charm and distract not only the Democratic National Convention but also the entire nation.

So when the Olympic bid project became more than a wild idea, there were powerful supporters ready to join the exclusive planning team and to capitalize on the reputation of the hospitality industry that had created the image of a city. It didn’t hurt the Olympic dream that Atlanta’s leadership needed a motivational tool for the redevelopment they knew the city lacked.

¹⁰ Allen 232.

¹¹ Allen 233.

¹² Ibid.

2. Candidature

In spite of the public relations spin on Atlanta's Olympic dream, Billy Payne was not the first to dream it. As Rick Allen tells us, an eager young Olympic handball player, who had moved to Atlanta in 1974, played in the Montreal Games two years later, and returned with the idea that Atlanta should host the 1984 Games. In spite of some support from Mayor Maynard Jackson, the Chamber of Commerce and others, the devastating report of Montreal's financial losses ended the dream for the time being. Atlanta was not yet ready.

The development that came in the following ten years, the expansion of the airport, the building of the World Congress Center, and the adding of thousands of hotel and motel rooms, would change that reality. The hospitality industry, which had become the city's chief claim to fame, would seem able to take on the world. In fact, as has already been reported here, it would be preparing to take on the Democratic National Convention by 1988.

The telling difference for City Hall and some of the leadership in the business community, however, would be the report of the Los Angeles Olympics of 1984 – investors made money! A reported \$200 million. And at no cost to the taxpayers! Enter Billy Payne and the Atlanta Olympic bid committee, who seemed frustrated but basically undaunted by the city's preoccupation with preparations for the Democratic National Convention. So they raised their own funds to mount a bid to the US Olympic Committee.

The informal bid committee, all friends of Billy Payne became Payne's "Crazy Atlanta Nine," the core of the Atlanta Olympic Committee (AOC).¹³ Charlie Battle, a King and Spalding attorney, joined the group and later became Atlanta's representative to the IOC and its world.¹⁴

Clinching the deal for early supporters was Payne's guarantee that the Olympics would be produced using only private money. No public funds would be used, he promised. But "by 1995 over \$350 million in public funds (local, state, and federal) had been expended in direct connection with the Olympics."¹⁵ The AOC and then ACOG went on to persuade the state legislature to approve the use of state-owned land for sporting events and housing:

Indeed, the plan the AOC submitted to the IOC called for two-thirds of the Olympic venues to be located on, or make use of, state property (the Georgia World Congress Center, the Georgia Dome, and Stone Mountain Park). While it was not widely talked about at the time, the choice of these locations would oblige the State of Georgia to expend significant funds to support the Games. The largest single contribution was made by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia,

¹³ Peter Candler, insurance executive, and Horace Sibley, Coke and SunTrust-connected King and Spalding attorney and senior partner; Ginger Watkins and Linda Stevenson, organizers of the Junior League's annual Festival of Trees, and Cindy Fowler, who ran an event-organizing business called Presenting Atlanta; Rutheiser 228

¹⁴ Allen 230.

¹⁵ Rutheiser 231.

who agreed to spend approximately \$120 million to build a part of the Olympic Village, which would be used after the Games as dormitories for students of Georgia Tech and Georgia State University.¹⁶

During the bid preparation the “Friends of Billy” and their supporters had spent huge amounts of money and used many friendly resources: “Officially, the AOC (Atlanta Olympic Committee) spent \$7.3 million on its efforts between 1987 and 1990, but this is widely considered to be an underestimate.”¹⁷

It just so happened that the US Olympic Committee visited Atlanta in the fall of 1987. Rick Allen reports that the “Friends of Billy” rented the impressive atrium of the High Museum of Art to do what they did best, throw a memorable party. “George Steinbrenner, the New York Yankees’ principal owner and a longstanding USOC member, called it ‘the finest event like this I’ve seen.’”¹⁸

That evening became the turning point for the Atlanta organizing committee (soon to be officially the AOC). In short order, Mayor Andrew Young allowed himself to be convinced that the Games wouldn’t cost the taxpayers any money, and he joined the bandwagon. Along with Coke, SunTrust and other Atlanta corporations like BellSouth, supporters helped the Payne team organize a slick and extravagant public relations campaign that culminated in Washington, D.C. in 1988:

The Atlantans rented a townhouse, had butlers in tuxedos greet guests and serve champagne, and arranged for 10 strolling violinists to work the room playing ‘Georgia on My Mind.’ Atlanta won, and it made a fine irony that the credit went not so much to the city’s vaunted power structure, or to its carefully groomed image or ‘story,’ but to three women schooled in the art of putting on charity balls.¹⁹

Once Atlanta became the US entry to the worldwide competition, the little bid committee grew, gaining resources and support for its debut in the “big time.”

During the years of Atlanta’s planning for the Olympic bid, there seemed to be little or no interest, “civic capacity” or private intent to address the city’s many social ills or even its general infrastructural disrepair.²⁰ Planning processes in Atlanta had long been inconsistent, fragmented, and concentrated on developing the central business district (CBD), with the only housing planned as upscale condominiums, lofts and expensive, gated apartment communities. “Affordable” housing that was developed, by only a handful of non-profits, meant housing that only families earning up to 80% of Area Median Income could afford. There was no attempt made to include housing for the homeless thousands whose numbers increased as “substandard” housing was decimated.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rutheiser 239.

¹⁸ Allen 237.

¹⁹ Allen 237.

²⁰ “Civic capacity has to do with the ability of a community to come together to address its problems.” Clarence Stone, et al, *Building Civic Capacity* (Kansas City: University Press of Kansas, 2001) 12.

The planners immediately dubbed Atlanta a “world-class city,” the next “international city.” This was their chance to redevelop Atlanta, to increase tourism for those two weeks in a way that would put Atlanta on the map as a destination, not just a convention site. They stated goals for creating an economic stimulus to the inner city, using that promise to soothe the public into submission as the private development plans went forward with minimal input and a nearly total lack of accountability. In fact, Norm Dixon of the *Green Left Weekly*, put it bluntly:

Business began preparing in 1989 to take advantage of the more than \$7 billion in Olympic contracts and predicted tourist spending. They created a body (MAOGA, The Metropolitan Atlanta Olympic Games Authority) with a huge budget and special powers to buy and sell land, borrow and lend money, form its own police force and distribute contracts for massive new building projects. It promptly delegated much of its power to a private corporation called the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG), which united promoters, developers and big business conglomerates.²¹

As early as 1989, the Olympic planners had gotten the state’s General Assembly also to legislate into existence the Metropolitan Atlanta Olympic Games Authority, the quasi-governmental non-profit entity which the City hoped would provide oversight to the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG), but which simply signed the Olympic bid and then played cheerleader.

MAOGA, the “Authority,” was created as the entity responsible for hosting the Olympic Games in 1996. The agreement for hosting the Games was signed between the IOC and MAOGA. It was that “oversight” entity whose job it was to approve all ACOG development projects over \$250,000. MAOGA owned the Olympic Stadium, acquired the power of “imminent domain” and could call up troops in an emergency. George Berry, who had been the Vice President of Cousins Properties, headed the board of the “Authority.”²² Berry had headed the state’s Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism, which Rutheiser calls “the state’s chief operating arm.”²³

What better rationale for redevelopment and widespread gentrification than to host the Olympic Games, claimed the growing chorus in support of “the Dream.”

Billy Payne and his “Dream” team, played their cards well with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), using Andrew Young, the former United Nations Ambassador, charismatic representative of the civil rights movement of the 1960’s, as assurance against concerns about possible racial strife. “As a former lieutenant to Martin Luther King, Jr., Young was also a living embodiment of King’s spiritual legacy and of Atlanta’s central role in the civil rights movement more generally. His symbolic capital was of inestimable importance in influencing IOC members, especially those from Africa and Asia.”²⁴

²¹ Norm Dixon, “Atlanta Olympics: Poor Pay the Price,” *Green Left Weekly*, summer 1996.

²² Powerful developer Tom Cousins, owner of Cousins Properties, used his influence to put his own staffers and colleagues in positions of influence and control.

²³ Rutheiser 236.

²⁴ Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta* (London: Verso, 1996) 229.

The IOC's choice of Atlanta in September 1990, however, stunned the world. Athens was the obvious favorite for the Centennial Olympics, but the IOC reported it believed Athens couldn't improve its infrastructure adequately or quickly enough to host the 1996 event. There was also talk in 1990 that the IOC's choice may not have been entirely objective.

It seems appropriate here to insert a reference to those allegations that, three years after the 1996 closing ceremonies, prompted a Congressional investigation. Representatives from the US House of Representatives' Commerce Committee traveled to the Atlanta History Center to "examine the contents of many, if not all, of 1,400 boxes of records that detail how Atlanta wooed IOC members from 1988 to 1990 ..."²⁵

All the documents accumulated from the bid preparations through the staging of the Games and the aftermath had become by 1999 the property of the Georgia Amateur Athletics Foundation (GAAF), a non-profit operated by former Olympic organizers. When the Atlanta Journal Constitution joined the request for access to the documents, the GAAF attorney, Joseph Bankoff, refused:

Bankoff said that while the GAAF will cooperate with government investigators – who will not necessarily make these documents public – it would not release "private" documents to news organizations.

In Atlanta, meanwhile, the GAAF has argued that bid committee records are not subject to the Georgia Open Records Act because the 1996 Games were privately funded and volunteers staffed the bid committee.

Last month, the GAAF offered to submit the documents to (Attorney General Thurbert) Baker's office for review. Baker declined the offer, saying they should be open to all because of the "inextricable link between private interests and government entities in the pursuit and ultimate selection of Atlanta as the host city." State and federal funds were used to build infrastructure in Atlanta and other Georgia communities that hosted Olympic events.

On April 30 (1999), after negotiations between GAAF and attorney general's office, the GAAF made nine (of 1,400) boxes of records available for public inspection. But, without warning, the GAAF first removed some documents from the files.²⁶

Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) chaired the Commerce Committee's subcommittee on oversight and investigations:

Upton took note of the GAAF's action. "That doesn't sound right, does it?" he said in an interview this week. "I mean, things don't sound right."²⁷

²⁵ Bill Brubaker, "Congressional Committee to review Atlanta Olympic records," *Washington Post*, May 5, 1999.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Attorney General Baker responded to GAAF's asking for a ruling from Fulton County Superior Court that the records were not subject to the Open Records Act:

Baker said that the GAAF's refusal to open these records has led to a growing perception among Georgians that Atlanta Olympic officials used improper inducements to bring the Olympics to their state. "I have said to GAAF representatives that their steadfast refusal to make these documents available certainly lends credence to the belief that GAAF has something to hide," Baker said. "If, as they say, they have nothing to hide in those records, they ought to be forthcoming and they ought to make them available."²⁸

Subsequent investigators restated the quest:

"What we're looking for is: Were there direct quid pro quo bribery transactions where someone associated with the Games in Atlanta was directly saying [to an IOC member]: I'm giving you this to get your vote"? the investigator said. "Short of that, we're also looking at the whole culture that seems to be part of the bid process, which is the piling on of lavish gifts to these [IOC] members. The 'Hey, here's a plane ticket' kind of thing."²⁹

The investigator said if a potential illegality were found, "we would make a referral to appropriate law enforcement agencies, likely the Department of Justice." If no laws are in place to prevent similar acts, the investigator said, "we would consider legislation to address those problems."³⁰

Thus the scandal that ended "not with a bang, but a whimper," could have been, indeed, may have been averted by the powerful interests represented by the Olympic organizers.

