

Background information for:

START NOW ATLANTA

Atlanta, the capital of the Southeast, is known for its growing economy, beautiful homes and fine universities. For most of its citizens Atlanta offers growth, vitality and prosperity.

But for 160,000 Atlantans this is not true. They live in 40,000 unfit dwellings in neighborhoods with names such as Vine City, Cabbagetown, Lightning, Summerhill, Mechanicsville and Buttermilk Bottom, only minutes from downtown Atlanta, but decades away from the mainstream of Atlanta's progress.

The social, economic and ethnic character of Atlanta's population is undergoing profound change. Middle-class families are moving to the suburbs, leaving behind in the central city area an increasingly large concentration of unemployed, underemployed, poorly educated, low-income families.

Some of the residents of the central city are long-time hard core slum dwellers. Added to this group are thousands of rural "in-migrants" who move to Atlanta yearly from surrounding states. Crowded into deteriorating housing and alien surroundings, the newcomers from deprived rural areas join the residents of the central city in a lonely, miserable existence characterized by restricted opportunities and despair. Most are unskilled. Many are illiterate, lacking the most basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. Many are unable to fill out job applications, read street or bus signs, or follow written work instructions. Finding no work and little hope, the family unit disintegrates as individuals break and flee or fathers move out to allow their families to qualify for public assistance. Desertion, divorce, crime, delinquency, unemployment and dependency follow.

Who are the poor in Atlanta?

They are young men, like the 21 year old holding two jobs, neither paying more than \$1.25 an hour, to support his wife and four children. A loan company is now threatening to garnishee his wages because he missed payments on money borrowed to buy Christmas toys for his children. One of his children had pneumonia. The medicine and additional coal to heat his room took all he had.

The poor are women, like the 33 year old mother supporting three children. She earns \$28.00 a week and pays \$12.00 a week rent on three rooms. She must leave her children alone at home while she works because there are no free day care centers near her neighborhood.

The poor are old, like the 76 year old man living alone in one room, existing on canned tomato juice and wieners which a neighbor brings every six or seven weeks. He is paralyzed. No one else ever comes to see him.

The poor are parents, like the mother and father struggling to feed eight children. The father drove a garbage truck for a private firm where his take home pay was \$58.00 a week. Sometimes he slept in the truck when he missed the one ride that took him near his home, some 18 miles away. One night a policeman came there to tell him that his 8 month old daughter had died of malnutrition

that afternoon. The man is now blind. He no longer watches his oldest son draw beautiful pictures --- a son who will never have a chance to develop this talent because he must quit school and feed his family.

Who are the people living in Atlanta's slums?

A study of 47,000 people, 16 through 75 years of age, living in poverty neighborhoods served by EOA centers, found that:

More than 2/3 of all unemployment in the Atlanta Metropolitan area is concentrated in these low-income areas.

77% earned less than \$3,000 a year.

52% of all households were headed by women.

82% were Negroes.

57% of the adults did not graduate from high school.

7% had no formal education.

12% needed medical aid to remove a work handicap.

11% claimed no job skill, or only farm work as experience.

22% of the whites and 25% of the Negroes were seeking work.

Of those seeking work,

75% were women.

65% of all seeking work were Negro women.

34% of the white women and 30% of the white men desired additional vocational training.

75% of the Negro women and 61% of the Negro men wanted additional vocational training.

The need for jobs, or better jobs, is a major topic of conversation in Atlanta's slums. The EOA centers are in daily contact with thousands who do not earn enough to support themselves and their families because they are unemployed, underemployed or underpaid. Seventy-two percent of all people coming to EOA neighborhood centers want jobs, though most need many other EOA services before they are prepared for steady employment.

At the same time, Atlanta employers beg for people with the skills they need to run their businesses.

Unemployment wastes both human and economic potential. At the lowest level, each man-year of unemployment costs the economy at least \$2,500-\$3,000 in lost wages or products. If the per capita income of the hard core unemployed in Atlanta could be raised just \$100 each year during a working lifetime, there would be an additional \$28 million injected into the economy. If that income could be raised to the income level of the average Atlantan, Atlanta business would benefit from an additional \$450 million of purchasing power.

These are just the extra-earning benefits. Add to this the millions saved on welfare (between \$75,000 - \$100,000 to support a family during a lifetime), unemployment payments, crime (some \$2,500 per year to keep a man in jail), and hundreds of agencies, services and programs aimed at dealing with or eliminating these

problems, and the figure would probably double or triple.

Part of the city's recent Community Improvement Program study dealt with jobs -- how many there are in certain categories and projections of what the situation will be in the year 1983 if present trends continue.

For example, by four of every ten new jobs will be in the City of Atlanta.

If present trends continue, these new jobs will be divided among government, finance, insurance and real estate - white collar jobs.

None of the new jobs will be in manufacturing or in wholesale trade and distribution.

It is necessary to look at population figures from the same report to see how these trends will affect Atlanta.

By 1983 the Negro population will increase by 62 percent, the white population by four percent. Well over half of the city's population will be Negro and more than half of the Negro population will be under 20 or over 54. Over 40 percent of the Negro families living in the city in 1983 are expected to have annual family incomes below \$5,000.

TO SUM UP, these CIP figures show that:

FIRST, Job growth will be in white collar occupations.

NEXT, population will consist of people unqualified for white collar jobs, by current standards.

NEXT, downtown retailing will be supported by a preponderance of families with poverty-level incomes, and

FINALLY, Atlanta's growth potential will be impossible to realize unless established trends are changed.

This gap between rich and poor is affecting Atlanta at every level. The extent of the gap comes as a shock to most.

