5-1-1983

William Berry Hartsfield's racial attitude towards blacks

Louis Williams
Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
WILLIAM BERRY HARTSFIELD'S
RACIAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS BLACKS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
LOUIS WILLIAMS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1983
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION ................................................. 1

II. THE HIRING OF THE FIRST BLACK POLICEMEN ............... 6

III. THE REACTION TO THE BUILDING OF THE "ATLANTA WALL" . 23

IV. CONCLUSION .................................................. 44

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................. 48
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From the time William Berry Hartsfield became mayor of Atlanta in 1937 until he retired in 1961, he was one of the most controversial figures of his time. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how a long-time segregationist ended up as one of the most liberal mayors of a major southern city. In addition, this study will attempt to introduce the reader to Hartsfield the mayor and Hartsfield the man.

William Berry Hartsfield was born in Atlanta, Georgia on March 1, 1890 to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hartsfield. He attended Crew Street School and Boy's High School, from which he dropped out in his senior year. However, shortly afterward an aunt gave him money to take a six month course in typing and shorthand at the Dixie Business School in Atlanta, upon graduation from which he took a position as stenographer for American Radiator.1

In 1916, Hartsfield went to work as a clerk in the law firm of Russer, Staton, Phillips, and Hopkins. In his spare time, he read widely among the books at his church, the Grant Park Baptist Church, and the Atlanta Public Library. Then he wrote to the deans of a number of universities asking for reading lists that would give him

the equivalent of the college education he could not afford. The reading paid off when, in 1917, he passed the Georgia Bar examination; later in 1953, he wrote to Ivan Allen that his "alma mater" was the public library.²

In 1921, Hartsfield went into private law practice. Soon after, in 1922, he entered politics and was elected alderman, serving from 1923 to 1928 inclusive, and as mayor pro-tem in 1926.³ In 1925, he was appointed to investigate the Candler family's offer of an automobile race track as an airfield. He enthusiastically approved it and was able to obtain the city's acceptance of it -- thereby beginning a love affair that would last throughout his political career and finally end in the development of Atlanta's airport that carries his name, Hartsfield International Airport.⁴

Hartsfield was temporarily out of politics from 1929 through 1931. In 1932 he again became involved in politics when he ran for the state legislature from Fulton County and won, after which he began promoting Atlanta as a regional air center. In his first act in the legislature, he introduced a bill that would authorize a city or a county, or a combination of the two, to build and operate airports whose facilities would be rented to airplane operators and concessionaires. In 1934, he was re-elected to another term in the house and, after a brief two-term stay in the Georgia Legislature, he


³Biographical Sketch, W.B.H. Papers, Emory University, Atlanta.

returned to city politics.\textsuperscript{5}

In 1936, he ran against James L. Key for the office of Mayor of Atlanta. During this period in its history the city was bankrupt and Hartsfield promised to balance the budget without raising taxes. He also concentrated on the corrupt policies of Mayor Key and his police chief, alleging that Key was too old to run the city and that he was trying to use the black population to get elected. In the election, Hartsfield received 8,951 votes to 8,543 for Key and became Mayor of Atlanta; subsequently he did save the city from bankruptcy without raising taxes, mainly through the help of some of Atlanta's big businessmen such as his personal friend and Coca-Cola millionaire Robert Woodruff.\textsuperscript{6}

In the election of 1940, Hartsfield ran against Roy LeCrew, an insurance man and former Chamber of Commerce President. The main issues in the campaign were Hartsfield's spending too much time on airport development and the establishment of police traps in and around the city. He lost to LeCrew, but returned to office when LeCrew resigned to enlist in the service. In a special election in May, Hartsfield won and would hold this position until he retired in 1961.\textsuperscript{7}

By the time Hartsfield had retired as Mayor in 1961, he had made his mark on the history of Atlanta, especially in terms of race relations. Moreover, throughout his twenty-three and a half year term

\textsuperscript{5}Biographical Sketch, W.B.H. Papers, Emory University, Atlanta.

\textsuperscript{6}Martin, \textit{William B. Hartsfield}, pp. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid, pp. 32-34.
as mayor he was constantly made aware of the growing black population in the city, especially after the Democratic White primary was outlawed April 1, 1946 in the Supreme Court case of Chapman vs. King. Thus, for the first time since the city election of 1895, blacks enjoyed full political rights in Atlanta. (Previously blacks had voted in general, open, and special elections.) Well before 1946, every effort was made by the Atlanta Negro Voters League and other black leaders to prepare blacks for full political participation when the opportunity presented itself. By 1946, then, black political power was an impending reality.

This occurrence was very important in terms of Hartsfield's relationship with blacks, because he had to court the black vote, if he wanted to stay in office after the outlawing of the white primary. In the special election of 1942 which Hartsfield had won, many blacks did not support him even though they were allowed to participate in the election because it was a special election. Thus, when the white primary was outlawed Hartsfield recognized the importance of the black vote, knew that blacks would be playing a major role in future elections, and encouraged the formation of a coalition between northside white and black voters.

On October 10, 1959, Atlanta had a million people living in the metropolitan area, a long-term goal of Hartsfield's. After seven terms as mayor it was time for Hartsfield to hand over the reign of power to a younger leader, Ivan Allen, Jr., a civic leader, businessman, and son of a distinguished Atlantan. On June 7, 1961,

---

Hartsfield stepped out of his office and announced to a crowd of reporters that he was not going to be a candidate for mayor in the May primary. In the election, according to Ivan Allen, Hartsfield never took a stand in the mayoral race; however, even without Hartsfield's formal support Ivan Allen was able to defeat Lester Maddox with the same coalition of northside whites and blacks to become the new Mayor of Atlanta.10

The outgoing mayor was described by The Atlanta Journal:

He's got a hot temper, a stinging tongue, a strong will, a quick wit, a kind heart, a sense of history, a sense of destiny, a sense of humor, a capacity for growth, and a built-in finely political radar set that seldom had failed him in his public life.11

---

9 Martin, William B. Hartsfield, pp. 141-142.


CHAPTER II

THE HIRING OF THE FIRST BLACK POLICEMAN

The decade of the 1940's saw many unusual events occur in and outside the United States. World War II had been fought and won by the Allies. With the return of black and white soldiers home, there were fears that a depression would occur if reconversion was mishandled. This kind of fear brought racial antagonism and led to two major race riots in the North and several lynchings of blacks in the South. Blacks were still considered "second class citizens" during that period, as the doctrine of "white supremacy" was the rule of the day. In Atlanta there were violent attacks against Blacks.¹

One of the most important events that occurred during this period was the Supreme Court decision of 1945 which outlawed the Democratic White primary (hereafter referred to as the white primary). It represented one of the most rigid devices that southern whites had devised to keep black people down. If a candidate won the white primary he usually won the general election. Because the majority of southern whites belonged to the Democratic party, the black vote would not count in the South until blacks could participate in the

Although blacks were allowed to vote in special and general elections the primary was closed to them. This exclusion made it very difficult for any blacks to seek office in the South. Thus when the white primary was finally outlawed blacks in the South had a chance to have a greater voice in government, a fact that politicians in the South had to take into consideration, even Mayor Hartsfield. The outlawing of the white primary opened the door to mass voting by Blacks in Atlanta and all over the South for the first time since the final days of Reconstruction. Black people in Atlanta began their march to become a force not to be ignored in the politics of Atlanta, the state, the South, and the nation.3

This chapter will look at the hiring of the first black policemen in Atlanta with a major emphasis being placed on what led to that decision, at that time, and what Mayor Hartsfield sought to accomplish by being the first mayor of Atlanta to hire black policemen. The focus, will be on Hartsfield's motives and reasoning for this historic breakthrough. The result of the outlawing of the white primary is evident in this breakthrough.

