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HOW THE CAR WON THE ROAD:  
THE SURRENDER OF ATLANTA'S CITY STREETS, 1920-1929

by

LAURA DRUMMOND

Under the Direction of Jeffrey Trask, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

## ABSTRACT

In 1899, Atlantans saw their city streets as multi-purpose open spaces, freely available to all persons and transit modes. By 1929, that understanding had changed. Streets became automobile conduits to rapidly and efficiently move motor vehicles around town. Other modes of transportation had disappeared or been marginalized. New government regulations tightly controlled or banished other street users and uses. Vast amounts of municipal space became the domain of automobiles, losing the democratic values which public roads formerly represented. This study will demonstrate that during the 1920s, Atlanta's powerful elites brought about this transformation of society's comprehension of the meaning and function of a city street. Seeing the automobile as the essential tool for city expansion, this pro-growth coalition directly intervened in state and municipal government to enact laws favoring motor vehicles. They sought and won the allocation of public funds to build the physical infrastructure and legislative superstructure to facilitate the presence of cars on city streets. The print media marketed the changed definition of street space, and promoted the automobile as a status symbol and a way to escape the always-contentious, multi-racial streetcars. Realtors and investors urged better roads for automobile access to their burgeoning suburban developments. While the transformative process took root and sprouted between 1900 and 1919, the twenties witnessed the bulk of the efforts of the growth alliance to remake Atlanta's city streets. No longer a luxury vehicle for the very rich, by 1920, the car had emerged as a necessity for all but the poorest citizens. Utilizing modern marketing methods and innovative business strategies, automakers helped emplace a national culture of consumption. Advertisements urged Atlantans to go into debt to purchase the latest models, while the local government struggled to cope with traffic gridlock and outrageous numbers of auto-related fatalities. Blaming streetcars for the congestion, business and civic

leaders also increasingly faulted pedestrians and children for their own injuries and deaths—they should not have strayed onto streets which no longer belonged to everyone. By 1929, Atlanta’s leadership had surrendered the city streets to the automobile; the car had “won” the road.

**INDEX WORDS:** Atlanta, Automobiles, Streets, Growth Machine, Urbanization, Urban Political Economy



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2021

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THE SURRENDER OF ATLANTA'S CITY STREETS, 1920-1929

by

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May 2021

## DEDICATION

This dissertation would never have happened without Bill Drummond. My best friend and faithful partner, he traveled with me every step of this academic journey and supported me in countless ways. He encouraged my first musings about whether or not to finally attempt a Ph.D. program. A long-time academic, he warned me of the vagaries of professors, the maddening intransigence of requirements tailored to the younger student with little real-world experience, and the necessity of acquiescing, no matter the inanity. He generously shared with me his in-depth knowledge of urban planning. It is to him I owe my first exposure to Molotch's sociological theory of the city as a growth machine. He was always available to discuss every challenge-of-the-moment, to hear excited descriptions of the outrageous self-interest and machinations of power elites, and to bring me news items of current controversies surrounding use of the public streets and efforts to re-take them for non-vehicular purposes. His fresh perspectives and insights shaped my approach and sharpened my arguments. I could not have completed this dissertation without his unwavering enthusiasm. For these many reasons, this study is dedicated, with much love and gratitude, to him.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As historians, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. This work owes an immeasurable debt to the many who have investigated the City of Atlanta, especially within the time frame of this study. Each has inspired and informed my work at every step. These include Franklin M. Garrett (the *pater familias* of all who write about Atlanta), Blaine A. Brownell, Floyd Hunter, Clarence N. Stone, LeeAnn Lands, Daniel Amsterdam, and Don Harrison Doyle. My guiding light on automobility and the emergence of motordom will ever be Peter D. Norton's groundbreaking work. And, of course, Howard L. Preston's study of Atlanta's advent into the automobile age is the sterling precedent against which my work will be judged.

I owe much to Tim Crimmins, Atlanta historian *par excellence* and the rare historic preservationist who speaks with both authority and power. The very first lecture in his U.S. Cities class—on the walkable city—sparked in me an enduring fascination with urban history. My dissertation chair and faculty adviser, Jeffrey Trask, has been a constant guide and mentor whose invaluable observations have made me a better scholar and this a better paper. To Donald Shoup I am also grateful. Memories of his kindness to a tentative grad student helped me through the difficult times, and his opus on free parking changed my life. I am now, proudly, a dedicated *shoupista*.

Finally, I wish it were possible to thank in person Cliff Kuhn, departed and deeply missed scholar and gentleman, *requiescat in pace*. He taught me what public history is and showed us all how best to live it. This paper is much the worse without his wisdom, passion, and guidance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....		<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....		<b>IX</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....		<b>X</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....		<b>XIII</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....		<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Molotch’s Growth Machine Thesis</b> .....		<b>4</b>
<b>1.2 Studies of Atlanta’s Decision-Makers</b> .....		<b>9</b>
<b>1.3 Methodology and Organization</b> .....		<b>15</b>
<b>2 ATLANTA’S PRO-GROWTH COALITIONS</b> .....		<b>26</b>
<b>2.1 The White Pro-Growth Coalition</b> .....		<b>28</b>
<b>2.2 The Black Pro-Growth Coalition</b> .....		<b>40</b>
<b>2.3 Boosterism and the Growth Coalition</b> .....		<b>53</b>
<b>2.4 Transportation as the Key to Growth</b> .....		<b>57</b>
<b>3 INTRODUCTION TO THE 1920S</b> .....		<b>63</b>
<b>4 PLANNING ATLANTA’S STREETS</b> .....		<b>78</b>
<b>4.1 City Planning in 1920s Atlanta</b> .....		<b>79</b>
<b>4.2 Funding Atlanta’s Street Improvements</b> .....		<b>91</b>
<b>4.3 The Spring Street Viaduct</b> .....		<b>96</b>
<b>4.4 The Twin Viaducts</b> .....		<b>108</b>

<b>5</b>	<b>REGULATING ATLANTA’S STREETS .....</b>	<b>126</b>
5.1	Carnage .....	129
5.2	Regulating Pedestrians .....	137
5.3	Regulating Children.....	145
5.4	Regulating Traffic .....	151
5.5	Speeding and Parking.....	162
5.6	Policing Traffic .....	183
5.7	Regulating Streetcars.....	189
<b>6</b>	<b>SEGREGATING THE CITY .....</b>	<b>207</b>
6.1	Segregating Stratagems .....	208
6.2	Zoning: Segregating the City .....	212
6.3	Black Atlanta in the 1920s.....	232
6.4	Semi-Segregated Streetcars.....	242
6.5	Race-Based Policing of Atlanta’s Streets .....	250
<b>7</b>	<b>SELLING CITY &amp; CAR.....</b>	<b>256</b>
7.1	The Business Cycle.....	260
7.2	The Florida Boom .....	267
7.3	Forward Atlanta: Selling the City .....	276
7.4	Atlanta and the Automobile Rollercoaster .....	286
7.5	Advertising the Automobile .....	296

**8 THE STATE OF THE STREETS 1929 ..... 316**

8.1 Traffic Study Overview ..... 319

8.2 The Parking Committee ..... 327

8.3 Pedestrians ..... 332

8.4 Traffic..... 334

8.5 Survey Recommendations and Impacts..... 338

8.6 State of the Streets – 1929..... 345

**9 CONCLUSION ..... 357**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 365**

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Primary Occupations of White Growth-Coalition Members .....	30
Table 2. Secondary Occupations of White Growth-Coalition Members .....	31
Table 3. White Growth-Coalition Politicians .....	31
Table 4. Exclusive White Men’s Clubs .....	34
Table 5. Home Locations of White Elites.....	37
Table 6. Atlanta Population Growth, 1890-1930.....	56
Table 7. U.S. Traffic Fatalities, 1920, 1930, 2017.....	131
Table 8. Atlanta Traffic Fatalities, 1920-1930.....	131
Table 9. GA Railway & Power Track Mileage Increases.....	189
Table 10. 1924 Atlanta Passenger Vehicle Use and Cost.....	196
Table 11. Atlanta’s Black & White Populations, 1890-1930 .....	233
Table 12. Total Arrests by Race and Gender .....	252
Table 13. Percentages of Total Arrests by Race and Gender .....	253
Table 14. Traffic Arrests and Total Arrests .....	253
Table 15. Number of Passenger Cars Produced in the U.S., 1918-1930 .....	286
Table 16. Advertising Revenue of Newspapers and Periodicals, 1880-1929.....	305
Table 17. Groups Represented on the Traffic Commission.....	323
Table 18. Horses, Bikes, Cars, 1900-1929.....	349



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of Atlanta’s Central Business District; 1929 <i>Traffic Survey</i> , pg. 38.....	23
Figure 2. 1928 Capital City Club banquet; Atlanta History Center.....	35
Figure 3. Top insurance executives Pace, Perry, and Herndon, ca. 1913.....	45
Figure 4. Georgia U.S. highway sign, ca. 1926; worthpoint.com.....	64
Figure 5. Night riders, “Parents Who Shirk,” <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , January 31, 1926.....	66
Figure 6. The new City Planning Commission, <i>City Builder</i> 4, no. 12 (February 1920): 7.....	85
Figure 7. Bond cartoon, <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , January 23, 1921.....	99
Figure 8. Spring Street viaduct under construction, 1923.....	103
Figure 9. Spring Street viaduct route.....	105
Figure 10. Mayor's dinner at the Biltmore, March 25, 1925; <i>City Builder</i> (April 1925): 7.....	114
Figure 11. Artist’s rendering of the Pryor Street viaduct; <i>City Builder</i> (August 1925): 4.....	119
Figure 12. Downtown viaducts; New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1931.....	120
Figure 13. Department store ad; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , March 3, 1929.....	123
Figure 14. The menacing automobile; “Talion,” <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , January 16, 1927.....	130
Figure 15. Insurance Agency ad headline; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , September 17, 1923.....	133
Figure 16. Underground sidewalks and subway; Beeler, <i>Report</i> , 1924, p. 83, Exhibit 10A.....	138
Figure 17. NSC Cartoon; <i>American City</i> 25, no. 3 (September 1921): 225.....	148
Figure 18. Variant of the Milwaukee mushroom; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , January 16, 1927.....	155
Figure 19. Five Points looking east, after 11/29/1921 and before 07/08/1925.....	156
Figure 20. Five Points looking north, after July 8, 1925.....	157
Figure 21. Editorial cartoon; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , January 21, 1928.....	163
Figure 22. Peachtree (left), Broad (south), 1925; <i>Progressive Atlanta</i> , pg. 27.....	167

Figure 23. Curbside gas pump, 36-40 South Pryor Street, Atlanta, ca. 1927.....	174
Figure 24. Ivy Street Garage ad; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , July 27, 1925.....	178
Figure 25. Cross-section of d'Humy ramp system, 1921.....	179
Figure 26. Ivy Street Garage, October 27, 1946.....	181
Figure 27. Kell Hall being demolished, August 3, 2019.....	181
Figure 28. Lakewood Jitney, Fulton County, 1920-29.....	192
Figure 29. Fageol double-deck bus to Morningside Park.....	197
Figure 30. Forward Atlanta ad, <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , December 7, 1925.....	200
Figure 31. Atlanta car-owning families, 1916-1930.....	204
Figure 32. Klan advertisement, 1924.....	209
Figure 33. Racial distribution of Atlanta's population, 1924.....	219
Figure 34. Atlanta un-zoned and zoned, 1922.....	222
Figure 35. Real estate ad, <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , May 31, 1924.....	228
Figure 36. Heman Perry's ad, <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , October 31, 1923.....	238
Figure 37. A front-loading "one-man safety car," 1925.....	245
Figure 38. Atlanta to Miami trucks; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , October 18, 1925.....	263
Figure 39. Tourist camp in Lakewood, south Atlanta, 1920s.....	268
Figure 40. Publicity sketch by A. W. Brewerton, for the <i>Atlanta Journal</i> .....	272
Figure 41. Forward Atlanta ad with the 3-point formula, 1929.....	283
Figure 42. Ad for car tops; <i>Atlanta City Directory</i> , 1923, pg. 6.....	289
Figure 43. Ad for Massengale Bulletin System, 1923.....	301
Figure 44. Ad for 1928 Dodge radio show; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , January 1, 1928.....	303
Figure 45. Atlanta Auto. Assn. ad, <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , December 3, 1924.....	308

Figure 46. Crowd views the new Ford, <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , December 18, 1927.....	311
Figure 47. Forsyth Street, view south from Carnegie Way, 1926. ....	328
Figure 48. How You Came To Work form and results; 1929 <i>Traffic Survey</i> , pgs. 37, 39. ....	330
Figure 49. Traffic signal locations in Atlanta's CBD.....	337
Figure 50. Georgia Power ad; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , May 29, 1930. ....	340
Figure 51. Ad for house with drive and garage; <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , December 10, 1929. ....	346
Figure 52. Future home of Tom Pitts cigar & soda shop, ca. 1890. ....	352
Figure 53. The horse-drawn horseless, 1910. ....	360

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The early twentieth century was an era of associations, organizations, institutes, societies, clubs of every kind; and Atlanta was a city of joiners. This paper will most often give the full name, though for readability, abbreviations will sometimes be used.

AAA	American Automobile Association
AAAA	Atlanta Automobile Accessory Association, eventually merged with AADA
AACW	Associated Advertising Clubs of the World
AADA	Atlanta Automobile Dealers' Association, local chapter of NADA
AAEA	Atlanta Automotive Equipment Association, eventually merged with AADA
AAMC	Atlanta Ad Men's Club (women were welcome members)
AAOSG	Association of Automobile Owners of the State of Georgia
ACTB	Atlanta Convention and Tourist Bureau, earlier the Atlanta Convention Bureau
AEC	American Engineering Council
AERA	American Electric Railway Association
AFT	Atlanta Federation of Trades, conglomerate labor organization
AGMA	Atlanta Garage Managers' Association
AIA	American Institute of Architects; also FAIA indicating a Fellow of the institute
AJBA	Atlanta Jitney Bus Association
ALAM	Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers
AMC	Atlanta Motor Club
AMCMA	American Motor Car Manufacturers' Association
APD	Atlanta Police Department
ARMA	Atlanta Retail Merchants Association
ASC	Atlanta Safety Council, local chapter of NSC
ASCE	American Society of Civil Engineers
AtIAA	Atlanta Automobile Association, local chapter of AAA
AUC	Atlanta University Center
AUL	Atlanta Urban League
BOMA	Building Owners and Managers Association
BPR	Bureau of Public Roads
CBD	Central Business District, aka, downtown
CSA	Citizens' Safety Association, forerunner to the Atlanta Safety Council
CIC	Commission on Interracial Cooperation
COC	Chamber of Commerce; also JCOC, Junior Chamber of Commerce
CSA	Citizens' Safety Association
FMC	Ford Motor Company
GADA	Georgia Automotive Dealers' Association
GM	General Motors Corporation
GMA	Georgia Manufacturers' Association
GMAC	General Motors Acceptance Corporation
GPSC	Georgia Public Service Commission
GSAA	Georgia State Automobile Association

HEB	Highway Education Board
LAW	League of American Wheelmen (women not welcome)
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAAM	National Association of Automobile Manufacturers
NACOC	National Automobile Chamber of Commerce
NADA	National Automobile Dealers' Association
NACW	National Association for Colored Women
NAREB	National Association of Real Estate Boards, the whites-only organization formed in 1908 as the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges, but changed the name in 1916; became the National Association of Realtors in 1972.
NAREB	National Association of Real Estate Brokers, the African American organization formed in 1947 as Blacks were excluded from the white real estate groups.
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NNBL	National Negro Business League
NSC	National Safety Council
NUL	National Urban League; the Atlanta chapter was the Atlanta Urban League (AUL)
NU	Neighborhood Union
OOHA	Out of home advertising; usually refers to billboards
OOHAAA	Out of Home Advertising Association of America
SAE	Society of Automotive Engineers. It began as the Society of Automobile Engineers in 1905, but in 1916, added in the American Society of Aeronautic Engineers, the Society of Tractor Engineers, as well as representatives from the power boating industry, and changed the name to reflect its broadened scope.
SMF	Southern Motorists' Federation
WGST	WGM were the call letters for Atlanta's second radio station, licensed to the <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> , which soon donated it to the Georgia School of Technology [now Georgia Institute of Technology]. The school immediately got a new license for educational broadcasting, with the call letters WGST.
WSB	Call letters of Atlanta's first radio station, licensed to the <i>Atlanta Journal</i> . What they stand for is somewhat esoteric; "W" was an early regional designator for naval radio signal entities, and "B" indicated the second entry in its class. The popular "Welcome South, Brother" explanation is a colorful local invention.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1899, the citizens of Atlanta, Georgia experienced their city streets as multi-purpose spaces open to the free exercise of various transportation modes, social functions, and commercial activities. By 1929, that understanding had changed: streets now served as automobile conduits with the major purpose of rapidly and efficiently moving motor vehicles around the metropolitan area. The heavier, faster, free-ranging machines had marginalized or eliminated horses, mules, bicycles, and even pedestrians. New municipal ordinances banished or tightly circumscribed all non-automotive street users and uses. Motorized traffic took over vast amounts of once-shared, free-to-all public space, running roughshod over the democratic values which city roadways formerly represented.

How did this happen? How did the car “win” the road? Academics have offered numerous explanations, and certainly multiple factors made possible and assisted the automobile’s rise to dominate the nation’s streets during the early twentieth century. A highly popular conception insists that Americans simply loved their cars. This narrative maintains that the preeminence of the car over all other forms of ground transportation occurred in a free, capitalist marketplace. Citizens voted with their dollars, right feet planted firmly on accelerator pedals. The automobile was the people’s choice, a triumph of democracy. Devotees of this view consider any suggestion to the contrary unpatriotic, even un-American.

This study suggests an alternate explanation. It will demonstrate that, between 1920 and 1929, a group of powerful, elite Atlantans transformed the meaning and function of their city’s streets. This coterie of influential whites, mostly men, comprised what Harvey Molotch terms a growth-machine coalition: a group of business leaders who viewed urban property as a market commodity capable of providing great wealth and power. These individuals had the most to gain

or lose in urban land-use decisions, and the automobile supplied the essential transportation component for successful property development. As such, cars needed accommodation in the forms of good roads and traffic laws to enable the mobility required for municipal spread.<sup>1</sup>

For the coalition, increased automobility and city expansion intertwined as co-dependents; one could not occur without the other. A new “motor age geography” had become necessary. Consequently, group members worked to ensure that local government enacted policies and distributed resources favorable to both. Their initial efforts took place in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but they got serious in the 1920s. During those ten years, they re-made the common understanding of a road’s purpose—conveying automobiles. In so doing, they reconstructed city streets, installing the physical infrastructure and legislative superstructure requisite for cars to function unobstructed by poor pavement and unhindered by slower, more vulnerable street users.<sup>2</sup>

On the list of explanations for how the car won the road, the growth-machine thesis with its coalition of powerful influencers ranks as one variant within the “elite-imposition” school. Adherents generally maintain that businessmen, professionals, the automobile industry, and city planners deliberately promoted the motor vehicle. Some see dirty-dealing conspiracies; others find less nefarious hookups between pro-car forces. Peter Norton, in his groundbreaking book, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, dismisses the elite-imposition theory as inadequate because none of its versions explain *why* elites fought so hard to privilege the automobile.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (1976): 309-14.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the nationwide construction of the new geography in the 1920s, see Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 125-39.

<sup>3</sup> Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 9-10, 13-14.

This study supplies that missing “why.” The growth-machine thesis offers a cogent, rational, and believable explanation of the motivating factors of the place-based urban elite alliance and their view of city expansion as a way to greater personal wealth. One of the important contributions of this narrative to the existing literature is that it fills the lacuna identified by Norton in elite-imposition theory. This study concentrates on the changing physical configuration of city streets and evolving legislation of street uses and users, largely directed by the pro-growth coalition to privilege the automobile.

Through long experience, the association of influential decision-makers and policy-setters understood the transportation as an essential component of development. Between 1899 and 1929, these power elites gradually embraced the automobile as the latest, most promising transit mode. Themselves wealthy men and owners of multiple cars, they early saw the potential of the new-fangled horseless carriage, and adopted it as the modern cog in their vision of the urban growth machine. In order to increase the utility of the automobile to achieve their expansionist goals, in the 1920s they re-made Atlanta’s streets and laws to facilitate motor vehicle travel. At the same time, the coalition promoted car use, deploying the latest marketing strategies and advertising techniques to convince city dwellers that they too needed to possess one of these marvelous inventions. Before the stock market crashed, the group had succeeded in both endeavors: nearly half of local households owned a car, and city streets existed primarily to move them.

A hundred years later, Atlanta still strives to build its way out of its notorious traffic gridlock while the greater metropolitan area continues to grow, extending in 2020 to include 29 counties with a population approaching six million. But the pattern began a hundred years ago with a group of local place entrepreneurs who held the power to direct financing, plans, and



policies. They enacted their vision of urban growth via automobile, enthusiastically endorsed motor vehicle use, and set into place the legal and physical structures necessary to establish motordom's autocracy, under which we all exist today. In Atlanta, the car did not "win" the road; instead, the pro-growth coalition literally paved the way as they surrendered city streets to the automobile.

### **1.1 Molotch's Growth Machine Thesis**

A closer look at Molotch's growth machine thesis helps explain Atlanta's own association of powerful elites and how they operated. His empirical theory rests on the assumption that land is a market commodity and therefore is of great importance to "place entrepreneurs"—those individuals and entities interested and invested in property. Owning, developing, and selling land can generate significant wealth.

However, the process requires constant activity to maintain or swell the revenue stream. A variety of strategies can be employed to keep the money flowing, such as acquiring undeveloped territory outside the city, or replacing small, outdated intown structures with larger, modern buildings capable of generating higher rents. Another popular technique, raising property values can be achieved either by increasing accessibility so that different sections of town become more attractive to investors, or by legislating exclusivity for wealthy residents in select neighborhoods.

The growth imperative forms the political and economic essence of virtually any municipality, and drives decisions about property, services, and finances. The city effectively serves as a machine to stimulate wealth and generate economic growth, an "areal expression" of

the business affairs and concerns of the place-based elites. As urban borders swell, so do their personal fortunes.<sup>4</sup>

According to Molotch, the desire for expansion motivates those with property interests to unite and form a coalition. The clearest indicators of their success are the continuous extension of city boundaries and rising population counts. To achieve both, the group works to influence local, and when possible, state and national governments, seeking favorable legislation. Decisions about land use, transportation, tax rates, labor relations, law enforcement, public utilities—each has the power to affect the business climate, attracting or repelling new industries, enhancing or curtailing growth. Should the real estate market fill completely, expanding development encroaches into surrounding communities. Ensuring that municipal policies will promote growth is a key function of the association, and often group members have government positions. But in or out of office, the place entrepreneurs hold considerable power at the local level.<sup>5</sup>

A pro-growth coalition usually consists of three types of individuals or organizations. The majority are property owners, business proprietors, and local investors—people with land or land-based interests who depend on city government to enable their everyday commercial activities. Financiers, lawyers, realtors, and syndicators make up another subset; they provide various forms of assistance or services to those in the first group. Also active in the association are those who may not have direct place-based concerns, but whose financial fortunes depend on city growth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” 309-10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 310, 312-13, 317-18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

Coalition members work not only through government, but also make strenuous efforts to promote the metropolis. They are the city boosters who generate community spirit, what Molotch calls the “we feeling,” which can greatly influence local politics. But boosterism can also reach beyond the city limits and spread the word about urban amenities and a commerce-friendly reputation throughout the region or even nationally. Often a function of the local Chamber of Commerce, it encompasses an array of activities aimed at a variety of audiences, including expositions, parades, public school curricula, professional sports teams, essay-writing contests, conventions, and advertisements in business and travel publications. All contribute to unite citizens, foster “civic jingoism,” and promote the pro-development agenda.<sup>7</sup>

Essential to the growth-machine efforts are the local media, especially, in the early twentieth century, the newspapers. An ever-expanding metropolitan region benefits their revenue streams with increased subscriptions from a growing population and a wider area of affect for their many advertisements. A paper’s financial status depends on the size of its customer base; not only will it sell more lines of advertising, but it can charge higher rates per line. The transition of print media from being subscription-dependent to relying primarily on advertising for the bulk of their revenues had occurred by 1900, but increased exponentially during the 1920s (see Table 16 in Chapter 7).

The newspaper is an active member of the pro-growth coalition on its own behalf. But it also acts as the group’s major mouthpiece, championing all the boosterish activities to unify the citizenry, burnish the city’s reputation, and promote the growth agenda. It generally does not care which direction urban expansion takes (a newspaper can be delivered to any doorstep), and therefore acts as a fair and disinterested observer, or at least maintains that perception. Although

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 314-15.

viewed as the voice of the community, in reality the newspaper does more than merely describe public events and activities. By its coverage, editorials, political slant, racial and religious biases, and even the advertising it accepts, it can also shape or direct public opinion. The media then is a valued and necessary member of the growth group, endorsing specific municipal policies to expand the local economy and attract wealth into the region.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars of the growth-machine thesis have described it as an urban phenomenon limited almost exclusively to the United States. That regional tendency could arguably be tied to Sam Bass Warner's American value system of "privatism," providing a foundation for the successful operation of U.S.-based growth-machine coalitions. Warner defines privatism as the insistence that the purpose of life is primarily to engage in a personal struggle for wealth, that "the individual should see his first loyalty as his immediate family, and that a community should be a union of such money-making, accumulating families." He asserts that widespread adoption of such attitudes has impacted the physical forms of American urban areas, whose "lots, houses, factories, and streets have been the outcome of a real estate market of profit-seeking builders, land speculators, and large investors." While not essential to an understanding of the city as a growth machine, Warner's economic framing of American individualism supports the place entrepreneurs' focus on space commodification as essential to growth, and on its subsequent effects on urban structure.<sup>9</sup>

Any study of the genesis of America's automobile age must consider Norton's *Fighting Traffic*. He argues that *before* city streets could be reconfigured to privilege automobiles, the

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<sup>8</sup> Molotch, "The City as Growth Machine," 315-16; Andrew E. G. Jonas, and David Wilson, eds., *The Urban Growth Machine: Critical Perspectives Two Decades Later* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1968), 3-4; Rick Beard, "From Suburb to Defended Neighborhood: Change in Atlanta's Inman Park and Ansley Park, 1890-1980" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1981), 377-78.

streets themselves had to be reconstituted as places where society agreed that cars belonged. He studies this social reconstruction through the lens of the various groups fighting over who had the right to the public roadways. The pro-automobile interests, collectively referred to as motordom, ultimately prevailed. This study contends instead that the reconstitution of society's street views happened *while* the physical reconfiguration took place. At least in Atlanta, no strict temporal divide between the two occurred. However, his delineations of the combatants and winner fit the narrative presented here.<sup>10</sup>

Norton convincingly describes how motordom effectively utilized rhetoric borrowed from the American ideals of individual liberty and free markets to persuade the country that motorists had a right to street space. But beyond highly-resonant oratory, the pro-car alliance had additional weapons in the form of national associations with local chapters in every city; a pro-business Republican political climate; substantial wealth to promote their agenda; and the sympathy of increasing numbers of motorists. The disparate and disorganized combatants (streetcar companies, parents of young children, police, independent traffic engineers not employed by the auto industry) lost, and by 1930, motordom had redefined urban streets. Again, similar actors and activities appear within the growth coalition narrative presented here.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation strives to put a face on the forces of motordom as it evolved in the early twentieth century. It falls into the elite-imposition category of explanations of how the car won the road, which Norton faults for not explaining why elites strove for automotive dominance. He never analyzes the motivations of the pro-car constituents, beyond undefined allusions to expanding capitalism. In contrast, the growth-machine theory offers a reasonable explanation of

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<sup>10</sup> Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 1-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. This writer strongly disagrees with Norton's "sympathy of motorists" characterization. They did not merely support motordom; they were one of its essential components.

precisely why the urban elite alliance promoted the car. The group sought financial gains from city expansion, which required the mobility and accessibility provided by the automobile. Norton takes a broad, generalized view, focusing on the goals and strategies of the entities comprising U.S. motordom. This study is more granular, scrutinizing the identities and actions of the local individuals and organizations leading the fight for the redefinition of one city's streets.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2 Studies of Atlanta's Decision-Makers

That Atlanta has long possessed a group of well-to-do decision-makers who controlled local policies and directed city growth can be found in the writings of an array of scholars. Several studies specifically about the city assert that a group or association of groups have dominated urban politics and influenced the plans and ordinances enacted by elected officials. Floyd Hunter's 1953 *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* led the way, documenting Atlanta's leaders and the system of power relations operative in the early 1950s. Businessmen, financiers, government officials, professionals, the newspapers, and others with civic interests made up his consortium, although a much smaller insider subset at the heart of the group held veto power. These men set the municipal agenda, making use of "propaganda media" to establish and maintain policies beneficial to their concerns. Hunter's was truly a path-breaking study, dismaying social scientists, especially those of the pluralist persuasion, and arguably inaugurating the field of power structure research. His empirical study of Atlanta's power base preceded Molotch by more than twenty years but fits well in the growth-coalition theory of local power.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9, 13-14.; Norton focuses on the goals of the conglomeration of entities comprising motordom.

<sup>13</sup> Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 11-13, 208; Clarence N. Stone, "Preemptive Power: Floyd Hunter's 'Community Power Structure' Reconsidered," *American Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 1 (February 1988): 87; G. William Domhoff, "C. Wright Mills, Floyd Hunter, and 50 Years of Power Structure Research," *Michigan Sociological Review* 21 (Fall 2007): 11.

Later came *Regime Politics*, in which political scientist Clarence Stone investigated how Atlanta's urban government collaborated with business interests to shape the city's policy agenda. While his regime theory differs from the growth machine thesis in approach, it fundamentally describes the identical government-private sector dynamic. Stone agrees with Hunter that, in Atlanta at least, the growth elites dominated. His chosen period of study (1946-88) enables him to address in detail the African American leadership's incorporation into and eventual control of the governing coalition. The present study also looks at the decision-makers of the Black community, who comprised a pro-growth alliance operating parallel to the ruling white coalition during a time when Jim Crow reigned supreme. For the most part ignored, Blacks on occasion held a singular power at the ballot box, which they would strategically employ to influence the municipal program to their advantage in the 1920s.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars across a variety of disciplines continue to utilize growth machine theory in their studies of numerous U.S. cities, including Atlanta. For the most part, however, they have investigated more recent history, and for a time, many believed that urban growth machines existed only after the second World War. Writing two decades after his initial thesis, Molotch acknowledged that his idea could also apply to pre-Fordist periods. The core growth-machine concept holds, though the details change over time. Coalitions continue to make use of the available technologies, marketing techniques, fiscal instruments, and trending industries.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Edward Cochran, "Governmentality: The New Urbanism and the Creative Class within Atlanta, Georgia" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012); Akira Drake, "The Politics of Atlanta's Public Housing: Race, Planning, and Inclusions, 1936-1975" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2014); Harvey Molotch, "Growth Machine Links: Up, Down, and Across," in *The Urban Growth Machine: Critical Perspectives Two Decades Later*, ed. Andrew E. G. Jonas and David Wilson (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 249.

This study joins the stream of more recent scholarship documenting earlier growth-coalition manifestations.<sup>16</sup> It demonstrates how, between 1920 and 1929, Atlanta's place entrepreneurs championed the new automotive technology, promoted motor vehicle use, and invited car manufacturing and related industries to locate in the area. The group employed innovative as well as traditional financing schemes, and went even further, deploying legislative tools to reconfigure the city streets to establish automobile dominance.

Outside of the growth machine school, others have studied Atlanta's power elites during the general time frame of this study. Lyon writes about building trends in Atlanta from Reconstruction to 1930, and asserts that pressure from local elites steered development in the central business district during the early twentieth century. Lands discusses the civic and business elites operating between 1880 and 1950, and how this "white, propertied power" divided the city by race and class, privileging exclusive park-neighborhoods. Amsterdam, who also focuses on the 1920s, describes how the "well-off bankers, manufacturers, merchants, and high-end lawyers who made up the city's white commercial and industrial elite" comprised "a group deeply committed to attracting new businesses to the city." They sought to "further the goals of urban reform and urban boosterism to prepare citizens for work and democracy while helping to lure new firms to their hometowns." Each of these different authors focus on disparate municipal elements and policies, but all chronicle the same set of influential Atlantans that comprise the pro-growth coalition of this dissertation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Domhoff maintains that between 1890 and 1920, growth coalitions not only existed, but developed a sophisticated system; G. William Domhoff, "The Shortcomings of Rival Urban Theories," University of California, <http://whorulesamerica.net/>.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Anne Mack Lyon, "Business Buildings in Atlanta: A Study in Urban Growth and Form" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1971), 384-86, 464-65; LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 2, 19-26; Daniel Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1-2, 5, 15, 39. Lands and Lyon write exclusively about Atlanta, while Amsterdam's is a comparative study of Atlanta, Detroit, and Philadelphia.



Doyle's comparative study of New South cities between 1860 and 1910 pushes back specifically against the growth-machine theory. His complaint focuses on what he calls its mechanistic view of urbanization, which portrays cities "simply as large, impersonal growth machines that respond reflexively to opportunities for economic expansion and to the dictates of geographic advantage." Such a view does not allow for human agency in the city-building process, and also omits government's essential role. Some cities like Atlanta flourished while others like Charleston languished. He attributes the difference to the men acting (or not) within their specific settings and capitalizing (or not) on locational advantages and amenities.<sup>18</sup>

A close reading of Molotch, however, reveals that powerful urban individuals and their organizations comprise the essential actors. They, in conjunction with government at multiple levels, utilize their city as a mechanism for expanding money-making capabilities. Setting aside an argument over the machine metaphor, this writer agrees completely with Doyle's description of the men who created the New South paradigm, and maintains that it perfectly encapsulates a group of prominent growth leaders.

At the head of each local enterprise were the leading businessmen, who may be likened to the major stockholders and board of directors. Not only did their individual businesses hinge on the success of their cities, their investment in local real estate rose or fell with their city's fortunes. They enlisted the aid of local and state governments, whose leaders often came from their own ranks, and engaged newspaper editors as propagandists, but the main energy and much of the capital that fueled the city-building process flowed from the business elite.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond Doyle, yet another study of southern urban areas effectively documented an Atlanta expansionist alliance a year before Molotch published his growth machine thesis. For five cities in the 1920s, Blaine Brownell catalogs the "urban ethos"— a defining conception of

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<sup>18</sup> Don Harrison Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 17. Doyle perhaps refers to some social scientific, economic, or geographic renditions of growth-machine theory, or assigns greater weight to the machine metaphor.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

the city encompassing the desirability and necessity of both urban growth and social order. His “commercial-civic elite” realized those two mutually reinforcing goals by focusing attention primarily on the downtown business district, and utilizing print sources to promote their projects. For Brownell, Atlanta exemplified the new metropolitan South as its elite men, acting through the local Chamber of Commerce, dominated urban affairs in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

Brownell’s narrative of the city’s leadership describes a typical pro-growth coalition: the close relationship between prominent businessmen and government officials, their concern with media and presentation, their occasional disagreements but general unanimity on the direction of municipal policies. He also takes care to underscore the fundamental inequities of such an alliance and its inherent biases favoring both commerce and whiteness. While the decision-makers at times had to factor in labor interests, they had no concern whatsoever for the Black citizens, and only did the minimum to maintain law and order and to enforce the existing racial status quo. The findings of this dissertation comport closely with his analysis of Atlanta’s leaders, their concerns, methods of operation, prejudices, and exclusivities. Brownell effectively describes a growth-machine association before Molotch named the phenomenon.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Preston’s *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935* greatly informed this study. Asserting that the car played a leading role in producing the modern South, Preston focuses on Atlanta between 1900 and 1930, with occasional comparisons to other U.S. cities. During that period, radical changes occurred in the city’s size, financial

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<sup>20</sup> Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 44-53. Mixon utilizes Brownell’s term, “commercial-civic elite,” and also cites Hunter’s books on Atlanta’s policymakers in his study of the 1906 race riot; Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 1-4, 132, and throughout.

<sup>21</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, xvi, xix, 53-60.

structures, and physical characteristics, aided by the automobile which provided not only convenient transportation but also a wealth-producing industry. By 1930, the car had become the prevailing means of urban transportation.<sup>22</sup>

Preston and this dissertation investigate the same city, people, topic, and nearly the same time period. Both arrive at the identical conclusion, that “Atlanta was transformed from a city built to serve the railroad to a metropolis adjusted to accommodate the automobile,” begging the question, why this study? A major difference is this paper’s utilization of the growth-machine thesis to explain when, how, and why a coterie of influential white men adopted the automobile as a tool for municipal expansion. Citing Paul Gaston, Preston does maintain that boosterish spokesmen did deploy the car to bring prosperity and recognition to the South. However, his primary focus is on the fiscal advantages of having auto dealerships and assembly plants in town, not how cars increased accessibility to developing properties. While generally acknowledging the fiscal motivations of prominent individuals and city officials, he does not reference the existence of the informally organized body of policy-makers. Neither does he investigate, as this study does, precisely how that group’s influence changed the local laws and city streets.<sup>23</sup>

Preston’s is more a top-down look at the effects of automobility on Atlanta and its pivotal role in transforming the city into a progressive metropolis. This bottom-up study specifically explores how the pro-growth elites created new systems—both physical and legislative—to privilege cars as their primary tool for municipal expansion. Their efforts resulted in a

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<sup>22</sup> Howard L. Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), xiv-xvii, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 68; as quoted in Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 16, 144. Preston does not reference Hunter or Molotch; his emphasis is not on the pro-growth coalition, its members, its motives, its mechanics.

reconfiguration of the streets specifically for automobile mobility, accompanied by a radically different understanding of what and who constituted acceptable street uses and users.

### 1.3 Methodology and Organization

This study was sparked by a desire to discover the origins of Atlanta's auto-centric ethos with its sadly inadequate mass transit system. By understanding how the city arrived at this transportation imbroglio, perhaps those of us who live here could find a way out of it. From the very beginning, and long before encountering either Molotch or Hunter, this writer decided that an investigation of the people empowered to create car-dominant roadways would comprise a critical part of the study.

Consequently, a database of over 200 white leaders (including four women) was compiled and eventually narrowed to 114 persons who had an impact on Atlanta's city streets in the early twentieth century. Another database identifies 21 African American leaders (including one woman). Certainly the city had many more Black leaders and prominent business owners than those selected here. During the Jim Crow era, however, very few had the power to bring any alteration to the city streets, and those who did had only indirect influence. The bulk of the physical and legislative changes to Atlanta's roadways occurred in the chambers of the all-white city council at the behest of the white business leadership. Throughout this dissertation, non-specific mentions of such entities as the pro-growth coalition, power elites, and city officials refer to the whites who held significant authority over their fellow African American citizens.<sup>24</sup>

As even brief sketches of 135 lives would make tedious reading, the general approach of this study will be to discuss the most important individuals as they enter the narrative within the

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<sup>24</sup> Hunter, in his study of Atlanta's leaders over just a few years in the early 1950s, had an initial database of 175, from which he selected 40 top-tier white elites to investigate in depth, and 34 Black leaders to determine what power they held and how they interacted with the white leadership; Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 10-11, 116-17, 175.

context of their transportation-related activities. Chapter 2 examines both of Atlanta's associations of place entrepreneurs, their members, their relationships, and the power differentials within as well as between the two racially-segregated groups. It will demonstrate how closely the city's elites mirror textbook examples of pro-growth coalitions in composition and function, and in their strategies for persuading government officials and fellow citizens to embrace policies advantageous to the groups' interests.

Seeing the car as the essential transit cog, the growth forces directly intervened with government bodies to write, enact, and enforce pro-automobile laws and limiting other street uses. Before most urban families even owned a car, coalition members initiated the allocation of public funds to construct a massive two-tiered system to facilitate motor vehicle movement. One tier consisted of the physical overhaul of city streets by grading, paving, and re-sizing roads and sidewalks. It also included building car-carrying viaducts above the city's original life line, the railroad network running through the heart of downtown.

The second tier comprised legislation to create a blanketing "web of regulation,"<sup>25</sup> defining and enforcing who could use city streets, and how and when and where. The expansion advocates' ultimate goal remained constant throughout: growing Atlanta for economic gain. They succeeded admirably: the city by 1929 had expanded in area, population, and reputation as the financial nucleus, central distribution point, and automotive center of the southeastern United States.

Atlanta entered the Automobile Age on in 1899, when a motor car first drove on city streets, causing much wonder and excitement. Over the next twenty years, policymakers slowly

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Barbara Young Welke, J.D., conjured the wonderfully evocative phrase, "the web of regulation" in her perceptive study, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 377.

came to approve and tentatively advance motor vehicle use. But the substantial work occurred during the decade of the twenties, culminating in December 1929's publication of the city's first comprehensive traffic survey. That document enshrined motor vehicle supremacy for the Greater Atlanta metropolitan area. Atlanta adopted automobility gradually over thirty years, with the decades characterized by the familiar trope of crawl, walk, run. The ten-year periods are loosely defined as follows:

1900-09 Co-existence—shared streets  
 1910-19 Conflict—contested streets  
 1920-29 Consolidation—exclusive streets

Neither the dates nor their descriptions are hard-and-fast delimiters, but do outline the general trajectory of the changing understandings of the city's streets. The first two decades saw the tentative beginnings of Atlanta's automobility, but the most striking alterations took effect and motordom achieved supremacy during the Roaring Twenties. Chapter 3 introduces that tumultuous decade of the consolidation of urban streets as nearly exclusive car conduits.

Four chapters describe the 1920s, the decade when the elite businessmen and professionals implemented the majority of the infrastructural changes to Atlanta's streets in pursuit of their goal of car-enabled urban expansion. Chapter 4 discusses the creation of the first official planning commission, and chronicles in detail how it, the growth alliance, and the city government united to pass bond issues for the construction of the three major viaducts. Chapter 5 documents the city's traffic problems and solutions: gridlock, fatalities, pedestrian control, children in the streets, the creation of a traffic regulation system, and removing or limiting once acceptable uses of the public roadways—including the streetcars.

Chapter 6 examines segregated Atlanta, the 1922 zoning ordinance and its claim to protect property values by racially-dividing residential areas. It considers Black Atlanta, semi-

segregated streetcars, and the race-based policing of city streets. Chapter 7 recounts two entrepreneurial tales: selling the city and selling cars. It first traces how the growth coalition used modern marketing techniques to establish Atlanta as the nation's southern business headquarters. It then describes the rescue of the flailing auto industry by saturation advertising and innovative business strategies. Chapter 8 wraps up the decade with a detailed look at the city's 1929 traffic survey, which ensured the streetcar's demise and deliberately kicked the twin cans of Atlanta's on-street parking and one-way streets dilemmas down the gridlocked roads, still unresolved today. More importantly, the study established automobile domination and cemented the understanding of city streets primarily as channels for cars and trucks.<sup>26</sup>

Chapter 9 presents some conclusions of the study. It examines the great liability of the growth-machine coalition: its massive inequities which left the majority of Atlanta's citizens voiceless in the policy-making process. Motivated by narrow self-interests, the power elites had little understanding of or concern for many of the important issues confronting all of the African Americans and most of the rest of Atlanta's citizens. Their policy of city expansion via automobile took years, cost millions of taxpayer dollars, and required copious amounts of legislation to restructure and regulate the streets. To undo any of it, or make meaningful changes to reduce its harmful effects will require similar investments of time, money, and political will.

The major goal of this dissertation is to detail why and how the "shared roads" of 1899 changed, primarily between 1920 and 1929, into virtual car conduits. It studies the alliance of top influencers in one city, Atlanta, Georgia, adopting the local view of the place where a growth-machine coalition operates. This street-level (in every way) perspective best elucidates the

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Deere, "AJC Continuing Coverage: Parking Tickets," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 28, 2020; Bill Torpy, "Two Ways of Looking at Changing One-Way Baker Street," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 3, 2019; Emil Moffatt, "Atlanta Mayor Puts Brakes on Baker Street Two-Way Conversion," *90.1 FM WABE* (July 11, 2019).

relationships between individuals and groups, actions and spaces. Doyle and Barrett both advocate the close study of specific urban settings and the individual business leaders operating within them; only through such detailed scrutiny can early twentieth-century transportation policy be understood.<sup>27</sup>

Youthful Atlanta did not possess much of the cultural baggage of some older southern cities. From its unconventional railroad beginnings, it was an upstart, a brash commercial town where business, and a reputation for busyness, reigned supreme. The 1864 conflagration forced locals to rebuild much of downtown, further enhancing the sense of newness and vitality. The rapidity of its literal reconstruction during and beyond the Reconstruction years gave civic boosters ample opportunities to boast of Atlanta's progressive and industrious attitudes and its eager embrace of modernity.<sup>28</sup>

Yet the city was not entirely atypical. Similarly-motivated and enthusiastic businessmen led their cities into the New South, embracing different industries, residents, forms of government, and cultural mores well into the twentieth century. What happened in Atlanta—the ceding of the streets to the automobile—happened everywhere else in the nation. But in addressing U.S. urban transportation issues of the early twentieth century, Barrett summarizes it best: “Common problems and common factors . . . all helped shape transportation policy in every city, but policy itself remained embedded in local history.” The individuals mattered; different actors in a particular time and place may have as much impact on city building and transportation

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<sup>27</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, xiv; Paul Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 5.

<sup>28</sup> City of Atlanta Board of Education, *Atlanta: A City of the Modern South* (New York: Smith & Durrell, 1942), 6-7; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, 136-58.



decisions than the external forces operating more generally. Atlanta then serves as illustrative though not archetypal.<sup>29</sup>

This dissertation utilizes the *Atlanta Constitution*, the city's only daily morning paper, as its most essential primary source, in no small part due to its availability in a full-text searchable format. The dual descriptive/prescriptive nature of any paper makes it suspect as a reliable document, but as Ryan observes, the newspaper "may be as close as historians can get to the voice of the public" simply because so many diverse entities reported their activities to it. As the city's paper of record, and therefore critical to this study, the *Constitution* published official accounts of municipal actions, and printed verbatim texts of newly-enacted legislation, debates, and mayoral speeches. Its standard fare of articles, op-eds, automobile advertising, and detailed obituaries of prominent personages proved very helpful. Perhaps most importantly, the owners and publishers of the three local dailies were valued members of the pro-growth coalition, sharing the group's expansionist goals, but also functioning as essential spokesmen to promote its policies and positions.<sup>30</sup>

This dissertation investigates one domain, the city streets, focusing specifically on those located within the "central business district" (CBD), or "downtown." The two terms are used interchangeably here, something Americans began to do in the early twentieth century. During

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<sup>29</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 11-34; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, xiv-xvi; Casey P. Cater, *Regenerating Dixie: Electric Energy and the Modern South* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2019), 5; Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930*, 5; Joel A. Tarr, and Josef Konvitz, "Patterns in the Development of the Urban Infrastructure," in *American Urbanism: A Historiographical Review*, ed. Howard Gillette and Zane Miller (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1987), 196.

<sup>30</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997), 13. The *Atlanta Journal* was the premiere daily evening paper, while the *Atlanta Georgian*, also a daily, was a much smaller afternoon paper. The two Black-owned weekly papers, the *Atlanta Independent* and the *Atlanta Daily World*, supplied fresh information and perspectives undocumented in the white papers.

that time period, Five Points, where five major thoroughfares converged, constituted the center of the CBD.

As a town that grew up around rail lines, Atlanta has no midpoint commons area, no central park or plaza. The heart of the city, its earliest center point, was an intersection of roads—a fitting symbol for a transportation-focused entity with railroads, interstates, and one of the world’s busiest airports. This space once called “the center of town life” has served as a navigational landmark, a community assembly area, an essential water source, the primary transportation locus, a tourist destination, and the dividing point between city quadrants where street numbers began at 1. It was once the busiest intersection in the city.<sup>31</sup>

Downtown has always laid claim to some distinctive territory—not only in municipal layout and functionality, but also within the imaginations of local citizens. It constituted the center of the transportation network as well as the major commercial area, but also dwelt as a “civic symbol” in the urban zeitgeist, the site of intersections *and* interactions. It performed as the city’s impromptu stage, a place of theatricalities and spectacles, a venue for communications of all types, open to everyone. This uniquely North American term first came into sporadic use in the late eighteenth century. Newspaper readers in 1890s Atlanta encountered occasional mentions of “downtown,” but usage increased more than forty-fold during the 1920s. The focal decade in this study matches this evolving understanding of the urban center and its streets at the time when America first became a nation of city dwellers.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 183-85. Both terms in this dissertation refer to the same area of Atlanta centered at Five Points. The map in Figure 1 shows the central business district boundaries, outlined as follows: just west of Spring Street to the west, just south of Forrest Avenue [Ralph McGill and Ivan Allen boulevards] to the north; just west of Piedmont Avenue to the east; and just south of Mitchell Street to the south.

<sup>32</sup> Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4-7. *Oxford English Dictionary*; “downtown, adv., adj., and n.,” OED Online, December 2020, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57300?redirectedFrom=downtown>. “Downtown” was referenced only 106 times in the 1890s, but 4,259 in the 1920s. In contrast, “central business

Downtown, a compact and walkable area, served as a natural gathering place. As the nexus of the transportation network of railroads, streetcars, and automobiles, it was the most congested area of the city in the early twentieth century. Naturally, it hosted the greatest number of pedestrians, not only during the three workday “rush hours,” but also for the noteworthy civic occasions. Every parade passed through the intersection where reviewing stands for visiting dignitaries stood. Atlantans in 1848 cast the town’s first ballots inside a grocery store at Five Points. By the early 1900s, tens of thousands congregated in front of the same location to watch election results projected by stereopticon onto the side of the nine-story Silvey Building just across Peachtree Street.<sup>33</sup>

Businesses advertised their downtown addresses proudly, noting how close they stood to Five Points. The location was ideal; a trolley to anywhere in the city could be caught at the intersection. Shoppers and workers alike rode in daily, even on the weekends to attend services at the many religious assemblies situated nearby. After the arrival of the automobile, the two outer lanes of many downtown streets stayed continuously full of cars parking curbside for free, as shown in the 1929 map of the CBD, which indicates the number of legal curbside parking spaces in each block (Figure 1 below). New automobile hotels throughout the “congested area,”

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district” is found only once before 1900, with 15 references in the 1910s and 32 references in the 1920s. Statistics on both usages were compiled from the *Atlanta Constitution* from 1868-1984.

<sup>33</sup> The Five Points intersection originated as a crossroads for important travel routes for indigenous peoples, who wisely located their footpaths on the ridgelines; the railroads would later follow their lead. Four of the streets in the intersection trace the paths of those prehistoric byways: Peachtree Street (north), Whitehall Street (south), Decatur Street (east), and Marietta Street (west). The fifth road was added by white surveyors who placed Line Street on a land lot boundary—the site of today’s Edgewood Avenue. The first election took place on January 29, 1848, with voters casting ballots at Thomas Kile’s grocery store at the northwest corner of Peachtree and Marietta streets, site of the William-Oliver building today; Franklin M. Garrett and Harold H. Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 3 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical, 1954), 1:263. For a description of one of the election night celebrations, see “Election-Mad Atlanta Enjoyed a Gay Night,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1908. The custom of gathering to view election results had disappeared by the 1920s, as people increasingly turned on their radios to catch the early returns, and cars choked the area with the growth of a lighted, night-time entertainment district.

officially defined by the city in 1924, provided covered parking and garage services to paying customers.

The commercial success of downtown drove real estate prices sky high, forcing many small business owners by the late 1920s to relocate to the suburbs. Burgess discussed the importance of mobility to municipal growth, maintaining that land values served as very accurate indices of mobility. Writing in 1925, he asserted that the highest land values in the city occurred at the point of greatest

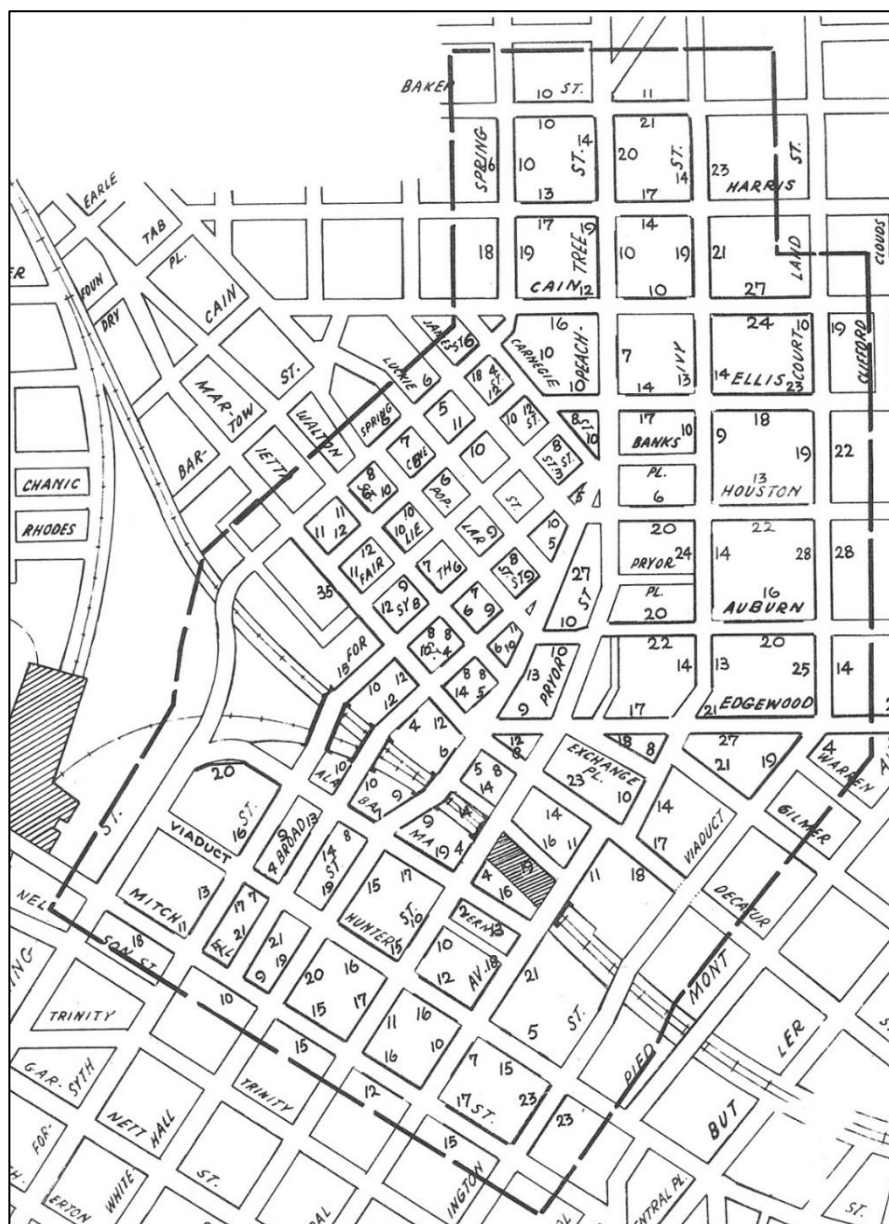


Figure 1. Map of Atlanta's Central Business District; 1929 Traffic Survey, pg. 38.

mobility. In Atlanta, that point was Five Points, the heart of the city.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ernest W. Burgess, "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project," in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. Jan Lin, and Christophere Mele (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 97. Reference to Five Points as the heart of Atlanta from "Journal-Herald Tour Will Begin," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1910.

Although the transportation network brought a unifying focus to downtown life, the throngs jostling on the public streets and sidewalks often found more conflict and division than harmony. Every streetcar had its own contested interior where the races mixed, touched, bumped, and sometimes fought in the crowded space. The often-celebrated democracy of downtown proved more democratic for some than others. Black Atlantans dared not linger long on street corners, as police made quick arrests for the nuisance infractions of idling and loitering, disorderly conduct, and the very useful, purposefully ill-defined charge of “suspicion.” The city center hosted labor strikes and experienced the nadir of the city’s overt racist actions. During the 1906 race riot, streetcars played a deadly role, delivering unsuspecting homeward-bound working African Americans into the hands of the white mob raging at Five Points.<sup>35</sup>

Another reason for this study to focus on Atlanta’s downtown is that politics and business resided primarily in the CBD. Major government buildings had downtown addresses, including the state capitol, city hall, main post office, the federal reserve bank, and all the courts. The prime retail, service, financial, hospitality, and entertainment facilities clustered in downtown; land-devouring entities like warehouses, factories, and sports fields of necessity located farther out where property cost less. Fogelson notes that the study of downtown is a study of power and those who wielded it. Logically, the pro-growth coalition focused most of its attention there, usually at the expense of other sectors of the city.<sup>36</sup>

Innovations and technological advances first appeared in downtowns; Atlanta was no exception. Installment of essential services (water, sewer, gas, electricity, telegraph and

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<sup>35</sup> Jon C. Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City: Problem, Promise, and Reality*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 8; Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century*, 42, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, xvi; Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*, 7.

telephone lines) occurred earliest in the city center. Gas-lit streetlamps shone first in the CBD, replaced in 1910 by dazzling electric lights, giving the district a new nickname, the “White Way.”

The roadways of the central business district also witnessed a series of “firsts” involving city regulations of street surfacing, usage, and traffic. These included such novelties as solid-surface paving, curbs and gutters, speed limits, traffic cops, illegal jaywalkers, stop signs, traffic towers, signal lights, loading zones, “non-parking” areas, one-way streets, and gridlock. The city’s earliest instance of vehicles banned entirely from a roadway occurred on Peachtree Street, on which heavily-loaded wagons and trucks could not travel as they tore up the asphalt road surface.

Finally, the heart of downtown was the location where the first automobile appeared on city streets. That momentous occasion took place on October 14, 1899, just outside the Kimball House, the finest hotel in town. A steam-powered Locomobile, fresh off the train, stood parked at the corner of Decatur and Peachtree streets, just steps from the middle of Five Points.

Atlanta’s automobile age had begun.

## 2 ATLANTA'S PRO-GROWTH COALITIONS

Beginning in the late 1970s, Professor Clifford M. Kuhn (1952-2015) and colleagues conducted a series of interviews with Atlantans about their lives and experiences in the city between the years 1914 and 1948. Two of the interviewees were retired businessmen who recounted their remembrances about the 1920s Forward Atlanta campaign, and gave a remarkable account of the men they called “real leaders of Atlanta.” A small, select group of prominent, close-knit, civic-minded white businessmen, they “wielded tremendous influence over municipal affairs.” They created Atlanta Spirit and promoted city growth. The Chamber of Commerce, elected officials, and this group of commercial and financial leaders caucused together to get things done in the city. Whatever they got behind or chose to sponsor, the rest of the city went right along with them. One of the interviewees said, “They were the leaders of the city, and they might meet at the various clubs, or maybe at somebody’s house. I know they used to meet a lot—I’ve been present at the Capital City Club, Driving Club. They used to have meetings at those places.” These “real leaders” constituted the inner circle of Atlanta’s pro-growth coalition.<sup>37</sup>

Many cities across the South have long possessed a coterie of wealthy white men enormously influential in civic business, society, and governance. By the latter nineteenth century, the merchants, financiers, industrialists, developers, and newspaper men in many urban centers had supplanted the former slave-owners of the old order. In Atlanta especially, this elite group emerged as the driven and determined urban architects of Henry Grady’s New South.

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<sup>37</sup> The interviews were broadcast in a 50-part radio series on WRFG; tapes of the interviews are at the Atlanta History Center; the transcriptions were gathered into the book listed here. Clifford M. Kuhn et al., *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 89. One of the two interviewees was Nathaniel Baxter Maddox (1901-93), a son of Robert Foster Maddox (1870-1965), mayor of Atlanta from 1909-11, and one of the “real leaders” described above. As a son of one of the elite, he would naturally have known about his father’s meetings at their home and at the most exclusive clubs in Atlanta.

They toiled together, embracing modern methods and technologies, constantly seeking progress—by which they meant *growth*. They wanted their town to lead, not just their state, but the entire southeastern United States. No city embodied the boldness, enterprise, and dynamism of the new order more, and none had more vocal or enthusiastic boosters than Atlanta.

The city grew tremendously both in area and population in the early twentieth century, and by 1929, Atlanta had emerged as the commercial, financial, and transportation headquarters of the region. The pro-expansion alliance had succeeded. To understand how, one must consider the group's members: who they were; where they lived, worked, and socialized; what commonalities drew them together; what circumstances divided them. Equally important to determine are what strategies they employed to persuade lawmakers and fellow citizens alike that the interests of the alliance were those of everyone else. As a group, they possessed the same attitude reflected in the popular mis-quote of General Motors president, Charles E. Wilson, who in 1953 did not famously say, "What's good for General Motors is good for the country." The powerful elites felt that what was good for them was in fact good for Atlanta, and did not hesitate to say so.<sup>38</sup>

This sense of entitled superiority led the leaders to neglect the concerns of many, if not most of their fellow citizens. Entire sectors of the city, especially the neighborhoods of the working classes and African Americans, had sub-standard everything: housing, streets, water, sanitation, schools, heating, lighting, transportation access. Unless such deficiencies began to seriously impact Atlanta's reputation, or until the policymakers needed their votes, these

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<sup>38</sup> John Kay, "The Concept of the Corporation," *Business History* 61, no. 7 (January 15, 2019): 1131; Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*, 36. What Charles Erwin Wilson (1890-1961) actually said at his Secretary of Defense Senate confirmation hearing in 1953 was, "I thought that what was good for America was good for General Motors, and vice versa." But as Kay notes, it did not really matter, as the popular distorted version exemplified the central role which large corporations had come to play in modern economic life. In the same way, either statement (accurate or not) exemplifies the attitude of the pro-growth coalition toward their fiscal goals vis-à-vis what might benefit the rest of Atlanta.



constituencies received little attention from business or civic authorities. The vast majority of city dwellers had little or no voice in municipal decisions. This glaringly undemocratic, oligarchic inequity is the great fault of the typical growth-machine alliance; Atlanta's was no exception.<sup>39</sup>

This chapter explores the men and women of the two, racially-segregated pro-growth coalitions. Throughout this paper, references to the elite decision-makers, policy setters, growth alliance, and other such terms designate the white leaders, without any racial descriptor. During the Jim Crow era of extreme segregation, the reality was that the African American leaders in Atlanta had little to no influence on municipal policies of any kind. When they did, they had much greater concerns that expanding automobility; their communities faced fundamental survival issues like lynchings, lack of healthcare, unlivable wages. Given the disparate sizes and spheres of influence of the two different leadership groups, and the fact that they seldom interacted in any meaningful way, they are discussed separately below.

## 2.1 The White Pro-Growth Coalition

Atlanta's pro-growth coalition did not suddenly appear full-fledged in 1899. Official business groups had formed early in the city, but disbanded during the Civil War. Merchants revived the Atlanta Board of Trade in 1866, but soon replaced it with a new organization more responsive to the city's growth, the Chamber of Commerce (COC). A group of top businessmen were the ones behind the formation of that highly-influential body, dedicated to "enlarging and extending the commercial influence and growth of the city."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 145.

<sup>40</sup> For histories of the Mercantile Association, the two Atlanta Boards of Trade, and the creation of the Chamber of Commerce, see Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 1:472-73, 712, 866-67. For documentation of the Chamber of Commerce in the early twentieth century, see Walter G. Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County* (Atlanta: Walter W. Brown, 1934), 339-43.

As informal associations, growth alliances keep no official records, but the establishment of the COC may signal the beginnings of the coalition in Atlanta. Certainly well before the turn of the century, the city's elite business leaders had joined together in a variety of business, professional, and social organizations, using their influence to lower tax rates and railroad freight charges, provide greater accessibility to downtown, and enthusiastically promote the city.

Over the time period of this study, the composition of this group naturally changed. Some born before or during the Civil War would gain great wealth and prominence late in the nineteenth century, especially Asa Griggs Candler, Sr. (1851-1929) of Coca-Cola fame, Joel S. Hurt, Jr. (1850-1926) whose electric streetcars enabled his Inman Park development, and Henry Morrell Atkinson (1862-1939), the forceful head of the streetcar and electric company that eventually became Georgia Power. All three would still possess enormous influence well into the twentieth century, though two would be dead before the endpoint of this dissertation, and the third would die within ten years. As these leaders aged and diminished in activity, younger men stepped up to take their places. Some, such as Robert Winship Woodruff (1889-1985), president of an automobile company as well as Coca-Cola, would go on to even greater fame beyond 1929. Although losses in the coalition occurred, the vacuums filled quickly so the group maintained its influence and authority. "The king is dead, long live the king!"-approach ensured continuity.

Although the term "elite" is used to refer to the coalition members in terms of their impact on the city streets, not all of them achieved that level of status socially. Some father-to-son legacy members inherited their advantages; others worked hard to achieve varying degrees of rank and riches. Not everyone in the database was widely known—then or now. Names like Candler, Hurt, and Woodruff live on in Atlanta on buildings, streets, parks, schools, and civic institutions. The name Atkinson, despite Henry's forty-year reign as a social, economic, and

business powerhouse, survives only on an electric power plant and the road leading to it. Other prominent or rising civic leaders do not appear in the database at all, e.g., future mayor and airport expansionist William Berry Hartsfield (1890-1971), as their spheres of influence did not extend to transportation and street infrastructure during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The database, like the coalition itself, contains multiple tiers of individuals. An 1889 newspaper article provides a detailed view of civic fortunes, listing names, worth in dollars, and the business entities of influential Atlantans. The reporter chiefly celebrates the industrious nature of everyone who generated so much from the postbellum municipal ashes, and underscores some defining characteristics of the commercial elite: busy, hard-working, thrifty, public-spirited, with a great love of the city and high hopes for its greatness. Similar descriptors apply to those in the growth-coalition of this study, along with similar gradations in wealth.

Some of the same last names appear in both lists. Atlanta early acquired a reputation for busyness and business long before the industry and productivity of the 1920s—the key decade of this study.<sup>41</sup>

Table 1 (at right) lists the chief occupations of the 111 white growth-coalition earners; three of the four women in the database held no paying positions. The top six in order included business owners, newspaper men (owners, editors, reporters, production workers);

attorneys, bankers, real estate entrepreneurs of various kinds (realtors, developers, building and

*Table 1. Primary Occupations of White Growth-Coalition Members*

Primary Occupation	Count
Business owner	25
Newspaper	15
Attorney	14
Banker	14
Real estate	12
Manufacturer	11
Other Professional	8
Streetcar/power company	5
Railroad	4
Police Chief	2
Chief of Fire Department	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>111</b>

<sup>41</sup> “With Our Millionaires [sic],” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1889; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:179-80.

loan officers, construction company owners), and manufacturers/industrialists. Most held positions as presidents of companies, founders and proprietors of large enterprises, prestigious professionals, or board chairpersons. A number would never reach such exalted levels, yet still wielded some influence which those higher-up found useful. The list contains the city's most important enterprises, and the majority of the men in the database were documented members of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce (women could not join until 1921). As Hunter notes, "The pattern of business dominance of civic affairs in Regional City [Atlanta] is a fact. No other institution is as dominant in community life as the economic institution."<sup>42</sup>

Many of the men also had significant secondary careers (see Table 2 below). When they had succeeded in their primary field, they sought or were sought out for other business options, often in real estate, transit-related entities, and banking. Both the primary and secondary occupations of Atlanta's elite represent all of the entities defined in the growth-machine thesis.

Finally, a number of the group also held elected positions (see Table 3 at right). Typical for a pro-growth coalition, few of the members ran for public office and the majority of those served on the Atlanta city council. The list contains duplicates, as most of those who achieved higher office had earlier been councilmen or commissioners. They provided direct ties between the group and the

*Table 2. Secondary Occupations of White Growth-Coalition Members*

<b>Secondary Occupation</b>	<b>Count</b>
Banker	18
Real estate development	11
Business	18
Streetcar/power company	5
Railroads	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56</b>

*Table 3. White Growth-Coalition Politicians*

<b>Politicians</b>	<b>Count</b>
Mayor	9
City council	17
County commission	8
State legislator	3
Governor	2
U.S. senator	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>

<sup>42</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 75.

government, facilitating the adoption of beneficial policies and the blocking or indefinite stalling of potentially harmful legislation. The association also exercised much of its influence through less obvious channels. Seldom did the very top men run for office, preferring to publicly endorse favored candidates and donate to political campaigns; they also made well-publicized and generous contributions to community-wide endeavors.

Most of the men in the coalition database belonged to professional, business, and special interest organizations. As Jackson notes, Atlanta had a reputation as a city of “joiners.” The abbreviations list at the front of this study contains federations, unions, consortia, leagues, and councils in which many in the growth coalition held memberships, with special emphasis on transportation-based associations. These associations proved invaluable venues through which businessmen could “collaborate” with city officials to ensure that advantageous legislation passed.<sup>43</sup>

Licensed professionals like architects, realtors, and engineers had their own institutions. Others represented specific types of business, such as advertisers, automakers, car dealers, hotel owners, garage managers, builders, and streetcar executives. One example, the Atlanta Manufacturers Association, exemplified the coalition mindset to grow the city and increase personal wealth. All the prominent businessmen in town joined because its purpose was “to stimulate the development of the material resources of Atlanta..., and also to advance the pecuniary and other interests of those in the association.” A number of organizations—national,

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<sup>43</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 29; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 174.

state, and local—existed for car owners and drivers. The Atlanta branches of these played significant roles in the surveying, financing, paving, and regulating of city streets.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to their business and professional relationships, the members of the pro-growth coalition had other close associational ties. Virtually all of the men participated in multiple fraternal societies and orders, including but by no means limited to Masons, Shriners, Elks, Red Men, Knights Templar, and clubs such as Kiwanis, Rotary, and Civitan. Many also took active roles in their churches, temples, and synagogues.<sup>45</sup>

In 1923, Steiner wrote about his contemporary era as “an age of crowds,” and how the then-current vogue for civic and fraternal organizations illustrated the prevalence of the communal spirit. He noted that “skilled propagandists” could win support for welfare and community drives by whipping up the public through carefully constructed campaigns with speeches, publicity, banners, and slogans. In a similar fashion, the members of the clubs could be manipulated to support already-decided policies and programs. The monthly meeting format, usually including a meal, utilized rituals such as humor, speeches, songs, and boisterous play to foster *esprit de corps* and secure enthusiasm for the group and its pre-arranged agendas.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Official petition of the Atlanta Manufacturers’ Association to incorporate is untitled, on page 7 of the *Atlanta Constitution*, March 28, 1902.

<sup>45</sup> While detailed information on some of the lower-tiered members could not be located, the top decision-makers, are reliably documented in sources like William J. Northen, ed., *Men of Mark in Georgia...*, 7 vols. (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1907-1912); *Notable Men of Atlanta and Georgia*, (Atlanta, 1913); Lucien Lamar Knight, *A Standard History of Georgia and Georgians*, 6 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1917); Daniel Decatur Moore, ed., *Men of the South: A Work for the Newspaper Reference Library* (New Orleans: Southern Biographical Association, 1922); Dudley Glass, ed., *Men of Atlanta* (Atlanta: Blosser-Williams, 1924); Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*; Lorenzo Ferguson Woodruff, and Hal M. Stanley, eds., *Men of Georgia* (Atlanta: Georgia Press Reference Association, 1927); James C. Bryant, *Capital City Club: The First One Hundred Years, 1883-1983* (Atlanta: Capital City Club, 1991). An excellent summary of the various halls, societies, and clubs can be found in Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 803-24.

<sup>46</sup> Jesse F. Steiner, “Community Organization and the Crowd Spirit,” *Journal of Social Forces* 1, no. 3 (March 1923): 221-26.

Where the clubs held their meetings, the physical surroundings, the type of meal served, the prominence of the speaker—all reflected the power, status, and social level of the members. The top decision-makers met in private clubs; only select invitees attended those gatherings. In contrast, professional associations and other organizations open to the general public gathered in the less-expensive hotels and restaurants. The popular and well-known “luncheon circuit” provided an arena for men to see and be seen on a regular basis. The frequency of such encounters nurtured unanimity—a principle of guiding importance to the coalition.<sup>47</sup>

The clubs and other formal associations represented a “chain of command” necessary to the functioning of the group. Rivalries of course occurred within the alliance and could present significant problems. While members of the business elite held much in common, that did not guarantee solidarity or eliminate arguments between competing enterprises and individuals. A consistently unified front required careful cultivation, primarily through the mechanisms of the professional associations and civic luncheon clubs. The head men at times might resort to coercive measures to enforce the chosen party line, but sometimes even they disagreed. This study’s best example occurred in the 1920s, when angry businessmen took opposing views of Atlanta’s street parking policies. The resulting stalemate meant that the city council took no action, to the detriment of the entire community.<sup>48</sup>

The very top men also held memberships in more select, by-invitation-only entities (see Table 4 at right). The Capital City Club, founded in 1883, billed itself as “the oldest and most prestigious social club for

*Table 4. Exclusive White Men’s Clubs*

<b>Club Name</b>	<b>Count</b>
Capital City Club	54
Piedmont Driving Club	27
Atlanta Athletic Club	26
Druid Hills Golf Club	15

<sup>47</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 10-16, 181.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-93; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, 19.

gentlemen of finance, commerce, and industry,” and claimed, with some merit, its role as “a vital force in shaping the destiny of Atlanta.” The Piedmont Driving Club began in 1887 as the Gentlemen’s Driving Club for owners and breeders of fine horses, and grew into one of the city’s greatest social clubs. Its large tract of land off Peachtree Street was eventually sub-divided, with 185 acres becoming present-day Piedmont Park.

The Atlanta Athletic Club organized in 1898 for the sports- and athletically-inclined. Its East Lake Golf Course opened in 1905, expanded to 18 holes plus clubhouse in 1915, and was the home course to amateur golf great Robert “Bobby” Tyre Jones, Jr. (1902-71). The Athletic Club also opened in 1926 a Philip Shutze-designed, magnificently-appointed eleven-story building on Carnegie Way, containing a main gymnasium with seating for 2,000 spectators.

Finally, the Druid Hills Golf Club debuted its course and clubhouse in 1912 on more than 100 acres in the exclusive Druid Hills

neighborhood east of the city. The club persuaded Georgia Railway & Electric to extend the streetcar line to pass in front of the clubhouse, allowing businessmen members convenient travel to their downtown offices.<sup>49</sup>

In these top clubs, Atlanta’s leading, all-white decision-makers enjoyed privacy and association with their own kind. Women and



*Figure 2. 1928 Capital City Club banquet; Atlanta History Center.*

<sup>49</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Driving and Racing,” January 5, 1887; “Druid Hills Golf Club Has Just Been Organized,” July 7, 1912; “Mammoth Construction Projects Are Going Forward,” March 21, 1926; Peggy Mitchell, “Athletic Club’s \$1,250,000 Home,” *Atlanta Journal Magazine*, April 4, 1926; Bryant, *Capital City Club: The First One Hundred Years, 1883-1983*, xiii, 162; Jack J. Spalding, *Piedmont Driving Club: History of the Club* (Atlanta: Lyon-Young, 1937), 5-18; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:136-58, 368-70.



children had limited access to designated areas. The men conducted a great deal of business while socializing in clubrooms, exercising in the gyms, sporting on links and courts, cooling off in pools and shower rooms, drinking beer and liquor from the club's private lockers beyond the reach of Georgia's prohibition law, and feasting sumptuously in the exclusive dining halls (see Figure 2 above). African Americans entered these exclusive clubs only as workers or wait staff.

The social clubs did not permit Jewish members. But well before the formation of the Capital City Club, a group of German and Hungarian Jews in 1866 established the Concordia Association to nurture their shared cultural heritage. They first met in the store of Morris Rich on Whitehall Street, but in 1892, constructed Concordia Hall on Mitchell Street, designed by famed architectural firm Bruce & Morgan. The association re-organized in 1904 as the Standard Club, and the following year, moved to 142 Washington Street to better serve the Jewish community centered in the Washington-Rawson district southeast of Five Points. By 1929, it had relocated to 400 Ponce de Leon Avenue, reflecting the influence of the automobile on the movement of the population northward. Victor Hugo Kriegshaber (1859-1934) helped organize the Standard Club. An engineer, builder, manufacturer, and financier, he presided over the Chamber of Commerce and served on the city's planning commission. A valued member of the power elites, he still could never join the most exclusive clubs.<sup>50</sup>

Prominent individuals also sought admission to the *Social Register*, "that most prestigious of American institutions." Listing indicated not only considerable wealth but also approved social position. Only individuals or couples recommended by other members could, after

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<sup>50</sup> David R. Cohen, "At 150, Standard Club Draws on Intown Roots," *Atlanta Jewish Times* (November 8, 2017). Kriegshaber's 1909 Beaux Arts mansion on the edge of Inman Park survives today as the Wrecking Bar.

thorough vetting, be admitted. Fifty-six members of the coalition appeared in the 1922 Atlanta *Social Register*.<sup>51</sup>

Besides associating professionally and socially, many of the white elites lived near each other. Table 5 at right shows the most common streets and neighborhoods where they resided, all of which would be considered high-end. Some were exclusive: the preeminent areas of Inman Park, Ansley Park, and Druid Hills all had deed restrictions prior to any official city zoning, ensuring that undesirables could not afford to purchase or build within their borders. Ansley Park specifically excluded

*Table 5. Home Locations of White Elites*

Street Name / Neighborhood	Count
Peachtree Street	25
Druid Hills	12
Ponce de Leon Avenue	9
Buckhead	8
Ansley Park	7
West Peachtree Street	6
Inman Park	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72</b>

African Americans from the neighborhood, except to live in one of the servants' halls.

Atlanta's white elites met frequently in common spaces. They lived, worked, played, prayed, and were buried in close proximity to each other. As Hunter notes, the locales in which they predominantly existed separated them from the masses and isolated them from the problems confronting ordinary citizens. The routes they drove (or were driven) to and from work lay mostly along streets with "new store fronts, neon signs, and the gleaming chromium of the new cars on display" in the Automobile Row section of Peachtree Street. Professionals and lower-tiered members of the coalition might pass through industrial areas or depressing neighborhoods, but they lived on pleasant streets in attractive sections of town.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Southern Cities Social Register, *Social Register Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Atlanta 1922*, vol. 36, no. 18 (New York: Social Register Association, November 1921), various pages. Quotation from the Social Register Association website, <https://socialregisteronline.com>, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> The majority of individuals listed in this study's database were buried at Westview Cemetery, established relatively late in 1884. Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta's first city-owned park and burial ground, was established in 1850. Many of the older coalition members are buried on the 48-acre Oakland site, but by the 1920s, the 600-acre Westview had become the preferred location. Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 17-22.

One thing all coalition members had in common: membership in Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce. The city's alliance of pro-growth advocates took its nascent form during Reconstruction when they played a leading role in organizing the Chamber of Commerce on August 7, 1871. The Chamber initially functioned as a way for merchants to band against a common enemy: the railroads with their ever-climbing freight charges. The burgeoning national economy of the late nineteenth century provided an impetus for businessmen to work together for lower shipping costs, favorable tax rates, and a more attractive urban environment. Their early efforts proved successful. In 1883, the COC incorporated; it constructed its own building two years later. By 1890, it had added a noonday meal service (an early entry into the luncheon circuit), and boasted a membership of nearly 600 men representing some 350 firms. By the end of the century, a business-based community power structure had developed, exhibiting all the characteristics of a controlling pro-growth coalition.<sup>53</sup>

Women could not join the Chamber of Commerce until 1921, when the Department of Women's Affairs was organized. Miss Laura Smith, one of the city's leading business women served as first chair, and as such, became an *ex officio* director on the COC's board, the first woman to join its deliberations. Smith, a former supervisor of the Atlanta school board, was general supervisor for Traffic Instruction for Southern Bell Telephone Company, and trained thousands of women as telephone operators. In 1922, the group was renamed the Women's Division, allowing self-supporting women to join, and soon after, Mrs. Samuel M. Inman was elected outright to a position on the Board of Directors.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> No records have been located for the Atlanta Board of Trade, or for the years of the Chamber of Commerce prior to 1883; Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 339; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, 138-42.

<sup>54</sup> "Women's Committee Meets at Chamber of Commerce," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 21, 1921; Laura M. Smith, "Women in the Chamber of Commerce," *City Builder* 6, no. 8 (October 1921): 5; "Businesswomen's Group to Form," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 1, 1921; "Women in the Chamber of Commerce," *City Builder* 6, no. 10 (December 1921): 18; Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 387.

Even the name of the Atlanta Chamber's magazine, *The City Builder*, underscored the goal of the organization—to promote city expansion. Its articles and advertisements hammered home the pro-growth, city-building message. A 1924 ad directly addressed the journal reader—"a substantial business man"—this way: "You want to see Atlanta grow because it means bigger and better business for you." In other words, what was good for the city was good for their bottom lines.<sup>55</sup>

Doyle notes that "It was largely by the process of city building that local business leaders became a class, a social entity bound by a similar world view, by common interests, and by associations and instruments of power that could advance those interests.... Upon such platforms, a powerful business class formed." His description accurately traces the formation of Atlanta's pro-growth alliance, which definitely contained men of power and influence.<sup>56</sup>

Hunter wrote about the power of Atlanta's elite in 1953, but his account captures the essence and scope of the authority of the decision-makers earlier in the twentieth century.

Most of the leaders are persons of power status. In some cases they have the machinery of government at their bidding. In many cases they control large industries in which they reign supreme in matters of decision affecting large numbers of the citizenry. They are persons of dominance, prestige, and influence. They are, in part, the decision-makers for the total community. They are able to enforce their decisions by persuasion, intimidation, coercion, and, if necessary, force.<sup>57</sup>

Hidden or overt, the power exerted by the coalition as a whole shaped the city in countless ways between 1920 and 1929. This study investigates one particular sphere of their influence. It shows how the group harnessed the motor vehicle as an agent to grow Atlanta and build their personal wealth. In this place and during this time period, civic, commercial, and

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<sup>55</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, "Clear the Track for Full Power Ahead," *City Builder* 9, no. 11 (January 1924): inside front cover.

<sup>56</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, 19.

<sup>57</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 24.

political power resided overwhelmingly in the hands of white men. The African American community, largely spurned and shunned, had its own leaders who on occasion could exert some indirect power of their own.

## **2.2 The Black Pro-Growth Coalition**

A number of Atlanta's most influential Black leaders also formed a growth-machine type of alliance, consisting of the top businessmen, educators, and ministers. It was logically a smaller group, as the city's African American population in the early twentieth century comprised one-third of the total. Despite Jim Crow restrictions, the city presented economic and commercial opportunities from which the members sought not only personal wealth, but also advancement for the larger African American community. They were painfully aware of the pervasive crimes (even if technically legal) of segregation, injustice, discrimination, and violence aimed against them; yet they forcefully protested against lynching, poor schools, low wages, and the living conditions of many of their fellow citizens. In Atlanta in the early twentieth century, the Black elites exhibited an awareness of the needs of the poor in their communities lacking in the parallel white coalition.<sup>58</sup>

But like the white pro-growth advocates, Black business leaders encouraged development and sought to expand their commercial and real estate interests. However, the white group almost totally ignored their African American counterparts—unless they were soliciting votes for or donations to campaigns for purportedly citywide improvements. The Forward Atlanta movement in the 1920s provides a striking, if stunningly short-sighted example of white leaders completely overlooking a substantial sector of the municipal economy. As elite businessmen, many with

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<sup>58</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 147-49.

substantial wealth, the Black coalition shared common features with the white group, yet remained outside of the city's dominant power structure.<sup>59</sup>

Before discussing the twenty-one leaders in Atlanta's Black pro-growth coalition, it is important to understand the circumstances under which they existed. Those conditions explain why the power they possessed was limited almost exclusively to their own communities. The failure of Reconstruction left many African Americans in conditions only marginally better off than slavery as the new southern imperative of white supremacy dictated that all persons of color be subservient to whites everywhere and all the time. Georgia enacted its first Jim Crow law—separating the races on trains and trolleys—in 1891. From then on, its cities and towns continued to expand restrictions on African Americans, keeping them, pre-birth to post-mortem, out of white space.

Whites severely circumscribed the physical area available for African Americans, utilizing a number of strategies to keep Blacks “in their place” within defined sectors of the city. The comprehensiveness of the segregation was stunning. The policy of “in their place” meant more than just regulating where Blacks lived; it restricted where they worked and what type of work they could do. It limited the type of training they received. Black public schools were grotesquely inferior in number, size, and amenities, and so severely overcrowded that they often operated daily triple sessions at a time when even double sessions at white schools had been eliminated. In 1913, the Board of Education tried to abolish seventh and eighth grades for black students on the grounds that future manual laborers did not need that much schooling. African Americans had to provide their own higher education, which they did with excellence,

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 150-53.

establishing in Atlanta a consortium of some of the best Black colleges and universities in the nation.<sup>60</sup>

African American Atlantans did not have a public high school, park, swimming pool, or library they could visit until the 1920s. “In their place” mandated separate restaurants, stores, hotels, bars, clubs, playgrounds, shops, theaters, hospital wards, churches, golf courses, burial grounds, and cells in the city stockade. Even chain-gangs were segregated. The only time the races worked together was when the white bossed the Black. No African Americans sat on juries (so much for “trial by jury of one’s peers”), served as police officers or firemen, drove streetcars, or cast a ballot in the all-important Democratic “white” primary. Voting restrictions and the political environment ensured that no Blacks held elected office. The dirtiest, most denigrating, physically demanding, and low-paying jobs fell to them. Even when holding identical positions as whites, e.g., public school teachers, they received two-thirds the pay of a white person.<sup>61</sup>

The ironies and absurdities of the ubiquitous “in their place” system abounded. Blacks could not sit down for a meal beside whites, but they could prepare and serve their food. They could not live next door, but daily entered white neighborhoods to clean their houses, wash their clothes, and raise their children. A black man could not ride in a car with whites, but could drive them in a car anywhere. On Atlanta’s streetcars whites sat at the front and Blacks at the back, except the Black nursemaids with their small white charges. No line physically delineated the separate spaces, so contact and intermingling frequently occurred, often with tragic results.

