

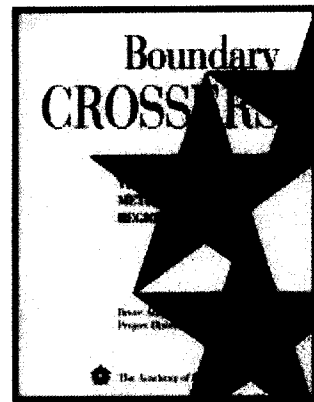
publications

Boundary Crossers Case Studies

[Table of Contents](#), [Foreword](#), [Atlanta](#), [Charlotte](#), [Chattanooga](#), [Cleveland](#), [Denver](#), [Detroit](#), [Kansas City](#), [Portland](#), [San Antonio](#), [San Diego](#), [Order Form](#)

Atlanta: Where Success Is Not Enough

Researched and written by Bruce Adams. From *Boundary Crossers: Case Studies of How Ten of America's Metropolitan Regions Work (Academy of Leadership, 1998)*



I. OVERVIEW

1. Atlanta Has a Bigger Idea

Imagine the chutzpa it took for Atlanta to try to capture the 1996 Centennial Olympic games. Many believed they should be held in Athens - Greece not Georgia. Only two other American cities had ever hosted the summer games - St. Louis in 1904 and Los Angeles in 1932 and 1984. "People thought I was nuts," explains Billy Payne, the college football star turned real estate lawyer who in 1987 got the idea to go for the gold. Three years later, on September 18, 1990, with the help of Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, who is highly regarded in the international community, Atlanta was awarded the games.

But for Atlanta, it wasn't enough to put on a great international sporting event. Mayor Maynard H. Jackson Jr. had a vision - Atlanta should use the 1996 Olympics as a springboard into the twenty-first century. Jackson, the South's first black big-city mayor (he had preceded Andrew Young in 1973 and succeeded him in 1989), was after more than a seventeen-day festival. He wanted to leverage the event into something that would leave a lasting legacy for the city.

Leon Eplan, then Atlanta's commissioner of planning and development, devised the plan. Eplan knew that Los Angeles and St. Louis had been little changed after serving as Olympic hosts. But Chicago, Atlanta's model, had been forever transformed by the

Columbian Exposition of 1893. The work done to prepare for the Exposition had helped Chicago enter the twentieth century.

In 1991, the late Dan E. Sweat, former head of Central Atlanta Progress and The Atlanta Project, explained the stakes for Atlanta: "We won't emerge in September of 1996 as a world-class city if all we've done is build some stadia and staged good games and entertained the visitors of the world. If we haven't significantly improved the daily lives of the people at the bottom of the economic heap, we don't deserve world-class status."

When he appeared at an International Olympic Committee meeting in Barcelona in 1992, Mayor Jackson had this to say: "The vision of Atlanta is rooted in the understanding that the Olympics represents a means and a catalyst for realizing the city of tomorrow. The event presents the unique opportunity to shape the city for the next generation of residents, workers and guests and to prepare for the challenges it will face in the next century."

An extraordinary partnership of the public and private sectors rolled up its sleeves and got to work. When they were finished, they had constructed numerous sports facilities throughout the city, built twelve miles of new sidewalks, installed 1,200 street lights, planted 10,000 trees, improved and added bridges and roads. In addition, they had targeted fifteen city neighborhoods for improvement and added 1,000 housing units in neighborhoods near downtown. Fifty pieces of public art and historic monuments were installed, new parks were built and existing parks improved. "We have transformed the city," according to planner Eplan.

2. From Terminus to International Gateway

Atlanta sits at the junction of three ridges that connect the coastal, Piedmont, and mountain areas of America's Southeast. Atlanta was originally named Terminus in 1837 when it became the zero milepost of the Western and Atlantic Railroad line from Chattanooga. Here the railroad connected to other rail lines. The name Atlanta was officially adopted in 1845, but the town remained small, serving a mostly rural and agricultural region.

The Civil War brought both opportunity and devastation to Atlanta. The population skyrocketed as this far-inland city seemed an ideal center for Confederate arms production and other manufacturing. Having become a key strategic site, Atlanta became an obvious target. On September 2, 1864, Union General William T. Sherman marched through Atlanta and burned it to the ground.

After the war, the old railroads returned to operation and new railroads proliferated as Atlanta billed itself the "Chicago of the

South." In 1868, Atlanta became the capital of Georgia and by 1880 Georgia's largest city. Pharmacist Asa Candler's patent medicine led to the first sale of Coca Cola in 1886, the start of a gigantic international business. A home-grown economy emerged with banks, newspapers, and businesses sprouting up all over town at the end of the nineteenth century. Two completely segregated societies - one white and one black - flourished. Atlanta became a center for education. Morehouse, Spelman, and Clark Colleges and Atlanta University were established for African-Americans and Agnes Scott College, Emory University, and Georgia Institute of Technology for whites.

The Atlanta region grew steadily in population and commerce during the early decades of the twentieth century under the banner of the "Forward Atlanta" campaign launched in the 1920s by Ivan Allen Sr. Atlanta's white businesses centered on Peachtree Street, while black businesses developed along "Sweet" Auburn Avenue. The divide was deep. In the 1920s and 30s, Atlanta was home to both the Ku Klux Klan and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* made its movie premier in 1939. In 1964, Atlanta's own Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Mayor William B. Hartsfield styled Atlanta "The City Too Busy To Hate." Dr. King, progressive Mayor Ivan Allen Jr., and courageous journalist Ralph McGill helped ease tensions during the difficult 1960s transition from segregation to integration. In 1972, Andrew Young became the first African-American congressman from the Deep South since Reconstruction, representing a predominately white district. In 1973, Atlanta elected the South's first black big-city mayor, Maynard H. Jackson Jr. And in 1976, former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States.