The total population of Atlanta in 1940 was 302,288. The black population of the city was 104,514, representing 34.7 percent of the total population; however, the most important characteristic

---


of the 1940 census report was that there were 67,908 blacks who were over the age of twenty-one out of a total population of 204,102 in that age group. Blacks represented 33.5 percent of the population in that category, that is, those eligible to vote. After 1945, anyone planning to run for office had to at least take the black vote into consideration if he wanted to win an election in Atlanta.

According to The Atlanta Daily World, in a seven part series entitled "Search for Equal Justice," the groundwork for the hiring of the first black policemen was laid as early as 1922. In that year 6,000 black voters swung a special election to then Mayor James Key in return for his agreement to build Booker T. Washington High School, the first public high school for blacks in Atlanta.

The Daily World article, by Cornelius A. Scott, the new publisher of that same newspaper, goes on to argue that the actual crusade for the hiring of black policemen was started in 1936, the same year in which Mayor Hartsfield first ran for mayor. Scott maintained that if there had been black policemen stationed in black commercial and residential areas, his older brother William Alexander, the founder of the paper, might not have been shot down in 1934 by a passing gunman. C.A. Scott began with a pamphlet requesting black policemen and, finally, in 1941 he wrote an article for the Commission on Interracial Cooperation entitled "It Doesn't Cost Nothing to Kill a Negro", explaining how police would help lower the

---


6 Ibid.
crime rate in the black community.\textsuperscript{7}

During the 1940's, and even before, there were more blacks arrested than whites, and more black homicides. In the January 1, 1948 issue, the Daily World compared homicides in Atlanta among blacks and whites, demonstrating that between the years of 1938 and 1946 there were 635 black homicides in comparison to 96 white homicides.\textsuperscript{8}

Throughout the period, there were constant reports of police brutality and discrimination by the all-white Atlanta police force towards blacks. According to Mr. B.B. Beamon in an interview for the "Living Atlanta" series, "it was not uncommon for the police to abuse blacks."\textsuperscript{9} The major argument for the hiring of black policemen was that they would help alleviate police brutality and the high crime rate among blacks in Atlanta.

Eventually, the call for black policemen became more widespread. In 1945, a protest demonstration was held when two hundred blacks marched from Auburn Avenue to City Hall carrying posters calling for the hiring of black policemen in Atlanta. It was a very orderly march and there was no interference nor were there confrontations with the police or anyone else.\textsuperscript{10} Blacks were beginning to let their


\textsuperscript{8}World, 1 January 1948, p. 6.


\textsuperscript{10}Herbert Jenkins, Forty Years on the Force, (Decatur: National Graphics, 1973), pp. 44-55. In the "Living Atlanta" series, former Police Chief Hubert Jenkins state that there were about one thousand demonstrators.
feelings be known publicly on a more widespread basis in Atlanta.

One of the primary forces behind the fight for the hiring of black policemen was the Negro Voters League, which was composed of many of Atlanta's major black leaders such as William Holmes Borders, Warren Cochran, C.A. Bacote, John Wesley Dobbs, A.T. Walden, C.A. Scott, and Martin Luther King, Sr. In a newspaper article, Borders gave the following account of what occurred when he and the people named above went to Mayor Hartsfield concerning the issue:

We went to Hartsfield and asked him to hire black policemen. We had only 6,000 black registered voters. He told us we had about as much chance as we had prayin' in the First Baptist Church. We went back and added 10,000 more black voters, asked him the same question again, and he asked, when do you want them?11

Warren R. Cochran, the Director of the Butler Street Y.M.C.A., painted a more vivid picture of what occurred at the meeting between Hartsfield and the members of the Negro Voters League:

Hartsfield was a total segregationist. He told us that until we got him 10,000 black votes we wouldn't get anything. When we got the votes, he listened to us. But the entire relationship between blacks and Hartsfield remained a matter of delivering black votes.12

---

11World, 27 October 1977, p. 1. In the "Living Atlanta" series Reverend Borders states that Hartsfield said, "We will get Negro policemen in Atlanta as soon as we get the Negro deacons in the First Baptist Church white."

12Ibid.
Still another witness, C.L. Harper, who was at that time the principal of Washington High School, suggested one more reason why Hartsfield was willing to hire black police at that time:

The reason is steeped in the changing times, and with all the crusades of that era, black police won acceptance mainly due to the death knell of the white primary, which assured thinking white leaders that it would be a matter of time before blacks become a political power.  

Former Police Chief Herbert Jenkins who had witnessed the demonstration staged downtown for the hiring of black police and was police chief when the first black policemen were put on the force, related the following conversation with his predecessor, Chief Hornsby, about the possibility of hiring black police in Atlanta during his administration of the force:

Well I was a Captain in the police department and I had talked to Chief Hornsby, who was Chief of Police at that time, and discussed with him what was developing and where it was heading and what was going to come. And I suggested he and I take our wives and go on a short vacation. In the meantime stop off in Miami and Savannah. Also, stop in Richmond, Virginia and Chicago where they employed black policemen. We discussed it and finally I went in there one day and said, "When were we going on our trip?" He says, "Forget it I am not going on any trip and there are not going to be any black police in Atlanta as long as I am Chief of Police. And if they ever force it on me, I am going to resign and am going to retire. I am going to keep them off as long as I can and if they give them to me anyway, I am gone!"14

Almost prophetically Chief Hornsby died soon after. Jenkins, being a close friend of the Mayor, was selected by Hartsfield to be the new police chief, a very difficult position to take on because of the issue of the hiring of black police. But, Jenkins being the person he was, was more than able to handle the difficult task put before him, as will be shown in the following pages.15

In his book, Forty Years On The Force, Jenkins offers a very enlightening and interesting account of Hartsfield and his handling of the controversial issue:

