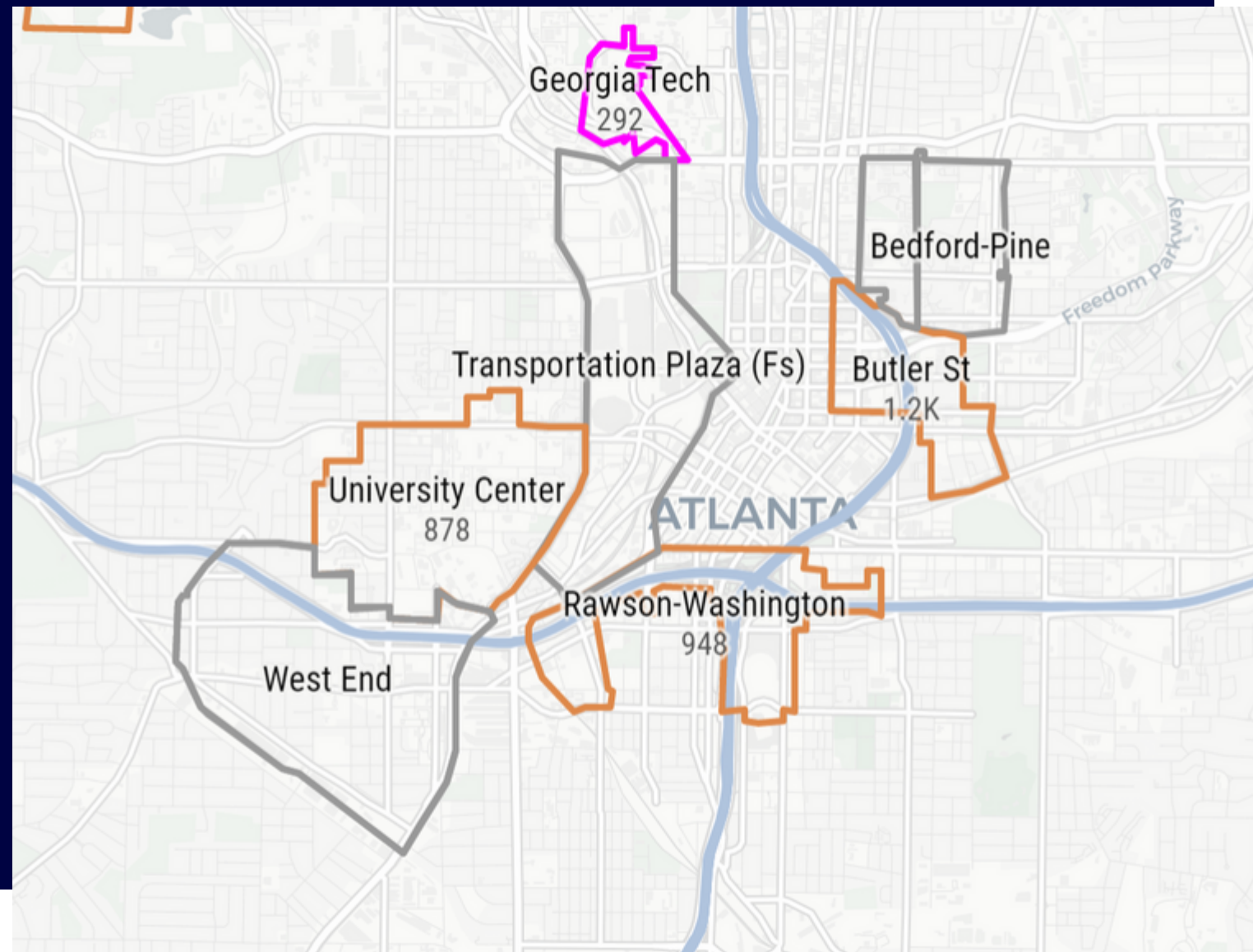


KYLE ROE AND JUSTIN CHAU

Urban Renewal in Atlanta

UNDERSTANDING THE UNINTENDED
CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN RENEWAL