In 1925, the city leased a former auto racetrack for use as a city airport, and in the 1930s William B. Hartsfield promoted Atlanta as the regional airport for America's Southeast. The development and expansion of what is now Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport helped make Atlanta the premier city in America's South. Atlanta's location as a transportation hub and its extraordinary penchant for boosterism led to significant growth. Without natural geographic features to constrain the sprawling growth, people fled the center city for greener suburban pastures. With typical understated humility, Atlanta's slogan in the 1970s was "The Next Great International City." In 1980, Ted Turner established Cable News Network, the first twenty-four-hour-a-day news station, bringing Atlanta into the technological age. And in 1990, Atlanta was awarded the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games.

3. Portrait of the Atlanta Region

Atlanta is blessed with a mild climate and a superb location to service America's Southeast. With the foresight to develop an

excellent regional transportation system and the good sense to move past the bigotry that has been the South's tragic legacy, the Atlanta region has developed a dynamic economy. A recent Department of Housing and Urban Development study of regional economies ranked Atlanta's economy at the top as a "booming region." According to HUD: "The Atlanta metropolitan economy has evolved from a traditional regional transportation and commerce center into an advanced business, financial, distribution and communications hub . . . The Atlanta region is one of the fastest growing metropolitan economies in the nation, with employment increasing 127 percent between 1975 and 1995" (compared to a national average job growth rate of 47 percent). According to a U.S. Department of Commerce study, the Atlanta region will be the nation's eighth largest employment market in the year 2000, with 2,377,000 jobs.

Shirley C. Franklin, the City of Atlanta's chief operating officer under Mayor Andrew Young, points to the "tremendous change in a short period of time. Thirty years ago, this was a relatively sleepy town." The importance of the telecommunications industry, now a driving force in Atlanta's hot economy, was barely recognized in planning efforts as recently as a decade ago. Journalists Neal Peirce and Jerry Hagstrom in their 1983 *The Book of America: Inside 50 States Today* point out that it was an advantage for Atlanta to be an economic late bloomer: "Atlanta's snail-like progress in the seventy-five years after Appomattox may have been a blessing in disguise. It never developed manufacturing, thus avoiding the overcrowding, smokestacks, and tenements of dynamic industrial cities." The region has had extraordinary job growth in recent years, many in high-wage, environmentally clean businesses.

The Atlanta region includes twenty counties, 111 incorporated cities and towns in a 6,150 square mile area. The metro Atlanta population in 1995 was 3,481,500, growing by 69 percent from 1975 to 1995 (compared to a national growth rate of 22 percent). Median household income in the region in 1995 was \$46,108 (compared to a national average of \$33,144). Of the Atlanta region's total population, approximately 72 percent are white, 25 percent black, 2 percent Asian, and 2 percent Hispanic. The City of Atlanta's population in 1995 was 424,300 (13 percent of the region's total), with approximately 67 percent black, 31 percent white, 2 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian. Fulton County, which includes the City of Atlanta, continues to be the largest county in the region, with 700,689 people (50 percent black). Fast-growing suburban Gwinnett County has a population of 457,058 (91 percent white), and is now larger than the City of Atlanta.

None of Atlanta's successes were inevitable, according to Peirce and Hagstrom: "All the advances of this 'Cinderella city' are now taken for granted by many. But they were not a foregone

conclusion in 1945." The Atlanta region made a strategic investment in the infrastructure needed to tie it to the global marketplace and the next century. The region's Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport now has the second largest volume of air passengers in the world after Chicago's O'Hare Airport. As a result, Atlanta is third in the country in convention visitors, trailing only Chicago and New York City. HUD points out that by linking shipping to trucking, Atlanta has effectively become "an inland port" connecting Charleston, Jacksonville, and Savannah to markets throughout the United States. The Atlanta region has become a global communications center because of its heavy investment in technology infrastructure.

Atlanta's other strategic advantage over its mid-century rivals for economic preeminence in the deep South - Birmingham, Charlotte, and Nashville - was its rejection of racism. With Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference located here, Atlanta was the center of the nation's civil rights movement. "The City Too Busy to Hate" became a magnet for the nation's best and brightest African-Americans.

All is not well in Atlanta, however. There are two Georgias - Atlanta and rural Georgia - and there are two Atlantas - rich and poor. As HUD reported, the prosperity of recent decades has not been spread equally throughout the Atlanta metropolitan region. Atlanta has one of the largest city-suburban income gaps in the nation. Her dramatic economic growth has concentrated in the largely white suburbs, leaving the majority black central city with fewer and fewer resources to combat growing problems. Atlanta's sprawling development has left it with serious air pollution problems and what Fortune magazine recently characterized as the nation's longest commutes to work.

To face the future's major challenges, Atlanta will have to call on what many think is its strongest civic attribute - its collective drive to improve. According to the 1996 report of the Georgia Future Communities Commission: "Georgia is a leader among the states because as a people, we have never been satisfied with success - our aspiration is fulfillment. We have been ready to do what it takes to improve on the status quo and to make future dreams a reality." As former Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell put it, "I had to run like hell to keep up with our image."

II. THREE LEGS OF THE STOOL: BUSINESS, COMMUNITY, AND GOVERNMENT

1. Business: Business Carries Atlanta Forward

The business community drives much of the agenda in the city and the region. "The Chamber of Commerce is the place to influence public policy in Atlanta," according to Chamber senior vice

president Susan E. Neugent. Former Mayor Andrew Young explains: "The way Atlanta's business leaders support the community is a direct reflection of the way the city and state government support business. Atlanta benefits from a clear sense of purpose and direction."

Business has had a take-charge approach since the early decades of this century. Ivan E. Allen Sr.'s "Forward Atlanta" campaign was Chamber-based. Atlanta's top businesses joined forces in 1941 to establish what is now called Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) to improve the quality of the central city. The power of the white, male business community in a region so noted for the strength of its African-American leaders is extraordinary. It is, however, disconcerting to walk into the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and see only a handful of black faces among the photo-graphs on the wall of the Chamber's 125-member Board of Advisors. By contrast, the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) adopted minority contracting policies unheard of in Olympic history.

