

Manufacturing Segregation: The Birth and Death of Underground Atlanta, 1969–1981

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1969, a \$10-million project restored 280,000 square feet of decayed downtown area in central Atlanta, creating a time capsule that would recapture the mood of gas-lit, turn-of-the-century Atlanta. A section of the central business district that had been sealed over by a viaduct more than 30 years before was thereby turned into a festive place. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that the four-block enclave was “new, rising like Lazarus from the dead [to become] an area of enchantment.”¹ Lazarus, or Underground Atlanta (hereafter UA), was designed and promoted as the perfect tourist and entertainment destination. The cobblestone streets and courtyards contained restaurants, lounges, boutiques, shops and historical attractions. During the day, children watched monkeys do tricks and swarmed around the ice cream parlor, while guides dressed in antebellum costume pleased history buffs. After sunset, upscale cabarets and nightclubs entertained downtown businessmen and women, and (mostly male) conventioners. The warm glow of gaslight must have enabled the visitors to imagine Main Street in the “good old days.” UA, however, did not turn out to be Lazarus, and its resurrection came to an end by 1981. In the words of historian David Goldfield, the project to create

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a downtown festive place did little more than “transform an old deteriorating area into a new deteriorating area.”² UA’s brief life represents another story of the failure to breathe new life into a downtown area. There are many reasons for the death of UA: security concerns, rival suburban entertainment, suburbanites’ fear of downtown crime such as mugging and vandalism, and the closure of popular businesses as a result of the construction of Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)’s downtown Five Points station. Because of the *laissez-faire* approach of its planners and managers, UA was unable to survive these challenges.³

This paper examines the birth and death of UA within a context of post-war urban transformation characterized by suburbanization and urban decline, writing its “biography” in relation to the post-war transformation of urban landscapes. Post-war affluence was visible in the rapidly growing suburbs, wherein sprang up shiny office buildings, gigantic shopping malls and detached homes with large backyards. While prosperous whites left cities for these crabgrass frontiers, the impoverished city dwellers, mostly racial and ethnic minorities, could not follow them due to financial expense, discriminatory mortgage lending and land use regulations such as restricted covenants. The Civil Rights Movement did not enable racial minorities to move to affluent suburban communities. Moreover, desegregation accelerated “white flight” to the urban fringes. Declining tax revenues meant that cities could no longer provide their citizens with sufficient public services. The absence of good public schools, public housing, public transportation and job opportunities resulted in deteriorating living conditions for the underprivileged. The decline of the city thus became obvious in the increase of homelessness, boarded-up grocery stores, and the growth of crime rates.⁴ Atlanta was no exception. Massive suburbanization in “the Capitol of New South” during the sixties and seventies resulted in many whites leaving for newly built suburban subdivisions, while the black urban population rose rapidly, reaching approximately seventy percent by the end of the seventies.⁵ Despite the increasing numbers of affluent African Americans, “Central City Atlanta became increasingly black and poor.”⁶

Many individuals tried to grapple with and reverse the deterioration of downtown Atlanta, and UA was one of their attempts to revive Main Street. Real estate developers, bankers, department store owners, and city officials wanted the thriving downtown back. Capitalizing on white suburbanites’ nostalgia, the promoters tried to create a space in which middle-class whites could return and stay. The planners and developers claimed those who left the city did not want to completely desert the Main Street they had once strolled

and cherished. The rise of tourism during the 1970s and 1980s enabled business persons and city officials to pursue the return of white middle-class suburbanites to the center of the city; historic preservation in particular played a major role in this as urban renewal and gentrification programs revitalized the historical landscape, refurbishing run-down, dust-covered old buildings and transforming them into historic structures.⁷ This paper explains how these developers, city officials, and promoters created this space and how their efforts met with both temporary success and eventual failure.