Mayor Hartsfield was by now pretty much committed to the idea because he quickly recognized, more than anyone else at the time, the importance of the Supreme Court decision in 1945 which abolished the Democratic White primary. This was the means by which Southerners had contrived to keep Negroes from voting in Democratic primaries which in the South at that time was tantamount to election. Mayor Hartsfield saw the great potential impact and changes this decision would have on Atlanta and the nation.16

14 "Living Atlanta," Black Police, Herbert Jenkins.
15 Jenkins, Forty Years on the Force, p. 39.
16 Ibid, p. 45.
On still another occasion, Jenkins summed up Hartsfield's attitude on the issue even better by declaring that, "Hartsfield had seen the writing on the wall." 17

There were during this period, and throughout his tenure as mayor, a number of Atlantans whom Hartsfield consulted about what action should be taken on certain issues and upon whom he depended for advice and counsel. Many were important white business people who resided on the Northside of Atlanta, including Robert W. Woodruff, Ivan Allen, Robert MacDougall, Jack Tarver, Ralph Huie, John O. Chiles, and others. There were, also, many black leaders who advised the mayor, such as A.T. Walden, M.L. King, Sr., Warren Cochran, William Borders, and others. The two groups, considered the white and black establishment or power structure, respectively, later formed a coalition that helped Hartsfield stay in office. Still, according to Jenkins, the overriding force in any discussion was Hartsfield himself. Although he would listen to the power structure groups, Hartsfield himself would eventually decide what he thought was best for the city. 18

The fight to hire blacks was not an easily won battle, and everyone involved had to be willing to do his best to make black policemen a reality in Atlanta. Blacks not only protested and demonstrated to make it a reality, but they also organized and informed the community concerning the issues of the black policemen. According to Chief Jenkins:

---

17 "Living Atlanta," Black Police, Hubert Jenkins.

18 Jenkins, Forty Years on the Force, p. 45-46.
They did a lot of work with different organizations and there were a lot of white organizations that came out publicly and endorsed the project, see, where you did not have that before. It was certain churches, and certain civic organizations at that time moved forward in the public who supported it. See I was convinced as I was reading the power structure, and that is the business people in Atlanta that had really run Atlanta for years. The real power structure as I construed at that time was leaning in that direction. Now I could set back and they would be either forced on me or I would be replaced and someone else would do it, and I would go back and say I need the authority I do not have. Mayor Hartsfield decided the best way to hire black policemen was to get a resolution by the city council; this eventually led to a hearing for the council's police committee.19

Mayor Hartsfield had city councilman Ralph Huie introduce a resolution to the Aldermanic Board; instead of voting on the resolution, they referred it to the Police Committee for a hearing. In addition, some of the Aldermanic Board said they would not vote on the resolution until they had a recommendation from Chief Jenkins on whether he was for or against the hiring of black policemen. They called a 7:30pm public meeting on November 27, 1947 to hear from everyone who was opposed or in favor of the resolution to hire black policemen.20

At that Wednesday night meeting there were approximately 1,000 people who filled the seats in Recorder Callaway's courtroom. Many of the comments in favor of and against the resolution were recorded by The Atlanta Constitution.21

Among the Blacks speaking for the resolution was the Reverend

---

19 "Living Atlanta," Black Police, Herbert Jenkins.

20 Jenkins, Forty Years on the Force, pp. 45-46.

Martin L. King, Sr. of the Ebenezer Baptist Church who argued,
"The time is ripe for Negro policemen. No racial trouble will result.
We are not asking for racial equality. All we want is a chance."22

C.A. Scott, General Manager of The Atlanta Daily World argues,
"Negro homicides have averaged 18 times more than whites for the past
two years. In 1946, there were 95 Negro killings to 10 whites.
Negro policemen can get convicting evidence and can reduce crime."23

Among the whites opposed were Walter A. Sims, attorney and
former Mayor of Atlanta who claimed,

It seems the colored brothers have convicted themselves. In
one breath they admit they commit the greatest number of
cri m es, and in another tell us the violations will be reduced
if we authorize Negro policemen. Until the Negro stops voting
in bloc, there should be no Negro police. Anyway they want
to start too high. We could start them in the City Hall or
some elementary place. We could put some in the tax office.
The Mayor can appoint his executive secretary. Maybe, the
newspaper, who is sponsoring Negro police would put some in
the City Hall press room.24

And Dr. A.H. VanDyke who maintained,

My record has always been to help the Negro. I was a member
of the old police board. When Henry Wallace spoke there
was no segregation of the race. We had Negroes in the
General Legislature as late as 1908. I believe we will
have another white primary law in Georgia next year. Give
the Negroes schools, parks, and playgrounds but don't
make policemen of them.25

There were many more comments that were made pro and con at
the meeting, but those already cited should give the reader a feel of what was going on in the minds of the people. Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, President-emeritus of Morehouse College, best sums up the meeting in which the issue of the hiring of black police was put before the general public, "It was so rough, I really thought a riot was going to break out."26

According to Jenkins, Hartsfield was always in the background on the issue, either coaching or guiding everything, until he could get the resolution passed. Hartsfield had Jenkins write a letter to the Board in favor of the resolution. And although ninety-eight percent of the all white police force was against the resolution, Hartsfield went before all three watches and told them to give the resolution a chance, because if they refused it, they would be forced to accept the black policemen anyway.27

The issue was finally brought before the whole Board on December 1, 1947, and was passed by a ten to seven vote. The reasons given by the council for passing the resolution were that a large number of citizens and civic organizations, as well as both daily newspapers, had advocated the hiring of black policemen in Atlanta and that, after examining over forty southern cities which had black police, they had found that their use aided in preventing the rise of crime in the black community.28

At the same time, there were many stipulation by which blacks

26 "Living Atlanta," Black Police, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays.

27 Jenkins, Forty Years of the Force, p. 46.

28 Atlanta City Council Proceeding, 1 December 1947, p. 86
were to be hired. Some of them were stated in Chief Jenkins' letter to the city council regarding the issue: they could be used in black sections of Atlanta only and they were to be used only on a trial basis.\footnote{29}

In addition to the restrictions that were included in his letter to the city council, Chief Jenkins later added more rigid stipulations on the hiring of black police. To begin with, they could not exercise police power over whites. Next, a black precinct would have to be established. Then, a delegation had to be sent to other southern cities to study their methods of operation and regulations. Lastly, they would not be given civil service status until their success had been proven.\footnote{30}

During the December 1st meeting, Councilman Allen alleged that the issue was a political one, backed by Hartsfield to secure black votes and that the Mayor's campaign to annex Buckhead having failed, Hartsfield was trying to gain the black vote to make up for this loss. Allen warned that in all probability, blacks would in the future have their own candidate for Mayor, Council, and Board of Education.\footnote{31} Indeed, if Hartsfield could have annexed Buckhead at that time, he might not have seen the need to help make it possible for Atlanta to have black policemen, because there were enough whites living in Buckhead at that time to reduce the

\footnote{29}Ibid.