For years, Atlanta's business elite looked down its nose at Atlanta's poor. Now that the problems have intensified and the link between the region's long-term economic success and the strength of Atlanta's center-city neighborhoods has become clear, the business community has begun to show a genuine interest in the neighborhoods. In 1991, with the world about to land on its doorstep for the Olympics and under former President Jimmy Carter's leadership, the Atlanta business and foundation communities made a major commitment of people and money to The Atlanta Project (TAP). The Atlanta Project represents "a new paradigm of corporate involvement in urban revitalization," Dan Sweat, former TAP program director, explained in 1995. "The unprecedented corporate commitment to the empowerment-partnership approach to urban revitalization at work in Atlanta is a clear signal that corporate America is eagerly searching for new ways to have a positive and meaningful impact on improving the lives of the urban poor."

The Atlanta Project has been a disappointment, reflecting the dangers of unreasonable expectations, but it does appear to have focused the business community on the wider needs and interests of the community. Corporate partnerships with neighborhoods were an integral part of the 1996 Olympic legacy program. In 1993, business leaders formed an odd political coalition- EduPAC - with PTAs and minority leaders to help elect a new slate of school board members.

Even with its increased attention to the neighborhoods and schools, the business community continues to focus on maintaining the quality of Atlanta's key business districts. Central Atlanta Progress launched the Downtown Improvement District

(DID) in 1996 to tax downtown businesses to reduce crime and increase clean-up. Paul B. Kelman, CAP vice president, explains: "DID represents citizens taking things into their own hands and getting things done. Yes, it does represent a failure of government. But you can bitch and moan or you can change it." Former Mayor Sam Massell is now the president of the Buckhead Coalition, an organization of business heavyweights in the city's prosperous northside: "We want to make sure Buckhead doesn't go through the normal cycle from growth to deterioration."

2. Community: "Black and White, Rich and Poor Can Live Together"

In the segregated 1950s, there were no neighborhood leaders at the decision-making table. The neighborhoods paid dearly for the successes of the downtown business interests. Major highways ripped through neighborhoods and destroyed communities. Many of the most likely neighborhood leaders moved out of the city over the next three decades, according to the Atlanta Journal's editorial-page editor Jim Wooten: "Now we know neighborhood people should be at the table, but there is no leadership structure to deal with."

Maynard Jackson won his campaign for mayor in part with the support of anti-highway neighborhood-based organizations. As mayor, in 1975, Jackson established twenty-four neighborhood planning units (NPUs) to review planning, land use, and budget decisions. Each NPU has a board elected annually. Proposed land-use changes, rezonings, subdivision approvals, and public projects cannot move forward without NPU review. According to the city's former commissioner of planning and development, Leon Eplan, "The most important result of this required involvement has been to reduce the number of public conflicts." The neighborhoods grew in strength. In a battle that received national attention, the Inman Park neighborhood negotiated huge changes to a proposed highway (now Freedom Parkway) to the Carter Center.

The NPUs gave some structure to neighborhood leadership, but Atlanta was far behind other cities in organizing neighborhoods for shaping their own economic development plans through community development corporations. "Part of our problem in low-income neighborhoods was that we haven't had a plan for what we want," according to former state legislator Douglas C. Dean. "When I grew up here in Summerhill, it was the Mecca of Atlanta. White and black. We had the leading citizens of Atlanta. Multicultural. Multi-income." Just blocks from the state capitol, the Summerhill neighborhood was split by a highway. The huge Fulton County Stadium was constructed. "By 1988, we had 66 percent unemployment and no net worth." Dean organized a community development corporation he now heads, Summerhill Neighborhood, Inc., and cut a deal with Olympic organizers. The

neighborhood got a job-training program and built the first new housing in the neighborhood in fifty years. "Deep down in my heart," says Dean, "I believe black and white, rich and poor can live together."

The Atlanta Project and the Olympic legacy programs, through their failures and successes, have taught Atlanta that top-down doesn't work. Decades of well-justified mistrust were not wiped out by a promise from Jimmy Carter. Jane Smith, TAP's program director, notes with disappointment that community participation in TAP activities has been low: "When I wonder why participation is low, I think of what one eighty-two-year-old woman told me, 'You people are always coming here and having your parties. You invite us to the parties and tell us we will get presents. None of the parties have done anything for me before. Why should I expect that you will be any different?'"

Douglas Dean says there is a difference now: "The Summerhill plan came from Summerhill." The Old Fourth Ward neighborhood that nurtured Martin Luther King Jr. also benefited from the Olympics, according to L. Mtamanika Youngblood, executive director of the Historic District Development Corporation: "The world was coming. Atlanta did not want to be embarrassed. What we do is internally motivated. We organized. We planned. Now we are implementing. We used the Olympics to leverage. But we will be here for a long time."

3. Government: Where Maynard Jackson Meets Newt Gingrich

When Maynard H. Jackson Jr. became the first black mayor in 1973, he split from the tradition of a close partnership between the mayor and the business community to pay more attention to neighborhood and minority interests. This led to a period of turmoil. Andrew Young's two terms saw a return to the traditional partnership between government and business. The hostility between Jackson and the white business elite softened considerably in his third term when he replaced Young, and a smoother transition to a workable partnership between white business leaders and black political leaders for the good of the city has been effected.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the governmental picture in the metropolitan Atlanta region today relates to the relationship between Atlanta and the rest of the region and the state. The City of Atlanta now has only 13 percent of the region's population. The Atlanta mayor and city council no longer dominate. Once tiny Gwinnett County, northeast of the city, has now surpassed the city in population and taken its place at the regional table. The test for the region's future will be how well the sprawling white suburbs, the aging inner suburbs, and the majority black central city are

able to work together and with the state, which has played a major role in funding city and regional infrastructure. Atlanta has one of the nation's most highly regarded metropolitan councils of government in its Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), but the ARC's powers are limited, even in its ten-county planning area.

It is another world out in Atlanta's suburbs. This isn't the world of Martin Luther King Jr. and Maynard Jackson. This is Newt Gingrich country. "Most people here would say Atlanta doesn't matter," explains Brenda R. Branch, director of economic development at the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce. "But people in the know realize Gwinnett exists because of the City of Atlanta. We know we must be involved in regional issues." As a consequence, Gwinnett officials have begun to be more involved in the business of the Atlanta Regional Commission. The sorting-out process among people with vastly different backgrounds and political persuasions is a messy, uncomfortable process. But the process has begun.

III. THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. How are decisions made in the region?

"It wasn't the Olympics that taught us how to work together," says Harry West, director of the Atlanta Regional Commission. "We were able to get the Olympics because we had learned to work together." Shirley C. Franklin, the City's chief operating officer under Mayor Young and managing director of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG), explains: "Maynard [Jackson] brought the neighborhoods to the table with the NPUs. Andy [Young] brought business back to the table. By the 1990s, everyone was at the table."

The Olympic deadline had a powerful way of focusing everyone's attention and promoting collaboration. With the world at her doorstep, Atlanta had to make her deadline. According to Richard W. Padgett and James R. Oxendine, writing on the Olympic legacy for Research Atlanta, "Given the degree of rancor and outright hostility that characterizes most initiatives that attempt to cross political or racial lines in the metro area, the most notable accomplishment of the Olympic movement in Atlanta may have been the degree of unity it forged."

The question is whether this degree of collaboration and cooperation will continue after the world goes home. From the evidence of recent history, one could argue either way. Compared to other regions, Atlanta has had considerable success and at times has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to work across the barriers that typically divide and diminish a region. But Atlanta's recent successes appear to be more the result of a red-hot economy than the result of a smoothly running network of

business/community/government partnerships.

While the lessons of the value of participation and collaboration have been demonstrated in Atlanta, the potential to drift back to old ways is real. The suburban jurisdictions have realized their power and have begun to flex their collective muscles, to the considerable consternation of the city. There are now many more decision makers in Atlanta than there were in the past. Black and white remain far more divided than the Atlanta myth would suggest. The gap between rich and poor is as large here as anywhere else in America. The ideological divide between a Newt Gingrich and a Maynard Jackson is huge.

In the spring of 1997, a delegation of the Atlanta region's public and private leaders visited Denver to see what they might learn about improving cooperation between the city and suburbs. Rick Porter, a Gwinnett home builder, told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution: "We don't trust each other. The business community doesn't trust the ARC [Atlanta Regional Commission]. The City of Atlanta business leaders don't trust suburban business leaders. The City of Atlanta political leaders don't trust the suburban leaders. Is it racial? Maybe it is. We clearly have a divisiveness in Atlanta that I have not heard [in Denver]."

The challenge of getting the three sectors - business, community, and government - together across the divides of income, race, and jurisdiction and keeping them together is considerable. Jane Smith, program director of The Atlanta Project, says she has learned that the most important aspect of people is what they do 8 to 5. "People of different color who work in business think alike. People of different color who work in service delivery think alike. And so on. Color is important, but we have to develop the civic will of people to come together and do something they don't do 8 to 5." Smith notes that business people are as uncomfortable in the neighborhoods as neighborhood activists are in a corporate board room. "You need organizations in the business of building these bridges," Smith concludes.

"Corporations don't work the way communities work," according to P. Russell Hardin, vice president of the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation. Hardin recalled a banker telling him: "The best kind of meeting is two people, with me telling you what to do." Long visioning processes and neighborhood dispute resolutions are too tedious for business executives. "They just don't have the tolerance," explains Paul B. Kelman, vice president of Central Atlanta Progress (CAP). "They pay CAP staff to go to those meetings."

On the other hand, the business and government sectors have a long tradition of working together in the City of Atlanta. In recent decades, neighborhood organizations and government have

worked together effectively. "The neighborhood people have the ear of public officials. Business hears from the neighborhoods through the government," according to Atlanta Chamber of Commerce senior vice president Susan E. Neugent.

The role of staff intermediaries is critical to maintaining communication and collaboration among the sectors in Atlanta. "CODA was the bridge," says Clara H. Axam, CEO of the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA). "There's no way the business executive is going into the neighborhoods. And the neighborhood folk are not comfortable in the board room. CODA could go either place. We learned how to translate conversations to each party. We are the bridge. Maybe that bridge allows us to get to the new reality [where leaders of all three sectors are at the table at the same time]. Without the bridge, we won't get there."

2. What are the best examples of successful collaboration?

Atlanta's recent success appears to be more the result of a booming economy than a strong network of successful collaborations. The record of Atlanta's four high-profile collaborations is mixed:

The 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. The Olympics have been Atlanta's most successful recent collaboration. Notwithstanding considerable international criticism of the excessive commercialization of the games and the tragic bombing at Centennial Olympic Park, Atlanta's Olympic accomplishment was substantial. Atlanta privately financed the largest Olympics in history and did it on time and on budget. The \$4 to 5 billion economic impact of the Games on the Atlanta region and the state of Georgia was significant.

Two independent organizations were established to get Atlanta ready for the Olympics. With only a few years to prepare, the approach was to put the authority for building the facilities, running the games, and leaving a legacy in the hands of private organizations with single missions outside the entanglements of the city bureaucracy.

The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) was run by Billy Payne, the person whose dream and hard work brought the Olympics to Atlanta. ACOG was set up as a private, non-profit organization to build the Olympic facilities and market and run the Games. ACOG raised and spent \$1.7 billion in what is only the second privately financed Olympics in history (Los Angeles in 1984 was the first). ACOG was successful in securing substantial minority business participation.

The city established the Corporation for Olympic Development in

Atlanta (CODA) with a twenty-four member board co-chaired by Mayor Bill Campbell and banker G. Joseph Prendergast. CODA raised \$75 million to focus on three major initiatives designed to leave a physical and human legacy for future generations of Atlantans - neighborhood revitalization, public spaces, and public arts. CODA also coordinated the infrastructure expenditures of the city, state, and private sector. CODA's neighborhood initiatives aimed primarily at the neighborhoods surrounding downtown that had been allowed to deteriorate shamefully for decades in the shadows of the gleaming office towers.

According to H. Randal Roark, CODA's director of planning and design: "The big light bulb of the Olympics is that neighborhood revitalization and downtown development are interdependent and must move forward together." Time will tell if the Olympic legacy includes a renewed and lasting commitment to this kind of cooperation and collaboration between business and neighborhood interests.

