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THE SWEET AUBURN CURB MARKET: THE SEARCH FOR CONTESTED SPACE  
IN THE CITY TOO BUSY TO HATE

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Southern Studies  
The University of Mississippi

by

KATIE CARTER KING

April 2015

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## ABSTRACT

The city of Atlanta has long boosted itself as the city too busy to hate: a place where business and southern hospitality thrive, without the social strife associated with the rest of the region. The Sweet Auburn Curb Market is an almost-century-old municipal market located in the Old Fourth Ward, one of Atlanta's historic inner-city neighborhoods. By taking a close look at its history, as well as the consumption practices and products associated with the space, alternate histories and stories of resistance become illuminated. Utilizing oral histories, archival research and anthropological theory to investigate the market, this thesis examines its function as a contested space within the city of Atlanta's heralded narrative. The market's history is delineated by time period as well as topic, focusing on its conceptualization and creation, the effects of urban renewal, and the influence of gentrification and internationalization on the space. Through this methodology, it can be seen how the Sweet Auburn Curb Market contains numerous narratives of integration within an imperiled neighborhood of a still-segregated city, as well as of a global South in a community space that remained typically relegated to a strict racial binary.



## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Sweet Auburn Curb Market community, whose kindness, care and willingness to be pestered by me never ceased to amaze.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Central Business District
NAACP	National Association of Colored People
NPU	Neighborhood Planning Unit

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express the deepest gratitude to my chair, Dr. Andy Harper, not only for making sure my thesis was complete and at its best, but also for always providing me with endless encouragement, even when I was reticent to accept. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Catarina Passidomo and Dr. Barbara Combs. Without your instruction, intellect, and curiosity, this project would be nowhere near what it is today.

I would like to thank my family and friends outside of the university—especially my parents, all three of them—to listening to me talk about this project for the last year and a half. Thank you for your attention and questioning, even when I could tell you were bored and I was repeating myself. Thank you for every time you told me to put the book down, chill out, and think about something else for a while. Without your support I would have never made it to Mississippi at all.

And finally, thank you to the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. Your willingness to accept me into your community, feed me, laugh with me, and tell me your stories has been a profound and beautiful experience. I hope I can give back to you as much as you've given to me.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“South of the North, yet north of the South, lies the City of a Hundred Hills, peering out from the shadows of the past into the promise of the future. I have seen her in the morning, when the first flush of day had half-roused her; she lay gray and still on the crimson soil of Georgia; then the blue smoke began to curl from her chimneys, the tinkle of bell and scream of whistle broke the silence, the rattle and roar of busy life slowly gathered and swelled, until the seething whirl of the city seemed a strange thing in a sleepy land.

Once, they say, even Atlanta slept dull and drowsy at the foot-hills of the Alleghenies, until the iron baptism of war awakened her with its sullen waters, aroused and maddened her, and left her listening to the sea. And the sea cried out to the hills and the hills answered the sea, till the city rose like a widow and cast away her weeds, and toiled for her daily bread; toiled steadily, toiled cunningly—perhaps with some bitterness, with a touch of *réclame*,—and yet with real earnestness, and real sweat.”  
—W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Atlanta has never been a city particularly known for anything. Perhaps Sherman’s burning, or the 1996 Olympics, or maybe even Coca-Cola comes to mind, but none of these convey a particular vision or idea about the place. Rather, they are vague images and events placed over a non-descript cityscape. This phenomenon, or “this studied lack of definition” as it has been called, has been well documented, with a 1992 national survey revealing 20 percent of those asked could conjure *nothing* characteristic about the city heralded as the capitol of the New South.<sup>1</sup> But such perceptions should not indicate a

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*, (New York: Verso, 1996), 3.

lack of effort from city boosters to remedy such characterless perceptions. Rather, throughout Atlanta’s history, planners have consistently worked to create a distinctly alluring image for their city, pouring money into certain sections of it, while leaving others to rot, all the while focusing on exporting a set of myths which serve to glaze over injurious history and ill-motivated public policy. This is unsurprising, as “urban planning proposals and development schemes for transforming urban landscapes typically serve the interests of political elites and monied interests—indeed, the city is often envisioned as a site for the production of value—symbolic and monetary.”<sup>2</sup> More often than not, the narratives created (and the un-equal development patterns that accompany them) rarely reach the city’s non-privileged residents in any meaningful way.

Within this push and pull lies the Atlanta of today, the Atlanta of the last hundred years: a city of competing narratives and histories, with some heralded while others remain shoved under the rug, too often only appearing in the mainstream narrative through overblown crime reports and suburban anxieties. This of course is not emblematic of only Atlanta; metropolitan areas throughout the twentieth century have, “by turns, been represented as sites of evil and virtue, savagery and civilization, threat and opportunity, the natural habitat of both the virtuous power elite and the disorderly, threatening mob.”<sup>3</sup> As the nexus of both the apprehensions and modernism of the New

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<sup>2</sup> Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Locating Culture,” *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 7.

South, Atlanta played host to such dichotomies easily, witnessed in the city's dueling narratives.

The chronicle most often publicly heralded is one of a city too busy to hate, one of affluence, industry and Southern progressiveness served with a smile. It can be glimpsed in the wealthy neighborhoods directly outside city limits, the highways, and the very texture of the sprawl so indicative of the city. But arguably more than anywhere else, this dynamic is inscribed into the essence of downtown and the central business district (CBD), located almost in the geographic center of the city. Playing home to what is commonly thought of as Atlanta's skyline, although such assertions remain debated as Atlanta has a number of skylines scattered throughout its massive borders, the CBD is a hodge-podge of gleaming glass skyscrapers dotted with the occasional historic building. Although this neighborhood was the city's cultural core from the time of reconstruction, local developers typically chose to rebuild rather than restore, leaving Atlanta with an ever-waning amount of historic structures. The city's demolition of its history remains so central, the *New York Times* dubbed it "the city too busy to remember" in 2014.<sup>4</sup>

In many ways, the CBD continues to be the bedrock of Atlanta prosperity. Garnering both local and foreign investment throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the business core has been the focus of city redevelopment during this time, a beacon of Atlanta's affluence. But when walking through the downtown area, cracks in this narrative begin to steadily appear. For all the high-rises and built wealth, very few

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Tierney, "Saying Goodbye to Friendship: In Path of Falcon's New Stadium, Atlanta Church Awaits Demolition," *New York Times*, July 27, 2014, accessed March 3, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/28/sports/football/in-path-of-falcons-new-stadium-atlanta-church-awaits-demolition.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/28/sports/football/in-path-of-falcons-new-stadium-atlanta-church-awaits-demolition.html?_r=0).



people grace the city sidewalks. Although once the center of Atlanta's cultural scene, the site of theaters and restaurants and Saturday shopping, the glittering new buildings that replaced the city's edificial history alternately lend themselves to financial progress and cultural sterility. Written into them is Atlanta's endless pursuit for self-betterment.

Turning a heel and heading towards the east, the landscape begins to change almost immediately, the signs of urban decay more apparent with each block crossed. Although no one really knows where the boundaries lie, you quickly cross into a new neighborhood: although often denoted as the Sweet Auburn neighborhood or the Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic District, by and large it is referred to as the Old Fourth Ward. Although technically separate neighborhoods, due to constant and conflicting mapping, zoning and boundary drawing, through this paper I will refer to the space as the Old Fourth Ward.<sup>5</sup>

These overlapping and boundary-confused inner-city neighborhoods serve as a telling gateway into a disputed Atlanta. Saturated with vacant, often burned out and boarded up buildings and peeling street art, few outsiders venture into the neighborhood. When a visitor who has no personal history there does descend upon the area, it is typically to view a handful of historic markers and monuments, alternately seeking to

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<sup>5</sup> "The drawing of limits and boundaries is central to understanding the political, economic, and sociocultural processes that restlessly reconfigured Atlanta's landscape. Although boosters speak of Atlanta as if it were an undifferentiated whole, the benefits of growth have been most unevenly distributed across the metropolitan region." Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 74. Additionally, there have been a number of competing entities trying to draw different Atlanta boundaries, including the Atlanta Police Department, Neighborhood Planning Units, and various historical preservation entities both on a local and federal level. All of these intercepting ideas and end goals have left Atlanta without any concrete, permanent boundaries or neighborhoods.

memorialize Atlanta as a black mecca and as the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. Even as they lie in a sea of under-development and dilapidation, these narratives struggle to reinforce an image of the city too busy to hate, even though the uneven and racist development patterns that have plagued Atlanta politics for over a century can be easily read in the landscape. Speaking to this point, despite being mere blocks away from downtown and home to historically important venues central to important Atlanta myths, the Old Fourth Ward has experienced almost nothing in the way of redevelopment and investment while money has been continuously poured into the CBD.<sup>6</sup>

Both the myth-infused neighborhood and city character focuses on Auburn Avenue, a street which held a brief (if extreme) concentration of African American wealth in the 1950s and 1960s, once even called “the richest Negro street in the world” by *Forbes*.<sup>7</sup> Placards remain posted up and down the oft-empty street, denoting where thriving insurance companies and newspapers once stood, with no mention of the array of factors which lead to the street’s demise. These historical anecdotes inscribe the myth of the black mecca onto the cityscape while taking no responsibility for the decay surrounding it. Alternately, visitors are more often directed a few blocks to the east, towards Dr. King’s birthplace, Ebenezer Baptist Church or the King Center. These institutions dominate the Civil Rights narrative of Atlanta, focusing without question on the enigmatic, non-violent leader. In doing do, myriad voices and tales remain swept

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<sup>6</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 129.

<sup>7</sup> Kuhn, Cliff, Harlon Joye, and Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 39.

under the rug, including the Atlanta Student Movement, the racially-fueled violence that once inflicted the city, as well as the social strife that has been imposed on the urban core. Unfortunately, unless visiting one of these sites specifically, outsiders rarely venture into this part of town, whether they are tourists or greater-Atlanta residents. The disrepair that plagues Old Fourth Ward's cityscape collides with suburban fears of the inner-city, in essence creating "a potent symbol linking urban decline and crime to ideologies of black welfare dependency and family pathology."<sup>8</sup>

Interspersed with these decaying edifices are the occasional signs of gentrification: newly built, colorfully painted lofts; trendy boutiques; or restaurants and bars bearing names such as Joystick Gamebar and Sister Louisa's Church of the Living Room and Ping Pong Emporium. Inherently apparent in this construction is the vast wealth disparity that plagues Atlanta as a whole, which has been brought into stark visibility through the continuation of uneven development. Although this is all true, many parts of Atlanta's story are left out of this visual narrative. Nonetheless, many of the jobs created, parameters placed on displacement, as well as how many local residents perceive the changes are unapparent. With city boosters rejoicing in the changing socioeconomics and local activists decrying them, many residents' voices remain unheard, which often lie in an un-polarized middle.

Likewise, conversations surrounding the neighborhood (as well as the city itself) remain largely entangled in a strict racial binary. This is not unprecedented, as less than

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Gregory, "Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community," *Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2003), 286.

one percent of Georgians considered themselves outside of the dynamic of black and white as late as 1980. But in the 35 years that have since passed, Atlanta has experienced a racial overhaul by way of massive immigration that is all too often not expressed in the city's construction or conversations.<sup>9</sup> When the Atlanta's vast international population is considered, it is typically through boosterism and profit, centering around specific, contained sites such as the World of Coke or the Dekalb Farmers Market, site created with profiting off internationalism in mind. There is very little within the Old Fourth Ward that could signify anyone of foreign descent resides or works there.

While these built edifices and historic monuments are only a piece of the city's construction,

such physical spaces implicate and reinforce the state-driven, public relations-motivated narratives that accompany

them, as “the *social*



**Fig. 1.** Modern image of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. Available from: Atlanta Preservation Center, [http://www.atlantapreservationcenter.com/event\\_detail?id=11110](http://www.atlantapreservationcenter.com/event_detail?id=11110) (accessed March 2, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Tore C. Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market: Food and Ethnicity in Atlanta,” *Southern Cultures* 13.4 (2007): 47.

*construction* of space defines the experience of space through which peoples' social exchanges, memories, images and daily use of the material setting transform it and give it meaning."<sup>10</sup> Between these created spaces of crafted history meant for public consumption and the stereotyped fears of the inner-city, another Atlanta narrative exists: one of cognizant urban neglect, racialized planning policies, as well as a tight-knit, longstanding community that is quietly changing urban perceptions through commerce, consumption, and the interpersonal exchanges that accompany such interactions. Within this liminal space, this murk, between the CBD and the Old Fourth Ward, between the state-sanctioned myth making and imposed blight, lies the Sweet Auburn Curb Market.

A one-story, brick building standing directly in the shadow of the 75/85 Downtown Connector that splits Atlanta, the market is an almost century-old gathering space and food emporium that lies directly east of the city center. Inside one of the many entrances that decorate the exterior, concrete floors, exposed white piping, and overhanging fluorescent lights contribute to the feel of a warehouse. In the middle of the 55,000-square foot floor, a large evergreen sign hangs from the rafters, spelling "Municipal Market" in red neon, outlined by a bright white light. It is the original sign that used to hang outside the front doors. Below its glow, multiple poster-boards read: "Buy your whole pigs here! Lowest price in town!" They decorate meat counters saturated with cuts that range from bacon to chitterlings to cow tongues and pork brains. While such fare is traditionally associated with African Americans, these days Korean and Vietnamese vendors are more often than not the ones selling it.

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<sup>10</sup> Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, "Locating Culture," 20.

The four meat stands are interspersed with four merchants selling various fresh and colorful produce, intermixing collards, okra, and tomatoes with kaolin and assorted products covered in Asian characters. While many of these stands have continuously operated for decades, in 2015 a new crop of vendors surround them. Featuring high end fare that often plays on transnational tastes, the recent additions focus on food typically associated with artisanal food movements: a juicery, a crepiere, or a stand dedicated to Venezuelan arepas. Many customers have been coming to the market their entire lives, with their parents and grandparents patronizing the space before them, coming to get food they know cannot be found anywhere else in the city; others are here for the very first time, or just stopped by for a quick lunch on break from one of the numerous office buildings in the CBD.

Continuously functioning since the building took form in 1924, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market performs as tradition-infused space in a town that has routinely demolished or painted over historic sites that do not fit into its mythic mold. Moreover, the market meets the vital, daily needs of those who patronize it through the provision of fresh food and community interaction. Atlanta's intertwining and far-reaching myths of a black mecca and long-time racial stability surround the market physically and mentally, inscribed unremittingly. Markers reading "Historic Old Fourth Ward" decorate nearby street signs while a placard at the far corner of the of building grants a partial, sanitized dose of the building's history under the banner "King Historic District," seemingly unaware that the market holds no overt ties to the Civil Rights movement. But walking through one of the various market entrances, these myths are cut short, as are stereotyped,

often fabled fears of the inner city. Replacing them are countless stories overshadowed or overlooked by tourism, mainstream media, and city boosterism.

The visual composition of the surrounding neighborhoods tells a compelling narrative of disparate, disregarded Atlantas; “The built environment of the city thus can be read for what it tells us about the personality and changing moods of the invisible hand(s) that write the urban text and, by doing so, influence the conditions under which we read it.”<sup>11</sup> But walking through one of the many double doors of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, urban space can begin to be read differently. Within the market’s brick walls a contested space is created, illuminating a narrative between the Atlanta of the haves and have-nots, more complex than the racial binary that so often continues to rule the city’s consciousness. Rather, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market creates a contested space that allows us to examine a microcosm of an African-American community stronghold in the face of urban renewal, displacement, and city-sanctioned blight that has been fueled by codified racism, both in a historical context as well as in the manner in which it continues to function today. Furthermore, the rapidly changing social tides of Atlanta are witnessed and expressed outside of ethnic enclaves and media portrayals.

As explained in the foundational work *The Anthropology of Space and Place*, contested spaces allow for cultural pluralization, allowing otherwise occluded histories and social phenomenons to become visible through their creation and function.

While these conflicts [created by contested spaces] principally center on the meanings invested in sites, or derive from their interpretation, they reveal broader social struggles over deeply held collective myths. In this way, contested spaces

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<sup>11</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 10-11.

give material expression to and act as loci for created and promulgating, countering, and negotiating dominant cultural themes that find expression in myriad aspects of social life. Spaces are contested precisely because they concretize the fundamental and recurring, but otherwise unexamined, ideological, and social frameworks that structure practice.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning from its earliest inception, embodied within its name and continuing throughout its history, the Curb Market functions as a counter-narrative to city booster-created myths and the metro-Atlanta stereotyping of the inner-city, allowing a lens into the various bi-products of gentrification as well providing a communal space for a city that has finally broken its racial binary. Such pluralization can be glimpsed within the community interactions and oral testimonies of its customers and vendors, many of whose parents and grandparents also frequented the downtown market. Utilizing statistical data and archival research in tandem with oral histories, a close look at the Curb Market reveals a culture of resistance to such state-sanctioned fears, myths and tides, countering such practices in a manner that seeks to “rework the American cultural myth of race and poverty through place-based practices,”<sup>13</sup> as well as creating a space for multicultural social integration to take hold in a still-segregated cityscape.<sup>14</sup> Viewed in this way, the market brings to light how the simple act of buying and serving food can

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<sup>12</sup> Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Locating Culture,” 20.

<sup>13</sup> Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Locating Culture,” 24.

<sup>14</sup> John R. Logan and Brian J. Stults, “The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census,” Census brief prepared for Project US2010: Discovering American in a New Century, March 24, 2011, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010>.



bring diverse, often otherwise alienated Atlantans together, while revealing the lingering problems the city continues to face.

The implications of exploring the Curb Market as a contested space are not only intellectual or academic; because of its long-standing role as a community stronghold, as well as its significance as the only place to buy fresh food in an entrenched food desert, the intellectual ramifications manifest themselves in myriad ways for the market's patrons as well as the communities they reside in.<sup>15</sup> A market, any market, pushes the boundaries of contested space, as they “create intersecting trading zones where histories, social groups and cultures reinforce, share and challenge... [M]arkets bring traditions together with current lifestyles.”<sup>16</sup> The regularity with which the market exists in both customers' and vendors' lives not only lends constancy to such interactions, but “makes them more intimate and socially complex” than other commonly used public spaces.<sup>17</sup> While market interactions are founded upon commerce, there is no purchase required to participate; in fact, many speak of the market as a community meeting place first and foremost. Exchanges transcend the public and the private, creating a liminal space that pushes such ideas even further, while always staying connected to its history and specific place—physically and mentally—within the Old Fourth Ward community.

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<sup>15</sup> Herbert T. Jenkins, *Food, Fairs and Farmers' Markets in Atlanta*, (Atlanta, GA: Center for Research in Social Change, Emory University, 1977), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Meta Robinson and J.A. Hartenfeld, *The Farmers' Market Book: Growing Food, Cultivating Community*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

As will be seen in the chapters to come I utilized variety of techniques, to explore the Sweet Auburn Curb Market and the Old Fourth Ward through this lens. Focusing heavily on oral histories conducted over a yearlong period, I interviewed customers, vendors, and market staff with a wide-range of histories and ties to the market about the space and its social repercussions. Their testimonies will appear throughout the text, with the exception of the second chapter, which deals with the space's inception almost a hundred years ago; I could locate no one personally to speak to with who had been alive long enough to remember the market's first decades. To supplement this extensive oral history work, I have compiled and incorporated statistical data, archival newspaper coverage, as well as scholarly works on the history of Atlanta.

Although the focus of oral history in my research is inherently limiting to a degree, relying on memory and testimony rather than quantitative data, I believe it is extremely important for the Sweet Auburn Curb Market community to dominate the voice in their own story, as it is a story of dominant narrative silencing the pluralizing voice for far too long. In engaging this methodology, I would like to draw from the burgeoning field of activist scholarship. Although there is no set definition or methodology for activist scholarship, one of its main tenants across the board requires a deep community involvement and focus on qualitative research. Furthermore, while taking the question of "research for whom?," it activity argues against researching for other scholars only, but for the community itself. Lastly it decries the myth of an objective narration, allowing communities to have a significant stake and voice in work

created about them.<sup>18</sup> While this kind of scholarship poses many difficulties and risks, such “methods regularly yield special insight, insider knowledge, and experience-based understanding.”<sup>19</sup>

Within each of the chapters to come, I delineate each section’s topic by both theme and time period, focusing on the major social tides affecting the market and the Old Fourth Ward during specific epochs of their collective history. Chapter 2 concerns itself with the initial creation of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. Following the emporium into the 1940s and 1950s, the chapter focuses on the circumstances and cultural impetuses that ruled Atlanta socially and politically at the time. In the second decade of the twentieth century, Atlanta had been proselytized with Henry Grady’s civic religion of the New South. Decades after his death, the city remained committed to the Georgia native’s ideals that sought industry, diversified agriculture, and racial stability through strict segregation. Still reeling from the large-scale destruction of the Great Fire of 1917 and the 1906 Race Riot, which triggered a re-inscription of strict segregating lines, city boosters continuously tried to push an ideal image of the state capital into the future while rebuilding as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Born out of this ideal was the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. Originally an open-air market beginning in 1918, the emporium began its tenure as a fully operational municipal market in 1924. Looking at the creation of the market through the interlocking public

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<sup>18</sup> Charles R. Hale, “Introduction,” *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles R. Hale, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 1-30.