\footnote{30}Ibid, p. 87.

\footnote{31}Ibid. All of the above-mentioned later came to pass; today, in 1983, one will notice that the city has its second black mayor, Andrew Young, a City Council and Board of Education that is predominantly black. Also, the Councilman Allen named above is not the later Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr.
pressures that had come about because of the outlawing of the white primary. Also, Hartsfield had always enjoyed the benefit of most of his votes coming from the Northside where, in fact, Buckhead was located. Without a doubt, the failure of Hartsfield to annex that area may have had a powerful effect on Hartsfield's willingness to help blacks.

There were fifty-seven blacks who took the examination for the police force, many with some college and military experience, thereby making them more than qualified for the job. From the fifty-seven only eight were picked as candidates to be trained as police. After training, they were assigned to a segregated unit under a white captain. Warren Cochran, the Director of the Butler Street Y.M.C.A., upon learning from Chief Jenkins that the men were going to be stationed in an old building on Butler Street over a liquor store, offered the use of two offices in his basement as a headquarters for the new black officers. In Chief Jenkins' judgment, the thought of black policemen frightened white people; therefore, he attempted to segregate the black officers until white people could overcome their fears. Not only were they not to be stationed in the Decatur Street Police Station, they also were not permitted to wear their uniforms away from the Butler Street Y.M.C.A. or carry their guns home.\footnote{World, 27 October 1977, p. 4. All of which probably would have discouraged the average person, but not these eight new black officers. Even with these restrictions they attempted to do their job.}

To add insult to injury, legal steps were taken by some whites to stop the hiring of black police in the city. \textit{Yarn vs. the City of}
Atlanta challenged the hiring of black police on the basis that blacks could not arrest whites, arguing that it was unconstitutional for black police to be allowed to arrest only blacks. The suit demanded that a restraining order be put on the hiring of the new black police officers. On January 28, 1948, Judge Bond Almond, dismissed the case declaring, "None of our business." While there were no more major obstacles placed in the way of the hiring of the first black police, this did not mean that they would be totally accepted.33

On April 30, 1948, a Friday evening, the first eight black police were presented to the public in a formal ceremony at the Greater Mt. Calvary Baptist Church by the Atlanta Branch of the N.A.A.C.P. The first black police in Atlanta were Willie T. Elkins, Willard Strickland, John Sanders, Jr., Robert McKibbens, Ernest Lyons, Johnny Jones, Henry Hooks, and Claude Dixon.34

Mayor Hartsfield, who had been so instrumental in helping bring about the reality of black police in Atlanta, was the keynote speaker for that special event. In his speech he assured the audience that he and the city government were proud to pay honor to the city's first black police, that the new officers had passed the same test, were selected in the same manner, and were trained as were their white counterparts. He went on to say that, "I firmly believe they will meet their tasks. Your success is your race's

33 Jenkins, Forty Years on the Force, p. 47. The suit was filed by some whites who did not want to see any black police, and not because they were interested about the limited power by which the new officers were to be hired.

success!" He was later quoted as telling the new officers, "Do the kind of job that Jackie did in Brooklyn."[^35]

On May 2, 1948 the first black policemen marched on to Auburn Avenue, with a crowd of blacks behind them as they took their place in the community as policemen.[^36] Not only did they pass their trial period, but soon all the stipulations placed on them were removed, and blacks would gradually constitute a sizable proportion and, finally, a good majority of the police department.

The effects of the first black police were many; most importantly, their hiring helped to bring about more registered black voters. The June 26, 1948 edition of the Daily World states that, according to figures released by Fulton County Tax Collector and Register, T. Earl Suttles, 82,010 voters were eligible to vote in the September primary in which Mayor Hartsfield ran against Charlie Brown, of which number 21,506 were blacks.[^37] In that primary a total of 40,055 voters visited the polls, of whom 22,405 were black. Hartsfield received 20,080 of the votes to 17,255 for Brown. More than ninety percent of the black voters who visited the polls voted for Hartsfield.[^38] This was the beginning of a relationship that Hartsfield was to enjoy with black voters throughout his tenure as mayor.

[^35]: World, 27 October 1977, p. 1. Jackie Robinson was the first black to play in the National Baseball League and he also won Rookie of the Year while playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers.


In summary, there are numerous reasons why the first black police were hired at that period, the major one being the outlawing of the white primary, an act which made many intelligent whites, including Mayor Hartsfield, realize the political impact this decision would have on future elections. Since blacks represented 34.7 percent of Atlanta's total population and 33.5 percent of Atlanta's possible voting strength, they had become a group that had to be dealt with after the outlawing of the white primary.

Another contributing factor was the black community's ability to register voters through the Negro Voters League. Then, using their voting strength as a bargaining tool, it became possible for blacks to gain many other social improvements besides the black police. Thus one comes back again to the major event of that period, the outlawing of the white primary, because the black vote was to become important in every election in Atlanta and not only in special elections as before when the white primary was still intact.

Mayor Hartsfield was politically astute enough to listen to blacks because of their newly gained political strength. He recognized that blacks were becoming a political force in Atlanta. Although he used blacks mainly for his own political gains, he kept his promises, thus proving to be instrumental in establishing better race relations in Atlanta. The one word that could best be used to describe Hartsfield and his actions would have to be practical. Even if he did not really care about blacks, he was practical enough, after the Negro Voters League was able to register more than 10,000 registered voters, to give them what they wanted. To every politician, votes mean all and Hartsfield was no exception.
At that time, it must be recognized that the white power structure, white civic organizations, Chief Jenkins, and the two newspapers supported him on the issue. As with so many things, the timing was right for this historical move. Even though all whites and blacks did not support the issue, enough of the public was willing to see the advent of black police to assure that in 1948 Atlanta gained its first black policemen.

Lastly, the interaction, between Hartsfield and all of the people mentioned was very important in helping bring about the hiring of the first black police. If it were not for Hartsfield's political insight and maneuvering, the issue may not have been brought before the city council for a vote. However, Hartsfield's major underlying reason for hiring black police was politics. Hartsfield knew that supporting this issue could possible lose him some white support. By adding restrictions and stipulations on the new black police he was able to appease both blacks and whites. With both groups supporting the restrictions and both willing to go along with the idea of hiring black police. The hiring of black police thus became a reality in that period in Atlanta history.³⁹

³⁹These judgements were arrived at prior to and independently of Rosenweig, "The Issue of Employing Black Policemen,"
CHAPTER III

THE REACTION TO THE BUILDING OF THE "ATLANTA WALL"

Just as the outlawing of the "white primary" by the United States Supreme Court served as a catalyst for many of the events that occurred during the 1940's, so did the 1954 decision in Brown vs. Board of Education which declared separate but equal unconstitutional serve as a vehicle for the Civil Rights struggle of the 1950's and 1960's.