VISION 2020. In 1991, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) launched VISION 2020, "the largest community-based, long-range planning effort ever conducted in this country." In the late 1980s, according to ARC director Harry West, it "became clear that the region's residents did not share a common vision of the future and that the region's splintered leadership too often acted at cross-purposes." The ARC, as a group primarily of elected officials, realized it had to engage leaders from other sectors in the visioning process. Former Governor George Busbee chaired the VISION 2020 steering committee.

Eight hundred business, community, and government leaders attended the first ARC conference to showcase VISION 2020 in May 1992. After a summer of work by the steering committee drafting future scenarios good and bad for the region, 500 community leaders attended a VISION 2020 Regional Congress in October. From January to May 1993, a series of twenty-three community forums attracted 2,000 citizens. Further outreach efforts, including special newspaper supplements and a televised town hall meeting, were added to the mix that led to the publication of "A Shared Vision for the Atlanta Region" in May 1993. Phase II of the project continued to involve a broad mix of the community in making the vision a reality. Committees went to work preparing initiatives in major policy areas. Starting in May 1994, ten stakeholder collaboratives involving 1,000 people were formed to draft specific action plans and design ways to make them happen. By June 1995, the Atlanta Journal and Constitution papers joined with the suburban Clayton News Daily to distribute a sixteen-page newspaper supplement on "The Regional Dialogue."

The final VISION 2020 report - "A Community's Vision Takes

Flight" - was released in September 1995. The report contains scores of very specific recommendations with clear direction as to which organizations, private and public, are responsible for implementation. Almost all counties have adopted general resolutions of support for the VISION 2020 report, and implementation efforts are underway. "It got people thinking," says former Mayor Sam Massell. "People met who wouldn't have met."

The Atlanta Project (TAP). With admirable candor, TAP program director Jane Smith concluded a 1994 evaluation: "Looks good, feels good, but it ain't too good." The Atlanta Project has been a disappointment, but not a complete failure.

One major lesson learned from the TAP experience is the danger of excessive expectations. Having a former president with enormous good will and millions of corporate dollars created completely unreasonable expectations. "Good will took over good sense," says Smith. As President Carter explained at a January 1997 conference at the Carter Center: "We thought we could solve in five years problems people hadn't solved in fifty years. The expectations were too high." There were problems of limited participation by neighborhood residents and issues of the accountability of loaned executives.

Lessons have been learned and documented. In several of the cluster communities, according to former TAP program director Dan Sweat, partnerships of local neighborhoods and major corporations "are connecting resources with residents to implement community goals and priorities on a scale and in ways never before attempted in an American city." Based on the first five years of TAP, a three-year Phase II has been structured to build on successes and focus on achievable performance goals in four critical areas: (1) increase the number of after-school programs, (2) increase the number of people leaving welfare for employment, (3) increase the number of four-year-olds in pre-kindergarten programs, and (4) increase the number of family health clinics in or near elementary schools.

The Atlanta Empowerment Zone. In the middle of planning for the Olympics, Atlanta saw another opportunity and took it. In the fall of 1993, President Bill Clinton unveiled the empowerment zone program as part of the federal government's strategy to revitalize urban communities. In 1994, Atlanta was selected as one of the nation's six empowerment zones. Atlanta's Empowerment Zone consists of thirty neighborhoods with 49,000 residents in one interconnected area. Each neighborhood is contained within a Neighborhood Planning Unit with elected representatives to the Community Empowerment Advisory Board. These neighborhoods are scheduled to receive \$250 million in grants and tax incentives over the next ten years. The Empowerment Zone Corporation was

established to manage the zone. The Corporation has a seventeen-member executive board headed by Mayor Bill Campbell.

Zone residents adopted a vision of an "Urban Village," where services, businesses, communities, and people are intertwined and interdependent. Participants identified four areas to improve in their neighborhoods - expanding employment and investment opportunities, creating safe and livable communities, lifting youth and families out of poverty, and providing adequate housing for all. HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros told the residents: "Atlanta can be much more than the site of the Olympics in 1996. It can be a model for a renaissance in inner-city life, a renaissance of youth. There's no greater opportunity to make this renaissance a reality than Atlanta's Empowerment Zone." While the money helps pay for some of the implementation of the neighborhood revitalization programs envisioned during the planning for the Olympics, some community leaders express concern that the Empowerment Zone has operated more as a large federal handout than as a genuine partnership.

3. What steps has the region taken to institutionalize collaborative problem solving?

The Olympics are over, and CODA and ACOG are packing up. The formal VISION 2020 process has concluded. Phase II of The Atlanta Project will end in two years. "The conversation that is everywhere," according to CODA president Clara Axam, "is how to keep this incredible momentum going."

"These partnerships are hard work," concludes Summerhill Neighborhood, Inc.'s Douglas Dean. "We have to get past the 'I know Bob' relationships we have established and build ongoing relationships between institutions that can sustain this." The Atlanta Project found that ingrained habits of mistrust constantly get in the way of relationship building. One of TAP's lessons learned is that "mistrust could be overcome if a key individual demonstrated strong skills in building consensus among widely ranging points of view and working styles." Who are the people capable of doing this? Where will these relationship builders work? What are the intermediary institutions that will keep the region cooperating and collaborating?

In March 1997, the Atlanta City Council created the Atlanta Development Authority, a non-profit corporation modeled after CODA. It collects under a single roof the programs of CODA, the Atlanta Economic Development Corporation (AEDC), the Urban Residential Finance Authority (URFA), and the Urban Residential Development Corporation (URDC), among others. The Development Authority is intended to develop a collaborative redevelopment agenda that carries on the public-private partnership created to prepare for the Olympics.

The Atlanta Empowerment Zone, Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership, Central Atlanta Progress, The Metropolitan Atlanta Community Foundation, and the Woodruff Foundation will also continue to provide some of this leadership. Mayor Bill Campbell has formed a group of fifteen community leaders - Renaissance Group - to build on the accomplishments of the Olympics and keep the momentum going. The various initiatives underway to implement recommendations of the VISION 2020 process will help to continue the focus on the need for regional cooperation. Hands On Atlanta has recruited a dedicated corps of 12,000 community volunteers who contributed 250,000 hours of service to the region in 1995. The United Way has undertaken a community-building initiative that might lead it to play an even more dynamic role in the community.