<sup>19</sup> Hale, “Introduction,” 21.

structures of white supremacy and southern progressivism, both in the name of courting industry and infrastructure, the un-espoused functions of the market come to light. Conceived of and created by the progressively minded Atlanta Women's Club, the implementation of a city market was a nexus of southern idealism, particularly diversified agriculture and a built urban core. And although the market was purported to be a segregated space from its inception, a close look reveals not only the breaks in the racial regime the market allowed, but also reveals key points of violence that directly contradict visions of racial harmony and a city too busy to hate. By exploring the market's physical location within the city, the plans and policies implemented surrounding it, and the journalistic narratives about it at the time, a new narrative of the city of Atlanta in the early twentieth century takes shape.

The third chapter focuses on the Sweet Auburn Curb Market's role in the politics of white flight and urban renewal, starting from mid-century and moving forward. As the "official" New South ideology faded away, its tenant of racial stability stayed firmly in place, joined by new impetuses for investment, development and internationalization. To achieve these goals and combat the rising tide of widespread white flight—to which the market itself distinctly fell victim, with its customer base becoming almost exclusively African American during this time—the city undertook a systematic process of urban renewal. Often called "negro removal," the programs implemented often sought to remove unwanted groups from central neighborhoods, typically in close proximity to the CBD, effectively diluting African American strongholds of wealth and power within the city. The Sweet Auburn and Old Fourth Ward neighborhoods became central targets of

such work, largely because of their proximity to Auburn Avenue. These areas largely disappeared from public discourse, only spoken of in relation to overblown crime statistics, instilling the idea that the inner city had no community, rather only delinquency.

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market directly combats this ideology in a number of ways. While these policies destroyed communities throughout the city, and inflicted deep pain upon the Old Fourth Ward, the market continued to thrive throughout this time, functioning as a community stronghold in the face of displacement. In the mid-1970s, when the city and the Food and Drug Administration attempted to shut down the market for various reasons, a number of hyper-local community groups came together to launch a grassroots campaign to save the historic structure. Drawing strength from patrons of the Old Fourth Ward, local groups utilized the power of on-the-ground organizing to get high ranking city officials involved—even the mayor—to ensure the market’s survival, saving a significant structure as well as ensuring the local community a public meeting place and a market from which to buy fresh produce in an otherwise entrenched food desert.

Beginning in the last quarter of the century, Atlanta again faced significant changes: as an immigrant influx that began in the 1970s continued to reshape Atlanta’s cultural boundaries, the millennial generation swapped the white flight of their parents for a desire to live inside the perimeter. Together, both of these social phenomena caused an upheaval of the racial and socioeconomic structure of the city. The first of these, the internationalization of Atlanta, is the focus of chapter four.

Although city boosters have focused a wealth of investment on trying to lure international business to the area, there has been little attention paid to international people. This is not altogether unsurprising, as the city has been caught in a strict racial binary, demographically as well as intellectually, since its inception. But by the last quarter of the twentieth century, Atlanta's dualistic makeup no longer actually existed; between 1980 and 2000 the number of non-white and non-black residents increased by 747 percent in Dekalb County, accounting for over a tenth of the population, comprised of largely Asian and Latino refugees and immigrants.<sup>20</sup> Although Dekalb County statistically led the international overhaul during this time, the rest of Atlanta followed in close suit.

Mirroring the demographic changes that transformed the city, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market now functions as a multicultural expanse, constructing a space for cultural interaction that capitalizes on and reflects Atlanta's newfound diversity. Market employees hail from innumerable countries around the globe, including Venezuela, South Africa, Korea, Switzerland, Ghana, Ethiopia and Vietnam. Bringing with them a myriad of tastes and lived experiences, these cultures became expressed and blended throughout the food in the market. Historically, the internationalization of tastes can serve as a bridge between cultures; according to historian Tore Olsson, the sweeping changes Atlanta underwent in the last three decades "deeply affected the way white and black southerners eat, drink, and think about food and themselves."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Beyond the simple acts of sharing a meal or a recipe, the market provides a space for diverse cultures to share and have a community-meeting place, just as the cultures of longtime patrons have utilized the space since its creation. While the city of Atlanta remains one of the most residentially segregated cities in America, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market provides a microcosm of positive social interaction and cultural integration.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the process of gentrification is currently overhauling the demographic make-up of Atlanta, as well as its built environment, which is the central concern of Chapter Five. With a recent study conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland naming Atlanta the seventh most gentrified city in the United States, gentrification has been a heavy topic on the minds and lips of Atlantans for the last 25 years.<sup>23</sup> For most, the word denotes displacement and the loss of neighborhood cultural vibrancy and character, mirroring the earlier ramifications of urban renewal in many ways. Much in the same

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<sup>22</sup> A 2003 study found that 8.8% of in-city Atlantans lived in integrated blocks, as compared to an average of 9.4% in other American cities. Furthermore, as those statistics could have changed with the tides of gentrification and reverse white flight over the last decade, a 2011 study (utilizing 2010 census data) found Atlanta had a dissimilarity index of 58.3, directly behind Kansas City, Missouri. (See Figure 4 for more information.) Lois M. Quinn and John Pawasarat, "Racial Integration in Urban America: A Block Level Analysis of White Housing Patterns," Employment and Logan and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin, January 2003, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://www4.uwm.edu/eti/integration/integration.htm>; Stults, "The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis," US2010.

<sup>23</sup> Zak Cheney-Rice, "These 7 Cities Expose Exactly What Gentrification is Doing to America," *IdentitiesMic*, October 22, 2014, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://mic.com/articles/102004/these-7-cities-expose-exactly-what-gentrification-is-doing-to-america>.

way that government control and imposed renewal often seeks to hide city scars, private interest-focused gentrification turns neighborhoods into “opportunities for profit and redevelopment,” with “the renewal fantasy that defines [such projects] hid[ing] an often racist history of deliberate and concentrated impoverishment.”<sup>24</sup> Often, as many scholars have explored, such neighborhood change can result in soaring racial tension, as has been the case in a number of Atlanta neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup>

When casting a quick glance over the Old Fourth Ward, the effects of gentrification are visually apparent, manifesting themselves in the new edifices sprinkled through the neighborhood as well as a shift in demographics. Even within the market’s walls, the meat and produce counters that are patronized largely by customers paying with EBT can stand in stark contrast to the newly instated restaurants showcasing sundry tastes. On the surface it signifies wealth disparity and suburban transplants. And while this is to a certain extent true, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market provides a lens to explore the multilayered story of change and effect gentrification is imposing on the area.

Although income inequality and displacement have grown with the area’s gentrification, the Old Fourth Ward has proved to be a neighborhood with a healthy amount of positive change. In fact, *National Geographic* spotlighted the community for

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<sup>24</sup> Cheney-Rice, “These 7 Cities.”

<sup>25</sup> For example, in the 1990s, fliers were plastered all over the nearby Kirkwood neighborhood reading, “Save our neighborhood. If you are concerned about the ‘white takeover’ of Kirkwood, come meet... to discuss how we can put an end to the homosexual takeover of our community. Kirkwood concerned black neighbors.” H. Gibbs Knotts and Moshe Haspel, “The Impact of Gentrification on Voter Turnout,” *Social Science Quarterly* 87.1 (2006): 117-8.



what they called “intelligent gentrification” in mid-2014.<sup>26</sup> Business in the area has continuously grown in the last 15 years, and the historic community has not been lost to the influx of white, wealthy residents. Instead, long-time denizens of the neighborhood have become increasingly involved alongside the new residents, making sure their voices are heard and their ideas considered as the neighborhood moves forward. The market functions as an outpost of the often-overlooked positive changes in the area.

Not only does the market bring together diverse cultures and crowds, racially as well as socioeconomically, but serves to fuel the culture of small business that has taken hold in the area. With a storm of new businesses cropping up in the market within the last ten years, it is routinely hailed as a small business incubator and a provider of jobs, very often for residents of the local community. While such establishments could easily be interpreted as the first tides of displacement and overhaul, management pledged their allegiance to allowing long-established produce and meat stands (some of which have been in place for over 40 years) to remain, ensuring the sustained cultural significance of the market as well as a space and a continued steady income for such vendors.

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market not only functions as an example of such positive renewal work, but has been hailed by many as one of the catalysts to major revitalization

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<sup>26</sup> Caroline Eubanks. “10 Reasons to Love Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward,” *National Geographic*, June 30, 2014, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2014/06/30/10-reasons-to-love-atlantas-old-fourth-ward/>.

in the area.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, when asked about the changes to the neighborhood and market, local residents and customers almost universally agreed that the changes undergone in the area were extremely positive; some, such as the outspoken Sylvester Sims, a local resident and businessman for more than forty years, went so far as to advocate for more.<sup>28</sup> The Sweet Auburn Curb Market has been a vital structure to the neighborhood and is integral to its cultural character, which are often the first casualties as gentrification slowly works its way into a neighborhood. By not only keeping the market in place, but by utilizing it as a tool to control and influence gentrification, the cultural validity of the market and the community attached to it remains intact.

A new tide of academic work seeks to rework the way academia views history, looking to decenter and pluralize dominant narratives in a way that reveals previously occluded histories and grants agency to those all too often forgotten by the text book. *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War to Civil Rights*, edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, is an excellent example of such work as they seek to dismantle many common thoughts about southern history.

In recognizing white supremacy as the “central theme” of southern history... historians have sometimes minimized variations on that theme in ways that impoverish our appreciation of the complexities of racism and power. Stunned by the sheer magnitude and obscenity of the Jim Crow South, historians often emphasize the power of white supremacist and their tools—violence, economic

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<sup>27</sup> Christiane Lauterbach, “Discovery: Bell Street Burritos,” *Atlanta Magazine*, November 1, 2010, accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/article/discovery-bell-street-burritos1/>.

<sup>28</sup> Sylvester Sims, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 31, 2014.

oppression, electoral fraud, and manipulation of the social structure—and minimized the contingent nature of white supremacist ideas and regimes.<sup>29</sup>

Although my work deals with local spheres of race and authority, looking towards specific policies and political ideologies rather than the overarching regime of Jim Crow and white supremacy, I seek to accomplish a similar subversion of narrative to reveal previously overlooked complexities.

There has been a vast amount of work done on the social and political phenomenon of the two Atlantas, dueling for resources and media attention. Texts such as Clarence N. Stone's *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal of Atlanta* and *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*; Ronald H. Bayor's *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*; and Robert Lee Bullard's *Sprawl City: Race, Politics, and Planning in Atlanta* rigidly and thoroughly document the decisions, more often than not race-based decisions, that have shaped the Atlanta we see today, from its politics to its infrastructure and overwhelming wealth disparity. Texts such as Charles Rutheiser's *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* round out this literature, looking directly at the myth-making machine that allowed Atlanta to create such insidious decisions while maintaining its public image as the city too busy to hate. But within all of this prose, there is little that focuses on resistance to state-imposed regimes and narratives, with each chronicle falling distinctly into one of the "two Atlantas." This thesis seeks to remedy that.

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<sup>29</sup> "Introduction." *Jumpin' Jim Crow*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

By looking at a contested, oft-forgotten space in an all-too-often disregarded neighborhood, not only are neglected intricacies of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market and Old Fourth Ward's collective history revealed, but the city of Atlanta's narrative as a whole is complicated. To achieve this, I draw from anthropological works focusing on contested urban space, much of which has been internationally based. Specifically, methodology will be drawn from academics who have been at the forefront of such literature, such as Steven Gregory, author of *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* and *Santería in New York City: A Study in Cultural Resistance*, and Setha M. Low, author of many books including *Politics of Public Space*, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, and *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. Although none of this literature focuses on public markets or on Atlanta specifically, I seek to apply elements of their methodologies in a manner that holds significance for the people and the history of Atlanta.

Additionally, despite its historical significance to both Atlanta's story as well as the history of civil rights, very little work has been done on the Old Fourth Ward; what research has been conducted almost exclusively falls into the narrow-scope of modern gentrification. This I also seek to rectify, allowing the history of a space and a community to be heard through their own oral testimonies.

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market's current mission statement reads deceptively simple, purporting to create a space "to rejuvenate, revitalize, feed, entertain and provide for the neighborhood that gave it its name," representing the "best of Atlanta, a blending

of both the old and the new.”<sup>30</sup> Taking these words and placing them in a historical context, exploring them through the lens of contested space and pursuing them in a workable, on-the-ground fashion (rather than attempting to solve problems through rhetoric as the city of Atlanta tends to do), we are able to view the Sweet Auburn Curb Market as a space in which to spotlight injustice, positive difference, and community-driven resistance and change. Moreover, by looking at the market in this manner, rather than through the dominant, top-down narrative provided by the city, we can begin to view the complexities of race and power in a city ideologically built on remaining above social strife, as well as how power can be wielded from a marginalized, often forgotten about space and community. From these small but stalwart points, we can begin to pursue a more humane urban future.

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<sup>30</sup> “History of the Curb Market: A Timeline of Success,” *The Curb Market*, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.thecurbmarket.com/our-history>.

## II. INCEPTION: CONCEIVED IN THE MIND OF THE NEW SOUTH

On a windy, warm day in May of 1917, Atlanta's firemen were distracted. When they received a call about a fire on Old Wheat Street, they didn't initially have any equipment to send over. Multiple blazes burned simultaneously throughout the morning in different parts of the city, causing limited access to resources. Beginning just a few blocks from where the Sweet Auburn Curb Market stands today in the densely packed slums of the African-American Fourth Ward, the flames that would become known as the Great Fire of 1917 took hold.<sup>31</sup>

Fire swept through the neighborhood, an already overcrowded space due to Atlanta's recent resegregation in the decade before, which cemented racial settlement patterns into law. Almost a decade later, the city was still reeling from the race riot of 1906, which left twenty-five African Americans dead over two days and hundreds injured. In the aftermath, city officials took a largely integrated city and reinscribed racial mores out of fear and a hope for stability.<sup>32</sup> Black Atlanta retrenched and relocated further

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<sup>31</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> As Cliff Kuhn explained in *Living Atlanta*, during this time, "the city consisted of a downtown core surrounded by diverse residential neighborhoods whose character and location were shaped by natural topography, the railroads, race relations, real estate interests, streetcars and automobiles." Although neighborhoods were largely segregated before the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, "there also existed black enclaves in otherwise white neighborhoods throughout the Atlanta area, where black residents doing domestic work had settled in order to be closer to their employers." Nonetheless, a segregated

from racial borderlands in the hope of avoiding future violence. Although many moved to the burgeoning West Side near Atlanta University, a large amount of people also moved into the congested neighborhoods directly east of downtown, what is known today as the Old Fourth Ward.<sup>33</sup>

Wooden shingle roofs framed most of the area's housing, which became quickly burning tinderboxes once the fire took hold. The blaze spread swiftly, taking out a number of other neighborhoods as it reached all the way to Ponce de Leon Avenue. By the time firefighters gained control of the blaze almost 12 hours later, Atlanta was left with 73 destroyed blocks, 10,000 newly homeless residents, and millions of dollars in damage. For many citizens, the fire reinvigorated memories from 50 years before as the destruction only compared to Sherman's infamous leveling of the city. The massive damage imposed created a disarray so enormous officials imposed martial law, earning it the illustrious name of the "Great Fire." And as residents struggled to rebuild, already congested housing continued to fill.<sup>34</sup> For the second time in half a century, Atlanta was forced to grapple with the urgent process of rebuilding a demolished, smoldering infrastructure.

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cityscape emerged, but with black and white neighborhoods typically checkered all over the city due to such restrictions and dynamics. "Class, ethnic and racial divisions not only helped define Atlanta's communities, but also contributed to a strong sense of neighborhood identity that on occasion shaded into territoriality and even violence." Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 32-35.

<sup>33</sup> Dana F. White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1970-1870," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 26 (Summer-Fall 1982): 215.

<sup>34</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 20-27.

Fire has remained central to the narrative of Atlanta almost since its inception. As cultural geographer Charles Rutheiser states, “The city’s phoenix-life rise from its own ashes is the crucial element of the city myth and the crucible in which the Atlanta spirit was formed.”<sup>35</sup> Atlanta named the phoenix raising from the ashes its official symbol in 1888,<sup>36</sup> forever reminding the nation as well as its own citizens of Atlanta’s “invincible spirit to overcome.”<sup>37</sup> This ideal was amply witnessed in the years following Sherman’s fire and into the twentieth century, as Atlanta struggled to rebuild and forge a new image for itself. As the whole of the South struggled with a future they did not recognize, all too often attempting to reclaim a South now lost through the Black Codes and later Jim Crow, Atlanta sought refuge in the “New South” ideology, seeking a bright and prosperous new century.

Atlanta rapidly fluctuated in the years following the Civil War, influenced by change from all directions. With the once-sustaining cotton economy in ruins, migrants from the countryside began rapidly moving into the ever-growing city, increasing its population more than fourfold in the years between 1890 and 1910.<sup>38</sup> Rural African Americans seeking new jobs and prosperity away from the plantations to which they had

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<sup>35</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> “Atlanta: History.” *City Data*. 2008. Accessed February 16, 2015. <http://www.city-data.com/world-cities/Atlanta-History.html>

<sup>37</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> David F. Godshalk, “William J. Northen’s Public and Personal Struggles against Lynching,” in *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 142-3.



been so long forcefully tethered fueled this increase, creating a new and significant black presence in the city.<sup>39</sup> Originally African Americans lived all over Atlanta, often to be near their white employers.<sup>40</sup> But as the city continued to grow and develop, racial concentrations began to permeate, fueled by the establishment of cultural institutions such as schools, colleges and churches.<sup>41</sup> The space surrounding Auburn Avenue became a significant African American hub, centralizing Sweet Auburn and the Fourth Ward to black community.<sup>42</sup>

By 1913, the city council passed residential segregation ordinances solidifying such housing patterns, largely in direct relation to race riot of 1906. As journalist Ray Stannard Baker remarked as early as 1908, the 1906 mutiny's "ominous size, greater by far than the ordinary race disturbances which express themselves in lynching, alarmed the entire country and awakened in the South a new sense of the dangers that threatened it."<sup>43</sup> It was in this high-tension climate that progressive action underwritten by racist ideology dug its teeth into Atlanta. Although later struck down as unconstitutional, the effects continued to linger in zoning laws for many decades to come.<sup>44</sup> While a number of social

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<sup>39</sup> Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 37-40.

<sup>43</sup> Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1964), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 37.

and political tides influenced these decisions, at the center of Atlanta's civic religion lay the "New South," fervently believing in prosperity and racial harmony through industrialization, diversification of agriculture and strict segregation.<sup>45</sup> While the "New South" was considered largely outdated by this time, the civic religion embedded itself into much of the public work being done at the time.

Although tales of its origin are varied and muddled, *Atlanta Constitution* editor and partial owner Henry Grady remains most well known for popularizing and instating the tenants of the New South dogma as Atlanta's ruling ideology. He exerted his rhetorical power from his editorial position, using the influential newspaper as a mouthpiece for the philosophy.<sup>46</sup> The ideas embedded in the creed were far-reaching and all encompassing in an effort to push the region into another prosperous era. But while the New South aimed to inspire classes across the entire South, the mythology of Atlanta lies central within its arguments and within Henry Grady's oratory on the subject.

In his most famous speech, given to the Banquet of the New England Club in 1886, Grady told the non-southerners that "from the ashes he [Sherman] left us in 1864

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<sup>45</sup> During this time, the Progressive Era was also accelerating at full force, with urban reform at the core of the Progressive's beliefs, just like those of the New South creed. As Robert Bayor explained, "Urban reform connected with the Progressive movement. Urban reformers during the Progressive Era sought to change the environment of slum-dwellers in an effort to enhance stability in the city as well as improve the lives of those living in dilapidated areas." Even so, African Americans were almost entirely left out of these pursuits. Much like other urban movements during this time, Progressives had ulterior motives to their betterment plans, as "white southern Progressives were also interested in social control, moral behavior, and bettering the environment." Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 130.

<sup>46</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 22.

we have raised a brave and beautiful city; that somehow or other we have caught the sunshine in the bricks and mortar of our homes, and have builded therein not one ignoble prejudice or memory.”<sup>47</sup> Although neither the proponents nor the ideas of the New South were formally organized in a political sense, the dogma ruled Atlanta’s political policy and downtown development as the city continued to try and recover its regional identity leading into a new future.

While industrialization of the South publicly remained at the forefront of this thought, intrinsically tied up within this push was the need for diversified agriculture. This point was born out of a newfound struggle within Georgia agriculture, the industry that had sustained the state since its inception. In the second decade of the twentieth century, Georgia farmers reeled from the destructive boll weevil and falling cotton prices, two forces that dovetailed to change the structure of agriculture in the state permanently. Cotton prices fell from 40 cents to 14 cents a pound, and coupled with the vast emigration of labor from the countryside, farmers in the early twentieth century were struggling to scratch out a living.<sup>48</sup> Grady traveled all over Georgia, connecting with farmers directly to champion his ideals, imparting a deep sense of patriotism in the turn away from long-held cash crops. In one speech that took place in Elberton, Georgia, he urged,

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<sup>47</sup> Henry Woodfin Grady, *The New South and Other Addresses*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers, Ltd., 1969), 32.