A further and even more ironic note: On Saturday, July 15, 2006, ten years later, the Atlanta Olympic Museum was opened at the Atlanta History Center.

Back to the bid story:

By the time the US Olympic Committee had selected Atlanta to compete internationally for the bid, Athens was the hands-down sentimental favorite. Even Juan Samaranch had been quoted as assuring Athens that if they worked hard they would host the games.

Other contenders, Melbourne, Manchester and Belgrade received very little serious attention from the IOC, but Toronto seemed the likeliest threat to Atlanta until the dissenting voices of protestors like the well-organized Bread, Not Circuses, which included scholars, activists, young people and many active sympathizers from the culturally and politically progressive community brought home the point that the city was, indeed, divided. Andrew Jennings quotes Toronto's bid leader, Paul Henderson, as moaning, "Atlanta had a major, major

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

advantage with a controlled press, a big advantage over Toronto. You have a monopoly newspaper there while we have four very strong, competitive dailies here.”³¹

In fact, Toronto was defeated by its own independent and progressive spirit, its openness and healthy culture of dissent, and by its courageous and curious academic and non-governmental organizational leadership. Bread, Not Circuses, the resistance group that included exciting activists like Michael Shapcott as well as academics such as David Hulchanski and Helen Lenskj, became the model for organizers around the world.

No such well-organized resistance to Atlanta’s very privately produced bid preparations disturbed the well-orchestrated party that would light a fire under Atlanta’s developers.

The Washington Post, on the other hand, called Atlanta “a town for sale ... a peddler’s paradise, the capital of commercial seduction and voluptuous rhetoric, a raw plutocracy that can make a deal faster than you can say, ‘a Co’Cola, please, ma’am.”³²

Atlanta activists knew that the entire process had occurred behind closed doors, with no public discussion, much less debate. There was no information provided to the public about the bid process, nor even an open debate about whether or not Atlantans even wanted the Games. The resistance that surfaced at the bid announcement and grew during the planning years was hardly covered by the local press.

In fact, corporate control of Atlanta’s media outlets, with Coke and Cox in the obvious center supported by their bankers at SunTrust Bank and their legal resource, the giant international law firm of King and Spalding, controlled at least the planning of the bid and its utter privacy. By the time the impact of the process hit Atlanta’s citizens, the media boosterism had become complete. Who would be foolish enough to observe that “the emperor has no clothes”?

But as Professor Rutheiser reported, “One did not have to look far beneath the shiny surface of the boosters’ celestial Atlanta, however, to discover what was actually one of the poorest and most racially segregated central cities in the United States.”³³

In 1990 Atlanta was also the most criminally violent city in the United States. Connecting the growing problem of violent crime to visible poverty and homelessness, the planners saw an opportunity to get control of the city while at the same time eliminating the “problem” people, mostly African Americans, in downtown Atlanta.

City officials and business leaders saw an opportunity to pave the way for a suburban invasion of the downtown area. Central Atlanta Progress had paid for the plans to gentrify downtown, finally abandoning original phrases like “vagrant-free zone,” “sanitized corridor,” and settling for the less controversial and now commonly used term, “Downtown/Business Improvement District.”

³¹ Andrew Jennings, *The New Lords of the Rings* (Great Britain, Simon and Schuster, 1996) 137.

³² Allen 241.

³³ Rutheiser 3.

The Atlanta way of making Olympic decisions included a few white men assembling informally, committing their own and the public's resources to create policy, to initiate legislation and to add to their ranks their country club cronies. They developed the structure for their own benefit and control, promising public benefit and spouting platitudes.

Not only was the Olympic rationale available, but it also became acceptable even to so-called "liberal" elected officials.³⁴ They were willing to accept assurances like, "just for the games" and "we can tolerate anything for a couple of weeks." The boosterism became patriotic, and people normally concerned with the reality of living in the city became mesmerized by the possibilities.

"What the Olympics can do for a city is bulldoze away barriers to development, clearing the path for massive urban renewal projects that otherwise would be unthinkable," said Dr. Charles Rutheiser, Johns Hopkins anthropology professor in *The Village Voice*, December 13-19, 2000.³⁵ And he should know, having written the popular and controversial 1996 expose of preparations for the Olympics in Atlanta, *Imagineering Atlanta*. That book would effectively keep him from tenure at Georgia State University, thus forcing him to seek a more hospitable academic environment elsewhere.

The Olympic proclamations, however, were met with protests from groups like the Open Door Community, Empty the Shelters, Concerned Black Clergy (CBC), and the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless (Task Force). The Task Force and CBC issued a call to concerned citizens to organize to save the conscience of the city; thus the Olympic Conscience Coalition formed, with clergy, laborers, homeless people, activists, service providers and residents of predominantly poor communities. Having been caught napping by the "It's Atlanta" surprise in September of 1990, these advocates and organizations took some time to "wake up."³⁶

Here it must be said that none of the people and organizations who worked hard perennially to find the most basic resources for poor and homeless people had expected that Atlanta, rife as it was with poverty and inner city neglect, could or should host the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Their concerns, however, went unnoticed.

Many of these organizations engaged in public debate, peaceful protests and resistance, which although attracting hundreds, had to rely on the national and international press for exposure of issues that local officials and local media largely ignored.

By the summer of 1992 when Barcelona's Summer Games closed with, "It's on to Atlanta!" there was no reciprocal excitement in Atlanta. Dr. Charles Rutheiser had just joined Atlanta's urban Georgia State University faculty and noticed:

The closing ceremonies in Barcelona had done much to turn expectancy into anxiety. Atlanta's Olympic mascot had made its long-awaited debut, but the amorphous,

³⁴ Liberal, as it is used here means tolerant of other views and tending towards representational government.

³⁵ Rutheiser, 4.

³⁶ I called our friend Michael Shapcott, of Bread, Not Circuses, in Toronto, and said, effectively, "HELP!" Michael responded with a gentle query that sounded like, "Have you all been asleep?"

blue, non-representational entity with bulging eyes and cheerily demented grin – rather appropriately named Whatizit – had been quickly and resoundingly ridiculed at home and abroad.³⁷

The temptation to satire was too great for Atlanta activists to pass up. Students from Empty the Shelters (ETS), a group of young organizers who specialized in creative resistance to oppression and worked as part of the Olympic Conscience Coalition, created a mascot for the Olympic Conscience Coalition of Atlanta and called her Spoilsport. They reasoned that the name would take the wind out of the sails of the boosting local media, and pitting her against Izzy, “the maggot,” would interest bored reporters who tired of covering only the preparations. ETS even published *Spoilsport’s Guide to Atlanta*, presenting ironic and authentic descriptions of the city and its attractions.

3. Planning process

September 1990 that brought the stunning Olympic bid announcement, also lit a fire under an ill-prepared social activist community. Serious research into recent Olympic impacts on cities like Los Angeles and Seoul became the work of groups that had concentrated on urgent issues of poverty. Word of the 720,000 – 800,000 evictions of poor people from housing in and around Seoul by 1988 alarmed and energized that non-profit social service community in Atlanta. An under-ground videotape made by a Jesuit priest dramatized the brutality of those evictions and met with protests of, “Not here,” and “nothing like that could happen in this country.” Activists naively developed a social manifesto called the Olympic Conscience Agenda, getting signatures from more than 300 organizations and leaders who had become frightened by the reports from other Olympic cities of massive displacement and arrests.

By early 1991, however, in spite of energetic organizing that included the Atlanta Labor Council, union members, poor people, residents of endangered neighborhoods, social activist and service organizations, as well as some elected officials, battle lines had been drawn.

Billy Payne now headed the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, as President, with Andrew Young as the Co-Chair:

In early 1991, the Atlanta Olympic Committee reconstituted itself as the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, or ACOG, a private, non-profit (sic) corporation. However, the Letter of Agreement worked out between ACOG and city and state governments clearly spelled out that ACOG was working on behalf of the latter, who assumed no financial responsibility for undertaking the Games. ACOG was thus yet another in a series of Atlanta’s public-private partnerships, even though it had steadfastly maintained that it is an exclusively private entity. As such, it claimed to be exempt from Georgia’s “Sunshine Law” and routinely refused to release information on its decision-making process or any aspect of its internal operations, including the salaries of its top officials. ACOG’s penchant for secrecy

³⁷ Rutheiser 1.

also proved to be increasingly problematic as the mobilization for the Games took place.³⁸

People from the Andrew Young and Maynard Jackson city administrations staffed ACOG. A.D. Frazier, Chief Operating Officer, came from the administration of former U.S. President (and former Georgia Governor) Jimmy Carter. All political bases were covered. As was usual in Atlanta, the leadership and power rested in the hands of white men. In 1993 Shirley Franklin was hired away from CODA (The Committee for Olympic Development in Atlanta) to provide policy advice, which meant she dealt with the resistance of poor, mostly black neighborhoods as they faced development plans. She ensured that the people were heard, and she visited them in their community centers and held forums so they could speak. But speaking and venting changed nothing. Policy matters were decided behind closed doors. And agreements were made behind those doors – agreements that would dominate the city of Atlanta and its policies into the future.

Neighborhoods that had organized to resist the Olympic development steamroller were courted, given promises, set against one another, and finally defeated. Some local leaders were given seats on committees and advisory councils. Instead of resisting stadium parking that destroyed community businesses, one neighborhood wound up arguing over what percentage of the parking revenues they could get. The strategy to divide and conquer resistance worked in most development cases.

But Maynard Jackson had promised his supporters that if they backed him in his bid for re-election as Mayor, he would use the Olympics to improve their neighborhoods. The city's infrastructure was crumbling. Traffic was nightmarish for commuters, and the city's poverty and crime topped the charts. But Jackson's long-running struggles with the white business community ensured that he would be resisted by ACOG and its determination to concentrate on expenditures inside the Olympic ring.

By 1992 Olympic development concerned itself with venues and neighborhoods contiguous to those venues. As a gesture of good faith, the concerns of thirteen Olympic neighborhoods inside the ring (but outside the fences) were designated the responsibility of the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA) headed initially by Shirley Franklin as CEO with then Mayor Jackson as the Co-Chairman of its Board. CODA would be responsible for "revitalizing" the neighborhoods inside the Olympic ring.