Beyond the boundaries of the city, how will the Atlanta region institutionalize the regional cooperation needed to guarantee continued success in the global marketplace of the next century? The Atlanta Regional Commission is among the most highly regarded regional organizations in the nation, but a business leader calls it "a toothless tiger." Regional councils of government seldom have the clout they need. City and suburban leaders do not share a single vision. The ARC recently approved the highly controversial Mall of Georgia, a certain promoter of further sprawl in Gwinnett County, over the strong objections of the city and others. Suburban voters vetoed a plan to extend MARTA, the region's public transit system, to Gwinnett County.

Recent recommendations for Atlanta's future are replete with proposals for establishing and strengthening institutions that promote regional cooperation and collaboration. VISION 2020 called for regional initiatives on subjects as diverse as public safety, environment, and human services. The Georgia Future Communities Commission has called on the governor and general assembly to authorize cities and counties to create regional service commissions that would have responsibility and authority to provide services regionally. To take full advantage of its post-Olympics economic development opportunities, according to Richard W. Padgett and James R. Oxendine, writing for Research Atlanta, the Atlanta region needs "organizations which can provide cross-turf mediation and facilitation, if not outright public leadership." But "[in] Atlanta," warns former city chief operating officer Shirley Franklin, "we rally around projects. The Olympics were more a project than a process. The Atlanta Project was more a process than a project."

4. Do the media help or hurt regional problem solving?

The Atlanta Constitution has a rich and admirable tradition. Constitution editor and publisher Ralph McGill was known as "the conscience of Atlanta" for his courageous leadership in promoting

racial understanding long before it was fashionable in the American South. Few today think the Constitution and Journal, separate morning and afternoon papers with the same owner, live up to the McGill tradition. "The papers aren't awful, they are mediocre," concludes one long-time observer. "For a city like Atlanta, a mediocre paper is embarrassing," says another.

Jane Smith, program director of The Atlanta Project, says it is difficult to disseminate the lessons learned by TAP because of the potential for misinterpretation by the media: "The news business in the United States is at a stage of development where it seems to require controversy. Headlines are chosen based on how contentious an issue is and not on the factual importance of the issue."

"The region shares a baseball team and a common media," explains Jim Wooten, editorial page editor of the Atlanta Journal. "The role of the paper is to help people have a dialogue that leads to a sense of community." The papers printed a major supplement on regional issues as part of the VISION 2020 project. Editorials sometimes provide names and addresses of key organizations and policy makers "to help people make things happen," according to Wooten. When asked how he thinks the paper's efforts would be rated by the public, Wooten says: "Not well. We are in the nascent stages of discovering how to help people build a strong sense of community." In March 1997 the Journal-Constitution initiated a weekly section called "Horizon" devoted "to covering growth and development in the Atlanta region. . . . We'll track the environmental, social and political impact of sprawl and discuss what average citizens - homeowners, consumers and families - can do about it. Our goal is to serve as a gauge of growth, from the money made to the problems it presents."

Author Shepard Barbash says cities get the media they deserve: "Atlanta's papers reflect the lack of a robust intellectual culture in the city. The business of Atlanta is business, not subtle thinking."

5. How does the region develop future citizen leaders?

Leadership Atlanta, designed largely for mid-career professionals, is one of the oldest community-leadership organizations in the country. According to program chair Russ Hardin, the key elements of Leadership Atlanta's strategic plan developed two years ago on the organization's twenty-fifth anniversary are the following: "(1) a new definition of Atlanta to mean the metropolitan area and not just the city of Atlanta, (2) confirmation of Leadership Atlanta's long-standing policy that each class reflect the diversity of gender and race in metropolitan Atlanta, and (3) a renewed commitment to recruit corporate leadership to the program and insure that the program is relevant to the corporate sector." There are more than a dozen leadership programs in

Atlanta's suburban counties.

In 1991, the Atlanta Regional Commission and the Metro Business Forum, a consortium of chambers of commerce in the region, joined to establish the Regional Leadership Institute, a week-long leadership training program held each year. The goals of the Institute are to create a shared sense of community in the region, build relationships of trust across the sectors, educate leaders about regional problems, and increase leadership skills.

VISION 2020 recommended developing community-based youth and adult leadership training and programs for the support of neighborhood leaders. The Metropolitan Atlanta Community Foundation is working to implement the recommendation. According to Winsome Hawkins, senior program officer at the Community Foundation, reflecting on the foundation's six year experience of engaging grassroots leaders in neighborhood improvement projects: "We have found that when residents are allowed to make decisions about the priorities to be addressed in their neighborhoods and develop plans to address those priorities, participation in those activities is usually high." The Atlanta Neighborhood Leadership Institute has emerged from the empowerment zone process to provide Saturday-morning conflict-resolution sessions. Hands On Atlanta has made leadership development one of its explicit goals: "Hands On Atlanta is committed to using service as a way to transform individuals into citizen leaders who take an increasingly greater role in the community."

6. Are young people engaged in the work of the community?

"When we hit barriers or problem areas during the VISION 2020 process," according to ARC director Harry West, "we occasionally asked ourselves why are we doing this?' We would then remember what the kids said to us about the future they want. Our reason became clear - their future." As part of VISION 2020, every school in the Atlanta region was involved in a project called "The Future Through Young Eyes." Young people contributed art, poetry, essays, and videos showing the kind of world they envision for the next century. The VISION 2020 project recommended the creation of "Passport to the Atlanta Region," a regional discovery program for sixth graders to visit "Ports of Call" around the region and learn about regional issues.

Hands On Atlanta has received national attention for its work in involving hundreds of Atlanta's youth in public projects. Supported by a strong staff and large budget that includes federal Americorps funds, Hands On Atlanta has developed a corps of more than 12,000 volunteers working on hundreds of community service projects. VOX is a newsletter written by young people and distributed throughout the Atlanta school system.