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<sup>60</sup> Stewart F. Gelders, “17 New Bond Money Schools Near Completion,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1923; Kuhn et al., *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*, 131.

<sup>61</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-194*, 97.

Georgia Railway and Power Company rejected as too expensive the demand by whites for their own trolley cars, as profits took priority over purity.

Noted Atlanta scholar Dana F. White writes of the “two Atlantas.”<sup>62</sup> Since Reconstruction, two geographical factors generally dictated the settlement patterns for African Americans in the city. Low-lying, unhealthy terrains, shunned by most, provided affordable real estate for the poorest citizens. Housing in close proximity to industrial locations, despite noxious noises, dirt, smoke, and odors, allowed walking to work. Meanwhile domestic help, maintenance men, chauffeurs, and workers took trolleys to jobs at the city center or in distant white suburban neighborhoods. Their reliance on streetcars would make them easy targets for the white mob violence during Atlanta’s 1906 race riot.

Restrictive legislation hardened the boundaries of the city’s racial divisions as events prompted migration both out of and within Atlanta. Boll weevil devastation and increasingly mechanized farms forced numbers of Georgian agricultural workers to the city. Finding jobs scarce and the environment hostile, many moved on northward. The 1906 riot had an enormous impact on African American spaces. Violence and fear drove business owners and residents away from downtown into established Black communities near Auburn Avenue to the east, and the westside cluster of colleges and universities. The 1917 Great Fire of Atlanta devastated the primarily-Black Fourth Ward. Former homeowners had to seek shelter in other already-crowded African American neighborhoods. Some left the city altogether, joining the Great Migration to the somewhat less restrictive urban North.

Black districts received far fewer of the services typically provided by municipal government. Unpaved and unlighted streets, lack of water and sewage systems, and infrequent

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<sup>62</sup> Dana F. White, “The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970,” *Atlanta Historical Journal* 26, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1982): 199.



trash collection and street cleaning characterized the high-density, low-income, often disease-ridden neighborhoods. As the *Atlanta Independent* observed, “The color line is too often drawn in the distribution of public services.” In Atlanta, the pro-growth policymakers oversaw the distribution of city resources, determining who got what, where, and when. Concerned with the direction of urban expansion, they made sure most city amenities went first to their properties and developments.<sup>63</sup>

The one city service applied generously to African Americans was policing. That of course meant policing *of* Blacks, not police assistance provided *to* them. Low-level crimes within African American neighborhoods received little attention. Serious offenses involving high dollar amounts or physical violence took higher priority, as well as every offense, large or small, against a white person. The Atlanta Police Department arrested more Blacks than whites every year from its founding in 1873 until the 1920s, when majority-white automobile-related infractions reversed the trend. Especially after the 1906 riot, many African Americans stayed close to home at night to avoid police harassment.<sup>64</sup>

Inside this confining atmosphere African Americans carved out their own spaces within two miles of Atlanta’s center. They turned inward, as Du Bois observes, working with each other, cultivating group self-reliance, and fostering a strong sense of community. They generally patronized Black-owned businesses, ate in the restaurants of African American women, and worshipped in churches with prominent ministers such as Joseph Simeon Flipper (1859-1944), bishop of the A.M.E. Church of Atlanta and chancellor of Morris Brown College. They read the

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<sup>63</sup> Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” 313; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 14, 58, 114; Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom:’ Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 103-05; *Atlanta Independent*, July 25, 1908, quoted in Tera W. Hunter, 103.

<sup>64</sup> Eric H. Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 63; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 115; Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 144.

*Atlanta Independent* newspaper owned by activist editor Benjamin Jefferson Davis, Sr. (1870-1945) and produced in his offices at 250 Auburn Avenue, Atlanta's Black Main Street. By 1928, they could also read the weekly *Atlanta World* published by Morehouse College graduate William Alexander Scott, II (1902-34). When sick or in need of legal advice, they sought out African American physicians and lawyers—professionals whom many whites did not realize



*Figure 3. Top insurance executives Pace, Perry, and Herndon, ca. 1913.*

even existed. When purchasing property, they employed a Black “realist,” as the title “realtor” applied exclusively to white real estate agents.<sup>65</sup>

While many African Americans lived in poverty, by the 1920s, a large middle class existed. A number of hard-working entrepreneurs achieved even greater success; an elite class emerged and leading Black-owned banks and insurance companies constructed offices along

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<sup>65</sup> W. E. Burkhardt Du Bois, “The Social Evolution of the Black South,” *American Negro Monographs* 1, no. 4 (March 1911): 7-10; Kuhn et al., *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*, 99-100.

Auburn Avenue (see photo above<sup>66</sup>). Alonzo Franklin Herndon (1858-1927) led the way, becoming Atlanta's first Black millionaire. Born into slavery, he worked in an Atlanta barbershop post-Emancipation. By 1904, he owned three shops with the best barbers in the South, including in his flagship at 66 Peachtree Street, outfitted with marble flooring, crystal chandeliers, and gold fixtures.<sup>67</sup> His whites-only clientele included the city's leading lawyers, judges, politicians, and businessmen, but that did not protect the store from the mob's 1906 rampage. He purchased a failing insurance company in 1905, and began offering policies and loans to African Americans at a time when white entities refused them service. By the 1920s, his Atlanta Life Insurance Company had branches across the South and an imposing building still standing at 148 Auburn Avenue. Herndon, the most prominent African American in the city, at his death held controlling interest in numerous corporations and had extensive properties in Atlanta and the orange groves of Lake County, Florida.

While none of the other leaders accumulated fortunes the size Herndon's, many achieved stature and wealth despite the obstacles to their advancement. Obviously, many more than the twenty-one decision-makers in this study's database existed; however, few had any impact on traffic control or street regulation, though most militated for better conditions within African American districts, including transportation opportunities. They organized into a pro-growth association, and shared the concern of the white coalition to ensure legislation favorable to commerce and expansion. Their power structure generally followed that of that of the whites, with a few select business and financial men at the very top, and a larger group of lesser lights,

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<sup>66</sup> The photo shows (left to right): Harry H. Pace, Heman E. Perry, and Alonzo F. Herndon in the Standard Life Insurance Company office on Auburn Avenue, ca. 1913; from Alexa Benson Henderson, "Heman E. Perry and Black Enterprise in Atlanta, 1908-1924," *Business History Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 222.

<sup>67</sup> The location of Herndon's magnificent barbershop at [then] 66 Peachtree Street would today be located in Woodruff Park on the west side, just south of the intersection of Poplar and Peachtree, across Peachtree Street from Moe's and the Happy Hookah.

important in the community, but serving more as assistants to carry out the decisions of the principals.<sup>68</sup>

Given the crushing strictures of Jim Crow, they had little influence over citywide policies, but they recognized and harnessed the collective force of the African American community as a voting bloc. In this capacity they exercised power and contributed, deliberately or inadvertently, to the redefinition of Atlanta's streets into automobile conduits. After the excruciating loss in the bond election of 1919, white power elites worked hard in the 1920s to win the Black vote on the critical viaduct bond issues. In return, Black leaders demanded, and received concessions in the form of municipal expenditures for increased services within their communities—running water, sewer lines, more schools, paved roadways, and healthcare facilities.<sup>69</sup>

The sole woman in the database, Lugenia D. Burns Hope (1871-1947), played *the* pivotal role in this defining accomplishment. Born in Missouri, but raised in Chicago, Lugenia attended the Chicago Art Institute from 1890-93, then quit school to support her mother and siblings. Employment at several charitable societies brought her into contact with the settlement house movement. The experience defined all of her subsequent work as a social reformer, community organizer, and life-long social gospel activist.<sup>70</sup>

She met Augusta, Georgia native John Hope (1868-1936) in Chicago at the World's Columbian Exposition. Shortly after their marriage in 1897, he accepted a position at the Atlanta Baptist College, later renamed Morehouse College. He became its first African American

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<sup>68</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 112-17.

<sup>69</sup> Writing about Atlanta's power relations in the 1950s, Floyd Hunter observes that Black leaders had to adapt themselves to the prevailing conditions of segregation and social exclusion, and notes that the advances made by African Americans were due mostly because of their power at the ballot box; *ibid.*, 138, 41.

<sup>70</sup> Ann Short Chirhart, "Lugenia Burns Hope (1871-1947) Fulfilling a Sacred Purpose," in *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Ann Short Chirhart, and Kathleen Ann Clark (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 16-19.

president in 1906, and in 1929, he was also named president of the Atlanta University Consortium—the newly-formed alliance of the historically Black schools of Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Atlanta University.

This burgeoning westside community contained some of the city's most influential African Americans, including Alonzo Herndon, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), and David Toby Howard (1849-1935). The Hopes socialized with them, with faculty members and their wives, and with the Reverend Doctor Henry Hugh Proctor (1868-1933), first Black pastor of Atlanta's First Congregational Church. From the college campus, they could watch the leased Black convicts working at the Chattahoochee Brick Company, owned by former Atlanta mayor James Warren English, Sr. (1837-1925), a prominent member of the white pro-growth coalition.<sup>71</sup>

Lugenia Hope launched the Neighborhood Union from her living room in 1908. The group of ten women worked to meet the spiritual and physical needs of westside Black Atlantans. By 1914, the organization had branches in African American neighborhoods across the city. They offered literacy and domestic science classes; held health clinics; provided daycare; lobbied for anti-lynching laws; and petitioned for better schools and sanitation facilities.

But Hope's crowning achievement in relation to Atlanta's streets, for which she has received virtually no recognition, was her work as chair of a women's registration committee for the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Originally working in 1918 to increase the Association's membership, under her leadership, the group also urged Black men to pay their poll taxes so they could vote in the upcoming 1919 city bond election. Her committee registered enough men to vote, enabling the stunning (to the whites) defeat of the bond issue—twice! It had repercussions for every subsequent bond vote in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

Atlanta, forcing white elites to make concessions to win Black voters in order to pass their all-important viaduct financing bonds.<sup>72</sup>

This signature accomplishment places Lugenia Burns Hope at the head of the black pro-growth association in terms of lasting, if unintentional, impact on the configuration of Atlanta's city streets. The achievements by another African American elite had great impact on the city's racial topography. Heman Perry (1873-1929) intentionally crossed the city's westside color line, bringing new residential areas, the first public high school, and the first city park to Black residents.

Of the twenty-one Black pro-growth leaders in this study, eight were businessmen and professionals, each of whom eventually added banking and/or real estate development to their resumes as secondary occupations. Two others held positions as newspaper publishers-editors, and another four, university educators. Unlike the white coalition, which had no clergy members, three served as ministers of large congregations—two of whom were also university leaders. Two members of the group were noted building contractors; another served as a government railroad postal employee. The latter, John Wesley Dobbs (1882-1961), during the time frame of this study, was just starting out in the coalition, but would, by the 1950s, become one of the top decision-makers. The eastside road he lived on, Houston Street, now bears his name: John Wesley Dobbs Avenue.

Of the group, Lugenia Hope was the sole community organizer, although many of the others were activists, working to improve the lives of African Americans both within and beyond their official occupations. Herndon, Du Bois, and John Hope took part in the Niagara movement; the latter two went on to hold leadership positions in the NAACP and the National Urban

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 29.

League. Lugenia Hope helped establish the Atlanta branch of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and in 1932, became first vice president of the Atlanta NAACP, creating "citizenship schools" for African Americans to learn about government and voting.

Herndon and Howard made substantial financial contributions to and in other ways supported a variety of Black churches, schools, organizations, and causes. Rev. Dr. Procter, with white lawyer Charles T. Hopkins, formed the Interracial Committee of Atlanta after the 1906 riot. Davis and Scott utilized their newspapers to promote the good of the Black community and redress social injustices. They also provided much-needed advertising space for Black-owned businesses catering primarily to African Americans.

Many in the group socialized together, and like the white coalition, they lived in proximity to each other—although split between the eastside Auburn Avenue district and the westside University Center area. The top men could not live entirely separated from middle-class Blacks as the white elites could and did; there simply was not the square footage in their segregated spaces for the construction of an exclusively-elite Black neighborhood along the lines of a Druid Hills or Ansley Park. In 1910, Alonzo Herndon constructed his fifteen-room Beaux Arts mansion at 587 University Place near Morris Brown College, close to faculty and students.

Coalition members belonged to a variety of business organizations. In 1900, Herndon helped found the National Negro Business League (NNBL); Davis served on its Executive Committee. Intent on furthering the economic development of African American businesses, the League embraced the "separate economy" concept, that Black businesses understood their clientele better than whites, and supplied much-needed services and products to the perpetually underserved community. They also provided employment for Blacks, offering jobs and positions to which they could not aspire in white enterprises. The League held annual conferences at which

Atlantan growth proponents spoke, including A. D. Hamilton on “Contracting and Building,” D. T. Howard on “Undertaking and Embalming,” and B. J. Davis on “Negro Newspaper Publishing.” Atlanta hosted the League’s seventh annual convention on August 29-31, 1906—just weeks before the city erupted with white racial violence.<sup>73</sup>

African Americans business owners could not join the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and it would be 1932 before the Negro Chamber of Commerce was formed. For retail business owners, the Atlanta Colored Merchants Association, a member of the national association, worked diligently to improve business conditions within the community. Black Atlantans also held memberships in national professional groups.<sup>74</sup>

Several coalition members belonged to the Knights of Pythias, Knights of Tabor, and a number identified as Masons. John Wesley Dobbs, eventual Grand Master, oversaw construction of the Prince Hall Masons’ building at 330 Auburn Avenue in 1937. William L. “Bill” Calloway, a pro-growth elite from a later era, remarked that “everybody who was anybody in Black America was a Mason.” Almost certainly all the men group members belonged to the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America, which claimed in 1909 to be the largest secret Black order in the world. As membership was not divulged, definitively identifying any individual as a Fellow is difficult; however, many of the Fellows were known to be businessmen and developers, which included several of the men in the database.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> John Hope, “The Meaning of Business,” in *The Negro in Business; Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University*, ed. W. E. Burkhardt Du Bois (Atlanta: Atlanta University, 1899), 56-57; Kenneth Hamilton, ed., “Records of the National Negro Business League, 1900-1924,” (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1995), v-vi, 7, 9, 16, 44.

<sup>74</sup> Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:900-01.

<sup>75</sup> W. L. Calloway, *The “Sweet Auburn Avenue” Business History, 1900-1988* (Atlanta: Central Atlanta Progress, 1988), 4-5; Michael Leroy Porter, “Black Atlanta: An Interdisciplinary Study of Blacks on the East Side of Atlanta, 1890-1930” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1974), 53-54.



The African American pro-growth coalition functioned as a power structure as did the whites, but only within Black Atlanta. It utilized luncheon clubs and societies to initiate and carry out community-wide campaigns while the white group had broader city and regional influence. Blacks furnished the labor which kept much of the city's commerce and industry moving, and provided services demanded by all Atlantans. However, those facts did not ensure that the white business leaders gave consideration to the living or working conditions of African Americans.

Interaction between the two coalitions, as far as this writer could discover, arose exclusively from some larger policy or program which the whites wanted implemented. Key examples include the two 1920 viaduct bond issues and the Forward Atlanta campaign; all three are considered in detail later in this study. In *none* of those instances did Blacks serve on any committees or assist in administering the projects. Whites sought only their dollars, their votes, and their ability to rally public support within their communities. Only when racial violence, like the white riot of 1906, threatened Atlanta's reputation did some whites reach out to Black leaders.<sup>76</sup>

Hunter, who personally interviewed his subjects, notes that in the 1950s, white leaders privately mocked the Black sub-community and its leaders, even while soliciting their money for some program. Certainly the same occurred in the early decades of the twentieth century. One condition absolutely did maintain throughout both time periods: "On the basic issues revolving

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<sup>76</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 114, 38-39. The one major instance where white and black elites worked together as businessmen in the time frame of this study concerned the financial difficulties of Heman Perry's Standard Life Insurance Company in the mid-1920s. To this writer, it appeared to be more a case of vultures circling. Prominent men proffered a loan (e.g., Julius Rosenwald, John D. Rockefeller, John Hope, and Russell Moton), but Perry rejected it, along with the condition that he resign as president. In January 1925, whites took over the Black-owned company, forming the Southern-Standard Life Insurance Company. The local paper account was tepid: "Two Insurance Firms in Merger," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 16, 1925. For the gritty details and associated conspiracy theories, see Alexa Benson Henderson, "Heman E. Perry and Black Enterprise in Atlanta, 1908-1925," *Business History Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 233-39.

around segregation, the top leaders in the larger [i.e., white] community are adamant in maintaining the present alignment of relationships.” Whites dominated, and scrupulously maintained that position; Blacks had to be kept in their place.<sup>77</sup>

### 2.3 Boosterism and the Growth Coalition

A successful Molotch growth-machine alliance must employ strategies to generate good will toward its policies and to draw positive attention to its city. These efforts include working to generate a “we feeling” among local residents, as well as publicizing the municipality across the region and even nationally. A long-standing tradition in Atlanta, the city’s enthusiastic boosterism had its own name, the “Atlanta Spirit.” Defined as “the impulse which prompts a citizen of Atlanta to let the world know what a great city is his,” the relentlessly upbeat attitude outshone the promotional efforts of other southern cities and came to express the ultimate in civic patriotism. Victor Kriegshaber, the COC president in 1916, wrote that the loyalty-inspiring moniker denoted a commitment to ideological and material city building with the single purpose of making Atlanta a worthwhile place to live.<sup>78</sup>

While many dismiss boosterism as just over-the-top salesmanship, Brownell credits the activity as more complex and substantive than most historians believe. While always zealous and often excessive, the rhetoric reflected the social views of the participants, and served to justify their policies and maintain their power. J. R. Short describes it as a serious strategy to develop the local economy, and an important way to create cohesion within the business community. He cites post-Civil War boosterism as critical to southern cities trying to attract northern investment,

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<sup>77</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 138; Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City*, 124-27.

<sup>78</sup> Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” 314; John R. Hornady, *Atlanta: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Atlanta: American Cities Book/Index Printing, 1922), 4-5; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 137; Victor H. Kriegshaber, “What Is the Atlanta Spirit,” *City Builder* 1, no. 1 (March 1916): 8.

and credits Atlanta with having one of the most sustained urban booster campaigns of the twentieth century.<sup>79</sup>

Atlanta's growth boosters aimed to garner positive attention for the city, promoting its pro-business atmosphere (e.g., low tax rates, efficient transportation, abundant labor), as well as local natural and recreational attractions, like Stone Mountain and the many golf courses. They remained mute on other topics, certain groups, and events, such as racial strife, African Americans, and lynchings. As much as possible, they pushed the city's progressive label in an effort to counter the prevailing view of southern towns as small, backward, and poor.<sup>80</sup>

Pro-growth elites also made what use they could out of Atlanta's scanty cultural offerings, never failing to mention the city's springtime hosting of the Metropolitan Opera. This annual event created regional buzz as Atlanta was the only place outside of New York City visited by the full opera company. Frederick J. Paxon (1865-1939), CEO of one of the city's largest department stores, an executive in the Retail Merchants Association, and former president of the Chamber of Commerce, wrote an article in the COC's *City Builder* about what the opera season signified to city merchants—which was, in a word, “everything.” It meant “actual money brought into the city and spent.” From a promotional standpoint, it was an invaluable asset. “The press all over the country...carry the story of the Opera here and the wonderful success, musical and financial, it is each year.” Opera week brought recognition to Atlanta once a year, but

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<sup>79</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, xiv, 126-27, 37; John Rennie Short, “Urban Imagineers: Boosterism and the Representation of Cities,” in *The Urban Growth Machine: Critical Perspectives Two Decades Later*, ed. Andrew E. G. Jonas and David Wilson (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 20, 40-41.

<sup>80</sup> “Urban Imagineers: Boosterism and the Representation of Cities,” 40-41; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, 19. Print media touted Atlanta's progress and progressiveness; “‘Bob’ Maddox Typical of Progressive Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 14, 1908; Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, *Atlanta: A Twentieth-Century City* (Atlanta: Byrd, 1904), 3-5, 10; *Souvenir Album, Atlanta, Ga.* (Atlanta, 1911), 1, 19; Southern Railway System, *Progressive Atlanta* (Atlanta: Southern Railway System, 1925).

boosters utilized it year-round in promotional pieces—effectively “capitalizing Culture,” as T. Cholmondley Frink advocated in Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt*. In the eyes of some, the major value of civic aesthetic events lay in their advertising potential.<sup>81</sup>

The growth coalition succeeded in merging its own private interests with those of the larger public. It both fostered and benefited from boosterish activities that promoted city expansion and raised Atlanta’s national profile. The power leaders succeeded to a large degree in mobilizing local government to achieve their financial goals while pushing the cost of their activities onto the wider community. As the role of business in government increased, the city itself came to function more and more like a corporation—which many applauded. Councilman and retail executive Robert A. Gordon, despairing of certain government inefficiencies, spoke in favor of more businesslike productivity, remarking that, “After awhile the city of Atlanta will learn that a city is nothing other than a big corporation, and that its affairs must be managed by men who are acquainted with at least the rudimentary elements of business.”<sup>82</sup>

The largest and most influential organization of businessmen in most American cities in the early twentieth century was the local Chamber of Commerce. Virtually every man in the coalition database compiled for this study belonged to the COC, and thirteen served as president. Between the years 1908 and 1925, every president of the Atlanta COC was a member of the power elites who impacted city transportation policy. Place promotion in the United States has always been dominated by the business community, and the Chamber was the organization

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<sup>81</sup> Frederick Paxon, “What the Grand Opera Season Means to Atlanta Merchants,” *City Builder* 1, no. 2 (April 1916): 11; Richard Lingeman, “Sinclair Lewis Arrives,” *New England Review* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 41.

<sup>82</sup> “Bob Gordon’s ‘Damn,’” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1921; Kevin R. Cox, “Revisiting the City as a Growth Machine,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 10 (August 2017): 392; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 140-41, 217-18.

through which the pro-growth group principally acted in order to sell their agenda to the public and advertise the city to the world.<sup>83</sup>

The Atlanta COC welcomed all resident *white* retailers, merchants, manufacturers, bankers, professionals, or business *men* of any type. Its goals were to advise and assist business owners, extend commerce and trade, enhance the business environment, and grow the city. While the primary focus remained commercial, the Chamber supported multiple causes and took active part in community programs, even those with more obviously humanitarian, social, or moral goals. As Deaton observes, businessmen endorsed these endeavors in the hopes of directly or indirectly improving the local business climate. Even in the most principled of civic welfare campaigns, “the practicality of businessmen necessitated that the economic value be added” to the cultural or religious arguments. Throughout the early twentieth century, the COC maintained a sterling reputation as the most reliable, principled, pro-active, and enthusiastic civic supporter, holding the title of “trailblazer of progress for Atlanta.”<sup>84</sup>

Constant city expansion functioned as the chief index of that progress, signifying the health and character of the city. Brownell asserts that no indicator of the disposition of urban development was as compelling as population size; by that measure, Atlanta in the early twentieth century certainly succeeded (see Table 6 at right). This “worship of growth” extended to all citizens, not just the elites. African Americans likewise embraced it; they enthusiastically joined

*Table 6. Atlanta Population Growth, 1890-1930*

Census Year	Increase		
	Population	Number	Percent
1890	65,533	28,124	75.2
1900	89,872	24,339	37.1
1910	154,839	64,967	72.3
1920	200,616	45,777	29.6
1930	270,366	69,750	34.8

<sup>83</sup> Short, “Urban Imagineers: Boosterism and the Representation of Cities,” 40; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 52-53.

<sup>84</sup> “In Behalf of Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1913; Thomas Mashburn Deaton, “Atlanta During the Progressive Era” (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1969), 104, 110.

the 1920 campaign to grow the city's population to half a million by 1930. Everyone would benefit from a more populous city—at least, that was the message, and most people believed it.<sup>85</sup>

But for the pro-growth coalition, wider borders and more people were just means to an end; their ultimate goal remained financial accumulation, which they derived chiefly from selling, developing, or renting out their properties. Cox argues that in order to flourish, they needed a friendly regulatory environment and nurturing public policies. A frequent ploy to achieve both involved broadly framing real estate issues as “for the common good,” claiming that the trickle-down effects from some new development (more tax revenues, new jobs, rising home values, better schools) would benefit everyone in the community. Fortunately for the group, residents were “all too willing to fall into this sort of trap.” It would happen time and again in Atlanta in the 1920s, especially with the construction of the cars-only viaducts.<sup>86</sup>

City growth—that key indicator of success—depended on two essential elements: a smoothly-running transportation network, and plenty of unoccupied land where newcomers could settle and land speculators could prosper. Atlanta has always had open space into which to expand, hindered in no direction by geological features or regional boundaries. But people had to be able to get there quickly and easily, and policymakers determined that the automobile was the best travel mode for suburban as well as urban dwellers—as long as the city built the roads to accommodate them.<sup>87</sup>

## 2.4 Transportation as the Key to Growth

The majority of the members of a Molotch growth coalition are place entrepreneurs, that is, individuals interested or invested in land, or who supported real estate development. These

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<sup>85</sup> *Atlanta Independent*, March 6, 1920; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 127.

<sup>86</sup> Cox, “Revisiting the City as a Growth Machine,” 394-95, 399.

<sup>87</sup> Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 2.

can include property owners, business proprietors, investors, financiers, lawyers, realtors. Other members may not have direct place-based concerns, but depend on city growth for their financial fortunes.

In Atlanta, real estate investing has long rated among the top ways to make money. In the late 1890s, newspaper accounts touted the property markets as responsible for the fortunes of the city's wealthiest citizens. One article presciently observed that "Some periods of depression come, but as a rule Atlanta real estate moves steadily upward, and other fortunes will be made out of it in the years to come. It is always in demand." Ten years later, other tales circulated about the rising prices in downtown, and the savvy investments of some prominent citizens. The brothers Adair, Forrest (1865-1936) and George, Jr. (1874-1921) had long been city real estate moguls, but even Asa Candler, Sr., best known for his Coca-Cola fortune, emerged as one of the shrewdest land dealers in town. He passed his property acumen to at least one of his sons, William Candler (1890-1936), who brokered numerous property deals in Atlanta and Florida. The construction of the Spring Street viaduct in the twenties would send parcel prices in that section soaring.<sup>88</sup>

But the successful development of real estate depends on accessibility to the property. The value of land relates directly to the ease and speed of the transport to reach it. Horse-powered vehicles running on tracks in the mid-1800s had first allowed the small town to expand beyond the original one-mile circle centered on the train depot. The circular city boundary with a three-mile diameter represented the distance a man might walk in an hour.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "A Short Sketch of the Atlanta of Today," July 20, 1898; "Great Increase in Realty Value," December 7, 1909; "Spring Street Property Brings Good Price," April 16, 1921.

<sup>89</sup> Jonathan English, "The Commuting Principle That Shaped Urban History," Citylab.com © 2019 The Atlantic Monthly Group, <https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2019/08/commute-time-city-size-transportation-urban-planning-history/597055/>; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 16; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 1:703.

Electric streetcars made possible the 1895 eastern extension of Atlanta to the DeKalb County line in order to annex the first streetcar suburb, Joel Hurt's fashionable Inman Park. The availability of the automobile in Atlanta in the early 1900s increased people's choices of the transit mode they would utilize to traverse the city. Edwin Percival Ansley (1866-1923), real estate magnate and president of the Realty Trust Company, began developing Ansley Park, the city's the first automobile suburb in 1905. Atlanta would extend its boundaries northward to include both the neighborhood and Piedmont Park, situated on the opposite side of Peachtree Street.<sup>90</sup>

Ansley planned an exclusive neighborhood aimed at buyers who could pay not only the price of the lot, architect's fees, and construction costs of a large home. They could also afford an automobile or two which they or their chauffeur would drive. He had tried unsuccessfully to convince the streetcar to run a line into the subdivision, but failed. Residents, should they want to take a trolley, had to walk, drive, or be driven over to Peachtree Street to catch one. New homes in Ansley Park usually included the novel, free-standing structures—garages—to house motor cars. The chauffeur would reside in the detached servant's quarters, the only place in the neighborhood where an African American could live.<sup>91</sup>

The car clearly offered greater range, infinitely more flexibility, and faster speeds than any of the other transit modes. However, private ownership meant that only the wealthy could purchase a motor vehicle in the early 1900s. It would remain far beyond the reach of even

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<sup>90</sup> *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:158, 307; Beard, "From Suburb to Defended Neighborhood: Change in Atlanta's Inman Park and Ansley Park, 1890-1980."

<sup>91</sup> John Temple Graves "'Atlanta's Social and Driving Center,' Ansley Park," *Atlanta Georgian*, September 17, 1906; "Ansley to Take Fight for Cars to Commission," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 7, 1909; "Ansley Park, New Subdivision," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 22, 1908.



middle-class citizens until 1914, when Henry Ford's moving assembly lines produced masses of affordable Model Ts, and installment buying became available.

Cost considerations did not deter the enthusiasm of the growth advocates, however. As early as 1909, they had determined that the car would best help them meet their goals for city expansion, with no streetcars necessary. As an added bonus, the auto industry itself provided exciting new retail and manufacturing opportunities. With Ansley Park in mind, investors started surveying the wide-open suburban landscapes for development options.

Merchants as well as professionals hailed the automobile as a way to grow their businesses by increased efficiencies and wider customer bases. David Tobias Howard (1849-1935), an African American embalmer and undertaker, exemplifies an entrepreneur who successfully monetized a motor vehicle. Born into slavery, he became one of the most successful operators in the state after purchasing an automobile hearse/ambulance, which expanded his business far beyond metro Atlanta.<sup>92</sup> As his wealth and his fleet of vehicles grew, he chartered the first Black banking institute in Georgia, the Atlanta State Savings Bank, and came to rival Alonzo Herndon as a leading philanthropist. Numerous others also increased their personal fortunes, directly or indirectly, by or from motordom.

Having chosen their course, the business elites by 1920 needed to convince Atlantans that creating an automotive infrastructure to expand and ease travel by car would benefit everyone in the city. This process had deeper significance than simply decisions about moving people and goods through the city; it involved an understanding of how the city should be spatially configured, and by whom. As place entrepreneurs, their land-based interests and accompanying

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<sup>92</sup> Black undertakers also offered ambulance services to their communities, as white doctors and ambulances of white hospitals often refused to take care of or transport African Americans; David T. Howard & Company advertisement, *Atlanta City Directory 1923* (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1923): 163.

accessibility requirements dictated their selection of the automobile. They understood that to make mobility by car effective, they had to get city government to pave the streets, supply parking spaces, and create a system to keep traffic running smoothly.<sup>93</sup>

Atlanta's growth coalition succeeded with its adoption of the motor vehicle as the new transportation method. In the twenties, cars began to supplant trolleys, and would have completely replaced them much faster but for the interventions of the gasoline shortages and rationings of the Great Depression and World War II. Trucks, likewise, made inroads on the railroads' short-haul business, but not until the construction of the interstates would trucking substantially replace trains for long-hauling freight.

By 1929, Atlanta was as automobile city, but it did not arrive there on its own. Always promoting itself as progressive, the city really only adopted its modern ideas from somewhere else. It never produced a single innovative traffic measure, like street paving, curb cuts, signal devices, crosswalks, traffic cops, or stop signs. Instead, it followed the lead of cities like Detroit, New York, and Chicago.

Atlanta officials made frequent trips to the Northeast and Midwest to observe practices and study laws in other urban areas, bringing back ideas to try out back home. The city council brought in the same national experts used by other cities to advise on the best methods for traffic control, zoning, and street regulation. That cross-pollination explains why by 1930, the U.S. was well on its way to possessing nationally uniform traffic codes and procedures, with Atlanta an eager devotee.

Atlanta's induction into the automobile age began with the appearance of the first car there in 1899. Thirty years later, local residents and businesses registered more than fifty

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<sup>93</sup> Jason Henderson, "The Politics of Mobility and Business Elites in Atlanta, Georgia," *Urban Geography* 25, no. 3 (2004): 193-95; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 117-18.

thousand motor vehicles with the Georgia Secretary of State. The journey from 1 to 51,890 began slowly, encountering varying degrees of resistance and acceptance along the way. Municipal leaders were fairly conservative at the start, though the Atlanta Spirit did exert itself with the 1909 auto show. Local automobility continued to progress intermittently over the next decade, culminating in the twenties, when the pro-growth coalition consolidated the dominance of the automobile. The next chapter introduces the main event: the Roaring Twenties.

### 3 INTRODUCTION TO THE 1920S

In an address to Congress in 1921, President Warren G. Harding asserted that “the motor car has become an indispensable instrument in our political, social, and industrial life.” The members of Atlanta’s pro-growth coalition would certainly have concurred; they, too, saw the automobile as a modern necessity. They had adopted it as the essential tool in achieving their goal of stimulating city expansion, which would, in turn, increase business opportunities leading to financial gains. Wealth accumulation remained their chief objective; urban growth supplied the means to achieving it; and the car was the engine driving that growth.<sup>94</sup>

Promoting and facilitating automobile use was therefore imperative. To accomplish that, they had to persuade local officials to put into place the structures, facilities, and regulatory apparatus needed to ensure that Atlantans would choose the car as their main transit mode. As Tedlow observes, the mass manufacture of motor vehicles may have been one of the great technological marvels of the twentieth century, but achieving national automobility required a vast legal, social, and economic infrastructure. Atlanta’s growth alliance undertook that massive overhaul of roadways, legislation, and culturally-acceptable definitions of street usage in the 1920s.<sup>95</sup>

A number of non-car-related factors assisted their efforts. It was a decade of Republican presidents, who ushered in a pro-business “New Era” of peace, prosperity, and virtually unregulated capitalism. Anti-trust fervor waned, labor struggled, and the power of corporations strengthened. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, from 1921 until his election as president in 1929, sought closer ties and cooperation between government and business. Although often

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<sup>94</sup> Warren G. Harding, *Address of the President of the United States Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress, April 12, 1921* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1921), 6.

<sup>95</sup> Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 112-13.

expressing a disdain for large government and bureaucratic interference with American individualism, Hoover greatly expanded the Commerce Department which published statistical data and standardization tools. In the motor vehicle category alone, his office authored numerous “recommended” and “uniform” standards, guidelines, policies, and sample legislation for states and municipalities to adopt for highways, street signals, traffic codes, and road signage. Most states readily complied. Hoover’s promotion of interstate connectivity through new highways led to the adoption of the official U.S. numbered highway system in 1926 (see Georgia sign at right), still in use today.<sup>96</sup>



*Figure 4. Georgia U.S. highway sign, ca. 1926; worthpoint.com.*

The end of World War I brought high unemployment levels as industries struggled to re-adjust to post-military production and soldiers returned from overseas looking for jobs. A national business recession began in January 1920, and reached its nadir in July 1921. Numerous labor strikes had Washington searching for ways to better industrial relations. Rising crime rates had cities such as Atlanta calling for the federal government to hire men for public works projects, including road-building, because “the most effective way to keep down crime is to keep down unemployment,” and “public construction is better than relief.” President Harding in turn asked municipalities to expand their workforces to aid the more than 2.3 million out-of-work Americans. Atlanta, with its plans for a new jail, the Spring Street viaduct, and a backlog of war-delayed construction, should have had plenty of jobs. But Mayor Key had to urge businesses to hire more men,

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<sup>96</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 36-40. Georgia Department of Transportation, “Timeline;” Richard F. Weingroff, “From Names to Numbers: The Origins of the U.S. Numbered Highway System,” <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/96summer/p96su2.cfm>, last modified June 27, 2017.

promising to publicly humiliate any uncooperative employers. It would be early 1923 before the post-war slump ended.<sup>97</sup>

World War I had effectively halted the state-federal partnership for road building and maintenance, as men, monies, and industries diverted to military activities. Within months of the war's end, however, Congress expanded the 1916 Federal Aid Road Act, and in 1921, passed a new Federal Highway Act. Many Georgia counties vigorously and successfully pursued federal dollars for their road projects, with Fulton County, Atlanta's home, leading the charge.

Motorized equipment and trucks made paving more efficient, and specialized machinery replaced farm tractors for road work. A flurry of road building led the Highway Board to publish the state's first highway map in 1920. The national safety goal of eliminating at-grade railroad crossings spurred counties to build numerous concrete bridges, a practice which Atlanta would soon emulate by constructing viaducts over the downtown railroad gulch.<sup>98</sup>

American industry had emerged from World War I more bureaucratically structured, an outcome of the high degree of organization demanded to create, equip, and transport a fighting force, then conduct a successful armed conflict overseas. Wiebe observes the new "bureaucratic orientation" in which businesses established their national trade associations, based on principles of scientific management. By uniting, group members could share expertise, present a united

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<sup>97</sup> National Bureau of Economic Research, "U.S. Business Cycle Expansion and Contractions," <https://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html>; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 101. Also, *Atlanta Constitution*: "Idleness and Crime," December 17, 1920; "Get To Work!" November 8, 1921; "Why 'Investigate?'" December 26, 1920; "2,325,000 Workers Out of Employment," January 6, 1921; "Plans Are Made to Obtain Jobs for Unemployed," December 15, 1921; and "Post-War Slump Completely Over, In Davis' Opinion," April 2, 1923.

<sup>98</sup> William Stull Holt, *The Bureau of Public Roads: Its History, Activities, and Organization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 27-32. The Act, 42 Stat. L., 212, was approved on November 9, 1921. Georgia's bridge department won national recognition as a leader in the construction of low-cost, efficient highway bridges: between 1919 and 1926, the state built more miles of federally-funded bridges than any other in the country; Lichtenstein/TranSystems, *Transportation Contexts for Georgia, from Colonial Trails to Interstate Highways* (Atlanta: Office of Environmental Services, Georgia Department of Transportation, 2012), 41-42.

front, solve common problems, set legislative agendas, and promote their particular industry and its products.<sup>99</sup>

Herbert Hoover elevated the lobbying power of national trade associations; they served as his preferred means for coordinating business interests with government policy. With his encouragement, the leading national consortium of municipal engineers produced the country's first uniform automotive standards. Atlanta possessed an array of trade, civic, and professional organizations, many of whom would play decisive roles in the city's planning, zoning, and traffic control efforts. Their efforts led to the city's embrace of the federal uniform standards in 1929.<sup>100</sup>

Recovering from the national business recession during its first two years, the 1920s emerged as the decade of consumption and leisure. The twenties witnessed the crowning efforts of American corporate capitalism to create what Leach describes as "a future-oriented culture of desire that confused the good life

with goods." Although not everyone shared in the material prosperity, no one escaped its imagery perpetually on display in movies, signs, billboards, store windows, and magazine and radio advertisements. Technology, mass production, and managerial efficiency supplied a plethora of novel products which transformed daily life, assisting the revolution in manners and morals. The automobile played its part by supplying a new sort of freedom. Courting couples



Figure 5. *Night riders, "Parents Who Shirk," Atlanta Constitution, January 31, 1926.*

<sup>99</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 293-95.

<sup>100</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, 37.

could escape parental scrutiny as they went for all-night rides (see sketch above), giving rise to the car's scathing label as "a house of prostitution on wheels."<sup>101</sup>

Automobile manufacturing emerged as the major growth industry of the decade. In 1921, Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce described how the world had come to depend on the motor vehicle. "Without the automobile, practically all industry would stop—transportation would be paralyzed—living costs would soar higher and higher—the progress of the world would be impaired and retarded." By 1923, the car, that once "indifferent product with an uncertain future," would surpass meat packing and petroleum as America's most valuable manufacture.<sup>102</sup>

The whole of Atlanta's business community celebrated the automobile's success. In the first months of 1920, civic boosters bragged about the city's position as the distribution point for automotive products throughout the Southeast, and the industry had already established a sterling reputation among local real estate investors. "Atlanta automobile firms occupy the finest buildings, pay the highest rents, and are requiring a greater number of new buildings than any other line of business." A drive out any direction out from Five Points brought views of "handsome and substantial structures which have been recently constructed expressly for the automotive industry." No one doubted that cars were not only good business, but also good *for* business.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, xiii; Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday; an Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 65, 70. The "house of prostitution" reference is from the famous sociological study of Muncie, Indiana conducted by the Lynds between 1924-25, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), 114. Sketch is from Doris Blake, "Parents Who ShirK," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 31, 1926.

<sup>102</sup> "Automobile Show Presages Prosperity, Atlanta to Be Mecca of Motoring Public March 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>," *City Builder* (February 1921): 21; "Autos Are First Product of U.S.," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1923.

<sup>103</sup> O. J. Willoughby, "Motor Pep From Atlanta's Incomparable Auto Row," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1920; O. J. Willoughby, "Prosperity Brings Great Building Development to the South's Greatest Auto Row---Sails Set for Record-Breaking Autumn Business in Southeast," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1920. The second



The 1920 census officially declared America a majority urban nation, with 54.3 million city dwellers compared to 51.4 million people living in rural areas. As a consequence of the population growth, now larger, denser cities confronted problems of insufficient housing, inadequate city services, and increased conflicts between different social and racial groups. Modern technological innovations brought contradictory pressures of centralization and decentralization. Steel-framed skyscrapers concentrated workers in downtowns, while the telephone and the automobile allowed for population dispersal to the suburbs.<sup>104</sup>

Atlanta followed the trend. In twenty years, the city had gone from a population under 90,000, to a new high just over 200,000. Ebullient over the expansion, the mayor, city council, and pro-growth business leaders would spend the decade coping with the outfall of that success. Providing merely adequate services required massive expenditures in the form of multiple bond issues to add water and sewer lines, construct new schools, and pave city streets with the hard, smooth surfaces demanded by the growing numbers of motorists.

Traffic congestion emerged as a severe problem for downtowns across the country, including Atlanta's. Every commuter was inconvenienced, whether traveling by trolley, automobile, or jitney. No one was happy—in addition to the street travelers, pedestrians were angry about being crowded onto the packed sidewalks, and by the rush of vehicles which made crossing the street as difficult as it was dangerous. Business owners worried that customers would go elsewhere if they could not find a nearby parking space. Something had to be done; editorials complained about the problem as well as the lack of response by the city council.

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article included nine photos of new buildings constructed for “automobile distributing firms” (i.e., car dealerships), along Atlanta's Automobile Row, which was Peachtree Street north of the Candler Building, but by 1920, had expanded to West Peachtree, Spring, and Ivy [Peachtree Center Ave.] streets.

<sup>104</sup> Bureau of the Census U.S. Department of Commerce, *Abstract of the Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), Population, p. 14, Table 6; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, xxi.

Throughout the decade, government officials struggled, trying various remedies, searching for one that would not only allay the problem, but also—and more importantly—would appeal to all of the influential policymakers in the growth coalition. Out of many possible solutions, the one that would have been most effective was never tried in Atlanta: limiting the number of automobiles using the streets.<sup>105</sup>

The city undertook major studies to comprehend and resolve its growth-related problems, exercising the progressive era propensity to seek the advice of specialists. Municipal business leaders preferred to consult engineers when seeking answers to what McShane calls “the diseconomies of urbanization.” Civil engineering at the time epitomized scientific knowledge and offered modern technological solutions. Atlanta would turn to three nationally-prominent experts for guidance on zoning and traffic, all engineers.<sup>106</sup>

Throughout the decade, the city expanded in people and territory. For Atlanta to remain the banking and distribution center of the Southeast, civic leaders had to embrace the concept of city planning to bring order and direction to current and future growth. By creating a planning commission and adopting a comprehensive land use plan, Atlanta would join the ranks of the larger U.S. cities, and further enhance its stature as a good place to live, work, and invest.

City planning in Atlanta had two major components: (1) zoning the city into segregated, use- or race-based sectors; and (2) fabricating the physical and regulatory components needed to solve the traffic problems caused by the ascent of the automobile. Chapter 4, *Planning Atlanta’s Streets*, describes the creation of the *physical infrastructure* necessary to provide motor vehicles’

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<sup>105</sup> “The Traffic Problem,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 5, 1920; Brownell, “A Symbol of Modernity: Attitudes toward the Automobile in Southern Cities in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (March 1972): 28-30.

<sup>106</sup> Clay McShane, “The Origins and Globalization of Traffic Control Signals,” *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 3 (March 1999): 389.

ease of movement in and around Atlanta, especially in the central business district. The volume of traffic generated by cars and trucks required wider roads, which proved difficult-to-impossible to achieve in downtown, although sidewalks could usually be trimmed—and were. Uniform grades and improved street paving enabled smooth driving and facilitated traffic flow, with asphalt and concrete the preferred low-traction hard surfaces for motor vehicles. Grade crossings, especially with the magnitude of both railroad and vehicular traffic, caused lengthy backups, not to mention crashes and deaths. Building viaducts over the downtown rail lines reduced gridlock and injuries.<sup>107</sup>

Chapter 5, *Regulating Atlanta’s Streets*, describes the creation of the *legal superstructure* to regulate all street users. Cars were fast, fun, and flexible; drivers could go anywhere, any time, and at speeds unsurpassed by any other earthbound transit mode.<sup>108</sup> But cars were also deadly, fueling carnage in the streets. The bodies from vehicular collisions piled up to amounts exceeding even today’s ho-hum 30,000+ annual national deaths. Cars, and all other users of the public roadways, had to be minutely regulated in an attempt to mitigate the hubris and stupidity which, then and now, cause most traffic “accidents.”<sup>109</sup>

Local power elites founded a number of popular and influential automobile-related organizations. These associations worked intimately with city, state, and federal officials, crafting car-enabling policies. Together, they spun a legislative “web of regulation” to stem the

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<sup>107</sup> State of Georgia, *First Annual Report of the Highway Department of Georgia to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta: Highway Department of Georgia, 1919), 67-68, along with the two adjacent unnumbered pages of illustrations.

<sup>108</sup> Airplanes had made their appearance, and savvy prognosticators foresaw their increased use. Despite its popularity, however, air travel never became affordable enough to meet their dreams for an airship in every garage.

<sup>109</sup> This author, as a veteran of an Atlanta-area police department, refuses categorically to label collisions between motor vehicles as “accidents.” With years of experience dealing with crashes, property damage, serious injuries, deaths, and death notifications, not once was any wreck in any way an “accident.” Unintended, yes, but not accidental. They all, without exception, stemmed from human error. Even the vast majority of “mechanical failures” result from manufacturers’ negligence, or more commonly, lack of proper maintenance. When’s the last time you checked the air in your tires?

costs of the human and property damage resulting from countless collisions. This massive regulatory apparatus included laws on the books, as well as a tsunami of novel devices, signs, signal lights, structures, and painted lines on the streets to control movement and activities on the roads and sidewalks. To ensure compliance, the police department re-instituted the traffic squad. Its top priority was to check the crime wave sweeping over the city—motor vehicle infractions—which produced so much death and destruction.<sup>110</sup>

A large number of the restrictions applied to non-vehicular street users, such as pedestrians, street vendors, peddlers, and child entrepreneurs. Many were banned altogether. Foot travelers did retain a place in the public streets increasingly occupied by private vehicles, but within a closely circumscribed space. New laws confined them to a small portion of the roadway delineated by painted lines at intersections only. The crosswalk dictated *where* a person walking could utilize the street, and local ordinances restricted *when* they could use it, subject to penalties for non-compliance. A major effect of the regulatory network was the removal or restriction of anything that was not a motor vehicle or a streetcar. Bicycles did retain street privileges as a transit mode, but cyclists had already to a significant degree self-deported from Atlanta's busy downtown.

Reconfiguring and regulating the streets facilitated the growing presence of the automobile, but rapid and chaotic city expansion brought additional challenges. The urbanization of America meant greater density as newcomers crowded into city centers. The 20-story high rises of the 1920s towered over Atlanta's now-diminutive, eleven-story "skyscraper" of the

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<sup>110</sup> Barbara Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*, 377; Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 174. "Countless" is used here as a term of borderline hyperbole. The car insurance carriers counted and documented every wreck as minutely as possible. With their knowledge and understanding of the causes, insurers freely acknowledged the predictability of the vast majority of collisions; Ambrose Ryder, *Automobile Insurance: A Description of the Various Forms of Coverage, Underwriting Methods and Selling Plans* (Chicago: Spectator, 1924), 161.

1890s. Their presence guaranteed even more people and vehicles in downtown on a daily basis, and limited the light and air reaching the streets below. Gas stations and other small commercial establishments edged into residential areas, fleeing high rents in the central business district. Apartment complexes disturbed the rhythm and density of single-family neighborhoods. Well-to-do, in-town dwellers escaped to exclusive suburbs sprouting at the city's edges.

Chapter 6, *Segregating the City*, documents how the Atlanta growth machine met these challenges. Zoning was a way to manage the chaos by organizing land uses and limiting what could be done and where. It provided a mechanism to channel new development into defined sectors. By putting more distance between where people lived, shopped, and worked, zoning increased the necessity for an automobile. Most power elites eagerly embraced the regulatory power of the comprehensive zone plan, which allowed them to maintain their influential position within the city while also taking advantage of burgeoning real estate investment opportunities. A few realtors resisted, especially if they had properties negatively affected by zoning, but the promise of “preserving property values” (usually code for “keeping out the riff raff”) won over nearly everyone with white skin.

For many southern cities during the twenties, zoning also provided a means to tighten the noose of Jim Crow. Atlanta's 1922 zoning ordinance offered the most well-known challenge to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1917 ruling against racially-segregated zoning. The city's distinctive race-based residential districting was eventually found unconstitutional, but its zone map continued to influence the racial composition of city neighborhoods into the 1960s.

Atlanta's African American population increased during the decade, but remained close to one-third of the total as the Great Migration continued. The zone plan straitjacketed those who stayed behind into segregated neighborhoods, resulting in severe overcrowding around east

side's Auburn Avenue and west side's Atlanta University Center. The restricted housing options mirrored the restricted seating options on streetcars and the just-introduced "motor buses." While white customers utilized the bulk of available seating, Blacks had to crowd into the back, just as they had to crowd into confined race-defined residential districts while whites expanded into the outlying suburbs. Whites made sure that Blacks were kept "in their place" everywhere.

Segregated housing districts might create locational distance between the two races, but the confined space inside a trolley permitted no real separation. The daily face-to-face encounters often resulted in conflicts and violence. Complete segregation proved impossible to achieve on either the streets or the streetcars, but traveling in the privacy of an automobile allowed escape from mixed-race crowds. Freedom from a chance confrontation supplied yet another compelling reason to buy a car.

The physical and legislative re-shaping of Atlanta did, to some degree, relieve traffic and land use problems, as well as burnish the city's modern, progressive reputation. But the mid-decade rise of a regional competitor and a lull in automobile sales required potent counter-punches. Chapter 7, *Selling City and Car*, describes how the advertising industry swooped in both to renew the Atlanta's standing as the Southeast's leading financial and distribution center, and to invigorate sales of new motor vehicles.

Marketing came of age in the 1920s, solidifying its ascendancy over American consumer purchasing. Young college graduates, often from the new business schools, entered the increasingly scientific field of advertising. They studied the markets, honed the soon-ubiquitous customer survey, and developed fresh merchandizing strategies directed toward specific audiences. Advances in color processing led to a wave of vibrant signs and vivid print advertisements. The billboard enlarged to become an effective way to reach car-driving

consumers, a stark contrast to the poster-sized, black-and-white card ad which had lined streetcar interiors since 1900. Electrical displays, especially those with colored lights, meant publicity did not stop at sundown, and added exciting tints to Atlanta's downtown white way.

Newspapers, journals, and magazines papered the nation, extending the publicity reach of those with a story to sell, which Atlanta did in 1924. Florida real estate speculation, long lurking at edges of the city's financial corridors, boomed in the 1920s. Suddenly, tourists and investors sought sunny shores instead of Atlanta's more prosaic attractions. To counter the flow of people and dollars southward, the Chamber of Commerce inaugurated the Forward Atlanta campaign. A mammoth publicity crusade, it nationally advertised the advantages of the city's stolid but secure banking facilities, its enlarged and zoning-enhanced manufacturing opportunities, its unrivaled railroad facilities for shipping, and its status as a provider of airmail service at the city-owned Candler Field. Forward Atlanta, a shining example of the media arm of the growth coalition in action, produced outstanding results. Hundreds of new enterprises, including some automobile manufacturers, located in the city, bringing employment to thousands of local workers.

It paid to advertise, not just the city, but also the automobile. Mid-decade auto sales lagged as the industry for the first time faced market saturation. Consumers hesitated to replace their older, still-functional automobile which had cost them so much—a common problem for retailers whenever a commodity was heavy, durable, and expensive. Advertising agency executives persuaded their car manufacturing clients to create new vehicle models every year, in several colors and with a variety of features, as a way to stimulate desire and appeal to new and returning customers. Newspaper ads quickly reflected the new marketing strategies. The automotive industry eventually grasped what the fashion world had known for decades: if you keep changing the styles, you never have to worry about flooding the market.

The advertising industry had since the late nineteenth century purposely and with great calculation shaped modern consumer attitudes to crave ownership of the latest designs with state-of-the-art accessories. A new sensibility of out with the old, in with the new, the advanced, the up-to-date, the modish had taken over. “Keeping up with the Joneses” proved to be a powerful motivator for the American consumer, and the automobile ranked as the most highly visible status symbol. Along with advertising and the introduction of planned obsolescence, two related factors greatly contributed to the tremendous increase in car sales. The availability of easy money and the removal of the stigma of buying on credit allowed middle- and working-class families to acquire a vehicle. During the 1920s, more than 70% of all cars were purchased on an installment plan; gone were the days of the cash-only cars available in the 1910 Sears catalog.<sup>111</sup>

The combination of new advertising with favorable interest rates and changing consumer sensibilities soon took effect: between 1920 and 1929, the number of private automobiles in Atlanta increased by 66%. All the new cars on the roads, coupled with the city’s half-hearted, sporadic efforts to regulate traffic flow, brought renewed gridlock to downtown. The situation frustrated commuters, hindered tourists, obstructed business, and smudged the city’s reputation. Civic leaders, forced to confront the intractable problem, turned to nationally-known experts for guidance.

Chapter 8, *State of the Streets 1929*, describes that year’s traffic survey, undertaken by the mayor’s specially-appointed Traffic Commission, with the invaluable assistance of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York City. Most of those participating in the survey had strong automotive interests, and the report understandably had a pro-car slant. The Commission also intentionally omitted trolleys from its consideration. The study’s authors

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<sup>111</sup> David L. Cohn, *The Good Old Days: A History of American Morals and Manners as Seen through the Sears, Roebuck Catalogs 1905 to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), 158-60.



claimed they were not “in a position to consider the effect of street car operation on traffic,”<sup>112</sup> prompting the question, if they weren’t, who was? Their disingenuous dodge, however, did not restrain them from faulting the streetcar as *the* major hindrance to swift and efficient traffic flow. One wonders how they managed to reach that conclusion without even studying trolleys. Ignoring the daily transit mode of thousands of Atlantans yielded a distorted view of city traffic patterns, but at the same time provided a crystal clear understanding of the vision of the pro-growth coalition and its legislative allies.

The study supplied a snapshot of the prevailing travel conditions in Atlanta in 1929. “Businessmen and politicians had come to a full realization that *the streets of a city are the most important element in its economic usefulness*” [emphasis added]. The traffic survey made no mention of the railroads, except as obstacles to movement. The railroads, the city’s life lines which pre-dated Atlanta itself, were viewed as interlopers slicing up downtown, instead of as the creators and sustainers of the central commercial hub.<sup>113</sup>

The railroads had long held an absolute monopoly on long- and medium-distance transportation in the United States. Thirty years of automobility increasingly challenged that dominance. Trains maintained their critical economic importance, but trucks had begun to make inroads on the short-haul side of rail freight traffic, signaling greater changes to come. With the viaducts and laterals built in the twenties, Atlanta had beginnings of a bi-level downtown (now greatly expanded). With railroads literally at the bottom, the automobile physically occupied the top tier. The concrete structures also symbolized the new order of the hegemony of motordom.

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<sup>112</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia* (New York: Policyholders Service Bureau, Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., 1929), 4.

<sup>113</sup> Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 120.

The pro-growth coalition succeeded in their goal of city expansion. By decade's end, Atlanta had added nearly 70,000 new residents and received official designation as a metropolitan area. The common understanding of the streets as public places where everyone had equal rights had disappeared, replaced with a general acceptance that streets were for cars. In actuality, the car did not "win" the road. Rather, the civic and business leadership eagerly handed Atlanta's streets over to the automobile. By 1929, their surrender was complete.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The Greater Atlanta metropolitan area in 1929 consisted of the boroughs of Atlanta, Avondale, College Park, Decatur, East Point, Hapeville, and a few unincorporated areas. It had a population of 359,668. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933).

#### 4 PLANNING ATLANTA'S STREETS

At the 1919 the annual meeting of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the leadership proposed that a city planning commission be formed to meet the demands of what Mayor James L. Key described as “the miraculous growth that the city is experiencing.” As a Chamber director, the mayor in the coming months would appoint the city’s first official planning commission. That the elite businessmen on the six-man commission were all members of the city’s pro-growth coalition only affirmed Hunter’s assertion: whenever Atlanta undertook to decide major policy on an issue, the top leaders would be well represented on any committee having jurisdiction over it.<sup>115</sup>

The actions of the planning commission significantly impacted the city’s course for the next decade by tackling two major problems: traffic congestion and haphazard growth. A truly comprehensive land use plan would have addressed the two interrelated problems together, but Atlanta’s planners chose to separate the two issues. They tackled the traffic problem first.

Trucks and cars, now essential tools for business and city expansion, needed to move easily through the city. But the mass of vehicles crowding the narrow streets inconvenienced customers and clients, delayed deliveries, and hindered police from chasing down lawbreakers. The great advantage of the automobile—speed—was entirely negated by the congestion in the central business district, much to the dismay and discontent of motorists. Worst of all, the city was gaining a reputation for gridlock.

Atlanta’s leaders finally began to realize that in order to keep automobiles traveling freely, the city’s antiquated road system needed an overhaul. Mayor Key led the way,

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<sup>115</sup> “City Planning Commission Will Work to Stimulate Development of Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 30, 1919; Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 225.

confidently declared that bridging the railroads would provide “the ultimate solution” to the downtown traffic problems. The many grade crossings of the network of rail lines did bring traffic flow on numbers of streets to a complete halt multiple times a day; the viaducts would eliminate one of the causes of downtown gridlock. However, it did nothing to address the most basic reason Atlanta’s streets were so crowded: too many vehicles. The mayor’s assertion in a way exemplified the common misconception that a city can build its way out of traffic congestion.<sup>116</sup>

Throughout the twenties, the growth advocates, acting in and through the official city planning commission, undertook major taxpayer-funded road-improvement and viaduct-building projects. They reconfigured the city’s physical infrastructure in an attempt to facilitate motor vehicle traffic. Despite all the evidence produced throughout the decade, Atlanta’s business and government leaders never acknowledged the reality that building more and bigger roads and bridges only brought more traffic.

#### **4.1 City Planning in 1920s Atlanta**

The Chamber of Commerce had proposed a city planning commission in late 1919, and William J. Sayward (1875-1945), FAIA, a prominent regional architect and chair of the Chamber’s Committee on City Planning, carried the concept into the new decade. In an article about city planning in the January 1920 issue of the *City Builder* magazine, Sayward carefully explained the concept of city planning, which most of the general public misunderstood as a municipal clean-up or beautification scheme. He defined it as a process which required a comprehensive survey of the city’s needs, studying topics like transportation, highways, street widening, bridges, housing, parks, and building requirements. Once the situation was

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<sup>116</sup> “Traffic Ordinance Signed by Mayor Key,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1920.

understood, solutions could be formulated in an overall strategy to fix pressing issues and prepare for future expansion.<sup>117</sup>

City planning, while not a new idea, was a relatively new practice in the United States. Inspired by George Eugène Haussmann's massive 1853-70 renovation of Paris, American architect Daniel Burnham led the design team of the White City at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. It presented to the nation an early example of a comprehensive land use plan, and exemplified the tenets of the City Beautiful Movement. Characterized by imposing boulevards, elaborate neoclassical public buildings, and spacious, sculpted gardens, the movement, which was most popular from 1900 to World War I, emphasized dignity, order, harmony, and virtue in urban form. It promised to uplift and improve the mass of citizens exposed to its artistry and refinement. Burnham (1846-1912) created plans for other cities in the early 1900s, notably San Francisco and Chicago.<sup>118</sup>

American cities quickly embraced the new urban aesthetic and many sought, if not city-wide makeovers, at least the incorporation of some of its elements. Atlanta, ever aware of advances made by competitor cities, managed to add a few representative City Beautiful features, such as the 1901 Carnegie Library and the 1909 City Auditorium and Armory. In 1903, the city hired the Olmsted Brothers to create a master plan for Grant Park, at that time the city's largest recreational space which eventually housed the Atlanta Zoo and the Cyclorama. City officials also attempted but failed to implement the 1910 Bleckley Plan which would have

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<sup>117</sup> William J. Sayward, "City Planning Committee Urges Survey," *City Builder* 4, no. 10 (January 1920): 12-13.

<sup>118</sup> Alexander Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 504-10; Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 15, 21; Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, 47; William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 4.

constructed a beautifying and unifying central city plaza over the dirty and dividing downtown railroad gulch.

By the time Sayward's article appeared in 1920, another type of city planning had gained acceptance. Planners and engineers sought a less embellished, more down-to-earth and practical approach during the second decade of the twentieth century. Civil engineer and St. Louis city planner, Harland Bartholomew (1889-1989) espoused the new City Practical, or City Efficient, as it was sometimes called. His consulting firm devised comprehensive plans for hundreds of American cities and towns. Using a standardized approach, they addressed streets, transportation, parks, water and sewer systems, zoning, appearance, housing, and finances. City Beautiful plans also dealt with these aspects of urban design, but engineer Bartholomew took a more utilitarian approach. His work helped circulate and popularize on a national level the pragmatic approach to city planning.<sup>119</sup>

William Sayward advocated for planning to encompass not only the beautiful, but also the efficient. "The city beautiful, to be sure, is a very commendable ideal and one which should be assured its place; but we must not forget that the city beautiful must absolutely be founded upon the 'city practical.'" Throughout the 1920s, Atlanta's growth advocates more often chose the functional approach rather than striving to create beauty. They supported services which promoted the city's commercial growth, but paid little attention to civic improvements not directly related to the practicalities of business. Atlantans in general would not support the allocation of public funds for what they perceived as what Lands calls "urban primping."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*, 519; Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, 47; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 171.

<sup>120</sup> Sayward, "City Planning Committee Urges Survey," 12; Lyon, "Business Buildings in Atlanta: A Study in Urban Growth and Form," 367-68; Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 5.

The city's business community did, however, enthusiastically embrace the concept of planning; they would take the initiative in implementing it in Atlanta. They saw planning as a way to understand present and future needs, to create a city attractive to visitors and investors, and to grow the city. Robert Otis, planning commission chair, itemized the qualities necessary for a good civic reputation: the city must be well-laid out for convenience and beauty; it must provide for transportation, business, and recreation; and it must have comfortable housing. Such a city would attract and retain new inhabitants. Warning that "the planned city attracts and the unplanned city repels," he urged that everything be considered upon the basis of expansion: zoning, commerce, parks, schools, wider streets, recreation, and entertainment. His claim, "Forethought along lines of city planning, with careful consideration for the *growth of the city*, pays from every angle" (emphasis added), encapsulated the coalition's approach to planning for a larger city and the various types of paydays it could bring.<sup>121</sup>

As part of preparation for a city plan, Sayward urged that traffic be one of the first items studied in Atlanta. He suggested that the main arteries of the city be arranged to improve traffic flow by following the most direct pathways at ideal grades. With great foresight, he urged the construction of an encircling road around the business district, insisting it would relieve clogged streets in the Five Points area and improve access throughout town. His was likely the first perimeter highway proposal, embodied today in Atlanta's Interstate-285, although no such roadway was built or even seriously considered during the twenties. The lack of a major arterial circumnavigating downtown would impede Atlanta's drivers for another forty years.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Robert R. Otis, "The Planned City Attracts and the Unplanned City Repels," *City Builder* 8, no. 2 (April 1923): 3-4; Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, 50; Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930*, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Sayward, "City Planning Committee Urges Survey," 12. Atlanta's perimeter highway, I-285, would not open until 1969.

Sayward proposed a council-appointed planning commission provided with adequate funding to undertake surveys and studies of the growth of Atlanta and its street traffic. He insisted that the newspapers mount an educational campaign first, so the public could understand what a city plan might accomplish, and then publish the commission's findings and recommendations. His article, itself an instructive example of public planning education, offered a way for the city to move forward. Mayor Key embraced the message, and would soon act upon it.<sup>123</sup>

In his annual message to the city on January 5, 1920, the mayor celebrated Atlanta's growth, "the most rapid and substantial . . . of any year in the city's history," but he also issued a challenge. To keep up with the burgeoning population, the city had to increase its services, so he asked for an emergency tax imposition to fulfill a long list of needed improvements: expanding the school system, waterworks, city parks, and libraries. He called for the establishment of a library for African Americans, who at that time were not permitted to use any of the city's existing public libraries.<sup>124</sup>

Denouncing the sad state of city streets, Mayor Key urged the development and construction of cross-town thoroughfares, viaducts and bridges, as well as widening and paving the streets. He blamed the streetcar company for the poor road conditions, and asked the city council to force the company to repair the damage. Animosity between Mayor Key and Preston Arkwright, president of Georgia Railway and Power Company, dated back to 1906, when then-Alderman Key first pushed for municipal ownership of all public utilities. The feud continued in 1919, when Mayor Key, in his inaugural speech, called for city ownership of the streetcar

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>124</sup> "Atlanta Urged to Prepare for Population of 500,000 in Mayor Key's Message," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1920.



system. That same year, he signed the ordinance allowing jitneys to compete directly with trolleys. The hostility persisted until Key left office in 1923, and the ramifications of the ongoing dispute would have serious consequences for the traction company in the coming years.<sup>125</sup>

Atlanta's greatness could expand, but only if the city took the long view. "We need to adopt a definite and scientific plan to meet the demands for a city of not less than 500,000 inhabitants," which he asserted Atlanta would reach in ten years. As the city population in 1920 was 200,616, the mayor's claim that it would more than double in the next decade was bold and inspiring. Newspaper editorials took up the theme, calling (in increasingly bolder and larger type) for "Expansion! **Expansion! EXPANSION!**" and urged the city council to take decisive measures. Atlanta, an editorial writer asserted, was "growing faster than any other city in the south. . . . We are trying to operate a great city with village machinery, and we can no longer do it without serious consequences!"<sup>126</sup>

City officials quickly responded, passing a tax increase and moving ahead with preparations for Atlanta's imminent unprecedented growth. In January, 1920, the council adopted the entire Chamber of Commerce's city planning recommendation from December 1919 (see figure below). A new 24-member city planning commission, the result of cooperative action between the city, county, and Chamber, included influential businessmen, industrialists, civic

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<sup>125</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Mayor Key's Message," January 6, 1920; "Let City Own Her Utilities, Say the People, August 26, 1906; "Key Urges Advisability of Municipal Ownership of Street Car System," January 7, 1919; Jean Martin, *Mule to Marta*, vol. 2, 1902-1950 (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1977), 47, 50-52; O. E. Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta* (Glendale, CA: Interurban Press, 1981), 78.

<sup>126</sup> "Atlanta Urged to Prepare for Population of 500,000 in Mayor Key's Message," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1920. The full text of the mayor's speech appears in the article "The New Council," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1920; "Greater Atlanta Plan Given Boost by 1920 Council," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1920. The 1930 population prediction of 500,000 fell sadly short at 270,366. Ninety-nine years later, the mayor's goal was finally reached. The July 1, 2019 estimate of the City of Atlanta's population was 506,811, an 18.7% increase over the population in the 2010 census. The city's area had reached 133.15 square miles in 2010. The population estimate for the 29-county greater metropolitan area in 2019 is about 5.9 million. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Atlanta city, Georgia," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/atlantacitygeorgia>, accessed June 14, 2020.

leaders, newspaper editors, lawyers, physicians, politicians, and two prominent women. The broad representation enabled a coordinated, regional approach to problem-solving, and the commission produced a Greater Atlanta report calling for improved schools, parks, and roads. However, lack of funds led to the disbanding of the commission a mere six months after its creation. Council had failed to bankroll the group.<sup>127</sup>

By July, the city council had decided to formally create a legal city

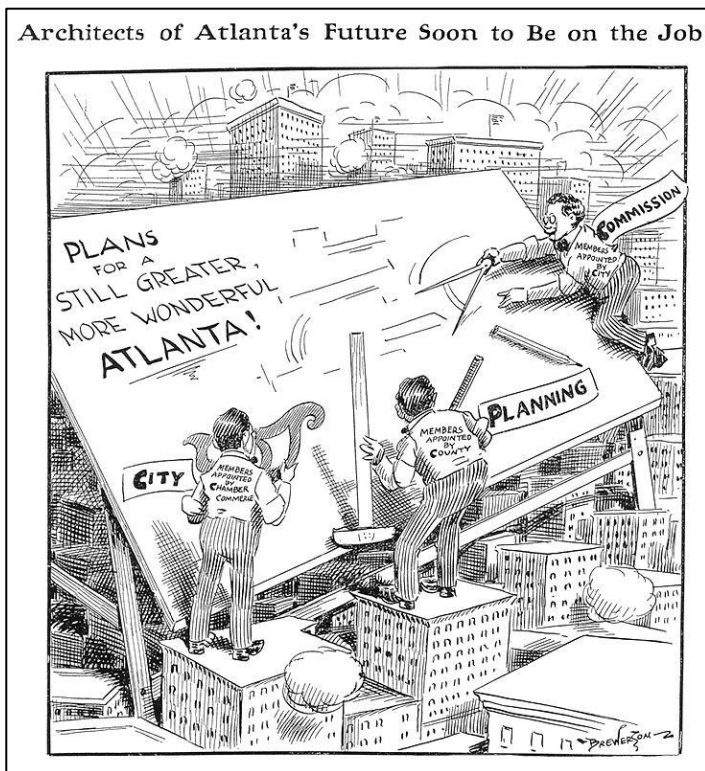


Figure 6. The new City Planning Commission, *City Builder* 4, no. 12 (February 1920): 7.

planning commission, and sought authority from the state. In mid-August, the General Assembly enacted legislation enabling the city to create a six-member City Planning Commission. On October 12, 1920, Mayor Key appointed the first official and legal Atlanta Planning Commission codified by city ordinance.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Blaine A. Brownell, "The Commercial-Civic Elite and City Planning in Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans in the 1920s," *Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 3 (August 1975): 345-46; Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 142; Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 129-30.

<sup>128</sup> "Legal City Planning Commission Wanted," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 14, 1920; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:777; City of Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924* (Atlanta: Byrd, 1924), Charter of 1874 as Amended, Ch. 26, §§ 401-415. The planning commission by the end of the 1920s had an annual appropriation of \$15,000, and employed an engineer, a stenographer, and an office assistant. Its jurisdiction extended six miles beyond the city limits into Fulton County, but did not extend into DeKalb County at all beyond the Atlanta city limits; Theodora Kimball Hubbard and Henry Vincent Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 41, 309, 16.

The six men appointed to the commission (plus the mayor as *ex officio* chair) comprised textbook examples from a Molotch pro-growth coalition, and are listed here:

- Michael Hoke Smith (1855-1931) – U.S. senator, attorney, real estate developer, former Georgia governor, former owner of the *Atlanta Journal*;
- Charles Almond Wickersham (1858-1949) – president of the Atlanta and West Point Railroad, on the board of directors of Coca-Cola and Trust Company of Georgia;
- Frank A. Pittman (1865-1958) – building inspector for the City of Atlanta, owner of Pittman Construction which built homes, office buildings, churches and roads; in the 1950s his company would construct part of the Expressway, the forerunner to I-85;
- Joel S. Hurt, Sr. (1850-1926) – civil engineer, designer and developer of Inman Park-the city’s first suburban neighborhood, built the city’s first electric street railway (second in the nation), bank president, real estate developer, one of the city’s most distinguished entrepreneurs;
- Fred J. Terry (1880-1923) – superintendent of the composing room of the *Atlanta Georgian*, labor leader, active in the Atlanta Typological Union and the Atlanta Federation of Trades;
- Robert R. Otis (1873-1960) – prominent real estate developer, agent for numerous downtown properties, including the Piedmont Hotel and the Peachtree Arcade, founder and president of Otis Realty Company, ardent city planning activist, and chair of the new planning commission;
- Mayor James L. Key (1867-1939) – attorney, former city alderman, mayor, and ex-officio chair of the new planning commission.<sup>129</sup>

The group which would advise the city council on Atlanta’s comprehensive land use plan consisted of some of the very people who stood to gain or lose most in municipal land-use decisions. All were members of the COC; the government/business fusion was apparent. Mayor Key appointed no ordinary citizens, not one small business owner, certainly no women.

Neither did the mayor appoint even one African American, despite a request from John Joseph Eagan (1870-1924), president of the American Cast-Iron Pipe Company of Atlanta. A wealthy industrialist, investor, and generous philanthropist, Eagan lived by his Christian

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<sup>129</sup> “Atlanta Leaders Placed on City Planning Board,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1920; Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” 314-15; Brownell, “The Commercial-Civic Elite and City Planning in Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans in the 1920s,” 346-47. A 1929 study of planning in the U.S. found that in Atlanta, the mayor was reported as seldom present at planning commission meetings; Hubbard and Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States*, 36.

principles, was active in downtown's Central Presbyterian Church, and served on the Atlanta Council of Churches. Listed in the *Social Register* and a member of the Capital City Club, Eagan worked to improve race relations in Atlanta, and took an active part in the 1919 creation of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. He urged Key to select a group of representative Black citizens to work with the new planning commission. Of course, they could not have served *on* the commission, but they could have assisted in making investigations and recommendations concerning matters affecting their communities' welfare. Eagan's request went unheard.<sup>130</sup>

The list of appointees, however, would have appeared eminently reasonable to the mayor and other civic leaders. The commission's charge spelled out the most important concern of Atlanta-style city planning, to pay attention to the city's "economic and commercial advancement." As Brownell notes, such a group, with "more than an incidental interest" in urban real estate development, could be trusted to act accordingly.

Urban planning commissions in the South . . . drew most heavily on those local individuals and groups who had considerable experience in finance, transportation, and land development and who were most interested in the consequences of a comprehensive urban design. Conflict of interest was never mentioned. . . . It would never have occurred to them that they might not be capable of representing the interests and concerns of the entire city.<sup>131</sup>

The planning commission employed as their first outside hire a general city planning consultant. Nationally-known expert Robert H. Whitten had an impressive resume. A city planner with a law degree, he served as secretary of the commission that drafted the 1916 New York City Zoning Ordinance, and as advisor to the Cleveland City Plan Commission. At the time Atlanta hired him, he also served as the city planning consultant to Indianapolis, and was on the

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<sup>130</sup> "Service Bureau for Community Highly Favored," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 26, 1920. The John J. Eagan Homes, a Black housing development in the Vine City section of Atlanta, was constructed in 1940, later renamed Magnolia Park, still in use, and managed by the Atlanta Public Housing Authority.

<sup>131</sup> "Planning for Atlanta!" *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1920; Brownell, "The Commercial-Civic Elite and City Planning in Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans in the 1920s," 347-48.

board of governors of both the American Institute of City Planning and the National Conference on City Planning. He had written zoning ordinances for several towns in the Cleveland suburbs.<sup>132</sup>

Whitten looked like the obvious choice to assist Atlanta's planning commission, but not everyone supported his selection. Joel Hurt lobbied instead for the Olmsted Brothers, a landscape architecture and planning firm formed by the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. after his retirement. In 1893, Hurt had hired the distinguished senior Olmsted to create a master plan for the 1300-acre Druid Hills neighborhood, a plan which the brothers updated in 1905. The city had also employed them to create a plan for Piedmont Park in 1910. Hurt favored the City Beautiful approach of the landscapers, while realtor Robert Otis, the active chair of the planning commission, preferred Whitten, whose methods more reflected City Practical concerns.<sup>133</sup>

Otis ultimately prevailed. The conflict between the two men represented ideological differences, and the outcome signaled a sort of changing of the guard. Hurt, a former *éminence grise* in city policy-making, was in decline, and would be dead in six years. The younger Otis, lower in the ranks of the pro-growth advocates, displayed the more modern sensibilities of speed and practicality.

The commission considered hiring three experts for landscape architecture, engineering, and zoning, but financial constraints led them to employ only Whitten. While charged with

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<sup>132</sup> After working in Atlanta, Robert H. Whitten (1873-1936) consulted with planning boards in many other cities. He was president of the American City Planning Institute and wrote several books on planning and zoning. His work in Cleveland laid the groundwork for the zoning ordinance of Euclid (a suburb of Cleveland), which led to the precedent-setting U.S. Supreme Court case of *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.* (1926) establishing the principle and practice of land-use zones in the U.S. *Engineering World*, 21, no. 1 (July 1922): 61; "Robert Whitten, City Planner, Dies," *New York Times*, June 7, 1936; "Encyclopedia of Cleveland History," © 2019 Case Western Reserve University, <https://case.edu/ech/articles/v/village-euclid-v-ambler-realty-co>; *Planning and Civic Comment*, 2, no. 2 (April-June 1936): 36-37; and *Planning and Civic Comment*, 3, no. 1 (January-March 1937): front cover.

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Anne Mack Lyon, "Frederick Law Olmsted and Joel Hurt: Planning for Atlanta," in *Olmsted South: Old South Critic/New South Planner*, ed. Dana F. White and Victor A. Kramer (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), 171-72, 177-78, 189.

devising both traffic and zoning plans, he tackled traffic first. A truly all-inclusive city plan would have combined the two, as properties and streets affected and reflected the activities of each other. Addressing them simultaneously could have provided a more thorough and ultimately more successful way forward for the growing city. However, Atlanta in the twenties would not adopt a comprehensive city plan.<sup>134</sup>

A sense of urgency prompted the decision to deal first with the city's clogged streets. Nationally-esteemed traffic expert, Miller McClintock, noted, "The alarming increase in street accidents and in street congestion during the past few years has rendered the correction of traffic conditions one of the most important municipal problems of the present day." On May 30, 1921, Whitten presented his traffic report to the Planning Commission. In it, he endorsed the already-approved Spring Street viaduct. He also cited the urgent need for additional north-south routes to relieve downtown's traffic congestion, suggesting the grade crossings at Central Avenue and Pryor Street be eliminated, and widening Courtland Street north of the Washington Street viaduct to serve as an eastside traffic arterial.<sup>135</sup>

Whitten recommended reviving the 1910/1916 Bleckley city plaza plan to span the railroad tracks, and relocating the city's freight and passenger terminals. To the latter he attributed special importance, claiming that "the railroad terminals are even more fundamental in the city's development than is its thoroughfare plan." He encouraged the city to proceed with zoning, traffic, and park plans, but always to make certain that those plans did not adversely affect the railroads.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 143.

<sup>135</sup> Miller McClintock, *Street Traffic Control* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1925), vii.

<sup>136</sup> "Indorse Viaduct on Spring Street," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 1, 1921.

While the planning commission officially adopted Whitten's report, they ignored, delayed, or altered a number of his recommendations. The group enthusiastically endorsed the plans for Central Avenue and Pryor Street, which before decade's end would have their own viaducts, but the city plaza remained a distant dream. Whitten would eventually be proven wrong in his assertion that the railroads were more critical to the city's development than its roadways.

At least Atlanta now had a plan. By Otis' estimate, the city was ten years behind the rest of the world in the urban planning process; he was off by at least a decade. Since 1899, European nations had held international congresses to discuss city plans, zoning and housing programs, land use systems, and street configurations. Americans did not participate in these meetings to any consequential degree for another ten years. In 1909, Washington, DC hosted the first national conference on city planning, and Harvard offered the country's first university course on city planning. In 1917, a group of planners incorporated the American City Planning Institute (today the American Planning Association). By this count, Atlanta lagged behind Europe by twenty years, and much of the rest of the country by at least decade.<sup>137</sup>

Atlanta's earlier, feeble planning bodies had acted unofficially, without power or funding, and they accomplished nothing. Not until the traffic congestion became, as Sayward described it, "unbearable" and near the "breaking point," did the State of Georgia alter the city charter enabling an official planning commission. Motorized vehicles packed the downtown streets causing traffic jams and frustrating businessmen, office workers, and shoppers. The intolerable situation offered one of two powerful motivations for the city council to create a planning commission. The other, which will be discussed in a later chapter, was the balkanization of land

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<sup>137</sup> Robert W. Otis, *Atlanta's Plan, 1909-1932* (Atlanta, 1952), 8; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 163-65; Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*, 513-14.

uses and segregation of the races through a city zoning plan. But an inescapable conclusion remains: the automobile had already impacted street users, street paving, the traffic apparatus, the police department, and city, state, and federal laws. During the 1920s, its impact would reach into the organization of the official city government.<sup>138</sup>

When it came to traffic, the city continued throughout the decade to waste time in more studies and surveys, ultimately failing to enact a truly comprehensive and effective plan to relieve heavy traffic. The one thing they did, and that very successfully, was to construct more and wider roads with the smooth, flat surfaces required by the automobile. Even at this early stage in the life of U.S. motordom, Atlanta, like other cities, believed in the fallacy of building its way out of traffic congestion.

#### **4.2 Funding Atlanta's Street Improvements**

The planning commission could only make recommendations regarding street upgrades, while a city council committee had the actual authority to effect change. The Committee on Streets and Sidewalks implemented the projects under the direction of the Chief of Construction. As Atlanta's population grew, the number and size of streets needed to expand to accommodate all the vehicles. More traffic also meant more wear on road surfaces. The dilapidated conditions hampered the smooth flow of traffic, as cars slowed over rough patches and dodged potholes.

No one disputed the sorry state of many of Atlanta's streets, but many complained about the half-hearted, piecemeal approach taken by city employees to repairs. Whitehall Street [today much shortened, with the northern section renamed Peachtree Street], part of the city's premiere commercial corridor, had been torn up by repair crews for nine months during 1920. One

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<sup>138</sup> Otis, *Atlanta's Plan, 1909-1932*, 8; Sayward, "City Planning Committee Urges Survey," 13; Atlanta, *Charter of 1871 as Amended*, Ch. 26, §§ 410-415.



editorial writer wondered how a town with so many fine buildings and so much business could be so indifferent to the quality of its thoroughfares.<sup>139</sup>

Poor road surfacing could also negatively affect development. Deteriorated paving on Edgewood Avenue, one of the streets converging at Five Points, was blamed for the downward turn of the neighborhood. After instituting street improvements, city officials credited the work with reviving the area and making Edgewood again one of the most important thoroughfares in the city. Its example underscored the critical connection between the condition of a road and its surrounding properties.<sup>140</sup>

By the 1920s, the city council had several legislative instruments at its command to pay for road repairs while at the same time retaining Atlanta's low, business-friendly citywide tax rate. One such tool was the power to create a tax assessment district. In order to acquire land for "street purposes" (defined as widening or extending existing streets, or opening new streets), the city planning commission could draw up a district consisting of properties which would benefit from the proposed improvements. Council then could levy a tax on the property owners within the specified area to pay all or part of the cost of the work.<sup>141</sup>

This "arbitrary assessment law" represented a new and expanded view of who should pay for road upgrades. Formerly, only those persons or entities whose property actually fronted the street slated for work paid a portion of the costs. Now everyone within the assessment district would bear some of that expense because their land would benefit from the road improvements, even if it lay a block or two away from the road being worked on. The tax assessment district

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<sup>139</sup> "Street Repairs in Atlanta," *The Atlantian*, May 1921; "Atlanta's Streets a Disgrace," *The Atlantian*, July 1922.

<sup>140</sup> "Paving on Edgewood Ave. Completed," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 12, 1924.

<sup>141</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Charter of 1871 as Amended, Ch. 19, § 273.

represented a major shift away from the concept that property owners paid for the roads on which their property fronted. City government had found an innovative way to bolster the public financing of very expensive street projects without having to gain the consent of every affected property owner.

Another funding source for road paving was the long-established assessment on the street railway company. Into the second decade of the twentieth century, the streetcar company had to pay the whole cost of paving and maintaining a width of eleven feet of any street on which it had a single line of track, more if the street contained double tracks. By the 1920s, council had amended the city charter to require the company to pay to pave sixteen feet of street width on any street carrying double tracks, which included the majority of the streets within the central business district.

Preston Stanley Arkwright (1871-1946), president of the Georgia Railway and Power Company, argued in a speech to the Atlanta Automobile Association against the increase in the assessment. Arkwright was a prominent attorney whose firm had helped Henry Atkinson win the great 1899-1901 trolley war against Joel Hurt. Atkinson, himself one of the city's great industrialists, had helped bring electric street lighting to Atlanta in 1883, and served as first president of the Georgia Electric Light Company, founded in 1890. The successful turn-of-the-century collaboration between the two men led them to incorporate, along with a few others, the Georgia Railway and Electric Company in 1902, with Arkwright as president and Atkinson as chairman of the Board of Directors.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> For substantial accounts of the "Second Battle of Atlanta," see Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 21-54; Jean Martin, *Mule to Marta*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1975), 74-108. The titans of Carson's title were Atkinson and Hurt.