Known as the Olympic Ring, this magic circle encompassed all of downtown and much of Midtown, as well as a large swathe of Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods. Although these latter areas were inside the ring, they were 'outside the fence' as far as Olympic organizers were concerned. The AOC was on record that its attention, and money, would be limited to the venues themselves, which were distributed among six distinct clusters inside the ring.³⁹

By 1993 CODA released its plan for that "revitalization" which called for the demolition of 553 private residential units that included approximately 1,393 people who still lived in these

³⁸ Rutheiser 234.

³⁹ Rutheiser 232.

severely deteriorated and dilapidated units. The Task Force for the Homeless issued a report, in the name of the Atlanta Olympic Conscience Coalition, which analyzed CODA's entire plan for redevelopment and publicized the complete lack of a plan to take care of the estimated 9,700 low income residents who were likely to be displaced if that plan were implemented.⁴⁰

The reality that followed hard on the heels of the 1993 CODA Plan was a process of demolition of a variety of housing – units condemned because of their deterioration were demolished as well as those neighbors swore were livable.

4. Inclusion of the housing dimension in the Candidature file: an afterthought

The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games planned only one housing goal: to house the Olympic “family” in a newly constructed Olympic Village. Reaching this goal would require the eventual land exchange downtown developers had longed for. Also, hotels, motels, and private housing would provide for visitors and the extended Olympic “family.” The housing needs of Atlanta’s desperately poor and homeless citizens were not the responsibility of the Olympics. In fact, former Mayor and civil rights leader Andrew Young called the Olympics a “business venture, not an anti-poverty program.”⁴¹

Any city hosting the Olympic Games must submit plans for housing not only athletes, media and officials, but also the spectators and visitors attracted to the drama and excitement. The bid proposal highlighted Atlanta’s hotel-motel capacity along with plans for an Olympic Village as the response to the IOC’s major concern about the city’s capacity to house the “Olympic family.”

The ACOG submitted goals for housing its own extended family, stating publicly that this was their only responsibility for housing in Atlanta. The IOC and its extended “family,” elected officials from “off,” as southerners say, meaning “elsewhere,” and the media would be housed along with athletes. And to house those insiders would cost invaluable units of public (social) housing.

By the time the City of Atlanta realized that ACOG would not provide even the motivation for raising resources to improve poor neighborhoods and their housing stock, the clock had already begun ticking on venue construction projects, and the mounting hysteria of “will we be ready” took over the conscience of even the most progressive local officials. Pressure to complete the massive construction projects drove policy, planning and publicity. Maintaining and creating housing for poor people was not a concern of the majority who held power.

⁴⁰ Atlanta Olympic Conscience Coalition, “A Displacement Analysis of the CODA Master Olympic Development Program for the City of Atlanta,” published by the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, 1993.

⁴¹ Rutheiser, Charles, “How Atlanta Lost the Olympics,” *New Statesman*, July 19, 1996, 1.

In fact, the situation was exactly the opposite of concern. In the center of the city sat “the “Techwood problem.”⁴² Right between Georgia Tech and Coca Cola and bordered to the east by I-75/85 highway, the “Connector,” the first Olympic redevelopment began to destroy a community of poor people.

One tactic used very effectively over the decades by local government and business interests was to abandon neighborhoods where poor and minority people lived. City services like public works and policing were withheld in order to turn the neighborhoods into blighted ghettos, ripe for redevelopment and gentrification. Public housing communities suffered that fate beginning less than a decade after their creation. Again it must be said that the Olympic Games gave the developers, the Board of Regents, Coca Cola and the city government the opportunity they had long awaited to speed that process.

⁴² For a complete history of the development and destruction of Techwood Homes, first US public housing development, see Dr. Larry Keating’s “60 Years and Out,” *Journal of Urban History*, March 2000, 284.

III. The housing dimension

1. The planning process

Naively expecting the powerful, well-positioned Olympic leadership, which included former Mayor Young, future Mayor Shirley Franklin, Billy Payne, and other powerful individuals at the very least to acknowledge the desperate need for housing and to address that need, the Atlanta Olympic Conscience Coalition asked Payne to make any new Olympic housing available for low income people. The response was a quick, “Do you all have \$140 million (\$154 million, finally) to pay for it?”

That coalition of poor and homeless people, activists, students, clergy, labor leaders, service organizations went into the ACOG headquarters a couple of days before Christmas 1993 and asked the Olympic leadership at least to use its influence to benefit Atlanta’s most vulnerable citizens. What the Conscience Coalition got was a weak, verbal agreement that none of the preparations would negatively affect poor and homeless people or the services they depended upon.

Rev. Timothy McDonald, long-time civil rights leader, nationally known and respected clergyman and savvy activist, later recalled, “Well at least we created some jobs for folks that day.” What he referred to was the fact that 95 people walked into the Inforum offices of ACOG that day, without being stopped by security. Later visits of the group would meet with security checkpoints throughout the building. Rev. McDonald quipped to one guard, “You can thank us for your job.”

The State Board of Regents, the governing board for the university system, decided to “contribute” most of the money for developing the “Olympic” housing, as long as it was designated for Georgia Tech and Georgia State students after the Games. The excuse local leadership gave for refusing to promise this housing for poor people, whose own housing had been destroyed to make way for it, was that the Board of Regents could pay for it, and there was no money in local coffers for developing public, or “social,” housing. The real reason for the refusal was the decades-long effort by Atlanta business leadership to clear that valuable land of all poor people who lived on it and use the land for “higher and better” purposes. Public housing was seen as a detriment to the revitalization of Atlanta – an eyesore. Abandoned by the government, neglected by the Atlanta Housing Authority, it deteriorated and appeared increasingly crime-infested. None of the leadership, either private or public, had any real intention of providing urgently needed housing for the hundreds of households that would be displaced.

The Atlanta Housing Authority is the quasi-government entity, which had for fifty years built and managed public, or “social” housing. That housing that had over the years replaced only a small percentage of the housing destroyed by decades of “urban renewal” came under what has become its final attack during the preparation for the Olympics.

Techwood/Clark Howell public housing community sat between the Olympic Center (Dome, World Congress Center and the Omni) and Georgia Tech, where the swimming events would take place. Techwood Homes was the oldest public housing project in the United States. One of the city's leading architects, Dick Bradfield, who knew the project well, shook his head when the plan for the "redevelopment" of Techwood became public: "That is some of the best, most substantial housing ever built. There is nothing at all wrong with it. It could last forever." In fact he went on to develop with Dr. Larry Keating a proposal for the redevelopment of Techwood/Clark Howell Homes that would have avoided demolition for all but just over 100 units. That plan was never seriously considered, Dr. Keating now muses. "We were naive enough at the beginning to believe that there was a serious intention to save the project."

Leading up to the Games, Maynard Jackson had hired Earl Phillips as head of the Atlanta Housing Authority. Phillips worked for two years with residents, with Keating and Bradfield and with local development resources to plan a real redevelopment of Techwood. But Jackson's determination to improve low-income neighborhoods for the residents had become an obstacle to the Olympic and business agenda. That entire housing complex was demolished to make way for the Olympic Village that would house athletes and some members of the press. After the Games most of it would be turned over to the Georgia Board of Regents, who paid for its development. The rest of Techwood homes would be replaced with mixed income housing. In fact the total loss of housing by the time the Techwood/Clark-Howell units were replaced in 1996 was 781 units – 1081 units of public housing became 300 units of mixed income housing.⁴³ "More than 4,300 people were displaced then," says Joanne Murphy, former resident and member of Techwood United for Fairness.

2. A short history of housing in Atlanta

Although Atlanta's leadership has historically shown an enthusiastic capacity for the redevelopment of the business district, the city's only housing policy has been one of gentrification. In fact the underlying theory, often enough expressed publicly, has been, "If you build it, they will come," and conversely it must be true that "If you tear it down, they will go away."

Atlanta's shameful history of housing gentrification accelerated as the result of the Central Business District's redevelopment efforts. By 1966 a total of 67,000 people had been displaced by some kind of government action. (24,202 displaced by the development of the expressway and 17,064 by general urban renewal.)⁴⁴

In addition, the supply of low-income private housing was reduced by half during the same period. Beginning in the late sixties the term "urban renewal" was called by some activists

⁴³ Dr. Robert Bullard, Clark Atlanta University, and Jerome Scott, Project South, "Environmental Racism and Economic Injustice in Olympic Atlanta," Press Release, July 30, 1996.

⁴⁴ Clarence N. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976) 227.

“Negro removal” because of the devastating and obviously intentional impact on minority communities.

The government acted in the interests of the business community, responding only temporarily and artificially to the cries and sporadic activism of poor communities for improved neighborhoods, for affordable housing, and for living wage jobs. Those cries combined with the obviously desperate housing conditions in neighborhoods like Bedford Pine, Vine City and East Atlanta to persuade the city and its Housing Authority to commit to developing public housing inside the city. After nearly ten years of resistance to the actual development of that housing (the city had resisted all efforts at scattered sites) a mere 3,383 public housing units were developed in what were then called “suburbs.”⁴⁵

Because Atlanta is the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the home of the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s, Atlanta claims a more progressive racial reality than exists. In fact the economic gap between blacks and whites has been widening consistently, regardless of claims to the contrary. Nowhere is that racial bias more obvious than in the housing market.

In *Race, Class and Urban Expansion*, Dr. Keating reports that in 1990 Atlanta was the fourth most segregated city in the nation and more segregated than any other Sunbelt city. Any so-called integrated communities are claimed as such because they lie on the edge of majority black neighborhoods where whites are moving back into the city and reclaiming now-valuable property. Dr. Keating asserts, “It must be active discrimination that has brought about this highly segregated pattern of living in Atlanta.”⁴⁶

Dr. Keating’s book tells the complete story of housing segregation in Atlanta, which occurred in many cases to segregate what were originally integrated neighborhoods inside the city. The aggressive efforts of policy makers to diffuse the increasing black voting strength destroyed alley housing, as well as pocket communities inside white neighborhoods. Between 1945 and 1953 more than 400 renter families were moved out of an area called Macedonia Park, without compensation, and without any help in relocation.

During the years between 1958 and 1968 more than 30,000 units of low-income housing were destroyed by the interstate “Connector” as well as by urban renewal projects that displaced 20% of the residents of the inner city, nearly all of whom were African American. Urban renewal brought stadiums, the rail system, MARTA, convention facilities and hotels. It brought the Peachtree Center mixed-use development complex occupying ten blocks of downtown. The Omni Complex was completed in the 1970’s and was the largest of these re-visioned downtown complexes.

At about the same time that the Omni Complex was developed, the rise of the suburbs had affected downtown retail to the point that in spite of the ice skating rink, the Omni Mall, restaurants and office space, the mega-center was failing. By 1987 Ted Turner bought the failed Omni complex to house his CNN Center and attachments. Aside from the

⁴⁵ Stone 145.

⁴⁶ Keating 44,

Omni/Dome/CNN Center and the Peachtree Center, the rest of downtown had deteriorated.