7. Has the region faced up to issues of race and disparity?

Examining the explosion of business centers in suburban America in his *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, journalist Joel Garreau found a booming black middle class. Profiling Patricia Lottier, the publisher of the *Atlanta Tribune*, a monthly magazine featuring African-American entrepreneurs, and her business CEO husband George, Garreau wrote: "They are part of a new black middle class without precedent in size and accomplishment in the more than four hundred years blacks have been in the New World. This black middle class is succeeding by the standards of the majority white culture in mainstream American careers. What's more, this new black middle class is burgeoning in the suburbs surrounding Edge Cities."

The success of the African-American middle class is a big story, but it is not the complete story. Examining the role of America's regions in the global economy, journalist Neal Peirce and colleagues reported in *Citistates* on how "sprawling development separates people by class and race." In Atlanta, Peirce described the way "vast office and commercial projects, with their thousands of jobs, flow to Buckhead and other developments on the affluent and overwhelmingly white northern periphery, leaving under- and unemployed blacks in south Atlanta trailing figuratively in the dust."

The trailblazing leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mayor Ivan Allen Jr., and Atlanta Constitution editor and publisher Ralph McGill put Atlanta far ahead of its southern rivals in the march to integration. This, as much as any other single factor, has been the key to Atlanta's economic prosperity. Atlantans black and white are proud of the region's open dialogue on race. "We talk about race every day," according to Shirley C. Franklin, the city's chief operating officer under Mayor Young. "We are comfortable with it. We have to talk about it to succeed."

"You can integrate a community at a certain level," explains Michael L. Lomax, former Fulton County Commission chairman, "yet powerful inequities remain." According to Lomax: "We are prepared to work in an integrated setting, but socially integration is too isolating for blacks. Yes, we meet and talk about race at Central Atlanta Progress, at the Action Forum, and at the Chamber. But we don't meet at church or at dinner."

Former President and Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter says it directly: "Atlanta is two cities. The greatest discrimination is not racial or ethnic. It is rich versus poor." Mayor Maynard Jackson was no less candid in his report to the International Olympic Committee in 1992: "Far too many of Atlanta's residents are poor, live unproductive lives, and are not participating in the recent growth and prosperity. Unfortunately, the gap between the

prosperous and the disadvantaged continues to widen."

According to a 1997 Annie E. Casey Foundation study, City Kids Count, 43 percent of the City of Atlanta's children lived in poverty in 1989 compared to 27 percent in 1969 and a 1989 national average of 27 percent. Thirty-three percent of the City of Atlanta's children lived in distressed neighborhoods compared to a national average of 17 percent. Of the fifty cities surveyed, only five had greater concentrations of children living in distressed neighborhoods. According to the 1990 Census, 24.6 percent of families in the City of Atlanta are living below the poverty level. In suburban Gwinnett County the figure is only 2.9 percent.

Compared to other regions of the country, Atlanta's tradition of talking openly about race and working for racial harmony is impressive. But only compared to others. The reality is that Atlanta, like the rest of the country, is far from where it needs to be. Richard W. Padgett and James R. Oxendine, writing on the Olympic legacy for Research Atlanta, laid out the magnitude of the problem as clearly as it needs to be said: "The substantial growth of Atlanta's African-American middle class, the great success story of the past two decades, has been almost completely overwhelmed in the public's perception by the great failure of the past two decades: our inability to resolve the very real economic, social and racial inequities which make metro Atlanta's urban core one of America's most desperately poor. Unfortunately, the tendency both inside and outside the city of Atlanta is to engage in divisive rhetoric which builds on, and in turn strengthens, the racial hostility and distrust which makes any real progress nearly impossible."

Michael H. Trotter, a lawyer who helped found Good Government Atlanta, points out that "78 percent of the people in the Atlanta Metro Area living below the poverty line live in the City of Atlanta, although the City contains only 13 percent of the region's population." Because of the concentration of poor people in central cities, according to Trotter, "the problem of poverty in our nation cannot be effectively treated, much less solved, as a local problem." Trotter explains that the City of Atlanta's noble commitment to build public housing has helped concentrate the poor and exacerbate their problems: "The problem is not that there are too many black people in Atlanta - the problem is that there are too many poor people in Atlanta." Trotter believes the new management of the Atlanta Housing Authority "is on the right track in its efforts to reduce the density of existing projects and to convert them to mixed occupancy. However, this effort will fail if the federal government insists on the replacement in the City of all the public housing units taken down."

Renee Lewis Glover, executive director of the Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta (AHA), explains that the point of AHA's

demolition and redevelopment strategy is to achieve "a substantial reduction in the number of distressed families who are concentrated on one site." In addition, Glover says: "A key component to this revitalization strategy is a comprehensive social services program, focused on education, job training and jobs, with the goal of facilitating the return to the mainstream of the low income families, who have lived for many years in the public housing communities. . . . We believe we are on the cutting edge of how to deliver the public housing resource on a 'human' scale, without the terrible stigma that has become the trademark of the public housing program."

8. What are the major problems facing the region?

Atlanta's enormous economic success has masked real problems. Despite the booming economy, and in some cases because of it, the Atlanta region faces enormous challenges as it prepares to enter the twenty-first century. "Now that the party is over and the glitter of the Olympics is a special memory," according to Atlanta Regional Commission director Harry West, "we must get to work and tackle the really difficult challenges facing our region right now. This is where the rubber meets the road. There are issues this region has put on the shelf, while it achieved greatness in other areas. These are the things that can hold us back no matter how many opportunities and advantages come our way."

The major obstacles to Atlanta's continued success come at the intersection of race, political turf, and region. To compete in the global marketplace of the next century, the Atlanta region must work together as a region. The barriers to this needed regional cooperation and collaboration are huge. "All of our major problems require regional solutions," according to planner Leon Eplan, "but we don't have the mechanism. The ARC has tried, but this region is a long way from consensus."