Although using a “living organism” metaphor (i.e., “birth,” “death,” and “life”), this paper does not try to convince readers to view UA as going through “a process whose trajectory has been out of the control of human hands.”⁸ In the United States, the lamentation of downtown’s “decline” appears so frequently in newspapers, television reports, business magazines, and even history accounts that people tend to understand it as a universal and maybe an ahistorical process. Applying a “free-market” model (i.e., “rise and fall”) to interpret the cause of downtown’s decline also assumes that market conditions determine a city’s fate, ignoring the role of human actors in urban decay. However, UA’s death epitomizes neither a “decline” nor a “climax” that all downtowns will universally or automatically experience. Rather, its passing was the inevitable result of a change that Atlanta had undergone after the Civil Rights Movement. In other words, this paper tries to show how different actors clashed over the fate of Main Street, who came to dominate the site, and how suburbanization and the city’s impoverishment affected the transformation of these power relationships.

By investigating its rise and fall, this paper argues that UA was destined to fail because of its endeavor to fulfill two conflicting desires, although both stemmed from a common objective—to recreate downtown in its “good old days.” One desire was to revive the “lively” downtown of the past, which required not only restoring historic structures but also making the space open in order to contain a variety of businesses and visitors. Unlike Disneyland or Sea World, with their gates and fences, its openness could work for an ideal of public space that geographer Don Mitchell seeks, in which the space should work as “a site of interaction, encounter and the support of strangers for each other” and as “a communicator of information and interchange.”⁹ However, another desire collided with this pursuit of openness, which was to return downtown to the white middle class. It was this collision between inclusion and exclusion that determined UA’s fate. By investigating newspaper accounts, UA pamphlets, downtown business organization reports, and television shows, this paper reveals how these two desires clashed and led to

UA's early death. First, I will demonstrate how UA was successful in recreating a vibrant Main Street and how its "inclusiveness" was admired as the mark of a good revitalization project. Then, I will uncover how the reputation of UA declined because of the appearance of "undesirable" elements and how this brought about the erection of iron gates and fences, thereby enclosing the property, killing downtown inclusiveness, and eventually terminating the life of UA.

II. "GENTLE AWAKENING OF THE HISTORIC SPA"¹⁰

The history of UA began with the discovery of a treasure, the dark, subterranean area of downtown. A series of city-sponsored development projects in the early twentieth century, in an effort to relieve traffic congestion and reduce accidents, had built viaducts and bridges over downtown's Central, Pryor, Peachtree, Broad and Forsyth Streets. While downtown businessmen built new streets on the bridges and viaducts, which became a major segment of downtown Atlanta, underneath remained the "old buildings of a former day, in their original turn-of-the-century styles."¹¹ Sealed by the viaduct, the site was completely deserted, becoming a "sheltered place for bums . . . , derelicts and broken men" and the "city's trashiest spot."¹² When Atlanta's City Design Commission (CDC) rediscovered the place in 1966, however, it was looked upon as an island of treasure. The viaduct had frozen a landscape of buildings dating from the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. The area also contained the Zero Mile Post, which marked the birthplace of Marthasville (the original name of Atlanta) as a railroad station.¹³ The CDC could not overlook such a golden opportunity for restoration, pointing out that "nothing else physically remains of Atlanta's history."¹⁴ According to the preservationists, the dark, dusty space under the viaduct would provide "an area rich in historical significance [in] contrast to the high-rise modern building." Historical significance, however, was not the only selling point; it was believed that restoration would turn the downtown wasteland into "a gold mine," a major tourist attraction that would generate "a sound margin of profit."¹⁵

The idea of UA grew out of the CDC's vision.¹⁶ In 1968, two Georgia Institute of Technology alumni established a development and management company called Underground Atlanta, Inc. (UAI), which purchased and refurbished the subterranean area as a historic park and leased space to individual businesses.¹⁷ The corporation also managed the security and cleaning of the area and provided various forms of entertainment. The support of the City of Atlanta, the Chamber of Commerce, and the State of Georgia's Tour-