Once again, as they had done in the 1940's, Southern whites sought to thwart the decision of the Court. They formed White Citizens' Councils that were usually made up of business and professional people; while the Ku Klux Klan was left with the task of again mobilizing the lower-income whites in an all out attempt to block any gains made by blacks.¹

In spite of these organizations and other forms of resistance, however, blacks made much progress in becoming part of the main stream of American life during the 1950's and 1960's. Brown vs. Board of Education sounded the death knell to segregation established by law. This was followed by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the first comprehensive piece of civil rights legislation, which outlawed discrimination in housing, hiring and public accommodations. An equally important

piece of legislation was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which lifted all restrictions put on black voters, and gave the Attorney General authority to institute suits on behalf of blacks deprived of voting rights. The increase in black voting which resulted was to be a significant factor in the future events in Atlanta.

Another of these strides occurred in education, on August 30, 1961 when four Atlanta high schools were integrated and this combined with the integration of several other Southern schools helped to loosen the hold that the segregationist had over education in the South. This event, according to Virginia H. Hein in her article, "The Image of 'A City Too Busy to Hate': Atlanta in the 1960's," combined with some self-confident words of Mayor Hartsfield, was the beginning of Atlanta's image as "a city too busy to hate". However, as will be shown below, the legal fight for integration of neighborhoods was one of the toughest battles that had to be won. The controversy of "Atlanta Wall" described below was part of this battle.

In this chapter the researcher will examine Hartsfield's mayoral campaign of 1957 and the reasons for his retirement from office in 1961 with emphasis being placed on the election of Ivan Allen, Jr., under the old Hartsfield coalition of Northside whites and blacks as new mayor. The researcher will also trace the changes which occurred in the Atlanta power structure during this period. The

---


3 Virginia H. Hein, "The Image of 'A City Too Busy to Hate': Atlanta in the 1960's," Phylon 33, (Fall, 1972), 207.
major focus for this chapter will be on reactions, especially Hartsfield's and Mayor Allen's initial response to neighborhood integration, thereby providing the reader with another view of the racial attitude of Hartsfield in a different situation.

In Hartsfield's last primary fight for the office of mayor of Atlanta, he won a slim victory over his opponent, Fulton County Commissioner Archie Lindsey. Hartsfield received 37,612 votes to 33,808 for Commissioner Lindsey. In winning the election over Lindsey, Hartsfield was able to depend on his long established coalition pattern of carrying the Northside precincts and the black precinct; however, he was badly beaten in the lower middle-class and lower-class white sections of the city which voted strongly for Lindsey. It was becoming evident in this primary that Hartsfield's strong hold on Atlanta politics was beginning to loosen.

In the December 1957 general election, Mayor Hartsfield's opponent was the segregationist Lester Maddox. In the campaign, Maddox claimed Hartsfield was too moderate on racial matters, that he ran city hall like a dictator, and hinted that there was corruption in the Hartsfield administration. Hartsfield on the other hand, concentrated on the more positive aspects of his administration and when the issue of race was brought up on several occasions, he totally avoided the issue. In the election, Hartsfield received 41,300 votes to 23,987 for Maddox, and won a very decisive victory. As in the primary election, Hartsfield's voting strength came from

---

Northside whites and blacks.  

According to M. Kent Jennings author of *Community Influentials*, nearly two years after the general election of 1957, it became obvious that the business leadership was thinking about withdrawing its support from Hartsfield. Several factors accounted for the change of attitude toward Hartsfield. To begin with, Hartsfield's, as he grew older, quarrelsome behavior was increasing to an unbearable point. Then too, he had fought a series of political contests that had created a great split among voters in the city. Finally, he seemed to be losing his strong control over the Aldermanic Board. Newer and younger political leaders were becoming involved in the political machinery and many of them did not feel any obligation to him and his coalition. Without business community support for campaign funds, the beginning of the end for the man who had run Atlanta for so many years was in sight.

After twenty-three and a half years as Mayor of Atlanta, Hartsfield, on the morning of Wednesday, June 7, 1961, stepped from his office and announced to a crowd of reporters that he would not be a candidate in the forthcoming primary. In an evening edition of *The Atlanta Journal* on that same day he was quoted as saying:

I will not be a candidate in the forthcoming primary. I wish to express my profound thanks to the hundreds of good citizens in all walks of life who have urged me to run but I believe my decision is a wise one for myself and my beloved city.

---

There probably were many unknown reasons for Hartsfield's retirement at that time, but one thing was for sure - he had been one of Atlanta's most memorable mayors.

For his successor, according to Jennings, Hartsfield first seemed to favor M.M. ("Muggsy") Smith, a state representative from Fulton County, who was also the choice of many younger and more dominant black leaders. Much of the big-business community, however, united to support of Ivan Allen, Jr., a well-to-do businessman from a well-established Atlanta family, who was president of the Chamber of Commerce. Jennings states that banker Mills B. Lane, Jr., was said to have been the decisive force in eventually persuading much of the Hartsfield "gang" into backing Allen. Although, according to Ivan Allen, Hartsfield never took a position in the mayoral race, his announcement that he was not going to be a candidate gave Allen his chance of winning the election.

In the 1961 general election, Allen's opponent was Lester Maddox who, as previously mentioned, ran unsuccessfully for mayor against Hartsfield in 1957. The main issue in the campaign was school desegregation, with Maddox the segregationist being a strong advocate of keeping the schools segregated. By receiving 64,330 votes to 36,091 votes for Maddox, Ivan Allen, relying on much the same voting coalition as Hartsfield had used for so many

---

8 Jennings, *Community Influentials*, p. 140.

years, became Atlanta's new mayor.\textsuperscript{10}

During this time period, Atlanta's power structure or establishment was to witness what could be called a changing of the guard in the passage of power from the old leaders of the city to the newer leaders. Former Mayor Ivan Allen gives a very vivid account on the subject in his \textit{Mayor: Notes on the Sixties}. According to Allen, the transfer of power began taking place in the early fifties and reached its peak in 1958 and 1959. In this new group in which he includes himself, he states that it was composed of

White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, Atlantan, business-oriented, non-political, moderate, well-bred, well-educated, pragmatic, and dedicated to the betterment of Atlanta as much as a Boy Scout troop is dedicated to fresh milk and clean air.