Another notable failure in urban revitalization was Underground Atlanta, the subterranean mall/theme park developed and redeveloped at the site of the inner city railroad tracks between the Capital and Five Points. Completed first in the later 1960's with restaurants, bars, shops and live music, it was bankrupt by 1982, developed again by the Rouse Corporation in the 1989 and bankrupt again by 1991. The project was funded by millions of public dollars, grants, bonds, and Community Development Block Grant funds. In spite of the infusion of \$200 million to develop Underground, between 1989 and 1992, the Five Points area of downtown lost 10,000 jobs as banks, large department stores, shops and restaurants followed the migration out to the suburbs and to midtown.

By 1990 the Georgia Dome had been constructed, and the Olympics came along with Centennial Olympic Park developed just in time for the 1996 Games.

Meanwhile the growth of the suburbs in subsequent decades and their concomitant retail development drained retail and office business from downtown Atlanta, which by the late eighties began to look like a ghost town.⁴⁷

In 1979 Johnstown, another black neighborhood inside majority white Buckhead, was eliminated to make way for a rapid transit station beside the Lenox Square Mall. And the story goes on and on and on: Candler Park, Lavista Road, and Oak Grove. Although in many of the cases in which black communities were removed there isn't much in the way of public record to tell the details on the stories, the obvious replacement of those black communities with commercial development is evidence enough of the long-term practice of Atlanta developers to remove or displace black residents.

3. Housing Displacement and Forced Evictions

As part of the preparations for the Games, the business community and Olympic planners had proposed to demolish Techwood Homes, Clark Howell Homes, and East Lake Meadows, as well as ten other public housing projects and re-develop them as mixed-income apartment communities. Their goal was the privatization of Atlanta's nearly 50-year-old public housing. While some of that redevelopment was left until after the Olympics, the public's silence towards the destruction of those projects came as a direct result of the careful campaign to prepare Atlanta for hosting the Games.

In fact, the first Olympic housing displacement that took cover under the Olympic banner was even celebrated by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The wrecking ball that ripped into Techwood Homes, one of the nation's first two public housing projects, was sent ceremoniously by Secretary Henry Cisneros, while a choir of

⁴⁷ Charles Rutheiser, "Making Place in the Non-Place Urban Realm" in Setha M. Low, *Theorizing the City* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 1999) 332.

former resident children sang, and business leaders cheered. Finally, the gentrification of Techwood Homes was underway.

Much has been written about the gentrification of public housing like Techwood Homes, but no chronicler is as thorough with the details of the “real deal” as Dr. Larry Keating of Georgia Tech. He reminds us that when Atlanta’s public housing finally integrated, years after President Kennedy’s de-segregation order, Techwood became 50% black within five years. Atlanta’s power elite began planning to eliminate their undesirable neighbors, and they took their plans to the newly elected Maynard Jackson in 1974. Jackson refused to go along with the plan. Jackson had campaigned on his promises to protect and improve poor neighborhoods. And Techwood/Clark Howell Homes, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, had been built to last and was absolutely perfect for rehabilitation, not demolition.⁴⁸

The influence of former President Jimmy Carter persuaded the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to fund a plan for the redevelopment of Techwood/Clark Howell Homes. Producing that plan, Dr. Larry Keating of Georgia Tech and Max Creighton, Director of the Atlanta Urban Design Center, spent two years developing a survey and interviewing residents to determine their needs and get their participation in constructing a plan for Techwood’s future.

Earl Phillips, Director of the Atlanta Housing Authority, and Richard Bradfield, local architect and proponent of public housing, suggested that AHA rehabilitate the existing Techwood Homes for residents. There would have been a modest loss of units if their plan had been accepted. But their proposition ignored the business community’s determination to demolish the project and replace it with housing for middle and upper income families.

With the election of Bill Campbell as Mayor in 1993, the Olympic development agenda was assured.

Using fear of rampant crime and violence to win public and resident approval, the Atlanta Housing Authority partnered with the powerful business community led by neighboring Coca Cola and Georgia Tech University to proceed with their plan. On the day that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros donned a ceremonial hard hat and pulled the switch to send the wrecking ball into the first building, a choir of children, soon to be displaced themselves from Techwood Homes, sang in apparent celebration. The ironic scene inspired one of the protesters to remark, “Rome is burning.”

Dr. Keating summarizes the loss: the City and AHA “destroyed a sociological community close to downtown services and employment . . . data for Techwood Homes indicate an average residency of 7.95 years. Approximately one-third of the families lived there more than 11 years and valued their homes and the proximity to friends, jobs, health care, and transportation . . . We do know . . . that the residents of Techwood Homes wanted their community preserved . . . most of the costs involved with moving and relocation were borne by the residents . . . only 545 of the original 1,117 households residing in the complex at the

⁴⁸ Richard Bradfield, Bradfield and Richards, Architects, Atlanta leader in designing congregate housing, who said, “It could last forever,” about Techwood Homes.

beginning of the redevelopment planning received relocation housing.”⁴⁹ Former residents report that relocation assistance was minimal and did not result in replacement housing for most of those displaced.

Olympic development had laid waste the oldest and soundest public housing in the country.

Tracking displaced residents of public housing is difficult in Atlanta, but we have learned about the process. In the case of the displaced from Techwood/Clark Howell homeless, the process involved a gradual turning of the spotlight onto residents who were even slightly late paying rent. They were the first to go. Next up for eviction were families who allowed others who weren't on their leases to stay, even for a while. If a tenant household included anyone charged with a felony, that family lost its housing. Many families who feared eviction left on their own to avoid that process. Others stayed and tried to participate in a process that was confusing at best and completely locked down at worst. They knew that the smallest offense would take their housing.

Residents were shown videos of the mixed income housing that would replace their units. But they were never told that only 30% of those new units would be rented by people from the lowest income levels. They were not told that the screening for those new apartments would include credit checks and background checks, which most of those original residents would not pass.

The Centennial Place housing community, which replaced a part of Techwood Homes, effectively removed the indigenous poor and replaced their housing with 342 units of market-rate housing. Dr. Keating goes on to report that “income limits for Centennial Place are substantially higher than previous public housing incomes. The median income in Techwood prior to redevelopment was \$3,219 per year. Income limits have been increased to \$34,000 for a household with two people and to \$38,250 for a household with three occupants.”⁵⁰

None of this “redevelopment” would have been accomplished without Atlanta Housing Authority’s new director, Dr. Renee Glover, appointed by Mayor Bill Campbell to gentrify public housing and to build a model community adjacent to the athlete housing that was built in the Techwood footprint. The well-honed tactics used to ensure that there was no one left in the community to re-house included strictly scrutinizing the behavior of residents and evicting them for minor lease infractions, offering immediate cash payments to residents who left on their own, and generally destroying the community through neglect. By the time the displacements were to take place, between 1993 and 1996, there were few if any residents left to bring back to the new housing.

Although the federal government had effectively destroyed protections for displaced public housing residents, the families who were displaced during this two-year period – the time it took for AHA to come up with the plan for gentrification -- became casualties of the agency’s historic abandonment of the very people it was created to serve. The local

⁴⁹ Dr. Larry Keating, “Sixty and Out: Techwood Homes Transformed by Enemies and Friends,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 26, No. 3, March 2000, 287.

⁵⁰ Keating, 304.

governments and the leadership of the business community, as well as the university system, abandoned any civic responsibility for housing people who earn minimum wage or live on fixed incomes.

Solving the Techwood “Problem” became the first big Olympic victory for the developers and the city – the Board of Regents got some of the land, and the Atlanta Housing Authority gentrified the rest, displacing hundreds of families from the core of the city. Some of those families were moved to other housing projects that had been emptied for the relocation. The game of “musical chairs” played instead with housing units, left hundreds of families looking for replacement housing and never finding it. Some moved south of the city using time-sensitive housing vouchers that were good for only a few years. Others found that even the vouchers failed to provide them with consistently affordable housing because of the cost of utilities.

The ultimate criticism came from a 1998 US Department of Housing and Urban Development audit, which acknowledged the physical improvements in the completely gentrified community but made another observation: “However, improvements to the lives of the residents who lived there are much less obvious.”⁵¹ This would be the only criticism from the federal level of the gentrification of public housing in Atlanta and the displacement of thousands of families.

Giving the appearance of allowing residents of those communities to have input into the process was going to take time, energy and collaboration. What better way to use the influence of the former President, who was still carrying the Moscow Olympics baggage, than to deal with the neighborhoods, the inner city neighborhoods that were so in the way of development.

⁵¹ Mara Shalhoup, “Atlanta Housing Authority Shell Game,” *Creative Loafing*, 11/6/02.

IV. Other immediate impacts of the 1996 Olympics

1. The Atlanta Project

On October 25, 1991, former President Jimmy Carter and former CEO of Central Atlanta Progress, Dan Sweat, announced the formation of The Atlanta Project. This effort proclaimed the intent to “address poverty and show the world that Atlanta possessed a social conscience.”⁵² It was not coincidental that The Atlanta Project, or TAP as it called itself, chose to operate in most of the poor “ring” communities. How better to improve the cooperation of those communities than to flood them with promises of resources and hordes of volunteers.

The Atlanta Project immediately began to raise funds for its own operation, competing with existing organizations that had long addressed poverty in those same communities. Feelings ran strong that TAP represented merely an effort to control organizations that were speaking out about real injustice and addressing obvious inequality. Communities that had felt the impact of urban “renewal” were naturally wary of outsiders whose announced intentions seemed another attempt at control. Making the poor people happy in their neighborhoods by offering them some programs and thereby dissipating resistance to the Olympic plans was the implication.

The real issues of oppression and social injustice would be raised by only a few serious activists who could then be easily marginalized. How could residents of neighborhoods that were losing housing and businesses be angry and fight Olympic redevelopment when they found themselves under the umbrella of a new and very expensive charitable organization like The Atlanta Project? And headed, at least nominally, by President Jimmy Carter.

After five years of spending money on its own structure and leaving no positive results, the Atlanta Project closed its doors to disgruntled public review. Clarence Stone said that The Atlanta Project “possessed no institutional capacity to design programs to combat poverty. ...”⁵³

Most advocates for poor and homeless people in Atlanta, however, believe that there was no institutional intent to solve issues of poverty but to create only the impression that Atlanta was a city with a soul. And this, too, is the Atlanta way: to appease with a little charity and even some socially acceptable rhetoric, but all the while maintaining the existing power structure and continuing to “let the steam out of the kettle” in very controllable ways.

The ultimate impact of TAP was that it attracted, and then siphoned off, critically needed funds from a usually disconnected business community, and it did nothing to address the problems that it sought to hide. Existing non-profits and organizations were told, “We gave at the office,” when approached for resources to address real needs.

⁵² *Building Civic Capacity* 15.

⁵³ *Building Civic Capacity* 15.