Introduction to Urban Renewal



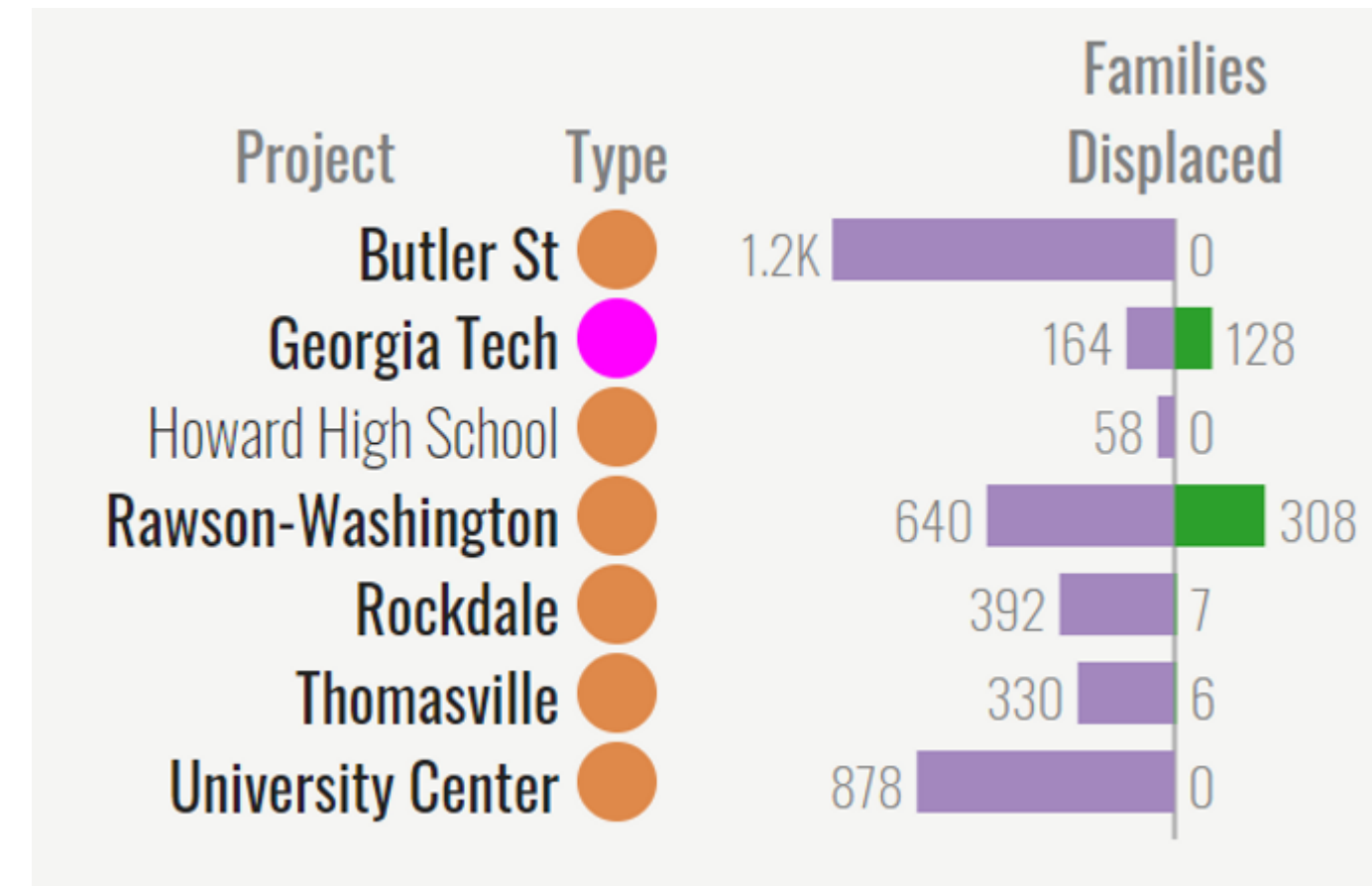
The Projects in Atlanta

Urban Renewal In Atlanta was a time of building and a time of reconstruction, however for as many steps forward that were taken for the city, many families and cultures took steps back as a consequence. The program was government subsidized and was meant to address issues of overcrowding and a decline in land values. With this intent in mind, cities were granted the ability to acquire, demolish, and rebuild acres upon acres of low value land. In the city of Atlanta, Urban Renewal also included the construction of schools. There was a total of 7 major projects centered in Atlanta. This includes: Butler St., Georgia Tech, Transportation Plaza, University Center, West End, Rawson-Washington, and Bedford Pine.