They were children of the Great Depression who had come out of it with an appreciation for hard work. Nearly ninety percent of them lived inside a half-mile radius of the intersection of Habersham and West Paces Ferry roads on the Northside of the city, the side of Atlanta which composed an important segment of the coalition of blacks and moderate whites that Hartsfield depended on to help him win many of his mayoral elections.\textsuperscript{11}

These new leaders, according to Allen, were the presidents of the five major Atlanta banks, men in charge of Atlanta-based industries such as Coca-Cola, the presidents of utilities, chairmen


\textsuperscript{11}Ivan Allen, \textit{Mayor Notes on the Sixties}, pp. 30-31.
of the three of four top retail stores, the regional branch managers of leading national firms in the southeast, the presidents of the larger local businesses, the chairman in charge of Atlanta's transit system, and the leading realtors. Lastly, this group had shared the same problems, interests and ambitions, attended the same schools, and all were close friends of Allen.¹²

Floyd Hunter in his recent *Community Power Succession* challenges some of Allen's overview, labeling the people in the new power structure "inheritors". According to Hunter, the "inheritors" represented a large portion of the new power structure; others came to power through corporate, professional, and political means. Many of the national corporations were establishing their regional headquarters in Atlanta, and many of these new corporate heads were not native Atlantans. What is more, many of the new members of the power structure did not share in the close-knit upbringing described by Allen. An example of one of these people was John Portman, the self-made architect who designed the Peachtree Center and Hyatt Regency in Atlanta; another was Tom Cousins, a real estate developer. But many of the people who did compose this new power structure were indeed from the group that Allen wrote about in his book.¹³

The changing of Atlanta's power structure is very important if one is to gain an understanding of some of the events that occurred

¹²Ibid.

in Atlanta during the 1950's and 1960's. Unlike Birmingham and other Southern cities, Atlanta and her white leaders were willing to sit down and discuss the issues with blacks, thereby avoiding many of the major violent confrontations that beset many sister cities in the region.

In 1960, the total population of Atlanta was 302,288. The black population had increased to 104,154 or 38.8 percent of the city's total and was steadily growing. The total number of registered black voters was 41,469 or 28.9 percent of the total, thereby making them a very important group when it came to city elections.14

During the 1950's and 1960's, Atlanta like many of the larger cities of America, was attempting a policy of urban renewal which called for the demolishing of the older decayed sections of the city and the rebuilding of these areas. Urban renewal, combined with the increasing black population, made it necessary for blacks to expand beyond the traditional neighborhood boundaries that had existed for them for so many years.

In Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent, an analysis of urban renewal policy in Atlanta, Clarence N. Stone states that black residential expansion seemed unavoidable, but white Atlantans attempted to stop this expansion and in many cases tried to ban and displace blacks from areas of the city where they had always lived. Conversely, Blacks wanted to remain in the areas they had always occupied, and they also wanted to expand into new areas of the city. For while they made up one-third of the population, blacks occupied

only one-sixth of the residential land.15

According to Stone, the desire by Black Atlantans to expand into new residential space was about to interfere with the goals of most white people of the city who were also attempting to expand into new residential areas. To stop or control this expansion, white Atlantans were willing to do anything. To make matters worse, the white business community hoped to move blacks out of the dying areas around the city's business district, thereby displacing even more of them. Lastly, Atlanta city planners in the early 1950's did not want to integrate housing but, instead, intended to improve distribution of housing, thereby adding more pressure on this very hot issue of housing in the city.16

Southwest Atlanta was somewhat of an anomaly. This area, according to Stone, was comparatively affluent and mostly white; however, blacks were beginning to move into it, along its northern border. Although this area was physically and psychologically far different from the Northside area, some public elected officials who were very important in the city's politics also lived in southwest Atlanta. They had used their political influence several times to stop black expansion and all subsidized housing from being built in their area.17 However, the mounting forces of change would prove to be much more than even they could have foreseen.

16Ibid.
17Ibid.
Before one can truly understand the crisis that was building, one must understand what was also occurring in the real estate market citywide. Real estate transactions during the 1950's and 1960's, according to Stone, were limited by "semi-official" and "understood" boundaries and "buffers" that separated black and white communities in the city.

While blacks acquiesced in these boundaries and in some instances were active parties to the so-called gentlemen's agreements, there is no question that they would have preferred an open and unsegregated housing market. Bargaining from what they regarded as an equal position blacks received limited amounts of expansion land and the transition of some neighborhoods from white to black in exchange for acceptance of a pattern residential segregation.\textsuperscript{18}

According to then Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., Peyton Forest, the neighborhood in which the crisis reached a head, was a white subdivision near Peyton Road, on the Southwest section of the city, where the developer became upset with the slow progress of the sale of homes and began to make threats to whites in the area that he might start selling homes to blacks. The developer pointed out that Blacks were already buying homes in adjoining neighborhoods;\textsuperscript{19} later, he bought an advertisement in \textit{The Atlanta Daily World} in which he advertised that homes in the subdivision were up for sale. Dr. Clint Warner, a black physician, made agreements whereby he might be able to purchase one of the houses. A white organization, the Southwest Atlanta Citizens Association, in an all-out effort to stop expansion in the area, repurchased the house originally bought by

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 15.

\textsuperscript{19}Allen, \textit{Mayor Notes}, p. 71.
According to the December 13, 1962 issue of the Daily World, the Public Works Committee in executive session, after a public hearing on a plan approved and sanctioned by Mayor Allen for closing certain streets in the Peyton Forest area as a "buffer" between black and white homeowners, gave his recommendation its endorsement. Mayor Allen had proposed that some eight hundred acres of land, which he felt had been improperly zoned commercial, should be re-zoned and offered to blacks to use for the purpose of building new homes to coincide with his proposal to close certain streets in the Peyton Forest area. He justifies this action in his memoirs:

I saw it as a way of accomplishing two things: calming the white people in the neighborhood and focusing attention on the unused eight hundred acres so we could get it re-zoned and put to use for low-priced or middle-priced housing. I saw it as a happy compromise between two very serious problems, and thought I could be Solomon before it was over. But I learned once again, that when you're dealing with the public you cannot assume they know all that you know.22

In response, the Empire Real Estate Board and members of the black community formed an "All-Citizens Committee" in hopes of rallying support from the community to halt Mayor Allen's sponsored plan for a "buffer" against black expansion. The committee was headed by Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr.,


22 Allen, Mayor Notes, pp. 71-72.
Reverend H.I. Boardin, and Jesse Hill.23

On December 17, 1962, the Aldermanic Board, by a vote of thirteen to one, passed the plan endorsed by Mayor Allen and the Public Works Committee to close certain streets in the Peyton Road area. Soon after, the All-Citizens Committee had Attorney Donald L. Hollowell file a law suit to stop Mayor Allen and officials of the city from closing Peyton and Harlan Roads.24

On December 18, 1962 two three-foot high steel enforced barricades were built on Peyton and Harlan Roads. At that point, Judge Whitman denied a petition by ten white and black citizens to stop the city from building the barrier, and ordered the hearing to be continued on Friday morning; however, a counter-action was taken in a petition filed in Municipal Court, which called for the removal of the barriers, contending that they were a "public nuisance". To coincide with the actions that were taking place a "selective buying campaign" was initiated against merchants supporting the ordinance.25 The barrier in question was becoming known as the "Atlanta Wall" or "Berlin Wall".