<sup>48</sup> Mrs. John R. Hornady, “Municipal Market Marks Triumph For Atlanta Women’s Club,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 27, 1924.

If we shall restore Georgia to her former greatness and prosperity—if we shall solve the problems that beset the South in honor and safety—if we shall save this Republic from the dangers that threaten it—it will require the earnest and united effort of every patriotic citizen, be he farmer, or merchant, or lawyer, or manufacturer. Let us consider then the situation, and decide what is the duty that lies before us.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, Grady continuously tied the fate of the countryside up with the fate of the city, indicating that there must be dual growth in order to allow the state as a whole to prosper. In some cases he described the city as “center spots of danger, with their idle classes, their sharp rich and poor, their corrupt politics, their consorted thieves, and their clubs and societies of anarchy and socialism,” insinuating that through farmer’s humble labor, they could help work to save the city itself.<sup>50</sup>

In the decades following Grady’s death in 1889, the New South ideals were no longer being heralded through the oratory of local figures, or at least not under that name. But while politicians did not publicly ascribe to the reconstruction-based ideas, policy continued to reflect them. Stemming from these ideals, city officials urged cultivators to grow food rather than the state’s long-held cash crops. Additionally, they brought in speakers and experts from agricultural colleges to help establish change into the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>51</sup> With swaths of land cleared by the Great Atlanta Fire in desperate need of redevelopment, this civic religion deeply embedded itself into redevelopment plans. As farmers from around the state continued to diversify their crops, growing a wide array of

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<sup>49</sup> Henry W. Grady, “The Farmer and the Cities,” *Life of Henry W. Grady, Including His Writing and Speeches*, ed. Joel Chandler Harris, (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890), 162.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>51</sup> Hornady, “Municipal Market Marks Triumph.”

foods, the city found the need for a venue to sustain these fledgling farmers. Furthermore, if local agriculturalists had a venue from which to peddle their wares, the thought prevailed that less food would have to be brought in from outside the state, a process that caused consistent price increases. To remedy these issues a municipal market, owned but not run by the city, rose out of the ashes of destruction.

The Atlanta Women's Club, a prominent group of white women who engaged in community improvement, first conceptualized the market in 1919. Often focusing on advancement through the ideals of the New South and the Progressive Movement, they "methodically investigated their community's needs and used their 'maternal' expertise to lobby, create, and secure a place for themselves in an emerging state welfare bureaucracy."<sup>52</sup> During this time, food shopping in Atlanta was a daily task; residents typically made their purchases from a variety of temporary stands populating the vast central marketplace in the city center.<sup>53</sup> By 1914, Kamper's, the city's first true "supermarket" opened, catering to the affluent as prices for the pre-packaged goods soared higher than those at more traditional outlets.<sup>54</sup> Increasing fears about ever-rising prices and the sanitary conditions of the city dovetailed with the Atlanta Women's Club's civic-minded ideology to make the creation of a formal municipal market their highest priority.

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<sup>52</sup> Paige Meltzer, "'The Pulse and Conscience of America': The General Federation and Women's Citizenship, 1945-1960," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30.3 (September 2009): 52-3.

<sup>53</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs, and Farmers' Markets*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Beginning in 1919, it first took form as an open-air curb market under the direction of a market expert located by a newly formed board of directors.<sup>55</sup> Commencing a five-year-long process, the expert, appalled at the continued lack of agricultural diversity in the state, focused on educating farmers under the helm of the market. Additionally, speakers from various agricultural colleges gave lectures, the State Bureau of Market disseminated information throughout Georgia, and members of the market's committee would "visit the farmers and tell them of the work being done in their interest, as well as the interest of the city people. Nothing was left undone to inspire the grower with enthusiasm in producing what Georgia needed for the table."<sup>56</sup> Inspiring farmers to alter their habits and their livelihood for their own well being, as well as that of Atlanta and the state as a whole, the curb market reflected the rapid changes farmers were making.

By 1921, the open-air market, which was then being called the Municipal Curb Market, was being heralded as a "great success," providing food that previously had to be shipped in from other states, including iceberg lettuce, chard, and honey-dew melons.<sup>57</sup> Not only did the market enable farmers to sell their crops for ready money, but it also provided homegrown food that was one-fourth to one-third cheaper than what could be found in local, run-of-the-mill retail stores. In fact, the curb market was so successful that

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<sup>55</sup> Could be one of two talked about in Mrs. Norman Sharp, "Municipal Curb Market Great Success," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 4, 1921.

<sup>56</sup> Hornady, "Municipal Market Marks Triumph."

<sup>57</sup> Sharp, "Municipal Curb Market Great Success."

United States Senator William D. Upshaw and Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture J.J. Brown went on a six-state tour promoting the creation of similar venues as a civic salve, “advocating the establishment of municipal markets as the logical basis of diversified farming,” as “all authorities agree [such work] to be the financial hope of Georgia.”<sup>58</sup> Modeled after the Municipal Curb Market, a number of new food emporiums were established as far away as Muncie, Indiana. Some of the most successful were located throughout Georgia—in Rome, Athens, Augusta and Fitzgerald—each further bolstering farmers, the penny-pinching city dweller, as well as civic boosterism.<sup>59</sup> As the Atlanta Women’s Club worked to establish a permanent space for the market over the next five years, this publicity and fanfare contributed greatly to its creation, allowing them to secure support from a large number of civic organizations as well as the mayor.<sup>60</sup>

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1924, the Municipal Market opened to much fanfare. Designed by A. Ten Eyck Brown, he built the fireproof, brown brick structure to withstand the elements.<sup>61</sup> Quickly, the market became to largest retail food center in Georgia,<sup>62</sup> and has

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Hornady, “Municipal Market Marks Triumph.”

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “Atlanta Curb Market,” Atlanta Preservation Center, *Atlanta Preservation Center*, 2015, April 6, 2015, [http://www.atlantapreservationcenter.com/event\\_detail?id=1110](http://www.atlantapreservationcenter.com/event_detail?id=1110).

<sup>62</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs, and Farmers’ Markets*, 30.

been called the largest food retailer in the entire Southeast during this time.<sup>63</sup> Farmers from every corner of the state soon joined in utilizing the space, bringing a wide array of produce, meat, dairy, and other goods. Even in the depths of the depression, the market served 25,000 to 30,000 customers per week, providing a steady income to hundreds of farmers and merchants while doing a million and a half dollars of business annually. From its inception into the 1940s and 1950s, the Municipal Market was the central food retail outlet for all Atlantans, whether living in the nearby neighborhoods or not. The space sold food that could not be purchased anywhere else, and its produce was widely considered the freshest in the city.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> S.A. Reid, "Urban Renaissance: City hopes market facelift will boost Sweet Auburn but merchants fear higher rents' impact on prices," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 24, 1993.

<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs, and Farmers' Markets*, 30-2.





**Fig. 2.** Panoramic view of the Curb Market, August 16, 1949. AJCP144-011aa, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archive. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, <http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atlphotos/id/3550>, (accessed February 20, 2015).

As the space continued to grow and prosper, the civic-minded bolstering of the city remained entangled in the space. Although it was never officially proclaimed to be a source of renewal and stability for Atlanta, these ideas were tied up in the actions and rhetoric surrounding the market, often embedded with the discourse of civic duty. As one 1941 *Atlanta Constitution* article enthused: “Atlanta’s Municipal Market is one of the city’s proudest boasts... You are a loyal citizen. This market belongs to you. Visit it. Help yourself—and by your patronage encourage your city to do those things that help the many.”<sup>65</sup> The market itself also sought to give directly back to the community; in its earliest days, vendors would communally gift a portion of their foodstuffs to a charity at the end of each week.<sup>66</sup> Although the Atlanta of the beginning of the twentieth century aimed to present itself as a southern progressive space in order to invite northern business

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<sup>65</sup> Press Huddleston, “Municipal Market, Largest Retail Center for Georgia Products.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1941.

<sup>66</sup> “Atlanta Municipal Market Becoming Very Popular.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1924.

to invest, this very rarely moved past rhetoric and into action. In most every way, white Atlanta was still caught up in the conservative moors of the rest of the South. The creation of the Municipal Market provides insight into a space in which such ideals actually took hold in order to create a pathway for positive, influential change.

However, agricultural diversification and the mutual uplift of city and country were not the only tenants the New South creed deeply imbedded in the public space. As the city embraced the myth of racial stability through segregation, it created the Municipal Market in this image. Although all races and classes were allowed to utilize the market's function to a degree, white farmers were given spots inside the fireproof walls, shielding them and their crops from any imposing elements, while black farmers were relegated to sell from the curb surrounding the building.<sup>67</sup> This distinction and delineation is one that continues to permeate the market's mythology today: although it continues to technically operate under the name "Atlanta Municipal Market," that name is rarely (if ever) spoken; rather, this history garnered the title the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, drawing from the neighborhood's name as well as the market's function, or more affectionately, the Curb Market. This name has remained so dominant since its inception that market management ceased to brand itself with the official title a number of years ago, marketing the space with the more community-oriented and historically-cognizant Sweet Auburn Curb Market instead.

This deviance in title is only the first step towards forming its own narrative in

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<sup>67</sup> "History of the Curb Market: A Timeline of Success," *The Curb Market*, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.thecurbmarket.com/our-history>.

response to the one placed upon it by the city. Although the myth of Atlanta's racial harmony focused on stability through exclusion, which on a level the market was accomplishing through the separation of vendors, customers were allowed to shop anywhere they pleased, no matter their race or status. Furthermore, while nominally segregated, the black and white farmers still used the same general space, not divided by neighborhood buffers as with almost every other public space in Atlanta.

Starting as early as 1890, there were very few social venues in which African Americans and whites were integrated at all.<sup>68</sup> Government-owned spaces often created an even stricter line of segregation than private spaces: for example, public parks throughout Atlanta were delineated as either black or white by the 1880s, and after a long battle to segregate the streetcars starting around the same time, segregation was finally written into law for them directly after the 1906 race riot.<sup>69</sup> But while the market functioned as an entirely public space, its role in providing shelter for myriad private enterprises made segregation harder to enforce, as well as less appealing financially as parks, restrooms and water fountains were not concerned with profit.

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the economy and consumption practices were modernizing and evolving, continuously becoming more consumer-oriented as new products and new places to purchase emerged. These private spaces did not have the demarcation of racial control or personal ties in the same way more traditional stores did, and with such rapid change underfoot, merchants were often

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<sup>68</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 147-8, 188.

more focused on potential profits than on strict racial demarcation. As scholar Grace Elizabeth Hill explains, “Commerce proceeded, then, upon a great deal of white denial over the contradiction between market incentives and segregation’s promise of racial separation and certainty. Making race and making money did not always coincide.”<sup>70</sup>

In this way, the market was no different. As struggling farmers found a space in which to sell their wares, with each additional purchase segregating consumption could only be detrimental to these individuals by cutting off potential customers. And while this was not radical for privately held businesses, in many ways it was for the market itself. While the changing economy and social spectrum had created no uniform patterns of discrimination and segregation in private commercial establishments, the one place this line was almost always drawn was where eating was involved.<sup>71</sup> Eating with anyone of another color was a strictly drawn taboo almost across the board.<sup>72</sup> And while the market

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<sup>70</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hill, “‘For Colored’ and ‘For White’: Segregating Consumption in the South,” *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>71</sup> Hill, “Segregating Consumption,” 173.

<sup>72</sup> Although not spoken of in the same way as buses, housing and education are, the segregation of consumption of food was foundational to the underpinnings of the white supremacist society. As Lillian Smith explains, black and white women activists in the 1930s would eat together as a way of directly combating their own prejudicial minds. “They believed that the Lord’s Supper is a holy sacrament which Christians cannot take without sacrilege unless they will also bread with fellow men of other color. Believing, they put on their best bib and tucker gathered in small groups to eat with colored women, deliberately breaking a taboo that had collected many fears around it... One of these church women told me of her first eating experience with colored friends. Though her conscience was serene, and her enjoyment of this association was real, yet she was seized by an acute nausea which disappeared only when the meal was finished. She was too honest to attribute it to anything other than anxiety welling up from the ‘bottom of her

sold produce and assorted goods directly to the customer, by August of 1924, it also included a large dinner restaurant, a soda fountain, as well as a quick-lunch stand.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, from the time of its inception, the market functioned as a space for all, not bowing to the strict social delineations that ran all other eating establishments. While it in no way became a utopian space outside of the social demarcations of race, as will be seen in fuller detail later in the chapter, the practices of consumption and patronage challenged the dominant social narratives of the era.

Beyond the Curb Market's absence of strict, enforced segregation, the sheer location of the market granted accessibility to a variety of different types of people, both racially as well as socioeconomically. The Curb Market is located in a historically entrenched African-American neighborhood, but it also borders the CBD. It resides five blocks away from Five Points, a vortex of white wealth for most of the early twentieth century, which continues to play home to what is commonly thought of as Atlanta's skyline.<sup>74</sup> At the time of the market's creation, Five Points and the area surrounding it not only operated as the center of white business in Atlanta, but as the center of the white

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personality,' as she expressed it, creeping back from her childhood training." Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 147-8.

<sup>73</sup> "Municipal Market a Credit and Benefit to All Atlanta." *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 25, 1924.

<sup>74</sup> There are disputes about what 'actually constitutes' Atlanta's skyline, as there are multiple, since the sprawling nature of the city has led to uneven development, with partial skylines interspersed throughout the Metro Atlanta region.

community.<sup>75</sup> Garnering its name due to the intersection of the city's five largest roads, Five Points "had long been the principal gathering place in a city that lacked any significant public open space downtown... owing to its uncontested multifunctional centrality in commerce, retail, entertainment, and finance."<sup>76</sup>

But beyond this stronghold of business and community, nearly two-thirds of what is now Northeast Atlanta's population was white in the early twentieth century,<sup>77</sup> with the African-American population confined to a few small, nearby neighborhoods. Old Fourth Ward was one of these.<sup>78</sup> Due to this historical pattern of settlement, not only were African Americans "for most of the twentieth century, spatially confined to a belt of neighborhoods ringing the central business district," but also "Atlanta's rich and poor often lived in close proximity to one another."<sup>79</sup> While such residential patterns reflect the ideals of New South ideology, providing barriers between racial mixing of any kind, within the space of the market such walls collapsed. This was not an arbitrary byproduct of the Municipal Market; rather, the location was chosen to reflect the exact center of greater Atlanta at the time of construction, allowing it not only to become the focal center

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<sup>75</sup> Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta 1946-1988*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>76</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Although, because of Atlanta's constant expansion and redrawing of city lines, the area considered is now thought of as Northeast Atlanta, it was the center of the city at the time.

<sup>78</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 119.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 114, 141.

of trade for the city, but also granting access to as many people as possible.<sup>80</sup>

Those who lived within walking distance of the market typically shopped there daily; at a time when going into town to shop became part of most residents weekly routine, the market became a Saturday shopping ritual for those living directly in the city as well as around it.<sup>81</sup> Through this ritualized action, customers of different races and classes became connected with each other through the functions of commerce and food, creating a community space that welcomed everyone. As Georgia State University public historian Richard Laub noted, “The market is one of those places that I think it’s not only an economic place where people exchange goods and services, but also a cultural place... a community asset, and people went there not only to shop but to see each other and be part of a community and a culture.”<sup>82</sup>

It was not only due to the location that such communities were brought together in meaningful ways. As a 1924 article in the *Atlanta Constitution* gushed, “Due to the fact that the producer is selling direct to the consumer and more than 100 different businesses are all under the one roof with the smallest amount of overhead charges, food supplies can be bought here for less than anywhere else.”<sup>83</sup> In direct competition with the only other consolidated food emporium in town, prices at the market remained extremely low,

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<sup>80</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs, and Farmers’ Markets*, 27.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 31-2. Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 188-189.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Laub, Interview by Gene Kansas, “The Curb Market,” Sidewalk Radio, JW Broadcasting, August 16, 2013.

<sup>83</sup> “Becoming Very Popular.”

attracting a wide variety of customers. The variety of clientele can also be determined in the diversity of foods offered from the very beginning.

In a time when the Sweet Auburn Curb Market slaughtered chickens and hogs on site and on request, freshly caught game such as rabbits and possums were also common. Although historically considered “black game,” “by numbers and weight, rabbits probably made up the most common game meal for rural people in the 1920s and 1930s,” both black and white.<sup>84</sup> Even more so, possum was emblematic of poor southern hunting in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, providing an easy source of calories during times when food was scarce. Such food was popular among vendors and sold with a lesser price tag, as the meat only needed to be trapped rather than raised. Such products drew in lower-income customers from the market’s earliest days; one farmer in October of 1927 claimed to have sold between 40 and 50 possums from his stand in a single day, as well as between 15,000 and 20,000 rabbits the year before.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, many vendors sold economically accessible fish such as mullet, croaker, mackerel, catfish, and crappie—all considered some of the “cheaper foods for poorer people to purchase.”<sup>86</sup> But in addition to such fare, retailers also peddled seafood considered to be delicacies, such as lobsters, crabs, oysters and shrimp.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, although white and black vendors remained

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<sup>84</sup> Wiley C. Prewitt, Jr. “Bodies of the Dead: The Wild in Southern Foodways,” in *The Larder: Food Studies Methods of the American South*, edited by John T. Edge, Elizabeth Engelhardt, and Ted Ownby, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 83, 85.

<sup>85</sup> “Municipal Market Selling Wild Game,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 31, 1927.

<sup>86</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs, and Farmers’ Market*, 30-31.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 31



segregated, “the fact that whites and blacks purchased many of the same items in the same stores subverted an ideology of *absolute* racial difference.”<sup>88</sup> [Emphasis added] In spaces such as the Municipal Market, racial boundaries were often blurred through consumption patterns. Everyone within public space of commerce congregated in the same capacity, for the same purpose: for sustenance, no matter which side of the booth they stood on, inside the walls or outside.<sup>89</sup>

While much of the integrated history of the market has been passed down through local lore, the black and white newspapers of the day provide a telling glimpse into how specific communities functioned within the space. From its inception in 1919, the major white paper in Atlanta, the *Atlanta Constitution*, spoke highly of the market, consistently publishing articles with titles such as “Atlanta Municipal Market becoming very popular.” The *Atlanta Constitution* unfailingly marketed directly to white housewives, often emphasizing that even if you didn’t live nearby, it’d be worth the extra walk. Even before the brick building officially opened, one article read,

The people of Atlanta are just beginning to realize in a full measure the great benefits to be obtained in trading at Atlanta’s big municipal market... As all the main thoroughfares leading to the municipal market, which is located on Edgewood avenue [sic], Butler, Bell and Boss Streets, are now nearly complete this will make it easy for everybody in Atlanta or vicinity to get to this market in very quick time and while the market is only five blocks from Five Points the little extra distance traveled will more than pay in the difference saved when you commence to fill the market basket.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Hill, “Segregating Consumption,” 170.

<sup>89</sup> Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 30-31.

<sup>90</sup> “Credit and Benefit.”

Although the market's proximity to an African American neighborhood can be read as the writer encouraged white shoppers to attend, its proximity to Five Points is emphasized, pushing potential customers to cross physical and mental boundaries.

Notably, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market was written about in the exact same manner in the *Atlanta Daily World*, the first African American daily paper in the United States. Often taking front-page headlines in the paper, the pieces read like any that would be found in its white counterpart's, advertising contests, promoting specific foods and even advertising when Santa would be coming to visit.

But written into most *Daily World* articles from the first half of the twentieth century are small specifications. One, promoting a giveaway for baskets of produce announced, "Many baskets of food were made available to a large group of *Atlantans of both groups* at the Municipal Market on Edgewood, Thursday, as the result of a big cooperative effort on the part of officials."<sup>91</sup> Another read, "Today and tomorrow will be the last time to get some of those free prizes being awarded to *all citizens* at the Municipal Market."<sup>92</sup> [Emphasis added for both] Small qualifications for a modern reader, but the few simple words in an African American newspaper sought to encourage black shoppers to patronize the market, as it existed as a collective space in which all were welcome. Additionally, the *Daily World* heralded the market as providing for distinct needs that their community sought:

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<sup>91</sup> "Many Baskets Are Given Away at Ye Municipal Market," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 3, 1934.

<sup>92</sup> "Free Prizes are Now Being Given Away at Municipal Market as Pear Week is Celebrated," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 17, 1934.

For several years we have seen the need of an Exchange where *our farm and city women* who make beautiful handiwork and can delicious preserves and jellies could serve their products to satisfy their desire for making money [...] Over a year ago such an Exchange was opened at the Municipal Market and it has grown from one small stand to larger quarters in which you will find beautiful handmade bedspreads, vanity sets, chair backs, pretty aprons, quaint pictures, novelties and canned fruits and vegetables, and jellies.<sup>93</sup> [Emphasis added]

In an era when African American needs were routinely and systematically overlooked by state practices, the market sought to directly fill the needs of all of its patrons, no matter their skin color or class.