In his 1922 speech to the auto men, Arkwright described the original, nineteenth century excuse for mandating road paving by the traction companies, that trolleys then were drawn by horses or mules whose shod hooves wore down the street surface between the rails. However, Atlanta's streetcars had been entirely electric-powered since 1894, and no electric streetcar wore down the pavement—it never touched the road surface at all, only the steel rails. Nevertheless, the policy remained in place. Arkwright said,

The street railway is still required to pay for this paving and to keep it repaired, although the repairs are made necessary, not by the street cars, but by the automobiles that have to run down the center of the street [*i.e., in the trolley tracks*] because other automobiles occupy the sides of the street as parking places.<sup>143</sup>

In 1924, the streetcar company had double and single tracks totaling about 220 miles. This number did not include the interurban lines to Marietta and Stone Mountain. As it utilized less than ten miles of track for freight operations and moving trolley cars, the company paid to maintain the pavement on a substantial portion of 200 miles of Atlanta roads. No wonder the city council did not want to change the policy. For decades to come, streetcar riders in Atlanta would continue to subsidize street paving for motorists.<sup>144</sup>

Arkwright, in his position as president of the city's franchise trolley system, naturally displayed a certain animus towards the automobile. However, he accurately pinpointed the true cause of much of downtown's traffic congestion—parked cars. Many streets within the central business district could accommodate four lanes of traffic; unfortunately, parked cars occupied two of those lanes, effectively reducing available travel space by 50%. The streetcar president

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<sup>143</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Charter of 1871 as Amended, Ch. 19, §§ 309-315. "Trolley Company Auto Benefactor, Says Arkwright," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1922.

<sup>144</sup> The map of Atlanta's streetcar lines shows the density of routes in the city, with double tracks prevalent in downtown; John Allen Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation* (New York: Beeler Organization, 1924), "Present Track Layout City of Atlanta," 74; Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 2, 11, 86.

had touched a sensitive nerve, as the city's business leaders were divided over on-street parking, an issue they never satisfactorily resolved.

The 1920 Georgia Constitutional Amendment for Street Improvements provided a third source of road-paving capital. It gave to any municipality in the state having a population of 150,000 or more permission to sell street improvement bonds. This type of bond could be issued without having to hold—and win—an always-contentious bond referendum. Instead, only two-thirds of the city council had to approve it. The funds could be used only for grading, paving, or re-paving streets.<sup>145</sup>

This piece of legislation applied exclusively to Atlanta, the sole city in Georgia whose population at the time (200,616) met the size threshold. No other city even came close.<sup>146</sup> The law had been enacted entirely for Atlanta's benefit. The city took full advantage, and in 1921 alone laid nearly \$1 million in paving with the new bond money. Mayor Key lauded the program's success, observing that "there have been no objections to this plan urged, and no antagonism to it, except by the streetcar company," taking yet another opportunity to denigrate Georgia Railway and Power. Nevertheless, the ten-year "baby bonds," as they were called, proved extremely popular and were heavily utilized throughout the 1920s.<sup>147</sup>

In sum, the city had multiple reliable ways to pay for street improvements beyond the traditional petitions from citizens, and large bond issues. That the city had to cobble together a variety of funding strategies for large road projects suggests that Atlanta's taxpayers perhaps did

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<sup>145</sup> Georgia Constitutional Amendment of 1920, quoted in Atlanta, Code of 1924, Ch. 14, §183, Paragraph 1, Sec. 7, Art. 7. The maximum term of the bonds was ten years, and interest could not exceed 6% per year. Bonds could be issued no matter what other debts the city incurred.

<sup>146</sup> The next largest city, Savannah, in 1920 had 83,252 inhabitants; Macon had 52,995, and Augusta had 52,548. No other cities in Georgia even had populations of 50,000, much less 150,000. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*.

<sup>147</sup> "Great Progress in City During Year Just Ended, Declares Key in Message," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1922.

not rate road paving as high a priority as the business community did—unless, of course, it was their own street. The growth advocates worked diligently to keep property taxes low in order to retain Atlanta’s pro-business reputation and promote real estate development. The various methods of road improvement funding provided the means to achieve those goals.

### **4.3 The Spring Street Viaduct**

The city’s most important paving project of 1921 was Spring Street. Prior to 1920, it ran 2.75 shady miles between Marietta and Peachtree streets. The southern end housed some mixed commercial, transitioning to residential as far north as Fifth Street, beyond which mostly undeveloped land predominated.

Spring Street exemplified the piecemeal, crazy-quilt approach to road paving taken by the city. The street’s surfaces consisted of the following: 1) Belgian block from Marietta Street to Pine Street; 2) macadam between Pine Street and Baltimore Place; 3) bituminous macadam from Baltimore Place to North Avenue; 4) water-bound macadam from North Avenue to Sixth Street; 5) no paving at all between Sixth and Tenth Streets; 6) more water-bound macadam from Tenth to Fourteenth streets; and 7) another section of dirt road between Fourteenth and Peachtree streets, where Spring ended. Creating a uniform grade for the entire length of the street, and then paving it with concrete was a large and expensive enterprise. Fortunately for the city, Fulton County agreed to undertake and underwrite the \$500,000 project.<sup>148</sup>

Spring Street had long been recognized as a westside alternative to the always-crowded Peachtree Street. Calls to grade and pave the street began as early as 1909. An already broad street, it ran from the business section to the city limits. In 1912, editorials called for designating

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<sup>148</sup> Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:797. There was a distinction between the various types of macadam in materials, cost, and effectiveness; “To Pave Spring Street in 1920 at County Cost,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 26, 1919.

Spring as the primary north-south corridor, and making the necessary improvements so it could provide some relief to growing traffic congestion. That no streetcar lines ran anywhere on the street made it ideal for exclusive automobile travel—an advantage noted at the time, but officials claimed that, without a bond issue, the city could not afford the outsized project.<sup>149</sup>

Improving Spring Street constituted the initial 1920s step to relieving traffic congestion on downtown's throughways, in particular the Peachtree/West Peachtree corridor. The trolley company had no plans to lay tracks there, eliminating the problem of streetcars hindering automobiles, and vice versa. Once widened and paved to a uniform sixty feet, Spring Street would become one of the city's major arterials. When a section of the newly-surfaced street opened in December 1921, hundreds of vehicles began using it, bringing instant, albeit temporary, relief to the clogged traffic in the central city.<sup>150</sup>

By the end of 1920, another part of the re-imagining of Spring Street had begun. The idea was to connect the city's two railroad stations, Brookwood Station on the north side with the south side's Terminal Station plaza. To accomplish that, a new bridge would have to span the rail lines and extend Spring Street to the intersection of Alabama and Madison streets (see map below). A group of city business leaders organized to push for the construction. Each had expertise in real estate development and/or banking.<sup>151</sup>

James L. Key – attorney and mayor of Atlanta;

J. Oscar Mills (1870-1946)– a civil engineer and landscape gardener, member of the public works committee of the Fulton County Commission, and a sales manager for the real estate firm of J. H. Ewing, Sr.;

Jones Henderson Ewing, Sr. (1867-1950) – real estate developer, pioneer of the development of both Peachtree and West Peachtree streets, member of the Fulton County Commission;

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<sup>149</sup> “Another North Side Traffic Outlet,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 7, 1909; “Grading of Spring Street Will Relieve Congestion,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 17, 1912.

<sup>150</sup> Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:796-97; “Spring Is Opened to North Avenue,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 24, 1921. Historically Spring Street proper had no streetcar lines until 2014. The new Atlanta Streetcar line intersects Spring Street in only two places on its way to and from Centennial Olympic Park Drive.

<sup>151</sup> “County Agrees to Assume Cost of Paving Spring,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1919.

Frank P. Rice (1838-1923) – real estate developer, vice president of the Atlanta Exchange and Banking Company;  
Benjamin Joseph Massell (1886-1962) – builder and real estate developer, founder and president of Massell Realty Company, and uncle of future Atlanta mayor Sam Massell;  
William T. Perkerson (1874-1943) – vice president and trust officer of the Fourth National Bank in Atlanta.

Their vision was extraordinary; such a massive construction project would be costly, and the approaches to the new bridge would slash through a swath of downtown properties. If realized, however, the viaduct would convey enormous benefits by extending Spring Street to relieve traffic congestion on the three bridges to the east (see map of the Spring Street viaduct below). A true western arterial street connecting the northside and southside commercial districts, it would allow heavy trucks loaded with merchandise and materials (then banned from Peachtree Street) to travel efficiently through the city, and would spur investment, especially on the southwest side which was rapidly developing into a light industrial area.

The first and most substantial hurdle was financial. In the early months of 1921, city officials and civic leaders worked diligently to get a bond issue passed, headed by Mayor Key and Lee Stiles Ashcraft (1871-1953), a prominent business currently serving as president of the Chamber of Commerce. Ashcraft made his name and fortune forming a hugely successful fertilizer firm, then branching out into numerous manufacturing concerns. He was also a director at Atlanta's First National Bank. His extensive experience in a variety of businesses, as well as his leadership of the COC, made him an ideal person to help lead the bond referendum. His collaboration with the mayor again demonstrated the close working ties between business and government. The new bridge was sold as a benefit not only city business, but also city motorists. The gain to Atlanta's mass transit riders would be the reduction of cars on streets where the trolley ran.

In order to get public monies for the viaduct construction, funding for schools, water, and sewer had to be included; otherwise, the controversial project might not succeed. Writing years after the fact, Robert Otis, chair of the city planning commission at the time, acknowledged that for any viaduct bond issue, they had “a gentleman’s agreement or understanding” that other sweeteners had to be added to bring the average voter to the polls. Without such inducements (see cartoon at right), Otis claimed, the

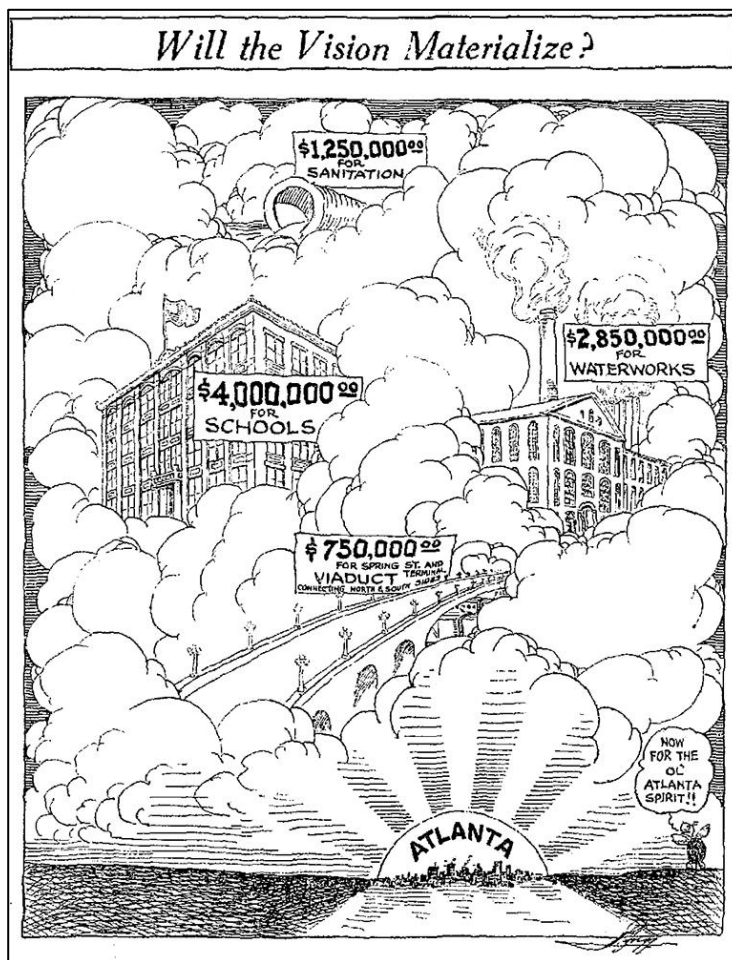


Figure 7. Bond cartoon, *Atlanta Constitution*, January 23, 1921.

general public would not have voted for a standalone viaduct bond.

This does not mean that the pro-growth coalition concerned itself solely with cars, streets, and bridges. It took an active role in promoting Atlanta’s overall health, financial stability, social well-being, and attractiveness to current and potential citizens, businesses, and investors. The group acted with city government to improve schools, healthcare, sanitation, water, jobs, parks, cultural amenities, playgrounds, and assistance to the poor.<sup>152</sup> However, this study focuses on the group’s role in changing Atlanta’s streets. Otis made clear that the new bridge held top priority

<sup>152</sup> For a compelling study of Atlanta’s elite and their social welfare efforts during the 1920s, see Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen’s Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 114-43.



for the planning commission, but understood it would not for the average Atlantan. Therefore, the proposed viaduct funding amount appeared negligible compared to the other much larger expenditures for projects with a broader appeal: only \$750,000 out of an \$8.85 million total bond issue. The rest of the money was allocated for city schools (\$4 million), waterworks (\$2.85 million), and sewer system upgrades (\$1.25 million).<sup>153</sup>

In Atlanta, two-thirds of those who voted had to approve the bond issue, and those voting had to constitute half of all registered voters. It proved a difficult bar to reach. As Amsterdam notes, “This requirement proved particularly nettlesome for Atlanta’s white business elite, whose strategy for luring new firms to the city focused on improving city services while keeping taxes low—a dual imperative that made debt spending businessmen’s leading option for pursuing public sector growth.” The 1919 bond referendum had failed in no small part due to a concerted African American effort. The women, led by Lugenia Burns Hope, organized voter registration drives and the men, after registering, either went to the polls and voted “no,” or stayed home and did not vote at all, which had the same effect as a “no” vote.<sup>154</sup>

That defeat of a bond issue which would not have served the Black communities gave notice of the power of African Americans to influence policy despite their limited voting rights. Black neighborhoods in general were woefully underserved by city utilities, and their schools were few, overcrowded, and ancient. The ability to vote in bond elections was perhaps the sole political power remaining to them in the Jim Crow era, and African Americans had learned in 1919 how to judiciously bestow or withhold their support depending on how a particular bond

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<sup>153</sup> Otis, *Atlanta's Plan, 1909-1932*, 11.

<sup>154</sup> Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 114. See his summary of the city's bond struggles in the time period, 114-16, and in-depth coverage of the Spring Street viaduct bond campaign and white courtship of the African American vote, 124-29.

issue might benefit them or their children. City authorities and business leaders had absorbed that lesson, too.

During the Spring Street viaduct campaign, businessmen and elected officials paid close attention to the total number of eligible voters. Mayor Key appointed a sixteen-member bond commission to promote the issue, chaired by Frank Martin Inman (1876-1950). Inman was a director at Lowry National Bank and a wealthy cotton broker, having inherited both positions from his more-famous father, Samuel Martin Inman (1843-1915).

While most of the commissioners were influential white men, the inclusion of three women demonstrated the city fathers' awareness of the importance of securing women's votes in what would be their first election since the 1920 passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. The commission's associate chair, Kate Richardson (Mrs. Samuel) Lumpkin (1862-1947), organized a 450-member women's committee. Lumpkin, a church and civic leader, had been presented an award by the Chamber of Commerce for her Liberty loan work during World War I. She was president of the Atlanta Federation of Women's Clubs, and had invaluable connections to large numbers of the new women voters. Key's inclusion of her on the commission in a leadership position was a savvy move which bore fruit.

The remaining fourteen members included representatives of each of the eleven city wards. All were "men and women of character and ability, of the highest type of citizenry, representatives of every phase of the growth and progress of Atlanta." The head of the Labor League, a prominent Jewish business and charity leader, a judge, bank officials, real estate developers, insurance men, a successful stock dealer, merchants, and former education board members, city councilmen, and county commissioners made up the rest of the commission.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> "Bond Issue Commission Appointed by Mayor Key, *Atlanta Constitution*, February 13, 1921.

The mayor appointed no African Americans, who organized their own commission to coordinate with whites in promoting the bonds. Mayor Key and Chairman Inman spoke at Black assemblies, while Mrs. Lumpkin appointed a special African American women's committee consisting of community-appointed leaders such as Lugenia Burns Hope. Key, Inman, and Lumpkin met with a group of 500 African Americans at Big Bethel Church on February 15, 1921, to address community concerns over the bond funding for Black schools. The city still did not have a public high school for African American students; to fill the gap, the city's Black colleges and universities had to offer high school courses, along with their undergraduate and graduate degrees. The mayor attempted to reassure the audience at the church that there would be "justice and fair play in spending this money," while Kate Lumpkin urged the women to "vote for the bonds for the sake of your children."<sup>156</sup>

A large publicity campaign took shape, framing the issue as a referendum on whether the city continued progressing or moved backwards. Newspapers championed the project. Rallies and meetings throughout the city garnered support. Even the schoolchildren got involved, reminding their parents to vote. On election day, the white schools opened late to give mothers the chance to vote while the Black schools had the entire day off to encourage a large turnout. Employers opened their work places one hour later so their employees could vote before coming downtown to work. Days before the vote, the newspaper reported a record number of voters had registered, and highlighted the African American Christian Council's endorsement of the project. On March 8, 1921, the bond referendum passed "by the most overwhelming majority ever piled up in any election in Atlanta," and Mayor Key signed the ordinance into law on June 7, 1921.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Bond Issue Commission Appointed by Mayor Key, February 13, 1921; "Negroes Are Told of Big Bond Issue," February 16, 1921.

<sup>157</sup> "Humanity and Bonds," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 1, 1921. The editorial laid out the case for each of the designated bond expenditures. "20,000 Atlanta People Eligible in Bond Election," *Atlanta Constitution*,

The bond issue was the first of several landmark municipal achievements of the 1920s. A special victory for African Americans, it secured funding for four new Black elementary schools and the construction of Booker T. Washington High School. It demonstrated the community's power to achieve a successful political intervention in Atlanta, as the 1919 bond rejection had, but this time by effecting positive changes. Meanwhile, growth advocates, greatly assisted by the local media, had their new cross-town automobile viaduct assured.<sup>158</sup>

The votes had hardly been tallied when Fulton County expedited its paving of Spring Street so the street would be completed along with the viaduct. Another situation suddenly emerged: a jump in real estate prices in the area. Barely a month after the bond vote, a small property at the southeast corner of Spring and Poplar streets sold for \$23,000, considered then an extravagant sum. The buyers planned a three-story building for the site. Rumors of other new projects flourished: "There seems to be considerable interest attached to the locations on and adjacent to the Spring street section, following the bond election, which authorized the erection of a big viaduct." Average property values in the area increased five-fold, from \$200 to \$1,000 a front foot. Already the prospective viaduct and street improvements were



Figure 8. Spring Street viaduct under construction, 1923.

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March 5, 1921; C. E. Robertson, "School Children Help Bond Issue," *American City* 25, no. 3 (September 1921): 246-47. "\$8,850,000 Bonds Carry by Overwhelming Vote Assuring Urgently Needed Improvements; Women Are Prominent in Success of Fight," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 9, 1921.

<sup>158</sup> David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 250.

generating new development.<sup>159</sup>

Construction began in October 1922 (see figure above<sup>160</sup>). Quickly the initial plan for an Alabama Street approach at the southern end of the viaduct had to be scrapped. The desired grade could not be achieved without blocking the fire department's headquarters, located in Fire Station No. 1 at 44 West Alabama Street. Switching the approach to Hunter Street [Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.; hereafter M.L.K., Jr. Blvd.] would cut off frontage or buildings on both Hunter Street and Madison Avenue. To pay for the unanticipated change in plans, the city council attempted to impose a tax on owners whose properties fronted the two streets, which required the consent of all those property owners. When several of them refused absolutely, the city resorted to its arbitrary assessment law. For the first time in Atlanta's history, council approved utilization of the law, basically a tax levy, which needed no property owner permissions. The planning commission quickly drew the boundaries for the new assessment district, and city council levied a tax on all the properties within it to pay for the viaduct approach.<sup>161</sup>

On schedule and under budget, the Spring Street viaduct opened on December 20, 1923 (see map below<sup>162</sup>). A formal ceremony at the Terminal Plaza began with the acceptance of the bridge by the city from the engineering firms Harrington, Howard & Ash of Kansas City, and Robert & Company of Atlanta, who implemented the project. Military groups, marching bands, and a crowd of about 20,000 paraded across the viaduct, and pictures of the celebration opened

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<sup>159</sup> "Work on Spring Street Is Rushed," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1921. The small property measured only 25' x 80'; "Spring St. Property Brings Good Price," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 16, 1921; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:797.

<sup>160</sup> The photo clearly shows the businesses at lower right which would be negatively impacted; AJCP338-036d, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Photographic Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library.

<sup>161</sup> "Viaduct Approach Requires New Tax," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 28, 1922.

<sup>162</sup> Base map is from O. E. Kauffman, "1906 Map of the City of Atlanta," (Atlanta: O. E. Kauffman, 1906). Geo-referencing and data by author.

every movie screening at the Howard and Forsyth movie theaters for days. The last pedestrian group crossing the bridge included the new Mayor Walter Sims, the former mayor, James Key, the city council, and the bond commission, and an hour later it opened to traffic.<sup>163</sup>

The main viaduct was 1,800' long and 60' wide, including the sidewalks on either side. Built of structural steel, the entire viaduct was encased in concrete to prevent deterioration from coal gases and the acids in locomotive smoke. Estimates predicted that 8,000 vehicles, traveling at a speed of 15 miles per hour, could cross the bridge in an hour.<sup>164</sup>

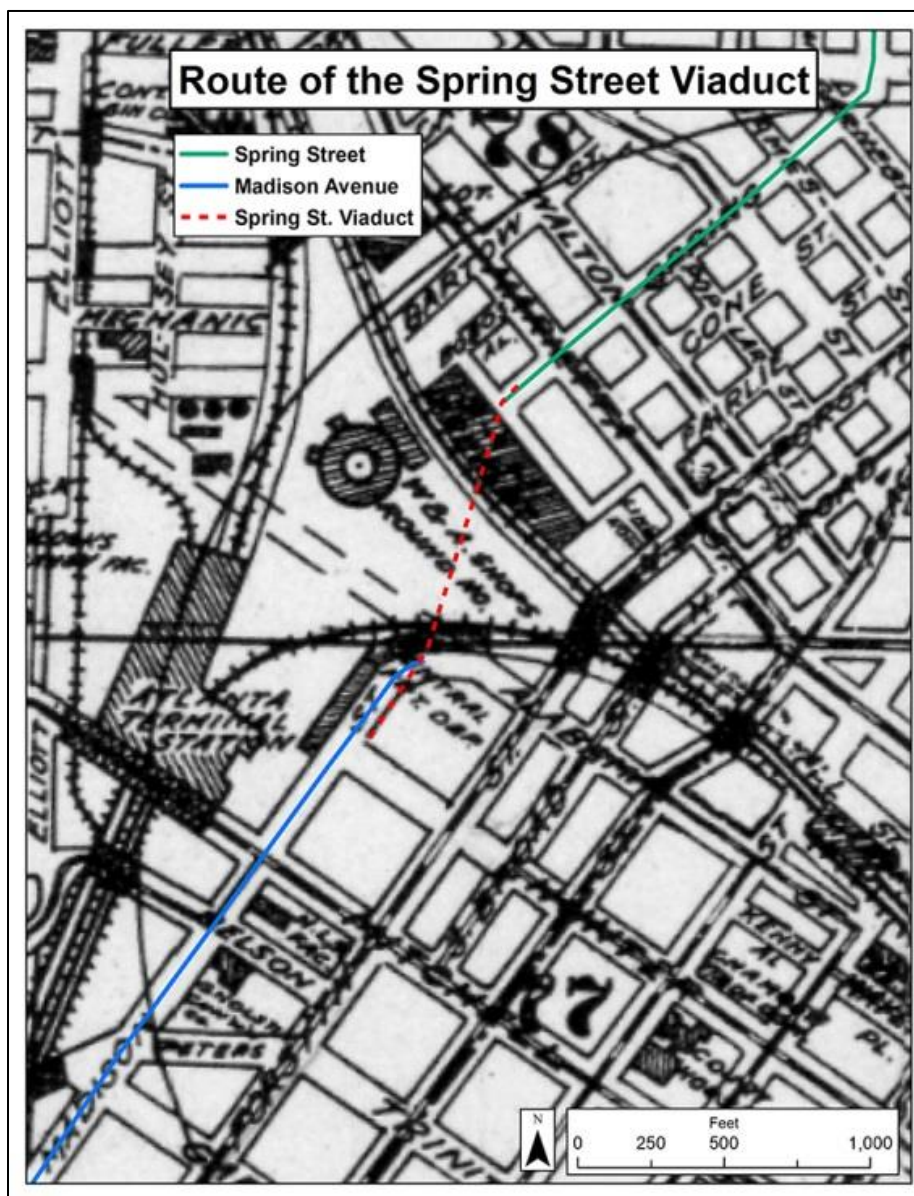


Figure 9. Spring Street viaduct route.

<sup>163</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1923: “New Viaduct Formally Opens to Stream of Traffic; 20,000 People Pack Plaza at Terminal Station;” “Howard” advertisement; “Viaduct Celebration Pictures Are Shown.”

<sup>164</sup> “Spring Street Viaduct Will be Opened Dec. 15,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 20, 1923; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:796-97.

With the completion of the viaduct, the goal of connecting the north side to Terminal Station had been achieved, but the dream of a true cross-town traffic artery remained unrealized. The Spring Street viaduct extended only as far as Mitchell Street, and had covered over a section of the very modest but grandly named Madison Avenue. Real estate developers urged that Madison be extended south to meet Whitehall Street, claiming it would raise property values and open up new business space on the south side. Work began in early 1925, and Madison Avenue re-opened on September 16, 1926 as the southern end of Atlanta's newest and finest boulevard. People in autos could drive from the Brookwood train station to Whitehall Street unimpeded by railroads or streetcars, making the journey much faster. Whitehall Street itself, once a principal residential street, rapidly converted to a business and industrial thoroughfare. In late 1926, the final act occurred when council renamed Madison Avenue "Spring Street."<sup>165</sup>

Well before that happy ending, the viaduct's presence had expanded the commercial district, adding five large office buildings costing nearly \$2 million. The business community was ebullient. Walter G. Cooper, chair of the city council's viaduct committee, wrote that one of the best accomplishments of the Spring Street viaduct would be its broadening effect on the vision of city citizens. He predicted it would lead to the construction of additional viaducts so that Atlanta could truly be a unified city. He wanted no trolleys on the entire length of Spring Street, as it was "a natural route for high speed traffic from Terminal Station to the northern limits of the city and beyond."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Madison Avenue," January 21, 1925; "Big Increase in Property Values on Madison Avenue Predicted by J. L. McCord," April 12, 1925; "The Constitution's Real Estate Review," August 30, 1925; "Many Improvements Will Be Made on South Side," October 11, 1925; and "Madison Avenue Extension Complete, Provides Great New Traffic Artery," September 17, 1926.

<sup>166</sup> Walter G. Cooper, "Millions of Construction Caused by the Spring Street Viaduct" *City Builder* 8, no. 5 (July 1923): 3-4.

A similar sentiment echoed in a newspaper editorial written the day after the Spring Street viaduct opened. Calling it “the march of progress, for which Atlanta has always been noted,” the editor asserted the greater value of the project would be its impression upon the public. It provided not only traffic congestion relief, but offered the lesson that a viaduct was “the only final traffic solution.”<sup>167</sup>

In 1920, Mayor Key claimed that the ultimate solution to the city’s traffic problem would come from the new viaducts. All three men—Cooper, the editorial writer, and Key—in 1923 affirmed that constructing roadways free of other street users would alleviate traffic bottlenecks, that the city could build its way out of traffic jams. The prognosticators opined that the Spring Street viaduct would set a precedent, and a newly-woke public would support future ventures of the same kind. Events proved them greatly mistaken as to the true solution for gridlock, but correct about garnering public approval of more road projects.<sup>168</sup>

The construction of the Spring Street viaduct signified a pivotal moment in Atlanta’s history. By agreeing to build a motor vehicle-only arterial (the largest such roadway in the city at that time), the city explicitly acknowledged the connection between auto travel and growth. Good car-friendly roads led to development and expansion, which in Atlanta equated to progress. In order to facilitate business and stimulate investment, the city, with the Spring Street viaduct, initiated its conversion of public streets to automobile channels. Once starting down that road figuratively and literally, Atlanta never looked back. Streets for cars became, in the 1920s, a powerful tool for city expansion, and the growth coalition wielded it frequently and effectively.

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<sup>167</sup> “Spring Street Viaduct,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1923.

<sup>168</sup> “Traffic Ordinance Signed by Mayor Key,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1920.



#### 4.4 The Twin Viaducts

Even before the Spring Street viaduct opened, plans for another set of viaducts over the railroads had commenced. Robert Whitten, the city's consulting engineer, had developed separate traffic and zoning plans. Atlanta did not adopt a single, broad, long-range master plan. Its fragmentary schemes and fitful measures always left something more to be done, its goals never fully realized. Building more roads emerged as the city's go-to method of solving traffic gridlock.<sup>169</sup>

Whitten's second traffic report, presented in August 1922, advocated more and wider streets, viaducts, underpasses, and traffic throughways. Extreme slow-downs still severely hampered trucking and commercial traffic. The latter, he claimed, handicapped the city's commerce and industry with the result that *the public paid higher prices for goods* (emphasis added). These last words caught the attention of everyone: the purchasing public, city officials, businessmen, real estate developers, and retail merchants.<sup>170</sup>

North-south roads were especially important, and Whitten strongly urged construction of viaducts at Central Avenue and Pryor Street. Only Central would carry streetcar traffic. Its connection to Ivy Street [Peachtree Center Ave.] on the north created an excellent trolley throughway. Streetcar lines could then be removed from North Pryor Street [Park Place], making it an exclusive automobile artery. Whitten's recommendations centering on efficient traffic movement corresponded with the street strategies of city planners across the nation.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 186. In 1939, renowned city planner, Harland Bartholomew, spoke at the annual banquet of Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce. He noted that then, seventeen years after Whitten's Atlanta plan, the city was still behind in city planning, with much of it the fault of uncontrolled expansion beyond the corporate limits; "Active Planning Program Urged for City by Expert," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1939.

<sup>170</sup> "Whitten Would Widen Downtown Streets to Relieve Increasing Jam of Traffic," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 20, 1922.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*; Brownell, "The Commercial-Civic Elite and City Planning in Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans in the 1920s," 354-56.

Between the viaduct bookends, 1920s Atlanta experienced plenty of other road and building construction as the city expanded. During the decade, the city grew by more than eight square miles (from 26.6 at the end of 1919 to 34.79 at the end of 1929), while the population of the city proper increased by nearly 35%, adding almost 70,000 people.<sup>172</sup> Surfacing and improving roads proceeded throughout the decade, with twenty-eight miles paved in 1925 alone. Asphalt and concrete, the two smoothest surfaces and most preferred by motorists, competed for primacy. Atlanta, however, poured more concrete than asphalt during the decade.<sup>173</sup>

The downtown business district expanded in all directions, as more and more of the once-residential streets turned commercial. Central locations remained desirable for offices, hotels, and commerce. While Atlanta would grow in every direction, “its exact geographical and business center will be guarded by its main arteries feeding into the city from five points of the compass.” As the *City Builder* explained, Atlanta had plenty of room to spread out, but developers still razed buildings in downtown as central real estate had “grown too valuable to permit antiquated buildings.”<sup>174</sup>

The continuing quest to widen narrow downtown streets led to the passage of the CBD’s first setback requirements. Council contemplated establishing a ten-foot building line on all main traffic thoroughfares, but started much more modestly, beginning with only specified portion of five roads. At those locations, new buildings had to be constructed a certain distance from a fixed

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<sup>172</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*. Area statistics are from the *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, Georgia for the Year Ending December 31, 1919* (Atlanta, 1919), 20; and *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, Georgia for the Year Ending December 31, 1929* (Atlanta, 1929), 20.

<sup>173</sup> “Atlanta Ranks Fifth in Concrete Street Pavement Yardage,” *City Builder* (December 1927): 28-29. An official of the Portland Cement Association stated that, as of October 1, 1927, only four other cities in the U.S. had more concrete street paving than Atlanta. This did not count the many miles of concrete in the unincorporated parts of Fulton County. The first concrete street in Atlanta, Austin Avenue in Inman Park, was paved in 1914; it remained in excellent condition thirteen years later with little or no maintenance.

<sup>174</sup> “City’s Growth Fast in Original Center,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 8, 1929; Dudley Glass, “Tear It Down and Build It Bigger--and Better,” *City Builder* (July 1929): 3.

point. That point varied; sometimes the center of the road, the inside edge of the sidewalk, or the curb, but all of them made a zero lot building line illegal. The new codes mandated that structures be set back from the street so that the main downtown arteries could eventually be enlarged to carry more vehicles.<sup>175</sup>

The setback ordinances in effect represented an Atlanta plan for future street widenings to reduce traffic congestion. The placement of the laws into the main body of the city code, rather than sequestered inside the building code, lent weight to their message. Lawmakers were looking ahead to a time of even more cars on city streets.

The construction of the “twin viaducts” provided another answer to the city’s traffic dilemma. Everyone acknowledged the need for additional bridges over the railroads. At least twenty railroad tracks carrying more than 100 trains daily crossed the heart of downtown in 1920, making it extremely difficult and dangerous for any pedestrian or vehicle to traverse grade crossings safely. Most trolleys did not cross at ground level due to the tracking complications. The river of rails also created a barrier between the north and south sides of town, a bifurcation impacting politics, business, and residents. Trains blocking the crossings caused significant traffic delays. City code required them to move after five minutes, but they often remained stationary at these crossings much longer, holding up motorists indefinitely. Lack of police enforcement of the law exacerbated the backups, but erecting bridges would reduce both traffic jams and accidents.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> “10-Foot Building Line is Proposed for City Streets,” and “Planning for the Future,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 16, 1922; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 89, §§ 2745-50. The streets were Peachtree, West Peachtree, South Pryor, Edgewood Avenue, and North Boulevard.

<sup>176</sup> In 1920, the count was 124 daily trains; the number only increased over the decade; “Come to Atlanta – the Center of Southern Commerce and Wealth,” *City Builder* 5, no. 3 (May 1920): 6. Count of tracks made from 1891 photograph of the Forsyth Street Bridge in Garrett, 2: 253; “Woodall to Ask for Safety Gates,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 15, 1921.

As early as 1921, a group of citizens and property owners met at the Kimball House to discuss a proposed Pryor Street viaduct to extend between Alabama and Decatur streets at the same elevation as the Whitehall viaduct. The meeting was headed by Colonel H. H. Dean, a Gainesville attorney with extensive real estate holdings in downtown Atlanta. Not coincidentally a few days before the meeting, his letter to the planning commission had appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution*. Dean made the case for viaduct construction as primarily a safety concern, but also emphasized that adjacent property holders approved, and suggested that the railroads and traction company would also lend their backing. Obviously, he was one of the supportive property owners whose holdings stood to increase in value if the viaducts were built. If the example of the Spring Street viaduct building bonanza held, anybody with real estate in the area of the twin bridges would likely see a jump in values.<sup>177</sup>

Robert Whitten supported the twin viaducts, as did John A. Beeler, the consulting engineer who had been hired by the traction company to produce a transportation plan for the central business district. Beeler had gotten his start conducting only urban street railway surveys, but began to add into his reports data on the other transportation options in each city he studied. He emphasized the importance of understanding how the various transit modes interacted. In the cover letter attached to his 1924 Atlanta report, he acknowledged the city's traffic problems, and noted the need for a comprehensive traffic system. He called for the immediate construction of the two viaducts, and relocating onto them all the streetcar tracks on Peachtree and Whitehall between Carnegie Way and Fair Street [Memorial Drive].

During the progress of our survey, it quickly became apparent that more than a survey of transit was necessary. It was obvious that the city's tardiness in

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<sup>177</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Viaduct Plans to be Discussed by Committee," August 26, 1921; "More Central Viaducts Suggested to Planning Commission," August 17, 1921. Garrett, 2:850, recounts the sale of Dean's Temple Court Building at Alabama and Pryor to Massell Realty for \$150,000 in April 1929—the month the twin viaducts opened.

evolving a definite city plan, coupled with the rapid and noteworthy growth in all phases of its life, were the underlying causes of the present acute situation.<sup>178</sup>

The pro-growth community enthusiastically supported construction of the two bridges, especially after the unqualified success of the Spring Street viaduct in stimulating new construction and soaring real estate values. Predictions abounded for a similar renewal in the vicinity of Pryor and Central, which had seen no new buildings in years. Handsome, modern offices and hotels might soon replace the old, small wood and brick structures.

The viaducts would relieve traffic congestion, though not primarily for pleasure drivers who could take other routes over the railroads. The freight-carrying heavy trucks would benefit the most. They could not avoid the grade crossings, and lost valuable time waiting for trains, with their engines running, burning gas and oil, and polluting the atmosphere already smoky from steam locomotives. Trains would move more efficiently, without having to halt for dilatory pedestrians or vehicles. Commerce and industry would gain from the time and expense saved by the removal of these last two grade crossings in the central business district.

The twin viaducts would eliminate the terms “north side” and “south side” from Atlanta’s vocabulary as the two sections of the city would then be linked up on every principal north and south artery. The city’s major business districts would no longer be bifurcated, and city and state government entities would be within easy reach of each other. In sum, the construction of the Central and Pryor viaducts could bring advantages to a number of Atlanta’s citizens in terms of

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<sup>178</sup> The Beeler Organization, Inc., Consulting Engineers, was located in New York City. John Allen Beeler (1867-1945) produced street railway reports for numerous cities, including Washington, DC, Boston, Kansas City, New Orleans, Dallas, Seattle. He also wrote articles, books, and technical publications about modern transit systems. Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, iii, 55-56. See Chapter 6 of this paper for more on the Beeler *Report*.

traffic relief and convenience. Nearby owners could benefit from rising property values, but businessmen, industrialists, and real estate speculators would also see financial gains.<sup>179</sup>

Two major entities had to be persuaded before the twin viaduct vision could materialize: the State of Georgia and the railroad companies. Permissions from both were crucial and uncertain. The railroads owned the tracks over which the viaducts would pass, and the state held title to the land on which the rail lines lay, as well as the air rights above them. Georgia also owned one of the railroads, the Western & Atlantic.

Early in 1925, Mayor Walter A. Sims planned a day-long conference, culminating in a sumptuous banquet, for high-ranking railroad and state officials. He understood how essential their good-will was. For additional persuading, he named ten prominent Atlantans as the reception committee greeting the dignitaries coming to town. This group included two bankers, two attorneys, the editors of the three daily newspapers, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the president of the Atlanta Convention Bureau, and the editor of the *Journal of Labor*. Commenting on the makeup of the reception committee, the *Constitution* noted that it was “representative of leading business interests here, . . . composed of civic leaders who are interested in what is best for Atlanta.” The article not only approved of the committee and supported the venture, but it also equated business concerns with those of Atlanta.<sup>180</sup>

On March 25, six railroad officials and Georgia Governor Clifford Walker met with the mayor and his committee. The visitors all pledged full cooperation and support of the viaduct construction project, with the affected railroads agreeing to pay their share. After a series of

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<sup>179</sup> J. Henson Tatum, “Benefits to City of Pryor Street-Central Avenue Viaducts,” *City Builder* 8, no. 6 (August 1923): 33; W. H. Lee, “Atlanta’s Viaducts in Sight,” *ibid.* (August 1927): 8, 39; Dana Belser, “The Significance of the Viaducts,” *ibid.*: 9.

<sup>180</sup> “Leaders Will Welcome Visiting Railroad Heads to Discuss Viaduct Plant,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 22, 1925.

discussions, Thomas Kearney Glenn (1868-1946) provided lunch at the exclusive Capital City Club for the

assembly. As the

vice president of

Georgia Railway

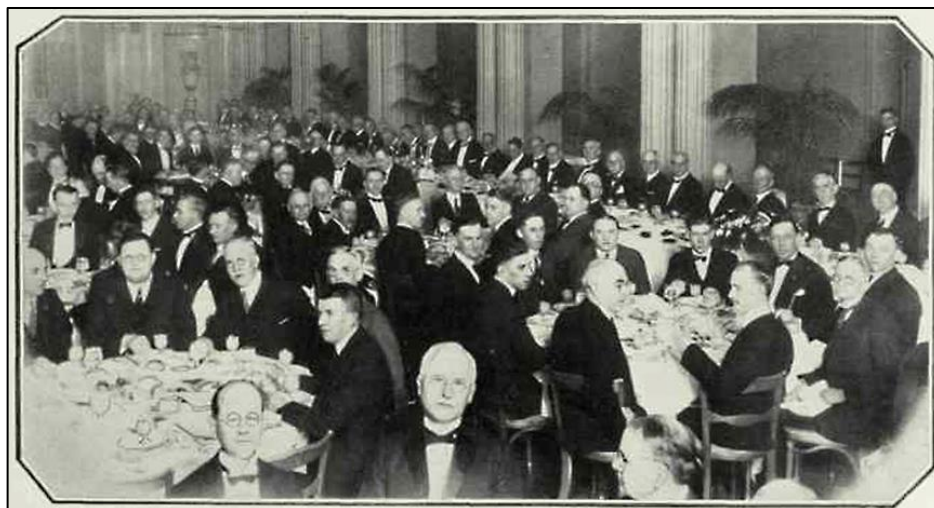
and Power

Company, board

member of First

National Bank, and

a director of the



*Figure 10. Mayor's dinner at the Biltmore, March 25, 1925; City Builder (April 1925): 7.*

Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway, he would have made an excellent host, being conversable in so many fields. The group then took an “automobile tour” of Atlanta to see the locations of the proposed viaducts and other attractions.<sup>181</sup>

The long day culminated in the mayor’s “Let’s Go, Atlanta!” banquet held at the new and luxurious Biltmore Hotel, owned by William Candler (1890-1936), real estate entrepreneur and one of the Coca-Cola Candler (see photo above). More than 200 men attended, including five railroad presidents, state and city officials, and a host of prominent business leaders. Numerous speakers endorsed the viaduct project. Robert Foster Maddox (1870-1965), president of Atlanta National Bank and former Atlanta mayor, spoke for the bankers and other business interests. Chairman of the Board H. M. Atkinson gave his personal guarantee of the support of the Georgia Railway and Power Company. Prominent attorney Reuben Rose Arnold (1868-1960) vowed to lobby the General Assembly for permission to construct the bridges. The five railroad presidents

<sup>181</sup> “Atlanta Faces Greatest Era of Prosperity, Declare Speakers at Get-Together Banquet,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1925.

expressed faith in Atlanta and the belief that the project would benefit everyone. All three newspaper publishers added their fervent pledges of news articles and editorial columns supporting the project.<sup>182</sup>

“A spirit of harmony and cooperation” characterized the dinner. Classic booster hyperbole accompanied assurances of funding for the viaducts and other civic improvements, which would produce “a new era of prosperity, one that should far exceed anything of its kind in Atlanta’s history.” Optimism prevailed as Mell Romaine Wilkinson (1864-1947), industrialist, banker, and insurance executive, confidently asserted that “Atlanta usually gets what she goes after.”<sup>183</sup>

Everyone attending the event understood the multi-faceted benefits they and their businesses would ultimately reap from the bridges. They also firmly believed that the project would benefit the city as a whole, that their interests and Atlanta’s interests were essentially the same. Leading newspapers would deliver favorable publicity for the coming bond referendum needed to finance the structures. City authorities knew that such “publicity and education was necessary in order to pass a bond issue.” The ordinary reader would see nothing but positives from this shining example of a progressive city at work.<sup>184</sup>

On some level, perhaps, the city elites may have acknowledged that their interests did not in fact match those of most Atlantans. Or perhaps they simply discounted the uninformed masses whose priorities did not match their own. But whatever their degree of self-awareness, the top pro-growth leaders understood that the majority of citizens did not want to spend their tax dollars

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<sup>182</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “So Now, ‘Let’s Go!’”, March 26, 1925; “Atlanta Faces Greatest Era of Prosperity,” March 26, 1925.

<sup>183</sup> “Atlanta Faces Greatest Era of Prosperity,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1925; Louis D. Newton, “Atlanta Going after Viaducts,” *City Builder* 11, no. 3 (April 1925): 5-6.

<sup>184</sup> Otis, *Atlanta’s Plan, 1909-1932*, 11.



on a couple of bridges many of them would never cross. As with the Spring Street viaduct, “the usual compromises for other city growth items” had to be added to the bond package in order to gain the interest and approval of a wider public. Pro-growth civic leaders had to mask their top priority—the viaducts—with additional projects which would attract the vote of the average citizen.<sup>185</sup>

Mayor Sims ended the banquet urging the attendees to contact their state representatives to quickly approve the viaducts. The legislature needed to act with speed so the governor could sign a bill that year; otherwise, the project would be delayed until 1927, as the general assembly would not meet during 1926. On July 23, 1925, the Georgia house approved the senate’s viaduct resolution, and the governor signed it later that same day. Atlanta could now officially proceed with plans for the Pryor Street and Central Avenue viaducts over the railroad tracks. The mayor responded immediately, announcing plans for financing the structures with a bond issue.<sup>186</sup>

An enthusiastic campaign delivered the desired result. In March 1926, voters ratified an \$8 million municipal bond program containing funds for schools, sewers, waterworks, a new city hall, and, of course, the viaducts. Mayor Sims rejoiced, and Alderman William B. Hartsfield, chair of the bond committee (and future mayor of Atlanta, the *City Too Busy to Hate*), lauded the old Atlanta spirit displayed by the consensus vote.<sup>187</sup>

A number of wrinkles in the plans developed over the course of the next two years which delayed the project. The big “Viaduct Row” (as the newspapers called it) involved the railroads; a disgruntled property owner brought suit against the city; and the traction company wanted a

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 16.

<sup>186</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, July 24, 1925: “Neill Urges Greater Speed on Legislation as Assembly Completes Half of Session,” “Plans for Twin Viaducts Will Be Pressed Forward, Mayor Walter Sims Says”; Walter A. Sims, “Atlanta Gets the Viaducts,” *City Builder*, August 1925, 4-5, 32.

<sup>187</sup> “\$8,000,000 Municipal Bond Program is Ratified,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 25, 1926.

guaranteed public transit monopoly before contributing funds to the project. All three caused serious delays. The first, most serious problem began with the city's proposal to lower the railroad tracks 4.5 feet beneath the two bridges. Reducing the grade would shorten the approaches, limit the damage to properties on Decatur and Hunter [M.L.K., Jr. Blvd.] streets, make the new viaducts level with the existing Whitehall Street viaduct, and greatly reduce the cost of the project. The four railroads refused to allow anyone to tinker with their tracks or interrupt their service. Their intransigence jeopardized not only the viaducts but the entire bond issue.<sup>188</sup>

Engineers saved the day. The bond commission, needing assistance with the technical details, sought the expertise of professionals with national reputations. The American Society of Civil Engineers appointed a committee to collaborate with the commission. Their two reports ultimately persuaded the railroads that they, too, would benefit. The lowering of the tracks could at last begin, but the malcontent property owner threatened to take his case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In the end, the city council voted to remove the nuisance by settling with the man. Nearly a year had passed since the \$8 million bonds had been voted and the public was getting restless. A newspaper headline proclaimed, "Now, To Work!"<sup>189</sup>

A few financial issues remained unresolved. Fulton County had to be persuaded to contribute to the viaduct funding; they eventually agreed to a sum of \$500,000. Georgia Power (by this time, the company name had changed from Georgia Railway and Power) initially agreed to help fund the viaducts, but first wanted from the city a traction monopoly. After weeks of

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<sup>188</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Delay in Viaducts Work Seen as Groups Disagree Over Lowering of Tracks," October 20, 1926; "Mayor Invites Railroad Heads," October 23, 1926; "Action by Council Seen as Presaging End of Viaduct Row," December 21, 1926. The four railroads were the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway, the Central of Georgia Railroad, the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, and the Western & Atlantic Railroad.

<sup>189</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Bond Commission Lauds Civil Engineers for Aid in City's Viaducts Plan," April 1, 1927; "Let the Work Begin," May 5, 1927; and "Now, To Work!" May 12, 1927.

discussion, Preston Arkwright, the traction company president, proposed a compromise by which the company would donate \$400,000 to the project with a city franchise assurance in the form of an eventual repeal of the jitney ordinance. On December 13, 1927, Mayor Ragsdale and Arkwright signed the viaduct contract, removing the last impediment to the project.<sup>190</sup>

A profusion of machines and laborers working 24/7 lowered the level of the railroad tracks within two months. The new laterals necessitated razing dozens of buildings and constructing concrete retaining walls. Walter F. Schulz, consulting engineer from Memphis, TN, drew blueprints for the super-sized structures, while William A. Hansell, the city's chief of construction, solicited viaduct bids. The winning firm, MacDougald Construction Company, began building the bridges immediately and made rapid progress.<sup>191</sup>

Another form of progress resulted as viaduct work started—real estate development. The Spring Street viaduct had produced a building boom in nearby areas, and investors looked for similar opportunities around the new viaducts in what had been a depressed section of the business district. To attract attention to growth opportunities, the Atlanta Central Improvement Association issued a free *Viaduct Booklet*, listing the names and holdings of property owners in downtown along with a map of the viaducts. The Association noted that while the area formerly lacked adequate transportation, the viaducts would erase that deficiency, bringing “one of the greatest opportunities for real estate activity and growth and development that Atlanta has had in many years.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “County Portion of Viaduct Fund Made Available,” September 8, 1927; “Power Company’s Proposal Breaks Viaduct Deadlock,” September 18, 1927; “Viaduct Contract Signed by Mayor and Power Head,” December 14, 1927.

<sup>191</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Track Lowering Near Completion,” January 22, 1928; “MacDougald Firm Awarded Viaduct Construction Work,” April 12, 1928.

<sup>192</sup> Garrett, 2: 850; “Viaduct Section Booklet Issued,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 23, 1928.

Property owners' optimism surged though they were spending between \$1,000 and \$100,000 each to remodel their properties. The new roadways did expand the city's business district "with level streets essential to retail shopping." Alabama and Pryor streets became commercial corridors. Central Avenue saw a mix of industry and retail combined with major wholesalers and parking garages. The Wall Street lateral opened up businesses along its rail-side walkway, and made a more pedestrian-friendly conduit between shopping on Central and Pryor (see both the pre-Photoshop "doctored" photo and Sanborn map below<sup>193</sup>). The viaducts did more than facilitate travel; they generated income and promoted growth. They signaled to the rest of the nation Atlanta's stature as a progressive city.

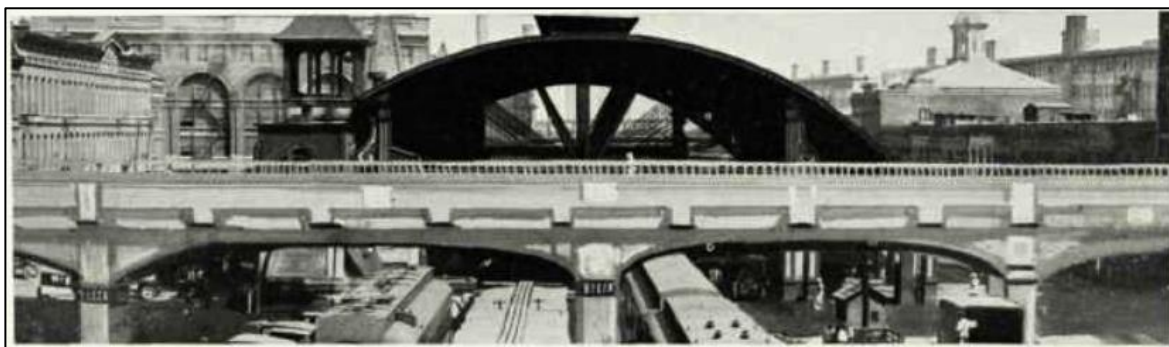


Figure 11. Artist's rendering of the Pryor Street viaduct; *City Builder* (August 1925): 4.

The 794-foot-long Central Avenue viaduct opened to traffic on March 16, 1929, less than a year after construction began, but officials held no ceremony as the Pryor Street bridge was not finished. Both viaducts officially opened on April 15, 1929, but with only the unveiling of a

<sup>193</sup> An artist from the *Atlanta Georgian* created the pre-Photoshop-manipulated photograph of the Pryor Street viaduct looking east toward Union Station. The map is a section from Volume 1, Congested District Key of the "Atlanta, Georgia 1931" Sanborn map. Colored markings added by author: twin viaducts in green; laterals in blue; Plaza Way in yellow; Spring Street viaduct in red.

commemorative bronze plaque to mark the occasion. Perhaps the length of the project—nearly five years—had muted any celebratory spirit. Also, the total cost exceeded \$2 million.<sup>194</sup>



Figure 12. Downtown viaducts; New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1931.

The completion of the twin viaducts and their laterals furnished an opportunity to re-open discussions about Bleckley Plaza, the original 1910 plan to construct a central square above the soot-filled railroad gulch running through the middle of downtown. The idea had been rejected by city and railroad officials in 1916. A group of concerned property owners and area merchants

<sup>194</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Central Avenue Viaduct Will be Opened to Travel First Time This Morning, March 16, 1929; “Great New Viaduct System Promises the Reconstruction of Central Atlanta,” March 24, 1929; “Atlanta Viaducts Completed, Open Monday Morning,” April 14, 1929.

now believed that the new structures over and around the gulch provided an “opening wedge for the construction of a plaza over the tracks,” especially as a portion of the work had just been done.<sup>195</sup>

The city still had no signature downtown park or assembly space. Five Points, never an especially large or aesthetically pleasing gathering place, had turned into a gigantic traffic jam. Smoke from steam locomotives continued to plague center city businesses with soot-damaged merchandise, even though railroad engines were prohibited from emitting black smoke for more than one minute when on the tracks between Washington Street and Union Station. Civil engineers were well aware of the structural harm caused to metal girders by the acidic smoke. The city had just paid extra to have its new viaducts encased in concrete to protect the underlying steel—a process costly not only in materials, but also in the additional time and labor required.<sup>196</sup>

A Georgia Tech city planning professor, writing in 1927, cited the many disadvantages of steam engines beyond air pollution. Atlanta had by then fourteen different railway companies running over 1,000 train units daily, and the only way to eliminate the smoke nuisance and other problems was to electrify all the railroads. With that accomplished, he claimed, the city could then easily place concrete slabs above all the downtown tracks, eliminating the unsightly gulch which still cut the city in two and was visible from an airplane. The plaza would create plenty of space for traffic-relieving boulevards, beautiful public buildings, and a large number of parking places.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> “Committee Will Combat Conversion of Union Depot Trackage into Freight Yards,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1928; “Plaza Committee Makes Report,” *City Builder* 8, no. 5 (July 1923): 61; Tatum, “Benefits to City of Pryor Street-Central Avenue Viaducts,” 33.

<sup>196</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 67, § 2021-23.

<sup>197</sup> “Value of Central Plaza to Atlanta Shown by Newell,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1923; Ralph Peters Black, “Greater Atlanta - the City Beautiful,” *City Builder* (October 1927): 36-37, 54-55; Tatum, “Benefits to City of Pryor Street-Central Avenue Viaducts,” 33.



The professor's solution and the dreams of civic leaders for a central plaza remained years in the future. Only a narrow pedestrian strip called Plaza Way was built over the tracks to bridge Pryor and Whitehall halfway between Wall and Alabama streets (see map above). Not until 1943's Plaza Park [Peachtree Fountains Plaza] connected the Pryor, Wall, Whitehall, and Alabama viaducts did a true public pedestrian plaza exist, but the viaducts and laterals of the 1920s were foundational towards its creation.

With Atlanta's great viaduct project complete, a noticeable improvement in traffic was seen across the district. Trains could go into and out of Union Station without having to stop and uncouple. Elimination of the grade crossings reduced danger and delays to people and vehicles. The Capitol, Fulton County Courthouse, and the in-progress new Atlanta city hall were easily accessible from anywhere in town. Construction of the viaducts created a street corridor above the east-west rail lines uniting the north and south sections of town.<sup>198</sup>

The pro-growth community achieved many of its goals with the construction of the twin viaducts. Property values increased, and the many building improvements enhanced the appearance of the once run-down neighborhood. The two bridges received at least partial credit for the record-breaking number of building permits issued by the city of Atlanta during 1928. They exceeded 1923's previous high by almost half a million dollars.<sup>199</sup>

City businesses quickly jumped at the chance to advertise their proximity to the new viaducts, and the convenience such a location afforded their customers. One of the city's signature department stores, Chamberlin-Johnson-DuBose, took out nearly a full-page advertisement (see ad below), claiming that "All Roads Lead" to their store on Whitehall Street.

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<sup>198</sup> Garrett, 2:849.

<sup>199</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, December 30, 1928: "New Record Is Made by Building Permits"; "New Mitchell St. Viaduct Favored By Finance Body."

Patrons could now easily avoid the traffic congestion at the Peachtree-Whitehall viaduct, and park conveniently and free for three hours at two nearby garages.

Both mayors who oversaw the viaduct bond issues during the 1920s had appointed special commissions tasked with ensuring the successful passage of the referenda. These commissions consisted of prominent white businessmen, professionals, and civic leaders, along with a few of elite white women to assist in securing the women's vote. In both instances, the groups took care to reach out to the city's African Americans.

Without backing from Black voters, bonds did not pass in the city of Atlanta. Prominent financier

**All Roads Lead to  
Chamberlin-Johnson-DuBose Co.**  
(and 3 hours free parking)

Study the above map for a moment. Note the convenient location of Chamberlin's to the main routes of travel from every direction. Then note how near to the store are Bell Brothers' and Bonner's Garages, both on Pryor Street. These two garages offer three hours' free parking for the automobiles of Chamberlin's customers. You merely have your claim check cancelled at the Round Table, Main Floor, Chamberlin's.

The convenience of the new viaducts at Pryor street (soon to be open for traffic) and Ivy Street (now open) seems to bring northwest and northeast Atlanta miles nearer to Chamberlin's, on Whitehall, between Mitchell and Hunter. The traffic congestion approaching and crossing the Peachtree-Whitehall Viaduct, may now be avoided by coming to Chamberlin's via the Ivy Street Viaduct, or, a little later, over the Pryor Street Viaduct.

**Chamberlin  
Johnson DuBose Co.**

Figure 13. Department store ad; *Atlanta Constitution*, March 3, 1929.

Frank M. Inman, chair of the failed 1923 city park bond campaign, declared, "In the past few years two campaigns for bonds were defeated by the negro vote because of their lack of



confidence in getting any of the benefits therefrom.”<sup>200</sup> It should have been obvious that funding another city park from which they would be excluded was never going to win their votes.

Since 1919, Atlanta’s African Americans refused to support any bond project which would not contribute to their welfare or interests. However, the city’s leaders ensured that the two viaduct referenda included amenities like schools specifically for the African American neighborhoods. Similarly, the city’s planning commission understood that average Atlanta voters would also not pass a bond referendum that did not address needs and concerns closer to their hearts and homes than some downtown bridges.

Robert Otis, planning commission chair, admitted that the viaducts were their top priority. The commission composed of elite businessmen added schools, water, and sewer projects—all of which were needed, but which also would guarantee passage. The two city bond issues which failed during the twenties contained no viaducts or street upgrades. While each would have provided civic enhancements, none would have advanced business growth and city expansion as much as new viaducts and better roads. The pro-growth alliance made more extensive efforts to pass the viaduct bonds because these mattered most to those dedicated to city expansion. When the stakes were high enough, the coalition would even reach across the racial divide to achieve its goals.<sup>201</sup>

The construction of the viaducts is at the heart of this thesis. The city-as-growth-machine viewpoint incentivized Atlanta’s businessmen and government officials to embrace the automobile as a key driver of municipal growth. Linking efficient transportation with more

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<sup>200</sup> “Inman Discusses Negro High School,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 18, 1924.

<sup>201</sup> The two failed bond referenda of the 1920s included \$2 million for city parks in 1923; and \$2 million for a new city hall in 1925.

development led to increased efforts to facilitate traffic flow. The viaducts demonstrated the city's willingness to eliminate other street users from the new roadways; no streetcars ran the entire length of Spring Street while the Central Avenue viaduct accommodated no pedestrians.

But road improvements comprised only the infrastructure portion of the traffic component of a city plan. The regulation of street use supplied the legal superstructure. During the twenties, Atlanta's leaders had to confront the problems of collisions and carnage which road-building alone could not solve. By the end of the decade, the city council, ably assisted by automobile clubs and associations, enacted an enormous amount of legislation to control everyone and everything in the city streets. Along with the various necessary enforcement mechanisms, a regulatory superstructure blanketed the city. The massive legal apparatus forever changed the appearance of the streets and sidewalks, the daily lives of citizens, and local citizens' understanding of the proper use of public roads.

## 5 REGULATING ATLANTA'S STREETS

On January 5, 1920, James L. Key gave the annual mayoral speech to the city council, and as the paper of record, the *Atlanta Constitution* printed the complete text of his message. Following longstanding tradition, his opening remarks mentioned the previous year, during which Atlanta had experienced unprecedented growth. In order to sustain that growth, he said, a number of issues had to be addressed, one of the most pressing of which was the crowded condition of downtown streets.

Traffic congestion has reached a point where it seriously handicaps business and travel. An effort is being made now by bodies of business men and others to propose a traffic ordinance that will afford some remedy to the situation. No fully adequate remedy can be found by mere traffic regulations. We have more traffic in congested areas than the streets will accommodate. The city must furnish additional thoroughfares for traffic and remove all possible physical barriers that impede its movement.<sup>202</sup>

The mayor's comments contained several striking items. First, he cited the grave harm to businesses caused by clogged traffic, an indicator of his top priority—keeping Atlanta's commerce and industry healthy and happy. Such a priority was not surprising in a city where the Chamber of Commerce had close ties with and held significant influence over the municipal government.

Key's position as an acting director of the Chamber almost certainly played a role in his advocacy for business, as his next sentence confirmed when he noted that members of the business community were currently at work on a new traffic ordinance. No one apparently saw any impropriety in the fact that bankers, merchants, and professional men might actually write ordinances. Such an arrangement exceeded lobbying or personal attempts to influence

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<sup>202</sup> "Atlanta Urged to Prepare for Population of 500,000 in Mayor Key's Message," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1920.

legislation, but it would not be the last time during the decade that a local commercial entity prepared the draft of an ordinance for the city's council's consideration.

That Mayor Key even mentioned a new traffic ordinance was ironic, given that he had vetoed the city's 1919 comprehensive traffic law just a few months before giving his speech. The new law would have created a one-hour parking zone in the central business district, eliminated a number of streetcar stops, and provided other changes to relieve traffic jams. Although council had unanimously approved the bill, the mayor vetoed it, and a veto override vote failed. A timely meeting between Key and members of the Atlanta Automobile Association, who opposed the traffic ordinance, led to the veto and the council's change of heart. The city's governing body had caved to pressure from a group of "auto men" dedicated to promoting the interests of motorists and the automobile industry. Another traffic ordinance, already in the works, would surely better represent business and automotive concerns, as it was being composed by members of those very groups.<sup>203</sup>

The mayor made a third remarkable assertion in his speech: the city must "remove all possible physical barriers that impede its [traffic's] movement." The notable part of that statement was his underlying assumption that the purpose of city streets was the unobstructed movement of motor vehicles. The "physical barriers" would include not only streetcars, whose stop-and-start motion hindered non-rail vehicles, but also pedestrians and anyone or anything else that slowed the flow. Already, as far as the mayor was concerned, the streets functioned as automobile conduits, obligating the city, as with the water and sewer pipes, to keep things moving along.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Numerous Changes Made in City's Traffic Laws at Meeting of Council," October 7, 1919; "Auto Men Oppose Traffic Ordinance; To Protest Today," October 8, 1919; "Mayor Key Expected to Disapprove Today Traffic Ordinance," October 10, 1919; "Veto of Traffic Ordinance Upheld," October 21, 1919.

<sup>204</sup> "Mayor Key's Message," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1920.

Key's speech called for action, yet he personally had contributed to the impasse. The frustrated community reaction to the gridlock—in both city streets and city hall—was pointed. While not calling out the mayor specifically, editorial writers complained that when it came to traffic the city talked too much and acted too little. They strongly urged council to do *something* to relieve the city's problems.<sup>205</sup>

In spite of nearly constant road work, Atlanta's traffic problems had not been resolved. The viaduct projects comprised the city's initial attempts to build its way out of traffic congestion, but the relief they provided proved only temporary. Narrow downtown streets remained inadequate for the growing numbers of vehicles. Moving and parked cars competed for the shrinking road space. Central city businessmen feared that people would no longer come downtown to shop or do business if too much traffic made the trip time-consuming and unpleasant. The city code would soon include a formal definition of the "congested area."<sup>206</sup>

Civic leaders also had to contend with other traffic congestion-related consequences: collisions and carnage. The rising numbers of deaths and serious injuries from automobiles dismayed Atlantans as well as urban dwellers across the country. Traffic expert Miller McClintock in 1925 wrote, "The alarming increase in street accidents and in street congestion during the past few years has rendered the correction of traffic conditions one of the most important municipal problems of the present day." Authorities embraced two major regulatory solutions: (1) reduce the number of pedestrians in the roadways; and (2) control all street activities.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> "The Traffic Problem," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 5, 1920; and "A Golden Opportunity," *City Builder* 4, n. 10 (January 1920): 16.

<sup>206</sup> Herbert T. Jenkins, *Atlanta and the Automobile* (Atlanta, GA: Emory University Center for Research in Social Change, 1977), 17; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 95, § 3134 (o) Congested Area.

<sup>207</sup> McClintock, *Street Traffic Control*, vii.

No evidence could be found to suggest that city leaders ever considered obvious alternatives, such as reducing the number of vehicles in the central business district, or reducing the speed of those vehicles. Nor did they consistently utilize the one method of effectively widening the narrow downtown streets—eliminating on-street parking. Originally four-lane major thoroughfares, such as Peachtree, Marietta, and Whitehall streets, had been basically reduced to two-lane roads because both outer lanes were occupied by parked cars. The remaining two center lanes had to accommodate the double-tracked trolleys as well as masses of new automobiles.

Shifting focus onto moving more *people* instead of more *vehicles* would have led to significant improvements in the range and efficiency of mass transit options. Instead, the growth coalition remained determined to privilege the automobile and its movement. Through the imposition of a massive regulatory superstructure, the business-friendly city council radically altered the behaviors of all street users, the duties of police officers, and municipal governance. The 1920s would prove a decade of trials, failures, stalemates, and unhappy compromises, resulting in more restrictions of the use of public streets than anyone had ever imagined. But none of their efforts resolved the twin traffic dilemmas: congestion and carnage.

## **5.1 Carnage**

Automobiles had been killing people since the earliest days of the horseless carriage, creating fresh outrage as the numbers mounted. With more people and cars in urban settings, frequent collisions inevitably occurred. The heavier and much faster motor vehicles crashed with more catastrophic results than horse-drawn wagons or carriages. The statistics told the story; so did the newspapers. Being struck by a moving car was a modern, very public, and especially horrific way to die. Society had not yet adjusted psychologically to the massive number of U.S.

traffic fatalities, and automobiles could at times appear threatening (see sketch below). Since the end of World War II, the national traffic death count has fluctuated between 30,000 and 50,000 per year. Today, the U.S. as a nation is comfortable with this number of traffic-related fatalities, and most citizens apparently are willing to countenance even more traffic deaths, given the

appetite for unlimited cell phone usage and demand for more in-car amenities which distract drivers.<sup>208</sup>

Between 1920 and 1930, numbers of U.S. traffic fatalities ballooned from about

12,000 to over 30,000—and

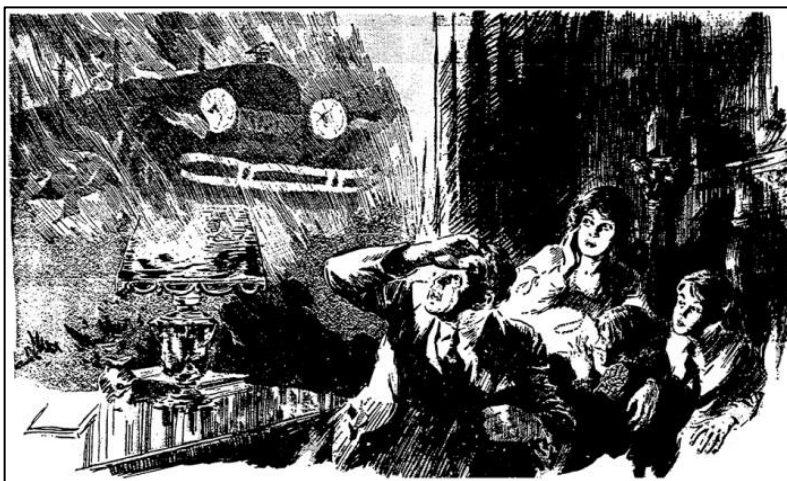


Figure 14. *The menacing automobile; “Talion,”* Atlanta Constitution, January 16, 1927.

this with vastly fewer people and cars than the nation has today.<sup>209</sup> The rate of U.S. traffic-related deaths per 100,000 population in 1920 was 11.5, but Atlanta’s rate was 26.4—*more than double the national rate*. The following tables demonstrate the rapidly increasing counts of registered motor vehicles and roadway fatalities. Automobile-related deaths increased

<sup>208</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “Traffic Crash Fatalities,” Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) Encyclopedia. Since 1930—the first year traffic-related deaths in the U.S. reached the 30,000 threshold—the number has not dropped below that figure, with two exceptions: across two years in the heart of the Great Depression (1932-33), and during four years of gas rationing in World War II (1942-45). Both examples suggest that substantially raising the gas tax would reduce fatalities and congestion. As a former Atlanta police chief noted, the war years interrupted the dominance of the car in American life; Jenkins, *Atlanta and the Automobile*, 59. The number of traffic deaths, after a decline in the early 2000s, is again on the rise, with more distracted driving (cellphones and complex dashboard entertainment centers), and increased sales of heavier-than-cars sport utility vehicles and light trucks. A recent report documents that pedestrian fatalities are up more than 50% over the past decade (2010-2020), following a three-decade decline.

<sup>209</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1930* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930).

Table 7. U.S. Traffic Fatalities, 1920, 1930, 2017

Year	U.S. Traffic Fatalities	Motor Vehicles Registered in the U.S. <sup>1</sup>	U.S. Population	U.S. Fatalities per 100,000 pop.	U.S. Fatalities per 100,000 registered vehicles
1920	12,155	9,239,161	106,021,537	11.5	132
1930	31,204	26,749,853	123,202,624	25.3	117
2017 <sup>2</sup>	37,133	272,480,899	325,147,121	11.4	14

<sup>1</sup>Includes all motor vehicles; buses were not counted until 1925.

<sup>2</sup>The most recent numbers available from the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Table 8. Atlanta Traffic Fatalities, 1920-1930

Year	Atlanta Traffic Fatalities (APD) <sup>1</sup>	Atlanta Traffic Fatalities (federal government) <sup>2</sup>	Motor Vehicles Registered in Atlanta <sup>3</sup>	Atlanta Population	Atlanta Fatalities per 100,000 pop. (APD) <sup>1</sup>	Atlanta Fatalities per 100,000 pop. (federal government) <sup>2</sup>	Atlanta Fatalities per 10,000 vehicles (APD) <sup>1</sup>	Atlanta Fatalities per 10,000 vehicles (federal government) <sup>2</sup>
1920	29	53	16,290	200,616	14.5	26.4	18	33
1921	17	53	17,168					
1922	37	53	21,561					
1923	34	53	26,977					
1924	32	53	36,012					
1925	38	65	37,946					
1926	40	68	38,753					
1927	42	65	42,046					
1928	41	71	45,788					
1929	56	89	51,746					
1930	53	87	51,394	270,366	19.6	32.2	10	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>710</b>						
<b>Increase from 1920 to 1930</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>215%</b>	<b>35%</b>				

<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Police Department (APD) numbers from the annual reports of the Atlanta Chiefs of Police.

<sup>2</sup>Numbers from the 1930 *U.S. Statistical Abstract*. Figures for 1921-1923 are averages.

<sup>3</sup>All years, except 1928, are calculated as a percentage of Fulton County registrations, based on the 1928 figure in the 1929 *City of Atlanta Traffic Survey*.

at higher rates than the city and national populations.<sup>210</sup> In 1924, an insurance expert noted that the number of automobile wrecks had kept pace with the rate of growth of the automobile

<sup>210</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933). The Atlanta table presents two sets of figures for the number of traffic fatalities. The first column's numbers, which are considerably lower, are from the annual reports published by the city's police chiefs. The second column of fatality numbers are from the 1933 *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, a federal government publication. Those death totals are higher, sometimes nearly double the figures reported by the chiefs. How could this happen? It would, of course, be in a police chief's interest to list a lower count of traffic fatalities; too many deaths reflected badly on the department. The discrepancy can perhaps be attributed to what in modern police parlance is known as "joking the stats." This not-uncommon practice involves massaging the statistics to make them more palatable to city officials, the public, and the media. Newspapers faithfully reported details of the city's automobile-related deaths as well as crash and death counts.



industry. He remarked, “To-day more people are accidentally killed by the automobile than by any other single means, barring the occasional earthquake or flood catastrophe.”<sup>211</sup>

The most commonly calculated death rate gives the number of deaths per 100,000 people. However, the number of deaths per 100,000 registered motor vehicles provides a more informative comparison. The tables show both, but the startling and horrifying take-away remains: the national death rate per number of cars in 1920 was nearly *ten times higher* than in 2017—and *Atlanta’s rates were worse* than either. City and country faced intolerable numbers of fatalities from the new death machines.<sup>212</sup>

Sensationalism characterized the newspaper coverage of traffic-related deaths in the early 1900s. By the twenties, reporting had been toned down, as the print media played its part in growth machine attempts to reduce negative associations with automobiles. Nevertheless, gruesome details enlivened articles about particularly poignant deaths, especially those of prominent citizens or children. Besides documenting the crashes, the papers frequently ran readers’ letters as well as their own editorials decrying the carnage in the streets. An *Atlantian* editorial railed against 1919’s forty-three automobile-related deaths. “Speed maniacs” drove recklessly, knowing they would not be punished, because, as the editor correctly observed, “the authorities do not care to do anything that might injure the automobile business.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Ryder, *Automobile Insurance: A Description of the Various Forms of Coverage, Underwriting Methods and Selling Plans*, 1.

<sup>212</sup> Note that the Atlanta rates in Table 1 are given per 10,000 vehicles, while the U.S. rates are per 100,000. Federal Highway Administration U.S. Department of Transportation, *Highway Statistics Summary to 1995* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997). The total number of U.S. motor vehicle traffic fatalities from 1900 through 2017 is 3,766,662, combined from the statistics to 1995 and *Persons Fatally Injured in Motor Vehicle Crashes, 1980-2017* (Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, 2018). The 2017 motor vehicle count is from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics in the U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://www.bts.dot.gov/content/number-us-aircraft-vehicles-vessels-and-other-conveyances>. Allison Arieff, “Cars Are Death Machines,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2019.

<sup>213</sup> On May 9, 1924, well-known retired businessman and former Atlanta postmaster, Hugh L. McKee, died under the wheels of a speeding car, which paused briefly, but drove rapidly away, leaving his mangled body with broken legs and crushed head lying in the middle of Peachtree Street by the Brookwood train station. Acting Chief of Police E. L. Jett launched “a finish fight to put an end to automobile killings.” The article noted that reckless

During the decade, the civic leaders and city officials intermittently reacted—only at periods of peak public outrage—by calling for more stringent police enforcement, holding the occasional safety week, tweaking road laws, and conducting yet another traffic study. They ignored the corrective called for by the editorial writer: to impose on all perpetrators prison sentences of six months to five years, which would instantly reduce road deaths. They would not contemplate such a drastic measure against the motor vehicle.

Roadway collisions did benefit the flourishing automobile insurance companies, who also kept an eagle eye on traffic statistics. As the ones who handled the losses, the insurance carriers were experts on the causes of vehicle wrecks. As their profits depended on accident prevention, they worked diligently with safety organizations (e.g., the National Safety Council and its local branches), car manufacturers, police departments, and government entities to improve safety. The insurance companies' program to prevent automobile accidents included education, better highway engineering, safer motor vehicles, proper legislation *and* enforcement, driver licensing, and the offer of lower insurance rates for the safest drivers.<sup>214</sup>

A local insurance agency's newspaper advertisement (see figure at right) urged subscribers to

**You May Be Killed Today!**  
**MORE THAN 10,168 KILLED**  
**and over one million accidents**  
**IN AUTOMOBILE CRASHES**

During 1921, as Reported by the U. S. Government for the United States Alone. And When the Reports Are All In It Will Be Found That the Record for 1922 Far Surpasses 1921. Atlanta Had 38 Deaths From Automobile Accidents Last Year.

Figure 15. Insurance Agency ad headline; *Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1923.

drivers had “caused death to some of the most substantial and valuable citizens of Atlanta;” “Police Launch ‘Finish Fight on Auto Killers’ As Net Is Tightened Around Slayer of M’Kee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 11, 1924; “Automobile Killings,” *Atlantian*, December, 1920, 5.

<sup>214</sup> Ryder, *Automobile Insurance: A Description of the Various Forms of Coverage, Underwriting Methods and Selling Plans*, 168-69.

purchase travel and pedestrian insurance. The ad pointed out that danger threatened, whether the customer walked, rode, or drove. The large numbers of crashes causing deaths and injuries to both people and property sent city automobile insurance rates skyrocketing. In 1926, a vice president of the Atlanta Casualty Exchange wrote that Atlanta's insurance rates remained high primarily due to incompetent, unlicensed, underage, and "hoggish" drivers; employers who inadequately supervised their company drivers; and the failure of the public to learn and observe the traffic rules. He called for the city council to put teeth into and enforce existing laws, a common *cri de cœur* throughout the twenties.<sup>215</sup>

In 1923, the Chamber of Commerce responded to the carnage by creating the Atlanta Safety Council to reduce the "alarming number of deaths and injuries" from automobile collisions, and to make Atlanta safe for motorists and pedestrians. Carl L. Smith, the secretary of the National Safety Council, spoke at a Chamber meeting, describing how such organizations operated elsewhere in the country, noting how one group functioned as vigilante traffic law enforcers. That very evening the Chamber organized a committee to initiate its own council headed by Mell R. Wilkinson, a leading city manufacturer, head of a large brokerage firm, and president-for-life of the prestigious and highly-influential Presidents' Club. Prominent industry leaders pledged financial and moral support from their companies.<sup>216</sup>

The safety council had offices, first in the Candler Building, later in the Chamber of Commerce Building, and it hired a secretary-manager with national experience as a safety underwriter. Both illustrated the group's substantial financial resources and expertise as well as

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<sup>215</sup> W. E. Roberts, "Adequate Auto Laws Urged to Reduce Insurance Rates," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1926.

<sup>216</sup> "Safety Council Plans Launched by Civic Leaders," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 13, 1923. The Presidents' Club, created in 1915, was a non-political group consisting of the official heads of, by 1927, ninety of Atlanta's civic organizations, formed to facilitate collective action in public enterprises, Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 802-03.

the seriousness of its intent to have an impact on the city's traffic problems. Composed of civic elites, Atlanta's safety council insisted it did not exist to wage war on motorists, as *every member owned at least one car and many of them controlled fleets of commercial trucks*. Its officers (a president, a first vice-president, and fourteen other vice-presidents) represented every sector of the growth coalition. Claiming that the 100 members on its Board of Control were "representative Atlantans," the council's interests clearly lay more with car and business owners than with average, working-class, or minority citizens. In 1923, the majority of Atlanta households did not own even one car.<sup>217</sup>

The Atlanta Safety Council would have enormous impact on all traffic-related matters throughout the decade. In addition to educating the public and pressuring the police, the group functioned as a quasi-governmental traffic agency, drafting city ordinances and apprehending violators. It exemplified the extraordinary reach of the power elites into the basic city responsibilities of making and enforcing laws. As a creation of the COC, the safety council acted as devoted guardians of Atlanta's reputation as a good place to do business. Traffic deaths, downtown gridlock, and reckless drivers did not match their idealized image of a growing, progressive city. Unfortunately, those were precisely the problems of the modern U.S. city; Atlanta had plenty of company.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> James L. Loftus, "Safety Council Nears Completion Or [sic] Organization," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 1, 1923. "The Atlanta Safety Council," *City Builder* 8, no. 11 (January 1924): 22, 55. The first president was Judge Shepard Bryan, first vice president was W. W. Orr, and other vice presidents included William Candler, Charles A. Wickersham, and Mell R. Wilkinson, all power elites.

<sup>218</sup> Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 87-101, contains a detailed discussion of other safety councils and their activities. In "Disinterested Opinion," *City Builder* 9, no. 4 (June 1924): 22, an editorial recounted the comments of a visiting North Carolina editor, who had called Atlanta a marvelously hospitable, growing, happy, and friendly city. But the visitor also said, "Only one thing disappointed me about Atlanta, and that was the obvious lack of traffic organization. The wonder to me is that they do not have a dozen deaths by auto accidents every day."

The mounting death toll, however, demanded even more intervention. The census bureau reported:

Each year it becomes more and more dangerous for a person to walk the streets. The reason usually given, and probably the correct one, is that the number of automobiles in use is constantly increasing. How, then, shall this ever increasing danger be lessened? The obvious remedy is to improve constantly the traffic regulations to keep pace with the ever-increasing number of automobiles. . . . Automobile traffic must be slowed down and controlled until it becomes safe.”<sup>219</sup>

The bureau called for more regulations; reducing the number of vehicles on the road never received a mention. At no level—federal, state, or municipal—did authorities ever attempt that obvious solution, certainly not in Atlanta. The city did not take the census bureau’s advice to slow down automobiles. When it came to speed limits in the 1920s, Atlanta only raised—never lowered—them.<sup>220</sup>

The city did increase controls on all street uses and users, instituting a massive array of measures to manage everyone. This legislative superstructure encompassed all the traffic-related entities imposed upon the streets, sidewalks, and the air spaces above them. The blanket of regulation included devices: painted lines on the roadways, raised safety islands in the middle of streets, regulatory and directional signs, and the various types of traffic signal lights embedded in the road surface, installed on posts (in the street or at the curb), or hanging in the air above intersections.

It also comprised the plethora of ordinances imposed upon those in or beside the roadway, as well as the specialized motorcycle cops and cornermen (policemen who stood on

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<sup>219</sup> “Autos Killed 3,808 Persons For Last Year,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 6, 1920.

<sup>220</sup> In one instance, the city council inadvertently decreased the speed limit when they extended the boundary of the inner fire limits, which had a lower speed limit, 12 mph, compared to 20 mph outside the inner fire limits. They made the boundary change in May, but did not recognize the problem for drivers until October, when the newspaper ran a big article, with a map showing the location of the new inner fire limit boundary lines, “Committee Votes to Extend Fire Limits of City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 6, 1922, and O. J. Willoughby, “Extension of Inner Fire Limit Necessitates Change in Speed Law,” and “Where and When to Park,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 1, 1922.

street corners or in the streets), whose duties consisted primarily of enforcing laws and directing traffic. In Foucauldian terms, the superstructure comprised a new “microphysics of power,” extended to the public streets, with police as part of the panoptic apparatus.<sup>221</sup>

The automobile ushered in a new stage in the development of a greatly expanded disciplinary society. The regulatory framework emerged in Atlanta primarily in the twenties in response to the car and the resulting chaos, congestion, and carnage it brought to the city. The entire structure evolved gradually, with numerous false starts, revisions, and revocations along the way. By the end of the decade, it still remained a work in progress, but slowly approached the comprehensive and stable system we experience today (albeit with ongoing adjustments and alterations). The remainder of this chapter describes the various elements of the superstructure, beginning with the regulation of people in the public streets.

## 5.2 Regulating Pedestrians

Civic leaders extolled Atlanta’s expanding population, the influx of tall buildings holding thousands of employees, and the concentrated retail sectors and large downtown department stores drawing throngs of shoppers. However, they deplored the resulting crowded sidewalks, and enacted new local ordinances to remove obstructions between the curb and the building line. These included outlawing all commercial sidewalk displays in the central business district; requiring property owners to keep walkways and streets clean and clear; scheduling time and placement of garbage cans left out for refuse collection; and restricting all street and sidewalk encroachments with time-limited permits. But the new regulations could only optimize existing sidewalk capacity, not expand it.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977); quoted in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Random House, 2010), 206-07.

<sup>222</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 89, §§ 2558, 2574, 2595, 2643-44, 2655-56.