Introduction to Urban Renewal

The Issues Presented

While the program may sound appealing on paper, in reality, many of these Urban Renewal projects had negative consequences. For instance, many of the programs disproportionately affected black communities. In more cases than not, the projects displaced many more black families and fractured the large communities. However, while this is an easy quantitative measure, Urban Renewal also had significant effects on the accessibility of public infrastructure, such as parks and schools. Though the benefits of urban renewal should not be completely discounted, what is clear is that the effects of Urban Renewal were not entirely positive either.





Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr.'s Perspective

Throughout his memoir, "Mayor: Notes on the Sixties", Allen portrays a primarily positive perspective on the Urban renewal process to the reader. In his words, "We had to plunge into urban renewal so that we could bring life back to the downtown area" (65). Throughout the memoir, Allen makes repeated reference to the symbol of the phoenix. By connecting Atlanta to the symbol of the phoenix, Allen is able to depict Atlanta as a city of rapid growth. When discussing Urban Renewal, Allen once again takes a similar approach. As shown in the quote, Allen describes Urban Renewal as a program that would "bring life back" to Atlanta's downtown. Just as a phoenix rises from the ashes, Urban Renewal would breath life into a dead city. With this description in mind, it is clear that Allen saw Urban Renewal as beneficial or at least had high hopes for it.



Later in his memoir, Allen makes explicit mention of the phoenix when describing the Atlanta Stadium, a project that only happened due to Urban Renewal, “But all during the summer of 1964 this magnificent structure was slowly rising out of the ground, like another phoenix from the ashes” (159). Again, Allen is seen depicting Urban Renewal, or at least the affordances provided by it, as a program that would reinvigorate the city of Atlanta. Allen would take Atlanta and create it in his own image and make it the “...most outstanding in America ...” (130).

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September 30, 1969

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND SECRETARY

CARLTON GARRETT
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

GILBERT H. BOGGS
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

HOWARD OPENSHAW
DIRECTOR OF REDEVELOPMENT

GEORGE R. SANDER
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Mr. Malcolm D. Jones
Executive Director
Citizens Advisory Committee
for Urban Renewal
City Hall
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Mr. Jones:

Mr. Persells has asked me to reply to your letter of August 18, 1969 relative to the Executive Committee's concern over several features of Atlanta's Urban Renewal Program. First, let me say that we share the Committee's concern over the length of time required to close out earlier projects. However, to imply that the length of time taken to close out projects is due to an apparent lack of aggressiveness on the part of the Authority is ludicrous. The original five urban renewal projects have been amended forty-two times, requiring an additional eight million dollars from the Federal government, and resulting in a stadium, expansion of Georgia State College, additional land for schools, parks, and neighborhood facilities, acquisition of commercial properties on Georgia Avenue, and numerous other improvements. The average length of time involved in securing Federal approval of an amendment has been twelve months, with several requiring thirty months.

A second major factor delaying project close-outs is the funding and construction of non-cash grants-in-aid. The Butler Street Project, for example, could not be closed out earlier because the proposed school was not funded until the passage of the 1968 bond issue, with construction starting in August, 1969.

Even after renewal land has been sold, many developers have experienced delays caused by the tight money market, high interest rates and soaring costs.

Nonetheless, projects are not closed out without special effort. Recently I established a special task force to identify and expedite all remaining activities to be completed in the original projects. Two of these projects - Butler Street and Georgia State - have been completed this year and are waiting final HUD audit. I want to assure the Committee that the Authority recognizes its responsibility to proceed as rapidly as possible to complete the early projects.

Citizens Committee

The citizens committee was an auxiliary committee to the Urban Renewal Committee of the Board of Aldermen. Many of their discussions and meetings are documented within the archive. Because they are unfiltered, there are multiple instances where individuals of the committee express their frustrations. This contrasts with the "smooth-sailing" depicted by Allen. For instance, Allen often mentions how the progress in Atlanta is fast paced, unrivaled by any other city in the south. However, in the archive, there is a letter written by Howard Openshaw, director of redevelopment at the time, responding to the complaints regarding progress from Malcolm D. Jones, the executive director of the citizens advisory committee.