"Regardless of its guise or manifestation," conclude Padgett and Oxendine, "the fundamental reason our metro Atlanta region continues to resist metro-wide approaches to metro-wide problems is race. It is not the only reason, but it is the overriding, defining reason. No suburban city, town or county sees benefits in merging its problems, its resources, or its efforts with those of the City of Atlanta. Nor does the City of Atlanta government seek any metro-wide cooperation which will in any way diminish the political or economic power of city government." In this environment, the recommendations of VISION 2020 and others for much needed service delivery coordination and government consolidation go nowhere. Shirley Franklin notes that the committee set up to plan for Atlanta's post-Olympics future has had public discussions of consolidation: "This is unheard of by a biracial group in public. It is the direct result of working together on the Olympics."

In addition to dealing with the issues of race and region, three related issues stand out as needing priority attention:

The Growing Gap Between Haves and Have-Nots. The gap between rich and poor in the Atlanta region is as large as in any other region in the country. Atlanta's booming economy is leaving tens of thousands of have-nots behind in wretched schools and crime-infested neighborhoods in the city, with little hope of sharing in the wealth of the global marketplace. Not enough of the suburban haves are willing to get involved in finding solutions. If the Atlanta region does not find ways to break its cycles of poverty, this growing gap between rich and poor will become an increasing drag on the region's success. Among other initiatives, suburban counties will have to take their fair share of the region's public housing.

The empowerment zone is a help, but it alone is certainly not enough. The Olympics are gone and The Atlanta Project will close shop in two years. Who will step up to the challenge of poverty in Atlanta? Were The Atlanta Project and the Olympic neighborhood revitalization initiatives merely short-term efforts to spruce up Atlanta's shabbiest areas for the Olympic visitors? Or does the region now have a lasting commitment to seeing that all of Atlanta's citizens should share in the benefits of its success? Will the state step in to ensure regional equity?

Sprawl and Environmental Pollution. Bottom-up local planning is an integral part of the American way, and nowhere more so than in the Deep South. It has its costs in the traffic congestion and environmental pollution that often come with sprawl development. Out in booming Gwinnett County, the locals have come to call Pleasant Hill Road "Unpleasant Hill Road." Nonetheless, plans for another megamall were recently approved by the county commissioners. The Atlanta region is out of compliance with federal air-pollution standards and under threat of losing its federal transportation funding. The region's long-term water supply is in jeopardy. In February 1997, the Environmental Protection Agency imposed a moratorium on sewer hook-ups in the City of Atlanta because of excessive discharges at one of the city's major treatment plants.

According to planner Leon Eplan: "In the absence of a regional authority, the state has to play a role. The most controversial issue in the Atlanta region is whether to build an outer-loop highway. That is a state decision." Some speculate that it will be a courageous governor who sees the importance of Atlanta to the state's economy. Others say the business community will demand reform when business leaders realize the region is about to lose federal transportation funding. Still others think the anti-Atlanta state legislature might just get mad enough to take away the tradition of deference to local delegations. With the campaign

money provided to politicians from suburban development interests, few think the kind of change that is needed will happen anytime soon.

Education. Perhaps the region's greatest economic threat is the inability of the Atlanta public schools to produce graduates well prepared for the modern workplace. According to ARC's Harry West: "We must reinvent our educational system. . . . We will have to become more involved in making education and job training relevant and targeted to our future workforce demands."

For many, education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and maintaining a robust economy. "I am not as persuaded by political solutions as I was," reflects Michael L. Lomax, former Fulton County Commission chairman. "I am increasingly persuaded of the importance of educational opportunity." In 1993, when EduPAC successfully supported a reform slate of candidates for the Atlanta Board of Education, business leader Ken Payne explained: "Atlanta's business community recognizes that the children in our public schools today are our leaders of tomorrow. Atlanta cannot be the first-class city it strives to be with a second-class educational system." Concerns about failing public schools are not limited to schools in the City of Atlanta.

9. Are the region's best practices transferable to others?

Atlanta is blessed with a mild climate and a great location. It had the strategic good sense to build an outstanding transportation system and to be the first major southern city to take a stand against racial bigotry. The result has been a booming economy, one of the hottest in the nation. On top of all this, Atlanta has an ex-president of uncommon good will and commitment to community building.

All of this is hard to duplicate. What can be duplicated is the drive for success, the constant sense that things will get better if the region learns from the lessons of the past and works to improve. When Atlanta was selected to host the Olympics, Leon Eplan studied other Olympic experiences to find the right path for Atlanta. When the Olympics ended, Research Atlanta in cooperation with Georgia State University's Policy Research Center, commissioned a series of excellent essays on what Atlanta learned from the Olympics and where it should go next. When the empowerment zone started up, Jane Smith was there with a well-thought-out list of lessons learned from The Atlanta Project. The communities that are willing to learn from their mistakes are the communities that are going to be best prepared for the twenty-first century.

Not everyone agrees that Atlanta is a community that learns from its mistakes. Author Shep Barbash has studied The Atlanta Project

closely and concludes: "Like other Americans, Atlantans do not learn from the past. They live in a state of amnesia, constantly inventing themselves and their history anew."

IV. CONCLUSION: A CINDERELLA CITY

Atlanta is a bold and brassy place where success measured in conventional terms is not enough; a Cinderella city where people expect impossible things to happen every day. A Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce's marketing publication opens with a quote from Atlantan John Huey, managing editor of Fortune: "I say 'Atlantans have had this theory for over a hundred years. They make up the most outrageous lie they can think of about Atlanta. Then they run around all over the whole world telling everyone about it until it comes true.' And the amazing thing is, it always comes true."

With her extraordinary strengths and equally extraordinary weaknesses, Atlanta faces the challenge of maintaining the momentum built during the preparation for the Olympic Games and directing her talents and resources toward building a more equitable society. Cynics suggest that recent efforts to improve the conditions of Atlanta's least fortunate will evaporate now that the Olympics are over. Others disagree. Shirley Franklin knows Atlanta is a pragmatic place, and she is optimistic about its future: "Atlanta is ambitious enough for future success to keep everyone at the table."



**UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND**

© Copyright 1998-2003, The Academy of
Leadership. Updated October 14, 2004