2. Cabbagetown, Summerhill, East Lake Meadows

Another development that took advantage of Olympic-related resources occurred in the old mill village, Cabbagetown, a little to the east of downtown. It was in 1995, “during a time of rapid renewal and gentrification within Atlanta's neighborhoods, the Mill was sold to Aderhold Properties for conversion into lofts. The project was one of the biggest loft conversions in the United States and required funding from several sources including the City of Atlanta, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Federal Empowerment Zone Program. Some of the caveats enforced before proceeding included the use of original materials whenever possible and the preservation of architectural details such as windows and skylights. In addition, the Empowerment Zone loan would only be given if 206 units were made available to "moderate income renters." Today the old Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill is a gated community called the "Fulton Cotton Mill Lofts" with 504 loft spaces for lease with prices ranging from \$655.00 to \$1800.00 per month.”⁵⁴ But along with the gentrification of the mill came changes to the neighborhood: “In Cabbagetown, the conversion of the mill into a gated loft building meant a radical disruption of both physical and psychic sense of place-identity.”⁵⁵

Summerhill was a majority African-American community between the old Grant Park neighborhood and the “Connector” (Highway 75-85) which cut right through the middle of downtown more than forty years ago. The development of the Braves’ baseball stadium had already displaced hundreds of people and betrayed the community that still hoped for new housing.

Soon, however, non-profit housing developers like Charis Community Housing had built new in-fill housing for residents who were much in need of better housing, and their emphasis was on improving housing stock for existing residents. But they were moving fast enough to change the impression from the main streets that Summerhill was a crime-filled, deteriorated neighborhood.

Along came the Olympics with a need to build a new stadium, in addition to the old stadium, next door, in fact. And the new stadium would be built larger than the Braves needed, so after the Games, it would be reduced by 30% and the old stadium would be demolished and turned into parking. Once again, the casualties of Summerhill redevelopment were the poor, the renters, and the owners of small businesses along the street leading to the new stadium. Townhouses appeared and new single family homes, all out of reach for the residents who were displaced, and most attracting upper income white families who come with the gentrification that is the way of Atlanta’s “redevelopment.”

Finally, at least 30,000 residents of low income housing in Atlanta were displaced to prepare for the Olympics. Many landlords also refused to renew leases, cancelled agreements, and raised their rents in a frantic, speculative move to cash in on the Olympic housing potential.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Crampton, “Cabbagetown, Atlanta: Re-placing Identity,” 1.

⁵⁵ Crampton 1.

And in spite of the hike in room rates, visitors tended to stay in hotels and motels rather than rent private housing. Transportation was legendarily chaotic, late, crowded, and the planners had done such a thorough job of demonizing the poor and homeless, turning the city into what looked like a military compound, that many visitors feared venturing far from the venues and contingent housing.

3. Other immediate impacts

Many vendors were lured into huge investments and leased spots on city property, with promises of hundreds of thousands of customers. Professor Robert Bullard reports, “Atlanta went out of its way to block Olympian visitors from local vendors and small entrepreneurs in Atlanta’s African American communities, causing many to lose their entire investment.”⁵⁶

“Black Atlanta is fighting mad. ACOG gave others the profits and want to give us the garbage,” said Al Geter, a South Fulton County resident and environmental activist.⁵⁷

It must be noted here that the first “Olympic venue” to be completed was a new jail, which, according to the staff person in the Department of Public Safety, was too small for the need the minute it stood ready for use.

4. Civil rights violations and the federal lawsuit

The criminalization of poor and homeless people that began in Atlanta in the mid eighties gathered steam after the successful bid announcement. Then that process exploded with proposed ordinances and policies that had been in the works for years. The activism that erupted in response to the criminalizing ordinances stimulated the organizing of the Olympic Conscience Coalition. But the accumulation of human and civil rights violations as a direct result of public policies and practices

It may interest visitors to Atlanta to know that the likely invisibility of homeless people will be largely due to city ordinances that prohibit entering a vacant building or crossing a parking lot without owning a car parked there; ordinances that assist police in clearing homeless people off the downtown streets. And controversy has already arisen this year, due to local politics in the U.S. that contradict Olympic principles. By decision of the organizing committee, the Olympic torch, on its journey from Los Angeles to Atlanta for the opening of the games, will bypass at least one county in Georgia because of a county resolution that denigrates gay people. This, and much else about Atlanta, the state of Georgia, and the U.S., will become more widely known because of the games.

⁵⁶ Bullard, Robert, *Environmental Racism and Economic Injustice in Olympic Atlanta*, Press Release July 30, 1996.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

It is to be hoped that world attention may lead to improvements. For Human Rights Watch finds that state officials and public policies contravene fundamental human rights principles in a wide range of settings in Georgia. For example . . . young black adults consistently accounted for more than 84.9 percent of the admissions (to jails) of all young adults for all drug offenses over the decade ending in 1995.⁵⁸

In 1989 the Task Force for the Homeless began documenting the pattern and practice of Atlanta's police arresting homeless people without probable cause. By the end of 1991 as the slew of newly criminalizing ordinances passed, in spite of massive protest from the activist and faith communities, homeless people were being arrested routinely and without "probable cause". Arrest and harassment were used as a deterrent. It was widely hoped by the downtown business association, Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), that the harassment and threats of arrest would pressure homeless people to leave the city or at least to find a way to disappear. No amount of reason, proposals for housing and support services persuaded CAP to attempt real solutions to poverty and homelessness, not in their backyard.

During the months leading up to the Games and the actual two weeks of events in Atlanta the "non-credentialed press" covered protests and the federal lawsuit, as it was being prepared and filed. "The non-credentialed press often look for non-sport human interest stories—urban poverty, racism, etc.—that might embarrass the host city in the world press . . . world media coverage could make or break an Olympics."⁵⁹ They found those stories.

Travelers' Aid, a non-profit organization developed to assist travelers and relocating people, distributed thousands of dollars in funds granted by local governments to purchase one-way bus tickets for poor and homeless people just to get them out of town for the Games. Calls came to the Task Force from Birmingham, Alabama and towns in Florida asking why homeless people were arriving in those places asking for help and saying they had to leave Atlanta.

Police in Atlanta were found to be mass-producing arrest citations, with the following information pre-printed: African American, Male, Homeless. The citations were left blank for the charge and the date and the arresting officer's name.

The Task Force partnered with the ACLU and volunteer legal resources to make sure homeless people knew their rights and had numbers to call if they were harassed or wrongfully arrested. Many people who were arrested were held for trial until after the Games. Habeas Corpus was suspended for many during the Games.

⁵⁸ Cynthia Brown, Allyson Collins, and Nandi Rodrigo editors of Human Rights Watch, *HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES: MODERN CAPITAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS? Abuses in the State of Georgia*, July 1996 by Human Rights Watch.

⁵⁹ Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *Inside the Olympic Industry: Power, Politics and Activism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 176.

5. Immediate responses: activism and resistance

Resistance to Atlanta's Olympic bid began in earnest only after the IOC announced, 'It's Atlanta.' As has been mentioned previously, the advocacy and activist community, kept in the dark with the rest of Atlanta's citizens during the two years of bid development, found that the only means of educating the public about the actual costs and potential damage from the Games was to go outside the corporate media control to other resources. To that end, the leadership of the Olympic Conscience Coalition went first to Bread, Not Circuses and invited the Toronto activists to visit and help organize.

To emphasize the seriousness of the community's intent to protect poor and homeless citizens, the Olympic Conscience Coalition held a commitment day in 1991, a year after its formation, with more than 300 leaders of non-profit agencies, neighborhood organizations, labor groups and elected officials signing on to the Conscience Agenda that called on the City of Atlanta to step up and protect housing and civil rights and social services of Atlanta's poorest and most vulnerable people. One after another of the local elected officials, liberal and conservative alike, assured the activists that at least there would be no negative impact on poor people because of the hosting of the Games.

Moving from shock to naïve expectations of Atlanta's leadership and the obviously necessary commitment to protecting the poor, activists and organizers gradually learned the way things would work. Privately bid for, the Games would be privately planned and organized. Financial risks would be insured by commitments of public funds. "The all-private, chain-link-fenced Atlanta event complete (d) the metamorphosis of the Olympics into a vehicle for big business."⁶⁰

The second invitation went out from activists to the Habitat International Coalition, an international watchdog over forced evictions and massive displacement of poor and indigenous people. Joseph Schechla, HIC consultant in Washington, D.C., traveled to Atlanta to work with the activists who were organizing meetings and investigations into the developers' agenda. The groups of players in the Olympic Conscience Coalition requested that HIC and Schechla develop a paper reviewing Atlanta's plans and circulate the brief to concerned academics and international activists who might energize the resistance beyond local limits. Schechla made several visits to Atlanta, writing his observations and experiences and communicating internationally to educate athletes and media worldwide about what Atlanta was doing to prepare.

Along with HIC, the Bread, Not Circuses organizers from Toronto also sent trainers to Atlanta to assist the Task Force for the Homeless, Empty the Shelters and other groups participating in the Conscience Coalition.

The planned redevelopment of neighborhoods, like the Summerhill stadium community, stimulated the organizing of residents into ANUFF – Atlantans United For Fairness, a group that worked, picketed, met with planners and elected officials and eventually lost the neighborhood to the stadium by one vote at a Fulton County Commission meeting.

⁶⁰ Jennings, *The New Lords of the Rings*, 289.

Techwood United For Fairness, or TUFF, included neighborhood mothers, advocates, legal resources and other members of the neighborhood that called the first public housing project in the US “home.” These heroic activists followed every step of the process that took two years, from first planning meeting to complete destruction of Techwood and replacement with Centennial Place.

Empty the Shelters was a group of young student activists who completed training with grassroots organizers and engaged in street theater and various activities opposing the Olympics, including the Copwatch effort that helped produce evidence for the federal lawsuit. They were also the group that created Spoilsport, the anti-Olympics symbol and spokesperson.

The ACLU of Georgia represented homeless people in most of the lawsuits challenging the laws that criminalized them. The Atlanta Legal Aid defended residents of public housing, Techwood, East Lake and others against the process that destroyed those communities.

The Task Force for the Homeless called together the groups that eventually formed The Olympic Conscience Coalition. The Task Force also found the law firm Ropes and Gray in Boston and provided the plaintiffs and evidence for the lawsuit filed against the City in 1996. That challenge resulted in the Federal Judge’s issuing a Temporary Restraining Order and a Preliminary Injunction against the City of Atlanta two days before the opening ceremonies.

V. Long term Olympic impact

1. Long-term civil rights impact

Immediately after the Games, publications surfaced calling for City Council and the Mayor to keep the City under control and continue legislating against homeless people. They were described as needing special services, treatment, training, and being resistant, of course, they needed to be rounded up and forced.

Those assumptions have formed the basis of Atlanta's policies for dealing with homelessness since before the Olympics, but the Games boosted the urgency of those policies and practices. And since the housing that they could have used was being systematically destroyed, without replacement plans, there was no alternative sanctioned by the powerful groups controlling Atlanta's development.