This can also be seen in the Municipal Market ads produced for the paper throughout the 1930s.<sup>94</sup> The state-run space routinely advertised in the *Daily World*, inviting its readership to shop and take part in the public food emporium. Much like the articles discussed above, the advertisements largely read almost exactly as any found in the *Atlanta Constitution*. But there was often a small specification often attached to the bottom of the ads. Typically printed in bold type, the lines read “Always Glad to See You” or “You Are Always Welcome.” Albeit through codified language, the emporium directly marketed itself to black Atlanta, letting them know through ad placement and rhetoric that African American customers were patently welcome.

This in no way went unnoticed by the staff of the *Daily World*. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the newspaper staff would go so far as to actively encourage customers to shop at the Sweet Auburn Curb Market through advice pieces. One, published in 1931,

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<sup>93</sup> “The Municipal Market,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 3, 1937.

<sup>94</sup> The *Atlanta Daily World* began in 1928, so there is no early coverage of the market’s opening and early work from the perspective of the newspaper.

read, “The MUNICIPAL MARKET is YOUR MARKET! Farmers bring the very best produce here to sell at prices that hardly pay for the harvesting. The MUNICIPAL MARKET has an advertisement in your WORLD each week.”<sup>95</sup> Beyond speaking to the black community directly, the *Daily World* pushed its readership to patronize a space that sought them out.

Not only did the market cater candidly to African Americans, advertising itself as a safe space albeit in a codified manner, it also attempted the same rhetorical flairs of civic duty on the black community. In an *Atlanta Daily World* article from 1931, the author urged, “This will help the farmers make more money and it is advisable to use them as food experts say that food prices are going up this winter. The use of pears will help many Georgians save money and also help Georgia farmers earn more money. It is a patriotic duty to eat Georgia pears. Your families will be benefitted.”<sup>96</sup> Through such words, the marginalized African-American community could take part in the betterment of their own lives as well as the lives of others by shopping at the Municipal Market.

Throughout the segregated city, African American neighborhoods lagged consistently far behind white neighborhood in terms of services, whether they be streetlights, sidewalks, sanitation or accessibility to the rest of the city via roads and public transportation. These widespread problems focused on the “continued neglect of black neighborhoods,” not only reinscribing inequality into these spaces and the people

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<sup>95</sup> Heath, Lloyd, “Shopping Tips,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 15, 1932.

<sup>96</sup> “Free Prizes.”

who occupied them, but “also isolate[ing] their communities.”<sup>97</sup> The Sweet Auburn Curb Market functioned as a space that broke down such patterns of abuse and disparity. Hailed as one of the best in the country, with numerous markets throughout the Southeast and beyond modeled after it, it provided services directly in and to a black community.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, breaking down such systems of oppression in a localized setting not only catered to diverse peoples in a time when it was taboo to do so, but also prospered because of and through this challenging of the dominant culture.

This in no way insinuates the market existed entirely outside of the culture of white supremacy, however. While social patterns throughout the space confronted the era’s principal ways of thinking in order for it to provide and prosper, the market could still hold violence and hate. While the segregation of the market did not limit access to resources directly, and in many ways broke through the racial boundaries of the New South ideology that governed almost every other aspect of public life in Atlanta, it also exposed other cracks in the Atlanta mythology. Namely, isolated points of racial friction that lead to violence within the space undermine the idea of complete racial harmony that permeates the city’s mythos, exposing the insidious nature of white supremacy, discrimination and segregation, and providing insight into how such mindsets inscribed themselves spatially into an otherwise socially integrated landscape.

One such occurrence took place in March of 1945, as a 56-year-old African-American man named James Henry Sanders attempted to pick up goods for his wife as

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<sup>97</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 190.

<sup>98</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs, and Farmers’ Markets*, 29.

the market was closing. Upon exchanging words with a white merchant who had ordered him away, the merchant began kicking and cursing him. When Sanders retaliated, three other white men who operated stores in the market joined in to beat him until two patrolmen arrived, each who also beat the man, causing him to go to Grady Hospital with numerous injuries. In the wake of this attack, Sanders was charged with eight different counts of assault and battery, found guilty of three, and sentenced to two years in prison.<sup>99</sup>

This was not altogether unsurprising, as three years prior, a similar and arguably more telling incident occurred, again between an African-American shopper and a white merchant. While attempting to return rancid meat her son had procured at the market earlier that day, a pregnant woman from nearby Grady Homes was dually ignored and scorned for a long period of time by the merchant. When she continued to wait to receive service, the merchant slapped her and beat her, but when the police arrived it was she that was booked on disorderly conduct and fighting. The significance of this event was not lost on Atlanta's African-American community, who called upon the local branch of the NAACP to bail her out.<sup>100</sup>

Such occurrences not only eradicate the myth of Atlanta harboring unwavering stability and non-violence, but also are also indicative of larger racial problems facing the city as the market moved into the mid-century. While the Municipal Market, and by

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<sup>99</sup> "Beaten Municipal Market Customer Given Two Years," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 21, 1945.

<sup>100</sup> "Protests Tainted Meat; Arrested: Housewife Handled Roughly by Municipal Market Clerks," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 1, 1942.

extension nearby African-American communities, received ample funding and attention from the local government, a closer look at the settlement patterns surrounding the market that enabled it to become ostensibly a space for all creates an altogether different narrative, one of New South ideology and racist public policies that “left the city with deep racial divides.”<sup>101</sup>

In an interview reflecting on his childhood at the Curb Market, customer Alton Evans gravely remembered of the Atlanta of the 1950s and 1960s,

There were pockets of segregation... There was Cabbagetown, which was notorious for being white, and I lived in the Grady Homes [Housing Project], which was all black... And then as you go farther towards North Avenue, there were pockets of real dilapidation. Real crime... So there were pockets of people all around, but people were not cross-pollinated. *There was no getting along.* If you didn't live in this neighborhood, then chances were you should not go to this neighborhood... We could see downtown Atlanta from Grady Homes, but it was still light years away. You could see the tall buildings, but you didn't frequent downtown.<sup>102</sup> [Emphasis added]

This mindset was not uncommon, or unjustified. As Ronald H. Bayor spends multiple chapters explaining in his work *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, the goal of city officials was to make African-American residential mobility from these communities almost impossible, keeping in place and reinforcing racial buffers and barriers. Compounding these factors was a lack of resources and development granted to these neighborhoods, even as the African American population continued to grow. As these dynamics culminated, the surrounding neighborhoods began to decline, unsurprisingly as “restricting any growing population to limited land areas increases the

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<sup>101</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, xv.

<sup>102</sup> Alton Evans, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 8, 2014.

population density, and high density is a main cause of slums.”<sup>103</sup>

The mental gap between white and black, have and have-nots, infested itself within the market as well. Telena Saxon for one, a Curb Market customer since the late 1940s, remembered as tensions remained high in the surrounding neighborhoods, white customers began to send their (typically African American) chaffers to shop for them.<sup>104</sup> But although the Sweet Auburn Curb Market highlighted the growing racial tensions in Atlanta at the time, it did not succumb to them, rather becoming a hospitable, safe space for local community residents to eat, shop and escape the problems that plagued their city, at least most of the time.

As the city moved into the 1950s and 1960s, new urban planning policies took hold. The most notable of these was urban renewal, largely in response to the massive outpouring of white and middle class residents from the city’s core. The dynamics of these policies, and the Sweet Auburn Curb Market’s response to them, are what I turn to in Chapter Three.

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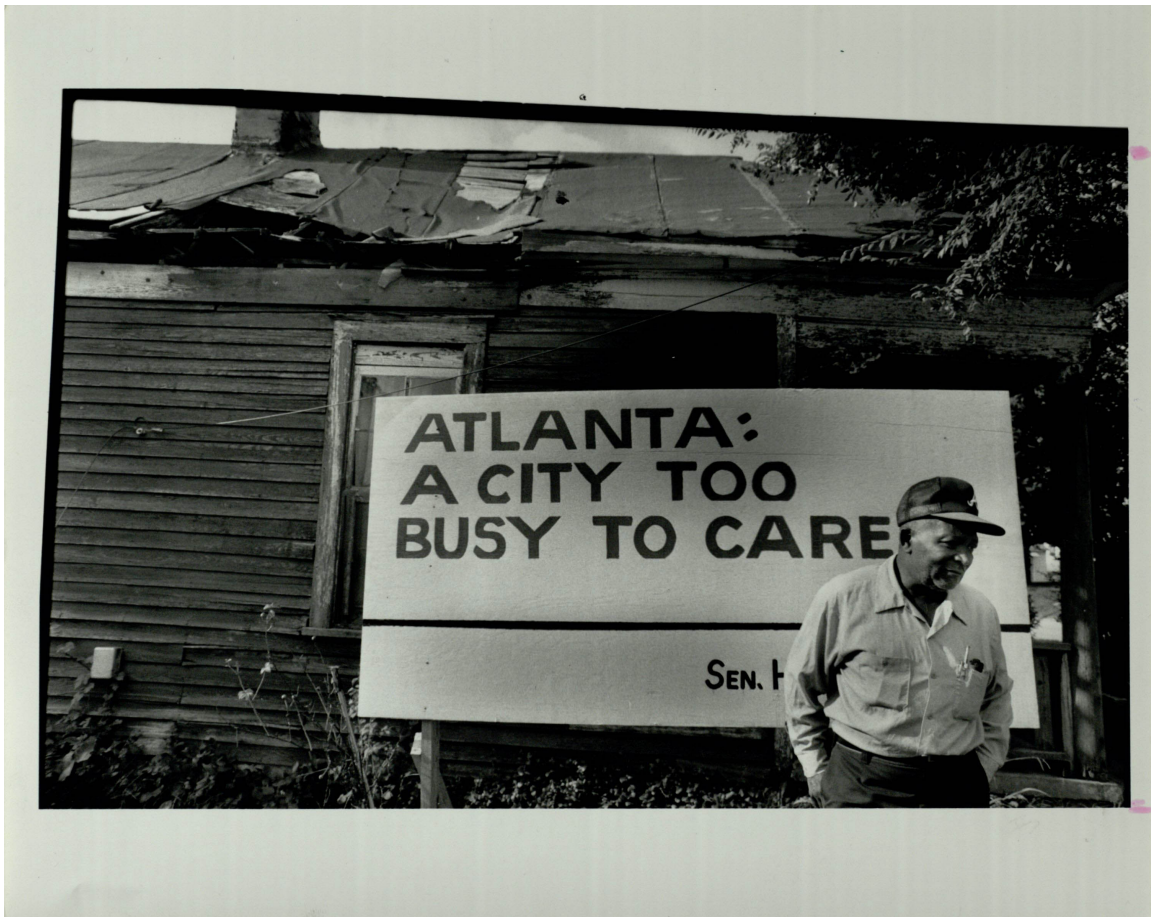
<sup>103</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 53.

<sup>104</sup> Telena Saxon, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 29, 2014.



### III. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST URBAN RENEWAL

Structurally, socially, and demographically, the city of Atlanta has been in flux since first established as a railroad intersection point in 1937. As it moved into the 1960s and 1970s, change began to permeate every block. For the first 30 to 40 years of its life, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market functioned as a space for all, born out of a civic religion



**Fig. 3.** Man stands in front of crumbling home, 1987. AJCP214-024o, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archive. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library. <http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atlphotos/id/1782>.

and a need for fresh, cheap food. But as white flight, sprawl, and urban renewal permanently altered the growth and development patterns of the city, the market changed in tandem. Just as the emporium was borne out of the political and social tides of Atlanta in the first half of the twentieth century, it similarly experienced the repercussions of the hollowing of the inner city. Likewise, as the market challenged racial perceptions and commonly held segregation patterns in the beginning, it remained a community asset, point of rally, and a space of shared culture and history in the face of both removal and negligence.

As it moved further into the twentieth century, the market's function as a socially constructed space became increasingly apparent, transforming its role in the local community as Atlanta changed around it. As city space grew more contested, often due to land-grabbing policies and the removal of residents, the market served as an intersection of these municipal and community-driven forces. As spatial anthropologist Setha M. Low explained,

The term *social construction* may then be conveniently reserved for the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control. The social construction of space is the actual transformation of space—through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting—into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning. Both processes are social in the sense that both the production and the construction of space is contested for economic and ideological reasons; understanding them can help us see how local conflicts over space can be used to uncover and illuminate larger issues.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Setha M. Low, "Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of the Public Space in Costa Rica," *American Ethnologist* 23.4 (Nov., 1996), 861-2.

By undertaking an analysis of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market through such a lens, we can begin to glimpse the greater forces at play within Atlanta politics and the neighborhood itself. As the social, political, and geographical construction of Atlanta's urban core transitioned in tandem with the greater social tides of the country and region, the market did as well. Through inspection of the market's history as well as its food, patrons, and activities, not only are local conflicts over space and use explained, but an often forgotten or unseen resistance comes to life as well.

Although the civic religion of the New South as Henry Grady and his comrades had imagined it faded away by mid-century, the push for racial stability stayed in place. Reacting initially to social upheavals such as Reconstruction and the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, by mid-century Atlanta was reacting to something new: the Civil Rights Movement, as well as its violent repercussions ripping across the South. The region became locked in a state of crisis, fueled by sporadically upheld Supreme Court decisions and a brutality that continued to rip through the land. Rural Mississippi drew national attention and Birmingham earned the colloquial title of "Bombingham." Keeping in line with its previous tenants of being above the social strife, the city refused to bow to the PR nightmare that the rest of the South grappled with. In an effort to be publicly cast as morally above the rest of the region, Atlanta's leaders launched a cognizant campaign to keep the New South capital out of national headlines.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Virginia H. Hein, "The Image of 'The City Too Busy to Hate': Atlanta in the 1960's," *Phylon* 33.3 (1972): 205-221.

As with previous historical periods, catchy slogans and public image did not always mean that the citizens of Atlanta were actually too busy to hate: rather, the city's racial prejudices were exposed more judiciously in urban design and planning policy, although violence was still utilized by the white community sporadically.<sup>107</sup> Quietly desegregating schools without any of the media attention or riot gear that had been brought out in Oxford, Mississippi or Little Rock, Arkansas, by the 1960s Atlanta was heralded as a beacon of light in a morally ambiguous South, as a good place to live and do business. This last part was critical, however, as Atlanta's calls for racial stability were led by the business community, which hoped to preserve and cultivate outside investment.

In 1960, the Chamber of Commerce ran an ad in both the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* that read: "How Great is Atlanta?" Innocuous and boastful at a glance, the slogan implied both the city's welcoming, tranquil nature, as well as the potential for media disaster should major violence strike.<sup>108</sup> "Whether this picture was true or false, it was a belief to which many subscribed; it was a reality to much of white

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<sup>107</sup> Although the most well-known image of racial violence in the city remains the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, acts of violence and intimidation continued into the 1960s. Beyond being home to the Klu Klux Klan, Atlanta incubated a number of off-shoot white supremacist organizations, such as the American Order of the Fascisti (commonly referred to as the "Black Shirts" and the Columbians, which instigated a series of bombings and beatings against the African American community; David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 52.

<sup>108</sup> Hein, "The Image of 'The City Too Busy to Hate'," 206.

Atlanta. But there was a black Atlanta with realities of its own which saw much of white Atlanta's reality as a myth."<sup>109</sup>

During this time, the city continued to operate on a very strict racial binary, both in national image as well as in citizen's day-to-day lives, in many ways sustaining southern stereotypes about a strict biracial society. "Atlanta, like the rest of Georgia and the Southeast [in the 1960s and 1970s], had not experienced the massive influx of immigration that transformed northern cities in the early twentieth century, and few tightly knit ethnic communities were noticeable within the city."<sup>110</sup> Although there were foreign enclaves laced throughout the city, made of mostly of Jews, Greeks and Cuban refugees, their numbers were limited. Furthermore, these new immigrants arrived in Atlanta financially solvent, allowing them to remain in their communities and out of the public eye. Although boosters began to purport Atlanta as an "international city" during the 1970s, as late as 1980 less than one hundred thousand foreign-born immigrants lived in Georgia.<sup>111</sup> Rather, the internationalization of Atlanta during this time had much more to do with attracting foreign business than any cultural interaction than might be taking place in the streets or inside businesses.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>110</sup> Olsson, "Your Dekalb Farmers Market," 45.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> "...slogans, special days, and articles in the paper were, however, more of an opportunity for politicians and reporters to proclaim Atlanta's internationalism than a real effort at real political and social integration"; Rebecca J. Dameron and Arthur D. Murphy, "An International City Too Busy To Hate? Social and Cultural Change in

This focus on investment and economic prosperity permeated many other aspects of Atlanta's social and political realities. With the arrival of white flight, vast amounts of white-owned businesses fled to the suburbs along with the residential population. Due to the shift in demographics, investment in the CBD remained a focus of local government for a number of decades as local officials concentrated on economic revitalization. Historic structures throughout the downtown area were razed to make way for big business, often "gutt[ing] neighborhood participation in the planning process."<sup>113</sup> Although Atlanta experienced a serious economic boom during these years largely due to development centered on investment and opportunity in the CBD, the benefits of such economic growth fell almost exclusively to upper- and middle-income, white-collar workers, most who took their wealth back to the suburbs with them.<sup>114</sup>

Ironically, as Atlanta gained the distinction of the cradle of the modern Civil Rights Movement, it became increasingly segregated due to white flight, planning policy and housing availability. Revitalization attempts were largely economically motivated, focusing on the central city that had been recently distressed by the loss of white money to the suburbs. As would be expected, the vast majority of those negatively affected were African American. The renewal programs principally focused on slum clearance,

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Atlanta: 1970-1995," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 26.1 (1997): 58.

<sup>113</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 182.

<sup>114</sup> Clarence N. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program of Atlanta*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 25.

repurposing the land for commercial and municipal building projects, including a new stadium, civic center, and highways. “The clearance of low-income housing from neighborhoods adjacent to the central business district (CBD)... illustrate[s] the racial, and to some extent class-related, functions of redevelopment, and in this way they connect postwar renewal to previous efforts to control black residential patterns.”<sup>115</sup>

Old Fourth Ward and Sweet Auburn became prime targets for “negro removal” under the auspices of “urban renewal.” As more and more residents moved outside city limits, white business and white political leadership feared for their stronghold over the city as it transitioned in a majority black space. Promoting urban renewal as a tool to revitalize the core of a city from which people were moving away in droves, it was also used as a tool to dilute African American strongholds of wealth and power within the city.<sup>116</sup> Although the press and white Atlanta saw only progress within the city too busy to hate, a major focus of such work relied on development plans with insidious outcomes to relocate African American families to the outer rings of the city.<sup>117</sup>

Unsurprisingly, “plans to demolish or weaken the black hold on Auburn Avenue, renewal, relocation, and public housing development eventually followed the intent” of previous policies, which were put in place “to control black residential mobility and maintain the segregation of the black population.”<sup>118</sup> Intricately intertwined in such plans

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<sup>115</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 70.

<sup>116</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, 11-12.

<sup>117</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 150.

<sup>118</sup> Bayor, *Race and Atlanta*, 72.

was one of the things Atlanta is best known for: the construction of the highway system, specifically the Downtown Connector. Bisecting Auburn Avenue and the Old Fourth Ward, the highway plans not only relocated huge swaths of downtown's African-American population, but also killed the vast majority of business in the area. As the highways were built, emphasizing Atlanta's already growing sprawl and car culture, white flight began its fearful rampage, fueled by "integration, which," in turn, "lured customers away from African American shopping districts."<sup>119</sup>

As the city and the Old Fourth Ward specifically transformed, rather than deteriorate in a pit of urban decay, renewal and neglect, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market took on an important significance in many local residents' minds. Although the demographic and residential changes affected the market, homogenizing its customer base into an almost exclusively African-American, hyper-local community, it did not suffer from the same detrimental effects of urban renewal as most other local businesses during this time. Rather, it was "one of the only business on Auburn Avenue that kept its strength."<sup>120</sup> As customer Nate Ragland remembered, "I don't remember it ever having a real problem."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Milo Ippolito, "Curb appeal: Live music, day for kids ahead as city market marks milestone," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, October 9, 2003.

<sup>120</sup> Nate Ragland, Interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market July 31, 2014. Note about the changing tides of civil rights, how the Old Fourth Ward was always a designated black space but now all of downtown Atlanta was becoming one

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



During this time, it became a black place, not only demographically, but also in its spatial creation in the minds of Greater Atlantans. As sociologist Barbara Combs explains,

Black places may be bounded geographically, but their more salient characteristic is that they contain social, cultural, and historic institutions, buildings, and establishments which signal to outsiders that the area is a black place. This perception carries forward and extends to the people who occupy the space and ultimately the goods and services offered in the area... and the shops and stores in the area come to be viewed as serving an exclusive black clientele. In this manner, both the racial authenticity of the space and the people who live in it are preserved.<sup>122</sup>

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market developed such a designation. Catering to an almost wholly African American clientele, it drew upon the neighborhood's increasing designation as a black community to cement such ideas.<sup>123</sup>

*Atlanta Magazine* food critic Christiane Lauterbach remembers her first trip to the Curb Market in 1975 distinctly. "Back then," she wrote, "only poor people and country folks in Georgia ate rabbit. No regular grocery stores carried it. But the market did, so I dove into a world where my senses were assaulted by whole pigs, obscene-looking

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<sup>122</sup> Combs, Barbara Harris, "The Ties that Bind: The Role of Place in Racial Identity Formation, Social Cohesion, Accord, and Discord in Two Historic, Black Gentrifying Atlanta Neighborhoods." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2010, [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology\\_diss/50](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology_diss/50), 41.