The 1924  
Beeler *Report*  
documented the  
large pedestrian  
presence in  
downtown. At  
Five Points,  
between noon  
and 2 p.m.,  
observers  
counted 27,590

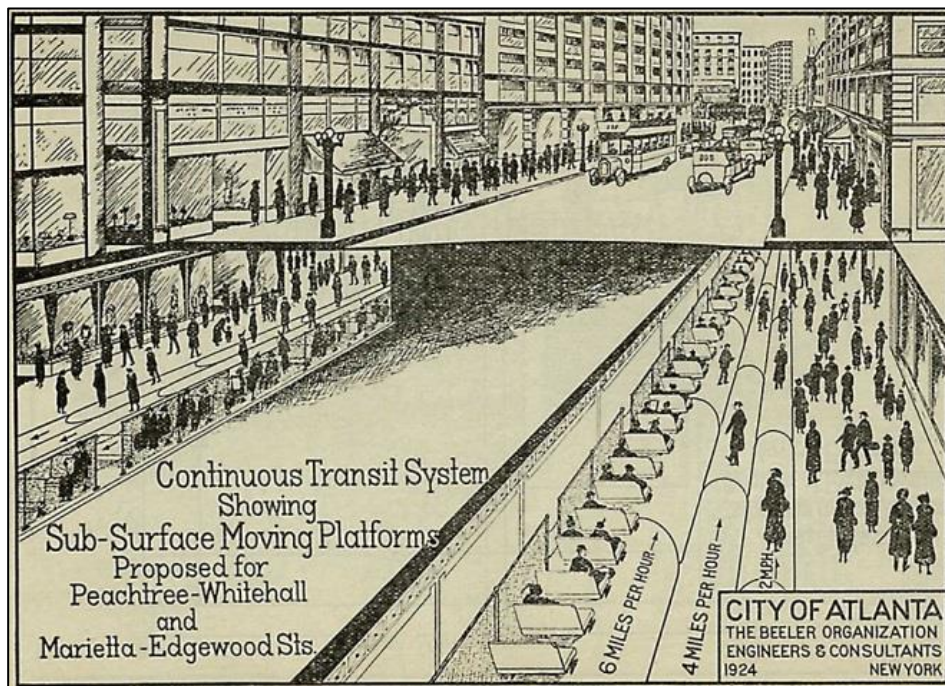


Figure 16. Underground sidewalks and subway; Beeler, *Report*, 1924, p. 83, Exhibit 10A.

pedestrians moving through the intersection on a weekday. The Saturday count was 21,125. The *Report* proposed a radical solution to the congested foot traffic: move pedestrians underground to stationary and moving sidewalks, the latter called “subways without trains” (see figure above). Beeler’s unique approach, unlike any other remedies of the time, prioritized pedestrians over all transit modes.<sup>223</sup>

The pedestrian far outranks all the rest in both number and importance. It is the pedestrian who watches the shop windows and patronizes the stores. He may have come down in an auto or a street car, but he becomes a pedestrian as soon as he walks on the street. Already the sidewalks are crowded and jammed in many places and street intersections are difficult to negotiate. The safety and comfort of the pedestrian is of paramount importance.<sup>224</sup>

Beeler understood that *everybody* at some point in their journey was a pedestrian.

<sup>223</sup> Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, vi, 124. Others offered different solutions. A Chicago engineer recommended ramping the sidewalks in Chicago’s Loop so they formed an upper tier above the ground level streets; Edward H. Bennett, “Raised Sidewalks and Traffic Separation Urged for Chicago,” *American City* 35, no. 3 (September 1926): 334-36.

<sup>224</sup> Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 54.

Although sidewalk demand had increased, sidewalk area did not. In any competition for the space between building lines, the streets would always win, particularly since national experts constantly proclaimed that street widening would solve the congestion problem. McClintock correctly observed that creating more space to relieve sidewalk congestion “cannot be anticipated by most cities in the near future.” In Atlanta, no future would see downtown sidewalk widening, at least not until the twenty-first century and then only infrequently as a traffic-calming measure. Instead, city roadways continuously cannibalized portions of the walkways as the demands of more vehicles ranked higher than the needs of more pedestrians.<sup>225</sup>

Atlanta’s street expansions devoured not only sidewalks but also vegetation and real estate. City officials eliminated a traffic bottleneck on Marietta Street by cutting eight feet off the sidewalks to widen the road. They removed the trees around city hall “which interfered with traffic,” and rounded the curbing so vehicles could more easily make the turn from Marietta onto Forsyth. The latter action was the result of a new ordinance requiring intersection curbs to be cut on a fifteen-foot radius—a measure which facilitated vehicle movement but reduced the size of every single city sidewalk corner. Property owners on South Forsyth Street lost frontage so the access to the Spring Street viaduct could be widened and extended. The omnivorous and ever-hungry motor vehicle demanded more and more territory, which city leaders happily ceded to it, relegating people on foot to a distant second class status.

The city’s first jaywalking ordinance took effect in late 1915, but lackadaisical police enforcement emboldened foot travelers to cross the streets at will, as they always had. The 1920s

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<sup>225</sup> “Whitten Would Widen Downtown Streets to Relieve Increasing Jam of Traffic,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 20, 1922; McClintock, *Street Traffic Control*, 159. An example of expanding pedestrian space as a traffic-calming device can be seen in the Five Points area at the heart of downtown. A square block of buildings was demolished in 1971-73 to create Central City Park [Woodruff Park today]. The sidewalks were expanded on the south side of the park, reducing Edgewood Avenue from four lanes in 1921 to two lanes in 2019.



saw increased regulation of those who walked, designed primarily to limit the time they spent with their feet in the roadways. New laws prohibited pedestrians from carelessly or maliciously interfering with passing vehicles; required them to exit expeditiously from cars and streetcars proceeding immediately to the right-hand curb; and mandated that they keep to the right at all times. The *Constitution* reflected the growing use of the pejorative label for pedestrians walking in the street: prior to 1920, it published 48 articles containing variations of the term “jay-walk,” while during the twenties, that number more than doubled to 106.<sup>226</sup>

As early as 1921, a newspaper editorial called for the city to paint lines at Five Points to safeguard against “innocent” jay-walking, and to create stop-lines for vehicles.<sup>227</sup> In 1922, the city council passed a new traffic code requiring the Chief of Construction to “paint white lines upon the streets of the City at the intersection of the streets and other places . . . to indicate where pedestrians are to cross streets.” While the new lines would also serve as vehicle stop lines, the ordinance specified that their purpose was to delineate where people could walk in the road. A corresponding ordinance required pedestrians to walk only in the portion of the street between the cross-walk lines, not diagonally. Both statutes effectively corralled pedestrians, limiting their presence in the street to the sections between the white lines. As Barrett observes, pedestrian control in the early decades of the twentieth century revolved around the principle of traffic segregation—keeping the foot travelers out of the streets as much as possible.<sup>228</sup>

Another pedestrian regulation new in the 1920s read, “Pedestrians shall not stop or congregate in the center of the sidewalk, but must move to either side promptly.” Not content

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<sup>226</sup> “Officer Thornton Teaches Big Class of ‘Jay Walkers,’” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 12, 1915; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 95, §§ 3135-3140.

<sup>227</sup> “To Help Pedestrians,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>228</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 39, § 734; Ch. 95, § 3137; Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930*, 133.

with removing people from the roadways, the city code barred them from stopping to chat in the middle of the sidewalk. Standing people, like the other sidewalk obstacles, hindered forward motion and needed to be curtailed. The new paradigm of streets as automobile conduits also applied to the sidewalks, now pedestrian conduits. For both, unhindered and efficient flow was the goal, and each represented steps in the development of the automotive city.<sup>229</sup>

City authorities frequently waged “war” on both speeders and jaywalkers, who alternately received the blame for the rising number of injuries and deaths. Sometimes, but not often, the vehicle drivers received heavy sentences for fatal crashes. Whenever they did, it made bold, all-caps headlines, like “**SPEEDER SENTENCED TO PENITENTIARY.**” Newspaper editorials and opinion pieces tended to fault either the walkers or the motorists, but sometimes called for everyone to take responsibility and for police to enforce all the traffic laws.<sup>230</sup>

Outcries against speeders and reckless drivers never ceased, but as the decade progressed, pedestrians more and more often carried the blame for the rising number of road injuries and deaths, including their own. A 1927 article cited the 445 pedestrian injuries which occurred in 1926, blaming nearly all of them on the pedestrians themselves who had jay-walked or ignored traffic signals. Fewer than 12 injuries occurred while those on foot were obeying the law (the unstated corollary being that someone else, obviously a motorist, had disregarded the law). The

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<sup>229</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 95, § 3139; Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 134. A newspaper editorial urged pedestrians to move along, not even stopping to gaze in shop windows, unless one did not impede other walkers; “When You Are Walking on the Street, Keep Moving Forward,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 31, 1922. The phrase “on the street” in the headline did not actually mean *in* the street, but alongside the street on the sidewalk.

<sup>230</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Authorities Push War on Speeders, September 30, 1920; “Safety on the Street,” November 29, 1920; “Heavy Penalties Given Traffic Law Violators; City-Wide War Opens,” August 14, 1921; “War Is Declared on Bright Lights and ‘Jay Walkers,’” May 13, 1924; “No Cases Made in Police ‘War’ on Jay-Walkers,” January 11, 1927; “Speeder Sentenced to Penitentiary,” October 21, 1920. The driver, who killed a pedestrian, was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter receiving a sentence of one to three years. The fact that the driver had previously been convicted of manslaughter in a stabbing death, coupled with the prominence of the victim, contributed to the case’s successful prosecution. The article, “Making Traffic Safe,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 30, 1922, stated that there were two sides to every question, and that the pedestrian was “frequently quite as much to blame as the motorist.”

city's greatest traffic weakness, the article claimed, was its failure to rigidly enforce pedestrian observance of traffic signals. By 1929, the civic and government authorities were asserting that most traffic deaths resulted from people crossing the street in the middle of the block or against the light at intersections, and condemned pedestrians as a "serious interference to the free and efficient movement of vehicular traffic." People on foot, along with the streetcars, increasingly bore responsibility for the carnage and congestion on Atlanta's streets—neither of which existed prior to the coming of the automobile. Yet motordom and its enablers refused to assign much blame to newcomer on the scene.<sup>231</sup>

In his January 3, 1927 inaugural speech to the city council, the new mayor Isaac N. Ragsdale initiated a drive to improve police regulation of pedestrians who, he claimed, consistently ignored traffic signals. "The traffic situation, in my estimation, needs to undergo improved regulation, particularly as respects pedestrians. . . . The large majority of pedestrians ignore the signals unless an officer is present to impress them. Numerous traffic accidents have been caused on Atlanta's streets. . . by failure of pedestrians to regard the traffic laws as rigidly as motorists are required to do." The mayor called for equal enforcement of traffic light ordinances on both pedestrians and motorists. Within days, jaywalker arrests increased and the Records Courts began to crack down on violators. Police assigned two officers to every downtown intersection with a traffic signal to watch for infractions by walkers.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> William Brady, "Health Talks: The Reckless Pedestrian," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1920, blamed pedestrian recklessness, while "Enforce the Law," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 28, 1920, faulted speeders and reckless drivers, claiming that the "pedestrian hasn't much more chance for his life than a rat." Contrast that with "400 Pedestrians Injured in 1926 for 'Jay Walking,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1927; Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 58. Earlier, Atlanta's hired traffic and zoning specialist, Robert Whitten, also held the pedestrian as the most serious impediment to traffic flow; Robert Harvey Whitten, "Painted Traffic Markings on Streets," *American City* 24, no. 6 (June 1924): 617.

<sup>232</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Text of New Mayor's Message," January 4, 1927; "'Jay Walkers' to be Arrested, Starting Today," January 7, 1927; "Police Campaign on Jay Walkers to be Continued," January 8, 1927; and "Special Traffic Squad to Arrest all 'Jay-Walkers,'" January 10, 1927.

Ironically, Mayor Ragsdale and the mayor pro tem, Alderman Guy Dobbs, were arrested eight days later for jaywalking as they strolled south on Peachtree Street. Despite warning sounds from a police whistle, the two men crossed against the red light at Marietta Street. Both received citations from the two officers working the Five Points intersection, then continued their walk south over the Whitehall Street viaduct. A few moments later, another policeman blew his whistle as the two men began to cross Alabama Street against the red light. The mayor came to a halt, but Alderman Dobbs did not, so he received a second citation. The next day in Records Court, both men “cheerfully” paid their fines, \$6.00 per violation.<sup>233</sup>

The incident demonstrated the ingrained habit of pedestrians to proceed across the street whenever they deemed it safe, no matter the color of the traffic light. Two prominent city officials well versed in the city code still managed to violate the law and become ensnared in a process which one of them had made a signature project of his administration. The mayor’s actions confirmed his own assertion that Atlanta’s pedestrians did, indeed, ignore traffic signals. If even he failed to obey the traffic ordinance, why expect strict compliance from the less-informed, less-aware average citizen?

The National Safety Council’s 1927 annual safety congress actually studied whether or not pedestrians could even be regulated. They concluded yes, but most effectively via two means: a timely blast from a loud police whistle to publicly shame the offender, and ongoing pedestrian education. As McShane notes, pedestrians had difficulty adapting to the regulation of an old, familiar behavior—walking across the street. New Atlanta ordinances upended the traditional English common law concept that street users shared equal rights to the roadways. They gave the right-of-way to motor vehicles, except at signal-light-controlled intersections.

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<sup>233</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “City’s Chiefs Are Arrested in Traffic War,” January 12, 1927; “Eighteen New Cases Made for Pedestrian Violations of Traffic Signal Laws,” January 13, 1927.

Even those, however, gave pedestrians only a partial right-of-way where right turns on red were allowed.<sup>234</sup>

During the week of August 7-13, 1921, Atlanta held a “No Accident Week” organized by the newly-formed Junior Chamber of Commerce. The service organization, later known as the “Jaycees,” provided opportunities for young people to study city government and learn a proper sense of civic duty and responsibility. City businesses and civic groups contributed to the campaign and held employee and member meetings to stress “safety first.” Streetcars displayed safety ads. The Atlanta Urban League distributed literature and convened rallies while the newspapers promoted the week’s assorted events. Despite the efforts, thirteen automobile crashes occurred, leaving two dead and thirteen injured, while several hundred traffic law violators were hauled into police court. In one of the week’s collisions, a large car hit a mule-drawn wagon, and then hastily fled the scene, scattering a group of white children playing on Central Avenue, narrowly missing them. A “wave of popular indignation against reckless driving” arose at the sorry outcome of the city’s designated “safety” week, manifested in angry letters to the newspapers, demanding action. But the mayor and city council had just gotten the \$8 million bond project passed, and had schools, water, sewer, and the Spring Street viaduct occupying their time; someone else would have to take the lead on traffic control.<sup>235</sup>

Seven days after the infamously unsafe “safety week” concluded, concerned individuals created the Citizens’ Safety Association, headed by Philip Thornton Marye (1872-1935), esteemed Atlanta architect. During World War I, Marye was the assistant to the commanding

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<sup>234</sup> “Regulation of Pedestrians,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1927; Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 220-24; McShane, “The Origins and Globalization of Traffic Control Signals,” 386.

<sup>235</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Campaign to Cut Accidents Opens,” August 7, 1921; “Urban League Weekly Bulletin,” July 31, 1921; “Heavy Toll Paid to Carelessness in ‘Safety’ Week,” August 14, 1921. The Atlanta Junior COC was chartered in March 1921, under the guidance of Lee Ashcraft, then president of the COC; “The Junior Chamber,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 28, 1921.

officer in the Motor Transport Corps in France and Germany. The Association's vice presidents were leading Atlanta insurance man, William Thomas Winn (1875-1930), and Coca-Cola heir and Biltmore Hotel builder, William Candler. The group mounted an educational campaign to eliminate jaywalking; campaigned to reduce traffic hazards on city streets; and waged warfare against reckless, speeding, and often-intoxicated auto drivers—the cause, they claimed, of the many road deaths.<sup>236</sup>

The Citizens' Safety Association partnered with Junior Chamber of Commerce for another safety week the following year. It eventually formed the basis of the Atlanta Safety Council, one of the most active and influential motor safety organizations in the city. The Junior Chamber continued to hold annual safety weeks throughout the 1920s. Both groups led the larger COC's efforts to decrease traffic injuries and deaths.<sup>237</sup>

### 5.3 Regulating Children

The failure of safety week underscored the need to increase the security of Atlanta's children, both at play and in travelling to and from school. If grown-ups, even city officials, could not re-train themselves to stop, look, and listen before crossing the road, it proved even more difficult for children who, until the advent of the automobile, had utilized the street for play space, especially in crowded urban centers. Fear for children's well-being motivated civic leaders to provide traffic education school programs, institute school safety zones, and organize play areas during the summer recess.

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<sup>236</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Citizens Form Safety Association As Result of Traffic Law Cases," August 19, 1921; "Automobile Club Organized Here," October 2, 1921; "Marye Made Leader of Automobile Club," October 23, 1921; "Keep It Up!" May 9, 1922. Marye designed many buildings throughout the Southeast; in Atlanta he designed residences, including the Randolph-Lucas House, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, the Walton Building, the Art Deco Southern Bell Telephone Building, and the Yaarab Temple, which would later become the Fox Theatre.

<sup>237</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "The Speed Hazard," October 25, 1921; "Safety First Week Set for Sept. 17-24," August 24, 1922; "Record Indicates 'Pedestrian Day' Decided Success," September 21, 1922.

In 1913, the Atlanta Public Schools had launched its first school safety program with the catchy slogan, “Don’t Get Run Over!” By the twenties, school safety programs could be found across the country, with new curricula designed by recently-formed entities like the Highway Education Board and the Education Division of the National Safety Council. High school students received driving instruction, while students age 14 or under participated in national essay-writing contests on highway safety. Kindergarten and elementary school children had play activities to raise street safety awareness. Rules for a traffic game, bearing some resemblance to the once-popular “Red Light, Green Light,” appeared in the National Safety Council’s *Bulletin of Safety Education* for school teachers. A newspaper’s children’s crossword puzzle sometimes included traffic-related clues.<sup>238</sup>

Since 1906, Atlanta had operated “recreation grounds” for white children during the summer months; a playground for African American children did not open until four years later. Editorials observed that Atlanta’s children had been robbed of areas for play, with the city’s crowded buildings and congested streets. “The only play place is the back ally [*sic*] or the narrow streets teeming with street cars and automobiles,” and, until conditions changed, drivers were urged to slow down.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> “‘Don’t Get Run Over’ Slogan Adopted by 20,000 Public School Children,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 4, 1913; “Schools to Teach Pupils to Observe Traffic Regulations,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 14, 1920; Idabelle Stevenson, “National Safety Council,” *Journal of Health, Physical Education, Recreation* 4, no. 2 (February 1933): 3-6, 60. The essay contests were conducted by the Highway Education Board; “A.A.A. Offers Prizes for ‘Safety’ Essay,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 6, 1921. “A Traffic Game for Children,” *American City* 33 (November 1925): 500, reprinted from the *Bulletin of Safety Education*, published by Education Division of the National Safety Council through the auspices of the National Bureau of Casualty and Surety Underwriters. The game rules came from the Memphis (TN) Safety Council, and were much more elaborate than the version of “Red Light, Green Light” this writer played as a child. “Boys [*sic*] and Girls’ Crossword Puzzle,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 20, 1924, contained the clue “the shortest word on the traffic signal;” the correct answer was “go.”

<sup>239</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Atlanta’s Playgrounds Give Joy to Many Children,” August 21, 1909; “Playground is Wanted for Negro Children,” April 20, 1910; Mary Dickinson, “Spend the Money for Playgrounds, Women Are Urged,” September 28, 1919; William Ullman, “When a Child’s Life Is at Stake,” May 6, 1928.

As an alternative, in 1923 Marion Columbus Kiser, Sr. (1880-1933), a real estate developer, president a national chain store system, and bank executive, proposed a new city park. He suggested that it be constructed on the site of a former leather-tanning yard which had a creek running through it. Citing the city's need for a signature recreational center, he urged passage of a \$2 million bond referendum to pay for the new park as well as upgrades for existing parks. Discontent with city spending of previous bond funds and concerns about the lack of details in Kiser's proposal contributed to the bond issue's defeat. However, African Americans voted overwhelmingly against a park they could never use; they were restricted to Washington Park, the sole public recreational space open to Blacks. The only sector in the city which voted in favor of the bond referendum was the Sixth Ward, which contained the proposed location of the new park.<sup>240</sup>

The bond defeat did not end Atlanta's push for children's play areas. The city continued to expand its summer playground programs, and by 1926 had twenty-one for white children and three for Black children, most of them held at public schools. National studies demonstrated that playgrounds reduced the number of child fatalities by automobiles (see cartoon below). A newspaper commented, "Providing more playgrounds in Atlanta means greater peace of mind for our motorists," suggesting perhaps that the larger concern lay with the ease of the motoring public than with safety in the roadways. Atlanta's playground system continued throughout the 1920s, with increasing levels of participation, and in 1929, proudly proclaimed that for the first time in six years, no child was killed by a car during the summer months.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Kiser Declares Park Backers Must Get Busy," July 8, 1923; "Why Bonds Failed," September 7, 1923; "Park Bond Issue Defeated, 4,418 to 2,360 Votes," September 6, 1923. The chosen park site was near today's intersection of Simpson Street and Centennial Olympic Park Boulevard. Sadly, the only remaining above-ground section of Tanyard Creek (so named because of the nearby leather-tanning yard) is in Buckhead.

<sup>241</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Playgrounds Reduce Toll of Accidents," June 21, 1925; "Atlanta Playground System is Praised," August 23, 1929.



Atlanta did not limit efforts at children's street safety to summer playgrounds. School re-openings in the fall prompted annual back-to-school awareness campaigns for motorists. Following the lead of the National Safety Council, Atlanta installed signs to designate safety zones in front of all the schools. The Atlanta Automobile Association organized the School Boy Patrols, who, wearing white belts and arm bands, assisted with traffic control within the zones. Both the Atlanta Safety Council and newspapers

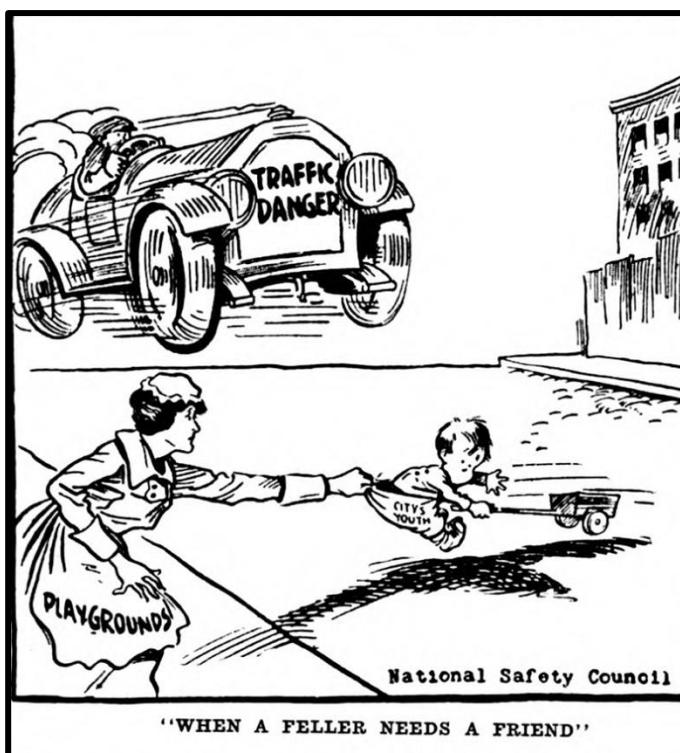


Figure 17. NSC Cartoon; *American City* 25, no. 3 (September 1921): 225.

offered prizes to the schools having the fewest number of car wrecks and child injuries. All were part of motordom's ongoing campaign to keep school children out of the streets.<sup>242</sup>

The Atlanta Motor Club and the American Automobile Association annually warned that having thousands of schoolchildren in the streets created traffic hazards. Both organizations emphasized that school children's safety in the streets was the responsibility of motorists—a rare instance in which civic organizations (but noticeably not the city government) placed the burden of a collision solely upon the automobile driver. The city's younger pedestrians, at least when on their way to and from school, received this special consideration—the presumption of innocence.

<sup>242</sup> Naomi Wolfe, "Thanks The Constitution for Aid in Safety Work," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 31, 1927; "Motorists Asked to Exercise Care for School Tots," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1928; Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 225.

Those same children, however, did not warrant that same level of care and concern if they were playing in the street or crossing a road outside a school safety zone. A large distinction existed between the *child* and the *schoolchild* when it came to assigning responsibility for traffic wrecks. Older children were sometimes held liable, but increasingly the public faulted parents for not properly watching or instructing their young offspring.<sup>243</sup>

A 1923 *Atlanta Constitution* article lamented the multiple causes of the city's traffic woes, a solution to which appeared elusive. It described the back-and-forth of the blame game between motorists, pedestrians, city officials, and police officers, and urged the hiring of more traffic cops. It praised the city's three major car-related organizations (Atlanta Automobile Association, Atlanta Safety Council, and Atlanta Motor Club) who worked to introduce new traffic control measures and raise public traffic awareness. Even the streetcar company won a word of praise for its safety efforts. In one oddly-worded sentence, the article praised everyone who was working to make "Atlanta's streets safe and free from time-killing congestion." Despite the article's focus on street safety, the writer apparently rated traffic more important as a killer of time rather than as a killer of people.<sup>244</sup>

Treading carefully, the reporter also partially faulted children—at least the careless ones—for playing in the streets, saying, "Automobile traffic cannot be regulated rigidly enough by law . . . to make the streets safe as playgrounds for irresponsible children." Nationally, car associations and safety groups also had to maneuver between children's safety and the automobile as an essential resource. A representative of the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce said, "Our industry . . . will welcome any program that will safeguard pedestrians,

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<sup>243</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "School Reopening Demands Extra Care by Motorists," October 9, 1927; "Keep Children Off the Streets," December 13, 1912; Fred N. Merry, "Another Revision Suggestion," August 26, 1912.

<sup>244</sup> "United Efforts Failing to Solve Traffic Problem, *Atlanta Constitution*, July 22, 1923.

particularly children. At the same time, the motor vehicle as a medium of great public service must be reasonably protected in its rights.”<sup>245</sup>

Atlanta’s mayor, Walter A. Sims, even investigated the possibility of *legislation to ban children entirely from all city streets*, but City Attorney James Mayson advised it would not withstand a constitutional challenge. Mayson did not mention, at least in the public record, the public outrage which would have erupted from such a draconian measure. But the dilemma remained of who to blame for child traffic deaths. A false binary eventually emerged in the responsibility equation: is it parent or child? The car’s driver was slowly disappearing from consideration. Certainly no motorist ever intended to harm a child; therefore, they should not be held accountable if they did. However, society demanded that somebody answer for the deaths of little ones. Ultimately, the mayor pronounced, “The burden rests finally on the shoulders of Atlanta fathers and mothers.” It was not politic to fault children, no matter how “irresponsible” they might be, so he chose the less precarious position—blame the parents.<sup>246</sup>

Intensifying rhetoric served to demonize pedestrians of all ages, characterizing them as motorists’ enemies. Confrontational government campaigns, aided by the print media, stomped-out the last unregulated pedestrian presence on the city streets. Formerly, the roads served as open public space, equally available to all. The introduction of new transit modes in the 1800s, such as omnibuses or streetcars, had not altered that understanding, but the motor vehicle did. Unlike today, no organized pedestrian resistance arose in Atlanta or much of the U.S. The New York City editorialist and publisher, Harold S. Bottenheim, called that city’s 932 traffic deaths in 1925 “municipal murder” permitted by the citizens. He asked if city dwellers were “baffled and

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.; George M. Graham, “Sending the Highways to School” (paper presented at the Second National Conference, Education for Highway Engineering and Highway Transport, Washington, DC, October 26-28, 1922), 88.

<sup>246</sup> “United Efforts Failing to Solve Traffic Problem, *Atlanta Constitution*, July 22, 1923.

beaten, definitely and permanently, by the lethal avocations of machines that should be our servants and not our masters?" Their answer ultimately proved to be affirmative.<sup>247</sup>

As Norton observes, "Whatever the legitimacy of their claim to street space, the motoring minority had the power to drive pedestrians from the pavements. Fearful for their safety, non-motorists learned to limit their own access to streets and to caution their children to look both ways before crossing." Even children now bore some responsibility for their own safety. Everyone on foot capitulated, however unwillingly, to the domination of the larger, heavier, faster motorized vehicles, and therefore to the redefinition of the public streets as automobile conduits. The city street became a place where pedestrians did not normally belong. But throughout the 1920s, the increasingly heavy hand of regulation fell not only on pedestrians and children, but also on other street users, including vehicles.<sup>248</sup>

#### **5.4 Regulating Traffic**

No one questioned whether Atlanta's sundry traffic-related problems required immediate and comprehensive attention on multiple levels. Prominent businessmen, realtors, and financiers worried that traffic issues would sully the city's reputation, and they weren't wrong. In 1924, Louie D. Newton, editor of the Chamber of Commerce's journal, *City Builder*, invited Douglas Southall Freeman, then editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, to record his impressions during a visit to town. The resulting article had several positive observations about Atlanta, its beauty, its spirit, and the Chamber elites who hosted his tour. But Freeman did make note of neglected street repairs, torn-up roads, sidewalks blocked by building construction, and over-all dirtiness.

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<sup>247</sup> In 1996, Sally Flocks founded PEDS, a pedestrian advocacy group in Atlanta. For a rare instance of organized pedestrian resistance, see McShane, "The Origins and Globalization of Traffic Control Signals," 386; Harold S. Bottenheim, "Start Parks and Stop Skyscrapers," *American City* 35, no. 3 (September 1926): 316-18.

<sup>248</sup> Peter D. Norton, "Street Rivals: Jaywalking and the Invention of the Motor Age Street," *Technology and Culture* 48, no. 2 (April 2007): 335; *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 208, 23-24.

In regard to the latter, he politely remarked that the street cleaning department's equipment was "not of the best." About city traffic, however, he pulled no punches: "The pedestrian apparently has fewer rights than in any city I know in the South. Traffic regulation is lax and needs complete, expert reorganization." After commenting on the "slouchiness" and incivility of the traffic officers, he noted that taken altogether, these items marred "the favorable impression Atlanta makes on visitors." Not the ringing endorsement hoped for by the Chamber.<sup>249</sup>

Traffic congestion spoiled more than just the visitor's experience of the city. Business in the downtown retail district felt the drag as customers and deliveries slogged through the crowded streets daily. An editorial summarized the situation in 1920:

During the hours of heaviest congestion each day, with pedestrians, street cars, automobiles, trash wagons, horses, mules and dogs, all in one great heterogeneous mass, shouting, clanging, honking and barking, all trying to make headway in varying directions, it often requires half an hour for a vehicle to advance from Five Points to the intersection of the two Peachtrees [a distance of just over half a mile], and to attempt to cross the street at such times is to hazard a trip to the hospital!<sup>250</sup>

Heightened awareness of both the traffic problems and their negative impacts on commerce and tourism led to the creation of new levels of city bureaucracy to enact and enforce traffic laws. In 1921, the city council created its own Traffic Committee and in 1923, established the police department's first Accident Prevention Bureau—a section allocated specifically for traffic control. Newspapers unfavorably compared Atlanta's traffic woes with those of other cities. The mayor, council members, and police brass frequently took "observation tours" to places like New York, Chicago, and St. Louis to study their traffic laws and enforcement

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<sup>249</sup> Douglas S. Freeman, "What a Recent Visitor Saw: A Helpful Diagnosis of Atlanta," *City Builder* 9, no. 4 (June 1924): 13-14, 42. Douglas Southall Freeman (1886-1953) was editor of the *Richmond News Leader* for 34 years (1915-49), and won Pulitzer Prizes for his multi-volume biographies of George Washington and Robert E. Lee.

<sup>250</sup> "Traffic and Enterprise," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 25, 1920.

practices. Local officials implemented many of the innovative solutions they acquired in these trips, assisting in the creation of national uniformity in traffic regulation. The tours also enhanced official awareness of Atlanta's place as an important regional center—a concept which would guide the city's trajectory over the decade. But, like most southern cities, Atlanta always lagged a few years behind those of the northeast and mid-west in implementing traffic control measures.<sup>251</sup>

Limiting the public streets to vehicles only, or at least primarily, proved a popular method of easing congestion and improving traffic flow. The streets as public meeting/gathering/trading spaces sharply declined as the city council placed regulatory burdens on fruit peddlers, street vendors, and farmers coming into town to sell their produce. New ordinances required everyone to have a business license, a tag, and signage on their wagons or trucks, as well as scales to weigh their products. Flower sellers had to display business licenses on their hand-held baskets. Food vending required a stove to keep cooked foods hot, and the once-ubiquitous bootblack stands were banned from both street and sidewalk. Offenders faced fines or time in the stockade.<sup>252</sup>

Even the construction of the city's Municipal Market [today's Sweet Auburn Curb Market] functioned as a traffic control measure. Located at the corner of Edgewood Avenue and Bell Street, the market, which opened on May 3, 1924, was just outside of the congested district,

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<sup>251</sup> "City Again Attempts Traffic Jam Solution," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 2, 1921; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 41, § 750, No. 33. "The Traffic Problem," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 2, 1920; *Atlanta Independent*, January 27, 1924; "One-Way Traffic on Cross Streets Favored by Sims," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 4, 1921; "Committee Votes Traffic Control Bureau for City," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 27, 1923. The tours usually lasted two weeks and often included stops in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. Councilman Walter A. Sims of the Traffic Committee, Alderman Jesse W. Armistead, chair of the Police Committee, and Police Chief James L. Beavers took trips in 1921 and 1923, which ended up with Atlanta adopting traffic towers and creating a police traffic bureau. Detroit often led the nation in traffic initiatives; "The Detroit Way," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 14, 1922.

<sup>252</sup> Atlanta, Ch. 70 §§ 2101-2153. The fine was up to \$100, and maximum jail time was 30 days.

but still only five blocks east of Five Points. It took the parked vehicles of farmers and truck gardeners off the streets and into a segregated space where they could sell their produce. The market's board of directors included influential citizens such as financier Colonel William Lawson Peel (1849-1927), former mayor James L. Key (1867-1939), successful publisher Walter O. Foote (1871-1933), and Derelle E. Harsey Sharp (1882-1969), president of the Atlanta Woman's Club. They lobbied for and helped construct the market. Sharp and the Woman's Club insisted that the building be constructed of fireproof brick and concrete. The building's cornerstone still bears her name, Derelle, although newspaper accounts always referred to her as Mrs. Norman Sharp. The board travelled to see other city markets and incorporate features from them in the Atlanta structure. Albert Anthony Ten Eyck Brown (1878-1940), one of the city's most popular and prolific architects, designed the building, which eventually became the largest single retail center for farm products in the state.<sup>253</sup>

Clearing the streets of most other users, however, did not resolve all of Atlanta's traffic issues. A large apparatus of traffic control measures had to be put into place to achieve the smooth flow of traffic envisioned by city officials and elites, although they never truly succeeded. The city electrician, an engineer, was in charge of traffic planning for the City of Atlanta. Like countless other traffic planners in municipalities across the country, Raymond L. Torras followed the lead of larger cities. As McShane notes, no one had predicted that the U.S. would end up with uniform traffic controls, but he explained how the system developed.

Once cities . . . began to employ full-time, professionally trained engineers to direct traffic, they deployed only certain traffic solutions. Traffic engineers had

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<sup>253</sup> The congested area (popularly called the congested district) was defined as the area bounded by Mitchell Street to the south, Central Avenue and Ivy Street [Peachtree Center Ave.] to the east; Cain Street [Andrew Young International Blvd.] to the north, and the Spring Street viaduct to the west; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 95, § 3134 (o); Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:802. *Atlanta Constitution*: "Municipal Market to Open Saturday," May 2, 1924; "Big Crowds Attend Opening Of New Municipal Market," May 4, 1924.

linked themselves together into a large, self-reinforcing, international, professional community by the early 1930s. Big-city political groups, especially downtown business interests, had a long history of turning to engineers for solutions to the diseconomies of urbanization. Engineers carried the enormous prestige of modern science and technology. Urban elites liked engineering models of problem solving.<sup>254</sup>

The history of Atlanta's traffic control devices followed the typical national trajectory in the implementation of the new technologies. The hand-held semaphores of traffic officers in the nineteen-teens remained in use through part of the 1920s, being gradually replaced by crow's nest-type traffic towers in which two policemen controlled red and green signal lights and sounded a bell when the lights changed. Later came the Milwaukee mushroom and its variants (see photo at right<sup>255</sup>); red octagonal stop signs; and two-light, individually-controlled electric signals

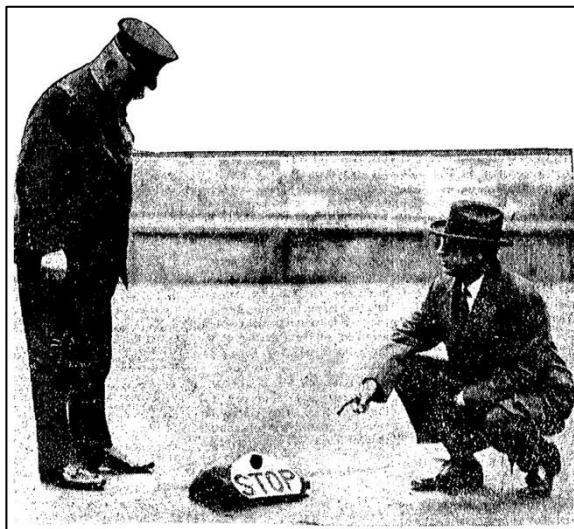


Figure 18. Variant of the Milwaukee mushroom; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 16, 1927.

suspended from wires above intersections (see figures on following pages<sup>256</sup>). The three-light, synchronized traffic light system, recognizable today, first went into operation in Atlanta on July 8, 1925. Earlier that year, the city had its first automobile crash resulting from a driver running a stop sign.<sup>257</sup>

<sup>254</sup> McShane, "The Origins and Globalization of Traffic Control Signals," 389.

<sup>255</sup> In the photograph, Atlanta Motor Club secretary, Oscar L. Haymond, explains this variant of the in-road Milwaukee mushroom stop "button" to Police Chief James L. Beavers; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 16, 1927.

<sup>256</sup> Street names added by author. The first photograph can be dated by the presence of the traffic tower in the center. Photos are AJCP555-027u and AJCP582-14d, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Photographic Archives. Special Collections and Archives

<sup>257</sup> The first traffic tower went operational at Five Points on November 29, 1921, "Traffic at Five Point Controlled by Large Lights," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1921. By July 1922, the city had installed fifteen traffic towers, all in the central business district, "Traffic Light Installed," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 13, 1922. Atlanta tested the Milwaukee mushroom in 1921, but evidently did not adopt it; "Atlanta Officials to Try New Form





Figure 19. Five Points looking east, after 11/29/1921 and before 07/08/1925.

Along with the new signals and signs, lines painted on the roadways constituted another physical traffic control device. In addition to the pedestrian crossing lines (which also served as vehicle stop lines), white stripes marked centerlines to separate vehicles moving in opposing directions. For very heavily-travelled areas, roadway marks separated lines of traffic moving in the same direction. National authorities urged adoption of on-street traffic markings, claiming they increased traffic capacity and segregated fast from slow-moving vehicles. As with all every other new traffic control device or measure, Atlanta first installed the new lines and markings in

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of Signal Lights,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 24, 1921. However, a traffic mushroom variant was introduced in 1927, “New Type Traffic Boulevard ‘Stop’ Signs,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 16, 1927. The three-light synchronized traffic signal system went into operation on the evening of July 8, 1925, “New Traffic Signal Lights in Use Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1925. The first crash from an ignored stop sign occurred on March 22, 1925; “Eight Are Hurt in Auto Crashes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 23, 1925.



*Figure 20. Five Points looking north, after July 8, 1925.*

the congested district of downtown, with Five Points the testing ground for modern traffic-control ideas.<sup>258</sup>

In addition to white lines, the city also painted red lines to designate “non-parking” zones. Sometimes the curbing was painted red instead of the roadway lines. While the city council enacted the 1922 ordinance requiring the lines, and the police chief had charge of line locations, the city power elites actually oversaw the painting of the lines. An extraordinary

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<sup>258</sup> Whitten, "Painted Traffic Markings on Streets," 617. It is difficult for the modern driver to imagine streets without line markings, or intersections without at least a stop sign. Any road system without these now-common forms of traffic control would obviously be a deadly one. The one exception might be Boston's infamous Storrow Drive in the 1970s, at least part of which had no lane markings at all. Instead, drivers would create new lanes as needed during rush-hour traffic. This writer experienced the phenomenon first-hand; it was terrifying at first, the routine. Surprisingly few crashes occurred there.

section of the city code specified that painting lines on the streets was to be done “under the supervision of the Atlanta Motor Club.”<sup>259</sup>

The Atlanta Motor Club, a non-governmental civic organization, formed in 1922 for the purpose of improving traffic conditions in Atlanta for locals and tourists. Acting under the slogan, “Motorists and Progress!” the members, including many business leaders, installed traffic signals and directional signs around the city. According to the group’s president, J. M. Van Harlingen, the club approached the city council, asking them to co-operate with the club’s efforts to relieve congestion “by having parking lines painted on the streets, under the direction of the club officials.” Council complied with the club’s request.<sup>260</sup>

Atlanta’s growth coalition heavily influenced government’s automotive regulations. Acting principally through the big three automobile-related civic groups, they not only suggested, but also directed the adoption of numerous traffic laws throughout the decade. Examples already presented have illustrated the involvement of the Safety Council and the Motor Club in shaping street and automobile regulation, with the photo of the motor club’s secretary showing a new signal device to the police chief a telling demonstration of the fact (see Figure 17 above).

Likewise, the Atlanta Automobile Association (the local chapter of the American Automobile Association) proudly acknowledged its success in securing legislation favorable to the automobile. The newspaper notice of the group’s general membership meeting, scheduled for October 17, 1923, quoted their executive secretary, C. V. Hohenstein, saying, “The Atlanta Automobile Association is intensely interested in the welfare of the motoring public. The

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<sup>259</sup> Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, § 3198. See also “The Fading Lines,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1921.

<sup>260</sup> “Motor Club Sets 10,000 Members As Goal in Race,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 23, 1922; J. M. Van Harlingen, “Atlanta Motor Club Auto Talks,” *City Builder* 7, no. 10 (December 1922): 13.

association believes that motor car owners are entitled to reasonable enjoyment in the use of their cars, and are opposed to drastic restrictions in the way of traffic regulation.” He announced the special guest for the upcoming meeting: Councilman James L. Wells, former chairman of the city council’s traffic committee and current member of the police committee. The supper meeting, held in the roof garden of the Cecil Hotel, featured a special orchestra providing dinner music. W. R. C. Smith, president of a prominent city publishing company and vice president of the association, delivered the keynote speech on “The Outlook in the Automotive Industry.”<sup>261</sup>

The Atlanta Automobile Association did not limit itself to wining and dining city officials to influence car-related ordinances, but actively introduced pro-automobile legislation and kept an eye on other bills, ready to block anything which might negatively affect the industry. A 1925 *City Builder* article boldly proclaimed,

One of the outstanding features of the association’s activities is along the line of legislative work. Every year the association’s office *checks daily every piece of legislation* introduced in the Georgia legislature, and during the past five years, *not a single piece of legislation, seriously affecting adversely the interests of those engaged in the automotive industry has been passed*. Many constructive pieces of legislation have been passed, which were backed and supported by the association. *What applies to state legislation, applies to city legislation* (emphases added).<sup>262</sup>

The article then proceeded to give details about how the association, working closely with the Atlanta Retail Merchants’ Association, had organized local businesses to push through an ordinance to reduce city taxes on mercantile assets. The unsigned article concluded that it would be impossible for the automotive industry to prosper without such organization behind it.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> C. V. Hohenstein, “Auto Dealers to Meet at Cecil Wednesday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 14, 1923.

<sup>262</sup> “The Origin and Development of the Atlanta Automobile Association, *City Builder*, May 1925, 32.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, 33. The tax rate was reduced from 52.20% of gross book valuation to 35%, which reduced merchant asset taxes by about one-third, according to the article.

The association welcomed anyone owning or interested in cars, but all of the city's car dealers held memberships. A newspaper more accurately labeled it "the auto dealers" group. John E. Smith, a highly successful dealer, served as president of the Atlanta Automobile Association in the 1920s, having been president of the Atlanta Automobile Dealers' Association the previous decade. During the dealers' association 1919 annual banquet held at the swanky Capital City Club, speakers from the National Automobile Dealers' Association told the audience to "get politics out of business and put business in politics," and declared the necessity of passing laws which would promote the interests of the automobile dealers.<sup>264</sup>

Absolutely no doubt exists that civic organizations such as Atlanta's Motor Club, Safety Council, and Automobile Association, successfully ensured that city, county, and state laws proved favorable to automotive interests. The city's business organizations, like the Automobile Dealers' Association and the Retail Merchants' Association, also pressured lawmakers not only to refrain from passing legislation that might negatively impact motordom's commercial concerns, but also to pass legislation that positively benefitted them. Similar groups across the country, as well as the umbrella national organizations, also worked hard to ensure that government at all levels championed motorists, the motor vehicle, and the automobile industry. Traffic regulations were written by people with vested interests in motordom, or they were members of the upper classes who owned cars and did not take public transit. Few, if any streetcar riders or ordinary citizens participated in the crafting of Atlanta's traffic laws.

The city enacted reams of this new legislation. The number of street user, vehicle, and traffic laws grew dramatically between the publication of the 1910 and 1924 city codes,

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<sup>264</sup> "Atlanta Automobile Men Hold Annual Meet," *City Builder* 4, no. 11 (January 1920): 23.

demonstrating the significance of the automobile's impact on everyday life in the city.<sup>265</sup> In 1910, the list of eight, simple "Rules of the Road" took up one page of the chapter on Streets and Alleys. By 1924, "Traffic Laws" warranted its own separate, 18.5-page chapter in the code.<sup>266</sup>

In Atlanta as elsewhere, the 1920s witnessed the massive investment of local government economic resources into accommodating the automobile. A 1928 newspaper account announced that the city now spent more than \$230,000 annually just on traffic control. The reporter cited the city comptroller's report, a copy of which he had received, not from the city, but from the Atlanta Safety Council, with whom the comptroller had shared his findings. The city had 66 traffic signal lights and 564 stop signs—all costing the city close to \$50,000 a year to operate and maintain. The city spent nearly \$5,000 a year painting lines on the streets and installing non-parking signs. Even more of the city's budget went to the salaries of the 35 policemen assigned to the traffic squad, the 125 policemen on traffic duty three hours a day during the "rush" period, and the police assigned to protect children in the school zones. These superstructure numbers do not include the much higher infrastructure costs of paving, widening, and maintaining the roads and bridges, gutters and curbs (which had to be re-shaped and downsized to accommodate a car's turning radius). Beyond infrastructure expenditures on streets and viaducts, the city in 1928 spent over \$1 million to meet the ever-growing needs of the automobile.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Atlanta's city council annually passed new ordinances, but these were collected and printed in large, single volumes only occasionally. The three published city codes for the general time period of this study were assembled and printed in 1899, 1910, and 1924. A copy of the state-mandated City Charter is included in each volume.

<sup>266</sup> City of Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1910* (Atlanta: Mutual, 1910), Ch. 85, §§ 2402-2677. *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 95, §§ 3133-3216.

<sup>267</sup> "\$231,450 Annual Cost of Traffic Control in City," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 24, 1928; "Mayor Urges Bonds for Public Improvements," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 8, 1929, which includes the text of Mayor Ragsdale annual address to the city council.

Yet the city still had not solved the problem of so many cars competing for road space. Today urban intersections without stop lights or at least stop signs are unimaginable. The lack of these essential devices contributed to the horrendous congestion and carnage on Atlanta's streets. The trial-and-error development of traffic controls occurred gradually in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and accelerated rapidly in the 1920s. But the dithering of the city council meant the continuing condition of traffic congestion in downtown, with no satisfactory resolution in sight.

### **5.5 Speeding and Parking**

A discussion of the ins and outs of council's struggles and failures to relieve traffic congestion by fiat is not the purpose of this study. However, two contradictory traffic laws in particular represent the power elites' efforts to privilege the automobile: vehicle speeds and curbside parking. While city speed limits changed over the thirty-year period, they only moved in one direction: up. On-street parking, however, had a bumpier path, with varying degrees of restrictions applied across different locations.

Achieving previously unimaginable speeds of travel was one of the car's major attractions, something no other mode of transportation provided. Not only did it make motor vehicles personally exciting to drive, but also it facilitated business by moving raw materials, goods, and customers quickly and efficiently. As insurance expert Ambrose Ryder stated in 1924, "Speed is the essence of twentieth century commerce, and . . . ninety percent of the value of the automobile lies in its speed." Many civic leaders united in their goal to make it easier for more vehicles to travel at greater speeds through the city—it was good for commerce and in multiple ways would assist in growing Atlanta. They did recognize that heavily-travelled areas with scores of pedestrians, such as the central business district, required somewhat lower speeds.

Outlying areas of the city had speed limits five to ten miles per hour higher than in the congested district. Speed limits in Fulton County, beyond the city limits, were even higher. The problem with speed was that it killed (see figure below).

The truly spectacular wrecks—where the car “turned turtle” (flipped over) and crushed the unfortunate occupants—usually happened in the suburbs or beyond the city limits. Traffic deaths did occur in town, but less frequently.<sup>268</sup>

Some people failed to realize, or at least acknowledge, that higher speeds did lead to more deaths. The *Atlanta Constitution*'s motors and highway department editor, O. J.

Willoughby, insisted that speed did *not* cause most of the injuries and losses to life and

property. Instead, he asserted that 99% of the time, collisions could be attributed “to other traffic violations by motorists or pedestrians, with carelessness leading the list.” He argued, rather obviously, that 50% more traffic could pass a given point driving at 20 miles per hour than at 12 miles per hour.<sup>269</sup>

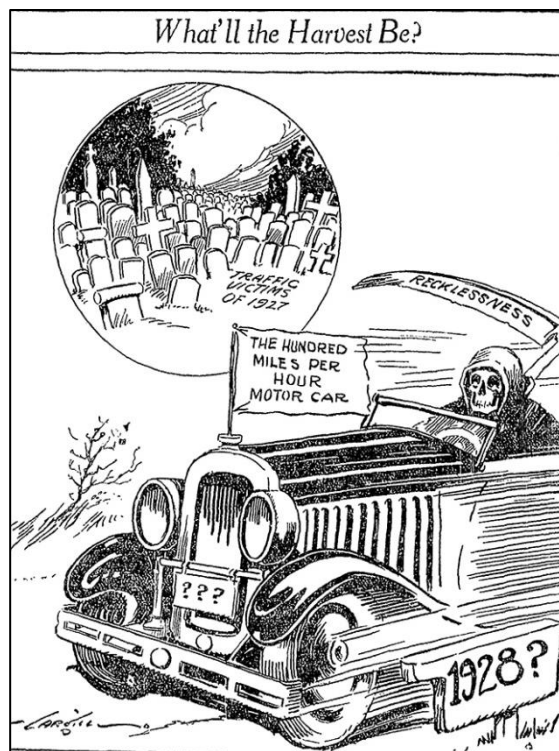


Figure 21. Editorial cartoon; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 21, 1928.

<sup>268</sup> Ryder, *Automobile Insurance: A Description of the Various Forms of Coverage, Underwriting Methods and Selling Plans*, 171. Ambrose Ryder was superintendent of the Automobile Department of the National Workmen's Compensation Service Bureau, and later manager of the National Aircraft Underwriters' Association. *Atlanta Constitution*: "Car Overturned by 'Road Hog,' Many Badly Hurt," March 28, 1927; "Theater-Goers See Auto Turn Turtle," October 10, 1915. Some car advertisements extolled their cars because they could not "turn turtle" due to lower centers of gravity; *Atlanta Constitution*: "The Regal 20," February 19, 1911; "American Underslung—The Safest Car On Earth," November 24, 1912.

<sup>269</sup> Ryder, 168; O. J. Willoughby, "Extension of Inner Fire Limit Necessitates Change in Speed Law," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 1, 1922.



Perhaps persuaded by Mr. Willoughby's all-too-fallible logic, the city council never did lower speed limits—intentionally. On one occasion they did inadvertently lower speed limits when, on May 1, 1922, they expanded the boundaries of the inner fire limit. Inside the inner fire limit, the speed was restricted to 12 miles per hour, while beyond, the speed was 20 miles per hour. The council did not realize the problem until five months later, when numbers of hapless drivers received speeding citations. At that time, the city did not post speed limit signs; motorists just had to learn for themselves where the speed limits changed. Council then made a concerted effort, assisted by the newspaper, to publicize the enlarged lower-speed-limit area. Willoughby suggested council set the speed limit to 20 miles per hour in all of downtown, but they eventually did better in 1929, setting the maximum speed limit throughout the city to 30 miles per hour, even in the congested district.<sup>270</sup>

One city councilman did note a particularly attractive feature of higher speed limits and faster-moving cars—they intimidated pedestrians. Council's traffic committee member Harry York made improving traffic flow a priority. He urged synchronized traffic lights as one solution, but also condemned those on foot as impediments to moving vehicles. He called pedestrians "the most flagrant and consistent traffic law breakers on the streets," observing,

The slow speed of motor traffic encourages them to disregard the red light signals because they know that a motorist can and will stop rather than hit a pedestrian, regardless of who has the legal right of way. If motor traffic moved at high speed, as it does in practically every other large city, pedestrians would not cross until the proper signal was given, because it would not be safe.<sup>271</sup>

Using higher speed limits to threaten pedestrians constituted a remarkable example of the mindset that roads were for cars, not people. The ultimate goal was rapid movement at any cost,

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<sup>270</sup> "30 Miles an Hour Fixed as Maximun [*sic*] City Speed Limit," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 3, 1929. Trucks, however, were limited to a 25 mph maximum.

<sup>271</sup> Stewart F. Gelders, "Many Traffic Congestion Remedies To Be Considered," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1923.

a cost which is unthinkingly accepted today. Car dealers abetted the speed narrative with advertisements touting high performance vehicles capable of quick getaways at traffic lights. A 1926 ad for the newest model of Hupmobile assured buyers that they could experience “the thrill of being away first at the traffic signal.” The 1929 new Chevrolet Six, however, could accommodate any driving situation: “At the slower speeds of city traffic it idles along with wonderful silence and ease. It shoots you ahead at the traffic light like an arrow from a bow. . . . Its spirited performance on the open road is a delight to everyone.”<sup>272</sup>

By the end of the decade, speed had become an important goal for city officials and civic leaders. Its presence symbolized modern society and a progressive city. “Speed used to be a luxury; it is now one of the necessities of life.” Everything now moved faster, as seen in the rapidity of the telephone, radio, express mail, modern machinery, and the automobile.<sup>273</sup> But higher speeds could only be achieved on roads cleared of all obstructions. After the city had removed or severely curtailed all other street users, motor vehicle traffic congestion persisted. Why? Because the biggest obstacles to cars traveling on city streets were other cars—*parked* cars.<sup>274</sup>

Unimpeded traffic flow might mean higher speeds and shorter travel times, but no one wanted to give up their right to park anywhere, anytime, and for free—just as they had since 1837 in the small village of Terminus.<sup>275</sup> Not until the 1930s did municipal zoning ordinances

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<sup>272</sup> “The New Prestige In Motoring,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 29, 1926. The ad was placed by Thompson-Cauthorn Motor Company located at 471 Peachtree Street on “Automobile Row.” The new Chevrolet Six also had the advantage of being manufactured in Atlanta, “National Demonstration Week! Drive the New Chevrolet Six,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1929.

<sup>273</sup> Ryder, *Automobile Insurance: A Description of the Various Forms of Coverage, Underwriting Methods and Selling Plans*, 172.

<sup>274</sup> For a masterful discussion of the parking evil, see Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 138-46.

<sup>275</sup> Atlanta was first called Terminus, the name given to the small settlement which grew up around the railroad terminal and junction point established southeast of today’s Five Points intersection in the fall of 1837; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 1:150.

require off-street parking to relieve parking shortages and improve traffic flow, but during the twenties, city leaders understood that they had a major conflict on their hands.<sup>276</sup> “Active” (moving) vehicles competed with “standing” (parked) vehicles for space in the public streets, with the greatest friction occurring on downtown’s narrow streets lined with office buildings and retail stores. Curb parking in the congested business district effectively turned four-lane thoroughfares into two-lane streets (see photo below<sup>277</sup>). With half of the roadway unavailable to moving vehicles, gridlock prevailed. On-street parking not only took up traffic lanes; it contributed to street traffic by individuals cruising in search of a vacant parking place, or by chauffeurs driving around while waiting for their car’s owner to shop or transact business. The 1924 Beeler *Report* showed 4,652 automobiles parked in Atlanta’s business district one day, more than half of them parked in the streets. Preston Arkwright, citing the narrowed travel space due to parked cars, said that unless the city acted to solve the congestion problem, “it will choke us to death.”<sup>278</sup>

Parked cars on city streets had emerged as a major problem in most large U.S. cities by the 1920s. William Phelps Eno, an early advocate for traffic regulation beginning with the stop sign in 1900, had by 1924, turned his attention to the problem of “dead” (parked) vehicles. He, along with other nationally-renowned engineers, advocated painted lines to delineate parking

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<sup>276</sup> Donald Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking* (Chicago: American Planning Association, 2011), 7, 22-23. Referring to the traditional concept of the English and early American “commons,” Shoup calls free curb parking an “asphalt commons,” where drivers compete for parking spaces like cattle used to compete for grass.

<sup>277</sup> View is looking south from the Candler Building. On Peachtree Street (left), two of the three car travel lanes are blocked by parkers, so autos freely used the double trolley track space. Broad Street (right), aptly named, could accommodate two lanes of parking, three lanes of cars, and double trolley tracks. Both streets were “white ways,” as seen by the rows of five-lamp street lights lining each road. The 1897, eleven-story English-American (Flatiron) Building is at the center.

<sup>278</sup> Hawley S. Simpson, “Downtown Storage Garages,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 133 (September 1927): 84; Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 6; Preston S. Arkwright, “Greatest Need for 1925: Traffic Regulation,” *City Builder* 9, no. 10 (December 1924): 43. Of the 4,652 parked cars in downtown, the count showed 814 in surface lots, 1,478 in parking garages, and 2,360 parked in the streets.

zones, which should only be located in places where they could not hinder moving traffic. They all viewed vehicular travel as the primary purpose of roads, permitting only brief pauses to load and unload passengers or freight. Traffic specialists suggested a variety of parking options preferable to curbsides: vacant lots, rooftops, basements, even public parks. Most agreed that eventually the construction of multi-story parking garages would provide the best solution, especially once entrepreneurs recognized their profit potential.<sup>279</sup>



Figure 22. Peachtree (left), Broad (south), 1925; *Progressive Atlanta*, pg. 27.

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<sup>279</sup> William Phelps Eno, "The Storage of Dead Vehicles on Roadways," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 116 (November 1924): 170-73; Kerry Segrave, *Parking Cars in America, 1910-1945: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 15, 53, 55; Miller McClintock, "Parking--When, Where and Why," *American City* 30 (April 1924): 360, cited by Segrave, 56. The adjectives "dead" and "standing" in reference to parked vehicles had been popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but by the 1920s, most people referred to "parked" cars, though "standing" was still used, as it could refer to a car that was stopped temporarily to take on or discharge a passenger.

Eno and others had a pretty good grasp of the main issues and offered some reasonable solutions, but their considerations omitted one important party with a large stake in downtown parking: the downtown businessmen. Most members of this group usually had no problem meeting their own parking needs. They could easily afford to rent personal spaces for their cars in one of the city's new parking garages, and probably preferred to do so given the security, proximity, and variety of amenities and services provided by these luxurious entities.

Throughout much of 1920, the city council debated creating a "non-parking" zone in the central business district where traffic congestion had become intolerable. A citizens' committee, composed of prominent citizens, drew up an ordinance eliminating on-street parking in much of downtown. They also proposed making some downtown streets one-way to increase flow.<sup>280</sup>

One letter writer to the *Constitution* weighed in heavily against the proposed legislation, claiming that it reflected only the interest of the "electric octopus" (the streetcar and its riders), not the interests of the city as a whole. In an early indicator of the probable reaction of the commercial community, the writer declared that the non-parking regulation would bring harm to "one of the most essential of all the classes in Atlanta—the business people." He urged the newspaper to keep in mind the "business usefulness" of all the cars driving in downtown daily.<sup>281</sup>

Nevertheless, city council passed a new traffic ordinance, effective June 15, 1920, which created a non-parking zone within a radius of several blocks around Five Points. Marietta Street, with its 60' width, remained available for curbside parking. The law prohibited parking in the zone from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and Sundays, and also made ten downtown streets one-way. It was a draconian measure by Atlanta standards.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> The customary phrase for an area where parking was prohibited was "non-parking," not today's "no parking." "Committee Will Consider Changes in Traffic Laws," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1920.

<sup>281</sup> "Interesting Discussion of the Parking Problem," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 15, 1920.

<sup>282</sup> "New Traffic Law Effective Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 15, 1920.

City councilman J. C. Murphy, who wrote the ordinance, toured the business district that first day, asking businessmen their opinions. He announced that, to a man, they declared that clearing the parking from central streets was a great benefit and a long step toward solving the city's traffic problem. The *Constitution* reported,

Members of the police force, the motorists themselves, and most of all, the street car riding public were quick to see big benefits accruing from the new non-parking traffic ordinance which went into effect Tuesday morning. With the principal downtown streets, except Marietta . . . cleared of standing vehicles, notable acceleration in the speed of street cars and vehicular traffic was apparent. Prohibiting the parking of cars and other vehicles on the streets was like removing logs jutting out from the bank into a stream, each one deadening and checking the current as it flowed past. No maze of automobiles got caught up behind a trolley car and no traffic jam was noted during the day.<sup>283</sup>

An additional benefit appeared when the owners of a number of vacant lots opened them up for parking, making substantial sums. Storage garages (all-day parking garages) did big business that first day, too.

The city had apparently discovered a way out of the congestion puzzle: remove the one remaining street obstacle, the logjam of parked cars. Such a positive outcome appeared to please a large number of citizens, with police, streetcar riders, and even motorists happy. The new ordinance had achieved one of the goals of the growth community: smooth flowing traffic on city streets.

Within six months, however, steady and vocal opposition to the ordinance had emerged. The Atlanta Retail Merchants' Association, the Atlanta Federation of Woman's Clubs, and the Atlanta Automobile Association protested the designation of non-parking zones, which they claimed interfered with shopping and restricted customer access to businesses. Morris Rich, head of the city's flagship department store, called the new ordinance unfair and discriminatory. In

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<sup>283</sup> "Non-Parking Rules Prove Beneficial," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 16, 1920.

response to the pressure by these influential groups, and disregarding the lobbying efforts of the streetcar company, on December 20, 1920, city council reversed itself and voted by a substantial majority to substitute limited parking in place of non-parking now in force on downtown streets.<sup>284</sup>

Businesses' anxiety about parking focused exclusively on customers, and never mentioned where their employees might park. Others saw workers as part of the problem. Someone who worked downtown would often occupy a single on-street parking space for the entire working day. A 1929 study of city planning in the U.S. found that "many cars assumed to be those of shoppers are really those of mercantile and commercial employees who use the streets for day-storage purposes, an uneconomic and unsocial proceeding in the whole scheme of urban life." Lack of turnover translated into reduced sales, so the worker who hogged a space all day long deserved censure.<sup>285</sup>

Atlanta merchants firmly believed that parking facilitated shopping, and the upper class women's groups concurred. These were women who would drive themselves, or be driven, downtown to shop. They would not have to take a trolley. The automobile associations opposed almost any sort of restriction on motorists. The combined pressure from these powerful groups led the city to adopt parking policies which they erroneously believed would stimulate development.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> "May Change Atlanta Auto Parking Laws," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 10, 1920; "Limited Parking Will Be Allowed," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1920; Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 114.

<sup>285</sup> Harold S. Bottenheim, "The Problem of the Standing Vehicle," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 133 (September 1927): 144; Hubbard and Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States*, 213.

<sup>286</sup> Even today, most people believe that limiting parking will hurt business; see Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 114. Modern research indicates otherwise. A 2000 survey of statistical studies on the economic impacts of parking restraint policies in urban centers concluded that no clear evidence exists of any link between parking restraint and retail success. Ben Still and David Simmonds, "Parking Restraint Policy and Urban Vitality," *Transport Reviews* 20, no. 3 (July 2000): 291-316.

The major reason for the intransigence of the accessibility dilemma was that the growth coalition divided over the issue. Some wanted smooth, efficient traffic flow, which they insisted would enable city growth, while others willingly sacrificed flow to ease customer access to downtown businesses. The Atlanta Motor Club argued for congestion relief by keeping the main traffic arteries free of parking. They wanted to abolish the thirty-minute parking provision on those streets, equating it with all-day parking. Writing in the *City Builder*, the club's secretary, W. G. Peebles, Jr., opined that the merchants did not understand that "thirty-minute-parking is taking dollars and cents out of their business. Nevertheless, it is true."<sup>287</sup>

Peebles questioned how one car owner had the right to park his vehicle and clog the entire street, blocking and inconveniencing a hundred other car owners. Police Chief James L. Beavers informed the motor club that merchants constantly complained about cars blocking their entrances, yet those same men also said to him privately, "We want all the congestion we can get and would like to see every street in Atlanta congested almost beyond movement." Calling such sentiment "petty selfishness," the COC secretary called for city council to take action against traffic jams, "the convenience of the entire public being of more importance than the accommodation of a minority."<sup>288</sup>

Virtually all of the city's merchants pushed back against *any* parking restraints, even against their fellow pro-growth partners. John E. Smith, successful car dealer and chair of the traffic committee of the Atlanta Automobile Dealers' Association, wrote to the newspaper demanding parking privileges for customers. He maintained the thirty-minute turnover brought more customers into the shopping district. "Deprive the car owner of parking space and he will trade where he can park," Smith declared, telling his fellow car dealers that in the interest of their

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<sup>287</sup> W. G. Peebles, Jr. "Atlanta Motor Club Auto Talks," *City Builder* 7, no. 7 (September 1922): 23.

<sup>288</sup> W. G. Peebles, Jr. "Atlanta Motor Club Auto Talks," *City Builder* 7, no. 8 (October 1922): 17.



customers, they should fight no-parking regulations and support time-limited parking. He concluded by urging everyone simply to accept the unalterable fact that the Peachtree-Whitehall corridor would never be a speedway.<sup>289</sup>

Councilman James L. Wells, chair of the committee which had drafted the 1923 traffic ordinance, answered Smith's letter directly in his address to the Atlanta Automobile Association. He contended that the no-parking regulation would not harm merchants or automobile dealers, and that if they would give it a six-month trial, they would be convinced. His memory must have been short. The 1920 no-parking regulation had proved very successful in relieving congestion, and popular with motorists and trolley riders. Merchants and car dealers hated it, and got it rewritten within six months.

Wells predicted that one day, the Peachtree-Whitehall corridor would become a no-parking zone (as it is today). Similarly, Judge Shepard Bryan, president of the Atlanta Safety Council, decried the parking of automobiles in narrow downtown streets, asserting, "It is not congested streets which make an enterprising city. It is the movement of traffic, and the more speedily the current of traffic is enabled to move . . . the more business the city can transact." Individual businessmen had conflicting opinions on how to regulate cars to maximize profit, but the growth coalition did not divide over the automobile. It did split over which should occupy the majority of the roadways: moving or stationary vehicles. The roads had been turned over to the cars; but the question remained. How would they divvy up the most prized real estate of all—Atlanta's city streets?<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> "Non-Parking Will Hurt Retail Shop," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 7, 1923.

<sup>290</sup> "Wells Outlines City's Traffic Relief Program," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1923; "Steady Traffic Flow Sought By Council," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1923.

Atlanta never generated a satisfactory answer to that question. Neither did any other city in the United States. The problem of the “standing vehicle” proved unsolvable to officials and businessmen who refused to act in their own best interests.<sup>291</sup> Most did not foresee a time when traffic congestion would actually drive customers away, and retail merchants would be forced to follow them out to suburban neighborhoods where a growing portion of the city’s white population was already en route.

During the 1920s, the decentralization of commercial downtown began, led by smaller food-related shops and, ironically, the filling stations essential to the operation of the automobile. In response, the city’s so-called leaders did not lead, but continued to dither between parking and non-parking, between constant congestion and easy travel. The automobile made possible residential development in outlying areas, but gridlocked streets negated one of the car’s major amenities—speed. The success of the automobile in its conquest of city streets would contribute greatly to the decline of the center city.

Not everyone was as short-sighted as city leaders in Atlanta and elsewhere. In 1927, a group of nationally-prominent city planners and traffic consultants studied the problem. Their report included a set of principles designed to assist municipal authorities in formulating parking and traffic flow policies. Their first principle stated that *the streets existed for the general public, to be used for pedestrians and for the transportation of people and goods*. This statement, which outrageously included the rights of those on foot, stood in strong contrast to the prevailing opinion that streets should serve primarily as vehicle conduits. Sadly, most city governments ignored the pedestrian aspect of the experts’ first principle.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Peebles, *City Builder* 7, no. 8 (October 1922): 17.

<sup>292</sup> Bутtenheim, “The Problem of the Standing Vehicle,” 144-45. Some of the worthies who participated in the study, conducted under the auspices of *The American City* magazine, included Robert Whitten, the Beeler Organization, Harland Bartholomew, Miller McClintock, and the federal Department of Commerce. *The American*

The report strongly recommended a multi-faceted, street-control superstructure, with various laws and regulatory devices to ensure safety and expedite traffic flow. The experts cited one specific example of a street obstruction common in most cities, including Atlanta: the curbside gasoline pump (see figure at right<sup>293</sup>). Besides the fire and safety hazards,



*Figure 23. Curbside gas pump, 36-40 South Pryor Street, Atlanta, ca. 1927.*

pumping gas at the curb also obstructed moving traffic to an incredible degree. By the late 1920s, many gas stations offered drive-in service, as the experts suggested. To do so, however, required more land and they had to move away from downtown to find affordable property to expand.<sup>294</sup>

The report urged that street regulations take into account the needs of “public transportation vehicles.” It acknowledged that streetcars and buses, which had to stop in the street to load and unload passengers, had the right to do so, and should be accommodated. As

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*City* (1909-1942) was an urban affairs journal of the Buttenheim Publishing Corporation of New York City, which published a number of business magazines and directories until its acquisition in 1974.

<sup>293</sup> Hunter’s Garage had a second pump was located just right of this photo. Note the curbside water hose; Atlanta’s “white way” five-light street lighting; the asphalt road surface worn where vehicles stopped to refuel; trolley tracks; concrete sidewalks; and granite curbing with a curb cut for cars to drive into the garage. Hunter’s also offered “day storage” (parking) for cars; AFPL005x\_011, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System Glass Plate Negatives Digital Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library (Courtesy of Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System).

<sup>294</sup> Buttenheim, “The Problem of the Standing Vehicle,” 146-47.

with pedestrian rights, most civic authorities, including Atlanta's, ignored the experts' opinion on the validity of the needs of mass transit.<sup>295</sup>

The traffic consultants also called for limited parking in business districts, and asserted the superior right to *move* a car over the right to *store* a car in the public right-of-way. They bemoaned the short-sightedness of merchants who opposed any restrictions on curb parking, and predicted that eventually all large new buildings would be required to provide on-site parking for their employees, tenants, and customers. Overall, the report contained an accurate assessment of the parking problem and offered reasonable solutions, which most cities ignored.<sup>296</sup>

Atlanta's city council, between 1919 and 1929, enacted, then retracted or overhauled new traffic ordinances on at least *eight* different occasions.<sup>297</sup> Often the new no-parking signs were not completely installed before council voted to lift the parking restriction. Eliminating on-street parking proved to be *the* intractable issue of the decade, one which was never satisfactorily resolved. Municipal governments in cities like Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, and New York also enacted, revoked, and re-enacted parking regulations, but none with the cyclic rapidity of Atlanta. They never settled on a permanent solution. The uneasy half-measures satisfied no one and did not relieve traffic congestion. As a New Jersey traffic engineer wrote in 1927, hoping for a single solution to traffic congestion that would "benefit all and injure none" was absurd; traffic relief could only come through compromise. The inability of the power elites to reach a consensus or a compromise perpetuated the "parking evil," and ensured that traffic gridlock remained a constant in Atlanta's business district.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 147-52.

<sup>297</sup> These occurred in 1919, 1920, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1928, and 1929. Perhaps during the years 1921, and 1926-27 the council was too busy building the viaducts and implementing the other bond measures to address traffic concerns.

<sup>298</sup> Simpson, "Downtown Storage Garages," 82. For a discussion of the various parking restrictions enacted/revoked/re-enacted in other U.S. cities, see Segrave, *Parking Cars in America, 1910-1945: A History*, 5-84.

Atlanta, like most urban areas, still struggles to achieve stability between parked and moving vehicles on its public streets. It is more successful now than in the 1920s due to the large amount of land devoted to parking. About 20% of Atlanta's central business district parcels are utilized exclusively for parking decks or surface lots. That percentage goes up to about 33% when mixed-use sites, comprised of building(s) and parking on a single parcel, are included. The percentage would go even higher if on-street parking were counted. In the twenties, city officials and businessmen had not yet realized just how much downtown land parked cars required.<sup>299</sup>

The dearth of off-street parking contributed to the parking problem, and the development of this important new element of the motordom infrastructure took some time. Although growth coalition members divided over on-street parking, none argued over the benefits of off-street parking, and a number of them eagerly embraced opportunities to profit from this emerging enterprise. Owners of valuable vacant downtown parcels converted them to surface parking lots, but greater returns could be found constructing public parking garages. Once again, the automobile demanded accommodation, and pro-car, pro-growth advocates altered the city's physical environment to give it more space.

The new facilities had the capacity to provide real traffic congestion relief, if only they had been fully utilized. But Atlanta's 1929 traffic survey showed that of the nearly 10,000 parking spaces available in downtown lots and public garages, only 6,000 were regularly in

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<sup>299</sup> Author's analysis of the land use codes of 2115 parcels in a section of downtown Atlanta, for the City of Atlanta's 2013 Downtown Atlanta Contemporary Historic Resources Survey. The boundaries of the survey area were Ralph McGill and Ivan Allen boulevards to the north; Piedmont Avenue to the east; Memorial Drive to the south; and Spring Street/Mitchell Street/Centennial Olympic Parkway to the west.

use.<sup>300</sup> Of course, one had to *pay* to park in those, while curbside parking remained free. The country's first parking meter was six years in the future.<sup>301</sup>

By the mid-1920s, most new hotels and department stores offered parking spaces to their guests and customers. Office buildings did not lag too far behind. Developer Charles Palmer observed, regarding his construction of a parking garage attached to the Glenn Building, "It is as essential in this modern day for office buildings to make provision for the automobiles of those who visit them as it was three generations ago for the storekeeper on Main street to have rails and hitching blocks for . . . the many people who visited his establishment using horses and buggies."<sup>302</sup>

The City of Atlanta had its own municipal garage in which to store and maintain city-owned vehicles, and car dealership buildings combined showrooms and garages into their designs. These smaller facilities served only clients and employees. In contrast, the new-build public garages expanded dramatically to meet the demand created by the city's on-again, off-again curbside parking restraints. The multi-story, car behemoths holding more than a thousand cars dwarfed the single-story, full-service garages of the early 1900s, many of which went out of business or re-located to the growing suburbs.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> W. Graham Cole, "How a Fact-Finding Traffic Survey Was Conducted," *American City* 42 (April 1930): 91.

<sup>301</sup> Henry F. Long, "Among the State Tax Commissions," *Bulletin of the National Tax Association* 21, no. 3 (December 1935): 82, mentions the successful installation of the Park-O-Meters in Oklahoma City, OK, in 1935. For a complete history of the development, installation, and legal challenges to the first parking meter, see LeRoy H. Fischer and Robert E. Smith, "Oklahoma and the Parking Meter," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1969): 168-208. Documentation for when Atlanta first installed parking meters remains elusive, but certainly occurred beyond the boundaries of this study.

<sup>302</sup> "Palmer to Build Garage of Nine Levels as Glenn Annex," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 19, 1928. An ad for the Biltmore Hotel mentioned "a complete, modern garage with private compartments for 60 cars with a qualified service man in attendance day and night," in "The Atlanta Biltmore Now Open," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 19, 1924. For customers of its large department store, Rich's built a 200-car capacity garage at the corner of Forsyth and Hunter [M.L.K., Jr. Blvd.] streets; "New Garage for Rich's Customers Is Latest South Side Development," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1928.

<sup>303</sup> Atlanta's garage was located at 126-130 Walton Street, "Municipal Garage Will Be Removed to Walton Street," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1916; the city code dealt in detail with the municipal garage's functions

The old moniker “automobile stable” had understandably faded from use as horses disappeared from the city’s streets. By the twenties, “automobile hotel” emerged as the descriptor for a very high-end parking garage. These large, modern, luxurious structures offered repair, maintenance, and cleaning services in addition to parking, and provided elevators for the customers (see advertisement at right). Earlier garages had used freight elevators to transport cars to upper floors, but new ramp systems allowed for self-parking, an innovation which appealed to a driver’s sense of independence and reduced costs for budget-conscious operators. The higher-end garages, however, continued to employ car “jockeys” (valets), showing that horse-related terminology was sometimes still in use, even if the horse was not.<sup>304</sup>

**DRIVE UP • DRIVE DOWN**

**The Road's Always Clear**

Convenient location, close to the downtown center of Atlanta.  
Clean and inviting atmosphere within.  
Cool in summer, steam-heated in winter; fire-proof throughout; clean floors.  
Courteous attention to every order.  
Moderate charges for service.  
These are the outstanding characteristics of Atlanta's new automobile hotel, the only one of its kind in the southeast, the largest modern garage in the world.

**N**O crowding is necessary anywhere in this garage. Room is here for 1,100 automobiles, with each space fronting on a 50-foot aisle or street.

From street level to any space on the topmost floor is a matter of only a minute at most; and you ride back down on the passenger elevator. Or you can deliver and receive your car at the door.

**IVY ST. GARAGE** 2 Blocks from 5 Points

Phones: WA 0115—IV 0268 — 23-33 Ivy Street

Figure 24. Ivy Street Garage ad; *Atlanta Constitution*, July 27, 1925.

One of Atlanta’s finest new automobile hotels, the Ivy Street Garage, was the city’s first to incorporate the very latest access mode, the Fernand E. d’Humy Motoramp System of Building Design, patented in 1919. The d’Humy system used a two-unit staggered floor construction, with level of the floors in one unit located midway between the level of the floors

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and users, Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 30, §§ 536-557. The Buick Motor Company’s new building at the corner of Spring Street and Baltimore Place had 90,000 square feet of floor space, with plate glass windows on three sides of the showroom and a garage in back, Theo. S. Lewis, “Buick Co. Opens Branch Here,” *City Builder*, September 1925, 46.

<sup>304</sup> Shannon Sanders McDonald, *The Parking Garage: Design and Evolution of a Modern Urban Form* (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2007), 25-33. McDonald’s is the definitive study of parking garages.

in the other unit (see image below<sup>305</sup>). Shorter ramps reduced the grade, making it possible for large cars to ascend in high gear and with improved visibility. The design also maximized

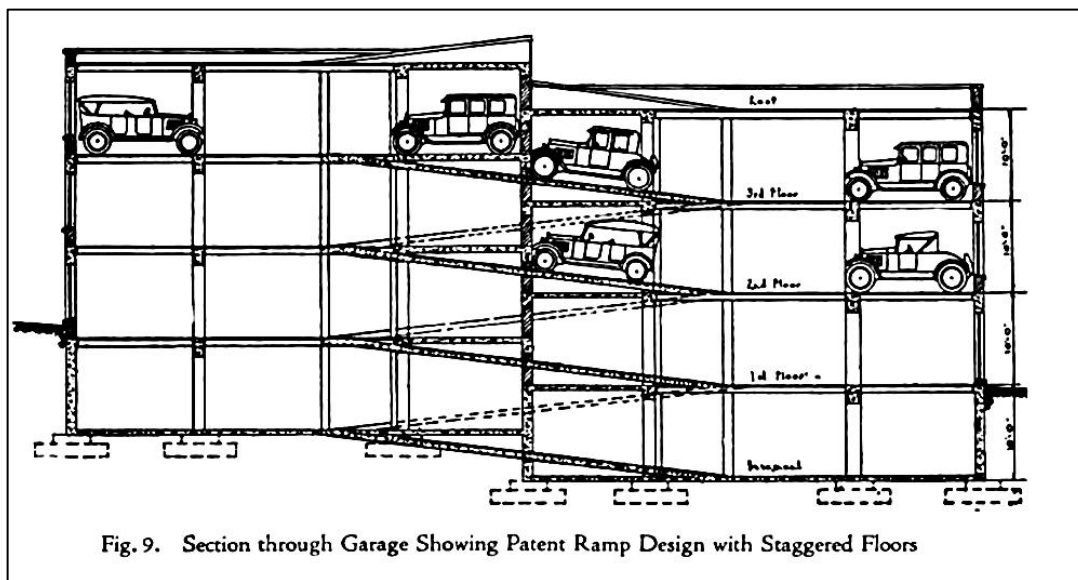


Figure 25. Cross-section of d'Humy ramp system, 1921.

valuable parking surface, and was recognized as the best configuration for a multi-story parking garage.<sup>306</sup>

The six-story Ivy Street building had room for 1100 parked cars, but the owner chose to limit parking to 600 spaces, reserving the upper floors for leased offices. The efficiencies of the d'Humy and other ramp systems soon rendered the elevator garage obsolete, and by 1929, the ramp garage was recommended in traffic studies as the complement to no-curbside-parking regulations.<sup>307</sup>

The garage at 37-39 Ivy Street [Peachtree Center Ave.] was the brainchild of Bolling Hampton Jones (1897-1933), a banker, manufacturer, progressive thinker, and enthusiastic

<sup>305</sup> Cross-section of d'Humy ramp system used in the Ivy Street Garage; compare with photo below right; Howard F. Blanchard, "Ramp Design in Public Garages," *Architectural Forum* 35, no. 5 (November 1921): 174.

<sup>306</sup> United States Patent Office, Fernand E. d'Humy of Englewood, New Jersey, Garage, utility patent no. 1,298,183, March 25, 1919.

<sup>307</sup> Ivy Street Garage To Stage Formal Opening June 10," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1925; Simpson, "Downtown Storage Garages," 86-87; Hubbard and Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States*, 214.



participant in the social, civic, and political life of the city. One-time postmaster for the City of Atlanta, and chairman of the board of the Fulton National Bank, Jones financed the venture with 7% real estate bonds offered by his new company, the Ivy Street Corporation. The yet-to-be-constructed garage, sometimes called the Bolling Jones Building, served as security for the bonds.<sup>308</sup>

Designed by local engineering firm Lockwood-Greene and built by Griffin Construction, the Ivy Street Garage, like other modern garages, had a rather plain façade: pale yellow brick exterior with brown diapering on the front (west-facing) cornice; ground floor storefront windows; upper-story windows in every façade to provide light and ventilation; and multiple vehicle entrances, each requiring a new sidewalk curb cut. The Yellow Cab Company building on the east side of Ivy Street [Peachtree Center Ave.] had to be demolished to make room for the new combination garage/office building. The implementation of the new structure exemplified the cycle of 1920s urban redevelopment, the old being demolished to make way for a new and different addition to the increasingly motorized landscape. The location proved ideal for businessmen, situated only two blocks off Five Points and across the street from the newly-enlarged Hurt Building, reputed at the time to be the largest office building south of Philadelphia. Opening on May 5, 1925, the new garage helped meet downtown Atlanta's desperate need for parking space.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> "\$535,000 First Mortgage 7% Real Estate Gold Bonds," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 2, 1924; "Hon. Bolling H. Jones, Postmaster, Atlanta, GA.," *The Post Office Clerk* 12, no. 12 (December 1913): 3-4. Officers and directors of the Ivy Street Corporation included President Jones and a group of attorneys, bankers, financiers, and textile manufacturers from Georgia and Massachusetts.

<sup>309</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Large Automobile Hotel To Be Erected on Ivy Street," October 5, 1924; "Ivy Street Garage To Stage Formal Opening June 10," May 24, 1925; "Opening of Atlanta's New \$1,000,000 Automobile Hostelry," May 24, 1925; John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 119-23.

It must be stated clearly and definitively and in the face of widespread misinformation that the Ivy Street Garage most emphatically was not Atlanta’s first garage. Neither was it the city’s first parking garage, nor even its first multi-story parking garage. Its only “first” was its



Figure 26. Ivy Street Garage, October 27, 1946.



Figure 27. Kell Hall being demolished, August 3, 2019.

d’Humy ramp system—the first one in Atlanta, that is. Garages in forty-two other cities in the U.S., England, and Canada already employed the ramp system, and another d’Humy-type garage was under construction in downtown at the time the Ivy Street Garage (see photos above<sup>310</sup>) opened.<sup>311</sup>

<sup>310</sup> Figure 26 shows the southwest corner; from AJCN048-014d, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Photographic Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library. Figure 27 shows the former Ivy Street garage/soon-to-be former Kell Hall of Georgia State University being demolished, by author. The view of the south façade shows the two-part staggered floors and ramp system; compare with d’Humy cross-section above.

<sup>311</sup> Ramp Buildings Corporation, “Building Multi-Floor Garages,” in *Building Garages for Profitable Operation* (New York: Ramp Buildings Corporation, September 1925), 14.

George M. Sparks, director of the Atlanta Extension Center of the University System of Georgia [now Georgia State University], purchased the garage for the school in 1945.<sup>312</sup> Well-known regional architect G. Lloyd Preacher undertook extensive renovations to render the structure into something remotely resembling a classroom building. Everyone complained about the small elevators, not appreciating the fact that at the time of their original installation, they represented the height of luxury for an automobile hotel.