24 World, 18 December 1962, pp. 1 and 4.

Race Buffer Goes Up, Is Hit in Court

By TED SIMMONS and JACK STRONG

The City of Atlanta erected barriers across Peyton and Hunter Roads Tuesday, prompting the second court action in two days against an ordinance creating a "buffer zone" in the northwest Atlanta area.

The second court action came in the form of a petition filed in Municipal Court. The petition seeks to remove the barriers, contending they are a public nuisance.

ALL BUSINESSES

The "selective buying campaign" was launched Tuesday night at a meeting of the Atl-

(The Atlanta Constitution—December 19, 1962)
Later on that week, Municipal Court Judge Robert postponed the hearing on the subject for two weeks on the request of City Attorney Newell Edenfield, because he argued that he had not had enough time to prepare for this controversial case. However, Attorney Hollowell who represented the plaintiffs, "urged that the case be heard immediately because of the emergency situation involved." The Judge delayed reconvening the case until 10:00am January 3, 1963.\textsuperscript{26}

Meanwhile, Mayor Allen had proposed a bi-racial body to help solve the dispute. He asked that the Negro Voters League, Empire Real Estate Board, West End Businessmen's Association, and the Southwest Civic Association each name three members to study the problems and work out some sort of resolution. The All-Citizens Committee, which was made of a number of people from the above group, spoke out against the idea and declared that there could be no bi-racial committee until the barricades were first removed. Black leaders were requesting immediate action on the issue.\textsuperscript{27}

Later, the Atlanta Negro Voters League and the Empire Real Estate Board called "erroneous" the report that they did not want to send representatives to help formulate a bi-racial committee to study the matter.\textsuperscript{28} An article in \textit{The Atlanta Constitution} on December 27, 1962, claimed that the split between Black organizations

\textsuperscript{26}Constitution, 21 September 1962, p. 7.


\textsuperscript{28}World, 28 December 1962, p. 1 and 4.
over whether they should agree to discuss the problems with the bi-racial committee until the barriers were removed was settled the night before. There was some dissention on whether or not to talk until the barriers were removed, with the older people being in opposition and the younger members pushing for the ideal of no action until the barriers were removed. In the end, both factions did come to the conclusion to discuss the matter in spite of the barriers not being first removed, a decision described by an editorial in the World as "proper and welcomed steps". 29

In a January 2, 1963 Atlanta Journal article entitled "Street 'Racial Buffer' Sets No Precedent, Officials Say" by Raleigh Bryans, one finds Hartsfield's name appearing on the issue. According to the article, what blacks called a "precedent", the building of the buffer, was not really a precedent at all. The article argues that the same kind of buffer, "street barricades and all", had existed on Paxson Street since 1961 and there were no protests made by blacks against them; that, the article claimed, the practice of having racial buffers was an old one and had been exercised many times with the consent of blacks; and that the earlier precedent Paxson Street was interesting because it was started during the administration of former Mayor Hartsfield.

This is so because Mr. Hartsfield, in his background, has been sharply critical of Mr. Allen's action in setting up the Peyton-Harlan buffer. Mr. Hartsfield is widely quoted for one thing, as saying that his successor's big mistake was "putting up something that could be photographed" — that is, erect the street barricades. Yet putting up a

29 World, 29 December 1962, p. 6 and Constitution, 29 December 1962, p. 3.
street barricades is precisely what was done by the city when Mr. Hartsfield was in office, and obviously with his sanction.30

The following day The Atlanta Constitution published Hartsfield's rebuttal to the Journal's article. Hartsfield declared:

During my term as mayor I do not recall ever having approved any street abandonment or barriers for racial purposes anywhere at any time.

Records in the City Clerk's office show that the Paxson Street action was 'a simple resolution' which was approved by the Aldermanic Board in my absence and approved along with hundreds of other papers, not by me but by the President of the Aldermanic Board who acts in the absence or incapacity of the Mayor. There was no formal abandonment ordinance, no advertisement, no publicity and no complaints whatsoever. . . Frankly, I never heard of Paxson Street until this story.

In discussing the issue of the construction of the "Wall" Hartsfield judged it an

. . . awful mistake which is not only hurting Peyton Road, but all of Atlanta. . . In a spirit of goodwill and civic pride I stand ready to cooperate with Mayor Ivan Allen and the Aldermanic Board in any movement to eradicate this source of friction and bad publicity.

This was the only article written in the newspapers during the incident in which Hartsfield publicly gave his opinion on the subject.32


32 Ibid.
Although there were many attempts by Ivan Allen and other members of the city to form a bi-racial committee to attempt to settle the dispute, these efforts were virtually fruitless. The only remedy to this controversy proved to the courts; however, even court action was a long and tedious process. On January 4, 1965, a Municipal Court judge, Robert E. Jones, threw out a petition that tried to have the barriers removed. On January 7, 1963, the Aldermanic Board overwhelmingly endorsed the "Wall" by defeating a

---

resolution to remove the barriers by a ten to three vote. However, blacks were later able to have the courts remedy the situation in their favor.

On March 1, 1963, Fulton Superior Court Judge George P. Whitman, Sr., issued a ruling on the "Wall" in which he ordered the city to destroy the barricades by March 4. Mayor Allen attempted to waste no time after the ruling was handed down; he had the wall destroyed within an hour. Attorneys Donald Hollowell, Horace T. Ward, and Howard Moore had argued the case against the "Wall" in Fulton Superior Court on behalf of the black and white plaintiffs who maintained "that the action by the city to build the barriers was arbitrary and capricious and unconstitutional". Attorney Hollowell added that the "motives and intent behind the road closing were not for the good of all the citizens of Atlanta".

Judge Whitman, in handing down his ruling, cited Georgia Supreme Court decisions of 1915, 1918, and 1924 that struck down Atlanta ordinances that had attempted to compel road segregation in property ownership. Judge Whitman was quoted as saying, "It has been the fundamental law of the state that: the social status of the citizens shall never be the subject of legislation."