<sup>123</sup> Although the neighborhood had historically been an African American space, because of its association with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Auburn Avenue, these perceptions were becoming increasingly cemented.

viscera, fatback encrusted with salt, baggies of edible kaolin, little bunches of yellow roots, enormous bouquets of collards, and yes, fresh rabbit sold at the fish counter.”<sup>124</sup>

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market of the 1970s was a very different market from the one in decades past. Although still carrying the same diverse arrays of food for a variety of different people, it no longer operated as a common space for all of Atlanta as it once had. Almost all of the food described by Lauterbach contains a traditional, cultural significance, most of which is commonly considered soul food, and all of which can still be purchased at the market. To much of the affluent, white population such edibles come attached with a hefty stigma to such a degree foodways scholar Anne Bower has called such diets “mythological” as they remain “so unquestioned, so static in their class and racial associations.”<sup>125</sup> The meat and produce described falls into such classifications easily, having been cataloged by cultural anthropologists as “Traditional Black Core Foods.”<sup>126</sup>

Some, such as yellow roots and kaolin retain a cultural significance while defying such easy categorization. In the South, non-licensed doctors prescribed yellow root for ailments ranging from high blood pressure to diabetes throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Christiane Lauterbach, “Grindhouse Killer Burgers: Grindhouse burgers attract new fans to Sweet Auburn’s market,” *Atlanta Magazine*, February 1, 2010, accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/article/grindhouse-killer-burgers1/>.

<sup>125</sup> Anne Bower, Introduction to *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture*, edited by Anne Bower, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>126</sup> Tony L. Whitehead, “In Search of Soul Food and Meaning: Culture, Food, and Health,” in *African Americans in the South: Issues of Race, Class, and Gender*, edited by Hans A. Baer and Yvonne Jones, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992). 102.

centuries.<sup>127</sup> Kaolin, although sold at the Curb Market in sandwich-sized bags with a note reading, “Not intended for human consumption,” vendors assume it will be consumed as it has been historically. Such fare is historically associated with rural, pregnant African American women, although it was once common among both black and white impoverished southerners alike. Often called white clay, chalk, or white dirt, kaolin is native to middle Georgia’s Piedmont area, making it more frequently found within state lines.<sup>128</sup>

Taken as a whole, such fare has been labeled as “n\*\*\*\*r food” or “poor peoples food,” according to foodways anthropologist Tony L. Whitehead [asterisks added]. These classifications illuminate “uses of food as symbols of group identity and as symbols of desirable social and moral superiority.”<sup>129</sup> Due to such associations with the food sold within the market, it is unsurprising that many non-black Atlantans abandoned the market during this time, assuming nothing was there for them. Coupled with the declining nature of the surrounding neighborhoods and a customer base that was distinctly non-white, the space gained a distinctly negative reputation throughout white Atlanta. Most Caucasian residents separated themselves from the market that was once cherished by local denizens.

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<sup>127</sup> *The Old Herb Doctor, His Secrets and Treatments*, edited by Health Research Staff. (Pomeroy, WA: Health Research Books, 1941), 76, 138, 168, 171, 178, 190.

<sup>128</sup> Susan Allport, “Women Who Eat Dirt,” *Gastronomica, The Journal of Food and Culture* 2.2 (2002): 10-13.

<sup>129</sup> Whitehead, “Soul Food and Meaning,” 108.

This does not mean that it was an entirely racially homogenized space, however. Although the vast majority of the customers were African American, adding to the neighborhood's history and the food sold in its distinction as a black space, Asian vendors began to appear at the market as well in the 1970s and 1980s. Additionally, a number of white vendors stayed, even as their white clientele fled for the suburbs.

In March of 1973, on the heels of massive displacements that occurred all over Atlanta, the 50-year lease the Municipal Market held on the land was set to expire. Quickly city officials began planning for new uses of the space. Although a single project was never formally agreed upon, it came to the public's attention that officials believed a new city police headquarters would better serve the land.<sup>130</sup> As city boosters, investors, and politicians tried to force revitalization onto the downtown area through multi-million-dollar building projects,<sup>131</sup> many viewed the market as an eyesore, functioning as a hangout for undesirables and an incubator for crime.

Adding insult to injury, the market came under scrutiny from both the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration for its sanitary conditions, with particular focus being placed on a rat infestation. With such substantial forces and agencies at hand, a permanent shutdown loomed. As speculation over closure of the market grew, groups from the nearby housing projects came together in a "storm of

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<sup>130</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Farms and Farmers Markets*, 32.

<sup>131</sup> Rutheiser, "Plugging the Hole in the Center, 1975-95," *Imagineering Atlanta*, 175-226.

protest” and “launched a vigorous campaign to save the structure.”<sup>132</sup> Hailing from Grady Homes, Capitol Homes, and Butler Street, housing projects all within walking distance of the market, which formed its central patronage at this time, they went so far as to circulate petitions to Mayor Maynard Jackson and Senator Andrew Young.<sup>133</sup>

A series of editorials from the *Atlanta Daily World* in 1973 and 1974 exposed not only how fervent the community remained about keeping the Sweet Auburn Curb Market open to the public, but also how multifaceted its use in the neighborhood was. One from 1973 read,

Let’s save Atlanta’s Municipal Market, not simply because it’s a nice old place, but because its also a valuable asset to our town. For half-a-century this historic building, located at Edgewood Avenue and Butler Street in downtown Atlanta, has served a multitude of customers, providing fresh vegetables, meats, poultry, fish, and a variety of unusual items that are virtually unattainable anywhere else in the city. Many shoppers come to the market by MARTA bus. Residents of nearby Grady Homes, Capitol Homes, and the high-rise retirement apartments to the East depend on the market and swear by it.<sup>134</sup>

In addition to being a historic asset to the community as a communal meeting space, the Curb Market was the only full-service food retailer within walkable distance for the great majority of those protesting. As the editorial emphasizes, its function as a retail space is not the market’s only role. The historic building also provided a cultural connection with and between its patrons that could not be found elsewhere in the city. The market’s

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<sup>132</sup> Jim Merriner and Don O’Briant, “Clean or Close: Fate of 50-Year-Old Market to Be Decided Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1974. Jenkins, *Food, Fairs and Farmers Markets*, 32, 34.

<sup>133</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs and Farmers Markets*, 32.

<sup>134</sup> Ellis Elmo, “Letter to the Editor: Municipal Market Gains Supporter,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 2, 1973.

proximity to key community aspects of the neighborhood heightens its importance. Furthermore, although the writer focuses on neighborhood-based reasons for the market's necessity, he also asserts it's a valuable asset to the city of Atlanta as a whole. Through this avowal, not only do the market and its customers affirm their presence in the city, but also their importance within it.

Another editorial, published the next year as part of an unsigned series dedicated to the preservation of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, read,

The Municipal Market, despite its highly publicized shortcomings, has done much more than it has received credit for in providing a vital service to the residents of the Auburn-Edgewood Avenue Community. It has for more than 50 years served as a convenient marketplace for thousands of Atlantans who could scarcely afford to shop any place else. It has provided business opportunities for many citizens of modest means who could never imagine finding a better way of



**Fig. 4.** Bloodstains on the basement ceilings of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. AJCP144-011q, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archive. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, <http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atl/photos/id/3520>.

making a living. If for no other reasons, we feel like these have made the market a vernal [sic] institution too precious to remove from the community it has become so much a part of.<sup>135</sup>

This editorial takes on a distinctly different stance than the previous one. Overtly combating preconceived notions about the space while admitting its flaws, the author views the market as a champion for those the city has all too often forgotten about, in providing food, community and jobs. Both pieces differed greatly from coverage of the market dispute in the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution*, which took on an extremely detached tone in their reporting. In direct response to these community actions, from editorials to petitions, the market remained open to continue serving those who fought for it, only shutting down briefly in 1974 for renovations.

However, community involvement and action does not mean that the market existed as a utopian space, outside of the forces affecting the rest of the neighborhood and city. Although local residents fought to keep the space open to provide numerous services to the community, that does not mean vendors and customers did not see the need for renovation. Rather, the resident populace placed blame squarely on the city and the market board, both of which were tasked with running and overseeing the space. Many patrons complained the market was “foul smelling and filled with rodents, flies, and roaches,” with bloodstains from the main-floor meat counters staining the ceilings of the basement.<sup>136</sup> During this time, a flea market and food stamp office filled the basement,

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<sup>135</sup> “Keep Municipal Market Open,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 28, 1974.

<sup>136</sup> Tyloria Y Tims, “Task Force Advises City To Buy Out Municipal Mkt. Board,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 7, 1988.

meaning customers were directly affected by these unsanitary conditions. Furthermore, there were allegations of racism directed at management. One 1988 *Atlanta Daily World* article stated,

The focus recently has been on black vendors, most of whom have shops in the basement of the building – who allege that management was unresponsive to complaints and discriminated against them in several ways, including allowing white and Asian vendors more time to pay rent, room to advertise, and more timely repairs.<sup>137</sup>

These accusations culminated in a local outcry to oust and replace the Board of Directors, which was ultimately upheld in conjunction with a city council-appointed task force validating these claims. Many times discrimination within the market and within the neighborhood did not take such an overt form, however.

As business strongholds and wealthy residents fled the area and the structures dominating the streets began to decay, the neighborhood took on an image to those outside of it as being a space where nothing actually existed. Apart from the physical separation from the suburbs and the inner city that lends itself to such mental separation, Atlanta tastemakers mediated such ideas through guidebooks and other propaganda. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, maps or pictures of the central city were simply not included in the literature.

Alternately, or rather, coinciding with these disappearing acts, existed the persistent image of Old Fourth Ward as crime ridden and therefore not to be set foot within. The neighborhood was by no means the only neighborhood that experienced this

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



phenomenon, with the entirety of the inner city taking on a pervasive image of fear and vice.

Even as some of its more problematic areas were being ‘disappeared,’ other aspects of downtown were all too visible in the local news media. Ever since Atlanta’s transition to a majority African-American city in 1970, downtown, especially the area around Five Points, had acquired a reputation as a place of danger and criminal activity far in excess of what the crime statistics warranted.<sup>138</sup>

But, of course, these spaces were not actually empty; rather, they were simply full of communities that did not fit in with the inescapable myths of Atlanta as an African-American haven, having been the direct recipients of decades of institutionalized, structural discrimination in the form of uneven development patterns. In fact, the Old Fourth Ward, despite being home to historically important locations central to fundamental Atlanta myths, experienced almost nothing in the way of redevelopment in the 1970s and 1980s. During that same time, investors poured money into the CBD, mere blocks away.<sup>139</sup>

The dual perceptions of vacant and crime-laden went hand-in-hand, often reinforcing each other: “The emptiness of ‘no one goes there’ represents a cultural imposition that it eclipses patterns of use therefore marked as deviant and therefore non-existent... [E]mptiness as a complex social space is defined by conflict among groups with distinct versions of the city and presences in society.”<sup>140</sup> This tension manifested

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<sup>138</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 176.

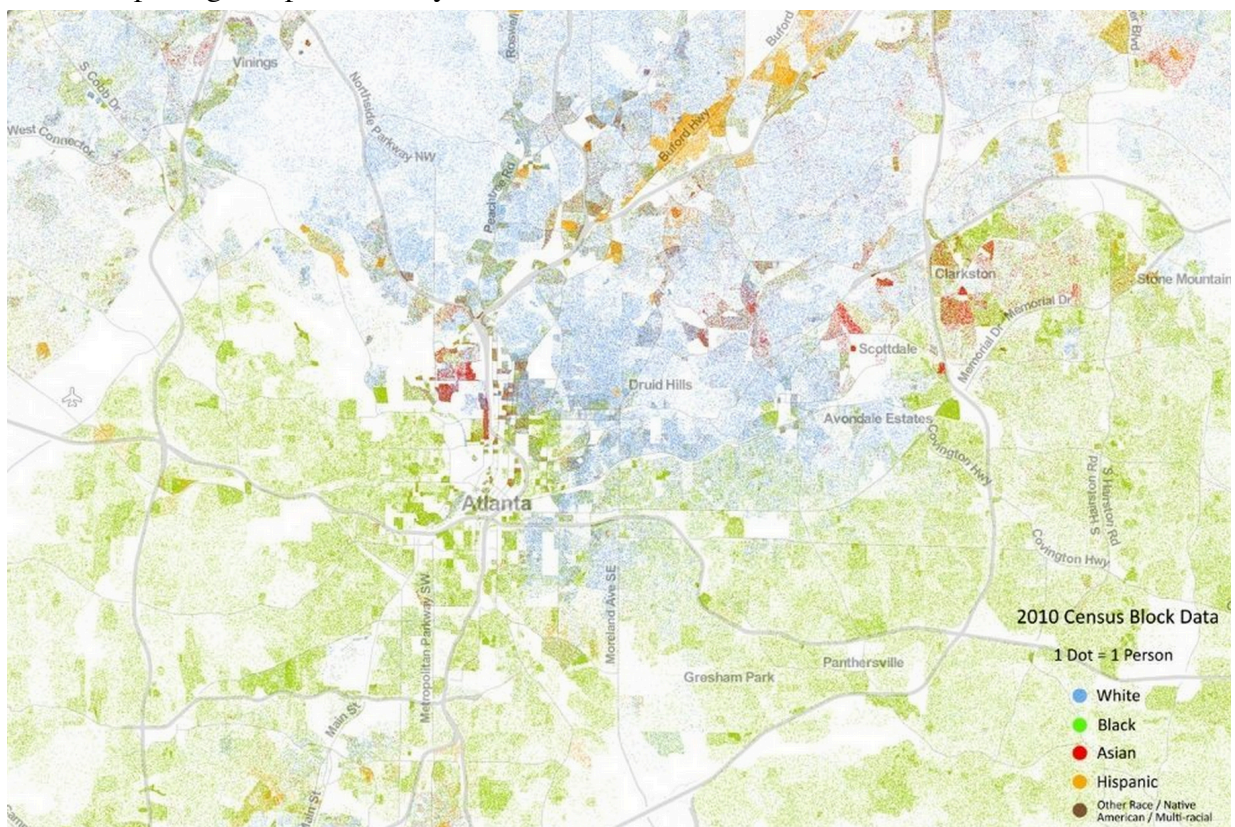
<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>140</sup> Gary McDonogh, “The Geography of Emptiness,” *The Cultural Meaning of Urban Space*, ed. Robert Louis Rotenberg and Gary McDonogh, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1993), 7.

itself locally by conflicts not only over cultural perception, but also over the utility and importance of vital community space, with one notable example being the Curb Market.

This is obviously not a phenomenon indigenous to Atlanta, however. American Studies scholar Liam Kennedy has asserted that the American city has long been a tangle of “racialized metaphors,” with its core functioning as “an abstract receptacle for displaced feelings about other things.” When discussing the urban cores of America, he explained,

On the one hand, it refers to the hypersegregation of the postindustrial ghetto – the intense concentration of poverty in increasingly isolated inner-city areas – and the deproletarianisation of the urban poor. On the other hand, the underclass is a compelling and powerful myth of behavioural deficiencies which combines



**Fig. 5.** Map of modern day segregation in Atlanta. Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator)<http://demographics.coopercenter.org/DotMap/index.html>

common assumptions about poverty and race. It generates images of criminals, delinquents, crack addicts and unwed mothers, and of an urban scene in which crime, drugs, unemployment, welfare dependency, indiscriminate violence and educational failure are norms of existence. More insidiously it signifies ‘blackness’; it is a term of racial categorization that connotes and normalizes what Daniel Moynihan once egregiously termed ‘a tangle of pathology’ in urban black poverty.<sup>141</sup>

But as Atlanta remains extremely segregated (see Figure 5), a fact that is increasingly compounded by its ever-growing sprawl, the fear and assumption of pathology become even more ingrained. Although the Old Fourth Ward has begun to shake such perceptions due to recent gentrification, until recently the neighborhood remained signified by deviance and emptiness, and to a large degree that perception lingers today.

As a public gathering space many people visited socially, not only to shop, in the middle of this inner-city aberration, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market was a key receptacle of such anxieties. But beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, federal agencies began attempting to revitalize the market, underwriting a series of renovations. But as with much of the rest of the urban core, such projects acted as a small salve rather than a cure; after years of systematic underdevelopment, isolated projects were only able to accomplish so much. As such, local media often decried the use of funds for the market, claiming the city continued to pour good money after bad, and that the space was likely a lost cause.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Liam Kennedy, *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 4-5.

<sup>142</sup> Charmange Helton, “Struggling market a wise investment?,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 23, 1996.

By this time, the nearby housing projects accounted for most of the market's customer base, with the heaviest and most consistent patronage heralding from Grady Homes.<sup>143</sup> Even those shoppers who did not live in government-subsidized housing typically paid with EBT or food stamps, recipients of the inner city's physical and fiscal structure crumbling around them.<sup>144</sup> Likewise, as Atlanta's homeless population escalated dramatically during this time—causing clashes between police, city officials, and residents that anthropologist Charles Rutheiser has aptly called Atlanta's “space wars”—the market drew a significant homeless population, which utilized its open floor plan and bustling atmosphere to hide in plain sight.<sup>145</sup>

As the market struggled financially, it became a receptacle for other urban fears twisted with perceptions of criminality and poverty. In this way, outsiders viewed the Curb Market similarly to the neighborhood itself, with efforts to ‘cleanup’ the market inextricably tangled with racial prejudice and the assumption of crime. As ex-Atlanta police chief Robert Jenkins described in his work *Food, Fairs and Farmers' Markets in Atlanta*, “Efforts to make the city market a success have included the renovation program, a general neighborhood clean-up... Atlanta police patrol the area and the building to allay fears of inner city crime and to keep the place from becoming a hangout

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<sup>143</sup> Alton Evans, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 8, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Helton, “Struggling market a wise investment?”

<sup>145</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 167; Latina Scott, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 29, 2014; Kenya Russell, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 31, 2014.

for undesirables.”<sup>146</sup> Reflecting the rhetoric propagated about the inner city since white flight othered and pathologized the space, outsiders deemed the market only a success if spit-shined and removed of ‘undesirables.’ While the word most obviously points to the homeless population who were often sighted there, given the context of renewal and development in the area, ‘undesirables’ could easily be read as any of the lower-income, African-American residents Atlanta had been alternately trying to contain or eradicate from the city center for years.

Despite these perspectives, for long-term customers of the Curb Market, this era of the market’s history is almost universally remembered as its heyday. When asked when he believed the market’s best and busiest time was, security guard and third-generation customer Gerald Boyd responded,

I would think the ‘70s, because I came here *lots* in the ‘70s. Those were my high school, college days. Always jam-packed. Never was a time when I came to the market that it wasn’t jammed in the ‘70s. Again, to get the steaks cut, however you wanted, to get whatever you needed for your cookout, whether it be fish or meat, the Curb Market was really just the place to come... But yeah, I would say the ‘70s were a time when it was just a hub of activity all the time, a mecca.<sup>147</sup>

Likewise, when customer Nate Ragland looked back on the market during this time, an era that constituted his first trips to the market,

It was just a bustling place. It was a place you wanted to come... It’s always been real friendly. Everybody seemed to know they were in the neighborhood. It’s always had that real neighborhood feel here in this market right here... It was a lot more busier then. People were everywhere.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Jenkins, *Food, Fairs and Farmer’s Markets*, 34.

<sup>147</sup> Gerald Boyd, interview by Katie King, August 8, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, 2014.

<sup>148</sup> Sylvester Sims, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 31, 2014.

Such testimony should not imply that in this sense the market was an abnormality compared to the rest of the neighborhood during these decades. Rather, it functioned as the local culture in miniature, aggregating the greater tensions, anxieties, and retaliations against outside perceptions of violence, vice, and emptiness. Ragland continued to explain about the late 1970s, the years in which he first moved to the city,

Atlanta was off the chain, if you know what that means. Atlanta was just so much energy all over the place. Auburn Avenue was on fire... It's just a place where you knew as soon as you set, as soon as you get off the plane or as soon as you came into the city and saw the skyline of Atlanta there was going to be some goings on going at that time... The thing that drew most of us to Edgewood... the biggest thing was this market right here. We've always made it a hangout, we meet here, eat here, you know. It's always been a focal point.<sup>149</sup>

The interplay between culture, community, and the market can be seen in the general activities surrounding the market during this time as well. For example, when celebrating the Sweet Auburn Festival in the 1970s, a festivity devoted to the neighborhood and community, a whole day took place inside the market, dedicated to it. This interweaving of locale and community within the space serves to illuminate not only the market's importance, but also its vitality. Furthermore, although there has been rumor and speculation over drug activity within the market over the years, it has experienced no violent history other than the racialized violence glimpsed in Chapter 2. Although the space is often maligned as perilous, this history negates the allegations and narratives of an empty or dangerous space.