Kell Hall, for the duration of its existence, exemplified how-not-to-do historic preservation by the choice of an incompatible new use for a very specifically designed historic structure. After its totally inadequate conversion to a classroom building, the interior appeared inexplicably and frustratingly convoluted to the uninitiated, while others simply enjoyed the recreational opportunities afforded by the indoor ramps (e.g., skateboarding, bike riding, roller blading). The building's plain and unassuming exterior was typical for a parking garage of the era. Despite its rather pedestrian nature, the pattern on Kell's west façade was valued as the sole surviving example of brick diapering in downtown Atlanta. Some preservationists, including this writer, actually *did* mourn the passing of this quixotic and irreplaceable relic.<sup>313</sup>

Ivy Hall anchored the school's central campus development for the next 30 years. On March 11, 1964, Georgia State College re-named it Kell Science Hall in honor of the school's first dean, Wayne Sailley Kell. In the summer of 2019, Georgia State University demolished Kell Hall to make room for a pedestrian plaza, a striking reversal of the city's usual pattern of cars displacing people. Atlanta lost its last, but never its first, early twentieth-century parking garage.

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<sup>312</sup> Not surprisingly, Sparks immediately found his school in desperate need of parking spaces—having just eliminated 600 of them. Ever since, GSU has been playing catch-up, struggling to meet the parking demands of its growing academic community. The school continues to buy up downtown buildings—for the land beneath them—to convert to surface parking lots, per to the Facilities Management department.

<sup>313</sup> For an *in memoriam* and retrospective of the non-functionality of Kell Hall, see Alex Sayf Cummings to Tropics of Meta, August 29, 2019, <https://tropicsofmeta.com/2019/08/29/the-house-that-mc-escher-and-the-marquis-de-sade-built/>.

Upon its opening, the “mammoth” Ivy Street garage was lauded with customary Atlantan boosterish extravagance as “one of the largest and perhaps the most modern structures of its nature in the world,” and “perhaps the best and most efficiently constructed building of its kind in the world.” More important than its architectural marvels, however, the garage provided protection from weather and theft. Motor vehicles required indoor storage until the mid-1920s, when durable paints and engines that could withstand the cold became available.<sup>314</sup>

A garage also gave businessmen “a place to leave their cars without the danger of being stolen or their owners being served with a summons to court for parking too long on the central business streets.” The possibility of auto theft was quite real in Atlanta, with an average of 1,174 cars reported stolen annually between 1920 and 1929. Getting a parking ticket in downtown, though, remained an infrequent occurrence during the twenties. That situation changed only occasionally, depending on the varying levels of enforcement provided by Atlanta Police Department.<sup>315</sup>

## 5.6 Policing Traffic

The problem of an inadequate number of officers to serve and protect perennially plagued Atlanta’s police chiefs. Its crime rate, higher than the national average for cities of its size, rose during the twenties. The arrival of the automobile, with all its attendant necessities, only exacerbated the situation. But the number of policemen in proportion to the city’s population did not increase at all. Civic organizations clamored incessantly for more enforcement of traffic laws

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<sup>314</sup> “Opening of Atlanta’s New \$1,000,000 Automobile Hostelry,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1925.

<sup>315</sup> Car theft numbers, separate from those of trucks and motorcycles, are from the *Annual Reports* of the Chiefs of Police of the City of Atlanta. “Atlanta—A Paradise for Automobile Thieves!” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 11, 1920. Automobile stealing in the 1920s was a recognized industry, with networks of professional thieves and fences. Stolen cars in Atlanta were found in states like Pennsylvania, Kansas, Montana, California, and Oregon, and cars from cities like Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Erie, Philadelphia, and Atlantic City were recovered in Atlanta.

to relieve congestion and reduce carnage, and the police chiefs pleaded with the city council for more men. The ongoing lack of personnel meant juggling officers between regular patrol duty and specialized traffic duty, leaving one or the other understaffed and everyone, except miscreants, unsatisfied.<sup>316</sup>

Into the void stepped the Vigilance Committee of the Atlanta Safety Council. This group of 100 motorists (whose identities were kept secret) cared greatly about the city's business-friendly reputation. If the police had inadequate resources to keep traffic flowing safely and smoothly, they would assist. Their enforcement activities included observing traffic violations; taking license numbers; warning violators via mail that subsequent infractions would be reported to the police; keeping a list of violators and their offenses; reporting third-time offenders to the police; and testifying against them in court. The vigilantes proved remarkably watchful; in the first week they sent more than fifty letters to violators. By the end of their tenure, they had recorded thousands of violations and induced many motorists to drive more carefully.<sup>317</sup>

The Vigilance Committee lasted only about six months. In early 1924, the Atlanta Safety Council instituted in its place a Safe Drivers' Club, whose members promised to support safe motoring by their exemplary driving habits. Dovetailing with the ending of the Vigilance Committee was the creation of the police department's Accident Prevention Bureau. Although never explicitly stated, the creation of the Vigilance Committee was an act of desperation by concerned businessmen to improve traffic conditions and Atlanta's image. After that brief stint

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<sup>316</sup> William J. Mathias and Stuart Anderson, *Horse to Helicopter: First Century of the Atlanta Police Department* (Atlanta: Georgia State University School of Urban Life, 1973), 82.

<sup>317</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Atlanta Vigilance Committee Is Organized in Effort to Enforce Traffic Laws of City," August 5, 1923; "Steady Traffic Flow Sought by Council," October 21, 1923; "Vigilance Committee Warns 50 Motorists," August 9, 1923; "The Atlanta Safety Council," *City Builder* 8, no. 11 (January 1924): 22, 55.

of considerable citizen involvement, city leaders finally instituted an official police squad to take over enforcement.

Most large cities in the U.S. already had a special section within their police departments devoted exclusively to traffic control. Atlanta's belated bureau, enthusiastically endorsed by the Atlanta Safety Council, went operational on January 1, 1924.<sup>318</sup> The new section was tasked with preventing accidents, facilitating travel, and relieving traffic jams and congestion; it proved highly effective. During its first year, traffic arrests increased 40%, and traffic casualties dropped 50%.<sup>319</sup>

Despite the impressive numbers, the city council voted to abolish the bureau after only 14 months, purportedly in the interests of "efficiency and economy." Immediately, the number of crashes and deaths rose. Over the course of one week in 1925, six people died and 33 were injured in 62 traffic collisions. An editorial railed against the mounting carnage, blamed it on the loss of the traffic bureau, and stated, "Every big city in the country finds it necessary to specialize in traffic enforcement. Atlanta cannot longer be an exception. . . . Atlanta is suffering economically from the present situation. Something must be done."<sup>320</sup>

The writer smartly hit on the two points most likely to spark some action from city leaders: (1) other big cities have a traffic bureau; and (2) it is costing us money not having one.

Usually Atlanta leapt at an opportunity to prove its progressive character by emulating

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<sup>318</sup> In 1911, the city had established a horse-mounted traffic squad, but seems to have been disbanded within a few years; "Mounted Traffic Squad for City," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 12, 1911.

<sup>319</sup> "Special Traffic Bureau Indorsed By Police Heads," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 17, 1923; "Traffic Bureau Plan for City Wins Approval," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 29, 1923; Mathias and Anderson, *Horse to Helicopter: First Century of the Atlanta Police Department*, 82-93.

<sup>320</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Traffic Bureau Abolished By Council Action," February 6, 1925; "Put the Bureau Back!" March 5, 1925; "Flood Tide of Tragedy," June 18, 1925; "6 Killed, 33 Hurt in 62 Accidents Here in Week," October 18, 1925; "Traffic Bureau Needed," October 21, 1925.

northeastern cities, and acted quickly when negatives like carnage and congestion threatened its business reputation. But neither argument proved persuasive this time.

No new version of a special police traffic division materialized. Instead, the pile of bodies grew higher as traffic arrests plummeted. It got so bad that Councilman Edward Hamilton Inman (1881-1931), chair of the council's police committee and city influencer *par excellence*, threatened to fire any officer not making enough traffic arrests. Reciting the abysmal statistics for the first six months of 1925 (849 collisions, 21 deaths, more than 800 injured), he said, "If you men don't work better, you simply won't work at all." As usual, enforcement efforts briefly increased for a time, then quietly subsided.<sup>321</sup>

Three deadly years later, the newspaper wrote even more emphatically about the effect of traffic casualties on the city:

Something must be done to stop the number of accidents, in the name of humanity, and—cold-bloodedly speaking—in the interest of the economic welfare of this city and community. This is the great trading center of the southeast. Atlanta has the largest retail and department store trade of any city in the sixth federal reserve district. . . . Visitors must not become apprehensive as to the safety of Atlanta's streets. Thousands motor to the city each week to shop, go to the theater, and enjoy the cosmopolitan life.<sup>322</sup>

According to this article, traffic collisions negatively impacted the health of Atlanta's citizens, but more importantly, the health of its reputation as a regional shopping and entertainment destination. Playing its role in the growth coalition, the paper publicly called for civic action to halt this ongoing threat to city expansion and prosperity.

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<sup>321</sup> "Get Speeders Or Quit Force, Police Warned," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 2, 1925. Inman, of the wealthy cotton-broker Inman family, was an early auto enthusiast, owning and racing expensive cars as early as 1909. In addition to the brokerage firm, he was president of the Kimball House Company, and served on the boards of multiple financial and industrial entities. In 1924, he built the Philip Shutze-designed Swan House in Buckhead, a mansion now owned by the Atlanta History Center.

<sup>322</sup> "Make Streets Safe At Once," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 22, 1928. The Sixth District of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and portions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, "Atlanta Wins Her Fight for a Regional Bank," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1914; Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, <https://www.frbatlanta.org/about/atlantafed/>.

The understaffed police department had no adequate response to the dilemma. Focusing resources on downtown traffic enforcement allowed robbers and burglars to operate more freely in the suburbs. Taking officers off traffic duty to walk patrol in residential neighborhoods left the central streets in a tangle. In 1928, Chief Beavers observed how untenable the situation had become:

The increased traffic on our streets has made it necessary to take a large number of officers off of patrol duty and put them to regulating traffic, thus leaving a large portion of the city without police protection. This condition is growing worse, and will continue to grow worse until we are given sufficient officers to properly police the city as well as to regulate traffic.<sup>323</sup>

Not until 1929 did the city again create a special squad of officers assigned exclusively to traffic duty, which they continue to maintain in various forms today. When the new section with 20 men on foot and 24 on motorcycles went to work, the number of traffic arrests more than doubled (see graph below). Traffic arrests had hit a new peak of over 8,000 in 1924 with the creation of the Accident Prevention Bureau; they dropped to less than 5,000 in 1925 after the bureau's dissolution. With the establishment of the new traffic squad, traffic arrests more than doubled in 1929.<sup>324</sup>

By the end of the decade, city and community leaders as well as the police department had come to understand that traffic enforcement could no longer be a sporadic affair. The nature of policing had changed. Traffic control was on its way to becoming a principal component of policing, and the reason why today's officers often refer to their job as "working the streets."

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<sup>323</sup> *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, Georgia Year Ending December 31, 1928* (Atlanta, 1929), 8.

<sup>324</sup> "Special Traffic Squad Is Assigned To Daily Duties," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1929; *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, Georgia Year Ending December 31, 1928* (Atlanta, 1929), 3; *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, Georgia, Year Ending December 31, 1929* (Atlanta, 1930), 27.



The police were not the only ones having to accommodate the new circumstances created by the more cars on city streets. In addition to status, speed, pleasure, and convenience, driving an automobile provided countless citizens with a novel experience: an up-close and personal encounter with a city policeman. In 1906, officers made only 56 traffic arrests; in 1929, they made 10,921. Large numbers of city dwellers for the first time faced an arrest for vehicle law infractions, though few were taken to jail immediately. Most violators simply received a summons to appear the next day in Recorder's Court, but the process was unfamiliar and upsetting. It also proved costly in higher insurance rates for serious or repeat offenders.<sup>325</sup>

The number of overall arrests in the city of Atlanta during the 1920s skyrocketed. Also, the number of white arrests rose dramatically. The automobile accounts for both. In general fewer African Americans owned cars than whites, and consequently broke fewer traffic laws. The car proved to be the great equalizer in the city's race-based policing: for the first time, greater numbers of whites, both men and women, were arrested than Blacks. An in-depth look at vehicle ownership and traffic arrests can be found in the next chapter.

The possibility of an in-the-street interaction with law enforcement would have been unthinkable to the majority of Atlantans in 1900 or 1910, but during the 1920s, had become an increasingly commonplace occurrence. Life would never be the same again, as even the most respectable citizens and elected officials now appeared in court on traffic charges. Alternatively, riding a trolley seldom resulted in an arrest and citation—an additional benefit of mass transit seldom considered then or today. Declining streetcar ridership exposed more people, as automobile drivers or passengers, to the regulatory superstructure established for motordom.

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<sup>325</sup> The citizen of today is likewise "arrested" when given a traffic ticket, even though most people are unaware of the fact. A police officer is free to take a driver to jail for running a stop sign, but seldom does as the jails would be even more crowded than they are now, plus it is a boring waste of time.

## 5.7 Regulating Streetcars

The high volume of automobiles resulted from the actions taken by the pro-growth coalition to remake the city to accommodate and privilege cars at the expense of other street users. Mass transit in the form of the streetcar paid the highest cost, as motor vehicle proponents marginalized and eventually eliminated it completely. Continuous city expansion during the 1920s required the traction

company to lay always-expensive new track as it double-tracked

Table 9. GA Railway & Power Track Mileage Increases

Type of Track	1905	1918	1920	1927
Single Track	72	68	68.324	58.582
Double Track	70	150	157.840	175.722

formerly single-track lines (see table above<sup>326</sup>). By mid-decade, Georgia Power began utilizing “motor coaches” (aka, buses) to serve customers residing in outlying suburbs. It was a significant concession, signaling the switch from rail to road—the latest development in mass transit.<sup>327</sup>

In the early twenties, the Georgia Railway and Power Company faced significant challenges on numerous fronts: labor conflicts, low fares, poor morale, a bad public image, and stiff competition from the jitneys. They also confronted a skeptical city council and an antagonistic mayor (James Key) who saw no need to lend any form of aid. Labor problems took early precedence as the local union staged a three-day walkout on March 10, 1920 in a pay and contract dispute, following two strikes the previous decade. During the strike, the *Atlanta*

<sup>326</sup> Table data is from James M. Wright, “The Fare Problem of the Atlanta Street Railways,” *Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 6, no. 2 (May 1930): 183.

<sup>327</sup> Atlanta’s last streetcar ran on April 10, 1949. It could be argued that the demise of the streetcar system would have occurred much earlier except for two exceptional events: the Great Depression and World War II. Both curbed the use of automobiles by the general public and increased reliance on trolleys. The reasons are numerous and not the subject of this study, but both events brought disruptions to the nation’s transportation system as it functioned in late 1929. The result was a sort of artificial extension of the life of the streetcar while the use of motorized vehicles was temporarily curtailed.

*Constitution* reported on the resulting “grand parade” of nearly 20,000 cars and trucks in downtown—with not a trolley in sight.<sup>328</sup>

Unfortunately, worse-than-usual traffic congestion ruined the party. “The statement has often made that our streets would take care of the traffic if it were not for the streetcars. Another balloon bursted. . . . Anyone who was down town between 5 and 7 p. m. during the strike will affirm this.” The reporter’s eyewitness testimony that streetcars actually provided traffic relief quickly faded from memory, and the familiar narrative—streetcars cause congestion—quickly regained and retained its dominance.<sup>329</sup>

Annual contracts and pay raises brought the strikers back to work. A second fare hike, from six cents to seven cents, went into effect. The company hired the nationally-renowned public relations firm of Ivy Lee to refurbish its image. President Arkwright instituted a campaign to train workers and build collegiality and pride. He personally travelled the local speaking circuit to push back against the false narrative that streetcars caused congestion.<sup>330</sup>

In one speech to the Atlanta Automobile Association at the prestigious Capital City Club, he made three main points. First, his company paid for the pavement that motor vehicles destroyed. Second, the automobile cut into the company’s revenues by free-hauling prospective streetcar passengers, and by competition from the jitneys. Third, parked cars created congestion,

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<sup>328</sup> Martin, *Mule to Marta*, 2, 1902-1950, 60; James M. Wright, “The Fare Problem of the Atlanta Street Railways [Continuation],” *Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 6, no. 3 (August 1930): 278, 87.

<sup>329</sup> O. J. Willoughby, “Motor Pep,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1920.

<sup>330</sup> The first fare hike, from five to six cents, was enacted in 1919—the first streetcar fare hike in 22 years. “‘Come Seven’ Is Cry of Car Conductors To Their Passengers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 2, 1920; Martin, *Mule to Marta*, 2, 1902-1950, 80-81. “Ivy Lee Retained by Power Company,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 17, 1921; Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 78. Ivy Ledbetter Lee (1877-1934), a native Georgian, established a publicity firm in New York City with clients like Pennsylvania Railroad, Bethlehem Steel, the Rockefellers, and Standard Oil. He is considered one of the founders of modern public relations.

slowing streetcars and disrupting their schedules. He predicted that on-street parking in downtown would eventually be banned altogether with so many people driving cars.<sup>331</sup>

Amazingly, the automobile men gave Arkwright an enthusiastic reception. He was one of the power elite, a member of the most prestigious clubs, listed in the *Social Register*, and an owner of cars. He had an abundance of close friends in the automobile industry. He also presided over Georgia Railway and Power Company which supplied electricity and gas as well as streetcars to the city; every person at that meeting was one of his customers. While the speech might not have changed any minds about the place of the motor vehicle in Atlanta, it did generate some much-needed goodwill toward the traction company—goodwill which would soon prove critical.

By 1923, things were looking up for the street railway system, and they placed an order for 33 new streetcars. Even better, the company's arch nemesis, Mayor James L. Key, was voted out of office. New mayor, Walter Arthur Sims (1880-1953) had never been a huge streetcar fan, complaining that they did not have enough "hustle." Sims, like all of Atlanta's mayors during the 1920s, was not in the top tier of the growth coalition. An attorney, he was active in numerous fraternal organizations, belonged to none of the exclusive clubs, but was a member of First Baptist Church as well as the Ku Klux Klan. During his two terms in office (1923-27), the Klan prospered until its self-implosion; the traction company won its ten-year battle against the jitneys; and Atlanta became one of the best paved cities in the South.

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<sup>331</sup> "Trolley Company Auto Benefactor, Says Arkwright," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1922.

The first jitney appeared on the streets of Atlanta in January 1915. It operated like a cross between a city bus and a taxicab (see photo at right<sup>332</sup>), running up and down Peachtree Street between Five Points and the split at West Peachtree



Figure 28. Lakewood Jitney, Fulton County, 1920-29.

Street, stopping to pick-up or discharge riders. The standard fare was a jit, a slang term for a nickel (five cents).<sup>333</sup>

Atlanta's first jitney ordinance passed in 1919 at the urging of Mayor Key, who had been militating for municipal ownership of all public utilities since 1906. The law imposed few requirements on the owners, and did nothing to restrict their areas of operation, even when their runs matched the most heavily-traveled sections of trolley routes. Unlike the streetcar franchise, no regulation required jitneys to cover all sectors of the city, leaving them free to cherry-pick the most profitable lines.<sup>334</sup>

By the twenties, many jitney operations had evolved into sophisticated operations, having standardized routes with scheduled stops very much like a trolley line, except on tires, not rails. The earliest jitney type, a small five-passenger touring car, was joined by seven-passenger cars, and even 10- to 20-seat Mason Road King buses, making serious inroads into streetcar revenues.

<sup>332</sup> Figure 27 photo is FUL-940-85, from Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Archives, University System of Georgia, <https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/vg2/id/6971/>.

<sup>333</sup> "Fleet of 'Jitney' Busses May Soon Be Running in Streets of Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 29, 1915.

<sup>334</sup> "Let City Own Her Utilities, Say The People," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 26, 1906; Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 67.

The jit fare increased to ten cents.<sup>335</sup> The American Electric Railway Association issued this stern warning:

Just so long as jitneys and buses are permitted to skim the cream off of street railway traffic, they are working an injustice . . . to the car company. . . . The jitneys take away a large part of the street railways profitable portion of the business. The short haul business in the thickly populated districts is the portion of the revenue of the street railway companies from which they can obtain that comparatively small amount of profit which enables them to live and give service to the community as a whole. . . . The operation of jitneys should be confined to non-competitive and supplementary or auxiliary service.<sup>336</sup>

Some city council members saw jitneys as healthy competition to the street railway system, but estimates place the amount of fares they cost the streetcars during the 1920s at \$1,500-\$2,000 per day. The street railway system was losing money. New, outlying neighborhoods requested that trolley lines be extended to their locations, but the company could not raise enough capital for expansion. Carson observes that by this time, “The permissive jitney control law was looking more and more like an act of revenge perpetrated by petulant politicians rather than action taken in the public interest by responsible legislators.”<sup>337</sup>

In 1923, city council did pass an ordinance requiring each jitney owner to obtain a \$1,000 indemnity bond. Because of the cost, 66 of the 95 jitney companies ceased operations. The remaining jitneys could no longer conduct business on roads with trolley tracks or within two blocks of a streetcar.<sup>338</sup>

Even with its competition curtailed, Georgia Railway and Power remained unsatisfied. The company had already contemplated expanding into the motor coach business because laying

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<sup>335</sup> Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 45.

<sup>336</sup> “Report of the Committee on Fare Systems” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the American Electric Railway Association, Albany, NY, 1920), 170-72.

<sup>337</sup> “Street Railway Wants Added Responsibility,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 30, 1923; Carson, 75.

<sup>338</sup> “\$1,000 Indemnity Bond for Jitneys,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1923; “Jitney Men Given One Day of Grace,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 1, 1923.

track to reach riders in outlying suburbs proved too costly. It also realized that its bus service would be subject to a number of regulations from which jitneys were exempt. In a preemptive move to eliminate jitneys entirely, it boldly petitioned council in 1924 for an exclusive franchise to supply *all* of the mass transportation within the city. It was an either/or proposition in their view. As Atkinson, stated, “A highly regulated and taxed business and an unregulated business cannot both live on the same streets. . . . It must be a choice between jitneys and the street railway. Both cannot survive on the same streets.”<sup>339</sup>

The city council held a well-attended public hearing on the petition. Power company executives Atkinson and Arkwright spoke in its favor. Not surprisingly, the major speaker against was attorney and former mayor, James Key, representing the Atlanta Jitney Bus Association. Council chose to defer action, but citizens in the community, including many influential businessmen and real estate investors, continued to express their support of the streetcars, along with Atlanta’s City Club, Motor Club, and Safety Council. The Atlanta Automobile Association took a neutral position, simply calling on the city to build more streets in every direction. In general, growth advocates endorsed the abolition of jitneys, whose unfair competition threatened the streetcar and soon-to-be bus company, both of which aided municipal growth.<sup>340</sup>

In the midst of the jitney war, the traction company gained a strong ally in John A. Beeler. The city council agreed that Atlanta needed a survey of its traffic problems. In February 1924, they chose the Beeler Organization, Inc., Consulting Engineers, of New York City to conduct a ten-month-long study paid for by the traction company. The report’s findings and

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<sup>339</sup> “Bus Line Service Plans Perfected, Says Atkinson,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 5, 1924.

<sup>340</sup> “Power Company’s Petition Heard; Action Is Deferred,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1923; “Safety Council Against Jitneys,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 15, 1925.

recommendations, issued in December 1924, vindicated the streetcar company's assertions about fares, the jitneys, and prevailing traffic patterns.<sup>341</sup>

The street railway had long claimed, based on its own studies, that during the evening rush hour (5-6 p.m.), motor vehicles constituted 90% of the traffic, and streetcars only 9%. However, autos conveyed only 17.75% of the people, while streetcars carried more than 82% of the people. Most traffic surveys counted the *number of vehicles*, when in reality the *number of passengers* was a more important count. Cars carried on average two persons, while a streetcar averaged 49 persons. Taking into account the greater length of streetcars, the average trolley still transported 49 people to the six carried by three automobiles. The street rail system did not cause the bulk of the city's gridlock (cars did), and it provided a much-needed service to Atlanta's traveling public.<sup>342</sup>

Beeler's report fully supported the streetcar company's statistics. During a single rush hour, it documented 346 streetcars carrying 16,286 people, while 3,505 other vehicles carried only 6,345 people in the same period. More than ten times the number of cars transported *less than half* as many individuals as the trolleys. A compilation of the annual numbers, costs, and miles traveled were even more compelling (see table below<sup>343</sup>). The study documented the overwhelming economy and efficiency of the streetcar over the automobile in moving people through the city. It recommended that streetcars should be given precedence in traffic movement because more people were dependent on them.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Martin, *Mule to Marta*, 2, 1902-1950, 149.

<sup>342</sup> "Power Company Asks 10 Cents for Single Fare," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 2, 1923.

<sup>343</sup> Table 10 created by author from data in Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 3, 5-6, 73.

<sup>344</sup> "Engineer Urges Need of Revision of Traffic Laws," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 6, 1924; *ibid.*, 39; John W. Colton, "Streets Becoming Choked," *AERA* 12, no. 5 (December 1923): 948, 951, 953-54.



A 1928 Detroit report comparing private automobiles to public transportation, echoed Beeler's findings, declaring that "if either type of vehicle is to be given preference over the other,

*Table 10. 1924 Atlanta Passenger Vehicle Use and Cost*

Vehicle Type	Number of Vehicles	Number of Passengers Carried Annually <sup>1</sup>	Passengers per Trip	Annual Mileage <sup>1</sup>	Cost to Passenger (cents per mile)	Total Cost to Users in the Seven Mile Zone <sup>2</sup>
Streetcars	330	75,500,000	35.3	14,000,000	2.00	\$5,139,000
Private automobiles	27,540	54,000,000	1.8	176,000,000	5.16	\$16,391,000
Jitney buses	136	4,500,000	3.6	6,000,000	4.26	\$417,000
Taxicabs	147	1,300,000	1.4	3,000,000	32.18	\$742,000

<sup>1</sup>In round numbers. <sup>2</sup>The Seven Mile Zone denoted the area of operations of the Georgia Railway and Power Company (which included electricity, gas, steam, and streetcars). It was a circle with a seven-mile radius, centered at the northeast corner of the Union Passenger Depot, and extended well beyond Atlanta's 1924 city limits. Its modern boundaries would roughly be Buckhead, north; Decatur, east; Hapeville, south; and I-285, west.

it unquestionably must be the street car and bus." That study, conducted by civil engineers, found that nearly 80% of the passengers in the afternoon rush hour were carried by mass transit (streetcars and buses), which comprised less than 6% of all the vehicles on the road. In comparison, only 20% of passengers traveled by automobiles and taxicabs, which comprised 85% of the moving vehicles. The motorists were the ones contributing the most to traffic congestion. Mass transportation in its most efficient forms provided the only solution to transportation problems in the largest cities.<sup>345</sup>

Beeler's report also had suggestions for improving the efficacy of the streetcars; specifically, re-routing trolleys off the Peachtree-Whitehall corridor, leaving it and the Spring Street viaduct free for motor vehicle traffic only. In addition to increasing trolley fares, the report

<sup>345</sup> Rapid Transit Commission, *The Relation of Individual to Collective Transportation* (Detroit: Heitman-Garand, 1928), 29, 31. The report recommended high-speed motorways to and inexpensive parking at the street-rail termini, making the use of trolleys for transport downtown more attractive (they were already more economical). The reduction in autos in the central business district would reduce traffic congestion as well as increase the speed of mass transit, making all the riders happier. Atlanta never attempted any coordination between trolleys and cars; never advocated "park and ride" solutions, adopted in cities like New York, Detroit, and Chicago in the 1920s; never considered rapid transit in the form of a subway or elevated railway with an exclusive right of way—at least until the inauguration of MARTA in 1975. Instead, Atlanta only sought to eliminate streetcars—the dominant mass transit mode, utilized by thousands daily.

also strongly advocated for a unified transportation system, eliminating jitneys and allowing the streetcar company to extend its service using motor coach lines.<sup>346</sup>

Beeler, in no uncertain terms, censured the jitneys as parasites. “The jitney is merely living off the best and most highly developed territory and operating on well paved thoroughfares largely paid for by the railway.” In 1925, as a result of his *Report*, the city council

finally voted to revoke the 1919 jitney ordinance, and created a new, much more restrictive law. Among other requirements, jitney buses had a 17-passenger minimum, and could not operate in sections of the city already served by



Figure 29. Fageol double-deck bus to Morningside Park.

the street railway company.<sup>347</sup> The jitneys were not abolished and could still run in Atlanta, but not where the streetcar company had operations. Within days of the new ordinance taking effect, Georgia Railway and Power announced the inauguration of its bus service to the suburban

<sup>346</sup> “Increase in Trolley Fares and Elimination of Jitneys Are Favored in Beeler’s Report,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1924; Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, v-vii, 79.

<sup>347</sup> Beeler, 45. “Jitney Busses Are Banned From Operating In Atlanta; Court Action Threatened,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1925; “Text of Ordinance Barring Jitneys From City Streets,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1925; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 56, §§ 1700-19, 35-45. Legal challenges to the ordinance by James Key and the Atlanta Jitney Bus Association were not sustained, “Court Upholds Jitney Decision,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 23, 1925.

neighborhoods of Ansley Park, Sylvan Hills, and Morningside (see photo above<sup>348</sup>). It proved a successful power move which effectively eliminated jitney bus service in Atlanta.<sup>349</sup>

The company implemented other Beeler recommendations throughout 1925 and 1926 to increase efficiency, attract customers, and reduce traffic congestion. It re-routed tracks, purchased larger streetcars, and spruced up all rolling stock, inside and out. The public responded with generous patronage and company revenues increased, especially with the new bus lines. The power company's public relations manager exuberantly proclaimed the street rail systems good service, without which no city could progress. "It would be futile for Atlanta to invite new industries to locate here if good street car service could not be listed among Atlanta's many assets." Some writers have called the late 1920s the trolley system's golden years, yet Garrett registers the irony that at the height of the company's popularity, the rubber-tired buses "sounded the first faint death knell for the steel-wheeled street car."<sup>350</sup>

One negative constant remained from the early years of the decade: the refrain that streetcars caused congestion. Studies, statistics, logic, even the assertions of the national traffic engineering experts did not matter. Most city officials and influential businessmen cast the trolley in the role of "villain rather than victim" of road congestion. Instead of seeing mass

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<sup>348</sup> The new Fageol double-deck bus operated under the traction company's subsidiary, Atlanta Coach Company. The one pictured served one of the new suburban neighborhoods, Morningside Park; Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Georgia Railway and Power Company 1926* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power, 1926), 12.

<sup>349</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Council Gives Trolley Heads Bus Monopoly," March 3, 1925; "Power Company Installs Subsidiary Bus Service To Suburbs of Atlanta," March 8, 1925; "Bus Service Begins Today," March 8, 1925; Timothy J. Crimmins, "Bungalow Suburbs East and West," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 26, nos. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1982): 84.

<sup>350</sup> L. K. Starr, "Atlanta's Street Car Service Unsurpassed," *City Builder* (April 1927): 12, 40-42; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:429; Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 91; Martin, *Mule to Marta*, 2, 1902-1950, 159. One writer takes a different position, saying that the 1920s was decade when the automobile eclipsed the streetcar in providing transportation for Atlanta citizens, and ended the only period in the twentieth century when mass transit flourished in the city; see Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 45, 70-73. A careful look at the data demonstrates that trolleys, by 1929, still carried more riders than automobiles; therefore, the car did not completely eclipse the streetcar entirely within the decade of the 1920s.

transit by rail as a solution, they saw it as the problem. Either they truly did not understand the difference between moving numbers of people versus moving numbers of vehicles through the streets, or they chose to ignore the facts. They undeniably preferred to retain the autonomy and flexibility afforded by automobiles for private and commercial use. At the same time they endlessly bemoaned the congestion, collisions, and carnage—and the subsequent damage to Atlanta’s reputation—generated by their own actions and choices.<sup>351</sup>

In 1925, city leaders began to push for the elimination of “unnecessary” trolley stops throughout the city. The moves were part of the Forward Atlanta campaign, a massive city advertising scheme initiated by the Chamber of Commerce, which will be discussed in more depth in a later chapter. As the name made obvious, a major theme of the campaign was the progressive character of Atlanta, its constant forward motion as a successful and expanding locus of commerce, industry, and economic opportunity.

A series of newspaper ads referenced a more literal component of the “forward motion” idea—the rapid movement of traffic through the city. Three prominent men and Forward Atlanta leaders personally appeared in these ads. Ivan E. Allen, Sr.’s credentials are listed (see advertisement below). Thaddeus Johnson (1879-1953) was president of the Atlanta Automobile Dealers’ Association and manager of the city’s Olds Motor Works (later Oldsmobile). W. R. C. Smith (1872-1941) was president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, a highly successful city publisher and the prime mover in the Forward Atlanta campaign. Their three ads called for Atlanta to speed up and give automobiles a chance to move. Slow street rail service hindered not just traffic, but also city progress. Streetcars acted as “a dam against the swift and regular flow of

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<sup>351</sup> Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 91.

automobile traffic during rush hours,” because other vehicles could not pass a stopped streetcar. Unnecessary trolley stops absolutely had to be eliminated.<sup>352</sup>

Ironically, the streetcar company paid for the ads. Georgia Railway and Power played an active role in Forward Atlanta, and it also had an interest in reducing the number of streetcar stops. Routes with more stops created scheduling difficulties, especially coordinating with feeder buses and interurban lines, plus they were slower and more costly for the

## “Eliminate Unnecessary Stops”

—says *Ivan Allen*



**IVAN E. ALLEN**  
Chairman “Forward Atlanta” Advertising commission, former president chamber of commerce, former president Southeastern fair, former state senator, president Ivan Allen-Marshall Co., and civic leader for more than two decades.

“**F**ORWARD, ATLANTA!” is our slogan now, and rapid transportation will help to quicken all activities in our city. **Faster street car service is needed**, and elimination of the large number of present car stops that are unnecessary will be one of the easiest and quickest ways to give Atlanta rapid transportation.

“Elimination of unnecessary stops has improved street car service in all other cities where it has been tried. Let’s give Atlanta also the benefits of this better service.

“Atlanta is going forward. But, unless our street car service is speeded up, it will delay our progress. I am in favor of eliminating needless stops in the interest of Atlanta’s advancement.”

(Signed) IVAN E. ALLEN.

(Published in the interest of BETTER STREET CAR SERVICE for Atlanta by the Georgia Railway & Power Co.)

Figure 30. Forward Atlanta ad, *Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1925.

company to operate. The Beeler *Report* even recommended increasing the distance between stops in downtown to speed up traffic flow.

By reducing trolley access points the company may have alienated some customers, but the streetcar division was just part of its business. Hydroelectric power overwhelming provided the most revenue, and the company signaled its increasing importance in 1927. It changed its name to the Georgia Power Company when becoming a subsidiary of the Southeastern Power & Light Company (today the Southern Company).<sup>353</sup>

<sup>352</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “‘Eliminate Unnecessary Stops’—says Ivan Allen,” December 7, 1925; “‘Give Traffic a Chance to MOVE’—says T. K. Johnson,” December 10, 1925; “‘Atlanta Must Speed Up’—says W. R. C. Smith,” December 14, 1925. It was illegal for other vehicles to pass a stopped streetcar which was taking on or discharging passengers, Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 95, § 3148.

<sup>353</sup> Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 37-38. A summer-long drought in 1925 reduced the company’s hydroelectric power output so much that electrical service had to be rationed, affecting manufacturers, homeowners, and even the streetcars across north Georgia. The setback demonstrated the

Despite dropping “railway” from its name, Georgia Power by no means abandoned its transit operations. That same year, the Railroad Commission of the State of Georgia granted the company another fare increase, from seven cents to ten cents, along with the rather remarkable admission that the 1920 one-cent fare increase had been too low.<sup>354</sup> The traction company also continued to push back against the narrative that streetcars caused congestion. The publication of the city’s 1929 traffic survey had conclusively proved that cars—not trolleys—made up the bulk of Atlanta’s traffic, so the company ran a series of ads touting the number of passengers the streetcars carried. The ad copy concluded that, “Obviously street cars don’t cause traffic congestion, they reduce it. Without them to do the biggest part of the job in city transportation, traffic conditions would be insufferable.”<sup>355</sup>

Suburban residential development, initially driven by the streetcar in the 1800s and early 1900s, was almost exclusively driven by motor vehicles in the twenties. Most Atlantan families still did not own an automobile (see Figure 31 below), as the clamor for mass transit by the suburban residents of Ansley Park, Morningside Estates, Virginia Highlands, and Sylvan Hills demonstrated. For Georgia Power, the motor coach proved a more cost-effective way to expand its operations into the outlying suburbs as laying trolley track was too expensive. Glidewell notes that the suburbs destroyed the densely developed urban communities that provided residents with

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company’s need for more water-powered electricity generating plants, but the parent company, Georgia Railway & Electric Company, refused to act. In response, Georgia Railway and Power (after some consolidations) in 1926-27 affiliated with Southeastern Power and Light as Georgia Power Company. It then was able to operate statewide. The transit system’s personnel remained the same, with Atkinson and Arkwright serving as board chair and president. Today, Georgia Power is the largest subsidiary of the Southern Company, which itself is one of the largest electricity-producing entities in the U.S.; Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, 88-89; Casey P. Cater, *Regenerating Dixie: Electric Energy and the Modern South* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 110.

<sup>354</sup> Wright, “The Fare Problem of the Atlanta Street Railways [Continuation],” 288-89.

<sup>355</sup> “The Traffic Model,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 29, 1930.

nearby everyday necessities. Their automobile-oriented development spread out those amenities over distances that one could only cross in a motor vehicle, car or bus.<sup>356</sup>

The pro-growth community did not vilify buses, despite the fact that they shared the traffic-congesting characteristics of streetcars so-often complained about (frequent stops, wait times for passenger loading and unloading). Instead, it actively championed the elimination of jitneys in favor of the power company's embrace of coaches. Apparently, a city franchise on mass transit per se was not the problem, just mass transit on *rails*. After all, automobile manufacturers produced buses, too.

By 1920, the motor vehicle clearly had surpassed the trolley as the key transportation component of city expansion, with unmatched advantages for industry, trade, and, to an extent, residential development. By their own admission, powerful city figures deliberately crafted the automobile-centric superstructure (financing, traffic controls, personnel, and legislation) along with its corresponding infrastructure (viaducts, attenuated sidewalks, curb re-design, and wider roads with smoother paving). While the pro-growth advocates enacted the various components of both structures in a piecemeal fashion over the years, the overall effect was a comprehensive remaking of Atlanta—physically, legislatively, organizationally, and fiscally.

The sweeping transformations implemented in the 1920s overshadowed earlier efforts; it was the decade of the consolidation of motordom. Like the construction of the viaducts, the revision of the city codes and the restructuring of city government lie at the heart of this dissertation. Transportation had long been recognized as key to city growth, and the latest mode—the motor vehicle—now superseded all others. Powerful decision-makers initiated,

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<sup>356</sup> Collin R. Glidewell, "A Pedestrian Transit Mall on Peachtree? How History, Policy, and Legislation Can Recreate a Proud Town," *bepress Digital Commons* (March 2007).

enacted, and sustained that process of city transformation for the car. All of these massive changes were instituted before most Atlantans even owned a one.

However, in Atlanta, numbers of the wealthy owned multiple cars. In 1909, elite businessman Edward H. Inman personally owned two cars. He paid \$6,500 for a six-cylinder Stearns roadster (about \$182,000 today), which he used for racing, while his four-cylinder Stearns touring car cost \$5,000 (about \$140,000 today). Ivan Allen, Sr., in 1928, owned several cars, including one he gave to his son, Ivan Allen, Jr., upon his matriculation at Atlanta's Boys High School. The members of the Atlanta Safety Council in 1924 all owned at least one automobile, and most owned fleets of vehicles for their businesses.<sup>357</sup>

A meaningful way to look at numbers of people and cars is to consider the number of families who owned a car. The graph below (Figure 31) charts the percentage of Atlanta *families* who owned a car from 1916 to 1930.<sup>358</sup> In 1929, the percentage reached a high of 47.9% (and fell again after the onset of the Great Depression). But it never reached 50% during the time period of this study. Despite the fact that a slim majority of its citizens did *not* own a motor vehicle, the city of Atlanta passed copious amounts of legislation and invested millions of dollars in transforming its streets and their usages to accommodate the car and to restrict all other street users. No one can reasonably contend that such actions exemplified democracy in action when the majority of "the people" had little or no say in these transformations.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> "Ed Inman's Autos Injured By Flames," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 24, 1909; "Damaged Machines Are Sold By Ed Inman," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 1, 1909; modern prices are based on the Consumer Price Index, calculated at Measuring Worth, 2020, <https://www.measuringworth.com/dollarvaluetoday/>. Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 98. Not many teenagers had their own cars in the 1920s, and Ivan, Jr.'s made him very popular. "The Atlanta Safety Council," *City Builder* 8, no. 11 (January 1924): 22.

<sup>358</sup> Percentage of families living in Atlanta who owned a car, from 1916 to 1930; data from the U.S. Census, the Georgia Secretary of State, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, and the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>359</sup> Using data from multiple sources, numbers were adjusted to include private automobiles only and to make an allowance for multi-car families: *Annual Reports of the Secretary of State of the State of Georgia*, 1916-



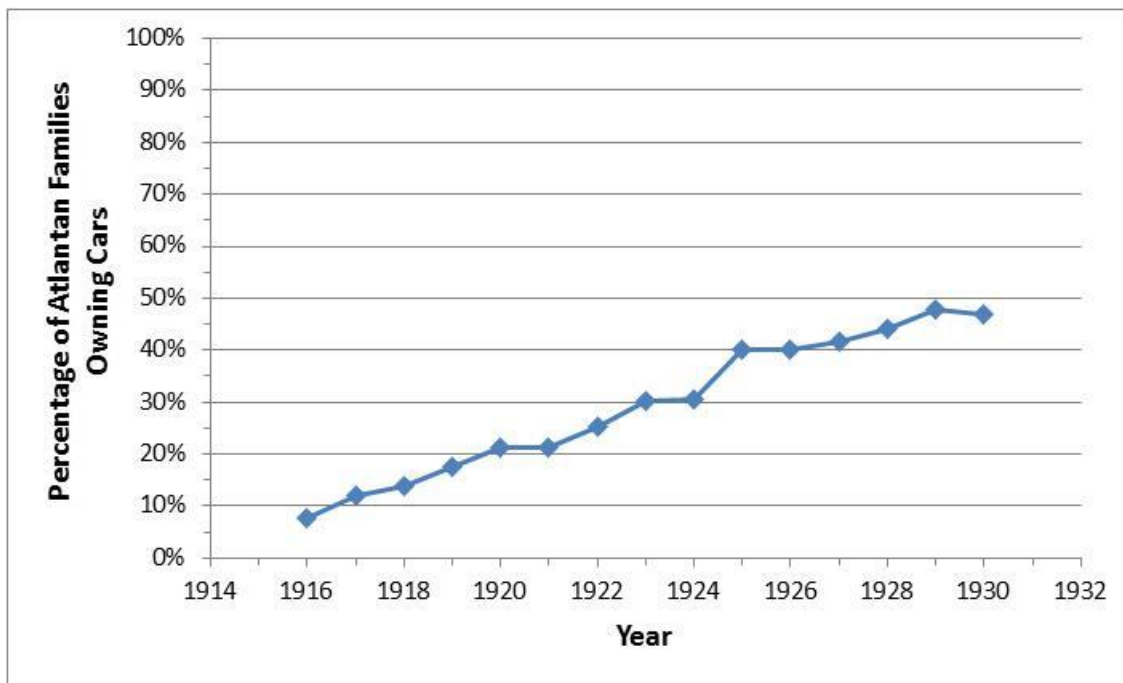


Figure 31. Atlanta car-owning families, 1916-1930.

While all non-vehicular street users lost ground in the contest for street space, the biggest loser was the streetcar system. Although trolleys moved much greater numbers of people through the city than cars, the great fiction, perpetrated by the power elites in traffic studies and in the media, counted a single automobile as equivalent to a single streetcar. The number that weighed most heavily was number of *vehicles*, not number of *passengers* carried. In that argument, the trolley—or any mass transit system—by definition could not win, and consequently lost street space. Adding insult to injury, the street railway paid taxes to use the public streets *and* paid to pave the roadways. No automobile owner paid to use the public streets. The gasoline tax, which was (and still is) minuscule, has *never* covered the cost of road maintenance and paving,

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1932; U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Office of Highway Information Management, “Highway Statistics Summary to 1995, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/summary95/>; “18% of Car Owning Families Have More Than One Car,” National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, *Facts and Figures of the Automobile Industry* (New York: National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, 1930), 1927, pg. 39; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*, Population, Vol. 6, pg. 296.

especially since most state legislatures, including Georgia's, frequently utilized the gas tax for purposes other than road maintenance.

Atlanta by the end of 1929 could without dispute be labeled an automotive city, even if all its people were not yet "automobilic."<sup>360</sup> Influential business and civic leaders had engineered the reshaping of the city infrastructure, and had without compunction inaugurated ordinances privileging the car on the city's streets, shunting aside or outlawing other street users. Taxpayer dollars in ever-increasing amounts paid for changes to the streets and sidewalks as well as the installation and maintenance of all the regulatory devices and personnel to enforce the laws. The system of automobility was well on its way to being fully integrated into the city's fabric, society, and culture.<sup>361</sup>

The streetcar had the disadvantage of running on a schedule and only in specified locations; it lacked the autonomy afforded by a car. The trolley also was shared space; *anybody* could ride one, if they had a nickel (or a dime in 1927). Streetcars were the transit mode of necessity for ordinary office personnel, shop girls, store clerks, non-elite housewives, domestic workers, and laborers of all types. A well-to-do white person might have to sit beside or near them. The automobile freed the monied not only from time and space constraints, but also from the possibility of contact with other classes—and races.

African-Americans on streetcars, even though segregated at the back, sat or stood nearby. The closely-confined trolley interiors, where the races daily met face-to-face, were the sites of ongoing conflict. Jim Crow laws might effectively separate Blacks from whites in many city

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<sup>360</sup> "Automobility," *New York Times*, March 3, 1922, p. 12, one of the first documented uses of the term "automobility," and the description of an "automotive" or "automobilic" people.

<sup>361</sup> Norton observes that by the mid-1920s, organized automotive interest groups began calling themselves "motordom," Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 3. Urry describes the "automobility system," and its exercise of domination, John Urry, "The 'System' of Automobility," *Theory Culture & Society* 21, no. 4-5 (August-October 2004): 25-27.

spaces, but on the street and in the streetcars, that division broke down. Traveling in the privacy of an automobile provided an escape from the mixed-race crowds on mass transit. Automobile travel further divided the segregated and segregating city.

## 6 SEGREGATING THE CITY

The census of 1920 marked the first time that the majority of Americans lived in urban areas. Although the state of Georgia remained overwhelmingly rural, Atlanta's population grew by nearly 35% between 1910 and 1920. Increasing urbanization in the U.S. meant cities with expanding territories, populations, influence, and wealth. Valuable downtown real estate became scarce and more costly than ever. Aided by advances in construction technologies and architectural designs, builders erected ever-taller skyscrapers for maximum square footage on minimal lot sizes, intensifying density in the city core.

Increasing automobility served as an urban segregating mechanism. Cars facilitated the development of suburban residential areas, deepening the live/work divide, at least for whites. Automobile ownership was virtually mandatory for those who lived in the outer neighborhoods with no streetcar service and sparse bus lines. Downtown morphed into the central business district as elegant homes on graciously-landscaped parcels along Peachtree and Washington streets fell when owners sold out to commercial concerns and moved north toward Buckhead or east into Druid Hills. In the poorer, in-town neighborhoods, more people jammed into closer quarters, especially African Americans, many of whom could not afford private automobiles and had to rely on the streetcars for transportation. They could not have lived in an Atlanta all-white suburb anyway, even if they had a car and the money to purchase a house there.

One method of gaining control in the midst of unregulated, chaotic growth was to zone the city, identifying its essential elements and separating them into discrete, carefully delineated geographic sectors. The component parts could be variously defined by land use, building or parcel size, economic indicators, or cultural constructs. A form of Taylorism writ large, zoning

provided a means of scientifically managing city growth, and as such held great appeal for place entrepreneurs.

The racial animus already codified in Georgia's and Atlanta's Jim Crow laws intensified with the city's zoning efforts during the 1920s. The 1922 Atlanta Zone Plan extended the partitioning to residential race sectors, claiming that such zoning would benefit everyone. After neighborhoods were segregated, the streets constituted perhaps the largest remaining space where the races mixed by necessity and on a daily basis. Pedestrians jostled on overflowing sidewalks and riders jammed into overfull trolleys. In the downtown district, virtually all categories of persons intermingled frequently. Not all the encounters were friendly or harmless. No matter how much power elites and city officials sought to divide the city into functionally and racially distinct sectors, the public streets remained inescapably integrated.

### **6.1 Segregating Stratagems**

Atlanta, like other southern cities, was already well-practiced in hegemonic segregation before the 1920s zoning craze. Acting illegally but with impunity, whites since Reconstruction had employed brute physical force in the form of lynchings, peonage, and individual as well as mob violence to dominate, suppress, terrify, and kill African Americans. Legally, white Georgians enacted the first race-based transportation restrictions in 1891, and continued to buttress their supremacy with Jim Crow legislation throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Segregation of the races in Atlanta was mandated by both custom and municipal ordinance in restaurants, hotels, saloons, barber shops, prisons, chain-gangs, parks, libraries,

swimming pools, and cemeteries where, even in the paupers' section, Blacks and whites were separated.<sup>362</sup>

Conditions for Blacks further deteriorated with the 1915 re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan, the vigilante enforcers of racial separation. Atlanta carried the designation as the Imperial City of the Invisible Empire, and estimates of the number of Atlantans in the local chapter, Nathan Bedford Forrest Klan No. 1, range between 15,000 and 40,000. The city benefitted economically by the presence of the Klan through its robe factory, publishing company, and other entities. The *Atlanta Constitution* covered its activities, meetings, participation in community events, and Lanier University without editorial comment. One national journal editor remarked on the city's

attitude toward the group, "Atlanta . . . does not consider the Klan a menace or a joke, but an institution, like the Elks, the Salvation Army, or any other." In other words, for many white Atlantans, the Klan was

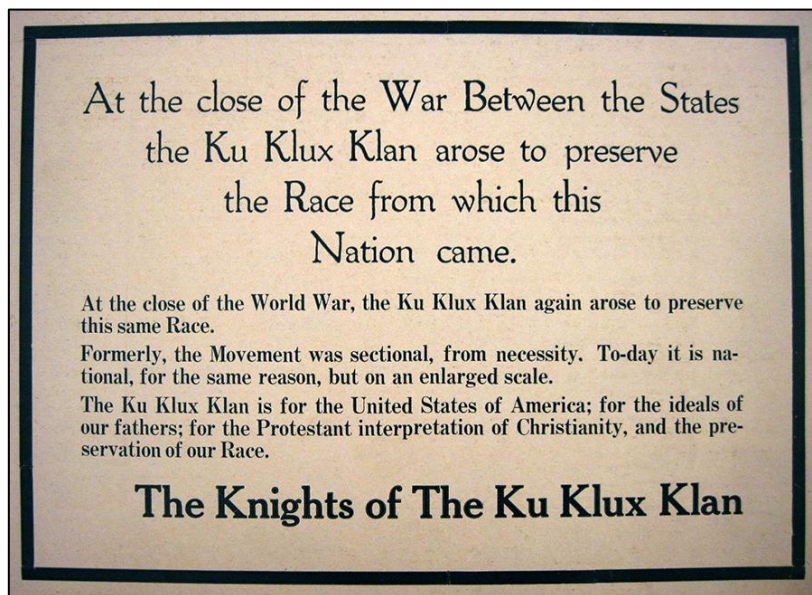


Figure 32. Klan advertisement, 1924.

simply another civic association for men of good will.<sup>363</sup>

<sup>362</sup> The law required railroad and streetcar companies to provide separate but equal accommodations for "white and colored passengers;" State of Georgia, *The Code of the State of Georgia, Adopted December 15th, 1895*, vol. 2 (Atlanta: Foote & Davies, 1896), § 2269 -2274 (Acts 1890-91, p. 157, § 2188).

<sup>363</sup> White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970," 215, lists 15,000 in 1923. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915-1930*, 262, fn. 17, cites a 1921 estimate of 40,000. Edward T. Devine, "The Klan in Texas," *Survey* 48, no. 1 (April 1, 1922): 10.

In 1920, the Klan began to recruit nationally under the direction of a fund-raising agency, the Southern Publicity Association. Disavowing the terroristic acts attributed to it, the group endorsed Americanism, Protestantism, temperance, and adherence to traditional social mores (see advertisement above<sup>364</sup>). Their message proved attractive to many white city dwellers disturbed by modernity, changing cultural values, and perceived threats to their racial supremacy. Henry Ford called Klan members patriots, and claimed the group was working for “the preservation of the supremacy of the true American in his own land.” The *Dearborn Independent*, his weekly newspaper, was filled with anti-Semitic articles. It was mailed free to schools and libraries across the country; Ford dealerships were required to sell subscriptions along with their automobiles.<sup>365</sup>

Between 1923 and 1927, Atlanta was led by Mayor Walter A. Sims, and the state of Georgia by Governor Clifford M. Walker, both Klansmen. Having them in the two highest offices in the state lent respectability to the group, as well as significant influence. A former Atlanta police chief admitted that at one time, most of the members of the police department were Klan members. However, violence and scandals brought sharp declines in membership, and by the late 1920s, the Klan had lost much of its potency. Zoning provided an alternative, non-violent way to keep African Americans in their places.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> The Klan advertisement is from W. E. McAllister, *Confederate Veterans Annual Year Book 1861-1924* (Atlanta, 1924).

<sup>365</sup> Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 21; Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom’: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 221-22; Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915-1930*, 9-12, 18-19; Victoria Saker Woest, “Insecure Equality: Louis Marshall, Henry Ford, and the Problem of Defamatory Antisemitism, 1920-1929,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (December 2004): 882. *Atlanta Constitution*: “Defense Is Made of Ku-Klux Klan,” November 8, 1920; “Ford Takes Role as Klan Defender,” August 27, 1924.

<sup>366</sup> The police chief in question was Herbert T. Jenkins, who joined the Atlanta police force in 1932, and served as chief 1947-72; Kuhn et al., *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*, 311-16. In an interview with Floyd Hunter in the late 1940s, Atlanta’s mayor admitted that there was still considerable Klan activity in the city, and that many of the police, firemen, and streetcar conductors were members; Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 147.

Long before Jim Crow, city authorities controlled Black areas with unjust measures by sometimes (literally) turning off the municipal spigot. Those citizens received far less than their fair share of public services like running water, schools, sewer lines, and street lighting. Even the streets in Black neighborhoods remained “unwashed, unswept, and unmended,” despite near-constant protests from the African American media and leadership. Only one city institution would never be charged with a lack of attention to African American citizens, at least while they were on the street in a white section of town: the police department.<sup>367</sup>

African Americans made up a constituency easily ignored as they could not vote in most municipal elections. No city official’s job depended on African American ballots; whites comprised the critical voting bloc. Only when seeking the passage of bond referenda did elite policymakers and government authorities patronize the Black electorate by promising to build new schools or extend sewer lines in exchange for their support. Otherwise, African American neighborhoods seldom entered into the political calculations of those in power, i.e., white men.

Whether by police harassment or withholding vital utilities, civic leaders ensured that almost one third of its population was less healthy, less safe, and had fewer educational and economic opportunities. As Brownell’s notes, the commercial-civic elites’ manipulation of the distribution and utilization of municipal resources and facilities functioned as a means of institutionalized social control. Zoning would provide another hegemonic oversight tool for white authorities.<sup>368</sup>

The paving and naming of roads also afforded very tangible means of separating citizens. A single street could serve as a physical delineator of racially-distinct sectors. Crossing through

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<sup>367</sup> *Atlanta Independent*, May 29, 1920.

<sup>368</sup> Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 143; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 166.



an intersection, the modern asphalt or concrete paving might give way to an inferior surface, such as macadam or Belgian block, or no surfacing at all. The name of the roadway could change, often indicating that one had traversed between Black and white living spaces. Atlanta today retains numerous street name changes which appear random to the uninitiated and are frustrating to all. A typical example is the north-south thoroughfare, Glen Iris Avenue-Randolph Street, which runs through 1.3 miles of the old Fourth Ward district between Ponce de Leon Avenue on the north and Edgewood Avenue on the south. The northern, Glen Iris Avenue end housed whites in the 1920s, mostly Jews and persons of German descent. South of Highland Avenue, the name changed to Randolph Street and was exclusively African American.<sup>369</sup> As former city mayor Maynard Jackson observed, “Whites didn’t want to live on the same street as blacks. So blacks lived on ‘Randolph Street’ and whites lived on ‘Glen Iris.’”<sup>370</sup> Despite their location on the same street, the two neighborhoods remained physically and experientially distinct, exemplifying the two different Atlantas.

## 6.2 Zoning: Segregating the City

Zoning proved to be the most comprehensive and effective way to segregate the races in a citywide fashion, but it accomplished much more than that. It allowed city officials to organize, direct, and facilitate Atlanta’s explosive expansion. In a way, the place entrepreneurs had been almost too successful. Rapid and haphazard expansion had brought unforeseen problems, such as traffic congestion, which threatened to undermine the smooth functioning of the city and

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<sup>369</sup> The 1925 Atlanta city directory is the first to list Glen Iris Drive (originally named Drive, today is Avenue), running north from Highland Avenue, a continuation of Randolph Street. Earlier city directories show Randolph Street running north to the city limits; from *Atlanta City Directory 1925* (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1925), 1365, and *Atlanta City Directory 1923* (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1923), 1463.

<sup>370</sup> Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family*, 18. Maynard Holbrook Jackson, Jr. (1938-2003), grandson of legendary Black leader, John Wesley Dobbs, was Atlanta’s first African American mayor, serving three terms: 1974-82, and 1990-94. Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport is partially named for him in honor of his airport expansion work.

jeopardize the very growth it sought. Yet it was not solely for local well-being that they sought to tame the civic disorder. They had positioned Atlanta as a regional leader with an increasingly national reputation which could suffer if the problems associated with progress continued. Zoning provided a tool by which the growth coalition could maintain its position of control within the city while allowing it to correct existing problems, encourage economic growth, and take advantage of development opportunities in newly-annexed city territory.<sup>371</sup>

Zoning, in its segregation of land uses, separated where people lived from where they worked, shopped, worshipped, and sought services (e.g., banks, barbershops, the post office, hair salons), entertainment (e.g., theaters, restaurants, sports venues), and recreation (e.g., parks). Slowly, the city was being reconfigured so that owning an automobile was becoming more of a necessity. Between 1900 and the start of World War I, the majority of car owners lived in rural areas. Urban dwellers could walk or take a trolley to most places in town. All that was about to change.

U.S. cities had, from the 1600s, directed how property owners could use their land, whether it was keeping pigs off public roads or requiring fireproof construction of buildings. During the 1800s, regulating land use by means of deed restrictions and land covenants was common, but enforcement difficulties led most American cities to terminate these forms of private regulation. By the 1920s, municipalities had turned to a public and more comprehensive land-use strategy which utilized their delegated police powers to protect the public order, health, safety, and morals of the community by a local zoning ordinance.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 101-02, 24, 84.

<sup>372</sup> Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*, 428-30. Police powers are regulated by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, and local authority to "police" land for the public welfare derives from state constitutions. Georgia first passed zoning enabling legislation for Atlanta's City Commission in July 1921, effective in August; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Charter of the City of Atlanta, Ch. 26, § 403. The intricacies of the proper wording of the enabling legislation led U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, in 1924, to appoint a committee to draft the Standard State Zoning

Welke documents the widespread “regulatory urge” as part of the process of early twentieth century state formation. From railroad legislation in the late 1880s, Jim Crow laws in the 1890s, anti-trust and truth-in-advertising acts in the early 1900s, and traffic ordinances throughout the 1920s, government at all levels employed police power to regulate a broad spectrum of activities and relationships that previously had been viewed as “inappropriate for state intervention.” This centralization of authority, she explains, was often though not always designed to protect individual liberties from the expansive reach of corporations.<sup>373</sup>

The creation of the traffic control system represented another example of this type of governmental interposition. The automobile, with the carnage and congestion it spawned, necessitated government action to protect the safety of the public, though in this instance by curtailing individual liberties in the roadways. Initiated in the early 1900s and exploding during the 1920s, the system extended the insinuating reach of regulatory power into the daily lives of American citizens through their use of the public streets.<sup>374</sup>

In a similar fashion, zoning controlled Americans’ use of their private land. Another shrinking of personal freedoms, this intervention served to protect the welfare of the greater public, and was in direct reaction to urban growth. All of these actions were justified as the exercise of police power in the interest of the public welfare. Each served to expand and centralize government authority.<sup>375</sup>

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Enabling Act, widely used by states, and another effective federal maneuver to ensure national uniformity. It is not the purpose of this study to mine the details of *Pennsylvania Coal Company v. Mahon*, 260 U.S. 393 (1922), which regulated police powers, or recount the opinions in *Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365, 47 S. Ct. 114 (1926), which affirmed the constitutionality of municipal zoning ordinances. However, fundamental knowledge of both is crucial to understanding the legal bases of much of the regulatory legislation passed in this time period. Both shed light on the mindsets of corporate and municipal actors.

<sup>373</sup> Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*, 351.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 351. Welke never references traffic control, street usage, or zoning laws in her study, but all three are consistent with her assertions about this era of government regulatory intervention which expanded and centralized state authority.

In the well-known 1926 zoning case, *Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, the U.S. Supreme Court found a comparable justification for both traffic and zoning regulation. The court noted that building zone laws had existed in the U.S. for only about twenty-five years. During that time, the increase and concentration of urban populations created problems which necessitated new restrictions on the use and occupation of private land within city boundaries. “Such regulations are sustained, under the complex conditions of our day, *for reasons analogous to those which justify traffic regulations, which, before the advent of automobiles and rapid transit street railways, would have been condemned as fatally arbitrary and unreasonable*” [emphasis added]. The court basically acknowledged that Americans of an earlier era would properly have denounced the stringent new zoning and traffic laws, but a modern, urban society demanded government abridgement of individual liberties for the greater good of, presumably, everyone. But in the laws limiting land use, just as those limiting street use, there were winners and losers; “in the public interest” did not always equate to “in everybody’s interest.” Atlanta’s growth community, in both instances, acted to safeguard a primary interest: their continued ability to direct activities to ensure a vibrant, expanding municipal economy.<sup>376</sup>

Surrounding land uses could directly affect conditions on city streets. The number of vehicles on the roads, the severe traffic congestion in downtown and its attendant damage to property and persons, even the types of vehicles predominantly in use in certain areas—all depended to a degree on the uses of the properties lining the roadways. Zoning not only affected activities on the public thoroughfares, those activities were part of the impetus for zoning in the first place.

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<sup>376</sup> *Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365, 47 S. Ct. 114 (1926), 386-87. The case found that the zoning ordinance of the Village of Euclid, Ohio (a Cleveland suburb) did not constitute an unreasonable extension of its police powers and was a valid exercise of authority, and it did not deprive Ambler of liberty and property without due process of law under the Fourteenth Amendment. The case provided substantial support of the zoning precedent.

Opponents to zoning in Atlanta and elsewhere saw it as a gross intrusion of state power into their private property rights, which it was. Zoning advocates asserted its many positive effects, including the benefits which could accrue to the public streets. Height limitations on downtown buildings ensured that lower nearby structures and the surrounding roads could get sufficient light and air. Taller buildings meant more people and more traffic—burdens Atlanta’s narrow central streets could not bear. Limiting skyscraper heights reduced population density which facilitated traffic flow. Siting commerce and industry away from residential streets meant fewer cars parked at neighborhood curbs, and the absence of the dirt, noise, and disturbances caused by the bustle of workers, clients, shoppers, and vehicles coming and going. With heavy freight traffic kept off single-family housing streets, neighborhoods experienced fewer vehicle collisions, children could play in safety, and the quiet, home-like character of the area was preserved.<sup>377</sup>

The creation of distinct commercial and manufacturing districts could even lead to economies in street paving. Heavy trucks continuously delivering goods and raw materials to and from stores and factories required durable and costly pavement, which now could be limited to those zoned areas. Less expensive paving sufficed for residential neighborhoods with their light-weight, low-volume traffic.<sup>378</sup>

But the most important benefit of a zoning system, far exceeding any other, was that it conserved property values. In many cases, it even increased property values. Segregating land uses facilitated that objective. Nobody wanted to live next door to a factory belching filth into

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<sup>377</sup> *Euclid v. Ambler*, 394; Robert Harvey Whitten, “Atlanta Adopts Zoning,” *American City* 26, no. 6 (June 1922): 542; “Zoning Plan for Atlanta,” *City Builder* 7, no. 10 (December 1921): 23; *The Atlanta Zone Plan: Report Outlining a Tentative Zone Plan for Atlanta* (Atlanta: Atlanta City Planning Commission, 1922), 4, 8.

<sup>378</sup> *Euclid v. Ambler*, 393.

the sky; it was unpleasant and unhealthy. Nobody's house in such a location would have a high resell value.<sup>379</sup>

The minimum lot sizes which zoning imposed in some residential areas preserved property values by preventing overcrowding and congestion, which many would view as admirable goals.<sup>380</sup> But they also excluded working-class people who could not afford to purchase a large lot or house. Collins Park, south of Buckhead, opened in 1922. Its average lot size was 100' x 300', selling for from \$60-\$100 per front foot; that is, between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per lot. An article about the new development stated, "It is probable that purchasers will be required to erect residences costing not less than \$15,000;" in other words, working class families should look elsewhere.<sup>381</sup>

The phrase "preserving property values" served as a class- or race-distinction signal, code for keeping out the riff-raff. These types of zoning restrictions acted like land covenants, but they had the advantages of covering the entire city and never reaching an expiration date. Lower-class, multi-family, and African-American-occupied housing could be relegated to less-desirable areas of the city, away from the new suburbs and the older areas of the city that whites viewed as *white*.<sup>382</sup>

As Richard Sennett asserts, the segmentation of zoning introduced a rational homogeneity which investors in new construction found reassuring. "They knew exactly what

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<sup>379</sup> Hubbard and Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States*, 188; Sting / The Police, "Synchronicity 2," in *Synchronicity* (Quebec, Canada: A&M, December 1982-February 1983).

<sup>380</sup> Whitten, *The Atlanta Zone Plan: Report Outlining a Tentative Zone Plan for Atlanta*, 6.

<sup>381</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, July 30, 1922: "A Wonderful Opportunity to Invest Backed by Peachtree Subdivisions;" "Plan Fashionable Residential Park." Collins Park is between Peachtree Street and Hemphill Avenue, south of West Wesley Avenue.

<sup>382</sup> Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 136. Her book provides an outstanding analysis of how white civic elites directed the development of Atlanta's public and private properties to further their own interests. See pgs. 135-57 for a detailed account of the Atlanta zoning process.

kind of area they were putting their capital into.” Zoning regulations classified each residential area in two senses. First, it categorized every neighborhood by lot size, house price, and the presence of amenities like sidewalks, street lights, and parks. Second, those defining characteristics ensured that the occupants had sufficient wealth to purchase a home there. In effect, every suburb and residential neighborhood was “class-ified”—identified by the social class of the individuals who could afford to live there. As Robert Whitten preferred, the “bankers and leading business men lived in one part of town, storekeepers, clerks and technicians in another, and working people in yet others where they would enjoy the association with neighbors more or less of their own kind.” A zone plan ensured neighborhoods homogenized by wealth and, by proxy, class and race. It provided a legal mechanism to maintain exclusivity and bar undesirables.<sup>383</sup>

Atlanta’s zoning system employed neither subterfuge nor euphemism when it came to skin color. Racial classification was an explicit component. The 1922 plan created, within residential areas, three race districts. R1 was “white;” R2 was “colored;” and R3 was “undetermined,” meaning that neither race comprised a majority of the occupants. It claimed to provide additional space for the housing areas of both white and “colored” groups to expand without encroaching upon each other’s territory (see population distribution map below).<sup>384</sup>

Lands notes the progression marked in Atlanta’s introduction of racial classifications into its comprehensive land-use plan. In the race zoning efforts of the previous decade, whites had

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<sup>383</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 135-36. Robert Whitten, in his Atlanta plan, did not explicitly reference class distinction, but in an interview with a magazine reporter, stated that he was opposed to zoning that allowed a mixture of residences for families of different economic status; “The Atlanta Zoning Plan,” *Survey* 48, no. 4 (April 22, 1922): 114-15.

<sup>384</sup> Whitten, *The Atlanta Zone Plan: Report Outlining a Tentative Zone Plan for Atlanta*, 10.

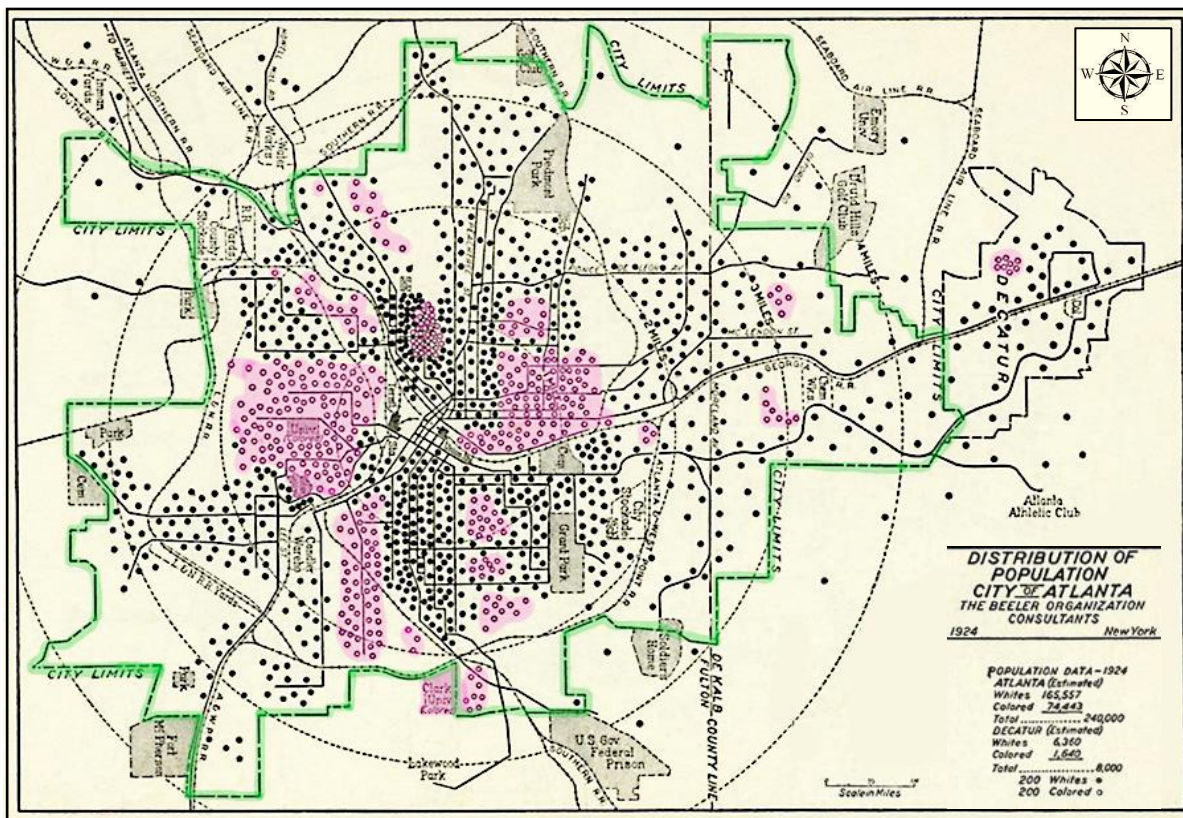


Figure 33. Racial distribution of Atlanta's population, 1924.

attempted to protect only their own neighborhoods from objectionable persons. In the new plan, they had moved “to formally sort the entire city.”<sup>385</sup>

The map above shows the racial distribution of Atlanta's population, with the African American areas highlighted in light red, and the city limits in green. The two largest concentration of African Americans are in the two areas north of the east-west rail line: Auburn Avenue to the east; Atlanta University Center to the west. South of that rail line are Summer Hill to the east, and Mechanicsville to the west, with the Clark University neighborhood south of both. The clustering shows how compact and discrete the space for Blacks was in the city.<sup>386</sup>

<sup>385</sup> Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 6.

<sup>386</sup> Map adapted by author from the Atlanta population distribution map in Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 85.



“Preserving property values” was one of the main goals of zoning, as Atlanta’s plan frequently asserted. But the report did not, nor did it need to, utilize that phrase explicitly when discussing residential segregation. Whites universally believed that the presence of African Americans depreciated property values, except in servants’ quarters located at the back of the big house. That assumption provided the most direct and effective argument for race-based zoning, according to Johnson, who recites this common example. “When Negroes move into a block, there frequently follows a rapid exodus of white residents who put up their property for forced sale and accept the loss as inevitable.” By not allowing Blacks to move in at all, zoning maintained higher property assessments for whites.<sup>387</sup>

Johnson asserts that, when it came to property values, African Americans were more often the *symptom* rather than the *cause* of their depreciation. Other factors undermined land values which bore no relation to the actual character and traits of African Americans. Much of affordable Black housing was situated in unattractive and unhealthy areas. He calls special attention to the negative effects of the automobile. Its display shops, garages, and filling stations dragged down the appearance and functionality of a residential neighborhood. The car itself made escape from the deteriorating conditions possible for wealthier families, while the poor had no option but to endure in place.<sup>388</sup>

Isenberg notes that in the 1920s and 1930s, most of the real estate community believed that racial mixing to any degree led to depreciated properties. The early decades of the twentieth century had brought an immense movement of African Americans off the farms, into the cities, and out of the south. This unprecedented and unregulated mobility of a population once confined

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<sup>387</sup> Charles S. Johnson, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, DC: President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, 1932), 44, 48.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

to plantations as slaves or to white-owned farms as sharecroppers or tenants troubled many white leaders. Increased African American consumer activity, and the achievement of *upward* mobility and higher social status (some of them even owned automobiles!) heightened white concerns and contributed directly to the institution of race-based zoning regulations. That the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled those ordinances unconstitutional did not stop Atlanta or other cities from continuing to enact racially-segregated neighborhoods.<sup>389</sup>

No one debated whether or not Atlanta needed a zoning plan. A building boom, sparked by postwar pent-up demand, created new in-town neighborhoods, outlying suburban residential areas, and an expanded downtown district. Skyscrapers proliferated to the degree that the period 1918-1930 won the designation as Atlanta's second skyscraper era. An editorial spoke out about the failure of the city to meet the modern standard of governmental service to its inhabitants: "Everybody knows, and must admit, a situation that is patent: That Atlanta is suffering, every day of its existence under present conditions." Mayor Key stated, "A zone plan is very essential to the city. It will prevent a vast amount of waste and destruction which has been going on account of the unrestricted and unrestrained power in each individual to build without regard to the welfare or development of the neighborhood."<sup>390</sup>

Uncontrolled growth and traffic congestion, coupled with the opportunity to implement a zoning solution, led directly to the creation of the city's first legal planning commission in July 1920. A myriad of problems confronted the six-man commission: increasing population, high demand for city utilities, gridlocked downtown streets, and random building construction. The

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<sup>389</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, 107, 109-10.

<sup>390</sup> Lyon, "Business Buildings in Atlanta: A Study in Urban Growth and Form," vi; "Charter Revision," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 4, 1920. The writer of this editorial sought a revision to Atlanta's city charter as the means to addressing the city's problems; others argued for a zoning plan. "Great Progress in City During Year Just Ended, Declares Key in Message," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1922.

commission decided to tackle streets and buildings first. But, as Robert Otis, real estate developer and acting commission chair, observed, “zoning became such an all-absorbing question” that a separate sub-committee had to be formed just to deal with it.<sup>391</sup>

The commission hired Robert H. Whitten, “perhaps the most influential zoning adviser in the United States,” as the city’s planning consultant in May 1921.

His work on the city traffic plan was important, but he had a greater impact and augmented his national renown with his Atlanta zoning plan. Whitten studied the city while also embarking on an intense promotional campaign to explain the concept of a zoning system and its success in other major U.S. cities.

He spent a substantial amount of time meeting with influential civic and professional groups to explain how a zoning plan would affect real

estate investment. He also met with parent-teacher associations, religious organizations, and the



Figure 34. Atlanta un-zoned and zoned, 1922.

<sup>391</sup> Otis, *Atlanta's Plan, 1909-1932*, 20. In most accounts of Atlanta’s zoning, Otis is usually referred to as the “acting chair” or “vice chair,” while each of the city mayors during the 1920s, James Key, Walter Sims, and Isaac Ragsdale, served as the *ex officio* chair. However, in an unguarded moment, someone on the planning commission responded honestly to a 1929 national survey about zoning and planning, and admitted that when it came to meetings of Atlanta’s planning commission, the mayor was seldom present; Hubbard and Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States*, 36. Otis was the true leader of the city planning commission from 1920 to 1933.

clubs of ordinary citizens to educate them about the work of the city planning commission. The local press greatly assisted his advertising efforts. News reports, editorials, and cartoons (see figure above) boosted the zone plan.<sup>392</sup>

Whitten diligently courted the most powerful city leaders. At lunch meetings with the Atlanta Rotary Club in the posh Capital City Club dining room, he discussed depreciating property due to lack of zoning, and predicted ruinous results if the city's haphazard building plan continued. At Chamber of Commerce forum luncheons, he reassured members about the constitutionality of zoning laws.<sup>393</sup>

In December 1921, Whitten capped off his public relations efforts with an article in the Chamber of Commerce's journal, the *City Builder*. This final appeal went to Atlanta's business community just before his presentation to the planning commission. Using New York City as his prime example, he described residential blocks invaded by garages, stores, and apartment buildings, and downtown skyscrapers which blocked the air and light on downtown streets, reducing the rental values of lower-rise buildings. In 1916, New York had instituted comprehensive zoning—a plan, not incidentally, devised by Whitten.

He previewed the general outline of the Atlanta plan, explaining the concepts of the use districts (residential, business, industrial), and the height and area zones superimposed over the use districts. He also introduced the big innovation—racially segregated residential districts. He

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<sup>392</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Explains Planning Commission Work," "Study of Planning Board Work Urged," September 23, 1921; "City Planning Expert to Address Meeting in Chamber Commerce," November 13, 1921; "City Planning Expert Urges Zoning System," November 15, 1921; "Whitten to Talk at South Side Meeting Tonight," November 18, 1921. Whitten, "Atlanta Adopts Zoning," 542; "The Atlanta Zoning Plan," 114. Figure 34 is a cartoon utilizing the "snob appeal" advertising strategy to promote zoning; *American City*, 26, no. 6 (June 1922): 542.

<sup>393</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Big Losses Laid to Lack of Zones," February 15, 1922; "Need of Zoning System Shown," February 16, 1922.

justified race zoning as essential to public peace, order, and security. It would, he insisted, promote the welfare and prosperity of both races without discrimination.<sup>394</sup>

Atlanta's planning commission, all members of the growth coalition, adopted the plan on January 2, 1922, and sent it to the city council's ordinance committee for consideration. The pro-zoning campaign continued, with five thousand copies of the report and maps printed and distributed. Whitten embarked again on the luncheon circuit for the hard sell, assisted by planning chair Robert R. Otis and H. D. Cutter, Jr., the commission's engineer.<sup>395</sup>

On Thursday, February 16—the day before the ordinance committee's vote on zoning—Whitten and his surrogates shifted into high gear. He lunched with the local chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers at the elegant Winecoff Hotel, while Otis and Cutter attended the meeting of the Atlanta Real Estate Board at the Peacock Café. Whitten joined them later that afternoon. Both realtors and engineers voted to send delegates to appear before the ordinance committee in support of the zoning plan.<sup>396</sup>

While Whitten met with realtors he, significantly, did not meet with any of the city's Black real estate men. The term "realtor" applied only to white men, and was the designation given only to those affiliated with the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB). That group had formed in Chicago in 1908 as the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges, but changed their name in 1916. At the same time, they adopted the term "realtor" to identify *white* real estate professionals who were members of their organization and subscribed to its strict code of ethics. They would register the terms "REALTOR" and "REALTORS" with

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<sup>394</sup> Whitten, "Zoning Plan for Atlanta," 22-23.

<sup>395</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Zone Plan for Atlanta Ready for Meeting of Commission Monday," January 1, 1922; "Council to Consider Zoning Plan Action," January 3, 1922; "Charter and Zoning to Be Heard in Open Sessions in February," January 7, 1922; "Big Losses Laid to Lack of Zones," February 15, 1922; "Need of Zoning System Shown," February 16, 1922.

<sup>396</sup> "Civil Engineers and Realty Men Favor Zone Plan," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1922.

the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in 1949. In 1947, Black real estate agents would form their own national organization, the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB), adopting the slogan “Democracy in Housing,” and copyrighting their own professional designator, “REALTIST.” Meanwhile, Atlanta’s white power structure completely omitted *any* Black real estate professionals from the discussions about zoning the city.<sup>397</sup>

At the meeting of the city council ordinance committee on Friday, February 17, 1922, opposition to the zone plan arose from Atlanta’s city attorney, J. W. Mayson, and Judge E. C. Kontz, who said zoning was unconstitutional and declared that it would strip citizens of their legal rights. Endorsements for the plan came from elites such as eminent developer Forrest Adair for the realty board, builder Victor H. Kriegshaber for the civil engineers, architect P. Thornton Marye representing the American Institute of Architects, realtor Benjamin D. Watkins, and the Ansley Park Civic League.

A number of groups and individuals urged modifications of the plan where it affected their particular interests. Thomas H. Connally requested an exception for his new building, then under construction at the corner of Whitehall and Alabama streets. It had been designed to be 16 stories, which exceeded the 12-story, 150' height limit in the proposed zone plan. As construction technologies improved, buildings in this time period were reaching new heights, sometimes eliciting outcries of dismay from local citizens or next-door property owners. The Building Owners and Managers’ Association, a national group, represented large and powerful real estate interests—including brokers, builders, investors, and property owners; Atlanta’s local chapter

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<sup>397</sup> National Association of Realtors website, <https://www.nar.realtor/about-nar/history>; National Association of Real Estate Brokers website, <http://www.nareb.com/our-history/>; Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 63. It is surely no coincidence that between 1947 and 1972, both organizations had the identical acronym, NAREB. Sinclair Lewis’ George Babbitt, himself a real estate agent, preferred the term “realtor” to “real-estate man,” as it sounded more professional.

was no exception. The group, sometimes called the “skyscraper men,” led the fight against any height limits, claiming that such restrictions threatened property values. The city council would grant Connally a variance for his tall building in 1922, and in 1929, would raise the downtown building height limit to 325' with no setbacks required, effectively demolishing the height restriction.<sup>398</sup>

With all the controversy, the ordinance committee tabled their vote, pending further study. The battle for Whitten’s zone plan continued in the pages of the local newspapers, with much of the opposition coming from real estate men. Some saw zoning as a threat to their private interests while insisting publicly that it would throttle city growth. Adair admitted the disagreements, but emphasized that the Atlanta Real Estate Board unanimously indorsed the plan. Ward Wight, board president, said that no more than 10% of realty dealers opposed zoning, and the ones who did owned properties which might be adversely affected. As in the on-street parking dilemma, the divided members of the growth coalition did not hesitate loudly and actively to disagree when a policy might hamper or harm their *personal* financial interests. Unlike the never-resolved curbside parking problem, however, a clear majority prevailed in the zoning dispute.<sup>399</sup>

Generally, zoning in Atlanta met with less resistance than that encountered by other cities, despite three spirited public hearings and some bitter fights in the ordinance committee. At one of the hearings, Judge Kontz declared that racially segregated neighborhoods had already

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<sup>398</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*, 172-74. Atlanta’s BOMA chapter was well organized, very pro-active, highly influential, and against height restrictions. The city hosted the national association’s convention in 1923; and in 1926, Thomas Connally served as the group’s president. *Atlanta Constitution*: “Changes Urged in Zoning Plan,” February 18, 1922; “Building Owners Will Meet Here,” January 7, 1923; “Building Height Limitations Hit,” January 16, 1923; “Boosting Atlanta,” December 26, 1926; “Skyscraper Men to Heart Palmer Report Today,” June 10, 1928.

<sup>399</sup> “The Atlanta Zoning Plan,” 114. *Atlanta Constitution*: “Real Estate Men Denounce Zoning Plan for Atlanta,” March 10, 1922; “Adair Declares Zone Plan Will Stabilize Values,” “City Zoning Plan Praised and Hit by Civic Leaders,” March 11, 1922.

been found illegal, and predicted the overturn of Atlanta's plan. Mayor Key pointedly asked him, "Are you opposed to separation of whites and blacks?" In an artful dodge, Kontz replied that he was simply stating the law, and did not care to indulge in personal views. On March 31, by a vote of 4 to 1, the ordinance committee approved the law, and sent it to the city council.<sup>400</sup>

On April 10, 1922, the city council adopted the zoning system ordinance, by a vote of 24 to 3. Alderman J. L. Carpenter attacked the ordinance, calling it one of the most vicious laws the city had ever passed. He criticized the experts from "up north" whom he held responsible, and vowed to "fight 'em to the finish. I'll build to the moon if I want to." Mayor Key signed the ordinance the next day.<sup>401</sup>

Most zoning laws tended to fix the already-established development patterns, and Atlanta's did the same. Major shifts in the building and commercial activities over the previous twenty years had already altered the city's central business district, where older residential streets such as Peachtree, Whitehall, and Washington were gradually giving way to business and industrial uses. Whitten's plan introduced no major changes, but followed the existing trajectories where business extended north along Peachtree Street, and industrial enterprises expanded south and west along Peters, Lee, and Whitehall streets. His only real innovation in the Atlanta plan was the explicit racial zoning.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> "City Zoning Plan Praised and Hit by Civic Leaders," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1922.