By 1998 the Federal lawsuit filed in early 1996 by the Boston firm, Ropes and Gray, was settled with cash payments to the five homeless plaintiffs and with Judge Forrester's order to the City Council of Atlanta, to the Mayor, and to the Atlanta Police Department, to cease arresting homeless people without probable cause that a crime was being committed. He further ordered that any homeless person arrested be designated "homeless" and allowed to call the Task Force, which was given the charge of training police officers and recruits in appropriate resources and treatment of homeless people.

And so the lawsuit that began with documented arrests of more than 9,000 homeless people during the year before the Olympics in Atlanta, ended two years later with a settlement.

In the spring of 2005 Mayor Shirley Franklin, at the behest of Central Atlanta Progress and Home Depot magnate Bernie Marcus, proposed a ban on panhandling in the downtown area of the city. Marcus was developing the Georgia Aquarium, a major tourist attraction and thus a feature of the downtown redevelopment plan that postdated the Olympics.

Activists gathered and began organizing what was soon called the Movement to Redeem the Soul of Atlanta. That soul had long been in jeopardy:

On Monday, July 18, 2005, at 1:00 Atlanta's City Council met to decide the fate of thousands of poor and homeless people. The issue on the agenda was a ban on panhandling in the downtown area, segregated into a "tourist triangle," where we are told people will be safer than they will be across the street from the "vagrant free zone."

This latest and most diabolical effort to cleanse the city of visibly poor and homeless people is brought to us by many of the same people who created the Mayor's Homeless Commission. The marketing of this racial cleansing proposal depends on the fear and prejudice of people who do not yet

understand poverty and homelessness: anyone appearing on the streets must need police intervention because surely there are services enough for all who want them. We want those people to know that for every one person asking for shelter and a good job and health care and treatment, there are thousands more behind them who do not get what they ask for because this city is CLOSING shelters and housing and opening jails. The city is proposing rounding people up and forcing them through a gateway that leads nowhere.

Rather than helping all of us in this city to understand the needs of poor and homeless people and deciding together to include excluded people – to house and employ and treat people with respect and delight – rather than being the “blessed community,” these downtown officials and leaders are willing to spend millions of dollars to incarcerate, to belittle, to separate and further exclude our sisters and brothers. And they are in a frantic hurry to get this done.

Why, we ask, are they willing to rush to incarcerate and criminalize, continuing the draconian policies and practices they were ordered by a federal judge to cease from? What is coming downtown that requires getting rid of people with real needs and real value? What kind of city are we sitting by and allowing these fear mongers to create? One where all of us live and work and play and create together and brush up against people different from us, with w “hi, there”? Or one where we call the nearest policeperson and report that man over there who looks kinda scary?

We ask why they would continue this policy that began with slavery and continues breeding fear and loathing. Why would they incarcerate rather than house? Why would they be willing to spend millions more building jails instead of building housing? Why would they use fear to sell their plans and policies?

They know by now that homelessness is the result of unrestrained greed and policies that support that greed. They know by now that everyone who is homeless was once housed and has the right to be housed – amongst us. They know by now that sick people whose housing is withheld will get sicker still and need more and more care. They know by now that demonizing a group of people serves the interests of the people in control who are looked to for protection. As a minister friend of ours once said, “There aren’t enough fences and gated communities to protect us from ‘them.’”

The most frightening aspect of all of this legislation and policy making is that the authors of the “vagrant free zone” do not want to see community grow – inclusive and celebratory community, where people who don’t look or think alike actually enjoy a bustling downtown, with lots of vendors and sidewalk activity. With colorful street festivals and crowds jostling for seats at bright, funky sidewalk cafes.

That is the vision for a downtown Atlanta that we hold dear. That is the vision of the blessed community – a community where everyone works for a livable wage and gets the health care s/he needs or wants and has time to enjoy life and friends and family and create meaningful relationships that produce a city too busy and happy to hate. That, believe it or not, is the vision for Peachtree-Pine.

Instead, the fear mongering produces suspicion and unhappiness and prejudice that in turn produce exclusion and deprivation and sometimes violence bred of desperation.⁶¹

That ordinance would finally pass on August 15, 2005, with an accompanying peaceful protest that led to the arrest of seven of the leaders in the Movement to Redeem the Soul of Atlanta. The recent one-year anniversary of the passing of the law saw the Movement group publicly remembering the events of last summer and observing that the Atlanta Police Department has been enforcing the ordinance. In fact some of the APD leadership has declared publicly that the law is unenforceable. And City Attorney Stacey Abrams has stated that the City knows the ACLU is ready to challenge the ordinance as soon as it is used and there are plaintiffs.

2. Long term housing impact

In order to represent the housing situation in Atlanta since the closing ceremonies of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, we must spend some time describing the national housing picture. According to the National Center for Housing Policy, by 2005 in the United States “working a full time job does not guarantee a family or an individual a decent, affordable place to live.”⁶²

The year after the 1996 Olympics approximately three (3) million working families in America spent at least half their incomes on housing. By 2003 the number increased by 67% to more than five (5) million. These families are more likely to have difficulty paying for food, transportation, health care or health insurance. Their children are twice as likely to have poor health as families paying proportionately less for their housing.⁶³

Service level jobs in this country are projected to be the fastest growing jobs through 2012 with the median hourly wage at \$8.82 an hour. But two years ago, Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment required an income of \$15.21 an hour, nearly twice the median hourly wage for service level jobs. Therefore, housing will remain out of reach for the working poor.⁶⁴ And the gap is growing.

⁶¹ Anita Beaty, *Atlanta's Soul*, June 2005.

⁶² Ann Schnare, “The Housing Landscape for America’s Working Families,” National Center for Housing Policy, Volume 5, Issue 1, April 2005, 7.

⁶³ Schnare, 8.

⁶⁴ Schnare, 13.

The United States as a nation has, for the past ten years, continued the policy of leaving the production of affordable housing largely to the states, with the predictable result leaving a 1.6 million-unit housing gap. The “affordable housing gap” creates homelessness. As families and individuals desperately crowd into units, use abandoned or extremely substandard housing, consistently try to “afford” housing that costs a minimum of 50% of an entire household income, they fall in and out of homelessness. In fact, if we look at the stunning fact that some estimate place the number of “severely cost-burdened” households at 7.5 million, we can use that number as a predictor of homelessness. Whether or not these households fall into literal homelessness depends upon this nation and each local jurisdiction’s commitment to providing housing that its working poor and income-restricted citizens can afford.

Over the past decades the federal government’s commitment to housing has disappeared to the point that Section 8 vouchers for qualified individuals and families are all that remain of housing supports. And the use of those vouchers is dependent on the housing market as well as on the cost of utilities. When there are fewer market vacancies, landlords do not need the rent supplements. When utilities exceed income, voucher holders lose their rental supplements.

Since we know that in Atlanta the average homeless individual or family losing housing has paid as much as 70% of the household income for that housing. Couple those numbers with the experience in Atlanta of the average homeless individual or family having paid a minimum of 70% of their income for housing and you have a clearly predictable number of families and individuals who will experience homelessness. No longer does this nation or Atlanta, for sure, put a value on providing decent, safe and affordable housing for all its people.

That defines its growth for the past four decades but at the same time to create some upper income inner city condominiums and housing communities that the traffic-weary new suburbanites began flocking to buy in the wake of the two-week event. The business community’s chant became, “Now that we have taken the city back from those vagrants and beggars, we must keep it!”⁶⁵ Thus the loft craze began and with it the redevelopment of entire neighborhoods, not for the original or renting residents, but for those upper income young professionals, some with families, who wanted the safety and exclusivity of the suburbs with the convenience of city living.

Atlanta not only has one of the smallest middle classes of any major city, but the ratio of white household income to black household income is an astounding 2.76 (Walker 1997). Further more, poverty is highly concentrated, with 84.1 percent of the city’s poor living in the city’s poorest neighborhoods.⁶⁶

For renters, gentrification brings even more desperation. Affordable rental housing stock is destroyed as owners speculate on the flight back to the city.

⁶⁵ Central Atlanta Progress, Newsletter, fall of 1996.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

In Atlanta by 2003 the gentrification of downtown included transformations in property taxes, displacement of the poor from inner city neighborhoods, and heightened racial tensions. As a result the city is discovering that “while white gentrification may be good for the city coffers, it is bad for many residents.”⁶⁷ Anecdotal evidence and media reports offer sufficient proof that the annual property tax increases continue to displace residents on fixed incomes. Atlanta’s older east side neighborhoods have offered ideal conditions for gentrification. In some of the neighborhoods property values increased 25% on one year. In Kirkwood, for example median sales prices increased 274% in the ten years between 1994 and 2004.⁶⁸ Kirkwood is a neighborhood that had experienced the white “flight” of the 1960’s and 70’s when the resident population went from being 100% black to nearly 100% white. Then during the years from the Olympic bid announcement until 2000 the white population increased from 1% to 14% and has moved toward 50% by 2005.

By 2004 the median priced home, \$223,266, required an annual income of \$69,600 a year. Some of the service level jobs in Atlanta, police officers, firefighters, and elementary school teachers earn incomes ranging from \$32,000 to \$45,000 a year.⁶⁹ A family with an income of \$40,000 a year can afford a home that costs no more than \$120,000, nearly half the median cost of housing.

In 2005 Fair Market Rent, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development was \$810/mo. for a one-bedroom apartment and \$944/month for a two-bedroom apartment. Necessary income for those rents to be affordable at HUD’s 30% of income is \$15.58 and \$18.15 respectively. Retail sales median income is \$10.31 an hour, exactly twice the minimum wage of \$5.15.

Combine this affordability crisis with the destruction of more than 12,000 units of public housing since the Olympics, 5,000 of those units removed between 1997 and 2004, and the recent announcement that the Atlanta Housing Authority is displacing 13,000 families because they are unemployed, and add the 20,000 hurricane evacuees, all of whom will be forced out of their emergency FEMA housing, and you have a housing crisis of enormous and tragic proportions.

Adding up the destruction of public housing units alone, we see the following:

- Techwood/Clark Howell Housing Community included 1,195 units before the Olympics; after the Olympics it became the Centennial Place Apartments with 360 subsidized units (30% for former income-level, not former residents) under private management;
- East Lake Meadows with 650 units and became The Villages at East Lake, with only 270 units rented to very low income households; After the Olympics:
- Carver Homes would become the Villages at Carver and would lose 700 units;
- Grady Homes – all 495 units destroyed in 2006, with plans for 615 new units, only 222 of which will be designated for “poor” residents;

⁶⁷ Lesley Williams Reid and Robert M. Adelman, Georgia State University. “The Double-edged Sword of Gentrification in Atlanta,” *A publication of the American Sociological Association*, 1.

⁶⁸ Reid 2.

⁶⁹ “Paycheck to Paycheck: Wages and the Cost of Housing in the Counties,” 2004; *Center for Housing Policy, National Association of Counties, July 2004, p. 19.*

- Capitol Homes is gone completely, with a loss of 368 units.