A recent study of social blight in Atlanta by our Community Council shows the disparity clearly.

The Council found that if you live in one of Atlanta's upper income areas you share an acre with six others; if you live in a downtown slum you share an acre with 56 others.

The Council found that a baby born to slum parents has only half the chance of surviving as an infant in the highest income areas.

The tuberculosis rate is five times higher among slum adults than for adults on the Northside.

The same trend follows in juvenile delinquency according to the Council. In Vine City the juvenile arrest rate is six times higher than in Buckhead. Juvenile problems are complex.

Worsened by severe deprivation, children represent one of the greatest tragedies of poverty. The cycle of public dependency and failure repeats itself as they grow up little better equipped than their parents to cope with the demands of urban life.

Many of the children live in broken homes. One out of four children in Atlanta live with only one parent. In our slums the figure would be more like one-half to two-thirds. Most of these parents work. Those who earn little cannot afford day care and the EOA and United Appeal centers for poor children can handle only 1,200. The remaining 12,000 children have no where to go. Often they are left alone at home or in the streets because parents have no alternative. Trouble is never far away. One out of six Atlanta youths will become juvenile delinquents within one year.

The school lives of these children are marked by poor attendance, low achievement and failure. They come from homes without books, pencils or privacy. No adults are available to guide and encourage the children. They are dulled by low protein diets. Obviously they cannot benefit from even the best education, if available, unless some of these needs are corrected.

It must be stressed that poor parents care very deeply about their children. But they can only do what is possible, and that is not much.

These are some of the serious and tragic problems confronting us.

The city government, Churches, United Appeal agencies and other public and private agencies perform hundreds of vital services. They do an outstanding job.

The National Alliance of Businessmen under A. H. Sterne, the Chamber of Commerce, the Jaycees, and private business are making tremendous progress in opening jobs, changing attitudes, and training the unemployed so they can become part of Atlanta.

In 1964 the city and county governments paved the way for Atlanta to receive anti-poverty funds. Because of their quick action Atlanta received one of the first urban grants under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. From the beginning, Atlanta's anti-poverty agency, Economic Opportunity Atlanta, or EOA, has been one of the outstanding programs in the country. Mayor Allen praises EOA's contribution to the city and credits it with helping keep Atlanta peaceful last summer.

Led by Boisfeuillet Jones as Chairman of the Board and Jim Parham as Executive Administrator, EOA has helped thousands lift themselves out of poverty.

....During the past 12 months more than 5,000 people have been placed on jobs by employment counselors in the 14 EOA neighborhood centers... 330 school dropouts were employed through the Neighborhood Youth Corps...80,000 hours of part-time work were available for youths last summer ...1,100 boys have been recruited for Job Corps training...1,048 people have received employment

training...

...Twelve EOA day care centers have provided two-thirds of all available "public" day care slots in Atlanta (800 of approximately 1200)EOA neighborhood centers helped poverty residents develop youth centers in five neighborhoods with sparse recreational facilities...2,300 children benefited from Head Start.

...Legal services supported with Economic Opportunity funds have successfully challenged antiquated welfare regulations and given a new degree of equity to the poor in their dealings with those who exploit their ignorance...the Comprehensive Health Center is providing preventive medical services to 28,000 residents of one inner-city slum...Planned Parenthood with a large share of funds from EOA is helping 7,500 women through nine centers...Senior Citizen Services, largely through EOA support, provides counseling, recreation, training and transportation to 2,500 aged participants monthly... 40 senior citizens work in the Foster Grandparents program providing tender loving care to children at Grady Hospital, the Fulton Juvenile Court and Carrie Steel Pitts Home.

...Aides in 14 EOA neighborhood service centers have contacted 25,596 poor persons during the past 12 months...15,763 requests were received for social services...total attendance at more than 2,000 neighborhood meetings during the past 12 months was 124,260 and provided a badly needed means of expression and communication for the poor...countless acts of kindness have helped relieve immediate distress.

The anti-poverty program has done much more. It has demonstrated the success of the first really new idea in social welfare since 1776. That new idea amounts to one little preposition, but it has revolutionized old methods. Instead of doing things FOR and TO poor people, EOA has shown the success of working WITH people to help them solve their own problems. EOA is not another hand-out program. It simply offers opportunities for education, training, and services. And most important of all, the poor help plan every program.

Some 200 neighborhood block clubs and their elected representatives to EOA committees attest to the success of this idea. Since 1964 the poor in Atlanta have spent more volunteer hours trying to improve their lives than all other volunteers together. The importance they attach to this new opportunity was shown last year when 12,000 poor people, most of whom had never voted, came to crowded

grocery stores, barber shops and neighborhood gathering places to vote for their representatives to EOA committees.

Of course, no one argues that these programs have been totally successful. Much has been learned, but we still face tough problems such as developing additional leadership among the poor, motivating the hard core unemployed, stretching limited dollars and using them most effectively, changing detrimental policies and laws, changing personal attitudes and involving more of Atlanta's citizens in these efforts.

During EOA's past four years, \$30,000,000 in federal money has been made available to help lift thousands of Atlantans out of poverty. Only approximately \$500,000 has been allocated by our city and county governments. Further progress in solving Atlanta's problems will depend on the interest of Atlanta's citizens.

The week of January 12 has been proclaimed START NOW ATLANTA week to urge Atlantans to learn about our city's problems, what the poor have done for themselves and what we can do to help them.

EOA is ready to lend a hand. Groups or individuals who want to visit poverty areas as guests of poor people or who want to volunteer in new ways can do so by calling EOA at 525-4262.