<sup>401</sup> "Complete Zone Plan, Recommended for City by Planning Commission, Adopted by Council," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 11, 1922; Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 131; Whitten, "Atlanta Adopts Zoning," 541-42.

<sup>402</sup> Lyon, "Business Buildings in Atlanta: A Study in Urban Growth and Form," 373; Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 2.



When the city adopted Whitten's zone system, it won the dubious distinction of being the nation's first "to embody in an outspoken form segregation along the line of social composition of the population." Silver maintains that Atlanta's plan was the most celebrated post-*Buchanan v. Warley* residential segregation plan. The 1922 plan's race zone section did not differ greatly from the city's 1913 and 1917 racial zoning ordinances, both declared unconstitutional, except it employed the professional language of zoning and was part of a city-wide plan. The lack of substantive change in the framing of the racial segregation portion of the plan should have alerted the planning commission to the coming rejection of the ordinance.<sup>403</sup>

Notable by its almost total absence was any controversy over the racial component of Whitten's plan—at least in the white press. Leaders of the white real estate community already agreed that any

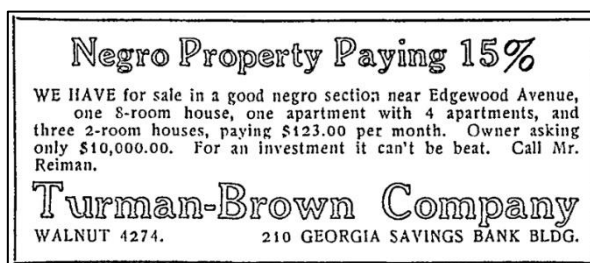


Figure 35. Real estate ad, *Atlanta Constitution*, May 31, 1924.

African American property constituted a bad risk and should be kept segregated. However, whites often owned the properties rented by Blacks because, as the ad above said, "For an investment it can't be beat." A national journal observed, "The Atlanta plan is the first which makes a distinction concerning type of residents as well as types of residence. To judge from the support it has received from the local newspapers and organizations of citizens, it seems to answer the prevailing desire of the white Atlantans."<sup>404</sup>

<sup>403</sup> "The Atlanta Zoning Plan," 114. Baltimore enacted the first comprehensive racial zoning ordinance in the U.S. in December 1910. Christopher Silver, "The Racial Origins of Zoning: Southern Cities from 1910-1940," *Planning Perspectives* 6, no. 2 (May 1991): 197. In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled racial zoning unconstitutional, *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917).

<sup>404</sup> Johnson, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, 48; "The Atlanta Zoning Plan," 115. The article did go on to warn about the precedent the Atlanta zone plan set, that it might open the way for new restrictions against immigrants or those of other races, religions, occupations, or modes of life. Whitten personally responded to the article, dismissing the writer's fear of restrictions against immigrants or others as something so

The outcomes of the zone plan on Black Atlantans elicited a different response. Despite their already crowded living conditions, the new plan provided no overall expansion of Black residential areas. The zoning ordinance map virtually deconstructed one eastside African American neighborhood, and segregated the majority of others on the west side of the city. Whitten claimed that there were “very few buildings of any value” in that eastside space, and opportunities existed for its improvement. His so-called valueless buildings primarily housed African Americans and their small shops. The plan called for their wholesale removal and replacement with white commercial and apartment house districts. Despite Whitten’s assertion that sufficient area for extending housing space for both races, Blacks found themselves more closely circumscribed by the plan within the city sectors they already occupied. No new space existed for them in the outlying suburbs, which were reserved exclusively for white residents.<sup>405</sup>

In 1923, Benjamin J. Davis, editor of the *Atlanta Independent*, wrote about other proposed city actions which, if enacted, would displace African Americans. Zoning, he claimed, had already drastically reduced where they could live, and their overcrowded residential districts had little room to spare. The only remaining option was for African Americans to migrate out of the city to find jobs and space. Davis predicted their leaving would constitute a devastating economic loss to the city, and most Black leaders agreed. A full year would pass, though, before relief appeared via judicial authority.<sup>406</sup>

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foolish that it would never be seriously considered or attempted; Robert Harvey Whitten, “Social Aspect of Zoning,” *Survey* 48, no. 10 (June 15, 1922): 418. He did not anticipate the follies of the 45<sup>th</sup> president.

<sup>405</sup> “Whitten Would Widen Downtown Streets to Relieve Increasing Jam of Traffic,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 20, 1922. The area Whitten was talking about was scribed by North Avenue to the north, Courtland Street to the west, Edgewood Avenue to the south, and Bedford Place/Fort Street to the east. Bedford Place today is Central Park Place to the north, Fort Street to the south, and access roads to the Downtown Connector in between. Whitten’s disrespect for the homes and people living in them was echoed years later when the interstates carved up Atlanta, taking a part of this same section of African American housing. Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen’s Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 131; Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 153.

<sup>406</sup> Benjamin J. Davis, “The Colored Man Bottled In,” *Atlanta Independent*, August 20, 1923.

On October 12, 1924, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled the racial districting portion of Atlanta's zoning plan unconstitutional.<sup>407</sup> Two years later, the court ruled the city's entire zoning ordinance was unconstitutional, based in part on the unconstitutionality of the state enabling legislation.<sup>408</sup> That ruling basically meant that no zoning anywhere in Georgia was valid. Within a year, the bad effects of a lack of zoning could be seen in the Atlanta. A local editorial documented the evidence, with automobile structures mentioned as part of the chaotic, beauty-destroying, zone-less infill.

Since the zoning law in Atlanta was killed, the suburbs of Atlanta—even the close-in residence districts—have become a hodge podge with garages, grocery stores, filling stations, and the like, destroying not merely the old resident sections but materially damaging the home owners. And yet there is no recourse and cannot be until a zoning law is enacted.<sup>409</sup>

The editor called for new zoning which would preserve the city's aesthetic appeal, segregate and systematize construction, enhance values, and give new impetus to development. His words could have been taken from a Molotch growth machine action plan, and might as well have been. The editorial demonstrated the how the media, itself a member, promoted the goals of the group. Another zone plan was needed soon; Atlanta was suffering.

A “prominent realtor in Atlanta” described the enormous injury to the city by the sudden revocation of all zoning restrictions. Builders and developers had moved quickly to construct

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<sup>407</sup> *Bowen v. City of Atlanta*, 159 Ga. 145 (1924); “Segregation Section Is Unconstitutional,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1924.

<sup>408</sup> *Smith v. City of Atlanta*, 161 Ga. 769 (1926); the ruling was handed down on February 11, 1926. Subsequent to *Smith*, in 1928 the Georgia General Assembly approved an amendment to the state constitution granting Atlanta, and other cities with a population of 25,000 or more, the power to pass zoning and planning laws; *Georgia Constitution*, Art. 3, Sec. 7, Par. 25, ratified November 6, 1928. The 1921 change in Atlanta's city charter had been deemed insufficient to empower the city to enact a zoning ordinance.

<sup>409</sup> “Atlanta Needs Zoning Law,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 10, 1927.

whatever they could wherever they pleased before another new zone plan emerged. He estimated that, between 1926 and 1928, the damages from the lack of zoning amounted to \$15,000,000.<sup>410</sup>

This scale of economic loss did not accord with the goals of the pro-growth advocates, nor did the harm to both Atlanta's and Georgia's reputations. Efforts immediate began to remediate the damages, as city councilmen worked to create a sustainable city zoning law. In addition, the mayor, council members, and county and state officials met to seek a state constitutional amendment to enable zoning. Their endeavors ultimately succeeded.<sup>411</sup>

The General Assembly in 1927 created a new City Planning Commission as part of the Atlanta's city charter, giving it very broad powers, including the power to regulate streets and sidewalks, relieve traffic and congestion, develop housing, and establish zones or districts to promote the public interests, health, morals, safety, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the city. In the 1928 November election, an amendment to the state constitution gave Georgia cities with populations of 25,000 or more the authority to pass zoning and planning laws, and on December 21, Mayor Ragsdale signed the new zoning ordinance approved by city council that same day.<sup>412</sup>

The new law did not include a racial segregation component, but that did not mean that race was no longer a consideration for guiding Atlanta's growth. Other invidious means of excluding specific populations from certain residential sectors remained available: required minimum lot and building sizes, along with prohibiting apartments effectively ensured the exclusivity of higher-end neighborhoods. As Lands notes, white elites "created a collection of

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<sup>410</sup> Hubbard and Hubbard, *Our Cities to-Day and to-Morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States*, 188. The realtor was not named in the report.

<sup>411</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "White To Seek City Zoning Law," February 6, 1927; "Atlanta Needs Zoning Law," June 10, 1927; "Zone Advocates Start Movement To Gain Support," June 25, 1927.

<sup>412</sup> "Republicans Break Through Democratic Ranks in Fulton; Hoover Given 462 Majority," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1928; "Zoning Ordinance Goes Into Effect," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 22, 1928; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2: 839-40.

cultural constructions around property that effectively stood in for one another.” Class zoning substituted for race zoning; language about tenants and rentals took the place of racist rhetoric; and the phrase “preserving property values” never lost its power to persuade.<sup>413</sup>

Amsterdam estimates that “by 1930, roughly 60 percent of Atlanta’s eighty-five thousand African Americans would live in just three of the city’s wards. Those three were also the city’s most populous.” Although all three of Atlanta’s racial zoning ordinances were declared unconstitutional, racial segregation continued in practice, and the city maintained its tightly-circumscribed African American residential districts, adhering to its conception of two separate Atlantas.<sup>414</sup>

### 6.3 Black Atlanta in the 1920s

Dana White observes that “Biracial is the qualifier that best describes the history and geography of Atlanta. There have always been . . . two Atlantas—one white, the other black.” Before Jim Crow, the city was racially divided. Clusters of Black working-class communities sprouted around factories, warehouses, stockyards, and railroad maintenance shops. As a result, ninety percent of the city’s Black population lived within a radius of two miles from the business center.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> “Commentary on *Village of Euclid V. Ambler Realty Corporation* (1926),” in *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*, ed. June Manning Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 281; Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 11-12.

<sup>414</sup> Silver, “The Racial Origins of Zoning: Southern Cities from 1910-1940,” 197; Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen’s Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 132.

<sup>415</sup> White, “The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970,” 199, 216; Porter, “Black Atlanta: An Interdisciplinary Study of Blacks on the East Side of Atlanta, 1890-1930,” 88, 274; Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 2. The Pittsburgh neighborhood, less than two miles southwest of Five Points, exemplifies an African American industrial community. It grew up around the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad shops beginning in 1883. Steady employment and segregation gave birth to Black-owned homes, businesses, churches, and schools; Pittsburgh National Register Historic District Information Form, prepared by author, March 2004.

Most of the city's African Americans dwelt in these racially-defined and overcrowded locales. Although their numbers increased during the first three decades of the twentieth century, they declined as a proportion of the total population (see table below). The 1920 census showed that the state experienced

only a 0.4% overall population growth, much of it due to the loss of more than 11% of its

*Table 11. Atlanta's Black & White Populations, 1890-1930*

Census Year	Population	White	% of Total	Black	% of Total
1890	65,533	37,416	57%	28,098	43%
1900	89,872	54,090	60%	35,727	40%
1910	154,839	98,451	64%	51,902	34%
1920	200,616	137,785	66%	62,796	31%
1930	270,366	180,247	67%	90,075	33%

Black inhabitants. The decade began with plummeting cotton prices, part of the national economic and industrial malaise. Adding to the state's woes, the boll weevil devastated the cotton fields. Increasingly, the mechanization of farming replaced laborers, horses, and mules with motorized equipment.<sup>416</sup>

Many people abandoned agriculture altogether, hoping to find jobs in southern towns and cities. Even more African American farm workers left the state as part of the Great Migration. Newspaper articles downplayed the exodus of Georgia's African Americans, but unquestionably a northward movement was underway. Bishop Joseph Simeon Flipper (1859-1944), former Chancellor of Morris Brown University and head of the A. M. E. Church of Atlanta, maintained that African Americans left the south because they sought "equal protection of life and property and equal justice in the courts." The remedy for Black migration, Bishop Flipper asserted, lay in the hands of the white man. But no such relief was forthcoming; equality and justice remained elusive; and thousands of African Americans continued to leave the state. The 1920 census

<sup>416</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*; Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 170-71.

showed Atlanta with only a modest 2% increase in its Black population as whites outnumbered Blacks more than two to one.<sup>417</sup>

Atlanta's Black pro-growth advocates, however, remained committed to improving local conditions as well as sustaining their own commercial enterprises. They worried about overcrowding in African-American neighborhoods, the lack of housing and jobs, and they urged a more equitable distribution of government services. Like their white counterparts, they saw the city as an economic generator, and they did not encourage their communities—or customers—to relocate up north; rather, they sought to halt the exodus. The Black press also discouraged migration as bad for business.<sup>418</sup>

By 1930, the percentage of Blacks to whites in the city had slightly increased. In accord with Du Bois' 1911 principle of internal integration, Atlanta's African Americans embraced their sense of solidarity and self-reliance. They patronized Black businesses and grew their civic organizations such as the Neighborhood Union and the Atlanta Urban League. They expanded and enhanced their educational institutions. Women's clubs and religious groups strove to improve neighborhood living conditions. The African American community and its leaders also continued to protest lynchings, resist the terroristic Ku Klux Klan, call for full enfranchisement, and demand revocation of Jim Crow laws. To the eternal shame of the United States of America, another hundred years would pass before Congress finally passed a federal anti-lynching law.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "No Alarming Exodus of Georgia Negroes, State Survey Shows," February 4, 1923; "Negro Conference," July 1, 1923; "Negro Migration Remedies Shown by Race Leaders," July 5, 1923;

<sup>418</sup> *Atlanta Independent*, November 1, 15, 1923; "Treat the Negro Right!" *Atlanta Constitution*, August 19, 1923; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 89, 114-15, 47-49.

<sup>419</sup> Brownell, *ibid.*, 38; Tera W. Hunter, 136-41. In 1920, the NAACP held its annual convention in Atlanta. The Association raised the issue of Black migration, and called for the suppression of lynching and the end to Jim Crow laws; "Discuss Problem of Negro Labor," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 1, 1920; "Negroes Ask End of Jim Crow Law," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 3, 1920. It would take an outrageous century plus until February 25, 2020, that the U.S. House of Representatives would finally pass H.R. 35, the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, amending Title 18, Section 249 of the U.S. Code to specify lynching as a hate crime act;

African American businessmen, along with their white counterparts, sought continuous expansion for Atlanta. They applauded Mayor Key's 1920 goal of a city population of 500,000 by 1930, although their model metropolis would include social justice and exclude racial discrimination—two items absent from the white leaders' formulation. The *Atlanta Independent* urged, "Let us build the greatest city in the south where race relations are most cordial and employment most abundant for every man who is willing to work; where the enforcement of all laws is the slogan of every citizen without regard to race, color or previous condition of servitude." Common goals of increased commerce and growth led Black and white elites to occasionally do business together, but in their disparate visions of the ideal city, the two different Atlantas endured.<sup>420</sup>

The geographic boundaries of those two Atlantas did not remain entirely static. Two shattering events in the previous two decades, the 1906 race riot and the 1917 great fire, caused large numbers of African Americans to relocate away from the city center. The riot led many to congregate in the Eastern Business District, effectively creating an African American equivalent of the city's central business district. It centered on Auburn Avenue. The fire destroyed large numbers of homes in the Fourth Ward, the elite residential section for African Americans. Many sought housing around the Atlanta University Center, the west-side cluster of Black institutions of higher learning.<sup>421</sup>

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<https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20200224/BILLS-116hr35-SUSv2.pdf>; Felicia Sonmez, "House Passes Historic Anti-Lynching Bill After Congress's Century of Failure," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2020.

<sup>420</sup> Brownell, 145-47, 152; *Atlanta Independent*, March 6, 1920.

<sup>421</sup> White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970," 212; Porter, "Black Atlanta: An Interdisciplinary Study of Blacks on the East Side of Atlanta, 1890-1930," 89-90. The Eastern Business District boundaries were west—Courtland Street; north—Forrest Avenue [Ralph McGill Blvd.]; east—Boulevard; and south—the railroads. Historically Auburn Avenue extended east from Peachtree Street in line with Poplar Avenue two blocks north of Five Points. In 1976, Auburn was realigned to meet Luckie Street at Peachtree, one block north of its historical pathway. It ran 1.3 miles to the now-gone Southern Railway [just east of Airline Street today].



The twenties saw the continued concentration of African American enterprises on and near Auburn Avenue. A profusion of banks, offices, real estate companies, stores, restaurants, civic and professional associations, social groups, and entertainment venues joined the long-established churches. Black leaders located their businesses and office buildings there. The Atlanta Urban League, with offices on Auburn, persuaded the city to repave three blocks of the “black” portion of the street in time for the 1921 meeting of the National Negro Business League. That same year, the city’s only public library for African Americans opened at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Courtland Street. The Butler Street Y.M.C.A., often called Atlanta’s “Black City Hall” because it was home to so many influential African American organizations, opened its new facility in 1920 at 22 Butler Street [Jesse Hill, Jr. Dr.], half a block south of Auburn Avenue. Wealthy entrepreneurs Alonzo Herndon and David T. Howard made substantial contributions to the building fund, and Alexander Hamilton (1870-1944) was the African American builder who implemented the Y’s design by noted architectural firm Hentz, Reid & Adler.<sup>422</sup>

The Prince Hall Masonic fraternity, which welcomed Black men from the upper and middle classes, had its temple at 330-334 Auburn Avenue. Between 1908 and 1924, its membership grew from 82 to 24,000, and the building provided a gathering place. The Masons published the weekly *Atlanta Independent*, the first Black newspaper in the city. It had offices on the fifth floor of the Odd Fellows Building at 228-250 Auburn Avenue. The editor, Benjamin J. Davis, the Masonic Imperial Potentate, was considered one of the city’s most powerful African American leaders. In 1928, William Alexander Scott started the *Atlanta Daily World* newspaper

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<sup>422</sup> “Urban League Weekly Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1921; “Negro Y.M.C.A. Building Will Open on May 16,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 9, 1920. NOTE: All Auburn Avenue addresses in this section utilize the latest street numbers, which date from 1926.

in a former print shop at 145 Auburn Avenue. Initially a weekly, by 1932, it was the only African American daily in the United States.<sup>423</sup>

Entrepreneur extraordinaire Heman Edward Perry (1873-1929) also expanded his business empire on Auburn Avenue. To his 1909 Standard Life Insurance Company, he added Citizens Trust Bank in 1921, the second bank established by Blacks in Atlanta. His remarkable advertisement of the stunning achievement of the bank's inception appeared on page six of the *Atlanta Constitution* (see advertisement below<sup>424</sup>). His 1917 Service Company expanded into an umbrella corporation. Standard Life, Citizens Trust, and the Service Company were housed in Perry's three-story building at 210 Auburn Avenue, while his many subsidiary enterprises were located on or around the avenue. Henderson accurately asserts that, with these various enterprises, "Perry initiated a substantial part of the business foundation of the modern black community in Atlanta."<sup>425</sup>

Not until the 1930s did John Wesley Dobbs bestow the name "Sweet Auburn" on the street, but well before then, the avenue had the reputation of housing the largest concentration of African American financial institutions in the nation. Numerous explanations for Dobbs' selection of the term "sweet" exist. Most compelling is Calloway's assertion that Dobbs gave it

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<sup>423</sup> Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:842. Scott started the *World* after he purchased Heman Perry's failed printing company and its equipment which had been housed at 145 Auburn Avenue.

<sup>424</sup> Perry's advertisement, crafted to appeal to white investors as well as his Black clientele, extolled the progressive themes of intelligence, engineering, modern methods, and economic development. The long journey from slavery culminated in financial success through group efforts.

<sup>425</sup> Henderson, "Heman E. Perry and Black Enterprise in Atlanta, 1908-1925," 226-27. The Service Company included subsidiaries such as a realty company, pharmacy, farm bureau, printing company, laundry, engineering and construction company, and philanthropic unit.

that name after hearing the expression, “there’s nothing sweeter than money,” an acknowledgement of the consolidation of Black wealth and commerce there.<sup>426</sup>

**THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF ECONOMIC STRUGGLE**  
*Have Finally Found Its Highest Expression in Group Action*

**Group Action Engineered by Intelligent Leadership Alone Put Over**

**The Citizens Trust Company, of Atlanta.**

SIXTEEN YEARS of privation and sacrifice have marked the trail over which the men have come whose untiring efforts have made this Bank a reality.

THIS BANK is laying the foundation for an intelligent conception, on the part of our racial group, of modern banking methods, which is the basis for economic development.

**THE CITIZENS TRUST COMPANY**  
 176 Auburn Avenue      ✦      ✦      Atlanta, Georgia

Figure 36. Heman Perry's ad, *Atlanta Constitution*, October 31, 1923.

Whatever motivated its selection, the name “Sweet Auburn” stuck, and partly because of it, Auburn Avenue became and remains, the second most famous street name in Atlanta.<sup>427</sup> The street’s physical space, as well as its name, emblemized Black Atlanta. In a time of lynchings,

<sup>426</sup> Calloway, *The “Sweet Auburn Avenue” Business History, 1900-1988*, 2. For a more poetic version, see the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the “Sweet Auburn Historic District,” NRIS 76000631, 1976.

<sup>427</sup> “Peachtree” alone supersedes it; however, only the Auburn Avenue Historic District has achieved National Historic Landmark status, which none of Atlanta’s many Peachtrees, even the original, have not.

disfranchisement, Jim Crow restrictions, and daily humiliations, it endured as a palpable presence—a *place*— which enabled as well as displayed the strivings and successes of the community. Their limited access to space in Atlanta forced African Americans to focus their attentions and concentrated energies within their defined enclaves. Territorially and psychologically, Auburn Avenue emerged as a space which projected and protected Black culture and identity. It exemplified Lefebvre’s complex concept of global social space: a geographical location, a generator of social structures, a place of production as well as a commodity itself, a political instrument, and a means for and facilitator of creative expression.<sup>428</sup>

In the 1920s, the avenue was not entirely occupied by Black entities. Around Piedmont Avenue stood a side-by-side racial mix of businesses. Farther east was solely African American. On the west end of the street, however, some well-known white enterprises resided, including the very exclusive Atlanta Athletic Club, Haverty Furniture, J. K. Orr’s shoe company, and Alvin L. Belle Isle’s garage and taxi service. Ironically, even the Ku Klux Klan had an Auburn Avenue address for a time. The two Atlantas might be separate, but sometimes they were not very far apart.<sup>429</sup>

During the decade, another Black enclave, ultimately larger than the Auburn Avenue district, emerged. Heman Perry did not limit his vision to the Eastern Business District, but looked west. Since the 1890s, a Black residential section had clustered around the African American institutes of higher learning in Ward One: Morehouse College, Spelman College, and

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<sup>428</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 85, 91, 95, 228; Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 37, 41-44.

<sup>429</sup> *Atlanta City Directory, 1921* (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1921), 1223-25. The Ku Klux Klan office was, for a time in the early 1920s, on the third floor of the Haynes Building at 2½ Auburn Avenue, just off Peachtree Street. By 1923, the propaganda arm of the Klan, the Southern Publicity Association, had moved in.

Atlanta University.<sup>430</sup> But these all adhered to the dictate of the acknowledged east-west racial dividing line, Ashby Street [Joseph E. Lowery Blvd.], which limited Blacks to sections east of Ashby. Perry, through his many business affiliates, broke that *residential* color line by purchasing land west of Ashby, building houses, and offering financing to prospective homeowners. He opened Atlanta's western suburbs to African Americans for the first time.<sup>431</sup>

Technically, the city had already crossed the line in 1919. First, the Atlanta Board of Education voted to make the white Ashby Street School (on the west side of the street) into a grammar school for African American children due to changing demographics in the area. Later that year, the city created Washington Park by accepting a land donation from a group of white churches. That first city park exclusively for Blacks was technically also on the "wrong" side of the color line; the former barrier was slowly being erased through multiple transgressions.<sup>432</sup>

In 1920, Heman Perry purchased seventeen acres of land near Atlanta University, hoping eventually to develop it into an African American residential neighborhood, even though it lay literally on the wrong side of the street. In 1922, he persuaded the school board to buy some of that land for the city's first Black public secondary school. Booker T. Washington High School was constructed with bond money from the 1921 Spring Street viaduct referendum, and opened in the fall term of 1924.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> On April 1, 1929, Morehouse College president John Hope, Atlanta University president Myron Adams, and Spelman College president Florence Read signed an agreement of affiliation which created the Atlanta University Center consortium.

<sup>431</sup> White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970," 214-18.

<sup>432</sup> The north-south race line, Simpson Street [Joseph E. Boone Blvd.], had been broken the previous decade when African Americans, under immense housing pressures due to the 1917 Great Fire, moved into previously all-white neighborhoods. The Ashby Street School, located at the southwest corner of Ashby [Joseph E. Lowery Blvd.] and DeSoto streets, opened as a grammar school for African Americans in the fall of 1919; "No Bible Reading in City Schools," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1919. Washington Park began as 6.57 acres; "Council Accepts Big Land Tract for Use as Park," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 4, 1919. Throughout the twenties, additional land and amenities were added to the park. Completed in 1928 with 25 acres, it had tennis courts, a dance hall, and the city's only public swimming pool for Blacks.

<sup>433</sup> The combination junior-senior high school was located south of West Hunter Street [M.L.K., Jr. Blvd.] and two blocks west of Ashby Street [Joseph E. Lowery Blvd.]. Construction began in 1923; "Cornerstone Laid for

The city's establishment of public facilities for African Americans beyond an established racial divide in no way indicated that officials were moving to *integrate* the west side. The balkanizing of African Americans into geographically distinct enclaves remained the policy in spite of necessary boundary adjustments. Dana White states that “*controlled segregation* was the accommodation arrived at.”<sup>434</sup>

The nearby locations of these amenities—a grammar school, a combination junior-senior high school, and a public park—proved successful draws for middle-class African Americans. Perry purchased some 300 additional acres west of Ashby Street [Joseph E. Lowery Blvd.] for a new development in the area known today as Washington Park. His earliest subdivision opened in the two blocks east of the high school, beginning with homes along C Street [Whitehouse Drive]. In 1924, he had West View Park under construction farther north.<sup>435</sup> Understanding that the city usually skimmed on public resources in Black neighborhoods, Perry successfully pushed officials to extend paving, electricity, water, sewer, and gas lines to his developments.<sup>436</sup>

African Americans in the Washington Park area were primarily middle-class white collar or skilled workers. Many owned their own homes and could afford some modern household conveniences. But fewer African Americans owned automobiles than whites in comparable suburbs. Even by the mid-1930s, less than 12% of the homeowners on Ashby Street had cars.

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Junior High School for Negroes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 6, 1923. The school opened on September 8, 1924; “Harper Will Head Negro High School,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 26, 1924.

<sup>434</sup> White, “The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1870-1970,” 216.

<sup>435</sup> Perry's land and subsequent subdivisions were generally bordered by Simpson Street [Joseph E. Boone Blvd.] to the north, Ashby Street [Joseph E. Lowery Blvd.] to the east, Greensferry Road [approximately comparable to Westview Drive today], and the Louisville and Nashville rail line [Atlanta Beltline Westside Trail] to the west. For a discussion of Perry's west side ventures, see Crimmins, “Bungalow Suburbs East and West,” 88-91.

<sup>436</sup> Henderson, “Heman E. Perry and Black Enterprise in Atlanta, 1908-1925,” 228. Sadly, Perry encountered financial difficulties, and in January 1925, lost his businesses and real estate holdings. Standard Life Insurance Company passed into white ownership, and Citizens Trust Bank underwent a complete reorganization. He quietly left Atlanta, and died in Missouri in 1929. For a detailed portrait, see Henderson, 236-42.

Most had to rely on the streetcars for transportation around the city—for work, church, shopping, or recreational activities.<sup>437</sup>

If west siders needed to get anywhere in the Eastern Business District, they could easily hop a Route 3 trolley at the corner of Ashby [Joseph E. Lowery Blvd.] and West Hunter [M.L.K. Jr. Dr.], passing through Five Points and continuing the length of Auburn Avenue as far as Boulevard. The 2.85-mile trip connecting the city's two major African American enclaves supported the Beeler *Report's* claim that ninety percent of the Atlanta's Blacks lived within a two-mile radius of the central business district. Although the line terminated at both ends in densely-populated Black neighborhoods, it also travelled through the heart of downtown. Whites would certainly have ridden Route 3, especially on the central part of the line, and they would have encountered African Americans there.<sup>438</sup>

#### 6.4 Semi-Segregated Streetcars

Streetcars remained a flashpoint for confrontations between the races. In a 1920 public speech, Ku Klux Klan Imperial Wizard W. J. Simmons directed some of his ire at Atlanta's streetcars which, he claimed, violated Georgia's mandatory segregated transportation laws. He urged racially distinct trolleys, not just separate seating sections. Despite the Klansman's fiery demand, the traction company retained its long-held economic decision not to provide racially-defined individual streetcars. Whites and Blacks continued to share each trolley, with whites sitting in front while African Americans stood or sat in the back. For Georgia Railway & Power, financial considerations could transcend the dictates of Jim Crow.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Crimmins, "Bungalow Suburbs East and West," 92.

<sup>438</sup> Route 3 was the Boulevard-West Hunter line; Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 2, 13; O. E. Kauffman, "Kauffman's Map of the City of Atlanta and Suburbs," (Atlanta: Southern Map, 1921).

<sup>439</sup> "Relations of Races Discussed at Rally," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1920; Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*, 279.

On two levels, Atlanta's streetcars regulated and reflected the spaces open to African American occupation within the city. Inside the trolley car, Blacks were relegated to the back sections at all times. If the streetcar became crowded and whites needed more seating, African Americans had to give up their seats and stand farther back. Outside the trolley car, some streetcar routes ran to the segregated Black enclaves, while others ran to nearby white residential sections. The geographies of the streetcar routes themselves often demarcated the boundaries of Black communities, while simultaneously providing a means of escaping beyond those boundaries.<sup>440</sup>

This spatial ordering of African American travel, whether defining which line to use or dictating where to sit, reflected and protected the hierarchy of race. The traction company did have limits in how far it would go to accommodate Jim Crow. As in its refusal to provide racially-separate trolleys, the company built race-based, geographically-separate routes only when there was sufficient traffic to bear the expense of two lines; in other words, only if both were profitable.<sup>441</sup>

In its catalog of Atlanta streetcar routes, the *Beeler Report* made a point of noting which lines carried which races. The Route 4 line served a "high-class white section" on the north (Emory University), and a "mostly white" territory on the south (Grant Park). But in between the two, it had to pass through "a colored section."<sup>442</sup> Similarly, the document reported that the Route 1 Decatur Street-Marietta Street line had an African American district on its eastern end and passed many Black retail shops on Decatur Street. It made no mention of race when

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<sup>440</sup> Brian McCammack, "'My God, They Must Have Riots on Those Things All the Time': African American Geographies and Bodies on Northern Urban Public Transportation, 1915-1940," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 975.

<sup>441</sup> Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*, 250.

<sup>442</sup> Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 14.



describing Marietta Street—an indicator that that street’s buildings housed primarily white enterprises. It did comment that the road’s expansive 60'-90' street width attracted “much automobile parking.”<sup>443</sup>

The Beeler *Report* did more than just describe streetcar routes. It also suggested ways to minimize contact between the races, insofar as it was economically feasible. Route 13 began just west of Joel Hurt’s white—and exclusive—Inman Park neighborhood. It ran through mostly Black Fourth Ward, into downtown, west through the Black Atlanta University district, then south into the white West End. However, few white riders from West End took that trolley. The report recommended eliminating that section, and initiating a new route to connect West End directly to the Alabama Street commercial district. Besides giving whites a convenient connection to downtown shopping, the changes would “stop an essentially colored line from operating unnecessarily into white territory.” The authors of the *Report* understood the undesirability of race mixing on streetcars, and suggested ways to reinforce the separation between racially divided communities.<sup>444</sup>

Atlanta’s older two-man trolleys had the entrance at the back and the exit in front. With the motorman driving the vehicle, the conductor stood at the rear entry collecting tickets and fares. White passengers complained about having to walk through the crammed Black section at the back to get to their seats up front. In 1925, the traction company introduced new one-man streetcars, in which the driver doubled as the conductor. The trolley entrance door was moved to

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<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

the front end of the vehicle, so Black passengers now had to traverse the length of the trolley to get to their area (see figure below).<sup>445</sup>

Inevitable close encounters, especially on the mixed-race smoking platforms at the rear of



Figure 37. A front-loading “one-man safety car,” 1925.

the trolleys, quickly escalated into physical violence, frequently with weapons and often fatal. Newspapers printed sensational accounts of the many racially-charged altercations, fights, injuries, and deaths. Every such instance underscored for the traveling public the sometimes objectionable or even dangerous nature of a streetcar ride. No wonder individuals and families, whatever their race, purchased a car as soon as they could afford one. An automobile freed them not only from the geographic and scheduling constraints of mass transit, but also from the anxiety and stress of a likely uncomfortable, possibly perilous contact with a stranger in a streetcar.<sup>446</sup>

<sup>445</sup> Martin, *Mule to Marta*, 2, 1902-1950, 141-42. The above description pertains to the Atlanta streetcars; elsewhere in the south, other customs prevailed. In Charlotte, NC, all trolley passengers entered and exited from the front of the streetcar, while in Memphis, TN, Blacks entered and exited from the rear while the whites did both at the front of the entrance. Some streetcars (though not in Atlanta) had moveable signs marked “White” on one side and “Colored” on the other, and could be changed to accommodate the changing racial profiles of passenger loads. For more details, see George S. Schuyler, “Traveling Jim Crow,” *American Mercury* 20, no. 80 (August 1930): 431. Figure 37 shows one of the forty new cars put into service by Georgia Railway & Power Company in 1925; AJCP552-068a, *Atlanta Journal Constitution* Photographic Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library.

<sup>446</sup> Examples abound in the *Atlanta Constitution*, but such sensational accounts of conflicts on mass transit were not limited to southern newspapers; see McCammack, “My God, They Must Have Riots on Those Things All

One such confrontation happened on the smoking platform of a streetcar on where a white man, M. V. Ragsdale, was standing. A Black man, Ernest Williams, hopped on the running streetcar between stops, stepping on the white man's toes in the process. An argument broke out. Another African American man struck Ragsdale with a billy club, and Williams pulled out a knife. Ragsdale drew a gun and shot him. The unnamed Black man jumped off the trolley and fled. Williams was taken to Grady Hospital and was not expected to live. Jumping on and off moving streetcars was illegal, but common. The incident underscored the fraught nature of even incidental physical contact between the races, and demonstrated how, literally, a trivial misstep quickly escalated into armed conflict and death.<sup>447</sup>

In another fatal encounter, the African American man was not even riding on the trolley. On January 8, 1920, Sergeant Ernest Casey, a 17-year Army veteran, was shot and killed around 8:00 p.m. on Auburn Avenue near Ivy Street [Peachtree Center Ave.]. Casey had been walking down the street, and apparently exchanged words with the conductor on a passing trolley. The motorman stopped the empty streetcar and the conductor got off and fired four shots at the unarmed Casey, who was running away. None of the witnesses got the trolley number, and Georgia Railway and Power Company filed no report of the incident. Police authorities said they believed the conductor shot the Black soldier in the back *because of something he said*. Military police at Camp Gordon, where Casey was stationed, said he had two previous arrests, and had been something of a trouble maker. In twenty-first century parlance, Casey was another victim of "living while Black."<sup>448</sup>

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the Time': African American Geographies and Bodies on Northern Urban Public Transportation, 1915-1940," 982, for accounts in New York and Chicago.

<sup>447</sup> "Ragsdale Shoots Negro Who Trod on Toes in Car," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1920. No further accounts could be found of Williams' death or any charges or a trial.

<sup>448</sup> "Colored Soldier Shot and Killed by Car Conductor," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 9, 1920. For an example of the numerous current news stories about African Americans investigated by police for going about daily,

Atlanta police were apparently stymied, but Coroner Paul Donehoo proved to be a Holmesian in his relentless investigation. The unidentified streetcar, out of service and heading to the car barn, carried no passengers at the time of the shooting. However, it had a driver as well as the conductor—an obviously reticent motorman who had not come forward. Comparing streetcar schedules with witness accounts, Coroner Donehoo tracked down all the out-of-service trolleys heading to the car barn between 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. on the date of the incident, and subpoenaed every motorman and conductor on those streetcars. During those interviews, he identified motorman J. W. Gibbs, who admitted that his conductor, J. T. Thrasher, did the shooting. A murder warrant was issued, but when police arrived at his home, Thrasher had taken his belongings and disappeared.<sup>449</sup>

The incident provides yet another example of the hair-trigger reactions of whites when they felt challenged or threatened by an African American man in public or on the streets of Atlanta. The encounter could be verbal or physical, no matter how accidental, or trivial. Violence often resulted, whether or not the Black person had a weapon. A third encounter, echoing modern headline events, demonstrates how the perception that an African American man might be reaching for a weapon could lead to his death.

Streetcar conductor Claud B. Hulsey shot and killed Will Randolph, an African American passenger, on Sunday night, March 30, 1924. The story that eventually emerged in conflicting news accounts stated that four noisy and drunk Black men boarded the streetcar on its route between Atlanta and Decatur. Hulsey was collecting their fares with the assistance of a helpful

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non-criminal activities, see Brandon Griggs, “Living While Black,” December 28, 2018, CNN, © 2019 Cable News Network, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/20/us/living-while-black-police-calls-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>449</sup> “Conductor Is Sought For Killing of Negro,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 15, 1920. It is not known if Thrasher was ever located or tried; nothing further appeared in the *Constitution*. Atlanta police had demonstrated a lack of initiative during the initial investigation, and the case would not have advanced as far as it did without the extraordinary efforts of the city coroner.

white passenger, H. P. Williams. When the conductor attempted to quiet the group, one of the Black men, Will Davis, cursed him, and Williams slapped him in the face. Another Black man, Will Randolph, butted in, and the conductor threatened to eject them all from the trolley. Both white men asserted that Randolph then made a motion as if to reach for a revolver in his hip pocket. They claimed to have seen the pistol, but Davis, the man who had been slapped, said Randolph did not have a weapon. No gun was found on Randolph or in the streetcar. Later, witnesses stated that a revolver had fallen out of Randolph's pocket, and one of the Black passengers picked it up, rushed off the stopped streetcar, hid it somewhere, and then got back on.<sup>450</sup>

Despite the fact that Randolph was unarmed at the time and was shot in the back, Hulsey claimed he fired in self-defense. An all-white DeKalb County Superior Court jury, after deliberating less than two hours, acquitted Hulsey of the murder charge. The incident demonstrates how friends and bystanders eagerly jumped in to support the person *of their same race* who was involved in the fracas. Again, a commonplace, unremarkable encounter almost instantaneously erupted into violence. The escalation of the use of force was rapid and excessive, and completely predictable—then as now.<sup>451</sup>

African Americans were not always the victims; they perpetrated some of the violence in the streets and on the streetcars. A dispute over seating on a trolley sparked one such episode. Around noon on Friday, October 21, 1921, Conductor Giley O. Phillips was working the Piedmont Avenue line. At Five Points, two white women entered the car, and he forced a “surly” Black man to give up a seat near the front of the trolley so white women could sit there.

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<sup>450</sup> “Hulsey Bound Over on Shooting Charge,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1924.

<sup>451</sup> “Conductor Freed of Murder Charge,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1924.

According to the conductor, the man said, “I’ll get you for this,” when he exited the streetcar at the next stop.<sup>452</sup>

That evening, Phillips’ trolley made its regular stop at Piedmont Avenue and Fifteenth Street in front of the Piedmont Driving Club [near Piedmont Park today]. When Phillips opened the door to admit passengers, he recognized the Black man from earlier in the day, waiting on the sidewalk. The man fired four shots, all of which struck the conductor, then fled on foot. Phillips was in critical condition but survived, and the African American remained unidentified. Streetcar employees created a reward fund to catch the perpetrator, with Georgia Railway and Power Company pledging an additional \$200. Eight months later, Willie Brown was arrested, based on information “furnished by other parties,” and jailed in the Fulton County Tower. He was charged with the assault on Phillips, whose wounds had left him disabled.<sup>453</sup>

A noticeable difference marks the approaches taken in the cases of the wounded white conductor (Phillips) and the fatally shot-in-the-back Black army sergeant (Casey). In the Casey case, Atlanta police basically gave up on apprehending the white conductor or determining which streetcar he worked on. Georgia Railway and Power Company filed no report. Only the remarkable diligence of a city coroner led to the identification of the motorman, who, under interrogation, admitted that his conductor had killed Casey. The guilty man was not apprehended.

In stark contrast, the motormen collected money for a reward to find the shooter of white conductor Phillips; the traction company filed a report and contributed handsomely to the reward. The Atlanta police did not give up on the investigation, and within six months, the

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<sup>452</sup> “Conductor Shot and Near Death,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 22, 1921.

<sup>453</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Will Offer Reward to Capture Negro Who Shot Conductor,” October 23, 1921; “Reward for Negro Who Shot Conductor,” October 25, 1921; “Negro Jailed as Assailant of Conductor,” June 18, 1922.

perpetrator was behind bars. Both incidents had initially unidentified perpetrators. Based on the reactions of the police and the streetcar company, and the time and effort expended to solve the crimes, one could reasonably conclude that the greater crime was the serious wounding of the white conductor, and the more trivial incident was the fatal shooting of a Black soldier. As with all other municipal resources, Atlanta police investigations were unequally distributed.

### **6.5 Race-Based Policing of Atlanta's Streets**

In 1930, George S. Schuyler wrote that there was “no more trying state . . . than being simultaneously a Negro and a traveler.” He urged all African Americans to buy a car as soon as possible to be free from the discomforts, discrimination, segregation, and insults they received on trains, buses, and streetcars, in the north as well as the Jim Crow south. An automobile meant freedom. It might also bring a modicum of equality, as service stations and garages, even in the south, treated Black customers with some courtesy. That civility, however, was primarily due to the stiff competition between rival oil companies.<sup>454</sup>

Just owning a car could be problematic for African Americans. It took some years for whites to become accustomed to the sight of a Black man driving his own automobile, not merely chauffeuring the white owner of the vehicle. Police frequently stopped African American drivers on the suspicion that the vehicle they were driving had been stolen. Schuyler recounts the experience of an acquaintance in an undisclosed Georgia location.

I know a prominent Negro politician in Georgia who was forced to stop his limousine in a backwoods village and be questioned by some ignoramus as to its ownership. He managed to get away all right by saying that the car belonged to “Mister \_\_\_\_\_ of Atlanta” (giving his own name). The use of the term mister convinced his interrogator that the automobile must belong to a white man.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Schuyler, “Traveling Jim Crow,” 423, 32.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

All of Atlanta's policemen were white and armed. In 1922, the union of African American ministers considered petitioning city council for Black policemen to work in the African American sections of town. When Mayor Key heard of the proposed petition, he stated that it did "not fit the plan of the police department and would not meet the approval of council or the police board." It would be another 26 years before Atlanta would hire an African American patrolman.<sup>456</sup>

Like the police, all of Atlanta's streetcar drivers and conductors were armed white men. The state of Georgia gave them police powers, so they carried weapons while serving in a dual capacity as both employees of the traction company and as agents of the city. As Brownell notes, there existed at that time an "unfortunate readiness on the part of white patrolmen and streetcar conductors to fire on blacks with the least provocation."<sup>457</sup> African Americans found themselves most often on the receiving end of gunfire, but all-white juries seldom convicted white perpetrators on the rare occasions law enforcement brought charges against them. The entire legal system was premised upon a "reasoning world of men"—and all of those men were white.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> "Negro Ministers Planning to Ask Negro Policemen," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1922. On April 3, 1948, the first African American officers in the Atlanta Police Department went on duty—on Auburn Avenue. They patrolled only Black neighborhoods and could arrest only African Americans; "History of the APD," Atlanta Police Department website, <https://www.atlantapd.org/about-apd/apd-history>; Mathias and Anderson, *Horse to Helicopter: First Century of the Atlanta Police Department*, 127-30.

<sup>457</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 115. As numerous incidents demonstrate, the "unfortunate readiness" of police to fatally shoot Black men, women, and children with little or no provocation was not limited to the early twentieth century; the early twenty-first century is following the too-long-enduring pattern.

<sup>458</sup> Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*, 87-88, 904.



Atlanta's arrest statistics display the unequal application of the law on Black and white citizens. Table 11 (see previous chapter) shows that after 1900, whites in the city generally comprised slightly more than two-thirds of the population, while African Americans made up slightly less than one-third of the population. For the purposes of comparison, two representative years, 1906 and 1929, were selected to demonstrate the disparity in numbers of total arrests based on race and gender. The number of traffic arrests are compared with the number of total arrests, as they help explain changes in the race and gender arrest percentages. The year 1906 was selected, as that is the first year of available data for traffic arrests; Atlanta's first traffic ordinance was passed in 1904. The year 1929 was selected as it is the last year of this study.<sup>459</sup>

*Table 12. Total Arrests by Race and Gender*

<b>Race/Gender</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1929</b>
Black Women	3,194	3,951
White Women	676	2,607
Black Men	10,317	13,389
White Men	7,515	17,277
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,702</b>	<b>37,224</b>

Table 12 above shows the number of total arrests in 1906 and 1929, broken down by race and gender. In 1906, although African Americans comprised less than 40% of the population, they accounted for more than half of all arrests. That year, arrests of Black men alone made up nearly half the total, and Black women were nearly five times more likely to be arrested than white women.

These numbers had changed dramatically by 1929. Atlanta's population more than tripled between 1900 and 1930, from 89,872 to 270,366. As expected with a larger population, the total number of arrests also increased, although the 1929 total was not even double that of 1906. The significant changes occurred in the number of white persons arrested. Nearly 4,000 more white men were arrested than Black men, and the number of white women arrested almost quadrupled.

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<sup>459</sup> Arrest data are from the *Annual Report of the Chief of Police for the City of Atlanta* for the various years; population numbers are from the U.S. Census for 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930.

Table 13 at right shows arrests by race and gender as percentages of the total number of arrests.

For both Black men and women, the percentage of arrests *decreased* between the two years, while the percentages for whites, especially women, saw notable increases.<sup>460</sup>

The advent of the automobile in Jim Crow

Atlanta explains the striking new disparities in arrest statistics.<sup>461</sup> Table 14 below demonstrates why. The police chiefs' annual reports documented that regulation of traffic had become a major portion of the average policeman's duties in the 1920s. The table below shows that in 1906, traffic arrests made up less than 1% of total arrests, while in 1929, traffic arrests accounted for 29% of all arrests. Traffic arrests by race are not available.

The numbers of whites and Blacks owning personal automobiles in Atlanta are not known for the period of this study. However, home ownership and the values of the homes owned can act as a

rough proxy for car-ownership. In 1930, 25% of all white families in Fulton County owned their own homes, and the median value of a non-farm home owned by a native-born white person there was \$5,651. That same year, about 17% of all African American families in Fulton County

*Table 13. Percentages of Total Arrests by Race and Gender*

<b>Race/Gender</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1929</b>
Black Women	15%	11%
White Women	3%	7%
Black Men	48%	36%
White Men	35%	46%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 14. Traffic Arrests and Total Arrests*

<b>Type of Arrest</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1929</b>
Traffic Arrests	56	10,921
Other Arrests	21,646	26,303
<b>Total Arrests</b>	<b>21,702</b>	<b>37,224</b>
Traffic Arrests % of Total	0.26%	29%

<sup>460</sup> Unfortunately, no individual causes of arrests are broken down by race and gender; only total arrests.

<sup>461</sup> Total arrests for the decade (not counting 1920 and 1921, which are not available) amounted to 265,112, with an average of 33,139 arrests per year. To ascertain that traffic arrests were the major cause of the increase, all arrests in the available police chiefs' annual reports for the decade were scrutinized. The passage of Prohibition did result in increased arrests, but those cases were bound over to state court, and were not included in the annual arrest counts. However, a new category of arrest related to Prohibition, "occupant of a dive," appeared in 1923. These totaled to 8,694 arrests for the decade, averaging to 1,242 arrests annually. However, traffic arrests for the decade totaled 53,519, averaging to 6,690 per year. Despite growing numbers of Prohibition-related arrests, traffic-related arrests overwhelmingly accounted for the increase in total arrests.

owned their own homes, and the median value of a non-farm home owned by a native-born Black person there was \$2,305.<sup>462</sup>

More white families owned their own homes and those homes were worth more. Those families likely possessed greater wealth, and therefore a greater ability to afford an automobile. Fewer African American families owned homes, and those homes had a lower market value. This suggests that those families might have less disposable income to spend on a car.<sup>463</sup>

Fewer Black car owners than white car owners would logically account for the greater number of total arrests of whites in 1929. A greater percentage of arrests were the result of traffic offenses. More white drivers meant more white traffic arrests, and the vast majority of drivers were white men.

The enormous jump in arrests of white women can also be attributed to traffic violations. By the 1920s, more women were driving, using the car to shop and visit, but also for family outings and picnics and even more extended ventures such as auto camping and cross-country touring. Conversely, African American women comprised the segment of the population least likely to be behind the wheel of an automobile—and therefore least liable to commit a traffic offense. Their arrest numbers bear this out.<sup>464</sup>

The economics of car ownership produced, for the first time in Atlanta's history, more arrests of whites than Blacks. Arrests of white men exceeded those of Black men in every year between 1922 and 1929, with traffic offenses the primary cause. African Americans, especially men, were also arrested for moving violations. Many worked as car or truck drivers, as they had

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<sup>462</sup> The census numbers for home ownership and value are available only at the county level. Atlanta, then as now, lay almost completely within the county, and Fulton, during the time of this study, was much smaller than it is today. It was not until January 1, 1932 that Fulton tripled in size by annexing Campbell and Milton counties.

<sup>463</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*.

<sup>464</sup> Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 136-37.

during the era of horse-drawn vehicles, transporting people, goods, and freight. Despite these many opportunities to violate traffic laws, arrests of African American men *declined* as a percentage of the totals. In the 1920s, automobility, especially the personally-owned vehicle, was substantially a white domain, and they had the arrest records to prove it.<sup>465</sup>

Throughout the twenties, more and more Americans—no matter their race—desired to own an automobile. The number of car sales rose dramatically in the first years after World War I, but beginning in 1923, sales slumped as the market reached saturation. The novel situation caused great agitation throughout motordom. At the same time, the Atlanta’s civic and financial leaders had an additional concern, the Florida real estate boom. Both circumstances threatened a slowdown in city expansion, and no amount of zoning or new roads would fix either problem. A number of strategies would, by decade’s end, solve the difficulties of the automotive industry as well as the city of Atlanta, but they all, to varying degrees, relied on an essential component: advertising.

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<sup>465</sup> The numbers for 1920 and 1921 are not available, but it is probable that the tipping point was reached during one of those years. In 1919, arrests of Black men exceeded whites by 1,405, while in 1922, arrests of white men exceeded Blacks by 2,191. Traffic arrests began to increase significantly beginning in 1916.

## 7 SELLING CITY & CAR

In the 1920s, Atlanta's civic and commercial leaders employed zoning as an expansion strategy. New neighborhoods, carefully stratified by race and class, stretched the city limits and spilled into outlying suburbs, initiating the city's first official designation as a "metropolitan area." A national recession during the first two years of the decade depressed the city's commerce and industry, yet did not dampen the boosters' ceaseless extolling of the city's numerous advantages. Many businessmen supported the mayor's optimistic "500,000-People City by 1930" campaign, displaying the chimerical number in their advertisements. The Chamber of Commerce urged businesses to relocate to the city. The Atlanta Convention Bureau announced plans to acquire more conferences and assemblies each year—an effective way to promote the city and help achieve the mayor's goal.<sup>466</sup>

Atlanta's retail-trade territory greatly expanded with the increasing use of the automobile. With nearly two-thirds of Georgians now within easy reach of the city, newspapers advised local merchants on how to attract a new type of consumer: the out-of-town shopper arriving by car. "Courteous treatment to automobile customers makes trade and adds to the general business of a city." More business translated into a growing city.<sup>467</sup>

Atlanta's ten-year growth to a half a million inhabitants, so optimistically predicted by Mayor Key at the beginning of 1920, never materialized. That year's census count, 200,616, did not even come close to doubling. Instead, the population increased by just over a third, reaching a total of 270,366 in 1930. Yet, between the viaduct-construction years of 1921 and 1929, the

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<sup>466</sup> "Atlanta Enjoys Glorious Fourth," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 6, 1920; "Come to Atlanta – The Center of Southern Commerce and Wealth," *The City Builder*, 5, no. 3 (May 1920): 5-11; "Atlanta's Facts and Figures," *The City Builder*, 5, no. 6 (August 1920): 22, 24; "1,502 Conventions Bring Net Profit of \$2,790,844 Report of Bureau Shows," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1921. Atlanta's population would not top 500,000 until 2019.

<sup>467</sup> Cator Woolford, "How to Bring Trade to Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1920.

city added to its skyline and street infrastructure. By mid-decade, Atlanta was well on its way to consolidating its position as the financial nucleus and central distribution point of the southeastern United States. A 1923-24 construction boom brought new offices, department stores, apartments, major hotels, as well as a substantial expansion of one of downtown's finest locations, the Hurt Building. Throughout the twenties, Atlanta annexed new territory in all four directions. By 1930, the city's area would reach nearly 35 square miles and the Greater Atlanta metropolitan area would encompass six boroughs.<sup>468</sup>

However, a regional competitor, aided and abetted by the automobile, threatened the city's growth. Florida's great real estate boom had developed gradually over the first decades of the twentieth century, but by the mid-1920s, motorists from around the country on their way to paradise were blithely driving *through*—not *to*—Atlanta. A deluge of realty company ads promised untold wealth to prospective Florida property owners, enticing local citizens and developers to relocate their cash, and sometimes themselves, to this coastal gold mine.<sup>469</sup>

In 1925, local investors and businessmen decided they had a true crisis on their hands; too many people and far too much money were moving south. The Chamber of Commerce proposed a nationwide publicity campaign to promote the city, the Forward Atlanta movement. Lyon accurately observes, "Nothing suggests Atlanta's mood of the twenties quite so well as the name 'Forward Atlanta'. . . . This slogan epitomizes the optimistic and expansive attitude of the

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<sup>468</sup> Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:788-89, 795, 797, 802-04, 839; Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, *Annual Report* (Atlanta, 1902-1930), 1929: 20. The Hurt Building at 45 Edgewood Avenue (two short blocks east of Five Points) opened in 1913; the 1920s expansion covering the entire block took three years; "Mammoth Hurt Building Marks Epoch in Business Progress of Dixie Capital," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 14, 1924.

<sup>469</sup> "Henry Morrison Flagler Museum," Palm Beach, FL, © Flagler Museum, 2019, <https://www.flaglermuseum.us/history/florida-east-coast-railway>; Garrett, 2:813-14.

city's businessmen as they faced the problems of the postwar decade. . . . No problem was insurmountable if approached with energy and the proper Atlanta spirit."<sup>470</sup>

Utilizing modern advertising techniques which targeted specific national markets, the venture proved incredibly successful, bringing in nearly 600 new enterprises and more than 16,000 workers to the city over a four-year period. One of the operation's premier acquisitions was a General Motors regional assembly plant for Chevrolets. The Forward Atlanta movement collected the city's financiers, elite and ordinary citizens, elected officials, civic organizations, and businesses large and small, all working to grease the wheels of the municipal growth machine. And it worked.<sup>471</sup>

American industrial production had increased 12% between 1910 and 1920, but exploded by 64% during the twenties. The automotive industry led the charge; passenger car output more than tripled over the decade, from 1.5 million in 1919 to 4.8 million in 1929. Motor vehicle manufacturing spurred the petroleum, steel, tire, glass, lumber, upholstery, and a host of other supplemental and subsidiary industries. The construction of new suburbs and taxpayer-subsidized roads boosted the economy and intensified appetites for more cars. Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce declared that "the world today depends to a large extent on the automobile. Without the automobile practically all industry would stop . . . the progress of the world would be impaired and retarded." As early as 1921, many in the business community began to believe that car companies had become too big to fail, a generally accepted notion today.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Lyon, "Business Buildings in Atlanta: A Study in Urban Growth and Form," 360.

<sup>471</sup> Garrett, 2:814-15; "Atlanta Chevrolet Plant to be Center of New Southeastern Region," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 29, 1928; Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission* (Atlanta, 1929), 73. The Forward Atlanta campaign officially lasted from 1926-29.

<sup>472</sup> Dumenil, 58; "Automobile Show Presages Prosperity," *City Builder* 5, no. 12 (February 1921): 21. A former chair of the Federal Reserve defined the concept this way: "A too-big-to-fail firm is one whose size, complexity, interconnectedness, and critical functions are such that, should the firm go unexpectedly into

Eager buyers mortgaged their futures for new cars—and any other novel and up-to-date product or venture—as the urban consumer culture entrenched itself in the American psyche. More and more of the nation’s workforce toiled in cities, and the assembly line rendered factory jobs rote and uninspiring. Leisure time gained a new importance as it afforded the opportunity for escape, pleasure, and adventure. Automobiles allowed exploration and brought a wide array of experiences within easy reach. Popular magazines, jazz, Hollywood movies, and ubiquitous advertising shaped and stimulated desires as greater wealth enabled greater consumption. The old-fashioned values, traditions, and economies of the Victorian era disappeared in the rush to modernity.

Throughout the decade, Atlanta’s growth elites continued to exercise their collective muscle, moving the city along the path of expansion, gaining more people, larger borders, and substantial wealth. The group seized on new opportunities to extend the city’s regional influence, and established Atlanta as the locus of finance, transportation, commerce, and manufacturing in the southeastern U.S. Embracing the automobile as their vehicle to fortune, they profited as motordom further entwined itself with national and municipal government, industry, and culture.

They worked diligently to promote automobile use and the auto industry, utilizing Atlanta’s position as the region’s leading advertiser, publisher, and paper producer. The print media by this time depended on advertising for the bulk of their revenues. In return, the newspapers in particular saluted businessmen and corporate leaders for forging the general affluence, especially for upper- and middle-class urban dwellers.

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liquidation, the rest of the financial system and the economy would face severe adverse consequences,” Ben S. Bernanke, "Causes of the Recent Financial and Economic Crisis," in *Testimony before the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission*, Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission (Washington, DC: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, September 2, 2010).



In 1929, more vehicles crowded onto city streets. Many Atlantans rode the wave of prosperity as business boomed, purchasing new or used vehicles, now within reach of even some in the lower classes due to price-segmented car lines and installment buying. Downtown traffic congestion grew worse, prompting the city council to undertake yet another traffic survey.

## 7.1 The Business Cycle

The “Roaring” Twenties did not start out that way. The decade began, not with a bang, but a whimper.<sup>473</sup> The economic boom, launched with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, had shuddered to a halt. Falling stocks started a nationwide recession in October 1919, which reached its nadir in July 1921. Business owners, who had placed optimistically-sized orders just months before the new decade began, ended up sitting on excess goods with few customers. American industries, geared up to a high degree of efficient wartime production, filled their lots and warehouses with surplus output. In the glutted market, retailers slashed prices in frantic attempts to liquidate their inert inventories. With orders canceled, manufacturers idled, and hiring ceased.<sup>474</sup>

Unemployment became rampant; all the soldiers had by this time returned from overseas to a dearth of industrial and commercial jobs. Agriculture, too, felt the effects of the economic malaise, which was exacerbated in the South. During the war, many farmers had taken on large debt as they expanded and mechanized their farms to increase output. The recession brought lower prices for agricultural products, and the boll weevil continued to devastate the cotton crop, the main source of income for much of rural Georgia. Easy credit dried up as market prices fell.

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<sup>473</sup> With apologies to Eliot, from his 1925 poem about post-World War I despair, “The Hollow Men,” in T. S. Eliot, *Poems: 1909-1925* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925).

<sup>474</sup> Charles P. White, “Hand-to-Mouth Buying,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 139 (September 1928): 137; Paul M. Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: Viking, 1928), 66-69.

Land values dropped and farms failed, sending masses of sharecroppers, tenants, hired hands, and owners out of the fields and into the cities, searching for jobs and swelling the unemployment numbers. Metropolitan populations rose so much that by 1920, a majority of Americans lived in towns and cities, and Atlanta reached its new population high of 200,616.<sup>475</sup>

Labor strikes, pan-handlers in the streets, and rising urban crime had Washington searching for ways to better industrial relations and put people back to work. Cities like Atlanta called for the federal government to hire men for public works projects, including road-building. Newspaper editorials asserted that public construction bested relief as a recovery strategy, and claimed that employment would reduce crime. President Harding in turn asked municipalities to expand their workforces to aid the more than 2.3 million out-of-work Americans. Atlanta's year-round building climate and backlog of public and private construction work should have provided plenty of jobs. But Mayor Key had to goad businesses into hiring more workers, threatening to publicly humiliate any reluctant employers.<sup>476</sup>

One stimulus to the economy came in the form of the 1921 Federal Highway Act, which would put men to work and improve the nation's transportation system. The new bill appropriated \$75 million of 1922 federal funding for the construction of interstate and intercounty roads and bridges. A new component required the paving surfaces to be durable and adequate for current as well as future needs. The highest level of government again spent

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<sup>475</sup> Giovanni Federico, "Not Guilty? Agriculture in the 1920s and the Great Depression," *Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 4 (December 2005): 957, 61-63; Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 169-70; Howard A. Turner, "Condition of Farmers in a White-Farmer Area of the Cotton Piedmont, 1924-1926," ed., U.S. Department of Agriculture (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1929), 2, 5-7; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*.

<sup>476</sup> National Bureau of Economic Research, "U.S. Business Cycle Expansion and Contractions;" Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 101; Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 149-51. See also *Atlanta Constitution*: "Idleness and Crime," December 17, 1920; "Get To Work!" November 8, 1921; "Why 'Investigate?'" December 26, 1920; "2,325,000 Workers Out of Employment," January 6, 1921; "Plans Are Made to Obtain Jobs for Unemployed," December 15, 1921.

taxpayers' money to ensure good roads for automobiles. Without the requisite infrastructure, cars would never have succeeded as the preeminent transportation mode in America.<sup>477</sup>

Adding to the economic woes, U.S. railroads faced problems on multiple fronts. In 1917, President Wilson had nationalized the railways, creating the U.S. Railroad Administration to temporarily take over their management during the war. The 1920 Transportation Act returned them to private operation on March 1 in a less-than-smooth handover. Company executives met in Atlanta, the Southeast's predominant railroad center, to negotiate the confusion and delays of the difficult transition.<sup>478</sup>

Railroad companies found themselves, post-government ownership, in poor condition. With the country crying out for increased production, the railways lacked sufficient numbers of freight cars to meet the needs. During the war, many of the usual activities of commerce and the public had been put on hold, halting building construction and business expansion. As life returned to normal, pent-up demand exploded. Manufacturers required rail transit for raw materials coming in and finished products going out, but the railroads could not handle all the traffic now requested of them. An editorial in *Railway Age* declared, "The commerce and industry of the United States would have to stop growing if the expansion of railroad facilities were not revived on a large scale."<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Holt, *The Bureau of Public Roads: Its History, Activities, and Organization*, 30-33; Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, 149.

<sup>478</sup> The 66<sup>th</sup> Congress enacted Esch-Cummins, as it was popularly called, on February 28, 1920; Ch. 91, 41 Stat. 456 (Pub. Law 66-152); *Atlanta Constitution*: "Many Railroads Ready to Reopen Atlanta Offices," March 2, 1920; "Railroad Heads Hold Conference," March 17, 1920; "Foresee Increase for Rail Labor," May 18, 1920; "Gompers Fights Increase in Rates," July 24, 1920.

<sup>479</sup> "The Needs of the Railways" and "Production is Limited by Lack of Freight Cars," *Railway Age*, 68, no. 1 (January 2, 1920): 1, 27; "I.C.C. Holds Hearing on Rate Making Procedure," *Railway Age*, 68, no. 13 (March 26, 1920): 1031; White, "Hand-to-Mouth Buying," 138.

The editor probably spoke too soon. Around the country, motorized vehicles began to take up the slack created by the inadequacies of the railroads. A bumper wheat crop in the Midwest forced farmers, during the 1920 freight car shortage, to utilize every available truck and car to transport the crop to safe storage. Farmers and businessmen hailed the rescue operation as a sign that “the day of the motor truck is rapidly approaching.” During the 1925 Florida freight



Figure 38. Atlanta to Miami trucks; *Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1925.

embargo, an Atlanta manufacturer would institute a direct shipping innovation in the form of a small fleet of trucks to carry his beds, mattresses, and box springs to Miami (see photo above). Two of his trucks could carry the equivalent of one regulation railroad freight car, and had the ability to stop at points all along the route, delivering goods to small towns as well as large cities. This “new method of shipping” was hailed as “another example of Atlanta’s undaunted spirit.”<sup>480</sup>

Throughout the twenties, the trucking industry would rapidly expand its efforts to make commerce and agriculture independent of the railroads. By mid-decade the railway companies had awakened to the changing situation. In Atlanta, at the annual meeting of the local chapter of American Society of Civil Engineers, Hunter McDonald spoke. A former Society president and chief engineer for the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway, McDonald acknowledged

<sup>480</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Trucks to the Rescue,” August 22, 1920; “Spring Beds to Florida by Truck, October 18, 1925. The Southern Spring Bed Company was located at 2 South Fort Street in Atlanta; R. Schwab, president, leased the large trucks from Cathcart Van & Storage located at 102 Houston Street [John Wesley Dobbs Ave.].

that motor vehicles and streetcars had become the most serious contenders for railroad business. Short-haul passenger and freight was fast becoming a thing of the past as more people took buses or used their private automobiles for pleasure trips, while trucks and interurban electrics carried local cargo. Railroads would have to excel in the long haul of both passengers and freight if they wanted to succeed.<sup>481</sup>

One executive astutely observed that the capacity of transportation limited all production. Railroad problems exacerbated the ongoing economic woes, impacting countless industries. Automobile manufacturing was not exempt from the general business slowdown. High-capacity factory assembly lines could now build far more vehicles than a nation in recession could absorb. The industry's go-to alternative market, Europe, had borne the brunt of the war, and overseas customers were in short supply. With demand plummeting, a number of car manufacturers went bankrupt; the rest chose to grit their teeth and endure.<sup>482</sup>

With the economy in decline, Americans voted with their pocketbooks in November 1920, opting for the promise of Warren G. Harding's "return to normalcy." In the past four years, the nation had lost thousands of lives in a world war and a global pandemic, and had suffered through the fear and uncertainty of race riots, labor strikes, anarchist bombings, widespread unemployment, and a president with serious health problems. Harding's mild demeanor, front-porch campaign, and pledge to restore a regular, steady order led to his landslide victory.

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<sup>481</sup> "McDonald Speaks Before Engineers," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1924.

<sup>482</sup> Frederick J. Koster, "American Destiny," *Railway Age* 68, no. 14 (April 2, 1929): 1089; Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Giant Enterprise: Ford, General Motors, and the Automobile Industry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), 12-13. The European automobile industry profited greatly from the war, rapidly expanding and improving to produce military vehicles and other war materiel. Post-war, Europe erected significant tariff barriers against American imports, but its auto industry for at least a decade after the war lagged behind America's in passenger car production, despite the growing world market for cars; James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 76.

Republican administrations would govern until 1932, when Roosevelt won his own majority as empty wallets again directed American voters.

Upon reaching its lowest point in July of 1921, the recession technically ended, but the nation's economic distress did not. The slow upward climb began. Not until a year later could business and industry claim that the danger point had passed. Markets remained uncertain and most dealers had to let their stock to run low. However, merchants saw glimmers of a rising demand which they hoped would bring prices along with it.<sup>483</sup>

In a signal of optimism, Atlanta enthusiastically hosted the Great Southern Automobile Show in February 1922. The sponsoring Atlanta Automobile Association afterward expressed great appreciation to the *Constitution* for the "splendid cooperation" and "generosity in news space" allotted for coverage of the exhibition. O. J. Willoughby, editor of the paper's Motors and Highway Department, effusively praised the show "worth many dollars" to the city as a whole.<sup>484</sup>

In April 1923, the U.S. Secretary of Labor James J. Davis declared the slump officially ended, celebrating "empty shelves, plenty of work, no strikes, and both employer and employees sharing in the general prosperity." His remark about unstocked shelving referred to the growth in consumer spending which sent goods flying out of stores. But it could equally have referred to the unconventional low-inventory strategy just coming into vogue.<sup>485</sup>

Industry and commerce began to embrace the hand-to-mouth inventory control system. Better known today as just-in-time (JIT) purchasing, the novel approach featured a policy of buying for immediate needs only. This style of inventory management marked an about-face

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<sup>483</sup> A recession is defined as a contraction that starts at the peak of a business cycle and ends at the trough, "U.S. Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions," National Bureau of Economic Research, <https://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html>; S. J. Nelson, "Danger Point is Passed, Business on the Upgrade," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 28, 1922.

<sup>484</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Thanks Are Given to *Constitution* by Auto Leaders," February 23, 1922; O. J. Willoughby, "Highest Praises Due Show Committee for Magnitude and Scope of Exhibits," February 12, 1922.

<sup>485</sup> "Post-War Slump Completely Over, In Davis' Opinion," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1923.

from the typical “forward buying” of goods months in advance of the time they would actually be required. As-needed purchasing limited the stocks of merchandise and raw materials carried by retailers and manufacturers. The unorthodox stratagem reflected the recent extreme economic conservatism of both producers and sellers, who vowed never again to be stuck with large, capital-devouring inventories of goods, as they had at the beginning of the decade. The system promised to reduce consumer prices, bringing buyers into the marketplace.<sup>486</sup>

An absolutely essential component of successful hand-to-mouth buying was the ability to re-stock rapidly. The postwar extension of the rail network and eventually-upgraded railway facilities resulted in greatly reduced shipping times. Heavy trucks carried loads of freight from terminals to stores and factories, and, with increasing frequency, directly from producer to seller. Unlike trains, trucks could provide efficient service across town. Altogether, the improved and expanded national transportation system allowed merchandisers and manufacturers to quickly and reliably replace sold items.<sup>487</sup>

The hand-to-mouth inventory system held particular importance for Atlanta. Mandatory rapid re-stocking ability meant that corporations could no longer concentrate all their factories and warehouses in a single location. Transporting goods across great distances, even with improved shipping, produced time lags, higher costs, and lost customers. Establishing regional headquarters, offices, and distribution centers offered the solution. Atlanta, with its extensive rail connections to seaports and the interior, found itself uniquely positioned to assume that role for the southeastern United States.

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<sup>486</sup> White, “Hand-to-Mouth Buying,” 136-37; Angappa Gunasekaran, “Just-in-Time Purchasing: An Investigation for Research and Applications,” *International Journal of Production Economics* 59, no. 1 (March 1999): 77-84; Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 31.

<sup>487</sup> White, 136.

## 7.2 The Florida Boom

Even during the worst of the recession Atlanta heralded itself as the financial center and distributing point of the Southeast. City boosters exaggerated and promoted its status as the region's primary governmental locus, leader in building construction, supreme convention city, golfing haven, largest advertising center south of Philadelphia, and the regional headquarters for railroads, telephone service, and film distribution. In addition to taking great pride in its abundance of professional and manufacturing enterprises, Atlanta also considered itself the most important automobile center in the South.<sup>488</sup>

While poised for a quick economic recovery, the city faced a significant new problem—major regional competition. The Florida real estate boom had its beginnings in the late 1800s when Henry Flagler completed the East Coast Railway connecting Jacksonville to Key West. A wealthy industrialist, Flagler had co-founded Standard Oil with his friend, John D. Rockefeller, in 1870. His next project focused on developing the Florida frontier, already an agricultural leader, into a magnet for vacationers. He constructed luxurious hotels along the rail lines and created the city of Miami. By the early twenties, tourism contested farming for the title of major state industry.

Georgia and Atlanta initially welcomed the volume of Florida-bound motor vehicles traveling across their borders, but had to acknowledge that the southern neighbor had much better roads. Winter storms often rendered Georgia roads impassable at the height of the tourist season, forcing many travelers to ship their automobiles by rail from Chattanooga to Jacksonville. The bypass cost city and state thousands of dollars in lost revenue every year. In an

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<sup>488</sup> "Atlanta Is," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1921.



effort to promote the Good Roads movement, the state advertised the newly-created Georgia State Automobile Association, an affiliate of the American Automobile Association.<sup>489</sup>

In 1920, the *Atlanta Constitution's* motors and highways department published an up-to-the-minute map and description of Florida's major roads, which were "possibly the best in the South." A large number of tourists travelled in automobiles and trucks, stopping at the "motor tourist" camps available at many small towns along the way (see photo below). Compiled with the help of a local travel and transport bureau, the column provided assistance to private and commercial motorists. By 1923, the newspaper was sending out its own employee to tour the Florida routes and create a free-of-charge guide booklet for south-bound travelers.<sup>490</sup>

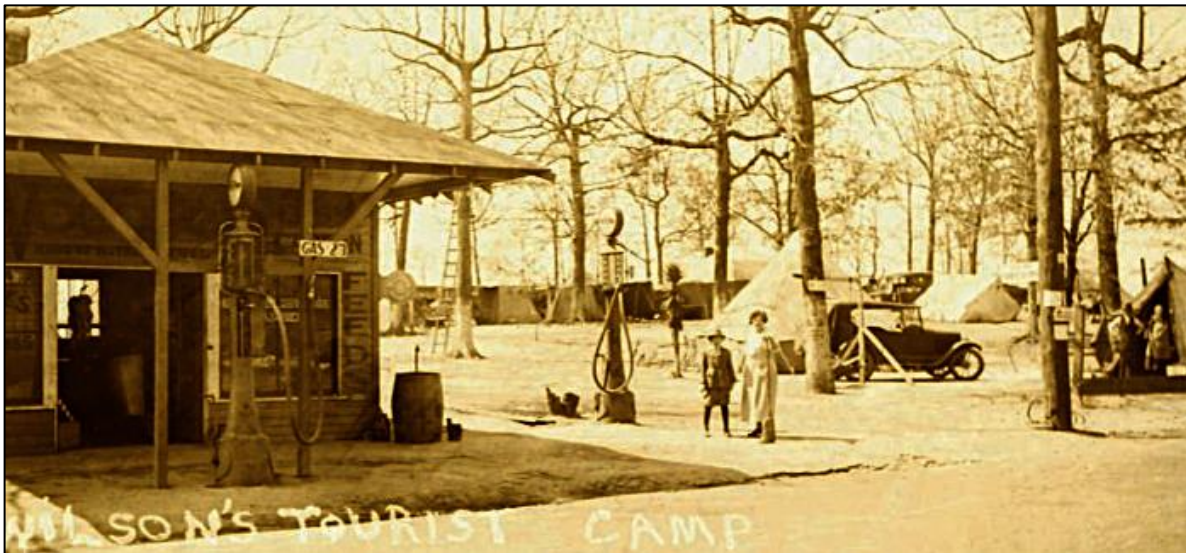


Figure 39. Tourist camp in Lakewood, south Atlanta, 1920s.

By 1924, owning a piece of Florida real estate had taken on an opulent mystique, and get-rich-quick promises lured thousands to the Sunshine State. On their way to the new goldmine,

<sup>489</sup> Wylie West, "Makes Plea for Better Roads in Georgia," *City Builder* 2, no. 1 (March 1917): 10.

<sup>490</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: O. J. Willoughby, "Florida Crowded With Tourists from Every Point of Compass," December 19, 1920; "Road Information for Florida Free at The Constitution," November 1, 1923. A tourist camp such as Wilson's usually provided tent space, water, bathroom, gas, auto supplies, and basic groceries. The owner often was adept at tire repair. Photo from Ed Jackson, "Whatever Happened to Georgia's Dixie Highway?" Georgia Historical Society, [http://georgiahistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/dixie\\_hwy.pdf](http://georgiahistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/dixie_hwy.pdf).

cars from every state passed through Georgia via Atlanta, which had the best roads, hotels, restaurants, and filling stations. The leisured classes from the Midwest could take the famous “Dixie Flyer” from Chicago to Miami, to which a special “Atlanta section” had been added. Travelers of modest means arrived by car or truck on the Dixie Highway which ran through downtown. Georgia’s state highway engineer documented “the enormous increase in tourist traffic coming through the state en route to Florida,” which was heaviest in the fall and spring, with the bulk of the volume concentrated on north-south routes.<sup>491</sup>

Ads flooded the newspapers, promoting properties across Florida with exotic amenities such as motorboat harbors and tarpon fishing. One advertiser invited his Atlanta friends to secure profits beyond their expectations by purchasing a plat in a “restricted” (i.e., whites only) Tampa subdivision. Leading local realtors got in on the action. The prestigious Adair Realty & Trust Company, with offices in Atlanta’s Healey Building and on Madison Avenue in New York City, offered coupon bonds in a Miami luxury apartment hotel overlooking Biscayne Bay.<sup>492</sup>

Some local advertising agents attempted to counter the stream of Florida promotions and stanch the flow of money there. Positioning Atlanta as a tourist destination—especially against swimming, sunning, sailing, seafood, and real estate speculation—was probably not the best strategy. But the metropolitan area did have a draw which Florida never could, the new Stone Mountain memorial carving. City boosters stood ready to make the most of it.

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<sup>491</sup> Paul Jones, “Atlanta to Profit by Unprecedented Florida Traffic,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1925; Warren Rabun Neel, *Eighth and Ninth Annual Reports of the State Highway Engineer to the State Highway Board of the State of Georgia, 1925-1926* (Atlanta: State Highway Department of Georgia, 1927), 161; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:813; Jackson, “Whatever Happened to Georgia’s Dixie Highway?”

<sup>492</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: William C. Freeman, “Lakewood Estates, St. Petersburg, Florida,” “A Cordial Invitation to My Friends in Atlanta and Throughout Georgia,” January 25, 1925; “\$807,000 *The ROOSEVELT*—An Apartment Hotel,” March 2, 1925.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy had persuaded the Venable family, owners of granite quarries and enthusiastic Klan supporters, to deed the north scarp of Stone Mountain to the group. As part of the June 18, 1923 dedication ceremony, a great automobile parade wound through the city, then carried distinguished guests out to the mountain some 14 miles east of Five Points. Notable sculptor Gutzon Borglum began drilling rock as patriotic songs and speeches rang out, celebrating the southland's "immortal cause which rose so white and fair." In what has to be one of the most inherently contradictory and ahistorical proclamations in the nation's public history, the carving was dedicated both "to the southern Confederacy" and "to the indissoluble union of the American people."<sup>493</sup>

Stone Mountain's memorial represented a high point in the early twentieth century spate of statue-building and street re-naming to honor Confederate "heroes." White southerners, increasingly distanced from their inglorious defeat, pursued their relentless quest for superiority to and domination over Black people. With the institution of slavery demolished, they institutionalized white supremacy in its place. Atlanta had some 40 streets named after Confederate or Klan leaders; about 30 remain in place today. The very public effigies (now protected by Georgia state law) and street name changes solidified the whites' interpretation of the Civil War re-defined as the noble "Lost Cause." The frequent use of "Dixie" to describe anything southern, including south-bound trains and highways, further exemplified the systemic cultural entrenchment of Jim Crow oppression.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Governor Trinkle to Open Memorial Work in Atlanta," June 8, 1923; Ralph T. Jones, "Impressive Ceremonies Mark Start on Memorial," June 19, 1923; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:591-95.

<sup>494</sup> Advisory Committee on City of Atlanta Street Names and Monuments Associated with the Confederacy, "Final Report," (Atlanta: City of Atlanta, November 20, 2017), 14-15. The state law protecting war memorials is O.C.G.A. tit. 50, ch. 3, § 1 (2017). The phrase "Lost Cause" originated with the title of Edward A. Pollard's book, *The Lost Cause* (New York: E. B. Treat, 1866), which chronicled the demise of a white version of the southern way of life. His second book, *The Lost Cause, Regained* (Atlanta: Phillips & Crew, 1868), initiated a reinterpretation of the Civil War, recasting slavery as a valuable barrier against a war of the races. With that barrier

Whatever else Stone Mountain might represent, it did epitomize growing automobile tourism. While a train and a streetcar brought sightseers from downtown to the village of Stone Mountain, only a car could deliver non-hikers and non-bikers to the base of the carved face. Promotional booklets and brochures listed it as an obligatory excursion, but the mountain never really succeeded as a leading tourist destination. It certainly could not compare to the attractions of coastal real estate to the south.<sup>495</sup>

Most of the contra-Florida advertising copy championed Atlanta's municipal growth and the extension of its residential development into the suburbs. Local real estate offered a safe investment, which was in rising demand, "as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar" and uninflated by risky booms. The city's continuous expansion guaranteed enhanced property values, but measured reasoning and promises of future security could not counteract the lure of rapid riches.<sup>496</sup>

With even the city's oldest real estate firm now sending precious underwriting dollars south (Adair was founded in 1865), Atlanta's business and civic leaders grew more and more concerned. The state of Florida had a tax-exemption policy and shockingly little regulation. Despite hopeful-sounding editorials about how much it was an asset to both Georgia and Atlanta, the boom to the south threatened the city's status as a premier investment site.<sup>497</sup>

Beginning in 1924, the Chamber of Commerce began to push back against the Florida tide. *City Builder* articles by businessmen and city officials urged a publicity campaign to tell the world about Atlanta. Mayor Sims with others authored a piece titled, "Why Atlanta Should

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gone, the contest for white or Black supremacy had begun. If the South secured the supremacy of the white man, then the true cause of the war would have been won; from "New Books—The Lost Cause Regained," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 14, 1868.

<sup>495</sup> Southern Railway System, *Progressive Atlanta*, 9-10.

<sup>496</sup> "Atlanta Real Estate," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1925.

<sup>497</sup> "The Human Tide," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1925.

Advertise,” noting that large, progressive cities were advertising themselves as if they were commodities, and recommended that Atlanta adopt the same strategy (see sketch below). Too many motorists passed through without stopping. The city needed to promote its advantages and opportunities, letting everyone know that they would receive a cordial welcome whether they came to invest their capital or establish their home.<sup>498</sup>

The Chamber itself pledged that the *City Builder* would become the mouthpiece for Atlanta, with news and stories on its trade territory. Efforts began to create a national mailing list, and upgrades to high-quality paper



Figure 40. Publicity sketch by A. W. Brewerton, for the *Atlanta Journal*

with three-color printing on the covers gave the journal a more attractive, up-to-date appearance.

In another thoroughly modern move, the COC took to the airwaves, broadcasting on the *Atlanta Journal's* WSB radio station an invitation to the world to come and see Atlanta.<sup>499</sup>

<sup>498</sup> Walter A. Sims, Alfred C. Newell, and Jesse W. Armistead, “Why Atlanta Should Advertise,” *City Builder* 8, no. 11 (January 1924): 5, 7, 33; W. T. Waters, “In Spite of Our Shortcomings, We Have Quite a Sizable and Thriving Village,” *ibid.*: 3-4. Figure 40’s sketch also appeared in the *City Builder* 11, no. 1 (January 1924): 6.

<sup>499</sup> “The City Builder Steps Out,” *ibid.*: 19-20; “Chamber of Commerce Takes the Air,” *City Builder* 8, no. 11 (January 1924): 37. The *Journal* began its radio broadcasting under the call letters WSB on March 16, 1922; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:790-92. Not surprisingly, the *Constitution* made no mention of its rival’s station; instead, it followed with its own initial broadcast the very next

Not content with publicity alone, the city's power elites sought advantageous laws to aid local industries. In late 1924, the state legislature ratified a bill which granted municipal and county tax exemptions for new or expanded factories. The favorable legislation laid the groundwork for the city's most successful venture of the decade, the Forward Atlanta Campaign, launched in mid-1925 and maintained over the next four years.<sup>500</sup>

Meanwhile, the Atlanta Convention Bureau acknowledged the Florida-bound crowds and the push for municipal advertising. On January 1, 1925, the organization announced the addition of new tourist and publicity departments, and changed its name to the Atlanta Convention and Tourist Bureau. It put greater efforts into destination marketing, ably assisted by its directors, all prominent men representing the city's most important businesses: hotels, railways, automobile dealerships, high-end department and clothing stores, telecommunications, insurance, publishing, and real estate.<sup>501</sup>

William Candler's Atlanta-Biltmore Hotel took the lead in reaching out to Florida vacationers. In March 1925, as the snowbirds began moving back north, the hotel established a tourist office in Miami. It offered a number of booklets and pamphlets about Atlanta's virtues as a stop-over point, including, of course, specifics about one particularly fine hotel. By June, the Convention and Tourist Bureau had organized its own outreach strategy. Gathering information on the approximately 30,000 tourists who visited Florida the previous winter, it planned mailers to each one at their home address in the fall (before they headed south next winter), inviting them

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day under WGM; James A. Hollomon, "Radio Telephone License Granted to Constitution," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1922; Constitution's Radio Service Broadcasted for First Time Friday, *Atlanta Constitution*, March 18, 1922. The call letters were changed to WGST in 1923 when the newspaper donated the radio station to the Georgia School of Technology. The assignment of call letters and their purported derivations is a complicated and fraught history; no attempt is made here to explain their meanings here.