Throughout these actions, protests and testimonies, the Old Fourth Ward community not only kept a vital structure in tact during a time when much of the city was

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<sup>149</sup> Sylvester Sims, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 31, 2014.

being torn down, but also managed to publicly fight against prolonged injustice being inflicted on the community under the helm of “urban renewal.” Through this conflict, they secured access to fresh, affordable food and a community landmark, all-the-while proving that real people use and live in this space, no matter what city actions say or what the travel literature signifies. “These analyses of class-based struggles in response to state-imposed spatial regimes emphasize how space is constitutive of power... because it ensures ‘invisible’ control over social reproduction of power relations.” By fighting for their community, access to vital nutrients, and for a cherished structure, residents fought this invisible control, all the while making themselves visible in the process.<sup>150</sup>

As witnessed through these decades, and as many residents of Atlanta’s impoverished neighborhoods learned, anti-renewal efforts were not consistently successful throughout the city, or even throughout the neighborhood. Most aptly seen in the removal and clearance of low-income housing throughout the city, very often community outrage held no effect over city planning policies. In this way, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market stands out from the overarching narrative, not only because it fought unfair social perception and the harsh realities of urban renewal, but because it won those fights in many ways. Although the market continued to struggle financially for a number of years, its continuous existence and utility for the local community stands out in a narrative where very few non-business interest spaces were allowed to remain.

Through this process, a culture of resistance was born in the market, one that continues to reside there today. Although it might not take the form of organized protests

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<sup>150</sup> Law and Lawrence-Zuniga, “Locating Culture,” 18.

and petitions as it did in the 1970s and 1980s, small acts of resistance and of pluralization are glimpsed throughout the space: through commerce and interaction, through job creation, as well as through the food sold and consumed.



#### **IV. COMMODIFIED YET ORGANIC INTERNATIONALIZATION**

In so many ways, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market still looks like it used to. Although the building underwent a series of facelifts throughout its tenure, its structural integrity has remained entirely intact, with remodels rarely focusing on the aesthetics of the space. Similarly, you can still buy much of what could be found in the market from its very first day, with traditional southern produce piled high, often too high to see behind it at all, whether it be pre-cut collards, okra, tomatoes or sweet potatoes. Intermixed with the fresh and colorful produce are kaolin, yellow root, and assorted packaged products covered in Asian writing. The four meat counters tell a similar story, housing various pieces and parts of animals that have been historically linked with impoverished southerners. Although such fare is traditionally associated with African Americans, Korean and Vietnamese vendors sell them at the market these days more often than not. Surrounded by restaurants founded on transnational tastes with smells of Africa, France and Britain lingering in the air, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market plays host for cultural interaction and hybridity.

For the better part of the twentieth century, city boosters promoted Atlanta as an international city. But almost entirely, this internationalization of the city has been part of a complex rhetorical push to attract foreign investment or an attempt to commodify and

sell Atlanta as a “different” southern city.<sup>151</sup> “Just as *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady looked north for investment and support in the wake of the Civil War, the city’s newest generation of boosters saw international dollars as the future for Atlanta and promoted the city’s hospitality, cheap labor force, and agreeable business climate.”<sup>152</sup>

Starting in the 1970s and gaining steam throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the demographics of the United States as a whole began to shift. “Black-white conflicts remain the deep-seated, unresolved core of group relations in the United States,” urban sociologist Michael T. Maly explains. “However, after the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, the largest wave of immigrants since the early 1900s entered U.S. cities, largely from Latin America and Asia.”<sup>153</sup> Because this dramatic demographic shift was largely centered in the country’s urban cores, major cities began moving away from the strict racial binaries that had so long dominated city configuration, moving instead towards a structure of complexity. Atlanta especially experienced this phenomenon in full force.

Despite an influx of Jewish, Greek and Cuban immigrants in the mid-twentieth century, as late as 1980 less than one percent of Georgians classified themselves as either non-white or non-black. From rural Georgia to the core of metro-Atlanta, this number barely changed, with almost all city-dwellers residing inside a strict dualistic racial

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<sup>151</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 66.

<sup>152</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 45.

<sup>153</sup> Michael T. Maly, *Beyond Segregation: Multiracial and Multiethnic Neighborhoods in the United States*. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), 29.

system.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, the majority of those who immigrated to the city pre-1970s arrived financially stable enough to largely keep to themselves in small ethnic enclaves, having been middle class and well educated in their home countries.<sup>155</sup> But the number of immigrants grew by leaps and bounds in the years leading up to the millennium, with the Dekalb County population increasing 747 percent between 1980 and 2000.<sup>156</sup> Fulton County, where the market resides, did not experience this level of growth, but there was still a significant uptick in its demographic change.<sup>157</sup> Although these shifts were felt throughout the United States during this time, Atlanta experienced it at much higher rates than the rest of the country: during the 1980s, the number of people within the state who did not speak English inside their home jumped by 113%, the highest of any state in national borders.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 46.

<sup>155</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 45; Dameron, “An International City Too Busy To Hate?,” 46-7.

<sup>156</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 47.

<sup>157</sup> Although Fulton County did not experience the same extreme population shifts Dekalb County has, many of the immigrants that live and work within Fulton County (and within the market) reside in Dekalb, making demographic change in the area harder to track. Furthermore, although foreign-born populations in the area remain low in Fulton County census data, there has still been a significant change. For example, between 2000 and 2010, the American Indian population rose by 49.21%, and the Asian population rose by 107.75%. While the immigration population numbers lag behind other parts of the city, these still represent significant, important changes to the historically African American neighborhood. “Population of Fulton County, Georgia: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Graphs, Quick Facts,” Census Viewer, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://censusviewer.com/county/GA/Fulton>.

<sup>158</sup> Rebecca J. Dameron and Arthur D. Murphy, “An International City Too Busy to Hate? Social and Cultural Change in Atlanta: 1970-1995,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 26.1 (1997): 49.

There were numerous reasons for this demographic overhaul, many of which played out on a national level. Atlanta's economy boomed during the 1980s, largely due to outside investment and development courted by civic leaders. Atlanta's thriving economy brought in many immigrants living throughout the United States to the city.<sup>159</sup> As Atlanta evolved into a "global center of trade," this economic transformation in turn brought "an expansion of the service economy, thus changing the social, economic, and spatial structure."<sup>160</sup> Unlike the immigrant generations preceding them, the newest wave of residents arrived with few financial resources and in search of work, attracted by the proliferation of low-level, service-based jobs. Beyond the city's economic attractiveness, Atlanta became a hub for refugees because of its designation as a resettlement area by private relief agencies. Such agencies drastically impacted the ethno-racial landscape of the city too busy to hate, bringing in evacuees from locales as varied as Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Eastern Europe, and settling them in the same communities scattered throughout Dekalb County.<sup>161</sup>

Although the Old Fourth Ward did not experience as intense an upheaval during this time, the ethno-racial structure of the neighborhood has also been in flux. Going into 2000, census data from Neighborhood Planning Unit M (NPU-M), which consists of the neighborhoods directly surrounding the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, highlighted that

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<sup>159</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 89.

<sup>160</sup> Maly, *Beyond Segregation*, 39.

<sup>161</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 89.

only six percent of the residents thought of themselves as non-black or non-white. Of the remaining 94 percent, well over three fourths of the local population was African American. Although these changes appear to be minor by the percentages, this was a significant uptick in non-binary racial groups in the neighborhood in relation to previous decades. Even so, by 2010 the demographics of the neighborhood had altered again significantly. Respondents were 56 percent African American, 34 percent white, five percent Asian, and another five percent “other,” meaning Native American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, biracial, or another ethnicity.<sup>162</sup> The same census explained that the city as a whole gained 22,763 white residents, 5,142 Asian residents, and 3,095 other residents.<sup>163</sup>

One of most universally heralded outposts of the city’s internationalization is another food emporium, cleverly titled Your Dekalb Farmers Market. A 14,000 square foot “animated monument to a multi-cultural Atlanta,” the farmers’ market sells a wide variety of unique crops and pre-packaged goods under almost 200 different national flags from every corner of the globe, which hang from the open rafters.<sup>164</sup> But as cultural geographer Charles Rutheiser explained,

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<sup>162</sup> “City of Atlanta 2010 Census Summary Report: Neighborhood Planning Unit M,” City of Atlanta Department of Planning and Community Development, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.atlantaga.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=3905>.

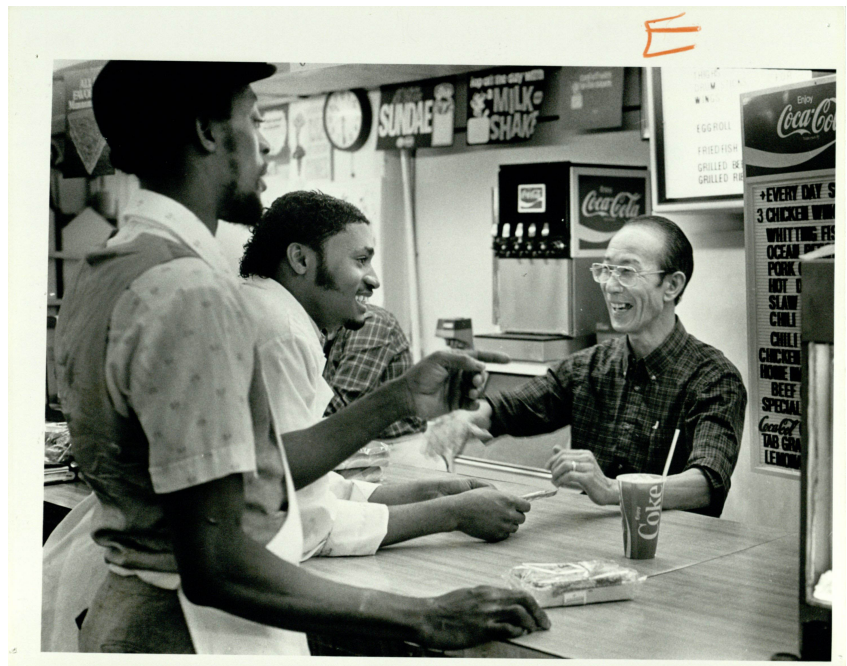
<sup>163</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010,” 2010 Demographic Profile Data, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

<sup>164</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 46.

Both the Dekalb Farmers' Market and the [1996 Olympic] International Village are good examples of the quasi-public domains of commodified spectacle that have become such ubiquitous features of the contemporary metropolitan landscape. They offer up sanitized and secure simulations of diversity and substitute impersonal relations of market exchange for non-spurious intercultural communication and social interaction.<sup>165</sup>

For the Dekalb Farmers' Market, much of clientele is made of up shoppers from all over the world, providing an international service that encourages more than simple spectacle. But far too often, those who visit such spaces as Your Dekalb Farmers' Market when seeking a dose of diversity retreat to the swaths of Atlanta segregation directly after leaving the parking lot.

Similarly, Atlanta boosters and politicians throughout the metropolitan area have embraced cultural diversity through public rhetoric, often in the form of fairs and festivals that only truly serve as economy-generating tools. But for most Atlantans, the émigré population remains hidden from sight when not explicitly sought after.



**Fig. 6.** Walter Smith and Ivan Andrews, who worked at meat counters in the market, speak with vendor Young S. Yi, 1984. AJCP144-011r, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archive. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library.

<sup>165</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 110.

Similarly, the immigrants and refugees that have changed the socio-spatial dynamic of the city drastically in the last four decades have had an extremely limited voice in the city's political and social life.<sup>166</sup> Oftentimes, this invisibility was yet another byproduct of city sprawl; whereas in cities such as New York or San Francisco, immigrant neighborhoods became immediately definable and noticeable, Atlanta's sprawl relegated many different groups to be "spread out over suburban strip malls and apartment complexes, with different ethnic groups sharing the same neighborhoods or juxtaposed with one another." Because of this, "representations of places and claims to space [by immigrant populations] most often go unrecognized by the numerically dominant white and black populations of the metropolitan area."<sup>167</sup> In this manner, spatially, culturally, and politically, foreign populations residing in Atlanta are all too often rendered invisible to those outside the émigré sphere.

But at the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, the international presence is palpable, surrounding the customer through people, language, as well as the products peddled. With a cursory glance, customers' immediately take in the foods long heralded as staples

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<sup>166</sup> Dameron, "An International City Too Busy To Hate?," 48; "In the early 1980s, the areas around Riverdale, south of the airport, became a major site for settling Southeast Asian refugees, particularly Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong. Other Asian and Latin American immigrants settled into the area as well. Now Riverdale boast an elaborate Hindu temple and a Buddhist shrine, along with a considerable number of ethnic groceries, restaurants, and other shops. As with similarly diverse Dekalb County to the east of Atlanta, Clayton civic and business leaders have rhetorically embraced 'cultural diversity,' at least as an economy-generating tool. However, despite a series of fairs and festivals celebrating cultural diversity, as elsewhere in the metro region, immigrants and refugees have a limited voice in the country's political and social life." Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 105.

<sup>167</sup> Dameron, "An International City Too Busy To Hate?," 48.

of the southern diet, with giant stacks of collards and sweet potatoes often overwhelming their view. But upon further inspection, they might be surprised by what they find. Interspersed through the regionally common produce, a number of surprises can be found: aloe vera juice packaged in English and Spanish; an assortment of teas with multiple types of Asian characters on them, including the traditional green tea and tieguantín; even Squid Brand Fish Sauce, a high quality condiment made and packaged in Thailand, essential to Thai and Vietnamese cuisine.

Although these treasures can be found for the immigrant shopper or adventurous native, the Curb Market does not explicitly focus on its international selection of fare. While specific restaurants will often promote their transnational tastes through social media or their personal websites, little-to-no signage in the market heralds this idea. Although the space capitalizes on the business generated by the global foods, it has not reached the rampant commodification of most other “international” spaces in Atlanta. While Your Dekalb Farmers’ Market’s founder created it to function as a commodified space of ethnicity, this evolution occurred organically in the Curb Market, a byproduct of social change rather than a focused creation of it.<sup>168</sup> This does not mean the implications of its multiculturalism have gone unnoticed, though; recently the local press have praised

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<sup>168</sup> To this point, Your Dekalb Farmers Market lies in the outer reaching limits of Atlanta, in a largely industrial space, not closely surrounded by other businesses or homes. The Sweet Auburn Curb Market’s location in a downtown neighborhood with a historically connected community helps to regulate and create change, as it is influenced by the neighborhood rather than constructed in open, vacant space. Similarly, this leads to a less sanitized, coherent specter of “internationalism.”



its diversity of food and culture under headlines such as “Sweet Auburn Curb Market invigorates with global goodies.”<sup>169</sup>

Today, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market employs workers from Venezuela, South Africa, Korea, Switzerland, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Vietnam, just to name a few. Those who populate and work at the market bring with them myriad tastes and lived experiences. Although the foreign-born population of vendors at the market rarely live in the Old Fourth Ward, they come together under the same roof for six days a week, with most working almost 12 hours a day.

Although food is just one part of every multifaceted culture, for immigrant culture it has also become vital and central, often the vanguard of cultural interaction and awareness. As Atlanta immigration and agriculture historian Tore C. Olsson explained,

Both journalists and historians are coming to grips with the social, political, economic, and cultural effects of recent immigrants and are finding the worn debate of the ‘melting pot’ versus ‘multiculturalism’ insufficient for fully explaining present issues... As historians and anthropologists recognize the tremendous cultural importance of food and its place within modern consumer societies, we gain an important tool in analyzing the effects of global migrations. Still, much of today’s southern food writing is cast in a framework of black and white, despite the addition of Latino, Asian, and African cuisines to the southern diet.<sup>170</sup>

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market provides a space in which similar conversations take hold in the day-to-day interactions between those who frequent the market. Beyond

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<sup>169</sup> Lauterbach, Christiane. “Sweet Auburn Curb Market invigorates with global goodies,” *Atlanta Magazine*, March 3, 2014, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/dining-news/sweet-auburn-curb-market-invigorates-with-global-goodies/>.

<sup>170</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 47-8.

tackling hurtful and pervasive stereotypes about the neighborhood as explored in previous chapters, the cultural resistance created by the Curb Market manifests itself in the internationalization of the market as well. Through the food sold and consumed on the premises, as well as the interactions between vendors and customers alike, it provides a space to “give public voice to ‘invisible’ or lesser known segments of the urban social order.”<sup>171</sup> Although such cultures of resistance may be seen in other work the market accomplishes, it provides exposure to different ethnic communities throughout Atlanta that otherwise often go unnoticed.

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<sup>171</sup> Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Locating Culture,” 22.

Additionally, through this pluralizing process, cultures are brought together and into the public eye more readily. Through the simple actions of commerce and daily, routine interaction, various ethnicities and cultures in Atlanta are rendered visible to those within the structured racial binary. This at once provides various cultures with a space to speak out from while creating positive, multicultural interaction. But because this is rarely marketed or specifically capitalized on further than through the sale of food, intercultural interaction remains commodified yet organic, resisting the sanitation that

often consumed spaces of created internationalism. Throughout this entire process, we



**Fig. 7.** Vendor washes produce, 1987. AJCP144-011s, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archive. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library. <http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atlphotos/id/3530>.

can witness the intentional and unintentional ramifications of Atlanta’s immigration influx of the last few decades, as well as how it manifests itself in “the way white and black southerners eat, drink, and think about food and themselves.”<sup>172</sup> Making the invisible people of Atlanta finally visible, cultural othering can continue to be challenged through localized, daily interaction and commerce.

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<sup>172</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 47.

The foreign-born market employees bring with them a wide variety of life experiences. Ralph Sarpong, the owner and operator of Afrodish, locally renowned for their African-style oxtails, is originally from Ghana. He moved out of his own country in pursuit of education, taking banking courses in London before moving to Atlanta to earn a finance degree from Georgia State University. But upon encountering an unstable job market, he and his wife began catering to airport taxi drivers, most of whom are African. From that success, they decided to cook from a permanent space in the Sweet Auburn Curb Market in the 1990s.<sup>173</sup> One booth over at Tilapia Express, a restaurant that specializes in different types of fish but serves everything from fried oyster po boys to wings, Farrah Abdi tells a different story. Abdi was an Ethiopian refugee who went to Seattle before settling in Atlanta. His first experience working with food was at a local Dairy Queen, a position he loved. For a short time afterwards he owned a sandwich shop on Memorial Drive, not far from the market, but when that failed he joined his nephew in opening Tilapia Express almost 15 years ago.<sup>174</sup> The Sweet Auburn Curb Market overflows with stories like these, of people searching for a place and a space in a new culture and country.

Like the rest of the city of Atlanta, the Curb Market operated on a strict racial binary from its inception. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, white flight ravaged the inner core of the city, and the market became almost exclusively African

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<sup>173</sup> Ralph Sarpong, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 21, 2014.

<sup>174</sup> Farrah Abdi, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 21, 2014.

American. But starting in the 1970s and 1980s, the first Asian vendors began popping up. This is not unique to the market, or even to Atlanta: Korean-owned grocery stores in impoverished African American neighborhoods became a common sight throughout America in the last few decades of the century.<sup>175</sup> Today, Asian Americans dominate ownership of both the produce and meat stands. More often than not run by Koreans, typically their workforce is gathered from the Latino and local African American population. Many of these vendors have been there for decades; even the owner of newly founded noir-themed restaurant Grindhouse Burgers even used to work summers at the Curb Market although he lived in Alabama at the time.

Many of these spaces within the market—though by no means all—can function as community outposts in a city whose structure provides no traditional ethnic enclaves. Ralph Sarpong, for example, estimates one quarter of his business comes from Atlanta’s African community, a number lower than in the past due to the influx of Caucasian residents in recent years.<sup>176</sup> Hirut Lemma, the owner and operator of Metro Deli and Soul Food, tends to stick to traditional southern soul food although she is originally from Ethiopia. But recently, Lemma added a falafel plate to her otherwise standard menu, wishing to see some of her own tastes reflected in the fare. The response has been so overwhelmingly positive, she is currently working to create an Ethiopian section of her

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<sup>175</sup> Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 90.

<sup>176</sup> Ralph Sarpong, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 21, 2014.

menu. This is largely in direct response to customers from her native-born country inquiring after it, looking for a taste of home.<sup>177</sup>

These spaces perform as more than just as a focal point of community interaction as well. For example, in February of 2014, in the wake of violent government and civilian clashes in Venezuela, an impromptu rally for freedom formed outside Arepa Mia. The small restaurant, which peddles Venezuelan street food, had only opened shortly before. Lis Hernandez, owner and chef, grew up helping her mother sell the corn flour flatbreads on the streets of her home county that they had previously made at home. In the short time the restaurant had been open, it became so well known throughout Atlanta's South American community that it became a cultural hub important enough for a rally to take place. According to Market Manager Pamela Joiner, "the whole Venezuelan community [in the city] decided to come to Arepa Mia."<sup>178</sup> Although the Venezuelan strife was not considered culturally important by Atlanta as a whole or covered by local media, South Americans from across the city were able to meet and share their feelings, both to each other and the community surrounding them. The Sweet Auburn Curb Market serves to reveal and grant space to otherwise hidden cultures in Atlanta through the everyday interactions between customers and vendors alike.