As the city of Atlanta continued to gentrify its core and surrounding neighborhoods, low-income residents were being forced out of their housing in the “new” Atlanta to pave the way for upper income residents who were coming in from the suburbs in droves.⁷⁰ Evictions were the result of this “resurgent gentrification,” a term coined by Dr. Larry Keating, leading chronicler of Atlanta’s housing history.⁷¹ Those people evicted are usually poor, female heads of households and minorities. And because, as stated previously, we know that the average person becoming homeless in Atlanta paid at least 70% of the household income for housing before becoming homeless, we can predict the risk of homelessness for those poor households trying to live through gentrification even if they are not forcefully removed.

Thus big business and its government had used the Olympics Games to remove poor people and their housing from the City as they attempted to create a tourist Mecca, a city where wealthy urbanites live, work and play twenty-four hours a day.

The years leading up to and immediately after the Olympics saw “breakneck” growth in the metro Atlanta region. “An average of 69,100 people moved into the metropolitan area each year during the 1990’s . . .”⁷² The growth occurred chiefly in the northern suburbs of the region, draining the inner city of resources, and at the same time further segregating people into walled and gated communities, complete with retail to serve their needs so many people bragged that they never went into the city at all. The media-fueled demonizing of poor and homeless people combined with the City’s criminalizing legislation played on the fear that drained the city of vibrant street life.

During the Olympics developers had demonstrated that they could create gated communities inside the city. They built condominiums that were completely secured by gates and security systems. Their policies and practices were increasingly codified into zoning regulations and city ordinances that became institutionalized NIMBY (not in my backyard). As a result the concentration on bringing development back into the city, which had been abandoned and neglected by the white power structure, brought its racism, classism and exclusionary vision with it.

Although Atlanta’s “sprawl problem” became a focus for planning and development, that focus rarely if ever settled on the glaring social inequities that attended the sprawl and its proposed solutions. The health and welfare of Atlanta’s poorest residents are still the casualty of development – the segregation of sprawl or the criminalization of the poor in the city. Each practice occurs at the cost of balanced growth, fair housing development and at the expense of human and civil rights.

⁷⁰ “Gentrification: An increase in property values resulting from development that often increases economic tensions and displacement of low income homeowners and renters of all age groups within the neighborhood as well as results in a change in the character of the neighborhood.” From *A City for All: Report of the Gentrification Task Force*, Atlanta City Council, Dr. Larry Keating, Chair; September 17, 2001, p.6.

⁷¹ “*Tales of the City: Current Gentrification in Atlanta . . .*” John Toon, Georgia Institute of Technology Research News, September 4, 2003, p. 2.

⁷² Environmental Justice Resource Center, “Sprawl Atlanta: Social Equity Dimensions of Uneven Growth and Development,” Funded by the Turner Foundation, January 1999.

There is no avoiding the blatant racism of Atlanta's sprawling redevelopment; statistics make the case:

- By 1999 nearly 30% of the entire region's people of color lived inside the city, but only 6.3% of the region's whites lived there;
- By 1999 84% of Atlanta's poor lived in high poverty neighborhoods, and 44% lived in extreme poverty neighborhoods;
- Between 1990 and 1996 Atlanta's urban land area expanded 47%, with 48,262 building permits issued during 1996 alone⁷³

The need for an automobile keeps people of color away from the suburbs, and public transportation is resisted because with it come "those people." So since the public transportation system is itself discriminated against because of its user base, its lack of adequate funding has caused a reduction in services. With the shift of demographics and the move back into the city of wealthy condo and loft dwellers – who are automobile dependent—there has been a reduction in MARTA services and access -- a *de facto* gentrification of the public transportation system. So the working poor, minimum-wage-earning, mostly African American people displaced to southern suburbs are left without transportation back to their jobs and support services.

In addition direct housing discrimination by banks, mortgage companies and developers keeps even middle income African Americans out of the mortgage market, and it is twice as likely to occur in the suburbs as in the city: 59% of the US middle income African Americans own their own homes, compared with 74% of whites. But the mortgage interest tax deduction is still by far the most expensive welfare program in the US.⁷⁴

Discrimination doesn't end with housing and transportation; the health of poor communities of people of color is ignored in the wake of sprawling development as well. While people of color comprise less than 30% of the population of five of the largest counties near Atlanta, they represent the majority of residents in half of the "dirtiest" zip codes in these counties.

- Atlanta metro residents (five county area) who live in majority white zip codes are exposed to an average of 38.2 pounds of toxic releases per person annually;
- Atlanta metro residents (five county area) who live in majority people of color zip codes are exposed to an average of 208.6 pounds of toxic release per person annually.⁷⁵

Between 1989 and 1999 Atlanta's poor increased by 77,456 individuals, while the poverty rate decreased slightly. The influx of middle to upper income residents in the northside neighborhoods kept the poverty rate down, while inner city residents, 60% of whom were African American, became poorer.⁷⁶

⁷³ Environmental Justice Resource Center, "Sprawl Atlanta," 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 8.

⁷⁶ Atlanta Regional Commission, *Regional Snapshot: Income Trends*, 2002.

In spite of the lack of federal protection for renters, some states have expanded tenant protections. Georgia, unfortunately, is not one of those states. Activists and housing advocates have for decades sought legislative protection for renters and faced the overwhelming lobbying power of property owners.

Most tenants do not even appear at housing court, and most who do have no legal representation as they face landlords with lawyers, resources and the courts on their side. A judge who traveled around the United States observing housing courts reported, “If fairness, effectiveness and sensitivity are equated with justice, then injustice is the norm.”⁷⁷

By 1996 landlords could refuse to renew a lease without good cause. The “One Strike” you’re out policy for Section 8 and Public Housing tenants, upheld in 2002 by the Supreme Court, allowed residents to be evicted for drug offenses committed by those presumed to be under the control of the resident, whether or not there was any knowledge of the offense. By 2002 it had long been obvious to developers, private business people and their public representatives that eviction was a powerful weapon for displacing families from public housing in order to redevelop valuable property.

Dr. Keating also described other negative impact of the Games, including inflation in construction costs, both immediately and longer term. Increases in rental housing were recorded in experiential documentation, with landlords displacing thousands in order to rent to Olympic visitors. “Price-gouging in the rental-housing market went unchecked. No one knows how many people ended up paying higher rents, the amount by which rents actually increased, or how many renters were forced to move.”⁷⁸

In April 2004 the Atlanta Housing Authority informed the 1,114 residents of Grady Homes, that their housing would be torn down within a year. Grady Homes was the last of the in town projects to undergo this gentrification. Residents were promised other housing options in public units during the renovation and redevelopment of the community, but they knew better. The residents of Grady Homes had watched as Techwood/Clark Howell Homes was destroyed for the Olympics and replaced by a 300-unit mixed income townhouse community. Gentrification and its attendant displacement again preyed on the poorest of Atlanta’s residents.

Beginning with the Olympic displacement at Techwood and the net loss there of more than 700 units of public housing, the steamroller of redevelopment continues today as Grady Homes, or rather the rubble that recently housed hundreds of families continues the destruction and privatization of public housing in Atlanta. No one knows how many low income units will finally be included in the replacement housing but residents don’t expect to be re-housed, and they are reduced in number by the age-old process of lease scrutiny, implementation of the “One Strike” policy and enforcement of the requirement that residents get jobs or enroll in schools. By the time the supposed replacement housing guarantees were actually offered, the number of residents remaining was fewer than 10% of the original resident families. And they were given vouchers or Section 8 certificates, which force them to shop for their housing, in many cases, outside the central city.

⁷⁷ “Evictions,” 18.

⁷⁸ Keating, 155.

Creative Loafing reporter Michael Wall said it clearly, “The simple reality is that the Atlanta Housing Authority has partnered with a team of developers to build a shiny new ‘smart growth’ development on 27 acres of prime real estate that Grady Homes now occupies—and in which 1,000-plus low-income residents just won’t fit.”⁷⁹

Two years ago, in 2004, the Atlanta Housing Authority began fencing in their remaining properties, requiring residents to carry identification at all times, and allowing no one without that ID to enter the housing communities. While local authorities boast that they are only creating the same kind of security enjoyed by many suburban, upscale developments, many of the public housing residents complain that they are being locked in.

Atlanta is still a city divided. Most neighborhoods remain segregated, and black family income lags behind whites by \$38,000 a year. One third of the city’s black families live below the poverty line and a huge 40% of Atlanta’s children live in poverty.⁸⁰

In Georgia thirty percent (30%) of all households are renters, with a median income of \$31,928. In the state of Georgia the median household income is \$58,802. Extremely low income is 30% of Area Median Income, or \$17,641 a year. 149,878 families in Georgia earn 30% or less of Area Median Income and cannot afford rent at all.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development maintains that “affordable” housing is housing that costs no more than 30% of a household income. So on an income of \$17,641 a family can afford no more than \$444 a month for a two-bedroom apartment. But in Atlanta Fair Market Rent for a 2-bedroom apartment is \$734 per month.⁸⁰

The Federal Minimum Wage is \$5.15 an hour. Affordable rent for that individual or family is no more than \$268 per month. But the Fair Market Rent is still \$734 for a 2-bedroom apartment. Many people work two and three jobs to afford housing for their families, but any extra expense can spin them out of their housing legally in seven days.

Using HUD’s (Housing and Urban Development Department) fairness policy, that housing should cost no more than 30% of income, we can say that the “housing wage” in Georgia is \$14.12/hour.

In all metropolitan areas, significant numbers of households who reported incomes below poverty also reported housing costs that were 70 percent or more of their income. A review of individual records indicates that many of these households actually reported housing costs higher than their income. Such a situation can indeed happen temporarily as people use their savings or build up debt.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Michael Wall, “Uprooted,” *Creative Loafing*, April 29, 2004.

⁸⁰ Living Cities National Community Development Initiative, www.livingcities.org: Atlanta was chosen for redevelopment funds in 1991, targeting public housing first at Techwood Homes, then East Lake Meadows and the Auburn Avenue Historical District.

⁸⁰ Task Force for the Homeless, *Georgia Housing Affordability Chart*, 2006.

⁸¹ Paul Leonard, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *1996 American Housing Survey*.