<sup>500</sup> Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 170; State of Georgia, *Constitution of the State of Georgia, 1877-1928* (Atlanta, 1929), art. VII, § 2.

<sup>501</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Paxon Reelected to Head Bureau," January 28, 1925; "Convention Bureau Will Move Tuesday," March 29, 1925; "'Atlanta Spirit' Plant Will Open to Visitors Today," April 9, 1925.

to break their journey in Atlanta. The Bureau also worked with the state on highway projects, recognizing that making Atlanta into a tourist town required good roads.<sup>502</sup>

The fall of 1925 brought unprecedented numbers of southbound travelers to the city. Railroads carried larger crowds than ever before. At the time, the city boasted eight railway systems with fourteen radiating lines carrying 130 trains daily—an average of one train arriving every eleven minutes. The volume of passengers required additional “tourist trains” on the southern routes, and the railroads’ liberal layover privileges allowed many vacationers to spend some time in Atlanta while on their way to Florida. City streets, too, carried heavier traffic volumes. A reporter noted the great numbers of out-of-state cars in downtown, even from faraway New York, Massachusetts, and California. He observed that most of them had parked near a hotel or restaurant, indicating that the visitors were “spending money with local people.” Clearly, the Florida boom brought a degree of winter-time prosperity to the metropolitan region, but the big money in the form of real estate development bypassed the city.<sup>503</sup>

A freight embargo enacted by Florida in 1925 added urgency to the municipal concerns. Initially applying only to its east coast locations, by the end of October the state had put a general embargo on all inbound cargo, with a few exceptions. The embargo affected only the railroads, the sole suppliers of heavy freight transportation throughout the interior. The infant trucking industry could not yet carry goods in large enough quantities to threaten the state’s

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<sup>502</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Tourists Invited to Stop-Over Here By Biltmore Hotel,” March 15, 1925; “Campaign to Bring Tourists to Atlanta Planned by Bureau,” June 28, 1925.

<sup>503</sup> Paul Jones, “Atlanta to Profit by Unprecedented Florida Traffic,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1925; Fred Houser, “Atlanta as a Railroad Center,” *City Builder* (September 1925): 30-31; Southern Railway System, *Progressive Atlanta*, 2.



economy, but, as mentioned earlier, some desperate producers organized small fleets to deliver their wares. Any railroad failure offered a new opportunity to truckers.<sup>504</sup>

Thousands of railroad cars were almost literally frozen in their tracks, and sat loaded with shipments for months in side-yards in Atlanta, Jacksonville, and around the country. A few enterprising automobile manufacturers devised a clever workaround. With no prohibitions on incoming cars, they shipped their cars via train to Brunswick, Georgia, where they hired men to drive them across the border to various Florida destinations. Not until early 1926 did the Interstate Commerce Commission Florida end the embargo so the freight trains could run again.<sup>505</sup>

Writing some years later, Walter C. Hill, vice president of the Retail Credit Company of Atlanta, described the city's increasingly-ominous situation this way.

In the summer of 1925, Atlanta, Georgia, faced a crisis. Psychological, perhaps, but a crisis nevertheless. Many were dismal and discouraged about the exodus of its people to Florida. They could see a business depression drawing the community into financial ruin. . . . Something was needed to overcome this psychological depression. Atlanta needed an awakening to her own resources, needed shaking out of the inferiority complex that had been induced by high-flown talk about millions made overnight in the Florida boom. She needed some spiritual stimulant that would cure this blight of hopelessness that seemed so speedily gaining ground.<sup>506</sup>

Without some sort of intervention, or until the Florida boom went bust, competitor cities to the south would soon overshadow Atlanta.

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<sup>504</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Atlanta Furniture Shipped to Florida," October 4, 1925; "General Embargo Put Upon Florida Inbound Freight," October 30, 1925. Embargo exceptions included livestock, perishables, foodstuffs, and any materials relating to preparing fruits and vegetables—Florida's chief crops—for shipment.

<sup>505</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Boats and Trucks Used to Get Florida-Bound Freight From Brunswick," November 16, 1925; "Embargo Relief to Benefit State," December 31, 1925.

<sup>506</sup> Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, 8. Hill's article originally appeared as "Atlanta Advertises" in *The Clevelander*, August 1929.



### 7.3 Forward Atlanta: Selling the City

Although attracting travelers created some economic benefits and free publicity, Atlanta's leadership wanted to attract more substantial and enduring investments. As a tourist destination, the city could never compete with Florida's surf, sun, speculation trifecta, and catering to seasonal, pass-through vacationers only temporarily bolstered sales. Instead of "tin can" tourists, the growth coalition sought more citizens, commerce, and industry, along with the new housing that would be needed by incoming corporate executives, office workers, and factory laborers. The establishment of plants, regional offices, warehouses, and distribution centers would permanently grow the city's fabric and population.<sup>507</sup>

The current president of the Chamber of Commerce, Wilbur Richard Carroll Smith (1872-1941), decided the circumstances warranted a bold response. He proposed a nation-wide campaign to advertise the city. Recognizing that Atlanta was "the only metropolitan city in the entire southeast that is not doing its part to attract in a large way people and capital to it," he suggested the Chamber raise \$250,000 to publicize the city's advantages. Dick Smith had founded and led the W. R. C. Smith Publishing Company, one of foremost publishers of engineering and technical journals in the South. His business vocabulary comprehended the concept of "publicity," as the majority of the revenue for journals, newspapers, and popular magazines now came from advertisements. He understood the media and methods of effective publicity. A nation-wide campaign, too, would not appear daunting to someone whose publications had wide distribution across the country. No doubt the project had the additional side attraction of possibly bringing more business his way.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Dudley Glass, "Let's Tell the Nation About Atlanta," *City Builder* (October 1925): 3; Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, 10.

<sup>508</sup> "Atlanta To Raise \$250,000 For Advertising," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1925; Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 393. Wilbur Richard Carroll "Dick" Smith (1872-1941) came to Atlanta as a

On September 17, 1925, as COC president, he invited 100 municipal leaders to a planning dinner at the elegant Atlanta Biltmore Hotel. William Candler, the Biltmore's builder-owner and a well-known civic patron, agreed to chair the venture. The board of directors' announcement of the fundraising drive sought to arouse community spirit, and solicited the participation of every business, enterprise, association, agency, school, and religious organization in one of the city's "most ambitious forward movements." Smith declared that once the world became acquainted with its many opportunities and advantages, Atlanta would "move forward even more rapidly" to its great destiny. The Forward Atlanta campaign was launched.<sup>509</sup>

Immediately, the crusade gained momentum. Haverty Furniture volunteered to house campaign headquarters in its building, providing a ground-floor office whose show windows soon filled with slogan banners and posters. On the recommendations of trade organizations in other cities, the Chamber hired the acclaimed American City Bureau, a New York and Chicago advertising firm, to handle the fundraiser. Ironically, it was the same company which had spearheaded very successful publicity campaigns for Miami, Daytona, and other Florida cities—Atlanta's arch nemeses. Vice President Daniel H. McFarland came to Atlanta to personally guide the operation. Noticing how everyone he met talked about Florida's marvelous growth, he

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McGraw Publishing representative in the early 1900s. He soon started W. R. C. Smith Publishing Company, publisher of multiple trade publications including the *Southern Automotive Journal*. In addition to heading the Atlanta COC, he was president of the Rotary Club; served on the mayor's 1925 twin viaducts committee, and was a founding member of the Brookhaven Country Club. His office was in the Grant Building on Broad Street, and he lived in Inman Park.

<sup>509</sup> "Atlanta To Raise \$250,000 For Advertising," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1925. William Candler (1890-1936) was one of the sons of Asa Griggs Candler, Sr., Coca-Cola magnate. He was president of the Biltmore Corporation, builder of the Atlanta-Biltmore Hotel and the Biltmore Apartments, broker of numerous real estate deals, and active participant in the elite local clubs. His office was in the Candler Building, and his home, Rest Haven, was on Springdale Road in Druid Hills.

declared, “Advertising did all that. . . . Florida had something to sell and she advertised for buyers.” He promised that the same could happen for Atlanta.<sup>510</sup>

Candler appointed George West, the youthful president of West Lumber Company, to head the working forces, while Ivan Allen, a former Chamber president and veteran of civic crusades, led the drive for advance subscriptions from potential big contributors. Businesses volunteered hundreds of workers to canvass door-to-door. The Atlanta Automobile Association pledged funding and cooperation, as did dealers, distributors, and other members of the automotive community. Realtors quickly jumped on board; merchants incorporated “Forward Atlanta” into their ads; and newspapers devoted countless column inches to promoting the movement and detailing every step of its progress.<sup>511</sup>

And progress it did. A “Let’s Go” dinner for more than 700 filled the Ansley Hotel’s rooftop garden on October 2, 1925, where the volunteers received instruction on salesmanship. A few days later, an American Legion band led the “army” of campaigners on a parade through the downtown streets, after which they dispersed to begin fundraising. Cognizant of modern advertising techniques, the ten-man commission had the event filmed and made sure local theaters screened it with their newsreels. By October 10, the entire \$250,000 had been raised, and the *Constitution* declared that the Forward Atlanta campaign was finished.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid; “\$250,000 Fund Success Sure, State Leaders,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 27, 1925; Glass, “Let’s Tell the Nation About Atlanta,” 3-4. The Haverty Furniture store was located on 13-15 Auburn Avenue at the intersection with North Pryor Street [Park Place], not to be confused with the Haverty Building on Edgewood Avenue.

<sup>511</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “\$250,000 Fund Success Sure, State Leaders,” September 27, 1925; “‘Atlanta Forward’ Campaign Is Given Unanimous Support,” September 20, 1925; “Atlanta Forward Campaign Will Prove Great Success, Predicts D. H. McFarland,” September 22, 1925; “Forward Atlanta Leaders Selected,” September 23, 1925; “Reports Progress In Fund Campaign,” September 24, 1925. The existence of a very early Rich’s Department Store ad, “Forward Atlanta!” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 29, 1925, indicates that Smith and the Chamber had been making plans well in advance of the September launch.

<sup>512</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “\$250,000 Fund Workers Ready For Big Drive,” October 3, 1925; “\$250,000 Drive Will Begin Today With Big Parade,” October 6, 1925; “Call to Civic Pride,” October 11, 1925. The fund eventually topped \$300,000.

But only the fundraising part of the campaign concluded; now the real work of actually advertising the city could begin. A new supervisory committee chaired by Ivan Allen consisted of what was billed as a group of “representative” Atlantans. Not surprisingly, the thirteen were all power elites: white, successful, well-to-do, and well-known men. The committee had no African American, women, working- or middle-class members. A large segment of the city’s population was not merely under-represented, but had no voice at all. The unspoken assumptions again prevailed—what was good for businessmen was good for Atlanta, and everyone benefitted when the city grew.<sup>513</sup>

While a nationally-known ad firm had handled the initial fundraising, the committee selected a local ad agency to direct the marketing phase. Eastman, Scott and Company had already achieved regional and national success within a few years of its founding, and had as clients some of the South’s leading manufacturers and financial houses. Their staff had expertise in the dual components of cutting-edge marketing: research and advertising. They began by surveying all of Atlanta’s industrial resources and advantages. U.S. companies required hard data before making any business decisions, especially momentous changes like opening a regional headquarters or building a branch factory far distant from the corporate base. The ability to provide industry-specific documentation in response to any inquiry emerged as a signature feature of the Forward Atlanta Campaign and one of its greatest marketing tools. Eastman, Scott’s first task was accumulating and organizing that information, which, at the insistence of

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<sup>513</sup> “Ad Fund Handled by Local Agency,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 8, 1925. Familiar power elite names show up on the list of the members of the Forward Atlanta supervisory committee, such as Ivan Allen, William Candler, W. R. C. Smith, Frank Adair, J. K. Ottley, Frank Neely, A. J. Orme, Louis Marquardt, and Philip Alston. Ivan Earnest Allen, Sr. (1876-1968) had come to Atlanta in 1895 to sell typewriters, but stayed to co-found Fielder and Allen, an office supplies company. It thrived, and he eventually formed Ivan Allen-Marshall Company on Marietta Street, of which he was president. Allen served on the boards of multiple banks, was in the Georgia legislature, and president of multiple location organizations, such as the Convention Bureau, the Southeastern Fair Association, the COC. He was a member of the most prominent local clubs, and lived on West Peachtree Street.

Chairman Ivan Allen, contained only the facts with no boosterish exaggerations. “The sole motive of this campaign,” he said, “is to ‘tell the world the truth’ about Atlanta.” Later, a New York City ad executive would remark that one of the strengths of Forward Atlanta’s ads was their lack of “blatant bombast.”<sup>514</sup>

The actual advertising began with a two-page, kick-off spread in the February 20, 1926 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The campaign targeted specific groups via the types of media they most often accessed, and tailored advertisements to individual audiences. Business papers and financial publications carried ads aimed at commerce and industry executives. Technical periodicals and trade journals reached professionals and the heads of industries best suited to Atlanta’s territory and amenities. The general public could read about Forward Atlanta in high-end journals like the *Post*, or in leading newspapers such the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*. Throughout, the ad copy promoted the city’s dominance in the financial and industrial fields of the southeast, its transportation facilities, and its central location.<sup>515</sup>

The diligent research and massive publicity program paid off. In December, the Chamber of Commerce’s Industrial Bureau reported that, after ten months of advertising, 136 new businesses came to the city, employing 4,630 people, and bringing in annual payrolls of more than \$7.3 million. The majority of the newcomers came from the East and Midwest (plus one from London), and most of them had established regional branch offices in town. The consensus

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<sup>514</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Ad Fund Handled by Local Agency,” November 8, 1925; “Selling Program to Advertise City Being Mapped Out,” November 29, 1925; “Advertising Expert Sees Great Atlanta in New Few Years,” December 3, 1926. Eastman, Scott and Company was a continuation of Watts & Beutell, an advertising agency created in 1919 by J. R. Watts, Jr. and C. R. Beutell, two former Georgia Tech engineers. They found success quickly, and by 1921 had expanded, hiring Myra C. Scott as a vice president. She was an Atlanta native, a graduate of Agnes Scott College with a journalism degree from Columbia University. Adding her name to the firm’s title, a bold stroke at the time, not only demonstrated her importance to the company, but also the growing presence of women professionals in the public relations field.

<sup>515</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “City’s Advertising Campaign to Begin Early in February,” January 2, 1926; “Plans Are Made For Nation-wide City Advertising,” January 31, 1926; Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, 10.

opinion was that Atlanta's first year of advertising had been an unqualified success. The mood of the citizens lifted, business morale improved, bank clearances climbed, retail trade increased, new buildings sprang up, and an \$8 million bond issue passed—including funds to build more viaducts. Having shaken off the last vestiges of the recession, Atlanta, at least some of it, was on a roll.<sup>516</sup>

The Black community had mixed reactions to Forward Atlanta. African American entrepreneurs saw economic promise in the large numbers of Florida-bound automobile tourists, but many rejected the city's big publicity campaign. It completely ignored them and their hopes for expanded communities and businesses. The *Atlanta Independent* refused to endorse Forward Atlanta and denounced the white press's acclaim of the "Atlanta spirit." However, it occasionally published the campaign's slogans, and reluctantly acknowledged that perhaps Blacks would benefit somewhat from general city growth.<sup>517</sup>

City officials, the Chamber of Commerce, and white businessmen united in celebrating the success of Forward Atlanta. New York ad expert Jesse H. Neal praised their work, claiming that "no other city in the country is using the business press with the intelligence and foresight of Atlanta." In keeping with the dictum of modern marketing that *continuous* advertising achieved the greatest benefits, the city's power brokers decided Atlanta could not afford to take a break. Eager not to lose momentum and to take advantage of the prevalent civic optimism, they proposed another fundraiser, this time for \$1 million, with an even larger-scale publicity campaign to run for three years instead of one. In late November 1926, the new drive began,

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<sup>516</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Greater Atlanta," March 28, 1926; "Ad Club Given Wood Gavel From Independence Hall; City Advertising Discussed," May 12, 1926; "Great Industrial Gain To City From Advertising Campaign, Report Shows," November 23, 1926; W. R. C. Smith, "What Are the Returns on Our Investment? An Analysis of the Profits Accrued from the Forward Atlanta Advertising Campaign," *City Builder* (December 1926).

<sup>517</sup> *Atlanta Independent*, November 27 and December 16, 1926, quoted in Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 150-51.

headed by the same men and ad agencies who had achieved such sterling results with the previous effort. On Monday, December 13, a parade of Atlanta's schoolchildren through downtown started the subscription drive. By Saturday, the entire sum had been pledged.<sup>518</sup>

The great enthusiasm and incredible fundraising speed probably had some basis in Florida's recent setbacks. By 1926, the boom had subsided somewhat, leaving numbers of property owners with land they could not sell and mortgage payments they could not make. A more devastating event in the form of the Great Miami Hurricane brought death, destruction, and an immediate check on sunshiny real estate promotions. Front-page headlines and photographs detailing flattened buildings, wrecked cars, overturned boats, and the newly homeless stalled the Gold Coast rush. Atlantans who once eyed beachfront investments re-focused on opportunities closer to home.<sup>519</sup>

New mayor Isaac N. Ragsdale, in his January 1927 inaugural speech, spoke of the power and value of advertising. If business grew bigger by advertising, so should cities. By April, the second round of publicity began. Ivan Allen, chair of the Forward Atlanta Commission, concurred with the mayor's opinion, and noted that "the Atlanta campaign is considered by

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<sup>518</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "\$1,000,000 Advertising Campaign for Atlanta is Inaugurated Monday," November 30, 1926; "Advertising Expert Sees Great Atlanta in New Few Years," December 3, 1926; "Advertising," December 6, 1926; "Drive Leaders Feel Certain of Success," December 12, 1926; "Campaign Launched," December 14, 1926; "Million Dollar Fund to Advertise Atlanta Raised, Candler Announces as Campaign Ends," December 18, 1926. The advertising expert, Jesse H. Neal, an executive with the Associated Business Papers of New York, was speaking at the Presidents' Club dinner at the Biltmore Hotel. William Candler benefitted personally from the many campaign-related events held at his hotel. This was not coincidence, but just another example of how members of the growth coalition took care of each other.

<sup>519</sup> The hurricane lasted from September 14-20, 1926, and made landfall in Miami in the early hours of September 18. The eye passed over the city's downtown at 6:15 a.m., bringing crowds of hurricane novices outdoors rejoicing that the storm had ended. The lull lasted about a half an hour when the wind abruptly increased to about 150 mph, taking some 372 lives and cause property damage of more than \$164 billion in 2007 dollars. Paul J. Richards, "Miami's Majestic Buildings Crumble Before Devastating Fury of Tropic Hurricane," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 20, 1926; "Striking Illustrations of Hurricane's Fury as It Swept Playground City of Miami," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1926; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Commerce, National Weather Service, "Great Miami Hurricane of 1926," [https://www.weather.gov/mfl/miami\\_hurricane](https://www.weather.gov/mfl/miami_hurricane); Richard Gray, "Monthly Meteorological Notes at Miami, Fla. For September 1926," (Miami Weather Bureau Office, September 1926).

national advertising authorities as the most successful community advertising ever launched. In fact, it has started a new form of city advertising, a form that more nearly approaches the advertising of American manufacturers.” Besides the actual ads, editorials in newspapers and journals across the country commended Atlanta on its novel approach, incidentally providing additional free and positive press for the city.<sup>520</sup>

A three-point formula formed the basis for the campaign’s publicity. (1) The South was America’s fastest growing market and as such warranted careful attention. (2) Industry could no longer serve the entire United States

from any one place, however centrally located. Modern merchandising, with its hand-to-mouth inventory systems and rapid re-stocking requirements, demanded decentralized distribution. (3) Atlanta, aka “Distribution City,” provided the point of greatest efficiency from which to serve the South. Transportation featured heavily in the new series of ads extolling the city’s now fifteen railroad lines and 70 million people within a day’s run. One of the ads (see figure above),

**THIS IMPATIENT AGE!**

*Cancellations come to him whose goods arrive last!*

A FUNDAMENTAL change has taken place in the American people. They will not wait for anything. They have no patience with delay. "They want what they want when they want it" —in the words of the old song.

And that change has created a new situation in merchandising. Merchants are buying hand-to-mouth. Wholesalers warehouse less and order oftener. They both expect the producer to have the goods handy, ready for quick delivery.

Speed, then, is the essence of selling under the new conditions. Availability of the goods. Strategic centers of distribution — preferably branch manufacturing plants—are essential. For the cancellations come to him whose goods arrive last.

In the South—America's fastest growing market—the logical, strategic location is Atlanta. Says the conservative Department of Commerce — "Atlanta is generally recognized as the principal headquarters city of this region." More than 900 nationally known concerns have confirmed this judgment by investing millions here in branch equipment.

And why?

Transportation for one thing. 15 main railroad lines radiating from Distribution City to reach seventy million prosperous people within a day's run.

Production economy for another. Economies in labor, power, taxes, raw materials, building costs—and a host more that enable the Atlanta producer to go into market with a better price, and a better profit.

Study the facts about Atlanta that apply to your business. They will be gathered especially for you, without charge or obligation, if you will write —

INDUSTRIAL BUREAU, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
Chamber of Commerce Building

Send for this Booklet!  
It contains the fundamental facts about Atlanta as a location for your Southern branch.

**ATLANTA**  
Industrial Headquarters of the South

Figure 41. Forward Atlanta ad with the 3-point formula, 1929.

<sup>520</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Text of New Mayor's Message," January 4, 1927; "Forward Atlanta Contract Placed," April 24, 1927.



incorporated the three-point formula in the copy, plus sketches of air, rail, and road transportation, as well as people working, shopping, at leisure, and having fun.<sup>521</sup>

The crowning achievement of the campaign occurred during 1928, when General Motors established its southeastern regional headquarters and a Chevrolet assembly plant in Atlanta. Chevrolet, an inexpensive car competing directly with the Ford Model T, had experienced record growth in the past two years, going from sales of less than 20,000 in 1925 to more than 80,000 in 1927. The factory, located on 32 acres along Sawtell Avenue in southeast Atlanta, occupied 410,000 square feet of floor space in five buildings, had a loading dock adjacent to the Southern Railway tracks, and a parking lot accommodating 5,000 cars. Employing close to 1500 men, most from the metropolitan area, it could produce 350 cars a day. As a result of the plant's location, adjoining property values increased eight-fold, going from \$50 to \$400 a square foot.<sup>522</sup>

The 1929 Forward Atlanta Commission *Report* documented the step-by-step wooing of Chevrolet, quoting from company letters. The initial contact in late 1926 produced this discouraging result, "We have no plans...for any new locations." Another outreach in early 1927 brought something a bit more hopeful: "We are fully aware of the advantages your city offers as the location for a car distribution plant...and it is not impossible that one of these days we will have to come to see you." The campaign continued to send persuasive data to General Motors, no doubt mentioning the city and county tax exemption for new factories. In October 1927, commission leaders received this happy news from GM: "We are thankful for all the information

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<sup>521</sup> Ivan E. Allen, "Atlanta Carries On," *City Builder* (June 1927): 46-47; Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, 9, 55-56, 93. Figure 41 is from the *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, Atlanta, 1929, pg. 93.

<sup>522</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Atlanta Chevrolet Plant to be Center of New Southeastern Region," January 29, 1928; "A Mammoth Industrial Exhibit in the South's Greatest Automobile Plant," August 5, 1928; "Thousands Atlantans Amazed at Magnitude of Chevrolet Plant," August 7, 1928; Boyd Taylor, "Chevrolet's Fine Plant in Atlanta," *City Builder* (July 1928): 10-11, 33-34.

we have received describing the facilities of your city. . . . A plant in your city became not only a possibility but a necessity.”<sup>523</sup>

The campaign chalked up other wins benefiting the city’s automotive interests. One of the major ones was the decision, in 1929, by the B. F. Goodrich Company to build a tire factory north of downtown near Georgia Tech. The plant would initially employ 1,000 workers and produce 5,000 tires per day.<sup>524</sup>

By any metric, the Forward Atlanta Campaign was an outstanding triumph. During its four-year run, the city gained 594 establishments with 16,911 employees and estimated annual payrolls of \$29.2 million. The movement cemented Atlanta’s reputation as a distribution center and branch office town, and according to one contemporary writer, turned “depression into progress.” While the campaign ended with the decade, its stunning success virtually ensured a continuation into the 1930s, a hope dashed by the onset of the Great Depression.<sup>525</sup>

Forward Atlanta exemplified the power and energy of the united business community. It took strong, sustained action on a national scale to ensure the city’s position as the regional leader. The group successfully utilized modern advertising techniques to market Atlanta, and along the way, also managed to protect their existing business interests as well as create new opportunities for the city and themselves. With ordinary folk excluded from leadership positions

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<sup>523</sup> Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, 60.

<sup>524</sup> “Atlanta Facing Greatest Era of Prosperity; Record of Progress Draws National Attention,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 18, 1928; Frank Shaw, “Goodrich Tire Factory Now a ‘Fact’; Will Be Making Tires in Few Months,” *City Builder* (August 1929): 22.

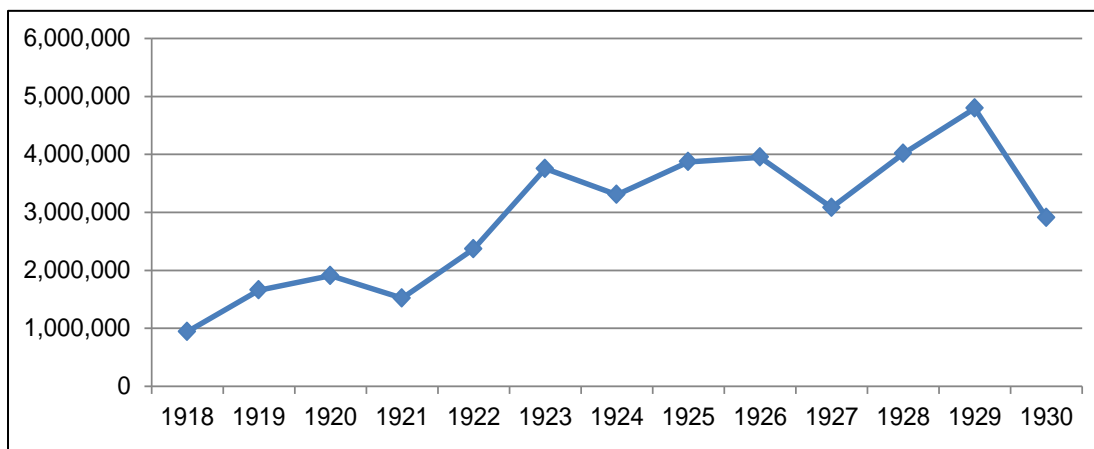
<sup>525</sup> Forward Atlanta Commission, *Report of the Forward Atlanta Commission*, 57, 73; Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 412; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 49; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:814-15. The Forward Atlanta campaign was so successful that Ivan Allen, Jr. (1911-2003) followed in his father’s footsteps by recycling the concept. Shortly before his election as mayor of Atlanta (1962-70), he persuaded the Chamber of Commerce into a \$1.5 million fundraiser to advertise the city for three years; “The Great Leap Forward,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 18, 1961.

(although their subscriptions were welcomed), the campaign epitomized the city growth coalition in action.

#### 7.4 Atlanta and the Automobile Rollercoaster

During the twenties, Atlanta experienced the downs and ups of recession and recovery, civic malaise and municipal success. The fortunes of the motor vehicle industry followed a similarly fluctuating trajectory, although the overall trend was up (see graph below<sup>526</sup>). Any market downturn caused great concern and brought a search for quick remedies because, locally and nationally, the automotive trades held an increasingly important position in the economy.

*Table 15. Number of Passenger Cars Produced in the U.S., 1918-1930*



The automobile industry and associated businesses had emerged as significant entities within the city's physical and economic presence. By 1920, Atlanta boasted 81 car dealers and 255 related businesses, such as garages, paint and repair shops, and parts and accessories stores. Automobile Row (the section of eight blocks of Peachtree Street between Ellis Street and Ponce de Leon Boulevard) had grown to include 79 automobile dealerships and related enterprises. In

<sup>526</sup> Data is from the U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*, Part 7, Roads, Motor Vehicles, etc., pg. 334.

1922, the city had 156 garages alone, the high point for the decade. With so many automobile-dependent businesses, Atlanta leaders worried greatly about the impact of the recession.<sup>527</sup>

Late in the first recession year, the Georgia Automotive Dealers Association held a dealer-banker convention at the prestigious Capital City Club. John Edward Smith (1877-1956), president of both the Atlanta Automobile Dealers Association and the city's largest, most prestigious automobile dealership, helped organize the event which sought to allay widespread worry. In November 1919, the Federal Reserve Bank had upped the rediscount rate on cars purchased on installment. The effect raised the down payment required for an automobile bought on a time plan from the earlier rate (which hovered between 25% and 33%) to almost 50% of the purchase price.<sup>528</sup>

The increase had an immediate and obvious dampening effect on car sales. Mayor James L. Key, in his welcome speech, stressed the significant role of the automobile industry, the city's largest, in supporting Atlanta's economy. He asserted "It does more to uphold the value of real estate, to keep bank deposits high and for our general and commercial welfare than any other business." M. B. Wellborn, governor of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, spoke to the standing-room-only crowd of nearly 400 troubled convention-goers. He described the current financial crisis as typical post-war inflation, and assured attendees that the Federal Reserve stood ready "to accept automobile paper from our member banks," as long as they met the requirements.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Counts are from the *Atlanta City Directory*, 1920, pages 1339-44. The Automobile Row numbers are from Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 37. I dispute some of the numbers in Preston, pg. 41, which may be miscounts or failure to take into account businesses which had multiple locations within the city.

<sup>528</sup> Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 83.

<sup>529</sup> M. B. Wellborn, "Industry Important, Says Wellborn," *Automotive Industries: The Automobile* 43, no. 18 (October 28, 1920): 887. Maximilian Bethune Wellborn (1862-1957) was the first chairman of the board of the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank, helping to open it on November 16, 1914. He served as its governor from 1919-1927.

The automotive trades embarked on a series of actions which, in little over a year, began to restore their profits. The Ford Motor Company slashed prices, cut costs, and forced very reluctant dealers to carry excess inventory. General Motors experienced catastrophic losses. Only a massive cash infusion from affluent patrons like J. P. Morgan and the du Pont family saved the corporation from the bankruptcy suffered by many other car manufacturers.<sup>530</sup>

With greater sales volume the goal, automotive entities expanded their advertising budgets dramatically. Advertisers no longer acted as simple brokers placing ads in the daily newspaper for in-town customers. Now, large ad agencies served multiple clients across the country, creating detailed promotional campaigns aimed at national audiences, and utilizing diverse media platforms. Vastly improved visuals and clever copy sought to break down consumer resistance to spending, emphasizing both the work utility and leisure possibilities of the automobile.<sup>531</sup>

Manufacturers, in their efforts to sustain a year-round production schedule, sought to coordinate their marketing strategies with local dealerships. Most dealers believed that winter was a dead time for car sales, and waited until spring to place orders and begin promotions. The manager of the Southern Oakland Company, headquartered in Atlanta, encouraged his fellow retailers to take advantage of their brand's nationwide publicity programs, calling them "the road to prosperity." The massive efforts bore fruit, eventually engineering "one of the most phenomenal business recoveries of 1922," a triumph which would extend throughout the following year.<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> The efficacy of the very different approaches of Ford and General Motors to the recession are well documented; Chandler, *Giant Enterprise: Ford, General Motors, and the Automobile Industry*, 12-13, 71-73; Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 83-108; Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, 148-50.

<sup>531</sup> Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 84.

<sup>532</sup> "Martin Tells of Dealer-Manufacturer Relationship," *Automobile Trade Journal* 24, no. 9 (March 1, 1920): 264-65. Walter B. Brown, "Recovery of Auto Industry in 1922 Was Phenomenal," *Atlanta Constitution*,

The growing popularity of “closed” cars contributed to the success. Before the twenties, manufacturers mainly produced the less expensive “open” cars, i.e., convertibles, with folding fabric tops which had to be maintained or replaced (see ad at right). Only the well-to-do could afford the more costly hard-tops, commonly called “sedans.” Sales for open cars were seasonal, but the increasing demand



**The Top of An Automobile**

is the most conspicuous thing on your car. When your auto top is worn and shabby, your whole car takes on that appearance.

Now is the time to have a new top put on and the work will be done in a hurry (as all automobilists are always in a hurry.)

**Automobile Tops, Seat Covers and Painting**

**THEY HAVE A NEW CAR**

is what every one thinks who sees your automobile after it has been painted and refinished by us. When your car has lost its lustre and the finish has “cracked,” its beauty is diminished and it looks like an old car. Let us make your car look like a new one with new paint and varnish that is put on by skilled painters.

**ATLANTA TOP COMPANY**

**WM. H. SPRATLIN and A. L. QUINN, Props.**

155-157 Edgewood Ave. Phone Ivy 5536 Atlanta, Ga.

Figure 42. Ad for car tops; *Atlanta City Directory*, 1923, pg. 6.

for sedans eliminated the dealerships’ usual winter slowdowns. With the automobile now a necessity rather than just a vehicle for pleasure rides, motorists required an improved year-round utility.<sup>533</sup>

George Babbitt himself drove an open-roofed, hand-cranked Model T Ford, while his family militated for a sedan: his wife, because it was cleaner and didn’t muss her hair; his son, because it had more class; his daughter, because her friend’s father had one. As Sinclair Lewis observes, the family’s discussion of their dream car represented “more than a study of

January 1, 1923, was originally published in the *New York Commercial*, December 31, 1922; B. F. Ulmer, “Springtime Favorite Period of New Motor Car Sales,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1918.

<sup>533</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: Brown, “Recovery,” January 1, 1923; “Pretty Type of Oakland Car Designed for Use Both in Summer and Winter, February 24, 1918. The major body styles were divided into two types. Open cars included the two-seater roadster and the four- or five-seater touring car. Closed cars with permanent tops included the two-seater coupe, the four- or five-seater sedan, and the limousine, which could seat five to seven passengers. In 1925, closed car production first surpassed open car production, and in 1928, nearly eight times more closed than open cars were produced.

transportation. It was an aspiration for knightly rank.” In America, the omnipresent automobile was emerging as a highly visible and very precise indicator of social rank.<sup>534</sup>

Motorism’s surge continued, and in 1923, a *Constitution* lede triumphantly proclaimed: “Ladies and gentlemen, the automobile—America’s most valuable manufacture today.” That year’s biennial manufacturing census ranked motor vehicles first among U.S. industrial products, outstripping steel (#2), meatpacking (#3), and petroleum (slipped from #2 in 1921 to #7). Over 13 million cars, trucks, and buses now travelled the nation’s roadways.<sup>535</sup>

The automobile industry’s #1 position provided a huge boost to railroad traffic, yet also aroused significant concerns within a railroad community only just shaking off its post-war doldrums compounded by the recession. The production of vast numbers of motor vehicles required massive rail shipments of raw materials to factories and parts to assembly plants like those in Atlanta. Trains also carried the finished vehicles to terminals across the country.

Atlanta’s railroads, and the city’s reputation, benefited from greatly from the automobile freight. A solid train called the “Automobile Special” ran from Cincinnati, leaving there at 12:30 a.m., and reaching Atlanta at 4:45 a.m. the following day. The early morning arrival allowed locally-destined vehicles to be unloaded and inside city dealerships by the start of business, while the rest continued their journey to other locations in Georgia and Florida. The magnitude of traffic necessitated a daily run of the Special.<sup>536</sup>

To accommodate the volume, the Southern Railway in Atlanta constructed a new terminal, just west of its mainline tracks on North Avenue. The location was within easy reach of

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<sup>534</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: Signet Classic, 1920), chs. 1, 6; pagination not available in online edition, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1156/56-h/56-h.htm>.

<sup>535</sup> “Autos Are First Product of U.S.,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1923; Bureau of the Census U.S. Department of Commerce, *Biennial Census of Manufactures 1923* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926), 24.

<sup>536</sup> Lauren Foreman, “Southern Railway Operates Automobile Special,” *City Builder* 10, no. 2 (April 1924): 40-41. A “solid” train had no cars added or removed en route and therefore could make better time.

the automobile district, which had spread considerably from Peachtree Street's original "Automobile Row" onto West Peachtree and Spring streets. Fifteen railroad cars at a time could line up at the 592-foot-long platform. A ramp allowed trucks and cars to drive directly from the platform to dealer showrooms via North Avenue, a route which avoided the most congested downtown streets. The combination of the Automobile Special and the new terminal contributed immensely to Atlanta's designation as one of the leading automobile centers in the U.S.<sup>537</sup>

Although happy about their expanding heavy-freight traffic courtesy of the motor vehicle industry, the railroads feared their new competitors driving on the roadways. As early as 1923, the rail carriers began to complain about federal subsidies of highways and roads. Thomas H. MacDonald, chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, spoke reassuringly, "The highway will never be a competitor of the railway. It will be a supplementary servitor. . . . Far from being a danger to the railroads, the highways we are building will be their faithful allies."<sup>538</sup>

Buses and trucks, however, increasingly usurped the railroads' passenger and freight short-haul traffic, so much so that in 1925, the railways claimed that they had lost nearly 3,800 miles of track to motorized challengers. MacDonald testified before President Coolidge's National Transportation Committee, insisting that highway transportation caused only a very small percentage of the abandoned trackage. As Goddard flatly states, MacDonald, that relentless pro-highway propagandist and promoter of the government-motordom coalition, flagrantly lied to the committee. Interstate Commerce Commission annual reports bear out Goddard's assertion.

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<sup>537</sup> Foreman. The Southern Railway, founded in Richmond in 1894, was one of Atlanta's premier corporate citizens, both as a taxpayer and an employer. In the 1920s, its North Avenue terminal, along with its tracks by the General Motors plant in southeast Atlanta, brought a high percentage of the automotive freight to the city; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:295.

<sup>538</sup> The railroads' complaints about federal aid to a competing industry have to be the mother of all hypocrisies, given the massive land grants worth billions which they received from the U.S. government in the 1800s. Thomas H. MacDonald, "What Our Highways Mean to Us," *Trade Winds* (February 1923): 16.



The documents show that the majority of track abandonments were the *direct* result of motor vehicle competition. Railroads had good reason to fear.<sup>539</sup>

Motordom's relentless momentum appeared unstoppable. As traffic increasingly clogged downtown streets and the numbers of auto-related fatalities swelled, the Chamber of Commerce applauded the great automobile industry which had done so much for the state and the city. In Georgia, more than 500 buses carried children to and from schools in rural as well as urban areas. Motorized tractors transformed agriculture and trucks allowed farmers to transport their goods to market more efficiently. The automobile had considerably extended Atlanta's retail territory; customers now drove from 50 to 150 miles to shop in city department stores. It also redefined retail geography at the city boundaries as merchants established branch stores adjacent to the new suburban neighborhoods. Some 5,000 local automobile workers received decent wages, most of which they spent in town. The Chamber enthusiastically credited the automobile with securing Atlanta's position as the financial center of the South.<sup>540</sup>

A similar sentiment prevailed nationally, as many hailed the booming automobile industry as the backbone of Coolidge prosperity. Allen notes, "The phenomenal activity of this one part of the body economic—which was responsible directly or indirectly for the employment of nearly four million men—pumped new life into all the rest." The rising tide of motordom may have lifted other industries, but the Republican administrations of Coolidge and Hoover greatly assisted business generally, and the car industry specifically. Reduced regulatory oversight, non-interference in business affairs, the lack of anti-trust actions, hostility to labor unions, and tax

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<sup>539</sup> The railroads dated their track loss from 1916; Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 115-17.

<sup>540</sup> T. K. Johnson, "The Day of the Automobile: Business Conditions Hopeful in Atlanta and Entire Southeast," *City Builder* (October 1925): 11, 41-42; Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, 80-81.

policies which favored corporations and the rich—all gave confidence to the business community.<sup>541</sup>

Throughout the twenties, government and business became more intertwined, particularly through the efforts of Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce for both Harding and Coolidge. Under his direction, Commerce grew from a small department with little control into a powerful, multi-agency organization. Acting with the trade associations, he brought corporate leaders and federal officials into public-private coalitions for the benefit of business. Each industry within multi-faceted motordom had its own trade group to participate in the quasi-governmental commissions and studies, to lobby and to secure policies and legislation advantageous to themselves.<sup>542</sup>

The Highway Education Board stands out as an example of a government agency whose constituents represented various sectors of motordom, and whose actions had a direct impact on Atlanta's streets. In 1920, the head of the Bureau of Public Roads, the president of the Hudson Motor Car Company, and an executive from the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce together urged the appointment of a Highway and Highway Transport Education Committee. Renamed the Highway Education Board in 1922, its members all had vested interests in

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<sup>541</sup> Allen, *Only Yesterday; an Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, 114, 118; Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, 34-37; Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 179-80, 265; David Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 95; Maurice E. Stucke and Ariel Ezrachi, "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the U.S. Antitrust Movement," *Harvard Business Review* (December 15, 2017): <https://hbr.org/2017/12/the-rise-fall-and-rebirth-of-the-u-s-antitrust-movement>. The auto industry prohibited unions until after the organization of the United Automobile Workers in 1935. The group's first strike was at General Motor's Chevrolet plant on Sawtell Avenue in Atlanta beginning on November 18, 1936; "'Sit-Down' Strike Grips Fisher Plant," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1936. General Motors and Chrysler would recognize the UAW in early 1937, but Ford held out until 1941.

<sup>542</sup> Allen, *Only Yesterday; an Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, 114, 118; Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 76; Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, 34-37; Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the Twentieth Century*, 111, 14. On Hoover's ambition for building up the nation's commerce, see "'Boss' of Radio Tells of Great Growth in U.S.," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1923.

furthering the construction of new roads, nurturing engineers to build them, and instructing the public on their proper use. A principle tenet of the Board was its insistence that *all* citizens should subsidize building and maintaining highways, whether they owned a motor car or not. Since everybody benefitted, everybody should pay.<sup>543</sup>

The Highway Education Board wrote road safety curricula for public schools, produced popular booklets and scientific bulletins, created traveling exhibits of properly constructed highways and bridges, and sponsored school good roads and traffic safety essay-writing contests. Atlanta's public school system adopted the federal agency's curriculum and approaches, and its students participated in the national essay contests. The city's future citizens would be well indoctrinated into the promise of the Board: that the scientific regulation of streets, highways, and traffic would promote the prosperity, welfare, and domestic happiness of American communities.<sup>544</sup>

The federal government, with its national educational programs and helpful regulatory stance, created a friendly operating environment for carmakers and their products. In 1922 and 1923, the industry produced record numbers of vehicles. But in 1924, they faced a thoroughly unfamiliar and distressing situation: their home market had reached saturation, something many thought would never occur. Virtually everyone in the country who could afford a car had by this time already purchased one. Many American families simply did not have enough money to buy

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<sup>543</sup> Norman Damon, "The Action Program for Highway Safety," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 320 (November 1958): 16; Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the Twentieth Century*, 112-13; Highway and Highway Transport Education Committee, "Proceedings of the Second National Conference" (Washington, DC, October 26-28, 1922), various; Graham, "Sending the Highways to School," 87.

<sup>544</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Schools to Teach Pupils to Observe Traffic Regulations," November 14, 1920; "A.A.A. Offers Prizes for 'Safety' Essay," November 6, 1921; Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education, "Proceedings of the Thirty-First Annual Meeting" (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, June 20-23, 1923), 29-31; Walton C. John, "The Purpose of the Second National Conference on Education for Highway Engineering and Highway Transport" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the Second National Conference, Washington, DC, October 26-28, 1922), 15.

even a low-priced Model T Ford, no matter how much they might wish for one. They would remain trolley-riding “straphangers” for the foreseeable future.<sup>545</sup>

Those who already owned cars saw no need to replace them. Mazur documents the tremendous, often insurmountable reluctance of the average buyer to replace a heavy item like a car while it retained usefulness. Manufacturers could not wait 6.75 years (the average lifespan of a motor vehicle at the time) until an automobile started to wear out, and the owner began to think about shopping for a replacement. Slowing down production was far too costly; instead, automakers needed to surmount the wall of consumer resistance and increase sales volume to match their tremendous output.<sup>546</sup>

The industry had just unexpectedly entered into a new period of its history: competition rather than growth. The era of peak profitability, the 1910s, had ended; the period of peak production capacity had begun. Prior to World War I, the problem had been for factories to make enough cars, not to sell them. Dealers did not have to hone their marketing skills; instead, they just pleaded with manufacturers to send them more and larger shipments quickly.<sup>547</sup>

That time had passed. The challenge now was not selling someone their first car; rather, it was getting the current car owner to purchase a new one, and make sure it was one of yours rather than one of the other guys'. The growing presence of a price-friendly used-car market

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<sup>545</sup> Robert H. Martin, “The Future of the Automobile Industry,” *City Builder* 6, no. 9 (November 1921): 3. Data recorded in table is from U.S. Department of Commerce’s census statistical abstracts for 1930, 1933, and 1950. In 1922, the idea of the auto industry would reach market saturation seemed absurd. The most serious problem engineers then worried about was running out of oil. The Mining and Metallurgical Engineers met in March 1921 to discuss the regional oil supplies of North and South America. They were not panicked. “No one appears to doubt...that, somehow, somewhere, new sources of power will be found to make possible man’s continuing and heightened mobility,” “Motor Car Statistics,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1922; “Automobility,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1922.

<sup>546</sup> Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 72-73, 92; Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, 155-56. Paul M. Mazur (1892-1979) was a leading investment banker working in 1927 for Lehman Brothers, where he eventually made senior partner. The 1929 average car lifespan cited is from National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, *Facts and Figures of the Automobile Industry*, 14.

<sup>547</sup> Chandler, 13; “How to Sell Automobiles,” *Fortune* (February 1939): 71-78, 105-09, quoted in Chandler, 161-163;

complicated matters and threatened new car sales. More and better advertising helped bring motordom out of the recession.

## 7.5 Advertising the Automobile

The novel situation encountered by automakers in 1924, a saturated marketplace, demanded an immediate response. The many technological innovations in engineering and manufacturing inaugurated by the Ford Motor Company's moving assembly line had dramatically expanded the ability to make record numbers of automobiles. Routinized and progressive assembly tasks, heavier machinery, specialized tools, parts-sharing across car lines—all combined to reduce costs and speed up production. By the mid-twenties, the other carmakers had followed Ford's lead with significant re-design and re-tooling of their shop floors.<sup>548</sup>

Automakers understood that, to sell all the vehicles they now produced, they needed to market to new and returning customers, and to nurture an easy buying experience for everyone. Both continuous demand and a constantly increasing demand were necessary to handle their expanded production capacity, which grew from less than 2 million cars in 1920, to nearly 5 million in 1929. Through various persuasive methods, manufacturers could, as Leach observes, forge a new consumer consciousness, and create a culture of desire.<sup>549</sup>

By the mid-1920s, an entire field of marketing had emerged, peopled by professionals, the graduates of business schools. Harvard led the country, establishing its School of Business in 1908, and offering the first master's degree in business administration. By 1920, numbers of colleges and universities had established graduate programs in retailing.

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<sup>548</sup> Daniel M. G. Raff, "Making Cars and Making Money in the Interwar Automobile Industry: Economies of Scale and Scope and the Manufacturing Behind the Marketing," *Business History Review* 65, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 723-24, 31, 35, 43-44.

<sup>549</sup> Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 21; Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 37.

Atlanta's business school began at the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1913, with Wayne S. Kell as dean. Officially named the Evening School of Commerce in 1914, it offered a three-year Bachelor of Commercial Science degree, and its classes met at night. Dean Kell oversaw the move off the Georgia Tech campus into a building on Walton Street in downtown to facilitate access by the non-traditional students, who made up a large part of the school's attendees. These "irregulars" consisted primarily of men employed full-time, who could only attend classes after working hours. In 1917, to offset the declining enrollment due to the war-time draft, the dean began admitting women students. The school, which eventually morphed into today's Georgia State University, grew rapidly during the twenties under the guidance of director George M. Sparks. A 1921 *Constitution* article credited the prominent place of women in the city's business life to their attendance at the Evening School. They took classes in accounting, office management, finance, and commercial law, but "the alluring field of advertising" was one of the most popular courses of study."<sup>550</sup>

Modern, scientific marketing had two distinct components: research and advertising. Ad agencies as well as large corporations created their own research departments to gather facts and figures about specific industries. The data included surveys of consumer needs and preferences as well as statistical studies of sales and trends, taking account of seasonal fluctuations and regional differences. The information fed into corporate forecasting and planning, and enabled better coordination between the divisions responsible for ordering, manufacturing, shipping, and sales. According to Isenberg, "industry experts well understood those who researched and

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<sup>550</sup> Stantec and Georgia State University, "Campus Historic Preservation Plan," (Atlanta: Georgia State University, June 6, 2014), 3-4. Georgia State buildings were named for two of the early leaders: Kell Hall (the former Ivy Street Garage, now demolished), and Sparks Hall. The war generally proved a great boon to women who wished to enter business; *Atlanta Constitution*: Bessie Kempton, "Atlanta Women Prominent in Advertising Work," June 12, 1921; "Women Enrolling in Commerce School," September 18, 1921. The evening school was considered a great asset by and for Atlanta businesses; James A. Hollomon, "Just in Passing," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1923.

defined markets often had the power to create them.” In the twenties, the obvious goal was to create a new market.<sup>551</sup>

The advertising side of marketing involved the promotion of commercial products and services in public media outlets. Trachtenberg notes how the earlier manifestations of advertising, which merely provided product information to potential customers, now assumed a different configuration. The modern advertisement supplied facts, but also described how the consumer *required* the product to meet a specific need—“a need incited and articulated by the ad itself.” As early as the late nineteenth century, department stores, the great innovators in advertising, had introduced this type of “story-telling” ad (a descriptor which aptly captures both its narrative and deceitful characteristics). Automakers, in this as in other aspects of selling, lagged behind the early merchandising geniuses, but caught up quickly after World War I.<sup>552</sup>

Allen describes the new approach this way:

The advertisers met the competition with better design, persuasively realistic photographs, and sheer volume. . . . They met it . . . with a subtle change of technic. The copywriter was learning to pay less attention to the special qualities and advantages of his product, and more to the study of what the mass of unregenerate mankind wanted—to be young and desirable, to be rich, to keep up with the Joneses, to be envied. The winning method was to associate his product with one or more of these ends, logically or illogically, truthfully or cynically.<sup>553</sup>

Each ad created its own portrayal of promise and aspiration, not just with words, but increasingly with images. The printing industry’s lithograph departments had progressed from the simple line sketches of the late 1800s. By the 1920s, they could photograph anything, transfer

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<sup>551</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, 94; T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 138. Lears has pointed out that by engaging in market research, advertisers were pioneering the statistical surveillance of private life, which would lead to “the maintenance of managerial cultural hegemony;” a view substantiated by Wimberly; Cory Wimberly, *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Government of the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>552</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1982), 135, 37.

<sup>553</sup> Allen, *Only Yesterday; an Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, 121.

it onto a zinc plate, and print between 6000-7000 impressions per hour. The higher-end national publications offered four-color printing to their advertisers, and pictures crowded the Sunday rotogravure supplements of large city newspapers, including Atlanta's three dailies.<sup>554</sup>

The city's printing industry had emerged as the South's leader. In addition to the newspaper companies, by the mid-twenties, nearly 100 printers, binders, and engravers worked in Atlanta, employing more than 2,000 workers and supplying the largest payroll of any single business, after the cotton mills. They produced telephone and city directories, books, catalogs, commercial forms, direct mail advertising, and agricultural and religious newspapers. Their leading outputs were the class journals—magazines of all types—which had nationwide circulation. Every major regional industry had its own class journal, many of which were published in Atlanta. It consumed more paper and printers' ink than any other city in the southeast due to journal production. Local postal authorities recorded higher receipts than any other city of comparable size in the U.S. due to the print mailings originating in Atlanta.<sup>555</sup>

Fortunately for the printers and publishers, Atlanta also stood at the center of the South's paper trade. Samuel P. Richards started the first paper mill in the city in the late 1800s, and in the early 1900s, multiple companies from the northeast and Midwest established branches in Atlanta, along with local entrepreneurs. By 1920, the city was the wholesale and distribution center for papers and paper goods of all kinds for the southeastern U.S.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Walter O. Foote, "The Printing Industry in Atlanta," *City Builder* (August 1926): 48. In 1919, the *Atlanta Journal* installed the South's first newspaper-owned rotogravure plant, which enabled it to insert local and state pictures instead of relying on the photographs from news syndicates; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:58. In 1926, the *Constitution* wrote an article about its 16-page Christmas advertising supplement, printed all in-house in four colors, for the M. Rich Brothers Company, one of the city's premier department stores; "Innovation in Advertising Presented by Constitution," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 28, 1926. Four-color wet process inks (the CMYK familiar to computer users today) were developed in the first decade of the twentieth century.

<sup>555</sup> Foote, "The Printing Industry in Atlanta," 5, 47-48; Louis D. Newton, "Atlanta Leads in Class Journals," *ibid.*: 6.

<sup>556</sup> "Atlanta as the Center of the Paper Trade of the South," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1921.



Advertisements did not only appear on paper. Signage of all types and sizes publicized products, businesses, special sales, and promotions. Electric signs, introduced in Atlanta in 1902, had grown in size, numbers, and colors. After 1912, panoramic and moving signs appeared. In 1921, the just-opened Howard Theater on Peachtree Street installed on its rooftop the city's largest flashing-light sign. Even the Chamber of Commerce, located one block east of Five Points, erected a big electric sign—visible from Peachtree Street—so visitors could easily find the building.<sup>557</sup>

Another type of sign, roadside billboards, aimed to capture the attention of the motorist. These had to be large enough to be easily seen and read while traveling at some speed. Earlier, outdoor signs in cities and small towns had been affixed to fences and buildings. With the coming of the automobile and the greatly improved streets and highways, advertisers preferred side-of-the-road locations. One of the country's first national out-of-home advertising groups, the Associated Bill Posters' Association, formed in 1891. By 1900, they had standardized sizes, allowing national brands to mass-produce posters that would reliably fit onto any billboard anywhere in the nation.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Big Electric Sign On Howard Theater Largest in South," January 9, 1921; "Chamber Erects Large Electric Sign on Building," May 20, 1923. Leach traces the evolution of electrical sign advertising, and notes that the most popular color standard, the Munsell Color System (still in use today), was developed by Albert Munsell in 1900; Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 47-50.

<sup>558</sup> The 1900 standardized structure held posters of three, eight, and sixteen sheets, with each sheet measuring 42" x 28"; "Out of Home Advertising," Florida Outdoor Advertising Association, Inc., <https://foaa.org/>. The largest standard-size billboard that is now used on highways and major arterial streets measures 14' x 48'; "Bulletins," Out of Home Advertising Association of America, Inc., <https://oaaa.org/>.

Atlanta's own St. Elmo Murray Massengale (1876-1929) established the South's first outdoor bulletin system in 1910 (see figure at right). The

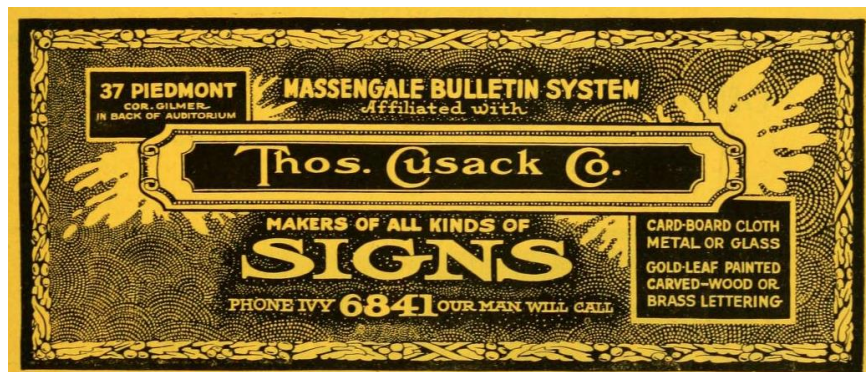


Figure 43. Ad for Massengale Bulletin System, 1923.

company, an outgrowth of the successful ad firm he created in 1896, was one of the first in the nation to hire landscapers to plant grass and care for the grounds beneath the lighted outdoor signs. Massengale, one of the city's elite businessmen, was called the "dean of southern advertising." He founded the Atlanta Ad Men's Club, the first association of ad agents in the South, and helped create the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World. His firm was one of Coca-Cola's first ad agencies.<sup>559</sup>

In 1925, the billboard industry established the Outdoor Advertising Association of America to protect its interests. That year, a merger between several firms created the gigantic General Outdoor Advertising Company, which had a strong presence in Atlanta. Large car manufacturers utilized the outdoor ad firms to place their displays on billboards across America, so Atlantans saw the same product promotions as people in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.<sup>560</sup>

<sup>559</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Glowing Tributes Paid Massengale On Anniversary," June 15, 1921; "St. Elmo M. Massengale, Prominent Advertising Man, Dies After Lengthy Illness," August 20, 1929. The Cusack ad with the Massengale Bulletin System is from the 1923 *Atlanta City Directory*, pg. 153.

<sup>560</sup> "Cusack," *Time* 4, no. 14 (October 6, 1924): 29. Massengale sold out to Thomas Cusack in 1919. Cusack was one of the leading firms in the big merger of 1925, which consolidated a large number of agencies throughout the U.S.

Over the decade, the city earned the reputation as the leading advertising center in the Southeast, offering the region's most extensive promotional facilities. Local auto dealers utilized every medium available to advertise their biggest event of the year, the Southern Automobile Convention. The Atlanta Automobile Association, which sponsored the annual show, placed ads in newspapers and posters on billboards. They also printed and distributed 100,000 pieces of direct mail for dealers to give to prospective customers. In 1924, for the first time, they also advertised on radio from the *Atlanta Journal's* station, WSB.<sup>561</sup>

In the early 1920s, few radio stations had on-air advertisements (the term "commercials" meaning broadcast product advertisements did not come into common usage until the 1930s). By decade's end, most sold ad time just like newspapers sold ad space. Calvin Coolidge became the first president to campaign on the radio when he addressed an estimated 20 million listeners on Monday, November 3, 1924, the night before the election he won. Edward L. Bernays, noted publicist and promoter of advertising techniques to create and control the desires of the masses, found the new medium a superb way to influence a large consumer audience.<sup>562</sup>

In 1928, Bernays orchestrated a promotional campaign for the new Dodge automobile, the Victory Six. It included the "Victory Hour," a one-hour national radio broadcast, involving multiple performers contributing live from Detroit, New Orleans, Chicago, and New York,

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<sup>561</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Many Answer Dodge Bros. Slogan Query," September 25, 1921; "Buyer Sees All Of 'Em At Show," January 28, 1923; "Southern Auto Show Publicity Planned," January 13, 1924. Besides its publications and radio stations, Atlanta offered superior telephone and telegraph services, being the home to the Southern Bell Company. The city also led the south in aviation, with its acquisition of Candler Field (now Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport), and the inauguration of air mail in 1926; Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 775-81.

<sup>562</sup> Carole Scott, "History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940," *EH.Net Encyclopedia of Economic and Business History* (March 26, 2008), <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>. Use of "commercial" for broadcast ads from OED Online, June 2020, Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37081?redirectedFrom=commercial>; Raymond Clapper, "Commercial Era Looms for Radio," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 12, 1924; Library of Congress, "Radio: A Consumer Product and a Producer of Consumption," <http://lcweb2.loc.gov:8081/ammem/amrlhtml/inradio.html>; Edward L. Bernays, "What Future for Radio Advertising?" *Advertising and Selling* (February 8, 1928): 27, 59, 61-62; Allen, *Only Yesterday; an Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, 117.

emceed by Will Rogers in Hollywood (see ad below). Called “the most intricate engineering feat thus far attempted in radio broadcasting,” 33 stations, including WSB in Atlanta, aired the NBC program. The entire country learned at the same moment about the newest Dodge motor car.<sup>563</sup>

A retired ad man, writing of his years in the industry during the first decades of the twentieth century, called it the “golden era of advertising-merchandising history.” Many strategies and media had been introduced or reached maturity during the time period. Improved transportation and communications supported the profusion of promotional devices. From the classified newspaper ads and streetcar posters of the early 1900s, publicity now reached audiences via direct-mail pieces, colorful magazines, sponsored radio programs, tabloids, telephone surveys, electric signs, half- or full-page newspaper display ads, lighted highway billboards, mail-order catalogues, and even the movies.<sup>564</sup>

*Tune-in on the*  
**\$60,000  
Dodge  
Broadcast**

January 4th, 9:30 to 10:30 P. M., Central Standard Time

**Programme Includes World's  
Leading Performers**

WILL ROGERS    FRED STONE    PAUL WHITEMAN  
AL JOLSON        DOROTHY STONE

Will Rogers, as master of ceremonies, will broadcast from Hollywood, Calif.; Fred Stone from Chicago; Paul Whiteman and his band from New York, and Al Jolson from New Orleans, in a link-up of 33 broadcasting stations made possible by the most intricate engineering with special telephonic circuits and the use of over 12,000 miles of telephone wire. WSB, of Atlanta, will bring the broadcast to you with faultless reception. If you have no radio in your home come and hear this outstanding broadcast of the year in our salesroom.

*You Are Invited to Our Showrooms to Listen in  
and Also See the*

**“DODGE VICTORY SIX”**

*Motordom's Sensation*  
**SPECIAL DISPLAY and DEMONSTRATIONS**

A car that is as outstanding in the field of engineering as is the famous Dodge Brothers \$60,000 broadcast. Make this a gala night—see the new car—hear this wonderful program—both at our salesroom.

**Lambeth-Eskridge Motor Co.**  
456 Peachtree Street

Figure 44. Ad for 1928 Dodge radio show; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1928.

<sup>563</sup> The NBC one-hour broadcast cost Dodge about \$67,000; “Radio In the Home: Dodge Hour Costs More Than \$60,000,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1928. Starting in 1927, the newspaper carried a special “Radio In the Home” section. The Victory Hour had another broadcast in March 1928. Walter Chrysler would buy Dodge Brothers later that year, and rename the car the “Dodge Brothers Six.”

<sup>564</sup> Harden Bryant Leachman, *The Early Advertising Scene* (Wood Dale, IL: H. B. Leachman, 1949), 247; White, “Hand-to-Mouth Buying,” 136. Leachman does not include movies in his summary.

Motion pictures brought advertisers multiple merchandising opportunities, such as product placement within a movie or product endorsements by movie stars. Film provided an excellent way to display motor vehicles and tell stories, as Charlie Chaplin brilliantly did in *The Kid* (1921), where he utilized cars to underscore his tale of class and wealth inequality. But one did not have to go to Hollywood to shoot an ad. Atlanta's Graphic Films Corporation produced motion pictures for sales or publicity purposes, which local theaters screened ahead of the feature film. As the company's own ad copy read, movies had the ability to attract, entertain, interest, explain, and above all, convince.<sup>565</sup>

Despite the variety of promotional venues available by the end of the 1920s, newspaper and magazine advertising still led the field. Car manufacturers utilized every possible medium to plug their products, while local dealers continued to place their ads in print publications whose readers lived within Atlanta's retail territory. Newspapers in particular won commendations from the Chamber of Commerce for their optimistic boosting of the city through their publicity about new businesses, enterprises, citizens, and buildings. The Chamber claimed that the papers had "contributed more to Atlanta's upbuilding and progress than any other one factor."<sup>566</sup>

Automakers spent heavily for newspaper and magazine advertising. In 1924, the national print ad dollars for passenger cars alone reached nearly \$9 million, making it the third largest class of merchandise advertiser in the U.S., after foods and toiletries. It was money well spent. Market research proved conclusively that people read ads and bought advertised merchandise.<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> Graphic Films Corporation ad, *City Builder* 11, no. 3 (April 1925): inside front cover.

<sup>566</sup> "Newspapers Lead Advertising Field, Declares Bryson," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1929; Stiles A. Martin, "What the Newspapers Have Done for Atlanta," *City Builder* 8, no. 1 (March 1923): 3.

<sup>567</sup> Charles Coolidge Parlin, *The Merchandising of Radio* (Philadelphia: Curtis, 1925), 7, 40, 42; Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors*, 103; Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 88. Automakers continue to spend heavily on advertising.

Census data (see table below) shows the increase in revenue received by newspapers and periodicals from advertising. In 1900, ad revenue provided just over 50% of the total revenue for the two print classes. Neither papers nor magazines relied on subscriptions and sales for the bulk of their earnings. By 1929, just over 70% of their \$1.5 billion total revenue came from advertisements.<sup>568</sup>

*Table 16. Advertising Revenue of Newspapers and Periodicals, 1880-1929*

Year	Revenue from Advertising (1000)	Total Revenue (1000)	Advertising Percentage of Total	% Increase in Advertising Revenue
1880	\$39,136	\$89,009	43.9%	-----
1890	\$71,243	\$143,586	49.6%	82%
1900	\$95,862	\$175,789	54.5%	35%
1910	\$202,533	\$337,596	59.9%	111%
1920	\$528,299	\$806,305	65.6%	161%
1929	\$1,120,238	\$1,580,565	70.9%	112%

Atlanta had more ad agencies than any other city in Georgia. The 1920 city directory listed 39 different entities under the “Advertising” category. That number grew to 58 by 1929. The Atlanta Ad Men’s Club, founded in the early 1900s, had 350 members at the beginning of the decade. While the club retained “Men” in its name, women advertisers could join and had equal privileges, a privilege rarely accorded to women in this time period. The local organization was a member of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, and successfully lobbied to bring the international group’s annual convention to the city in 1921.<sup>569</sup>

<sup>568</sup> Table is adapted and expanded from James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 49. The 1929 data is from Table 742, Printing and Publishing Census Statistics, pg. 734, volume 12, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*.

<sup>569</sup> *Atlanta City Directory 1920*, vol. 43 (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory, 1920), 1334-35; *Atlanta (Georgia) City Directory 1929*, vol. 52 (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory, 1929), 1810-11; Bessie Kempton, “Atlanta Women Prominent in Advertising Work,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1921; Paul Warwick, “3,000 of World’s Leading Ad Men Convene Here,” “To Entertain Ad Men,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1921.

Prominent publisher and one of the city's most influential power elites, W. R. C. Smith, led the campaign to bring the international convention to Atlanta. Possessing a knack for advertising, he took an active role in the Ad Men's Club, whose members included businessmen as well as advertisers. The local club had a significant and self-proclaimed role in promoting activities leading to city expansion. The group described itself as "one of the most progressive civic forces engaged in the upbuilding and betterment of Atlanta," and boasted that "hardly any local movement of any responsibility is inaugurated without the support, advice and encouragement" of the ad women and men.<sup>570</sup>

The Atlanta Ad Men's Club's stated goals included: (1) working for truth in advertising; (2) educating the public as to the economic benefits of advertising; and (3) working to secure favorable legislation and blocking laws that might harm the industry. Concerning goal #1, while the industry might not actually produce honest ads, it did succeed in spreading the idea that ads conveyed accurate and reliable information. Frederick, writing in 1929, admitted that she and others, especially women, saw ads as a great source of knowledge. By the twenties, goal #2 had been met. Every merchant understood the financial impact of ads, and every consumer paid attention to ads, if not fully cognizant of their impact. Goal #3 was a work in progress, but had already achieved a consequential victory in the federal income tax law, which categorized advertising as a deductible business expense. In some tax brackets, companies could actually make money by expanding their ad budgets. Leachman attributes some of the massive post-war growth in the industry to this novel fiscal benefit. Manufacturers "seized upon the windfall—

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<sup>570</sup> "History of the Advertising Club of Atlanta," *City Builder* 5, no. 3 (May 1920): 12-13. Smith, in 1925, would initiate the Forward Atlanta campaign.

glad to have Uncle Sam pay their advertising bills.” Ad men found it easy secure orders in such an environment.<sup>571</sup>

The automotive businesses of Georgia and Atlanta thoroughly appreciated the importance of advertising to their financial security. The Georgia Automotive Dealers’ Association had formed in 1919, with the goals of increasing service to customers and advancing dealers’ interests. They held their first annual meeting in early 1920, hosted by the Atlanta Automobile Association at the Capital City Club. The keynote speak addressed some 400 dealers on the important topic of “Selling and Keeping the Customer Sold.” He praised the state’s advertisers as knowledgeable and well-versed in their art.<sup>572</sup>

The Atlanta Automobile Association, among its various activities, provided advertising assistance to members. One of their more memorable efforts was the “Buy Something for the Car for Christmas” campaign in 1924. They placed numerous display ads (see ad below) in the city’s three big daily newspapers, and utilized other forms of publicity to maximize their results. The promotion appealed to everyone in the Association—car dealers, accessory retailers,

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<sup>571</sup> LeRoy Rogers, “Facts About the Atlanta Advertising Club,” *ibid.* 8, no. 2 (April 1923): 37; Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: Business Course, 1929), 336, 38; Leachman, *The Early Advertising Scene*, 221. The Code of Federal Regulations regarding income tax has always considered advertising an ongoing business expense, an allowable deductible; 26 CFR § 1.162-20 and 26 CFR § 1.263(a)-4.

<sup>572</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Georgia Auto Men to Banquet,” January 11, 1920; “Mathers Is Head of Auto Dealers,” January 22, 1920. The keynote speak was Edward S. Jordan, president of the Jordan Motor Car Company in Cleveland, OH.



wholesalers, and members of the other allied automotive trades. Charles V. Hohenstein, executive secretary of the group, declared that 50,000 car owners lived within a 25-mile radius of Five Points. Most used their vehicles for pleasure or a combination of business and pleasure.

Their families would appreciate useful accessories. However, for some fortunate few, there was only “one supreme gift—a new car.”<sup>573</sup>

During the 1920s, Atlanta’s motordom industries were not the only ones investing in advertising and taking note of the changing buying habits of the American consumer. At a quarterly meeting of the Atlanta Retail Merchants’ Association in 1928, executive secretary Charles V. Hohenstein described the changes in marketing

over the past 20 years. R. A. Kline, a local department store executive, spoke about the new consumer. He described the passing of the old era of necessities-only purchasing to “the present age of prosperity and widespread buying of luxuries.” The high wages of American workers, he correctly claimed, had given them the best standard of living in the world. While not applicable to everyone (especially farmers), per capital disposable income in the U.S. did rise 50% between

**SOMETHING FOR THE CAR**  
**CHRISTMAS**

**A Different and Better Gift**  
**“Something for the Car”**

Give a man or woman Something for the Car and the success of your Christmas Gift is assured. Such gifts are appreciated many, many times more than articles of short service, which frequently would not even be the choice of the recipient.

**THE CAR—His Car—the family pride.** How attractive it will look when equipped with the latest accessories that contribute to safety and motoring luxury. Serviceable. Practical. Enjoyable. Such gifts reflect your good judgment and are sure to please.

**GIFTS FOR THE CAR** grow in affection as the months pass by. When the usual Christmas Gifts have worn out and gone into the quickly forgotten past, your gifts for the car are still enjoyed. Constant reminders of your thoughtfulness when you give “Something for the Car for Christmas.”

**THE WHOLE FAMILY** shares in the enjoyment of such gifts. Sunday, week days, always. They lend an air of prosperity visible to all, friends and neighbors alike. “Something for the Car for Christmas” is truly an unselfish gift.

**THE MEMBERS** of this Association, who have splendidly arranged their stocks for your inspection, display the “A.A.A.” emblem. Their doors are open to pleasantly receive and serve all practical gift seekers, so that they can give—

**“Something for the Car for Christmas”**

This is the emblem of the Atlanta Automobile Association. It is displayed on the windows of representative dealers who guarantee satisfaction with every sale. This month it guides you to Gift Success.

Figure 45. Atlanta Auto. Assn. ad, *Atlanta Constitution*, December 3, 1924.

<sup>573</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Auto Men to Conduct Advertising for Xmas,” September 28, 1924; J. V. Freitag, “Accessories Make Ideal Xmas Gifts,” November 2, 1924.

1922 and 1928, as industrial productivity almost doubled. The average wage of working Americans was the highest in the world, and automobile workers' typical earnings exceeded that average. Coolidge prosperity had made possible the widespread spending on non-essentials, purchasing based wants, not needs.<sup>574</sup>

More and better advertising helped bring motordom out of the recession; but it could not, on its own, overcome the challenge of market saturation. Eventually automakers adopted three additional approaches to the problem, which together enabled them to dispel forever the saturated market specter. Besides more sophisticated marketing to generate customers for the mass of new cars, their strategies included: establishing diversified, price-segmented car lines to reach shoppers with different wallet sizes; introducing new annual models; and offering installment purchase plans to enable even marginal buyers to acquire an automobile. Should these all prove insufficient, government assistance in the form of additional spending for highways and bridges could provide a backstop. Economists asserted that public expenditures reliably bolstered business whenever consumer demand was low. But that was unlikely to be needed because American culture had become a culture of consumption.<sup>575</sup>

Most auto manufacturers, led by General Motors, embraced the idea of the annual model release—a new re-designed (more or less) car every year to stoke society's craving for the latest thing. Henry Ford was having none of it. In his opinion, advertising based solely on stylistic changes constituted an immoral form of consumer manipulation. He derided any ornamentation

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<sup>574</sup> "Retail Merchants Told of New Selling Conditions," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1928. Hohenstein was executive secretary to both the retail merchants and the automobile associations which shared offices, indicating how closely the retail merchants and pro-auto advocates worked together. Raymond A. Kline was a vice-president and general manager of the Davison-Paxon Company, which had sold out to Macy's in 1925. Two years later, Macy's had completed its massive new store at 200 Peachtree Street, still standing. Statistics on income and standard of living are from Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors*, 94.

<sup>575</sup> William Trufant Foster and Waddill Catchings, *The Road to Plenty* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 94-95.

on cars and amenities, having in 1909 famously asserted, “Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black.” While the “black only” option did not apply to the Model T until 1914, his resistance to new business strategies (price segmentation and planned obsolescence) and to offering superficialities (a choice of colors and accessories) cost him dearly.<sup>576</sup>

A number of consumers, especially women, rejected the monochrome Fords. One writer remarked, “The Model T was a wonderful car, but it certainly did not flatter your pride of ownership.” The company lost market share precipitously in the mid-1920s. General Motors, meanwhile, had introduced the new DuPont lacquer paint in a bright blue color on its 1924 Oakland Six. Duco, specially formulated for the automobile industry, dried quickly, was durable and scratch-resistant, and only required one coat. Car manufacturers would use it for the next thirty years.<sup>577</sup>

Faced with shrinking sales, in 1926, Ford prepared for the production of his first new passenger car in nearly twenty years. He officially stopped manufacturing Model T’s on May 27, 1927, closed plants for retooling, idled workers, and watched his market share collapse. The first Model A rolled off the River Rouge plant’s assembly line on October 21. Ford gave the fully updated vehicle, which came in four standard colors and nine body styles, an extravagant debut,

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<sup>576</sup> Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors*, 99, 103; Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, 6-7; Henry Ford and Samuel Crowther, *My Life and Work* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 1922), 71; James Couzens, “What I Learned About Business from Ford,” *System* 40, no. 3 (September 1921): 361. The original Model T’s did not come in black at all; touring cars were red, roadsters were gray. In 1914, Ford began to use a lacquer-like, baked enamel paint which provided a hard, durable surface. The color black happened to dry the fastest, so the choice was practical and economic, not aesthetic; “Model T,” in *Encyclopedia of Detroit* (Detroit: Detroit Historical Society, ©2020), <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/model-t>.

<sup>577</sup> “Chevrolet,” *Fortune* (January 1939): 39-40, quoted in Chandler, 153; William Sherman Dutton, *Du Pont: One Hundred and Forty Years* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 295-301. The first Atlanta ad for the “True Blue” Oakland Six appeared in 1924; “This One Thing Only,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1924. Pyroxylin, Ford’s in-house version of Duco, was introduced on the Model A in 1927, “Pyroxylin Tested For 5-Year Period,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 22, 1928.

spending \$2 million on advertising. Branch plants across the country each received one display model, to be revealed to the public on December 2. Atlanta's seven Ford dealers had received Model A photos and data for distribution that day, but only the showroom of the Ford factory on Ponce de Leon Avenue had an actual vehicle. In less than a week, some 50,000 Atlantans came to view the Model A (see photo below), and by late December, Beaudry Motor Company, the city's leading Ford dealership, had its own display model. Deliveries began in the new year.<sup>578</sup>

In 1929, a marketing academic wrote about the growing national emphasis on style, and held the automobile responsible.

Not only did the industry highlight new models

with splashy publicity campaigns, but the automobile itself, as a transportation vehicle, had increased social interactions which made people more conversant with current events. Rural dwellers had access to many of the same products as urbanites, and could now (aided by federally-funded roadways) travel longer distances "to satisfy their style requirements." Other



Figure 46. Crowd views the new Ford, *Atlanta Constitution*, December 18, 1927.

<sup>578</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "Ford to Exhibit New Car Dec. 2," November 25, 1927; "First New Ford to Appear Here on Next Friday," November 29, 1927; "The New Ford Car," December 2, 1927; "Fifty Thousand," December 7, 1927; Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors*, 104; Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, 163; David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 292-93.

industries, especially radio, adopted the carmakers' profitable "new annual model" regimen as the national appetite for style over substance grew.<sup>579</sup>

Lears labels planned obsolescence as so much "advertising bait," but underscores its success. Manufacturers might make only small, cosmetic changes to a product, but consumers found the novelty compelling and rushed to make their next purchase (and still do). The quest for happiness and escape from the humdrum of daily living might motivate the culture of consumption, but the personal dissatisfaction and promise of freedom were both fabricated notions, creations of the ad agencies and their employers, the American manufacturers. Yet, to guarantee that customers would act on the feelings and beliefs generated by the ads, sellers needed to ensure that prospective buyers had the means to acquire the goods. Automakers in particular facilitated credit buying, navigating the final hurdle on their path to greater profits.<sup>580</sup>

Mazur explains the rationale for installment purchasing, which came to play such an important role in how American businesses did business.

Obsolescence has been a vital ingredient in American business prosperity. One step beyond, however, was still necessary in order to ensure as large a consumer demand as American business desired and needed. The consumer was already exhausting a good deal of his purchasing power, which was a serious impediment to increased sales. *It was therefore necessary that increased consumer purchasing power should be created.* And this was done by the extraordinary extension of instalment purchasing, the plan which enables American consumers today to satisfy many billions of dollars' worth of their needs and desires. . . . The purpose of the instalment plan is to convert future earning power into present purchasing power.<sup>581</sup>

Most people could not afford to buy a car, except by saving up for a long time, or by borrowing money. On an installment plan, they could make a down payment, followed by

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<sup>579</sup> William J. Reilly, "Methods for the Study of Retail Relationships," *University of Texas Bulletin* no. 2944 (November 22, 1929): 35.

<sup>580</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 126; Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, 210.

<sup>581</sup> Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 97. Italics added.

periodic payments of a set amount (including interest) over a set period of time until the debt was discharged. Once considered a chancy maneuver to which only the feckless or the beleaguered resorted, “buying on time,” especially for large-ticket items like houses and cars gradually won acceptance. By the end of the decade, the Big Three carmakers had established entities to finance sales of their own vehicles to both dealers and retail customers. General Motors, naturally, had a head start, having in 1919 established the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (G.M.A.C.), with an Atlanta office in the prestigious Hurt Building. Not until 1928 did Ford charter his Universal Credit Corporation, which had a local office on Marietta Street.<sup>582</sup>

For many city dwellers, however, a vehicle was not absolutely critical for daily transportation. The great need for an automobile often lay not in its utility as a transportation device, but in the status it conferred upon the owner. A profusion of new status-indicators abounded in the 1920s, such as an electric refrigerator, a radio (or two), an electric washing machine. But these were all indoor items. Besides your house and the neighborhood in which you lived, nothing could match the high visibility of the car parked in your driveway or on the street in front of your home. That vehicle announced to every neighbor and passerby your fiscal status, and consequently your social status. Ownership of a new model from higher up in the price brackets indicated greater wealth and conferred higher social standing.

In 1899, Veblen claimed that to gain and hold the esteem of one’s fellow human beings, one had not only to possess power and wealth; one had to *display* power and wealth. The

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<sup>582</sup> “How to Sell Automobiles,” *Fortune* (February 1939); 71-78, 105-09, quoted in Chandler, 166-167; Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 102; Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 189-91; Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*, 293; Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors*, 104; Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age*, 171. Newspapers mentioned the credit financing businesses: *Atlanta Constitution*: “G.M.A.C. Provides Credit for Dealers,” February 18, 1923; “Mammoth Hurt Building Marks Epoch in Business Progress of Dixie Capital,” September 14, 1924; “Ford’s Special Financing Organization Active Here,” February 17, 1929.

automobile provided the perfect vehicle (no pun intended) for conveying one's socio-economic position to the world. In a consumer-oriented culture, people make assessments based on appearances and possessions. A constant calculation ensues, comparing one's own stuff to that of others, and trying to figure out how to rise through the ranks. The popular comic strip, "Keeping Up with the Joneses," ran from 1913 until 1938. It documented the travails of a social-climbing family, constantly and unsuccessfully trying to copy their neighbors (the Joneses, who never actually appeared in the strip). By the 1920s, the phrase was entrenched in the common idiom, a metaphor for the imitative striving of Americans to equal or best each other in the exhibition of their possessions. A 1924 op-ed piece in the *Constitution* deplored people trying so hard to keep up with the Joneses, who owned expensive, "high-powered cars."<sup>583</sup>

The automobile owned the decade of the 1920s. No other industry grew so rapidly to a #1 ranking among U.S. products. In ten years, car manufacturing vastly expanded, accompanied by its many supporting industries and subsidiary businesses. Even railroad freight car production had to be enlarged to meet the shipping demands of automakers—an example of a hidden, ancillary branch of motordom, whose tentacles became ever more interwoven into the fabric of daily life.<sup>584</sup>

The automobile industry expanded and solidified the entrenchment of the consumer culture which department stores and others had inaugurated decades earlier. Unprecedented manufacturing output, marketing advances, and the quest for an ever-growing number of buyers

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<sup>583</sup> "Chasing the Joneses," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1924; Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), Chap. 3; Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 46-47; Allen, *Only Yesterday; an Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, 121; Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, 246.

<sup>584</sup> Foster and Catchings, *The Road to Plenty*, 92.

combined to transform not only consumers, but also the culture. Mazur, writing in 1928, observes,

The American consumer has been a product of evolution. The average consumer of the middle nineteenth century who struggled for shelter and necessities has been left far behind by the great twentieth-century middle class of America riding in its seventeen million automobiles, and worrying primarily about its luxuries.<sup>585</sup>

Commercial stratagems now shaped the daily lives of U.S. citizens with the promise that one could achieve happiness through acquisition. By the end of the decade, the culture of consumption had become America's culture. People eagerly assumed debt to purchase a car so they could "acquire prestige in the present and pay for it in the future."<sup>586</sup>

Atlanta's growth coalition had firmly embraced the automobile as its vehicle to fortune, and it profited as motordom further entwined itself in American—and Atlantan—government, industry, and ethos. The group continued to exercise its collective power during the twenties, pushing the city along the path of expansion, gaining more people, wider borders, and greater wealth. Every member understood that the automobile provided easy and essential access to the stores and offices in the central business district. Any disruption to the smooth flow of vehicles could have disastrous consequences on city and suburb. Unfortunately, with more cars on the roads, traffic congestion frequently gridlocked downtown streets. Large retailers began to establish branch stores in the suburbs—an early warning sign of the eventual decentralizing exodus. Life at the city's heart was at risk. By 1929, Atlanta's business and civic leaders knew they had to take swift and definitive action. Naturally, they decided the time had arrived—for another survey.

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<sup>585</sup> Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*, 42.

<sup>586</sup> Cohn, *The Good Old Days: A History of American Morals and Manners as Seen through the Sears, Roebuck Catalogs 1905 to the Present*, 531-32.



## 8 THE STATE OF THE STREETS 1929

The 1920s have popularly been called the first “decade of the automobile.” With air transport still in its infancy, cars and especially trucks began to threaten the powerful railroad companies. Motordom, that complex web of interdependent entities which produces, supports, and enables motorized vehicles—grew exponentially, further entwining itself into the fabric of American society. Atlanta’s growth coalition of realtors, financiers, publishers, lawyers, businessmen, and elected officials embraced it all. They privileged the automobile, their vehicle to greater fortune, to such a degree that the public roadways became mere car conduits with all other street users restrained or forbidden. An 1899 city dweller would not recognize the smooth-surfaced, regulated, and dangerous streets of downtown in 1929. The amount of gridlock and congestion would stun them; current inhabitants themselves found it pretty intolerable.

In April 1929, Atlanta undertook another traffic survey, this one guided by experts from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York. Few of the actions city leadership had taken since 1920 to makeover the streets had achieved the desired effects. The new viaducts and traffic regulations had not eliminated congestion; automobile-related fatalities had almost doubled over the decade; and the business community remained divided over one-way streets and on-street parking. And all the time, more vehicles appeared in the roadways as automakers succeeded in expanding America’s consumer culture. Through their sophisticated marketing, non-stop advertising, and savvy business strategies, they had made the automobile the number one product in the country. City leaders thought perhaps another study of the situation might yield definitive answers to the city’s apparently intractable traffic problems.