Although the city of Atlanta remains extremely segregated between the distinctions of black, white, and "other," the racial harmony and stability Atlanta has long

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Pamela Joiner, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, March 14, 2014.

searched for can be found in small, personal doses at the market. Vendor-based, non-supermarket food emporiums “incorporate patterns of community and exchange that feed us deeply.”<sup>179</sup> And as the Curb Market continues to do so, boundaries created through motivations for stability are broken to make way for a more human, accepting, truly integrated society. Rather than instituting change from above as Atlanta has historically sought to do, within the market change occurs from the ground up, revealing the invisible and placing people in direct contact with one another. Working as a microcosm for positive change, the market is a space in which this type of work can happen more readily than in other spaces, as it “require[s] no purchase to participate,” and the regularity with which people return “makes [it] more intimate and socially complex than other public events.”<sup>180</sup> These factors, combined with the market’s diverse vendor and customer base, allow it to become the perfect space in which to participate in multicultural interaction, bringing dissimilar groups together in a meaningful, largely unplanned way.

Furthermore, this diversity can be glimpsed in the food as well as in the community of customers drawn to it. As historian Andrew Heinze has explained in his work on European Jews in America, food often works as a “bridge between cultures.”<sup>181</sup> Sweet Auburn BBQ creates one-of-a-kind barbeque, traditionally a classic southern staple, while marketing themselves with a historically African American neighborhood’s name. Run by local food entrepreneur Howard Hsu, the restaurant stand creates barbeque

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<sup>179</sup> Robinson and Hartenfeld, *The Farmers’ Market Book*, 1-2.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 166.

<sup>181</sup> Qtd. in Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 55.



with “a mix of French style, Asian spice, and Mexican panache... so that you can employ your ‘Visa’ without ever leaving downtown.”<sup>182</sup> Sweet Auburn BBQ’s own website boasts, “items on the menu such as pimento cheese wontons or coconut lemongrass ribs demonstrate the perfect marriage of traditional and innovative styles that Sweet Auburn Barbecue has to offer.”<sup>183</sup>

Similarly, transnational blending of tastes can be found in two of the market’s most recent additions: Panbury’s Double Crust Pies and Le Metro Creperie. The former serves the traditional British pies the owners grew up with in their home country of South Africa, offering a steak and stout hand pie, which scrumptiously includes a special Guinness sauce. Next to such conventional fare lies a smattering of hand pies that have southern roots infused into them, including the Country Chicken Pie, Cajun Chicken Gumbo Pie, and the Southern Breakfast Pie. Le Metro Creperie boasts similar distillation tactics: among the traditional Parisian crepes lies the “Perfect Pimento” on the menu, featuring homemade Pimento cheese. “As Atlanta lost its reputation as a city cast solely in black and white, ethnic food became the vanguard of cultural interaction, increasingly blurring the lines between foreign and native cultures and cuisines.”<sup>184</sup> This increase in cultural interaction and awareness is perpetuated through the market, rendering the invisible visible through the creation and purchasing of food.

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<sup>182</sup> “Pitmasters: Sweet Auburn BBQ,” *The Curb Market*, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.thecurbmarket.com/explore-the-market/sweet-auburn-bbq>.

<sup>183</sup> “About Us,” Sweet Auburn BBQ. *Sweet Auburn BBQ*. <http://sweetauburnbbq.com/about-us/>.

<sup>184</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 56.

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market is not alone in this cultural blending of cuisines. As immigration historian Donna Gabaccia has explained in her work examining the repercussions of ethnic food *We Are What We Eat*, immigrants who provide for themselves by feeding those of their own culture—called “ethnic enclave businesses”—are “provided a rather fragile financial foundation... The unpredictability inherent in enclave markets repeatedly encouraged small businesses to look father afield, beyond the boundaries of ethnic communities, for a wider market of more diverse consumers.”<sup>185</sup> Many times, this inclusion was tailored directly towards native southerners, as food entrepreneurs sought to diversify their business in order to seek financial stability.<sup>186</sup> At the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, a local and often historic consumer base was already in place, a pillar of the market that has made it so attractive to new and burgeoning businesses. Through these restaurants, they have been provided an opportunity to feed their own communities while reaching new customers and cultures alike.

As urban sociologist Michael T. Maly argues, the wealth of scholarship on segregation patterns and the institutionalized forces behind them, while valid and extremely important, can often have a defeatist tint to it, leading readers “to believe that individuals are powerless to effect change and work toward breaking down the color line.”<sup>187</sup> But by focusing on individual, localized sites of cultural and ethnic pluralization,

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<sup>185</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>186</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 54-5.

<sup>187</sup> Maly, *Beyond Segregation*, 2.

individual agency against institutional mythmaking and segregation comes vividly to light. Arguably more important in a culture of rapidly changing social tides, reverse white flight and high racial tension, the microcosm of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market highlights that integration is not a lost cause, “neither inevitable nor universal.”<sup>188</sup> Rather it is something that can be created and maintained through individualized action and interaction, whether over a meal or a cash register. In a market that has received and distilled the social tides of Atlanta for almost a century, the narrative of internationalization “undermines the long-held popular interpretation of southern culture as reactionary, stagnant, and resistant to change. The interaction of native and foreign cultures in the last decades of the twentieth century was less of a ‘clash’ than a slow intermingling that melded the exotic with the ‘down home.’”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>189</sup> Olsson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market,” 56.



**Fig. 8.** Interior of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, 1994. AJCP310-046g, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library.

As we move into the twenty-first century, such integration does not only stem from the internationalization of Atlanta, and by proxy, the market. The social and racial demographics of Atlanta are currently in a state of rapid flux: moving into the present moment, gentrification is taking hold of the city at a rapid pace. The Old Fourth Ward is in many ways considered ground zero of such upheaval, with newly erected condos dotting the still depressed landscape. It is the repercussions of such change that we turn to in Chapter 5.

## V. GENTRIFICATION OF THE MARKET AND OF THE CITY

Throughout the United States, gentrification has become one of the most controversial issues surrounding city growth and change. Inner city revitalization efforts have collided with a suburban millennial expatriation to create a phenomenon often causally called “reverse white flight.” Affluent, typically white citizens have begun to repopulate the long-neglected urban cores of the country. In Atlanta, this phenomenon has reached new heights.

Atlanta is often called one of the most rapidly gentrifying cities in America.<sup>190</sup> Recently the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland gave the city a gentrification rate of 31 percent, indicating the percentage of low-income tracts of land that have undergone significant change, making it the sixth most gentrified city in the country as of 2007.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Although statistical research puts a handful of cities before Atlanta as more gentrified, the city’s wholesale clearance of its slums and public housing throughout the 1990s and 2000s has elevated this topic within the southern city. Couple with vast revitalization plans stemming from the 1996 Olympics, gentrification has been more government incentivized than in other locales. Upcoming documentary *The Atlanta Way* is a prime example of how these tensions have settled over the city in a different way than in other cities.

<sup>191</sup> Zak Cheney-Rice, “These 7 Cities Expose Exactly What Gentrification is Doing to America,” *IdentitiesMic*, October 22, 2014, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://mic.com/articles/102004/these-7-cities-expose-exactly-what-gentrification-is-doing-to-america> , [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/07/most-gentrified-cities\\_n\\_4234239.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/07/most-gentrified-cities_n_4234239.html).

No matter the exact figures, gentrification ran so rampant in the 1990s (largely because of the intense revitalization efforts surrounding preparation for the 1996 Olympics)<sup>192</sup> the city was forced into the creation of a Gentrification Task Force in 2000 helmed by the city council.<sup>193</sup> Old Fourth Ward is often cited for being ground zero of Atlanta's intense gentrification by local and national media alike.<sup>194</sup> One study conducted to examine the effects of gentrification on voter turn out in local politics found the Old Fourth Ward had a change rate of .799, looking at a variety of factors including rent, housing values, and poverty levels.<sup>195</sup> Although a vast amount of buildings still stand empty, visibly decaying throughout the neighborhood, they stand in stark contrast to the towering and expansive

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<sup>192</sup> “Atlanta provides a demonstration project of contemporary practices of urban revitalization that are more concerned with the artful design of secure, simulated, and resegregated environments – Jim Crow in twenty-first-century drag – than in confronting the more deep-rooted and intractable issues of poverty, unemployment, crime, and racism. Indeed, in many ways, Atlanta’s Olympic preparations constitute no more than a not so ingenious array of facades, props, smoke and mirrors designed to present the image of a healthy, vital, integrated city.” Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 6.

<sup>193</sup> H. Gibbs Knotts and Moshe Haspel, “Impact of Gentrification on Voter Turn Out,” *Social Science Quarterly* 87.1 (March 2006): 113.

<sup>194</sup> Shalia Dewan, “Gentrification Changing Face of New Atlanta,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/11/national/11atlanta.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/11/national/11atlanta.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&); Eubanks, “10 Reasons to Love Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward,” *National Geographic*, June 30, 2014, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2014/06/30/10-reasons-to-love-atlantas-old-fourth-ward/>; “Revitalizing Neighborhoods: Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward,” *Metro Jacksonville*, October 11, 2012, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2012-oct-revitalizing-neighborhoods-atlantas-old-fourth-ward>; Max Blau, “Can anyone stop Atlanta’s rapid gentrification?,” February 3, 2015, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://clatl.com/freshloaf/archives/2015/02/03/can-anyone-stop-atlantas-rapid-gentrification>.

<sup>195</sup> Knotts and Haspel, “Voter Turn Out,” 118.

lofts that now cover tracts throughout the area. Likewise, within the last decade, the neighborhood has become a well-known restaurant and entertainment district, featuring bars with names such as Sound Table, Joystick Gamebar, and Sister Louisa's Church of the Living Room and Ping Pong Emporium.

The Sweet Auburn Curb Market is only four blocks away from Sister Louisa's, separated by a highway overpass, a home for low-income senior citizens, as well as a number of trendy, hip restaurants. Steady gentrification has become readily apparent inside the market as well; while the meat and produce stands continue to function as they have for many decades, largely run by and catering to the same people who have been there for years, more affluent customers and restaurants that cater to more sundry tastes also inhabit the space. Beginning with the opening of Grindhouse Killer Burgers in 2008, a horde of new, artisanal restaurants flooded the space, including Bell Street Burritos, YumYiggity Hot Dogs, Miss D's New Orleans Pralines and Popcorn, and Rawesome Juicery, among a number of others.

But with gentrification becoming a weighty buzzword in recent history, many of the nuances of problems and progress within such change often remain overlooked. As H. Gibbs Knotts and Moshe Haspel succinctly explained in *Social Science Quarterly*,

To some, gentrification epitomizes needed revitalization in the inner city, while to others gentrification represents destruction of longstanding communities. Critics of gentrification are particularly troubled by fears that existing residents on fixed incomes may be pushed out by higher housing costs, increased property taxes, and higher monthly rents. Gentrification can lead to racial tension if residents of one ethnic group displace longstanding residents of another group.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Knotts and Haspel, "Voter Turn Out," 110.

Furthermore, all too often gentrification is viewed only through the lens of race, and is relegated to the binary of either good or bad, positive or destructive. As “different people within gentrifying contexts have different perspectives on its benefits and harms, and in some cases residents see both positive and negative aspects at once,” many scholars within recent years have begun asking for a “more complex and ambivalent normative assessment” of the phenomenon.<sup>197</sup> Within such complexities, we can view the myriad repercussions of gentrification, as well as how they interact with and influence each other.

That by no means should obfuscate the very real conflicts that often accompany gentrification, racial and otherwise. Extreme tension resulting from displaced groups has arisen in the city of Atlanta. In 1996 in the nearby neighborhood of Kirkwood, a white gay couple won a lawsuit against their neighbors for allegedly running a crack house. In the aftermath of the ruling, the neighborhood rose up against the couple, and they received death threats and a car vandalization. Pinpointing racial differences and sexual preference as the breaking point, a well-distributed flyer in the area at the time read: “Save Our Neighborhood. If you are concerned about the ‘white takeover’ of

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<sup>197</sup> Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, “‘Positive’ Gentrification, Social Control, and the ‘Right to the City’ in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place,” (paper presented at the Conference “Neighbourhood Restructuring & Resident Relocation: Context, Choice, and Consequence,” Delft University of Technology/OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment, Delft, the Netherlands, November 2-5, 2010.



Kirkwood... Come meet to discuss how we can put an end to the homosexual takeover of our community. Kirkwood concerned black neighbors.”<sup>198</sup>

However, for a variety of reasons, such tension has been minimized in the Old Fourth Ward. Although the racial and socioeconomic make-up of the neighborhood changed dramatically over the last two decades, as explored in the last chapter, long-time local residents became actively involved in the Historic District Development Corporation (HDDC), a development corporation based on revitalization efforts of the area. This participation has positively impacted the community as the HDDC now owns and rents out most of the historic rehabilitation housing. Furthermore, there are tax breaks available for low-income seniors, as well as historic preservation incentives that keep pre-renovation property taxes intact for nine-years.<sup>199</sup> Such active measures have allowed many long-term residents to keep their homes or remain in the neighborhood, and “provides low-income residents with some relief against rapidly escalating property taxes in a gentrifying neighborhood.”<sup>200</sup>

What is much harder to define within the context of gentrification is one of the largest arguments against it: as neighborhood demographics change, the character and culture of the neighborhood changes in tandem, leaving the streets a sanitized and

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<sup>198</sup> Qtd. in Knotts and Haspel, “Voter Turn Out,” 117-118.

<sup>199</sup> “Historic District Development Corporation,” *Housing Facts & Findings* 3.2, Fannie Mae Foundation, [http://www.knowledgeplex.org/kp/text\\_document\\_summary/article/refiles/hff\\_0302\\_sidebar1.html](http://www.knowledgeplex.org/kp/text_document_summary/article/refiles/hff_0302_sidebar1.html).

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

palatable version of their former self. From these changes, a new neighborhood identity forms, with various groups within the neighborhood viewing the alterations as improvement, while others view it as sterilization.<sup>201</sup>

Within these rapidly changing demographics and social forces, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market remained a stalwart point in the local community, both to newcomers and those who had been shopping there since they were little. While an organic food stand and a juicery are often synonyms for impending gentrification to an almost comic degree, their presence has not taken the usual toll of displacement. Going into the 1990s, although the market was heavily patronized by the local community, it was financially struggling with only 13 of the market's 40 stands occupied. Then-market manager Karl Gustafson told the local media in 1996, "We've got an established customer base. It's largely African American and on some type of government assistance. This market cannot survive on that base."<sup>202</sup>

During this same time, the market had been a focal point of outrage in the greater-Atlanta area. Due to a 3.5 million dollar federal grant designated for community development by the Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program in 1986,

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<sup>201</sup> Barbara Harris Combs, "The Ties that Bind: The Role of Place in Racial Identity Formation, Social Cohesion, Accord, and Discord in Two Historic, Black Gentrifying Atlanta Neighborhoods," Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2010, [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology\\_diss/50](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology_diss/50), 37.

<sup>202</sup> Charmange Hleton, "Struggling market a wise investment?", *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 23, 1996.

the Curb Market remodeled in the 1980s.<sup>203</sup> But within a few short years, the market began declining again, prompting an additional 7 million dollar federal loan in 1993. Three years later, the city continued to grant loans to the market through the Empowerment Zone Program, which lent funds to seriously distressed rural and urban communities in order to stimulate economic growth and improve standards of living.<sup>204</sup> Because HUD viewed the Curb Market as a job creator and therefore economically viable, they designated it as a means of empowerment for the community. As federal funds poured into the space, it became apparent that the citizens of greater Atlanta did not feel the same way. Vocal critics arose throughout the 1990s, asserting the city continued to throw good money after bad.<sup>205</sup> *Atlanta Journal Constitution* articles about the Curb Market offered headlines such as “Sweet Auburn’s sourness” and “Struggling market a wise investment?”

Today, there is only a single booth left unfilled in the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, one that is being intentionally left empty until market management can locate someone willing to fill it with the only things the market doesn’t have right now: the day-to-day pre-packaged necessities found at a grocery store, like cat litter and cereal. While the hallmarks of gentrification line the inside of the market, the vast majority of those interviewed see these changes as for the best.

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<sup>203</sup> Pat Burson, “Sweet Auburn’s sourness: how to spend \$3.5 million,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, December 3, 1987.

<sup>204</sup> Helton, “Struggling market a wise investment?”

<sup>205</sup> Charmange Helton, “Sweet Auburn’s new vendors may put it back in the market,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 23, 1996.

As Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph found, it is not always an easy process to break racial or socioeconomic barriers and tear down stereotypes, but one of the best ways to move past them is by integrating and promoting public spaces everyone has access to. “Cultivating and strengthening organizational ‘places’ that provide opportunities for both provision and shared use... may diversify the kinds of spaces available to residents, integrate their activities into the broader community, and provide a range of neutral grounds on which to find some common ground—or greater comfort in difference.”<sup>206</sup>

All of this, which has been called “intelligent gentrification” by *National Geographic*, has had a distinct impact on the community, one that differs largely from the typical urban renewal tales.<sup>207</sup> These factors have converged within the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, bringing a fresh crop of customers with the new restaurants in addition to the socioeconomic overhaul to the area. Grady Hospital employees, Georgia State University students, and newly local residents make up more of the customer base with each passing year. But not only were demographic changes within the market a byproduct of fluctuating local social tides; by 2010, local media hailed the market as “a catalyst for

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<sup>206</sup> Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, “‘Positive’ Gentrification, Social Control, and the ‘Right to the City’ in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place,” (paper presented at the Conference “Neighbourhood Restructuring & Resident Relocation: Context, Choice, and Consequence,” Delft University of Technology/OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment, Delft, the Netherlands, November 2-5, 2010.

<sup>207</sup> Caroline Eubanks, “10 Reasons To Love Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward,” *National Geographic*, June 30, 2014, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2014/06/30/10-reasons-to-love-atlantas-old-fourth-ward/>.

the redevelopment of Downtown’s Auburn Avenue,” with Grindhouse Killer Burgers—the first in an onslaught of new restaurants—drawing “more epicurean crowds to the building.”<sup>208</sup> During this time *Atlanta Magazine* gushed that the new crop of restaurants brought “much-needed ethnic and health-minded diversity to the scene.”<sup>209</sup> Such statements overlook the variety of foods that were accessible long before Grindhouse Burgers and Bell Street Burritos took over stands, rhetorically looking down upon those who were previously in the space. Nonetheless, it does signal a new era by a writer who shopped at the market for decades previously.<sup>210</sup>

At a glance, such rhetoric would insinuate the first tides of complete overhaul, with the dismissal of the long-term vendors that do not bring in “epicurean crowds” at its heels. But as market manager Pamela Joiner has assured the community, reiterating the sentiment in interviews and various conversations, there is no desire from within the market to oust the vendors and customers who have supported it for so long. Rather she seeks to diversify the offerings as well as the crowds, racially as well as socioeconomically, to allow it to function as a space for all. Because of this push, the Curb Market’s demographics have changed significantly over the last decade, although

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<sup>208</sup> Christiane Lauterbach, “Discovery: Bell Street Burritos,” *Atlanta Magazine*, November 1, 2010.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, Christiane Lauterbach is a long-time customer of the market. She began shopping there in the 1970s because of their selection of food that could not be found anywhere else in the city. Although she spoke highly of the market at the time and in retrospect, her writing indicates a different tone for the market in the 2000s and 2010s.

the African American, Old Fourth Ward community remains a large percentage of its customer-base.

But interspersed with these customers are ones of a new variety, representing countless ethnicities, cultures and economic backgrounds that speak to the changes Atlanta as a whole as undergone in recent years. With the market attracting close to 1500 people a day, diverse patrons sit in close quarters at the family-style tables that proliferate, or make small talk waiting to be served amid the disorganization of the produce stands and meat counters. The city of Atlanta remains segregated; the racial harmony and stability Atlanta has so long searched for can be found in small, personal doses through these individual actions and interactions.