Education, work, and income figures reveal further separations. While overall the city has the fifth-highest percentage of college graduate among Living Cities sites, only 13 percent of African Americans hold a bachelor's degree. The typical household income for black families lags behind white families by \$38,000, and Hispanic families don't fare much better, with an income gap of \$25,000. A full third of the city's African Americans live below the poverty line. The US Census of 2000 records the changes in the location of poverty in Atlanta and documents the segregated nature of many neighborhoods in Atlanta along both racial and economic lines. Finally, with 40 percent of its children falling below the poverty line, Atlanta has the highest rate of child poverty among Livable Cities Sites.⁸²

Between 1989 and 1999 the number of Atlanta's poor had increased by 77,456 individuals, while the poverty rate decreased slightly. The influx of middle to upper income residents in the northside neighborhoods kept the poverty rate down, while inner city residents, 60% of whom were African American, became poorer.⁸³

Urban sprawl that began in the seventies and increased in the eighties produced measurably negative impacts on the environment. By the late 90's people of color represented the majority of residents in five of the ten "dirtiest" counties of metro Atlanta. People of color make up 69% of the resident population in the "dirtiest" zip code in the five-county area.⁸⁴

The 1996 Olympic Games and the development plans surrounding that mega-event had provided the drama, the energy and the interest in long-held dreams of politicians and investors alike to propel Atlanta into the ranks of international cities. Today, ten years after the mega-event that attracted developers and planners to try again to gain control of the city, downtown is exploding with expensive, high-rise, inner-city loft and condominium construction. And the major developer with nearly complete control over Atlanta's political leadership is Tom Cousins.

Ten years ago this summer, Atlanta welcomed the world to the show. "The show" turned out to be a dress rehearsal for what was to come – the complete destruction of inner city public and private housing that very poor city residents could afford. And if housing for poor people is systematically removed and not replaced, those people show up on other people's sofas, moving around as necessary, and finally asking for shelter. Then when the shelter is removed to make way for developers, those people show up in other neighborhoods, in housing they cannot afford, and eventually in cars, in abandoned buildings, on the streets and under bridges.

Summarizing Atlanta's environment, Dr. Ronald Baylor, Chair of Georgia Tech's History Department, has this to say:

At the end of the twentieth century, even a cursory walk around Atlanta reveals the legacy of race relations for the urban environment. . . . an oppressive and exploitative environment with racial barriers at every turn.⁸⁵

⁸² Atlanta Census 2000, Georgia State University *Andrew Young School of Policy Studies*, 3.

⁸³ Atlanta Regional Commission, *Regional Snapshot: Income Trends*, 2002.

⁸⁴ EJRC Urban Atlanta Sprawl

⁸⁵ Baylor, Ronald,

A long-term and intended by-product of the mass displacement caused by the 1996 Olympics was the dissolution of the black voting strength in the center of the city. The demographic upheaval created by the displacement of thousands of African American households and the migration into town of majority white suburbanites has determined future political realities.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Conclusion

For Atlanta Olympic planners, outdoing the Los Angeles Games of 1984 was a basic and early goal. For a city only one-fifth the size of Los Angeles, to sell more than 11 million tickets -- “more than Los Angeles and Barcelona put together” – was a noteworthy accomplishment.⁸⁶ The number of athletes and countries competing allowed Atlantans to claim that the 1996 Olympic Games were twice as big as the Los Angeles Games, in fact the largest Olympics ever.

Today, ten years later Atlanta continues the housing gentrification and displacement that had cost 30,000 people their homes. Atlanta continues its criminalization of poor and homeless people with the recent passage of a law against panhandling in “the tourist triangle.” The city that described itself as “too busy to hate” is blatantly the city too greedy to care. And that is the memory that haunts poor and homeless Atlantans and renews their nightmare daily.

Criminalizing continued under the category “Quality of Life” ordinances. Politicians sold the policies that were being written by Central Atlanta Progress, and the public believed the media descriptions of homeless people as threatening people who need incarceration.

When Shirley Franklin replaced Mayor Bill Campbell in 2001, the activist community hoped for a reversal in policies and practices that criminalized homeless people but expected nothing of her, given her Olympic participation. Her training under Andy Young stood her in good stead as she ascended the Olympic ladder, used by the powerful to soothe relations with angry, frustrated low-income African American neighborhoods.

But Mayor Franklin began her first term with an aggressive program to “enforce the quality of life ordinances.” She addressed a group of activist leaders and challenged them that when they had the power of the business community she would listen. Her attitude has been “make me.”

In 2003 Shirley Franklin created the Mayor’s Homelessness Commission, a group further empowering local business people and using the Atlanta Project’s model. From then on anything that concerned homelessness or the agencies serving homeless people came “under the jurisdiction” of this commission. United Way, the business community’s charity, staffs the Commission and determines that only the sanctioned organizations get major funding. The Commission gives the Mayor cover as she institutes more draconian policies and presides over the absolute destruction of all Atlanta’s housing projects.

In May of 2005 the Mayor closed a 125-bed shelter for women and children, having promised replacement beds prior to the closing. Now, in 2006, women and children wait for

⁸⁶ Atlanta 1996, The Greatest Show on Earth?

shelter in the Task Force waiting room. Those 125 beds have not been replaced, and the Mayor's Commission unabashedly supports funding facilities outside the city.

What was a year ago a thriving community of residents living a stone's throw from Grady Hospital is now a vacant lot, with only the rubble remaining to show what was there. The property, increasing in value by the day, is among those prime pieces of real estate inside the city waiting for the "mixed income" development that has sealed the fate of those people no one is tracking – the former residents who were promised units in the new neighborhood. The Atlanta Housing Authority assures advocates and politicians that no one was displaced – that everyone who was there at the time of the actual emptying out of Grady Homes received a Section 8 Certificate or a housing voucher.

Today the only sign of Grady Homes is the sign. And like those at Techwood, one would be hard pressed to find many of the residents who used to live there."⁸⁷

Section 8 and vouchers depend upon the housing market for their usefulness. When landlords have other options they prefer choosing tenants who are able to pay market rents. And if a Section 8 holder doesn't find a landlord willing to accept Section 8 subsidies, that family can lose its certificate. The subsidies are ending for thousands of units owned by landlords who don't need the subsidies because the market has changed in their favor.

The 1996 Olympic Games and the development plans surrounding that mega-event had provided the drama, the energy and the interest in long-held dreams of politicians and investors alike to propel Atlanta into the ranks of international cities. Today, ten years after the mega-event that attracted developers and planners to try again to gain control of the city, downtown is exploding with expensive, high-rise, inner-city loft and condominium construction. And the major developer with nearly complete control over Atlanta's political leadership is Tom Cousins.

Today Atlanta's redevelopment plans include a brand new mega-project, the Beltway, spearheaded for Mayor Franklin by Ray Weeks, a Tom Cousins connection. The Atlanta Development Authority, headed by Cousins' son-in-law, Greg Giornelli, coordinates city development for the Mayor. Cousins' employee, Lisa Borders, presides, as President of Atlanta City Council, over the legislative branch of the City government, while Cousins'-backed Mayor Shirley Franklin cheers Cousins and his allies as they begin turning the Peachtree Street corridor into a replica of downtown Manhattan. High-rise condominiums are springing up on every block, every street face, and all marketing to highly paid professionals and all boasting street level restaurants and shopping.

The development boom makes no room for working poor Atlanta's, the majority of whom can afford rents between \$250 and \$500 a month. The gentrification of Atlanta's downtown and intown neighborhoods approaches completion as the Olympic Museum celebrates ten years since "that summer."

⁸⁷ 11 Alive.com, Reported by Keith Whitney. "Gentrification Chasing Some Out," May 10, 2006.

2. Recommendations

According to well-known Olympic scholar, Helen Lenskyj, “The Olympic Games have always been a bad thing for the region that hosts them. They involve massive long-term changes to regional infrastructure to accommodate a two-week influx of tourists and athletes . . . the whole agenda is dominated by multinationals.”⁸⁸

Indeed, Atlanta’s experience brought housing displacement, evictions, arrests, expenditures of public funds, and the cementing of developers’ control over the city’s administration and planning processes.

Human rights issues may seem unrelated to a sporting event, but the Olympic Games have historically showcased the international community's respect for what Atlanta's application called the "justice and equality inherent in fair play." At the same time, the Olympics have often been a lightning rod for political controversy—for Nazi racist supremacism (Berlin 1936), for black-power salutes (Mexico City 1968), for anti-Israeli terrorism (Munich 1972), and for reciprocal boycotts by the U.S. and Soviet Union (Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984), among others.

Beijing lost its bid to host the 2000 Olympics because of China's gross and systematic violations of human rights, and Human Rights Watch was among the organizations that campaigned for taking its human rights record into account. As the world's attention focuses on an Olympic site, it follows naturally that the host country's human rights record is of interest. And so it should be: as South Africa under apartheid discovered, a country that wishes to participate in the world sporting system should also participate in the international human rights system and strive to meet the standards of that system.⁸⁹

But for those of us who have experienced the Olympics in our cities and those who prepare and anticipate its impact on poor and homeless people, it is necessary to hope that developing a collection of shared data, experiences, and guidelines for cities hosting the Games can result in a global recognition of human and civil rights that cannot be separated from original Olympic ideals. As former Empty the Shelters leader, Holli Levinson says now, ten years later, “We may have no reason to believe that the Olympic Movement will respond to our recommendations, but we must hope.”

To that end, we make the following recommendations, based on Atlanta’s experience hosting the 1996 Summer Olympic Games:

1. The International Olympic Committee should establish requirements that the bid process be developed publicly, with all segments of Civil Society represented in an assessment of the city’s housing and social supports for all its citizens.

⁸⁸ DeMause, *The Village Voice*, July 18-24, 2001.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Abuses in the State of Georgia*, July 1996.

2. A documented description and accounting of all low income housing units must accompany each bid, with a post-Olympic documentation of no reduction in housing units for poor people.
3. A fund must be developed to secure tenure for poor people in cases of unforeseen displacement.
4. There must be no forced evictions or even displacement of people caused either by preparation or hosting of the Olympic Games.
5. The civil rights of all citizens of bidding cities must be protected and that protection documented to the satisfaction of local, national and international human and civil rights organizations.
6. There must be no sweeping poor and homeless people into jails and off the streets.

There must be legal documents/contracts agreed to binding the host cities to their bid promises and declarations

Postscript:

Eleven years after the 1996 Olympic Games, the Atlanta Housing Authority has announced plans to complete its destruction of public housing by declaring 3,000 occupied units “obsolete” and displacing 9,600 residents. Elderly and disabled residents are included in the removal plans, although there are only two-year housing vouchers offered for those hearty residents who manage to hold out through the preliminary scrutiny and concomitant evictions. Research proves that no more than 10% of displaced public housing residents are ever able to use the vouchers or certificates.

Activists led by resident association leaders have demanded public hearings and filed a formal grievance against AHA with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Research is being prepared to assist lawyers in bringing a request in federal court for injunctive relief to stop the evictions and the demolitions.

The Olympics began the modern redevelopment of Atlanta and paved the way for downtown developers to control the city. This gentrified city makes room only for those people who can afford the average housing costs. The average “housing” wage in Atlanta must be at least \$17.00 per hour to afford average rents. Minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour, and required that a family earn at least three times that amount in order to afford fair market rent.

The City that called itself “The City Too Busy To Hate” has become the City that is excluding its working poor, elderly and vulnerable citizens. Atlanta’s Olympic legacy is the creation of a city that is privatizing its healthcare, its public utilities, its public land and eliminating very low cost housing, public healthcare, and access to public transportation.

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