The Cold Hard Truth

A Different Perspective

The truth about Urban renewal is that it isn't as glamorous as Allen would have it seem. To be honest, Atlanta wasn't as progressive as Allen would lead you to believe. In Atlanta the process of progress was described by Allen as "Our urban-renewal program was being called one of the most outstanding in America ... It was clear that Atlanta was on the upswing in almost every area, that she had momentum, and that our efforts in the first half " (Allen 130). Yet according to other sources, it would turn out that Allen was incorrect about this as well, rather it would seem otherwise. (quote about progress in ATL)

Projects of Atlanta

The Effect of Atlanta Renewal

One of the main projects in the city of Atlanta was the clearing and gentrification of neighborhoods and communities. By the late 1960s, an estimated 4,077 families had been displaced by urban renewal projects in Atlanta, 89% of which were families of color. Something to consider was the fact that Atlanta in the 60's was 38.3% black in this time. An official report on the urban renewal projects showed that, "Atlanta's five Urban Renewal Projects now comprise 1303 acres, originally contained 2,971 substandard residential structures to be demolished, 1500 dwellings to be rehabilitated, will require 4,545 families to move..." All the neighborhoods that were leveled for city projects were also redlined neighborhoods and were primarily black families and communities.



This is confirmed by documents in the Ivan Allen Digital Archive with ,“It was brought to our attention that one of the most pressing needs is a complete and up to date listing of all vacant land in the city that is, or could easily be, zoned for low or moderate income housing.”. The city of Atlanta was looking to gentrify and make the city look more appealing through the destruction and replacement of what was considered “substandard housing”. An official document describing what was wanted says, “The operation of the corporation includes the demolition, cleaning and boarding-up and renovation and repair of sub-standard housing and properties.” Through the process of urban renewal, many communities and families were broken apart as the homes and lives they had known were taken from this in the name of progress.



School Systems in Atlanta

In post desegregation America, schools were a major point of contention and cause a lot of tension between leaders of Civil rights groups and civic leaders. Atlanta and Allen's administration were no exception to this.

The master plan for the stunning, split-level Georgia State College of the future is still largely on the drawing board, but need, logic, and vision are

Unequal Access

In "Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta" by Page, there is a line that states "The stalling tactics of the Atlanta school system are best illustrated by two disparate facts. First, when Atlanta is compared to a number of other southern cities in 1963 in regard to school desegregation, it comes up next to last in the total number of students desegregated." (Page 229). This quote seems to be in direct contrast with the picture Allen portrays in his Book's quote, "Our urban-renewal program was being called one of the most outstanding in America ... It was clear that Atlanta was on the upswing in almost every area, that she had momentum, and that our efforts in the first half " (Allen 130). Looking at the contrast between these two quotes, it is clear that not all was as it seemed for Atlanta. While the white population seemed to thrive off of Urban Renewal, the historical documentation would show that the Black population suffered for it.

Public Facilities

Through Urban Renewal, many new facilities and parks were built in the city. This infrastructure and effort can be seen through in Atlanta even to this day. In an excerpt from Allen's book he states "Nineteen office parks were built or announced in the outlying areas (Atlanta being one of the pioneers of that concept) -- and a 3,000-acre industrial park became the second largest in the country." (Mayor 146) These facilities were put in place to help encourage the growth and health of the communities and provide more for the population of Atlanta, but much like the other projects, this didn't benefit the black population well. In fact, many of the projects and new structures were built to almost segregate themselves from the black population. To quote the Twentieth Century Atlanta "The desegregation of these facilities solved only part of the problem. The lack of park and recreational space in black neighborhoods remained an issue of racial contention." (Twentieth Century Atlanta 151)

“Our outstanding record of physical growth merely brought us charges that we had an ‘edifice complex’ and **cared more about urban renewal than about ‘human renewal’**”

MAYOR IVAN ALLEN

Why it Matters

The importance behind this topic is that Urban Renewal was beneficial for the city of Atlanta in a lot of ways. Yet, even though much of the city benefited, it did not benefit the black community to the same extent as everyone else. It's important to keep this in mind as one looks at the city and how far it's come. To realize that not everyone in the city was always offered the same affordances and that many people were purposely put at a disadvantage for the convenience of others. So when you look at the city of Atlanta, you should take the time to see the faces behind it. To see those who suffered so that the city could move forward, to see those who rose up to meet a society who put them to every disadvantage, to see those for who Urban Renewal was Urban destruction.