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Presentation Title: A Moderate Jim Crow?: The Myth of Atlanta in the Civil Rights Era

During the Civil Rights era, Atlanta Mayors William Hartsfield and Ivan Allen Jr. actively cultivated an image of their city as one “too busy to hate.” Despite the contentions of numerous scholars since at least the early 1970s, the popular conception that Atlanta was exceptional in matters racial remains prevalent in public conversation and even within some commemorative institutions. Drawing on the work of Kevin Kruse, Matthew Lassiter and other scholars as well as analysis of voting records and public discourse in the city’s newspapers, this piece seeks to demonstrate the nature and extent of resistance to the fight of African Americans for civil rights in Atlanta from the late 40s through the 1960s. Rather than judge the role of Atlanta’s white power structure against that of other segregated cities and comment upon its supposed relative progressivism, the paper frames the question of the city’s reaction against the demands of the Civil Rights Movement itself. From this perspective it is clear that the resistance of Atlanta’s white civic and business leaders as well as a majority of its white residents was broad, determined and active in every area integration was sought and utilized tactics ranging from conciliatory to violent. Further, this paper attempts to place a clearer view of that history and its implications within the context of sociopolitical discussion concerning race that continues beyond the 1960s and the American South.