This does not mean that vendors have not left due to changes in the market. Rather, it denotes no business has been forced out due to price hikes or impetuses to diversify in the last few decades. Although there were hikes in rent and storage space costs after the 1974 renovation, in part to help pay for the work done, this has not be an issue as the Old Fourth Ward began gentrifying. That being said, many vendors abandoned their leases in the 2000s, because of the anticipation of gentrification: when Atlanta tore down all the nearby housing projects as part of an effort to create mixed-income housing, many vendors vacated, assuming their customer base would leave with demolition process.<sup>211</sup>

Although this had a definite effect on the market, it was not a wholesale overhaul, as many feared it would be. Today, one of the largest groups of customers at the market

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<sup>211</sup> Pam Joiner, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, March 14, 2014.

hails from the nearby low-income senior citizen high-rises. Utilizing the Curb Market as their only source of grocery shopping, most nearby senior homes sponsor weekly trips to the Curb Market as many of their residents have been shopping there since their childhood. Furthermore, almost every customer interviewed at the market grew up in the once nearby Grady Homes, often affectionately referring to themselves as “Grady Babies.” While many no longer live in the Old Fourth Ward area, they make special trips into the neighborhood to shop at the market they grew up in.<sup>212</sup>

The intercultural interactions brought out by the market do not neutralize the negative effects of city planning policies and evacuations of past businesses. Nevertheless, they have a profound impact on the community they occur in. These individualized actions alleviate prejudicial attitudes by placing previously unfamiliar people within the same context. The more contact dissimilar people have with members of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, “the greater the chance of minimizing mistrust, fear, or suspicion among groups.”<sup>213</sup> Well-designed gentrification that retains integration achieves this extremely well. As political scientist Ebenezer O. Aka, Jr. asserts, “Adults that are moving into the neighborhood and the children raised there typically engage in pro-urbanism, and [gentrification] can have culturally positive

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<sup>212</sup> Alton Evans, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 8, 2014; Michael Young, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 16, 2014; Bennie Rivers, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 8, 2014; among others. Additionally, although not necessarily in an official interview, in having various conversations with customers throughout the market over the course of a summer many expressed this idea to me.

<sup>213</sup> Maly, *Beyond Segregation*, 6.

ramifications such as greater tolerance of other cultures.”<sup>214</sup> Public spaces play a very important role in this as well.

‘A public space well designed and well managed, the breastplate of daily life can take part, which allows us to see others as a complete population. Seeing people different from oneself meet the same scenario similarly creates a temporary bond.’ The public space, if properly organized, if offers the possibility of social communion because we can look away from the daily routine and, therefore, increase our disposition towards others.<sup>215</sup>

By allowing people the physical space to take part in a communal activity, they are placed at once both inside and outside of their comfort zone, forced to see others and themselves in a new light.

Equally important to this equation is how long-time customers, tenants and residents, perceive such shifts in the market. Allowing the historic landmark to remain preserved through the process of gentrification adds weight and importance, as it is an integral part of the community. As sociologist Barbara Combs explained,

Place attachment is the practice and affective ties which bond people to places, and amidst a changing urban landscape, gaining an understanding of the factors that influence attachment in black gentrifying neighborhoods can aid in building strong communities that both preserve African American heritage and are respecting of diversity.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ebenezer O. Aka, Jr., “Gentrification and Socioeconomic Impacts of Neighborhood Integration and Diversification in Atlanta, Georgia,” *National Social Science Journal* 35 (2010): 2.

<sup>215</sup> Amin, Ash. "Collective culture and urban public space." *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action* 12.1 (2008): 5-24.

<sup>216</sup> Barbara Harris Combs, “The Ties that Bind: The Role of Place in Racial Identity Formation, Social Cohesion, Accord, and Discord in Two Historic, Black Gentrifying Atlanta Neighborhoods,” Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2010, [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology\\_diss/50](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology_diss/50), 165.



By monetarily revitalizing a landmark institution that remains vital to the community, longstanding members of the community are typically more accepting as their heritage and memory remain tied up in it, even as it becomes more and more promoted as a site of tourism. And while the market plays host to numerous different businesses and culinary influences that were not always part of its culture, by and large, customers are overwhelmingly happy with the changes they've seen.

Latina Scott, an eight-year employee of the market who grew up patronizing the space, believes the changes have been overwhelmingly positive, despite the transformations being significant.

It just used to be like one little building that just—not so much that was in that's in here now, from the space size that they had to enlarge [in regards to the renovations]. In here, the people are different. All of the original people that were here when I was here [as a child], a lot of them are gone, either gone or sold their business or passed on... It's just really changed a whole lot from what it used to be. It's more like upgrading as the years go, compared to what it used to be, just plain solid this is where you come. Now you get a feeling when you come in, you get to see a whole lot more. You get to meet a whole lot of new people. And we have a whole lot of new things that's coming in now... It's been exciting. It's been very exciting... It's something that needed to be done. With the construction it looks very nice now. I love it now. It's something that will bring more to Atlanta than it's been a historic place.<sup>217</sup>

Some, such as local resident Sylvester Sims, advocate for more change.<sup>218</sup> As Curb Market security guard and third generation customer Gerald Boyd summed up, “It is the same place that it used to be, although not. It's still that same place, but quite different now.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Latina Scott, interviewed by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, July 29, 2014.

<sup>218</sup> Sylvester Sims, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 1, 2014.

<sup>219</sup> Gerald Boyd, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, August 5, 2014.

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All of this alleviate the problems Atlanta's gentrification caused for many. Even what is thought of as "positive gentrification' also generate[s] a set of fundamental tensions—between integration and exclusion, use value and exchange value, appropriation and control, poverty and development—that play out in particular, concrete ways on the ground."<sup>220</sup> While the gentrification and the diversification of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market brought a newly integrated customer-base to the space, it also highlighted one of Atlanta's largest ongoing problems: income inequality. Currently, the city is home to the highest rate of income inequality in the country. As of 2010 census data, 13.7 percent of Atlanta residents live on less than \$10,000 a year, with 6.8 percent earning between \$10,000 and \$14,999.<sup>221</sup> All the while the city is becoming more and more known nationally as an affluent hub of technological innovation.

There are few places in the city where this stark disparity is more apparent than directly surrounding the Curb Market. "You don't have to be a statistician or policy analyst to understand there's a huge gap between Atlanta's have and have-nots," wrote *Atlanta Magazine's* Rebecca Burns in February of 2014. "Just walk down Edgewood

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<sup>220</sup> Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, "'Positive' Gentrification, Social Control, and the 'Right to the City' in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place," (paper presented at the Conference "Neighbourhood Restructuring & Resident Relocation: Context, Choice, and Consequence," Delft University of Technology/OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment, Delft, the Netherlands, November 2-5, 2010.

<sup>221</sup> Alan Berube, "All Cities Are Not Created Unequal," Brookings Institute's Metropolitan Opportunity Series, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/02/cities-unequal-berube>.

Avenue [where the Curb Market is located] on any given evening; you will find one group of people sleeping on the sidewalks of the Downtown Connector underpass and another paying \$20 for parking spots in an empty lot near a bar called Church.”<sup>222</sup> This disparity is easily witnessed within the market itself. Long-established, often elderly residents of the area make up a huge section of the market’s patrons, often purchasing meat and produce with government subsidized EBT. But more and more of the market’s main clientele comes from Grady Hospital employees and other downtown businesspeople, overtaking the space during the lunch rush with clip on nametags often accompanied by designer handbags. Although there are visibly obvious disparities, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market is also helping to bridge that gap through its creation of jobs, as well as by making fresh food more affordable to low-income residents.

Since Grindhouse Killer Burgers emerged as a vanguard of a new restaurant standard in 2009, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market has been hailed across the board as a small business incubator. Most of the newly incorporated businesses from the last five years have thrived, with a number opening in other locations throughout the city. Grindhouse, for example, just opened its fourth location in half a decade in Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. A number of factors contribute to these small business success stories, including extremely low overhead and a preexisting customer base. Market staff seeks to increase such benefits by offering three months of free rent to

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<sup>222</sup> Rebecca Burns, “Atlanta: Highest rate of income inequality in the U.S.,” *Atlanta Magazine*, February 21, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/agenda/2014/02/21/atlanta-highest-rate-of-income-inequality-in-the-us>.

new vendors, as well as in-house security and business support.<sup>223</sup> There is currently a waiting list for restaurants that would like to become part of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market community.<sup>224</sup>

The market remains a lucrative asset to the Old Fourth Ward and Downtown neighborhoods. Nevertheless, according to general manager Pamela Joiner, it currently holds a five million dollar debt leftover from two-decade-old federal loans. It is only economically “surviving” rather than “thriving.” Although exact figures are hard to estimate as each business oversees their own employment, the market provides jobs for at least 130 people, with numbers much higher during the holidays. Many locals believe the Curb Market’s chief contribution to the city is as a job creator. “I think that’s one of its greatest services,” Joiner said in an interview. “[providing] employment for people who live in and around the area.”<sup>225</sup>

As the market expands into an economically and racially diverse space, managerial efforts continue to promote and provide for the long-term, lower-income residents of Downtown, Sweet Auburn, Old Fourth Ward, and Cabbagetown. The market provides free, healthy cooking demonstrations at least once a month that seek to educate shoppers who use the market as their regular grocery store. Additionally, beginning in the

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<sup>223</sup> Jeanne Bonner, “Sweet Auburn Curb Market viewed as business incubator,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, December 10, 2010, accessed April 26, 2014, <http://www.ajc.com/news/business/sweet-auburn-curb-market-viewed-as-business-incuba/nQnzB/>.

<sup>224</sup> Pam Joiner, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, March 14, 2014.

<sup>225</sup> Pam Joiner, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, March 14, 2014.

spring of 2014, the space started to host a weekly farmers' market. The program promotes buying locally while providing a healthy shopping option in an area where there are few similar options. Through a non-profit called Wholesome Wave, the market is now licensed to double any EBT dollar spent at the markets' market, allowing impoverished customers to purchase twice as much.<sup>226</sup>

As the Sweet Auburn Curb Market lies directly in one of Atlanta's many food deserts, such decisions take on heightened significance.<sup>227</sup> Atlanta as a whole has the third highest rate of food deserts in the United States, behind New Orleans and Chicago. There is not a single corporate grocery store in Downtown, Sweet Auburn, Old Fourth Ward, or Cabbagetown, and transit problems complicate this lack of access to fresh food. Atlanta's food deserts remain products of "low population density combined with a lack of comprehensive public transit[, meaning] that many people simply cannot get to places where fresh food is available."<sup>228</sup> The Sweet Auburn Curb Market is attempting to directly combat this problem. While fresh and prepared food are in abundance at the market, other day-to-day necessities cannot be purchased there currently, from diapers to cat litter to cake mix. Management is in the process of renovating a large vacant space—the only space presently left unoccupied in the market—in the hope of bringing in a

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Although the Sweet Auburn Curb Market provides fresh food to the local community, it is the only fresh food retailer in the area. No full service grocery stores remain in the neighborhood.

<sup>228</sup> Rebecca Burns, "Stranded in Atlanta's Food Deserts," *Atlanta Magazine*, March 3, 2014, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/features/2014/03/03/stranded-in-atlantas-food-deserts>.

general grocery vendor. While the Curb Market functions as a grocery store to numerous hyper-local residents, Joiner believes there are 23,000 underserved people living within “shopping distance,” and seeks to provide a fully functional grocery space for them all.<sup>229</sup>

Although the Curb Market occasionally internalized racist attitudes of the city as a whole in previous years, in the last decade it has served to bring these once alienated people together under the auspices of changing demographics and redevelopment. The positive effects of gentrification by no means take place in a void, carrying with them displacement and price hikes. But while such issues continue to plague the Old Fourth Ward, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market continues to meet these problems head on, grappling with them as they go.

While it struggles to overcome the problems of the city as a whole, the market has become recognized as emblematic of the city on a national level. In 2014, *USA Today* named the market one of the best in the world, citing “how reflective [it is] of the local region.”<sup>230</sup> Likewise, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the establishment a community asset in their 2012 report on the revitalization efforts on Sweet Auburn as a whole, asserting, “The Curb Market celebrates local agriculture, the

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<sup>229</sup> Pam Joiner, interview by Katie King, Sweet Auburn Curb Market, March 14, 2014.

<sup>230</sup> Meredith Witman, “Best food markets around the world,” *USA Today*, October 5, 2013, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/2013/10/05/worlds-best-food-markets/2922967/>.

history of the Sweet Auburn neighborhood, and the diversity of the city. It serves as a cross section of those who live and work in Atlanta.”<sup>231</sup>

The market remains in contact with the long-term, historic residents of the neighborhood and continues the long-standing tradition of African American foodways within the space, thereby effectively retaining a conversation with the past. All the while, it has once again become an economically viable space by incorporating transnational tastes onto its menus and into its demographics, capitalizing on and simultaneously fostering demographic change. By doing so, the market creates both conversations and meals that expose customers to a new dialogue that breaks the traditional binary that long dominated both the market and the city as a whole. Nevertheless, it also carries with it problems that continue to afflict Atlanta, such as income inequality and the dire need for accessible, healthy food. The Curb Market as a cultural microcosm highlights the positive changes that can come from urban renewal, showcasing an ethnically diverse and mix-income population while continuing to ask question about what such changes mean as well as their repercussions. As Atlanta continues to evolve, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market will be right there with it, with arepas, burgers, and collard greens providing the ingredients for a new place narrative.

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<sup>231</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation: Main Street, *Assessment Report: Sweet Auburn*, by Teresa Lynch, (Washington, D.C.: National Trust Main Street Center, 2012), 14-15.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout the last five chapters, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market and its history has been observed and interrogated through the lens of contested space. By doing accomplishing this, patterns of resistance against a dominant narrative become illuminated. When glimpsing at the market today, there is a wealth of knowledge to be found: in a manner that resembles the original space in many ways, otherwise socially alienated customers, vendors, and products integrate under the same roof. Consumers from various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds come together at the family-style tables that proliferate throughout the market, meeting of artisanal crepes, kale salads, Afro-Caribbean fare, soul food and Venezuelan arepas. Through its history, fare and the people who populate both sides of the counter, the Sweet Auburn Curb Market stands as both a monument to and a reflection of the social issues and ethnic complexities of downtown Atlanta. Through the presentation of a diverse array of cultures, the market provides a space for cultural understand and interaction, allowing for a newfound ethnic and economic pluralism.

And while all of this is accomplished, this should not insinuate the market is a utopian space by any means, nor has it even been. While the space inside the market and the actions that have historically (and continue to) take place in that space directly challenge various narratives and policies the city of Atlanta has placed in the inner-city



neighborhood, that does not mean it has not fallen prey to the social tides that dominated the rest of the city. Rather, it served as a space to react against it in various ways, although to various ends.

Through the process of oral history and archival work I have striven to tell the story that those inside the market would like to be told, their voices having been silenced by city politics and narratives for far too long. With the tenants of activist scholarship in mind, which ensures mutual engagement within a community and eschews false narratives of complete objectivity, I sought above all else to present a narrative that the community would tell about itself, never resorting to academic speculation, although within the narrative I present there is certainly room for it. Rather, I chose to tell the story that was presented to me, one of hard work, food, and a community resource. I felt this focus on community engagement and point of view was especially important in light of the fact no academic work has ever been done on the Sweet Auburn Curb Market.

However, as my interviews were almost completely held and gathered from the space of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, there is the question of who is left out, who no longer patronizes the space that may once have. This question is a valid and intriguing one, although one that is outside the scope of this paper. Furthermore, as an inherent outsider of the community, having not grown up in the city of Atlanta, but rather Marietta, a suburb to the Northwest of the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, there are inherently pieces of the narrative that were not divulged to me. Although I sought to remedy this through constant communication and social immersion over a year and a

half, a period in which the community accepted me in so many ways, it is without question there were certain things that would not be divulged me to.

But this work, like so many others, is only the beginning. My hope is that future scholars will take this work and push it further, enriching the community and the history of Atlanta in the process. Through these points of community engagement, activism, and storytelling we can begin to pursue a diverse, pluralized, community-driven narrative of the city of Atlanta and those that reside within it.

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## VITA

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### EDUCATION

**Bachelor of Science**, Major in Journalism with a concentration in magazine writing and editing, Minor in American Studies with a depth study in Cultural Studies, 2012  
Boston University, College of Communication, Boston University, MA  
GPA: 3.38/4.0 Dean's List, Spring 2009, Fall 2010

**Study Abroad**, Natural Sciences Program, Summer 2009  
Boston University, London, United Kingdom

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Research Assistant**, The Womenfolk  
Oxford, MS | May 2014 – Present

- Currently conducting academic research for American folk revival band working to reconstruct their history, with research focusing heavily on archival work

**Oral Historian**, Sweet Auburn Curb Market Oral History Project  
Atlanta, GA | March 2014 – Present

- Researched and located potential interview subjects for oral history project, breaching a historically closed community within inner-city Atlanta
- Conducted in-depth interviews that balanced gaining personal histories and the history of the market, as well as focusing on the contextualization within greater Atlanta and its political climate
- Recorded interviews with both video and sound to be used for archival and documentary purposes
- Transcribed interviews for publication as well as use within greater thesis work

**Docent**, Burns-Belfry Museum and Multicultural Center  
Oxford, MS | October 2013 – Present

- Key holder in charge of opening and closing museum on designated days
- Providing student tours with extensive insight while emphasizing the importance of community connection and outreach
- Orienting visitors to the exhibits, explaining the significance of national, local, and community history being presented in a common space
- Working as a guide, answering visitor questions about local and national African American history as well as the history of the museum itself
- Researching pertinent local history through archival photographs

**Producer, Graduate Assistant**, Sounds of the South, Mississippi Public Broadcasting  
Oxford, MS | August 2013 – Present

- Researching and writing scripts for short radio pieces on southern music and musicians, discussing their role in southern history
- Independently recording and producing audio pieces that meet the standards and quality of Mississippi Public Broadcasting
- Solely in charge of digitizing of over 70 pieces from the program's beginning, making them available for streaming and syndication
- Coordinating between the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Southern Documentary Project for use of space, equipment, and vocal talent
- Learned use of a variety of editing program and tools without supervision, including Pro Tools and Adobe Audition

**Operations Team Member**, Red Dress Boutique  
Athens, GA | October 2012 – June 2013

- One of the original ten-person team tasked with increasing ShopRedDress.com from tenth to fourth in overall traffic ranking among online US independent women's clothing retailers
- Assisted in managing and posting on Red Dress Boutique's social media platforms
- Responsible for inventory control online and at Red Dress HQ
- Processed and shipped hundreds of online orders daily

**Editorial Intern**, *Paste Magazine*  
Decatur, GA | May 2012 – August 2012

- Pitched and wrote 5 to 7 daily news stories, combing RSS and Twitter feeds for relevant content
- Additionally performed interviews for publication and wrote features and reviews on a wide variety of artists and music
- Pitched ideas and conducted in-depth research for weekly infographics on music, television, film, and other popular culture-related information
- Sole intern sent to document the Calgary Folk Festival in words and photos
- Maintained edit calendar, overseeing and contributing to publication and release dates

**Arts Editorial Intern**, *The Boston Phoenix*  
Boston, MA | January 2012 – May 2012

- Worked directly under the arts editor, functioning as his research assistant on a wide variety of topics and transcribing interviews
- Wrote book reviews and conducted interviews for publication
- Proofread and copy edited final copy, a task not assigned to any other intern
- Participated in weekly arts editorial board meetings, discussing copy, content and scheduling
- Assisted with daily administrative tasks around the newsroom

**Staff Writer**, *Muse*, *The Daily Free Press*  
Boston, MA | September 2009 – March 2011

- Wrote for weekly arts and entertainment installation of the daily paper
- Covered numerous concerts and album reviews, in addition to conducting interviews with different artists and public figures such as Michael Cera

**PUBLISHED WORKS**

- “On Keeping A Notebook,” Thought Catalog | 2013
- “Catching Up With Damien Jurado,” *Paste* | 2012
- “Catching Up With Milo Green,” *Paste* | 2012
- “Foxes: Warrior EP,” *Paste* | 2012

“Wild Cub: Youth,” *Paste* | 2012  
“River City Extension: Don’t Let the Sun Go Down On Your Anger,” *Paste* | 2012  
“Catching Up With Screaming Females’ Jarrett Dougherty,” *Paste* | 2012  
“Book Review and Interview: James Geary at the Harvard Bookstore,” *The Boston Phoenix* | 2012  
200+ other daily pieces written for *Paste*

### **ACADEMIC INVOLVEMENT**

Paper Presentation, “Creating Contested Space: Reclaiming History Through Public Art in the City too Busy to Hate,” Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association Conference in New Orleans | 2015  
Paper Presentation, “The Sweet Auburn Curb Market: The Search For Contested Space and Cultural Resistance in the City too Busy to Hate,” Graduate Student Conference in African-American History | 2015  
Paper Presentation, “Creating Contested Space: Reclaiming History Through Public Art in the City too Busy to Hate,” Auburn University at Montgomery Liberal Arts Conference—Southern Studies | 2015  
Paper Presentation, “The Sweet Auburn Curb Market: Gentrification, Diversity Politics, and Southern Foodways in the City Too Busy to Hate,” Three Minute Thesis | 2014

### **LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

DJ, Rebel Radio 92.1, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS | 2014-2015  
Red Carpet Videographer and Interviewer, Oxford Film Festival, Oxford, MS | 2014  
Volunteer, Southern Foodways Alliance Symposium, Oxford, MS | 2013, 2014  
Volunteer, Athens Area Humane Society, Athens, GA | 2012-2013  
Communications Director, College of General Studies, Boston University, Boston, MA | 2009-2010  
DJ, WTBU, Boston University, Boston, MA | 2009