Mayor Allen later defended the action that he had taken concerning the incident in his book. He stated that

---


35 Constitution, 2 March 1963, pp. 1 and 8.

36 Ibid.
The people of Atlanta didn't understand all of the subtleties of the situation. They only saw a crude barricade—the "Atlanta Wall" it came to be called—stretched across a road, making a dividing line between blacks and whites. I had forgotten an axiom that William B. Hartsfield once used: "Never do anything wrong that they can take a picture of." The press had a heyday, and the feeling against me was understandably bitter in the Negro community. "I don't see how any decent white man can do what you have done," said the Reverend Sam Williams, who had been one of my stronger supporters in the past.37

Michael James O'Conner in his dissertation on "The Measurement and Significance of Racial Residential Barriers in Atlanta, 1890–1970" judged that before the "Atlanta Wall" incident, Atlanta had a segregated housing market that was accepted without question and there was nothing done to stop the practice. However, after the incident, blacks were able to buy houses on a more equal opportunity basis and attempts to deny blacks homes were performed with more discretion.38

In analyzing the Black response to the "Wall", Mr. George Coleman, City Editor of the World, stated, "It was not that big of an issue."39 Another member of the newspaper, William Alexander Scott, III, Director of Circulation, informed the researcher that Mayor Allen's action concerning the issue was "a retrogressive act done in the interest of allowing tempers to cool." He goes on to say, "Everybody thought it was wrong, but after it was destroyed the

37 Allen, Mayor Notes, p. 72.


tempers had cooled and Dr. Warner executed his right to purchase the
home." He continued by saying

The need for housing on the middle class level had increased
and they were willing to pay more than whites. When whites
realized that they could get more from blacks than from their
white counterparts they, therefore, were willing to sell their
homes to blacks. In fact, blacks were willing to pay
astronomical high prices. Also, all the 'Wall' did was stall
the buying of housing for Blacks for a short time. 40

Overall, the issue of the "Wall" was a very controversial event.

All the major papers of the city constantly kept their readers
abreast of what was happening from day to day. The Atlanta Daily
World, the Black newspaper of the city, devoted extra attention to
the issue, basically because it involved Black Atlantans.

If Hartsfield had been mayor during this period it is possible
that the issue may not have become as big as it did. Ivan Allen,
being new to the position, did not possess the political genius of
Hartsfield. Hartsfield having worked with blacks in getting the
black policemen was very aware of both black reaction to discrimination
and their potential political power in local elections. He would
have been hesitant to provoke the anger of blacks by building the
"Wall". His method probably would have been negotiation with blacks,
looking towards having them set their own limits as he did in the
police controversy.

In this controversy over the building of the "Wall",
Hartsfield's mild criticism of Mayor Ivan Allen was not in terms of
support for Blacks so much as one of his disdain for Allen's lack of

40 Interview with William Alexander Scott III, The Atlanta Daily
World, Atlanta, Georgia, 1 March 1983.
political astuteness. Hartsfield was once more being the "politician"
in respect to the race issue.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Three analyses of Hartsfield's racial attitudes give us a beginning for summarizing the impact of his administration upon Black Atlanta. First Roger Williams, in "The Negro in Atlanta", judged Hartsfield, "...no great liberal as his northern audiences are surprised to learn today".1

Second, Clarence Stone, in Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent, offers a more detailed analysis of Hartsfield:

Though Hartsfield's background did not predispose him to be a racial liberal, he did bring certain assets to the changing political scene. He was personally very accessible to constituents, black as well as white. He never forgot that constituents were individuals, with particular needs. But he also had a knack for making gestures that reassured groups of constituents of his concern for their welfare. He was a pioneer among Southern white politicians in showing social courtesies to blacks. While Hartsfield was discreet about his contacts with black leaders, he nevertheless openly campaigned for black support and established a good working relationship with the leaders of the Atlanta Negro Voters League.

Finally, Hartsfield's own account for the National League of Cities, entitled "Cities and Racial Minorities: Atlanta's Approach", presents the best analysis:


44
When I first became Mayor of Atlanta, in 1937, I was elected under what was known as the white primary -- a device through which white citizens of the South had traditionally decided upon their officials. The ratification was effected through the general election, but the conclusion was often foregone if not decided outright by the lack of opposition. This pattern was the same in all levels of government, in the South, and had been so since before the turn of the century.

... ... ...

But the winds of social change were blowing, even in 1937. A Negro citizen of Texas brought suit in his state, charging that the white primary was a device chiefly for the disenfranchisement of Negro and thus constituted a denial of constitutional rights and guarantees accorded by the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court, as you know, decided in his favor, and from that time on, the days of the white primary in the South were numbered. Some hard core resistance was evident in a few states, as they tried various responses to the court's decisions. None were of any lasting value, and soon the limited political participation of the Democratic Party was transformed into a more representative group.

... ... ...

Sooner or later as I talk about Atlanta and its experiences in these days of trial and political upheaval, I will mention a fact proudly recorded by all those who value what has happened in our city. Atlanta has six Negro colleges and universities. The presence of these institutions of higher education, together with the confluence of businessmen in the Negro community, make up a very fine group of educated men and women. They were and are instrumental in furnishing through their ability an ideal sort of leadership that is so necessary for good race relations.

... ... ...

The City of Atlanta, soon after I had reached the Mayor's office, began a program of improved liaison between the two races. Negro citizens were encouraged to come to City Hall and air their grievances and present their requests for improvements if they wished to do so. What is probably even more important, city officials began attending meetings of Negro citizens and evidencing some interest in Negro civic affairs. This was not always looked upon with approbation by some in the white community, but I felt that the first step was a recognition of a basic equality of citizenship
Overall, Hartsfield was a practical politician. He first showed how practical he was when the black community in the 1940's came to him requesting that he hire black police. At first he said "no"; then he later changed his mind when they were able to register 10,000 new voters. Hartsfield was astute enough to know that if he did hire black police he would more than likely lose a number of white votes, and he wanted to have another source of voters to counterbalance his actions. Later, when the controversy arose over the building of the "Atlanta Wall", Hartsfield made a very practical statement to then Mayor Ivan Allen, "Never do anything wrong that they can take a picture of."4

Hartsfield found himself caught up in changing times. He recognized them. According to Alexander Scott when asked by the major press how he accounted for his longevity as mayor, Hartsfield replied "...that it was due to his ability to change with the times."5 Although many of his Southern counterparts were unwilling to work with blacks, Hartsfield, because he noted that the times were changing, at least attempted to work with them. Even more important was the fact that in many of his twenty-three years while he was mayor of Atlanta, he was able to establish a coalition between Northside whites and black that had the best interest of the city of Atlanta

---


4 Allen, Mayor: Notes on the Sixties, p. 72.

5 Interview with William Alexander Scott, III, The Atlanta Daily World, Atlanta, Georgia, 1 March 1983.
in mind. If blacks and whites had not been able to work together, Atlanta may not have become the city it is today. Finally, Hartsfield may very well not have been a true "liberal" in today's terms, but in his time he was the driving force that Atlanta needed to move ahead. One fact will always be true about Hartsfield and that was he was truly an intelligent and astute politician who will go down in history as one of the greatest mayors Atlanta has ever had up to this period in her history.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIVATE PAPERS

Atlanta, Georgia. Emory University. William Berry Hartsfield Papers.

DOCUMENTS

Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta City Council Minutes (1947).


INTERVIEWS


"Living Atlanta" Series. Atlanta Public Library. Atlanta, Georgia. Tape Interviews.


UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS


NEWSPAPERS


BOOKS


ARTICLES