Mayor I. N. Ragsdale’s traffic commission claimed to represent everyone in the city with an interest in street traffic. Members came from state and local government, the big newspapers,

the major labor group, professional and civic organizations, and numerous business and automobile associations. The railroads had only one representative as the viaducts had rendered their input less important to traffic discussions. Georgia Power had two representatives; it supplied the city's gas and electric power as well as the streetcar and bus services.<sup>587</sup>

Most of the entities taking part in the study had strong automotive interests, so the report understandably had a pro-car slant. But the traffic survey deliberately omitted streetcar movement from the study. Refusing from the start to investigate the daily transportation of thousands of Atlanta citizens through the public streets would, and did, yield a distorted view of city traffic patterns. The flagrant omission also unequivocally favored the automobile.

The commission's final report called for the re-routing of pass-through traffic around the central business district, and the removal or relocation of numerous trolley stops. It recommended that Atlanta adopt the federal Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance, and ensure that all traffic control devices conformed to the standards of the American Engineering Council. The report called for more men on the police traffic squad, but it most strongly urged the city to create a permanent city Traffic Commission.<sup>588</sup>

The 1920s saw the consolidation of the automobile as the defining element on Atlanta's and America's streets. At the beginning of the century, the principle that all users had equal rights to the public roadways prevailed. By the end of 1929, the conquest of the street by motor vehicles was nearly complete, with only streetcars providing any sort of competition. But the era of trolley supremacy had passed. Laying new track to the outskirts of town was costly and time-consuming; most of the company's efforts during the decade consisted of double-tracking the busy and more lucrative downtown routes. Instead of extending streetcar lines, the traction

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<sup>587</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 2, 8.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

company served the nascent residential suburbs with buses which fed into the street railway system. Free use of the roadways by those on foot had disappeared. Instead, regulations corralled pedestrians between painted white lines at intersections with traffic lights, and jaywalking violators faced fines and a good chance of injury or death. Moving vehicles had the right of way; increasingly speedy motor vehicles intimidated pedestrians and most cyclists. The “shared road” was not.

Over the decade, motor vehicles had acquired new forms and features. In the twenties, the earlier tall, boxy, hand-cranked, and open-top cars had given way to low-slung, elongated sedans with electric starters and lights, available in an array of colors. They increasingly resembled their later twentieth-century counterparts. The paving on downtown streets and sidewalks gradually conformed to uniform standards, with asphalt and concrete the preferred road surfaces. The apparatus of street regulation and traffic control incrementally matured. Civic authorities and citizenry tried to come to terms with streets full of cars which could travel farther and faster.<sup>589</sup>

The municipal code began to address the adjustments in the physical and psychological environments necessary to survive in what was proving to be a dangerous new world. While conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles festered, a more significant rivalry grew into the unresolved contest of the decade: parked versus moving cars. Whether stationary or in motion, however, the car retained top priority in discussions about city street. The 1920s established the supremacy of the automobile and the solidification of its position as the sole legitimate consumer of road space.

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<sup>589</sup> McShane, “The Origins and Globalization of Traffic Control Signals,” 394.

## 8.1 Traffic Study Overview

By 1929, Atlanta's streets had become more congested than ever before. The automaker's business strategies and the now-dominant consumer culture had combined to put more motor vehicles on the roadways. The twin goals of ever-increasing production and acquisition of automobiles dictated that the situation would only grow worse, unless city leaders took drastic actions to accommodate a future of forever more cars.

At a 1928 meeting of the Atlanta Retail Merchants' Association, Sam E. Levy spoke about the effect of the automobile on the city, especially traffic congestion. Levy had co-founded Prior Tire Company, the "Don't cuss, call us" gas, oil, tire, and accessories company located in the Automobile Row section of Spring Street. He recounted the heavy commercial losses suffered as a result of the consumer's dread of braving the downtown traffic tangle. A large rural population within a few hours' ride of city amenities only added to the "general snarl" on the streets. Businessmen, Levy prophetically declared, would have to accept rigidly-enforced parking laws, or else they would see merchandising "decentralized and scattered in communities all over the city," which was already happening with certain types of small stores. The intelligent merchant, he said, would provide parking for customers which would encourage them to come to town to patronize his business.<sup>590</sup>

Levy's talk echoed the conclusions of the 1926 "Vehicular Traffic Congestion and Retail Business" pamphlet published by the U.S. Department of Commerce. The federal study identified four factors causing vehicular traffic congestion, in order of most egregious: (1) faulty traffic regulations; (2) lack of parking facilities; (3) narrow streets; and (4) the streetcar. At the same time, the study contradicted itself by admitting that the vehicle most involved in the

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<sup>590</sup> "Retail Merchants Told of New Selling Conditions," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1928. Samuel Elias Levy (1894-1969), was a Georgia Tech alumnus and real estate investor. He came up with the no-invective slogan.

widespread traffic congestion was the automobile, but never suggested that reducing the number of cars in city centers might bring some relief. It did warn that, “If merchants do not do something to relieve the present traffic situation, within 15 years there will be no down-town shopping districts of any importance.” Large cities were decentralizing, and residences had already been pushed out of downtown interiors. Business might depend on traffic, but traffic could also detract from business.<sup>591</sup>

Atlanta was not alone in suffering from gridlocked streets. Every large U.S. city had its own tale of traffic woe, and a number had already undertaken studies in search of solutions to the widespread predicament. The state of New York in 1926 had authorized the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company [MetLife] to research Albany’s crowded streets. The company’s Safety Service division began investigating traffic as an offshoot from its workplace studies to reduce accidents and injuries. The insurers developed procedures to systematically scrutinize urban traffic conditions, including what areas to study, which organizations to involve, and who should lead the effort. A comprehensive, sophisticated report with concrete recommendations resulted. Atlanta, always lagging a little behind the streets curve, eventually took advantage of their process.<sup>592</sup>

McShane describes how engineers provided the expertise to analyze traffic congestion and offer mechanisms to control the chaos. The word “survey,” a term borrowed from civil engineers, described the quantitative methodology employed by practitioners in the growing field of traffic engineering. Numbers and measurements lent factual certainty to their solutions.

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<sup>591</sup> Inez Katherine Rolph, *Vehicular Traffic Congestion and Retail Business* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926), 1, 3-5.

<sup>592</sup> W. Graham Cole, “A Traffic and Public Safety Demonstration,” *American City* 35, no. 4 (October 1926): 470-73; Estelle M. Stewart, *Personnel Research Agencies*, *Bulletin of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics No. 518* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1930), 92-93.

Drivers and pedestrians, however, did not easily acquiesce to survey proposals, so the professionals learned to solicit community input. Motor clubs and transit companies had special importance due to their active involvement in city governance. Having an educational component in the form of a public hearing proved essential to adoption of the final report.<sup>593</sup>

Gudis concisely captures the hows and whys of the universal acceptance of the traffic survey during the 1920s this way:

The traffic survey quickly gained support as a most popular tool for the promotion of automotive- and business-friendly urban planning and traffic transportation schemes. Businessmen and politicians had come to a full realization that the streets of a city are the most important element in its economic usefulness, and sought to record how it functioned, and how its traffic flowed or bottled it up. Traffic flow studies became a numerical, easily visualized means by which coalitions of engineers, planners, and business leaders in metropolitan areas could identify and communicate to the public the unfavorable effects of urban growth and congestion, and seek support for their solutions that would accommodate the frictionless traffic of automobiles.<sup>594</sup>

Early in 1929, Atlanta's civic and business leaders realized they had to take action to tame the mass of automobiles. Motor vehicle registrations in Fulton County had increased 376% over the past ten years: from 12,065 in 1919 to 57,445 in 1929. The vast majority (80%) of those vehicles were registered in the City of Atlanta. Few changes could be made to the city's horse-era downtown streets to meet the volume of traffic, besides constructing viaducts, and those were already finished.<sup>595</sup>

City zoning laws accounted for some of the traffic problems. They had concentrated business in certain sections, which also increased the number of cars and pedestrians in those places. Greater density allowances in commercial and industrial areas meant that a parcel which

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<sup>593</sup> McShane, "The Origins and Globalization of Traffic Control Signals," 391-93.

<sup>594</sup> Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape*, 120.

<sup>595</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933*, 224; Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 3. In 1929, 45,788 motor vehicles were registered in Atlanta.

20 years ago might have held a low-rise building could now hold a skyscraper with thousands of occupants during the work week. Residential areas also added to traffic. The new suburban neighborhoods had no streetcar lines, and while buses provided transit service, many preferred to use their cars to travel to and from work or shopping. Some housing sections also permitted multi-family apartments, which only added to the density. Meanwhile, street widths generally remained the same, except where sidewalks had been reduced or eliminated. Widening was prohibitively expensive, especially in the central business district. Property values there had risen astronomically over the decade, making it impossible to acquire more land for public roads or walkways. Atlanta would have to find other ways to manage traffic.<sup>596</sup>

A local editorial helped prepare the public for the traffic survey contemplated by the mayor and council. The writer celebrated the recent opening of the twin viaducts which had already brought some congestion relief. He warned, however, that a lasting solution would require severe and unpopular measures, especially curtailing on-street parking, a move merchants continued to fight. Everyone would have to acquiesce for the greater good.<sup>597</sup>

On April 16, 1929, two days before the editorial appeared, Mayor I. N. Ragsdale had written to James L. Madden, a vice president of Metropolitan Life, requesting their assistance in conducting a fact-finding survey of Atlanta's street traffic. Not for the first time, the city turned to national experts. Within two weeks, Madden confirmed that the Director of Safety Service, W. Graham Cole, and his staff would be happy to work with Atlanta. Local leaders were

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<sup>596</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 3; "Chairmen Named on Traffic Study," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 24, 1929.

<sup>597</sup> "Traffic Improvement," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 18, 1929.

enthusiastic, and unrealistic expectations abounded; the survey would relieve congestion, speed up traffic through downtown, and eliminate accidents.<sup>598</sup>

The mayor appointed a 42-member commission to conduct the survey. It was chaired by Charles C. Whitaker, a

construction engineer and

vice-chair of the Atlanta

Safety Council, the local

motoring club devoted to

reducing automobile

collisions. Mayor Ragsdale

*Table 17. Groups Represented on the Traffic Commission*

<b>Affiliations of Traffic Commission Members</b>	
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Count</b>
Businesses and business associations	23
City departments, commissions, committees	6
Professional organizations (architects, engineers, etc.)	5
Civic organizations (Boy Scouts, two civic leagues)	3
Automobile associations	3
Georgia Public Service Commission	1
U.S. Postal Service	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

said he had selected commission members from groups “having an interest in traffic matters.”

That broad descriptor could have applied to every Atlantan. But, despite the mayor’s claim that the survey would be conducted “with the best interests of the citizens of Atlanta in mind,” many of them, especially African Americans, had no voice on the commission. Its members represented white-led state and municipal governments, the city’s largest labor group, professional and civic organizations, and numerous businesses and automobile associations (see table above). The railroads and the streetcar company each had representatives, as did the daily newspapers, but no members of the Black press participated. The all-white makeup of the commission effectively proclaimed that Black citizens and their use of the public roadways did not matter.<sup>599</sup>

<sup>598</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Traffic Census Prepared to Aid City Congestion,” September 14, 1921; “Survey of Traffic To Start at Once; New Viaduct Voted,” April 16, 1929; Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey*, *City of Atlanta, Georgia*, iii.

<sup>599</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, ii, 2, 4, 8. Early newspaper accounts reported 46 commission members, but the final report lists 42; “Atlanta Traffic Survey to Be Started at Once; Commission Appointed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1929. The mayor served as *ex officio* chair.



Metropolitan Life supplied engineers who did the design, implementation, and analysis. The survey was divided into ten aspects of Atlanta's traffic problem, with a committee for each. Three additional committees provided generalized assistance: Steering guided the group; Review assessed the individual studies for inclusion in the final report; and Publicity, with the aid of the three daily newspapers, prepared press releases to keep the public informed as the project progressed. Prominent white businessmen chaired every committee.<sup>600</sup>

The ten study committees furnished information and facilitated access. They did much of the groundwork, under the guidance of the engineers, distributing questionnaires and tabulating data, assisted by volunteers from 66 local stores and businesses. The Atlanta Police Department provided men to the Parking Committee, and automobile dealers donated vehicles and observers for making time-study runs over twelve designated routes. Even the Boy Scouts took part, counting parked cars, and handling the travel-to-work survey. The commission, however, made and approved all recommendations. The seven-month study focused on the traffic problems in central business district and on its main thoroughfares.<sup>601</sup>

Automotive concerns featured prominently, as one would expect in a traffic study, but the interests of other users of the public roadways, such as cyclists and street traders,<sup>602</sup> are glaringly absent (see Table 17). Streetcar riders, which included thousands of Atlantans, played no part in the survey. An early newspaper report had declared, "Every phase of Atlanta vehicular and

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<sup>600</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 8. The ten committees were: Traffic Flow, Vehicular Routing, Parking, Passenger Loading, Physical Conditions, Pedestrian Study, Laws and Ordinances, Enforcement, Signs and Signals, and Accident Study; "Organization of Permanent Commission on Traffic to Make Continuous Study of Problem Recommended," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 1, 1929.

<sup>601</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 4, 6-8.

<sup>602</sup> In 1920s Atlanta, "street traders" included those offering merchandise for sale *anywhere* outside of a building. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, city ordinances imposed new regulations on, or banned entirely, the selling of goods or services (e.g., shining shoes) in the streets, on the sidewalks, or in close proximity to either; Atlanta, *The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Atlanta, Code of 1924*, Ch. 61, §§ 1831-1832, 1852-1853, 1858-1859; Ch. 70 Peddlers. The city had opened the Municipal Market on Auburn Avenue as a site where farmers from surrounding areas could sell their goods rather than from their wagons parked in the streets.

pedestrian [*sic*] traffic activity will come under the scrutiny and observation of members of the commission.” This, unfortunately, did not happen. A disingenuous sentence in the final survey report stated, “As the operation of the electric railway system of Atlanta is under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Public Service Commission (GPSC), a state body, the Mayor’s Traffic Commission, which was appointed by the city administration, did not feel that it was in a position to consider the effect of street car operation upon traffic.” The report suggested a different study be done for the trolleys.<sup>603</sup>

That disclaimer ignored the fact that the GPSC and Georgia Power both had representatives on the mayor’s commission. Worse, it completely disregarded the fact that the traffic survey actually *did* evaluate the effect of streetcars on city traffic. In multiple sections of the final report, committees faulted streetcars as a major source of low speeds and traffic delays on downtown streets. One entire committee (Passenger Loading) concerned itself *exclusively* with streetcar stops in a complete contradiction to the commission’s stated policy. That committee took no notice of trucks, buses, taxis, or indeed private autos which also impeded traffic flow whenever they stopped to load or discharge passengers or freight. The report stated that streetcar riders, once they exited the trolley, “significantly impacted the continuous flow of traffic by their disregard of the rights of vehicular traffic.” The committee chose not to acknowledge that *everyone* eventually exited their vehicle and became a pedestrian, even people who parked their cars at the curb.<sup>604</sup>

To speed things up, the committee wanted mid-block trolley stops completely removed, and a number of other streetcar access points eliminated or relocated. The Peachtree Street stop

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<sup>603</sup> “Chairmen Named on Traffic Study,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 24, 1929; Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 4.

<sup>604</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 41.

just south of Five Points (immediately past the Marietta-Decatur streets intersection) received special condemnation for its “serious interference” with traffic. The committee acknowledged that removing access would inconvenience streetcar users, but would greatly facilitate the movement of “vehicular” traffic. That one statement made their priorities crystal clear.<sup>605</sup>

The commission did not study the streetcar *moving*; it did study the streetcar *stopped*, when it loaded and unloaded passengers. Only the traffic-impeding aspects of trolley use interested the surveyors, not the massive numbers of citizens it *moved* through the city daily. The survey report contained this assertion: “The public streets are provided for the use of the public. The suggestions embodied in this report are not offered with a view to curtailing their use but to making them more serviceable *to those who require them most*” [emphasis added].” The commission made obvious that, for its members, and by extension the city of Atlanta, those who required the public streets most were motor vehicle drivers. It focused on actions to make the public streets more serviceable to that group and no one else, and it did so by curtailing street use for all others.<sup>606</sup>

The entire survey based its counts on the vehicles, not the people using the public streets. The city’s 1924 *Beeler Report* had conclusively demonstrated that a single streetcar carried more passengers within a defined amount of road space than multiple automobiles taking up the same amount of road space. For the commission, however, only the vehicle counts mattered. It should have considered, but never did, what would happen if everyone riding trolleys one day decided to drive cars instead. The resulting gridlock would have gained the attention and anger of everyone involved.

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 27, 41-44. The use of the term “vehicular” to describe passenger cars and trucks but not streetcars was noteworthy sleight-of-hand to re-define trolleys as invalid street users.

<sup>606</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 34.

Such a situation had already occurred once in Atlanta during the 1920 trolley workers strike. The *Constitution's* automotive reporter, O. J. Willoughby, described the enormous influx of cars into downtown, and the (apparently unanticipated) extraordinary congestion they brought with them. He admitted that the common belief, that “our streets would take care of the traffic if it were not for the streetcars,” was completely untrue. Everyone caught in the rush hour mess could confirm it. That a mass transit option actually relieved traffic was knowledge quickly forgotten post-strike, and not soon re-acquired.<sup>607</sup>

The commission's anti-trolley omission guaranteed some biased conclusions before the survey even began. The one-sentence, don't-blink-or-you'll-miss-it dismissal of the daily transportation mode for thousands of citizens resulted in a report which did not accurately portray city traffic patterns. In so doing, it positioned the automobile as the sole and rightful proprietor of Atlanta's streets.

## 8.2 The Parking Committee

The Traffic Commission concerned itself with more than streetcars. Its Parking Committee undertook three types of parking counts in Atlanta: on-street parking spaces within the Central Business District (2,665), parking spaces in garages (4,482), and parking spaces on surface lots within or adjacent to the business district (6,000). The city had adequate parking. But paid spaces, especially on lots, remained empty, while the no-cost, curbside spaces stayed continuously occupied throughout the day.<sup>608</sup>

With sufficient paid parking available, reducing or eliminating on-street parking on a few of the busiest streets would free up entire lanes for moving traffic. Eureka! This was the street-

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<sup>607</sup> O. J. Willoughby, “Motor Pep,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1920; Beeler, *Report to the City of Atlanta on a Plan for Local Transportation*, 39.

<sup>608</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 37, 39.

widening solution city leaders desired but despaired of, staring them in the face. A glance at virtually any contemporary photo of Atlanta’s downtown streets clearly shows how road space might double without on-street parking (see photo below<sup>609</sup>). But curbside parking had two



Figure 47. Forsyth Street, view south from Carnegie Way, 1926.

inarguable advantages. First, it could often get the driver closer to their destination, assuming one found an open space nearby, or cruised around until such a space became available. Data confirms that cruising for parking in downtowns was commonplace by the 1920s. Second, and perhaps most importantly, on-street parking was *free*. As Donald Shoup and George Costanza demonstrate, free parking is a powerful imperative for most American drivers, one that had already entrenched itself by the 1920s.<sup>610</sup>

In “The Parking Space,” an episode of the popular 1990s television sitcom, *Seinfeld*, two characters are driving around Manhattan’s Upper West side looking for a place to park. Passenger Elaine Benes urges George Costanza, the driver, to just park in a garage. The ensuing dialogue describes cruising technique and underscores the mandate for many that parking be free.

<sup>609</sup> Photo is from Franklin M. Garrett, *Yesterday's Atlanta*, Seemann's Historic Cities Series, No 8 (Miami, Fla.: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1974), 129.

<sup>610</sup> Simpson, “Downtown Storage Garages,” 84; Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*; Tom Cheronos, “The Parking Space,” in *Seinfeld* (Columbia Pictures Television, April 22, 1992). This was Episode 39 of *Seinfeld* (Season 3, Episode 22), written by Larry David, Greg Daniels, and Jerry Seinfeld, directed by Tom Cheronos, and produced by West-Shapiro Productions and Castle Rock Entertainment,

George: Look, I have my system. First I look for the dream spot right in front of the door, then I slowly expand out in concentric circles.

Elaine: Oh come on, George, please put it in a garage. I don't want to spend an hour looking for a space.

George: I can't park in a garage.

Elaine: Why?

George: I don't know, I just can't. Nobody in my family can pay for parking, it's a sickness. My father never paid for parking; my mother, my brother, nobody. We can't do it.

Elaine: I'll pay for it.

George: You don't understand. A garage. I can't even pull in there. It's like going to a prostitute. Why should I pay, when if I apply myself, maybe I could get it for free?<sup>611</sup>

Some people will not pay to park, preferring—then and now—to waste time and spew carbon into the atmosphere just to get a free even if less convenient parking spot. Proximity to the final destination matters somewhat; time spent cruising seems to matter not at all; cost-free is the true imperative. “Free parking” of course does not exist, as Shoup has unequivocally proved. Everyone pays, just not always at the point of sale.

The refusal of Atlanta's leadership to progress beyond the nineteenth century hitching-post, tie-your-horse-in-front-of-the-saloon practice eludes comprehension. In the 1920s, traffic engineers documented the efficiency of mass transit modes, and argued in favor of widening streets by eliminating curbside parking—the great usurper. Their data and recommendations went unheeded, and many ceased to make the argument at all. More engineers began to work for the automobile industry, with Miller McClintock exemplifying the traffic scholar-*cum*-industry spokesman transition. Once in that position, no one would suggest removing *any* motor vehicles from the streets, moving or stationary.<sup>612</sup>

The Parking Committee conducted one of the more unusual studies of the entire survey, the “how you came to downtown today” count. Boy Scouts handed out “ballots” (see image and

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<sup>611</sup> Cheronos.

<sup>612</sup> Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 161-69.

table below) to pedestrians entering buildings, instructing them to select one of the six choices to describe how they got there: on foot, by car (including where they parked), by bus, or by streetcar. Balloting sites included major department and chain stores, drugstores, and a number of large commercial firms. Each person was asked to vote just once. The final tally showed that only 11% walked, and less than 5% took a bus, while over a third drove. The greatest number of respondents, nearly half, arrived in downtown via the streetcar—proof, if any were needed, of the streetcar’s importance to a large percentage of Atlanta’s citizens. Based on this survey, which counted people not cars, one would conclude that trolley-riders required the public streets most.<sup>613</sup>

MAYOR'S TRAFFIC SURVEY		Method of Arrival	Percent
<p style="text-align: center;">Count of Method of Transportation Downtown used by STORE AND OFFICE BUILDING PATRONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please tear off and deposit in box the stub below that indicates how you came downtown today.</p>		By Street Car	44.9
		By Automobile*	
		Parking Method	
		On Streets	14.8
		In Garages	13.8
		On Parking Lots	9.4
		On Foot	11.0
		By Motor Bus	4.7
		Miscellaneous or Unknown	1.4
		*38.0% total.	

Figure 48. *How You Came To Work form and results; 1929 Traffic Survey, pgs. 37, 39.*

The major disappointment of the Parking Committee’s section of the survey final report was their reluctance to offer any solutions to the parking problem. Curbside parking took up traffic lanes, but few wanted to surrender personal convenience and/or no-charge parking.

<sup>613</sup> With the cooperation of businesses in the central district, ballot boxes were placed at the entrances and printed ballots were handed to all patrons with the request that they tear off and deposit in the ballot box the stub indicating the method used in coming from their homes; “Traffic Count by Ballot To Be Made in Atlanta Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1929; Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 35, 37, 39.

Retailers insisted that customers be able to park close to their stores. Police seldom enforced no-parking restrictions on the few downtown streets where partial bans were in effect. More and more cars drove on Atlanta's streets every year. With congestion out of control, the chief aim of the survey was to find remedies. In this, the committee dramatically failed.

The Traffic Commission's Parking Committee could not agree on what recommendations to make, so Mayor Ragsdale, in mid-October, named a special committee to come up with a set of downtown parking regulations to be given directly to the city council. Members of this new, special parking committee included Charles Whitaker, consulting engineer and chair of the Traffic Commission; and James L. Wells, president of Sloan Paper Company, chairman of the city council's traffic committee and on the Traffic Commission's steering committee. Other members included a real estate agent, a city councilman, two Georgia Power executives, and three men representing the Atlanta Retail Merchants' Association—the owner of a high-end women's clothing boutique, the president of a furniture company, and the manager of a car dealership.<sup>614</sup>

This special committee was charged with reviewing the report of the Traffic Commission's Parking Committee and making recommendations to council. Because the members of the new special committee *also* could not agree, they produced two separate reports containing diametrically-opposed parking recommendations for the city. The Whitaker faction favored expanding downtown's no-parking zones. These zones were not extensive, consisting only of sections of North Pryor, James, Fairlie, and Poplar streets, as well as viaducts in the central business district. The other group contained the merchants who argued vehemently against *any* additional parking restrictions. That faction actually called for more, not less parking,

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<sup>614</sup> "Seven Members of Parking Body Named by Mayor," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 15, 1929.



asserting that “There is such a thing as regulating traffic and trade to death.” Whitaker’s group, however, believed “The free movement of traffic and the convenience of the traveling public should receive first consideration, as in so doing many times the number of people may be served than are accommodated by street parking.”<sup>615</sup>

The stubbornness of both sides led the survey’s Parking Committee to adopt the common Atlanta leadership approach: suggest further study. The impasse exemplified what happened whenever the growth coalition divided against itself—nothing; they chose instead simply to maintain the status quo, whatever that happened to be. Traffic would eventually ease when congestion forced many stores to move to accessible outlying areas; some already had. Decentralization was probably not the solution the downtown merchants envisioned, but by their intransigence, they contributed to their own demise. They failed to heed the Commerce Department’s prediction, or the prophetic warning of Sam Levy, one of their own.<sup>616</sup>

### 8.3 Pedestrians

In strong contrast to the parking group, the Pedestrian Study Committee did not hesitate in its recommendations to rein in foot travelers in the streets. It lamented unruly pedestrians who crossed intersections against traffic lights, exited trolleys at the incorrect curb, or jaywalked. They created hazards and seriously interfered with “the free and efficient movement of vehicular traffic.” Pedestrians should make brief appearances in the streets, and then only at the direction of a police officer, a traffic signal, or white lines painted on the roadway. Proper enforcement and

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<sup>615</sup> “Traffic Officials at Odds on City Parking Problem, *Atlanta Constitution*, October 22, 1929.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*; Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 129-30; Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 9, 39. Sam Levy’s speech to his fellow downtown merchants about accepting no-parking zones appears earlier in this chapter.

a program of continuous public education would better control those who walked and keep them from slowing traffic flow.<sup>617</sup>

The committee tallied the number of pedestrians at eight major intersections in the central business district on normal business days. The counts took place during the periods of heaviest traffic, the three rush hours: Morning 7:30–9:00 a.m.; Noon 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.; and Afternoon 4:30–6:00 p.m. Noon experienced the heaviest foot traffic, when office workers on their lunch breaks mingled with shoppers and visitors. To no one’s surprise, Five Points had the greatest number of pedestrians, 59,390 in one day, more than double the number at any of the other seven intersections surveyed. Remarkably, it also had the fewest number of pedestrian violations, which the committee attributed to the savvy of those using the popular, dangerous, and intensively-policed crossroads.<sup>618</sup>

The committee wanted to facilitate pedestrian movement on city sidewalks, but admitted that downtown walkways did not have enough capacity for the volume of foot traffic. Sidewalks could not be widened by pushing back building fronts (obviously impossible) or by reducing street widths (obviously unthinkable). The opposite had already occurred in Atlanta, as city officials ordered some sidewalks trimmed to make roads wider. Aside from recommending the removal of sidewalk obstructions, the committee had no remedies to offer pedestrians to ensure efficient sidewalk use.<sup>619</sup>

The Physical Conditions Committee, which also addressed pedestrian flow on the sidewalks, acknowledged that within the central business district, the narrow sidewalks could not

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<sup>617</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 58-59, 65-66.

<sup>618</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Count of Pedestrians Will Start Today,” May 9, 1929; “Reports Due Soon on Traffic Surveys,” July 24, 1929; Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 58-59, 61, 64-66. The Five Points intersection was defined as the crossing of Peachtree and Whitehall streets with Marietta and Decatur streets. The Edgewood Avenue intersection with Peachtree to the northeast was not included.

<sup>619</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 58, 65; “Plan Widening of ‘Bottle Neck’ On Marietta St.,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1922.

be widened. To increase space, it recommended new legislation to prohibit retailers from using the sidewalks to display merchandise. The sidewalk area should be retained “entirely for public rather than private use.” In keeping with that policy, beggars and vendors of miscellaneous small items (e.g., chewing gum, pencils, matches) could be classified as “sidewalk obstructions.”

These people irritated the public and, as charities existed to help them, the committee felt they did not need to beg or sell on the public walkways. It recommended that the city revoke all permits for such activities, and issue no new ones.<sup>620</sup>

#### 8.4 Traffic

Vehicle counts accounted for most of the work of the Traffic Flow Committee, and its report contained a variety of detailed tables, charts, graphs, and maps. Spring Street, the major north-south arterial (which included the city’s longest viaduct over the railroad tracks), carried downtown’s heaviest traffic load, followed by Peachtree and Marietta streets. The city’s busiest traffic intersection was at Marietta and Spring streets, where 22,347 vehicles crossed in one 11-hour period (6:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.).<sup>621</sup>

Additional counts revealed the different types of vehicles using the streets and where they concentrated. More than three-quarters of all vehicles on the downtown streets were automobiles (77%), followed by trucks (15%) and streetcars (less than 5%). Buses, motorcycles, and horse-drawns of any kind (e.g., carriages, carts, wagons) each accounted for less than 1% of all vehicles traveling through the central business district. Peachtree Street carried the most streetcars, while the few horse-drawn vehicles mainly travelled mainly the Decatur-Marietta corridor.<sup>622</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 47-48.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 18; “1,250,000 Autos Recorded in 4-Day Count of Traffic,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 18, 1929.

<sup>622</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 19, 21, 23.

Despite the large amount of traffic on Spring Street, the most motor vehicle wrecks occurred on Peachtree Street, followed by Marietta Street, Fair Street [Memorial Dr.], and Piedmont and Ponce de Leon avenues. Although the total area of the business district comprised less than 2% of the entire city, more than 16% of all crashes occurred there. The Accident Study Committee showed that *drivers caused two-thirds of all traffic collisions* [emphasis added]; pedestrians, the remaining third. As volume of traffic increased, so did the frequency of crashes. Failing to signal and speeding accounted for two-thirds of all driver-caused wrecks. Jay-walking and crossing at intersections with no traffic signals caused more than 50% of all pedestrian-at-fault crashes, while playing in the street came in third.<sup>623</sup>

The Accident Committee recommended more rigid enforcement of the ordinance requiring a correct report of every collision, but made no mention of stricter application of the moving vehicle laws or prosecution of violators. It absolutely failed to chastise drivers, suggest greater penalties for infractions, or advocate for the adoption of more stringent driver licensing requirements. *Nowhere* in the entire survey report are remedies suggested to correct the unlawful behaviors of motorists, despite the fact that drivers caused the majority of “accidents” (twice as many as pedestrians), and the majority of the fatalities. Elsewhere, the report’s authors have no hesitation in calling out pedestrians for illegal actions like crossing the street incorrectly and interfering with the rights of vehicles. Beyond insipid appeals for more education and support for safety regulations, the drivers of cars and trucks got a pass.<sup>624</sup>

The Enforcement Committee scrutinized the Atlanta Police Department. Of the department’s 337 personnel, only 48 were assigned to traffic duty, although additional patrolmen

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<sup>623</sup> “Street Blocking Hit by Committee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 11, 1929; Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 99, 103, 105-108.

<sup>624</sup> Atlanta Mayor’s Traffic Commission, 4, 107, 111.

helped direct traffic during rush hours. Twenty-four officers in the traffic squad rode motorcycles, too few to adequately enforce speeding and reckless driving ordinances throughout the city's 34.8 square miles of territory. The committee recommended hiring more officers in general as well as motorcycle officers in particular. Within the past three years (1927-29), Atlanta motor vehicle registrations increased nearly 20%, and motor vehicle wrecks increased 156%, yet the number of police had remained constant. The National Safety Council recommended that a traffic squad should have 3-4 men per 10,000 inhabitants. By this metric, Atlanta's traffic force should have 70 men.<sup>625</sup>

During the first six months of 1929, Atlanta police worked 6,410 traffic cases. Parking infractions led the list (2,364), with "driving past stop sign" violations second (1,023). The report found that the public had a negative attitude toward stop signs, and thought the city had too many. The committee actually blamed the "excessive" number of stop signs for the violations and collisions at those locations. Removing many of the city's stop signs would "help enforcement and tend to decrease accidents."<sup>626</sup>

The Signs and Signals Committee had a similar opinion of Atlanta's traffic signals and signs in general, saying that the city had an excessive number (see map on next page). The effectiveness of traffic control devices depended on the cooperation of drivers, and too many signs and signals only bred contempt for the law. The committee studied the American Engineering Council (AEC) report on street signs, signals, and markings, and urged that Atlanta adopt their standards.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 68, 71.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 68-69. As a former police officer, this writer is disgusted with the level of ignorance displayed here; it is akin to saying that testing fewer people for the novel coronavirus will lead to fewer cases.

<sup>627</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 73-75; American Engineering Council, *Manual on Street Traffic Signs, Signals and Markings* (Washington, DC: National Conference on Street and Highway Safety, 1930). The map shows the locations of the 49 traffic signals in Atlanta's central business district (the light blue area) in 1929; adapted from *Traffic Survey*, pg. 81.

The committee also followed the AEC’s lead by suggesting that Atlanta discontinue the use of a yellow light following both red and green lights—a practice which caused numerous accidents. The yellow light should show only following the green light. This change could be

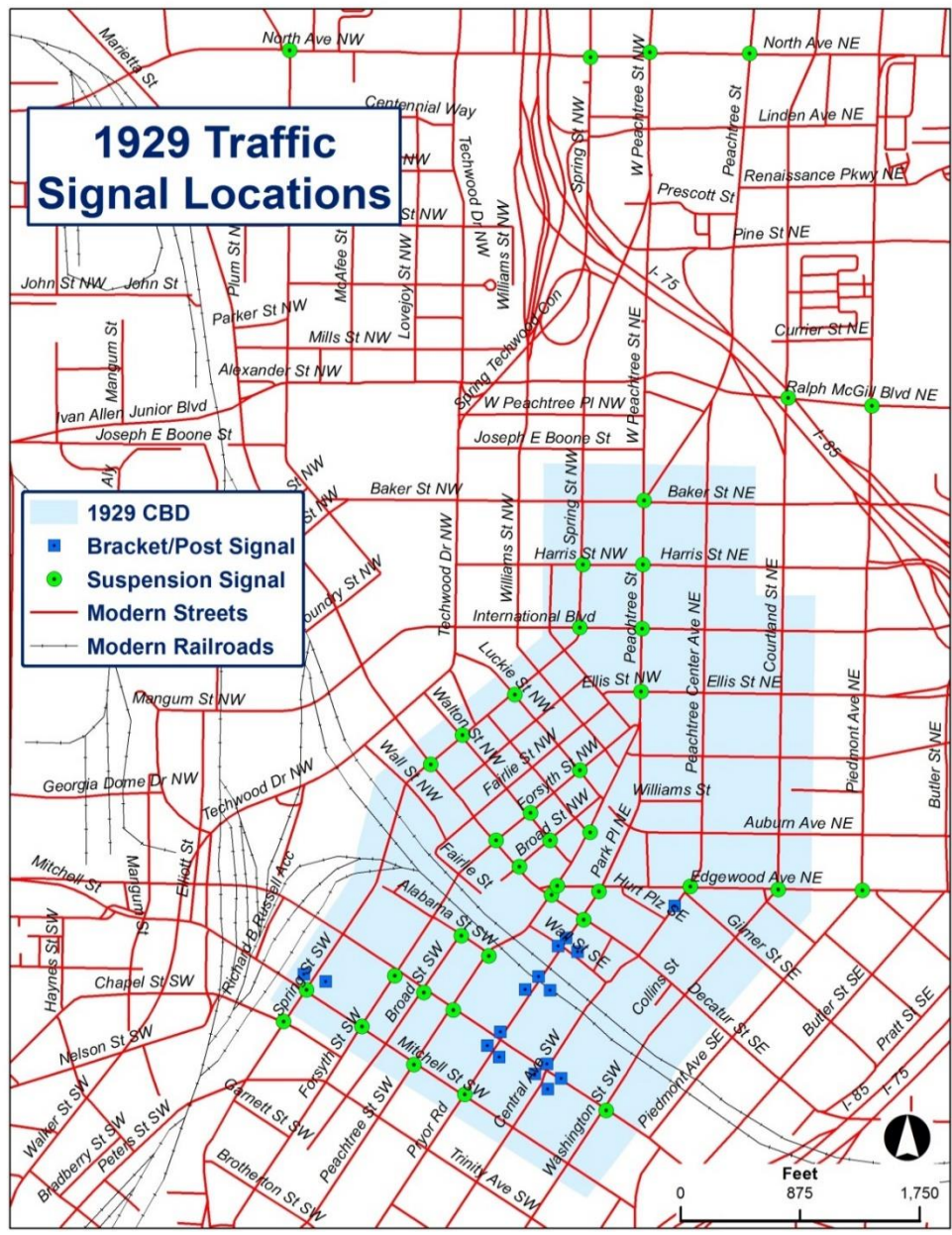


Figure 49. Traffic signal locations in Atlanta's CBD.

implemented whenever the city adopted the “flexible progressive” type of traffic control system,

which had integrated signals, allowing variable timings to meet traffic conditions at each intersection.<sup>628</sup>

## 8.5 Survey Recommendations and Impacts

Chairman Whitaker presented the Traffic Commission's final report to Mayor Ragsdale at the end of November. It was eventually published, with copies distributed to the city council and made available to the public. The survey report divided its conclusions into two categories: (1) physical changes, and (2) traffic control measures and devices.<sup>629</sup>

No large physical changes to Atlanta's narrow streets could be done, though intersection curbs could be cut back to improve turning radii to accommodate trucks and larger automobiles. This would obviously reduce sidewalk size, but here as elsewhere in the report, pedestrians needs were of little concern. However, providing alternate routes to truckers and pass-through motorists had the potential to benefit travelers and relieve congestion in the Central Business and Retail District.

The Vehicle Routing Committee created a map of the entire city indicating proposed routes for through traffic. To further ease traffic movement, obstructions in the roadways and on the sidewalks should be removed, and streetcar stops re-located to less busy streets. Due to the refusal of the Parking Committee to make any concrete recommendations about on-street parking, the Commission simply endorsed their suggestion for further study. Apparently no one in the business community or municipal government had the fortitude to deal with the parking

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<sup>628</sup> American Engineering Council, 25-26; Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 78-80.

<sup>629</sup> "Organization of Permanent Commission on Traffic to Make Continuous Study of Problem Recommended," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 1, 1929; Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 9. For an excellent summary of the Atlanta survey, its participants, methodologies, and recommendations, see Cole, "How a Fact-Finding Traffic Survey Was Conducted," 89-92.

dilemma. This leadership failure would consign Atlanta citizens to an ongoing purgatory of traffic congestion for decades.<sup>630</sup>

For traffic control measures, the Commission recommended that the city adopt a new traffic ordinance based on the Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance proposed by the Second National Conference on Street and Highway Safety. It urged the city to gradually replace the existing traffic control signals to a system meeting the AEC's standards, and called for a reorganization of the Traffic Division of the Atlanta Police Department. Its signature recommendation, however, requested that the city create an official body to take charge of traffic in Atlanta.<sup>631</sup>

The "safe and expeditious handling of traffic" had become one of the city's major problems, affecting both business and social life. The solution to traffic problems had five major components: (1) a traffic control plan; (2) the alteration of streets and sidewalks as demanded by traffic and permitted by business and financial considerations; (3) a program for the future development of roads to handle more traffic; (4) the development of popular support for street regulation; and (5) strict and impartial law enforcement. Only an officially designated group, with the appropriate authority and engineering staff, could adequately undertake these tasks and meet the persistent demands of city traffic. The survey strongly urged that the city council create a permanent Traffic Commission to study Atlanta's traffic and make recommendations.<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>630</sup> Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, 10, 33.

<sup>631</sup> The Second Conference on Street and Highway Safety was held in Washington, DC, March 23-25, 1926, under the direction of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. Its signature accomplishment was the adoption of the uniform code of traffic laws and regulations; *Atlanta Constitution*: F. C. Chandler, "Safety in Streets Is Everybody's Problem," March 28, 1926; "Safety Council Receives Report on National Meet," April 1, 1926.

<sup>632</sup> "Organization of Permanent Commission on Traffic To Make Continuous Study of Problem Recommended," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 1, 1929; Atlanta Mayor's Traffic Commission, *Traffic Survey, City of Atlanta, Georgia*, 3-4, 9-10.



Initially, the survey report received acclaim from leading citizens and the press. Some businesses quickly utilized its data in promotions and advertisements. Rich's department store instituted its "Follow the Crowds to Rich's!" campaign. One of the survey pedestrian counts showed that its store at the northeast corner of Alabama and Broad streets was the shopping center for 150,385 people every day (so the ad claimed), and urged other shoppers to follow the crowd.<sup>633</sup>

A Georgia Power ad claimed that cars carrying only six people took up as much road space as a single streetcar carrying fifty passengers. It included a clever sketch, showing what an automobile would look like if it were built in proportion to the average number of customers it carried in downtown

(see ad at right). Ad copy accurately cited the Traffic

Commission's finding that cars made up 78% of all street traffic; streetcars, only 4.7%. Yet Atlanta's streetcars carried 275,000 passengers a day, more than the population of the entire city. The ad concluded, also accurately, "Obviously street cars don't cause traffic congestion, they reduce it. Without them to do the biggest part of the job in city transportation, traffic conditions

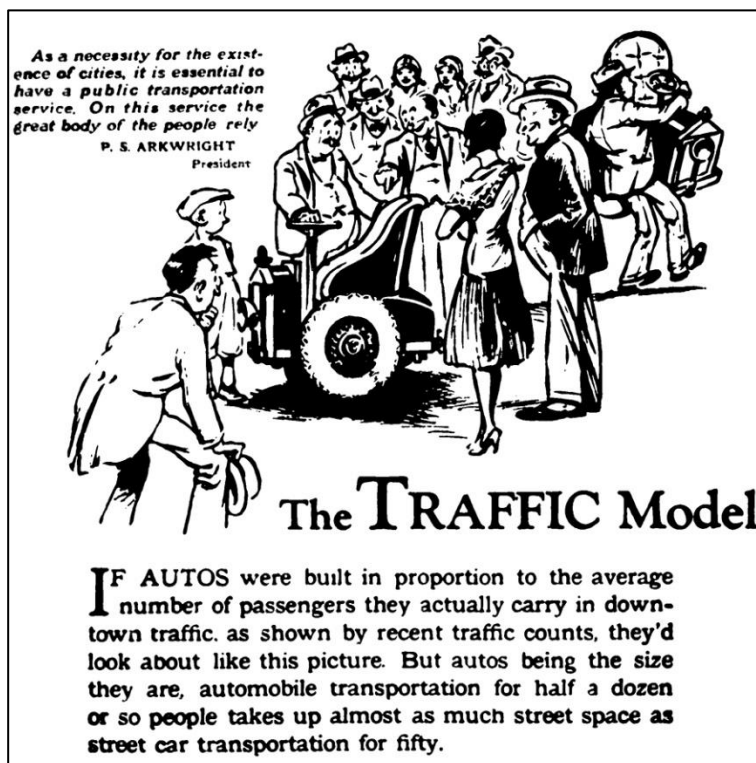


Figure 50. Georgia Power ad; *Atlanta Constitution*, May 29, 1930.

<sup>633</sup> "Follow the Crowds to Rich's!" *Atlanta Constitution*, July 2, 1930.

would be insufferable.” It invited motorists to give the streetcar a try, but most would not until the gas rationing during the next world war restricted driving. Americans in general have difficulty surrendering personal freedoms for the greater good.<sup>634</sup>

The first three months of 1930 passed, and nothing had come of the traffic survey’s recommendations. In that year’s annual state-of-the-city speech, Mayor Ragsdale commended the survey commission, recommended that all members of council study the report, and urged the city council’s traffic committee to create a permanent traffic commission. Although the city council formally endorsed the survey, the traffic committee refused to take the requisite initial step of creating a permanent traffic commission, which was the most important and most strongly urged of all the survey recommendations. After all, establishing a select committee devoted to meeting traffic needs would have been an indictment of themselves for not doing their job. In truth, council’s traffic committee *had* continuously failed to deal with the traffic congestion which had only grown worse over the last ten years.<sup>635</sup>

In August 1930, the Atlanta Safety Council sent a petition to Mayor Ragsdale, urging the city to establish the permanent Traffic Commission. The petition noted that few of the survey recommendations “have been either remotely considered or put into effect.” The group had received assurances that such a commission would be appointed once the survey was completed. The mayor presented the petition to council, but to no effect.<sup>636</sup>

Charles Whitaker, the former chair of the traffic survey commission, began making the rounds of civic and professional groups, seeking their support for the “traffic improvement

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<sup>634</sup> “The Traffic Model,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 29, 1930. The recent pandemic has served to underscore the fact that many Americans choose not to follow medical guidelines (e.g., masking, vaccinating) to control disease spread, preferring instead to retain their personal liberties no matter the cost.

<sup>635</sup> “Atlanta Council Reorganized for Year’s Work, Mayor in Annual Message, Urges Strict Economy,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 7, 1930.

<sup>636</sup> “Citizens’ Board Urged to Enforce Traffic Rules,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 18, 1930.

movement.” Speaking to the Atlanta’s Builder’s Exchange, he discussed the proposals of the survey’s voluminous report based on seven months’ of study. No progress had been made in implementing *any* of its recommendations. The intransigence of the city traffic committee remained absolute. They failed to follow Herbert Hoover’s operative principle for improving traffic conditions: after finding the remedies, you had to apply them.<sup>637</sup>

In late March 1931, exactly two years after Mayor Ragsdale had inaugurated his survey, Mayor James L. Key named members to *another* commission to study traffic conditions. He charged the group with ascertaining “the best method to solve what is one of our most vexing municipal problems.” Though council did act to make the traffic commission “permanent” (it wasn’t), Key ignored the earlier study as if it had never taken place. A newspaper editorial reported the events, and with more than a little bitterness recalled the 1929 survey.

Only a few years ago a similar commission, headed by C. C. Whitaker, an outstanding expert in traffic control, spent many months in analyzing traffic conditions in every part of the city. It filed a report, replete with graphs and accompanied by full recommendations. No more intelligent study was ever made of a municipal problem. This report was cast aside and the time and energy expended by the prominent citizens who composed the commission was effort thrown away.<sup>638</sup>

The writer highlighted the typical *modus operandi* adopted by Atlanta’s leaders when faced with difficult civic dilemmas during the twenties: (1) appoint a committee to undertake a fact-finding study; (2) disregard its recommendations; (3) repeat as often as necessary. For proof, he cited a just-completed investigation of sewer system difficulties, which council was in the process of steadfastly ignoring. The editorial somewhat dejectedly concluded: “It is to be hoped

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<sup>637</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Builders’ Aid Voted in Study of Traffic,” August 22, 1930; F. C. Chandler, “Safety in Streets Is Everybody’s Problem,” March 28, 1926.

<sup>638</sup> “The Traffic Commission,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1931.

the report of the new traffic commission will not meet the fate of its predecessor and that of other commissions appointed to study and report on municipal problems.”<sup>639</sup>

The editor had uncovered an ongoing pattern of action/inaction adopted by the Atlanta city council. Hunter found an identical operational process in place in Atlanta during the late 1940s-early 1950s. City leaders hired outside specialists to make plans, but put so many restrictions on them that most citizens never even knew about their work. He found city files full of expert advice on what to do to fix various municipal problems, but on which no measures had ever been taken. “Action results when a plan fits the relatively narrow interests of the policy-makers, but on many issues there is community paralysis and inaction.”<sup>640</sup>

Morris Opler, noted American anthropologist, also noted the general phenomenon, describing it this way:

Often it is the social scientist’s presence and prestige, rather than his knowledge, that are wanted. There are powerful men of affairs everywhere who give lip service to a “scientific age” but who do not propose to alter their habits of mind or action one iota in response to it. . . . This type of executive or administrator is willing and even eager, in deference to the new age, to have a social scientist in the background . . . to have him put the seal of approval on what is proposed.<sup>641</sup>

Mayor Key, like his predecessors, reacted to the congestion, crashes, and casualties on the streets caused primarily by motorists precisely as his predecessors had done, by more data-gathering. Elected officials as well as influential decisionmakers knew that hiring experts to conduct a much-publicized investigation and publish a seldom-read report would satisfy most Atlantans that at least something was being done, even if nothing was actually getting done. The

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 240.

<sup>641</sup> Morris Opler, “Social Science and Democratic Policy,” *Applied Anthropology* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1945):

ritual had been followed, saving city leaders from having to make difficult decisions to actually fix problems.<sup>642</sup>

The practical impact of the 1929 traffic survey did not extend beyond the eventual establishment of a citizen traffic commission. However, the survey served several valuable purposes. It gathered voluminous data about Atlanta's downtown streets and sidewalks, their various users, and the types of traffic control measures and devices employed by the city. In so doing, it documented the tremendous impact the automobile had made on the city's streets and the people using them. It recorded the inarguable primacy of motor vehicles over all other forms of transportation in the city, and made clear the preferential treatment given by Atlanta's leaders to those vehicles and their drivers.

The survey's committee chairs consisted primarily of elites from the city's pro-growth coalition, a group concerned about the effect of traffic congestion on their businesses and Atlanta's reputation as a business-friendly city. However, when the survey ended, they failed to implement its proposals. Coalition members passionately disagreed about parking, and the group ultimately took no actions to relieve congestion, beyond continuing to restrict non-vehicular street users, a task they undertook with enthusiasm. An obvious conclusion is that city leaders really did not want to solve congestion, because doing so would require dealing with its primary cause, too many cars.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Atlanta's powerful growth advocates had chosen the automobile as their preferred transportation mode. From the successful effort to win the national automobile show in 1909, through the auto-centric 1929 traffic survey, the group had championed the car, reconfiguring and re-defining city streets to extend its presence.

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<sup>642</sup> Hunter called the process "a ritualistic panorama," Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 240.

The survey, in its methodologies and conclusions, discounted the chosen transit option of the majority of Atlantans, streetcars. Its recommendations focused on restricting anybody or anything which might hinder the free flow of automobiles on the streets, except parked cars.

Perhaps a more important conclusion to draw from the survey than its preferential treatment of the car was the mindset giving rise to that preference. The report's underlying assumption held that the public streets served as traffic channels, and satisfactory service meant the optimum movement of vehicles, not persons. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the principle that everyone had equal rights to the public roadways prevailed, but the 1929 traffic survey officially finalized the primacy of motor vehicles over all other means of transportation on Atlanta's streets. It highlighted the changed understanding of the roadways. No longer shared spaces, the streets had a new and simpler definition: car conduits.

## **8.6 State of the Streets – 1929**

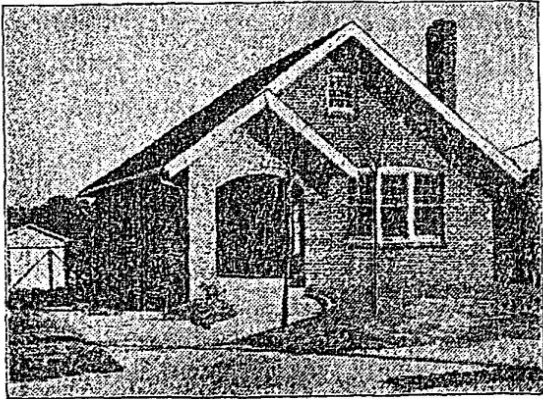
Atlanta's streets had undergone a remarkable transformation in ten years. They were much busier, especially in the central business district where close to 186,000 pedestrians a day jostled on the sidewalks of major downtown intersections, while nearly 200,000 vehicles of all types jammed onto the narrow streets. Thousands of cars now parked along the curbs, effectively cutting the size of many downtown streets in half. Three new viaducts, two exclusively for auto traffic, tied the north and south sectors of the city together. Over the decade, miles of streets had been graded and paved, usually with concrete, and the traction company installed elevated platforms in wider streets to provide safe access for streetcar passengers.

The entire public space from building line to building line was crowded with traffic control instruments including signs, lines, and overhead wires holding signal lights. Non-traffic-related devices included an extensive white way, trash receptacles, postal collection boxes, and

more overhead wires for telephones, telegraphs, and trolleys, plus supply lines to newly-electrified buildings. Service stations had gas pumps, pressurized air dispensers, and water hoses on the sidewalks to provide curb service to drivers. By 1930, however, many of these had moved out of the congested district to the suburbs where rents were cheaper.

The buildings lining downtown streets had changed. Churches sold their valuable in-town properties and moved farther out, giving way to tall office buildings and department stores. Once-fashionable mansions became boarding houses or were demolished to make room for hotels, movie palaces, and apartment buildings. Their wealthy former owners sold out at a profit and decamped to Buckhead or Druid Hills. A few of the original structures remained, serving as the headquarters for local clubs or art and history organizations. The establishments of motordom claimed a large swath of territory along Peachtree Street, popularly called Automobile Row, which by 1929 spilled onto West Peachtree, Spring, and Ivy [Peachtree Center Ave.] streets.

Not only downtown streets had changed; residential neighborhoods, especially the new suburbs looked different. Cars still parked along the street, but beginning in the 1910s, driveways were added to individual homes to provide off-street parking. By the 1920s, ads for new bungalows mentioned asphalt or “cement” (actually concrete) drives (see image above).



**1480 Hartford Ave.**

This beautiful 5-room and breakfast room red brick bungalow has hardwood floors, furnace heat, cement drive and garage. Small down payment, monthly notes like rent. NO LOAN TO ASSUME.

Call Mr. Settle for Information.

**W. D. BEATIE**

101 Marietta St. Building WA. 2811

Figure 51. Ad for house with drive and garage; *Atlanta Constitution*, December 10, 1929.

In the early 1900s, the word “garage” applied to a building for motor vehicle storage, or the act of storing a vehicle. At that time the garage might be new built, but most often was a converted stable as cars gradually replaced horses. By the late twenties, many new home ads featured garages (always detached at this time), taking for granted that of course one had an automobile to park in it. George Babbitt had a concrete driveway; also a corrugated iron garage which he wanted to replace with a framed structure as the old metal one was not up-to-date. The automobile, whether moving or stationary, demanded plenty of land, on and off the streets.

Motor vehicle traffic also changed the nature of policing. In 1921, the city installed its first traffic tower holding two officers who worked the hand-operated signal indicators. More towers quickly followed in the congested district. But by 1929, the rapid advance of technology had replaced these now-dated structures with three-color, electric traffic signals mounted on poles or wires. A sophisticated system allowed central timing of the lights to react to changing traffic conditions.

After two short-term experiments, the city council finally authorized a permanent traffic squad in 1929. Its cornermen directed traffic and ticketed jaywalkers, while the motorcycle cops chased down drunk drivers and speeders. Pistols replaced billy clubs. Bicycles, the great innovation of 1897, were eliminated, and most of the horses were gone.<sup>643</sup> As the decade ended, the department was even asking for small, speedy automobiles to replace motorcycles. Policing in Atlanta had entered the modern era, where the majority of a patrol officer’s time is spent dealing with motor vehicles while driving in a car from call to call.

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<sup>643</sup> The Atlanta Police Department never really got rid of all the horses, and today maintains a Mounted Patrol Unit which does daily patrol duty and works large events like parades, festivals, and Falcons’ football games. The horses are sworn officers and have their own badges; “Atlanta Mounted Patrol,” © 2021 Atlanta Police Foundation, <https://atlantapolicefoundation.org/programs/community-engagement/mounted-patrol/>. In 2018, bicycle patrols were re-established throughout the city as part of a community-oriented, anti-crime effort; *Atlanta Police Department Policy Manual*, APD.SOP.4070 Bicycle Patrol, September 15, 2018; <https://www.atlantapd.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=2166>.



The laws police enforced had multiplied to meet the vastly changed functioning of city streets and sidewalks. Pages and pages of new ordinances defined who could be in the public roadways, what they could do while there, how long they could take up some street space, and the penalties for any infractions. Rules of the road, rules of the sidewalk, licensing requirements, regulations for every moving vehicle—a vast legislative superstructure overlay the city’s public spaces, exempting no one.<sup>644</sup> Even schoolchildren had to learn about traffic safety and how to correctly cross the road.

As Wiebe notes, a massive administrative bureaucracy at every level of government emerged to enforce, manage, and maintain the regulatory environment, and most Americans passively accepted the new regime. The multifarious departments, offices, and bureaus were ably assisted by local councils and clubs as well as representatives from the national trade groups, professional associations, and automobile organizations. The underlying urge for greater continuity, regularity, and functionality led to the creation and subsequent universal adoption of uniform traffic codes and devices, and a nationwide system of highways.<sup>645</sup>

In Georgia, the motor vehicle department, created in 1916 as a division of the Secretary of State’s office, had grown so large with expanded responsibilities that by the end of the decade, the Secretary begged the legislature to establish it as a separate department. His request was well founded. In 1920, Fulton County had 20,363 registered passenger cars; by 1929, that number almost tripled to 56,416. Trucks in the state of Georgia saw an even more spectacular increase, from 12,000 in 1920 to more than 50,000 in 1929.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Georgia did not have a driver’s license law until 1937, and did not conduct driver’s license examinations until 1939; Table DL-230 “Year of First State Driver License Law and First Driver Examination,” U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, “Highway Statistics Summary to 1995, Section 2: Motor Vehicles,” <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/summary95/>.

<sup>645</sup> Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920*, 294-96.

<sup>646</sup> George H. Carswell, “Annual Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Georgia for the Year Ending December 31, 1929,” (Atlanta: Stein, 1930), 3; Secretary of State, *Annual Report of the Secretary of State*

The railroads worried as the trucking industry began to compete for short haul freight just like streetcars and automobiles had already purloined short-distance passenger travel. The Atlanta and West Point Railroad's daily suburban trains from downtown to College Park were long gone. Concentrating on long-haul freight and passengers would keep the rail lines in good financial shape until the construction of the interstate highway system in the 1950s. However, during the twenties, the railroads carried an enormous amount of automotive freight into and out of the city, benefitting not only themselves, but also their direct competitors. Ironically, the railroad industry had a significant role in contributing to the reputation of Atlanta as a leading automobile center.

The business sections of the city directories demonstrate how far Atlanta had come in its embrace of the auto industry. The table below compares the number of entries related to the three transportation modes: horse; bicycle, and automobile.<sup>647</sup> The horse category included items such as the makers of wagons and carriages, blacksmiths, stables, wagon yards, repairs. Bicycle entries included sales and repair shops. Automobile entries included parts, accessories, repairs, gas stations, parking lots, parking garages, dealerships, used cars, cars for rent, tires, and many more. The percentages of the totals are

*Table 18. Horses, Bikes, Cars, 1900-1929*

for the three modes combined. Rail

travel is not included.

Bicycle counts remained fairly stable, but as a percentage of the totals, declined by more than half. The golden

Year	Number of <i>City Directory</i> Entries			
	Horse	Bicycle	Automobile	Total
1900	147	12	0	159
1920	48	19	303	370
1929	26	12	349	387
Percentage of Total Entries				
1900	92.5%	7.5%	0.0%	100.0%
1920	13.0%	5.1%	81.9%	100.0%
1929	6.7%	3.1%	90.2%	100.0%

*for the State of Georgia* (Atlanta: Franklin, 1898-1932); U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, "Highway Statistics Summary to 1995, Section 2: Motor Vehicles."

<sup>647</sup> *Atlanta City Directory* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies/Byrd/Atlanta City Directory, 1899-1930).

age of the bicycle as a popular form of adult transportation occurred in the late nineteenth century. By 1929, cyclists made up only a small portion of all the vehicles riding the streets; it was far too dangerous. The huge swing occurred between the horse and the automobile, which basically switched places. In 1900, the only non-rail competitor to horse-drawn vehicles was the bicycle, but by the end of the twenties, the automobile had completely replaced the horse, not only in numbers on the streets, but also in impact on the local economy.

Atlanta began 1929 with the Southeastern Automobile Show, which opened on January 14. A crowd of more than 10,000 attended the show on the first day where eager buyers placed 25 orders for the latest offerings from Detroit—both record one-day totals (at that time) for any auto show in the South. Beautiful women promoted the new cars while an orchestra played. Twenty manufacturers, including motordom's biggest names, exhibited 127 different models with new designs, colors, and features. One reporter said the pageant was enough to make a man "trade in his old bus for a swanky new speedster," which, he observed, was why they held this event in the first place. The six-day show drew record crowds and sales. Atlantans did love Automobile Week.<sup>648</sup>

They also loved their cars, as the 1929 Traffic Survey demonstrated. The volume of cars on downtown streets far surpassed any other vehicle on the road, even besting the pedestrian counts at the busiest intersections. While merchants often griped about the congestion, the majority actually welcomed the mass of potential customers who traveled to the business district every weekday.

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<sup>648</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: Loyd A. Wilhoit, "Attendance of 10,000 Is First Day's Record at Automobile Show," January 15, 1929; "Automobile Show Crowds Continue," January 17, 1929. No vehicles changed hands at the auto show; cars could only be ordered.

But one Five Points merchant famously disagreed. Countless historians and history buffs have referenced or recited the words of Tom Pitts, owner of a cigar store and soda fountain at Five Points. In his 1926 interview with Elinor Hillyer, a reporter for the evening daily newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal*, Pitts lamented the automobiles rushing through downtown, not stopping to patronize small businesses. But he was not just any shopkeeper. As a *Constitution* reporter observed in 1924, “The story of Tom Pitts is the story of Atlanta.”<sup>649</sup>

Thomas H. Pitts (1872-1938) was born in Boston, Georgia, a tiny town in Thomas County just north of the Florida border. He never attended school, but at the age of 23, came to Atlanta. With very little capital, he managed to open a cigar stand in the prestigious Norcross Building, on the southwest corner of Peachtree and Marietta at Five Points. Within four years, Pitts had become a prosperous businessman, acquiring a partner and opening a branch in the popular Jacob’s Pharmacy (of Coca-Cola fame) at the intersection of Whitehall and Alabama. Newspaper accounts from the 1890s praised his stock of cigars and tobacco goods, and claimed that everybody in town knew Mr. Pitts, “one of the jolliest, best fellows in town.” More newspaper articles early in the new century relieved Tom Pitts of the necessity of advertising—reporters were his best publicists (possibly his best customers, too). By their accounts, his was one of the most elegant cigar stores in Atlanta.<sup>650</sup>

When the Norcross Building burned in 1902, Pitts moved across the street into 21 Peachtree, with a second location around the corner at 3 Decatur Street. He soon opened cigar

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<sup>649</sup> Elinor Hillyer, “Tom Pitts Tells of Changes at Five Points,” *Atlanta Journal Magazine*, October 10, 1926; “City’s Progress Told in the Story of Pitts’ Success,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 12, 1924; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 821-23; Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, 134, 36; Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 149-50; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 120.

<sup>650</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Mr. Thos. H. Pitts,” December 24, 1897; “One of the Boys,” July 31, 1898; “What T. H. Pitts Wants,” December 23, 1902; “The Best Cigars,” July 5, 1903.

stands in the new skyscrapers, the Fourth National Bank and the Candler Building. His center-city locations guaranteed him plenty of walk-in traffic.<sup>651</sup>

In 1911, Pitts received notice from his landlord that his lease would not be renewed. In a daring move, Tom took out a five-year, \$100,000 lease on the old Collier Building, located just across Decatur Street, at the confluence of Edgewood, Peachtree, and Decatur. The location today is the site of a Walgreen's pharmacy chain store continuously patronized by students at Georgia State University. In 1845, George Washington Collier, one of Atlanta's pioneer citizens, built the original wood-frame grocery store on the site. In 1858, Collier replaced the wood store with a three-story brick

structure, which he also had to rebuild after it was destroyed by Sherman's troops in 1864

(see photo at right). Pitts

undertook a complete

renovation before taking

occupancy, installing a large,

marble counter as the soda

fountain side of his business

was expanding.<sup>652</sup>



Figure 52. Future home of Tom Pitts cigar & soda shop, ca. 1890.

<sup>651</sup> "A Real Story About One of Atlanta's Young Business Men," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1905.

<sup>652</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: "5 Points Corner Leased by Pitts," July 29, 1911; "Atlanta's Strides from Day to Day," July 8, 1914; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 1:237-38, 438. Figure 52 shows Five Points ca. 1890 looking east, with plenty of foot traffic in the street. Edgewood Avenue is left; Decatur Street is right. Thirty-one years later, Tom Pitts' cigar and soda store would occupy the same building as Harry Silverman's cigar store, the post-Civil War Collier Building; from an undated, anonymous photograph album, Special Collections, Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library.

The cigar and soda shop at Five Points stood on one of the prime retail properties in the city, perfect for a smaller business which depended on foot traffic. It had frontage on Peachtree, Edgewood, and Decatur. It became a known gathering place, and Atlantans would often tell their friends to “Meet me at Tom Pitts.” His location soon earned the title, “Pitts’ Corner.” In 1920, he had a major increase in his annual lease to more than \$32,500 a year—a record figure in the Atlanta real estate market at that time. In 1923, Pitts gained membership in the esteemed Capital City Club.<sup>653</sup>

In 1924, the *Constitution* conducted an in-depth interview with Tom Pitts about his life and business acumen. He acknowledged taking advantage of the growing demand for tobacco products, transitioning from pipes to cigars and more recently, cigarettes. He started offering ice cream sodas as Georgia considered state-wide prohibition, and expanded to soft drinks and flavored milks as the national temperance movement gained influence. Pitts told the reporter that he had always considered a central location essential for his type of business, which required thousands of sales of mostly low-priced items in order to turn a profit. It explained why he paid enormous rents to be at Five Points, the business heart of Atlanta.<sup>654</sup>

It came as a shock to many when Thomas Pitts closed his famous soda and cigar stores, retiring from business at age 54, on October 1, 1926. In his famous, often-quoted interview in the *Journal*, Pitts recounted how downtown had changed; how Five Points, once a gathering place at the center, was now a thoroughfare people dashed through on their way to somewhere else. He did not hesitate to assign blame.

I think the real thing that did it was automobiles, and more automobiles. Traffic got so congested that the only hope was to keep it going. Hundreds used to stop;

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<sup>653</sup> “Record Rental Paid by Thomas H. Pitts,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 28, 1920; Garrett and Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, 2:821-23; Bryant, *Capital City Club: The First One Hundred Years, 1883-1983*, 200.

<sup>654</sup> “City’s Progress Told in the Story of Pitts’ Success,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 12, 1924.

now thousands pass. . . . New traffic rules have made it impossible to park an automobile within two or three blocks of Five Points, and the traffic signals keep everything moving. Street cars do not take on and let off passengers at the old junction corners, but rush past to the block beyond. . . . For years and years Five Points was the best retail spot in the city. . . . Five Points has become more like a Wall Street business section. . . . The place where soda fountain trade is, is where automobiles go, and one must have wide spaces for curb service.<sup>655</sup>

In a complete about-face from his 1924 assertion, he somewhat wistfully added, “A *central location is no longer a good one for my sort of business*” (emphasis added).<sup>656</sup> Tom Pitts, like a few other keen observers, acted on the evolving decentralization of downtown, for which the automobile certainly bore some responsibility. He precisely described the street changes instituted during the twenties: traffic signals; on-street parking restrictions; the elimination of streetcar stops at congested corners. He presciently perceived that his type of store now needed plenty of space where cars could drive up and either get curbside service or drivers had only a short walk to shop inside.

Tom Pitts’ store could be likened to the canary in the coal mine, a signal that changing conditions in downtown would no longer sustain a successful business enterprise of a certain type. Many would eventually move out to the suburbs, while others simply retired from the fray; meanwhile Atlantans arranging a downtown rendezvous would no longer tell each other to “Meet me at Tom Pitts.” During the remaining years of the decade after Mr. Pitts’ departure, Atlanta’s traffic congestion would only get worse as more cars crammed onto downtown streets.<sup>657</sup>

Tom Pitts’ abandonment of Five Points presaged Richard Sennett’s discussion of modern “dead public space” by fifty years, but the ideas area the same. The intersection called Five

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<sup>655</sup> Hillyer, “Tom Pitts Tells of Changes at Five Points.”

<sup>656</sup> Hillyer, “Tom Pitts Tells of Changes at Five Points.”

<sup>657</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*: “Famed Atlantan Dies,” February 23, 1938; “Thomas H. Pitts Last Rites Today,” February 24, 1938.

Points, Atlanta's closest thing to a town square and once a communal meeting place, had become a pass-through space, "an area to move through, not be in." Sennett asserts that the public square had lost its essential nature—a space where a variety of persons intermixed and a diverse array of activities took place. It had become a dead space, a space contingent upon motion. City streets, and even the spaces around them, like sidewalks, plazas, and squares, have become functions of motion. "Their design concept merges with the technology of transportation, losing any experiential meaning of their own." People no longer gather in the street, and seldom stop or gather on the sidewalks—the street and the sidewalks have only one valid *raison d'être*—to be spaces where motion is the only acceptable activity. Keep moving or be run down.<sup>658</sup>

Throughout the twenties, Atlanta's power elites continued to exercise their collective will, moving the city along the path of expansion, gaining more people, wider borders, and substantial wealth. They seized on every chance to extend the city's regional influence, and secure Atlanta's position as the southeastern locus of finance, transportation, commerce, and manufacturing. As early as 1909, they had chosen the automobile as their vehicle to fortune, confident it would bring customers to downtown, open up the hinterlands for new homes and businesses, and provide economic opportunities not only by making and selling cars, but also through the many subsidiary industries of motordom. Local newspapers publicized motor vehicles, with special "traffic talks" and "motor pep" columns and detailed stories about car races, auto shows, and the latest models. Auto ad sales generated considerable revenue for paper and magazine publishers. Realtors benefited from the automobile as an expansion tool, bringing new enterprises in and helping residents live further out. The coalition assisted, and profited

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<sup>658</sup> Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 12-14.



from, the greater involvement of automotive interests in Atlanta's government, industry, and culture.<sup>659</sup>

Over the course of the decade, automobiles became incredibly popular and increasingly essential, broadening horizons physically and experientially. Members of the pro-growth coalition were hardly the only ones privileging cars over streetcars. The rapid and all-encompassing embrace of the motor vehicle brought many benefits, but also an array of unanticipated, unintended, and sometimes horrific consequences. Atlanta's leaders, like those in other cities, failed to address all the problems. During the 1920s, they never developed a comprehensive city plan for land use and traffic control, but instead implemented sporadic, unsystematic, partial measures. "The result, of course, was that cities, and the life-styles of their inhabitants, were increasingly altered to meet the demands and opportunities created by the automobile." The car had won the road.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> Brownell, "A Symbol of Modernity: Attitudes toward the Automobile in Southern Cities in the 1920s," 24-27.

<sup>660</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 186; "A Symbol of Modernity: Attitudes toward the Automobile in Southern Cities in the 1920s," 43.

## 9 CONCLUSION

On January 5, 1928, the Detroit Rapid Transit Commission presented a report to the mayor and city council entitled *The Relation of Individual to Collective Transportation*. The commission consisted primarily of esteemed engineers in the automobile industry and was chaired by the vice president and general manager of Packard Motor Company. The purpose of the report was to show the growth in private automobile use (“individual transportation”) and in public mass transit (“collective transportation”). It detailed the facilities needed to accommodate both along with plans to provide for an efficient and economical future city.<sup>661</sup>

The committee’s name, Rapid Transit Commission, might lead one to think their major concern was efficient travel by mass transit. Not so. The report’s second paragraph amply demonstrated the group’s pro-automobile stance. It asserted the universality of the effects of automobility, claiming everyone wanted wide roadways so they could travel by car freely in any direction. The economic feasibility of meeting that desire was the only real question confronting the city.<sup>662</sup>

The Commission acknowledged the right of the individual to occupy the public roads, which previously had not presented any real problems. Historically, only a small percentage of the population possessed private transportation, and that only over limited distances. In urban areas, the more economical approach had been to collect individual rights into a public transit option available to the entire community. But “the introduction of the automobile, and its corollary, the hard surfaced road” had changed everything, giving to individuals freedom and range of movement never seen before. Within the past twenty years, the right of the private

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<sup>661</sup> Rapid Transit Commission, *The Relation of Individual to Collective Transportation*, 7, 9. Other commission members included a city alderman and an attorney, as well as engineers and a statistician who worked for the city of Detroit.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

individual to use the public road had gained a new significance. Upon that right, the entire automobile industry, the U.S.'s number one producer, had been constructed. Any effort to remove or abridge that prerogative could not be attempted or even considered; it would result in a "social revolution."<sup>663</sup>

The resulting quandary, to which the report would supply multiple solutions, was how to affordably accommodate both individual and collective transportation modes. Not surprisingly, the Commission's answers involved building more and bigger roads and highways. They did acknowledge that the car had its most economical use and greatest value in low-density, long-distance travel (i.e., suburbs and hinterlands), while mass transit was the most practical and efficient travel mode in areas with high concentrations of people (i.e., cities). The report cited statistics similar to Atlanta's *Beeler Report*, how trolleys and buses transported 72% of the passenger traffic in only 5.4% of the vehicular traffic. It even went so far as to say that, in central business districts, mass transit should be given preference over the automobile.<sup>664</sup>

However, the rest of the report provided various ways to enlarge and enable greater automobile use. It suggested that mass transit for trips from outlying areas into the city center be relegated to elevateds or subways, freeing up street space for everyone else. While insisting that mass transportation was the *only* solution to traffic problems in cities, the Commission contradicted its own assertion by advocating and providing for even greater use of cars in cities, citing the following reasons.

In spite of the fact that individual transport in automobiles costs nearly twice as much per passenger-mile as any form of rail transport, its use has increased until it is now more important in point of national expenditure than all other forms of passenger transportation put together. Of still greater consequence and social significance is the fact that this represents almost entirely new business developed in the last two decades. In other words, a new national riding habit *has been*

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., 11, 19, 21, 29.

*created* which requires for its satisfaction nearly five times the amount of money per annum that is spent on all the other elements of passenger transport combined (emphasis added).<sup>665</sup>

In other words, cars cost twice as much as trolleys to operate. Five times the total amount of money spent on all other passenger travel modes went into expanding and maintaining the requisite infrastructure for motor vehicles. The economics made no sense; but, apparently, the Commission found it too hopeless or incomprehensible that any sort of resistance to this relatively new phenomenon be mounted. Building public streets to accommodate private cars—at enormous taxpayer expense—was really the only solution offered in the report. Clearly someone somewhere had made and was continuing to make a great deal of money off their creation of the “new national riding habit,” the demanding automobile, which cost so much and took up so much space.

Basically the Detroit Rapid Transit Commission gave the roads to the cars, which is what happened in Atlanta. The Commission’s report only twice mentioned in tandem the words “automobile” and “hard-surfaced road,” but it was clear that they understood the necessity of good roads to the car. Without that “essential corollary,” the automobile could not have provided the freedom and ease of movement which made it universally popular and indispensable.<sup>666</sup>

The importance of a hard-surfaced roadway to the automobile was instantaneously apparent to anyone riding in one. The early horseless carriages frequently overturned when hitting a bump or dip in the road, and easily became mired in mudholes. Cartoonists found fodder in the frequent, usually-harmless mishaps (see image below). Prominent Atlanta physician, Dr. Ludwig Amster, complained to a *Constitution* reporter about the “abominable” state of the city’s streets. Utilizing the nomenclature of the day, the doctor said that good *roads*

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

(out in the country) were fine, but wanted to know why the *streets* (inside the city) were

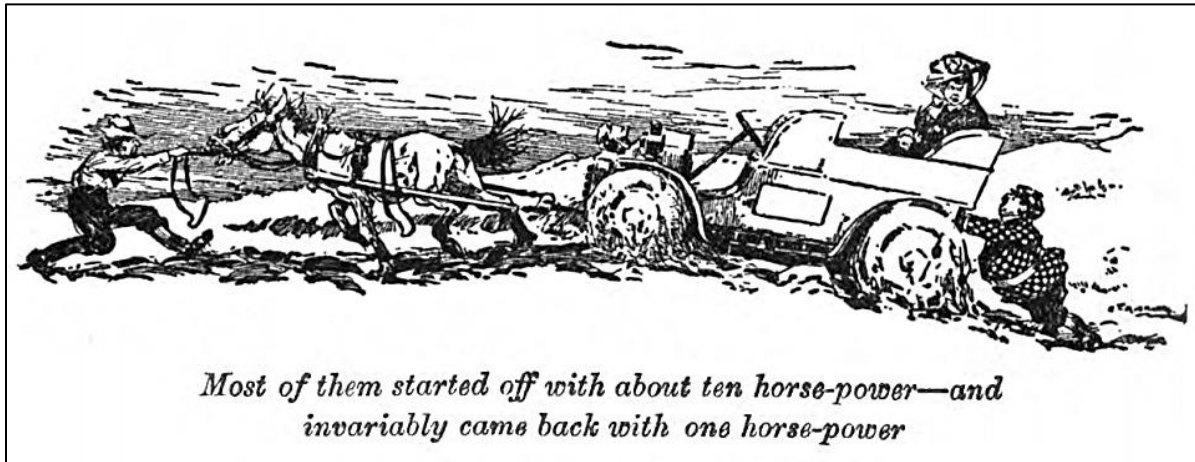


Figure 53. *The horse-drawn horseless, 1910.*

“unpaved, rough, filled with gullies.” A frequent motorist thoroughly familiar with the city map, Dr. Amster observed that the Whitehall-Peachtree corridor provided the only good stretch of pavement, and once off it, anyone riding in a car could tell the difference. “As long as you walk or ride in a street car or even ride in a carriage, the condition of Atlanta’s streets are not so noticeable, but once you get into an automobile you will jolt with indignation not only mentally, but also physically.”<sup>667</sup>

Cars require hard, smooth, durable surfaces on which to travel; without a network of paved roads, its range would be limited. The modern first-world motorist can scarcely comprehend a time when this was not universal knowledge. During the 1920s, Atlanta regularly spent vast sums on paving suitable for automobiles. In the prior two decades, the combined business interests, pro-growth advocates, and elected officials of Atlanta promoted automobile

<sup>667</sup> The cartoon in above is from George Fitch, *The Automobile* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 5. “Dr. Amster Talks About Atlanta’s Bad Streets,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 30, 1909. Dr. Ludwig Amster (1863-1936) was the city’s preeminent gastroenterologist. In 1905, along with surgeon Dr. Floyd W. McRae, Sr., he founded the Piedmont Sanatorium, today’s Piedmont Hospital. The once-standard usage of “streets” for city and “roads” for county or rural thoroughfares explains the otherwise incomprehensible transition, in Atlanta where Peachtree Street suddenly becomes Peachtree Road at what was once the Fulton County line, and in Decatur where Clairmont Street becomes Clairmont Road (yes, the “e” gets dropped) at what was once the DeKalb County line.

use and advocated for motorists rights. In the twenties, they re-legislated and reconfigured the city's streets, but all of it took place before the majority of Atlantans even owned a car.

“Inequitable” perhaps best summarizes in a word the problem with the growth-machine coalition. Other descriptors—hegemonic, unfair, unjust, discriminatory, preferential, non-inclusive—also apply to the way any urban pro-growth urban alliance functions. The complete exclusion of any African American from the dominant white association provides the largest, most egregious example of the inequity of the system in the time period of this study. However, all working-class and most middle-class whites also had no representation in the city's most powerful decision-making body. As Hunter observes, the ordinary person has no voice in policy determination, where the decisions are handed down from above. “These individuals are the silent group.... The flow of information is downward in larger volume than it is upward.” Despite loud claims about addressing community problems and concerns, only narrow interests inform the workings of Atlanta's “unrepresentative set of power wielders.”<sup>668</sup>

The top men had little understanding of the important issues confronting all of the Blacks and most of the rest of Atlanta's citizens. At least some of their blindness resulted from their lack of connection to the lives of average folks. One's operative milieu has great effect on one's views of society, as the following transportation example demonstrates.

The segregated existence of many of Atlanta's pro-growth, car-centric individuals left them unaware of or unconcerned about the difficulties faced by ordinary people who rode the crowded streetcars to work daily. If one never had to take a trolley, one could not comprehend its strategic importance to the thousands who did. That lack of awareness made it easier to label

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<sup>668</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 248-52; Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*, 87.

trolleys as the enemy of freely-flowing traffic and demand they be curtailed or eliminated, giving no thought to the hardships such actions would place on those dependent on mass transit.

The extreme short-sightedness of the anti-streetcar position, which resulted in hordes of new automobiles choking the streets beyond what any number of trolleys ever did, underscores the same bias toward the automobile by Atlanta's power elites demonstrated by Detroit's Rapid Transit Commission. The expense did not really matter; taxpayers would cover that. The slicing up of the city by new arterials and later interstates did not really matter; only the poor in the run-down neighborhoods, invariably the sites of the new roadways, would be discommoded. Even traffic congestion did not really matter. Eliminating or reducing cars in downtown might hurt business, and, as Brownell notes, many downtown merchants had concluded that traffic congestion was preferable to isolating the central business district by limiting cars.<sup>669</sup>

The disconnect between the pro-growth policymakers and the masses had the potential to create conflicts leading to protests and violence. It did happen in Atlanta, as seen in 1914-15 at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, where workers struck, unsuccessfully, for better conditions, higher wages and the right to unionize. Generally, however, during the time period of this study, the overwhelming wealth and power of the top men, greatly assisted by Jim Crow legislation, made significant pushback against their authority virtually impossible.

The city's growth alliance did nurture relationships with labor leaders. Walter Cobb Caraway (1876-1937), a linotype operator for the *Atlanta Journal*, was also president of the Atlanta Federation of Trades and head of the Labor League. He was selected by the mayor to serve on the influential Spring Street viaduct commission. Attorney and former tailor, Louie Philip Marquardt (1876-1935), had represented workers during the Fulton Bag and Cotton strike,

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<sup>669</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 120.

and headed both the Atlanta and Georgia labor federations. He was selected as a member of both the city's planning board and the Forward Atlanta Commission.

The inclusion of these two into the lower tiers of the coalition, however, did not counterbalance the lack of representation of most Atlantans on policy-making bodies. The vast majority of the citizenry were not self-governing; they had little to no control over their urban environment. Even the city council represented narrow interests, rather than those of the greater community. As Hunter remarks, "This situation does not square with the concepts of democracy we have been taught to revere."<sup>670</sup>

This is the great problem with the growth-machine alliance. Recent studies underscore the anti-democratic nature of the coalition, and demonstrate that, in some places, governments are beginning to respond to the demands of ordinary citizens, especially homeowners, regarding zoning and land-use regulation. Molotch discusses the environmental and economic costs of growth, unequally borne by the non-elites, and the emergence of counter-coalition groups. Strategies including historic district overlays, assertion of Native rights, and community benefits agreements are resulting in more representative, use value-conscious growth; not just growth benefiting the few.<sup>671</sup>

The coalition's policies of continuous growth and non-stop expansion of car-crowded roads have had massive environmental impacts and contributed enormously to the existential climate crisis humanity now faces. Today, a plethora of efforts are underway to displace the single-rider, petroleum-powered motor vehicle, create shared and non-car streets, densify cities,

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<sup>670</sup> Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 1, 251.

<sup>671</sup> Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place," 318-20, 26-28; Vicki Been, Josiah Madar, and Simon McDonnell, "Urban Land-Use Regulation: Are Homevoters Overtaking the Growth Machine?," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 11, no. 2 (June 2014): 228-30; Jennifer Darrah-Okike, "Disrupting the Growth Machine: Evidence from Hawai'i," *Urban Affairs Review* 55, no. 2 (2019): 429; Colleen Cain, "Negotiating with the Growth Machine: Community Benefits Agreements and Value-Conscious Growth," *Sociological Forum* 29, no. 4 (December 2014): 937-39.



reduce carbon emissions, and keep the earth habitable. Any successful attempt to alter the dominant position of the automobile in society must be prefaced by an understanding of how that preeminence was established. This means recognizing that the rise of the automobile was accomplished through a years-long series of deliberate policy choices made at every level of government. Those choices transformed physical and legislative systems, re-organized the city itself, and even altered the architecture of its buildings. To comprehend how such policies were formulated, one must understand the power structure which conceived and enacted those policies. I have attempted to show how this dominance was established in one city, tracing the steps of its emplacement by those in power, i.e., the pro-growth coalition.

By understanding what happened—and how—in a single place, one can find specific ways to counter inequitable and destructive trends that may be applicable regionally and nationally. It was not Atlanta’s love affair with the automobile that established the car’s supremacy on the roadways, nor was it democracy in action; it was capitalism in action. As Cronon observes, “The landscape we have created for them [cars] makes no other options available to us. We have no choice but to love them. . . . The scale of our resulting dependence on the automobile is so vast that unwinding these dependencies is hard even to imagine.”<sup>672</sup>

By demonstrating that deliberate choices and specific policies led to automotive supremacy, this study suggests that similar determination, resources, and sustained legislative actions will be necessary to alleviate somewhat the catastrophic consequences of Atlanta’s, and America’s, massive carbon footprints. Popular grassroots campaigns of good will and good intentions will not suffice against a ubiquitous motordom that has been entrenched in American life and on the American landscape for more than a century.

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<sup>672</sup> William Cronon, in Foreword of Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), xii.

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