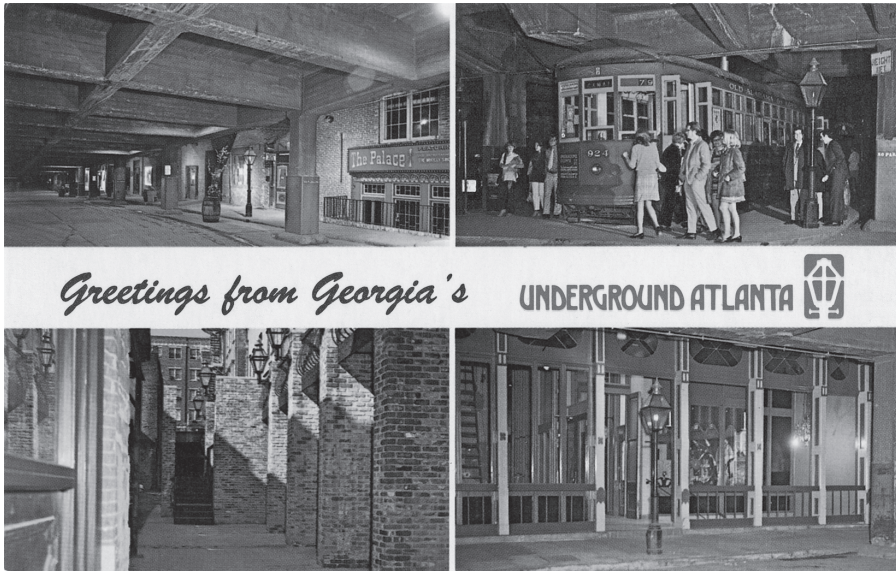


Fig. 1 Postcard of Underground Atlanta Incorporation.

ism Committee enabled the young company to borrow \$4 million to purchase the area and create a historic and festive place (Fig. 1).¹⁸ The objective in implementing the plan was to sanitize the area, and “sandblasting” in 1968 marked the beginning of Underground Atlanta’s construction.¹⁹ The CDC had already proposed to clean up the site and bring in desirable tenants. To make downtown commercially feasible, CDC planners also proposed to provide “needed controls over [the] character of [UA’s] development,” an approach that included removing homeless people.²⁰ In other words, their attempt to purify the site was not only physical but cultural. This was also evident in the UAI’s historical exhibition, the theme of which centered on the Civil War and the city’s recovery from Sherman’s destruction but did not include the experiences of African Americans, who comprised more than half the city’s population in 1970. According to anthropologist Charles Rutheiser, the UAI presented only a “highly sanitized representation of Atlanta’s past,” especially as it regarded race.²¹

In addition to sanitizing history, the UAI dramatized and molded the theme of UA to make the center of the city a place for middle-class families, who were to be the area’s major constituents. When the UAI attempted to establish a “historic adventure,” they well understood what middle-class families

wanted in a downtown public space.²² Consequently, they tried to turn the property into a theater in which visitors could experience the aura of a nineteenth-century Atlanta street by strolling among classic buildings and newly installed gaslights, and being served dinner by waitresses in antebellum dress. The exhibition of an old streetcar dramatized Atlanta's origin as a train station. Visitors would be able to sense Atlanta's past through such "long-forgotten smells" as "the aroma of fresh bread baked in a 60-year-old gas oven" and via the sounds of old wooden flute replicas played by children in the alley.²³ UA even had a printing shop which published the *Atlanta Phoenix*, "Georgia's Newest Old News Paper." Advertisements and historical information helped visitors "reorient themselves to the past," while the smell of ink and the feel of old, brown paper added to the experience.²⁴

This theatrical, family-oriented atmosphere reflected UAI officials' strategy to attract the suburban middle class, who secluded themselves in single-family detached houses. Postwar amusement had a good command of it; according to Susan Davis, for instance, "family entertainment" was a major attraction of the postwar theme park, entertainment that was "not just entertainment that can be enjoyed across generational boundaries, but the assertion of parental control . . . , entertainment for children and youth under the supervision of parents."²⁵ Historic adventure was one such form of family entertainment, and one which provided parents with a controlled opportunity to teach their children about the city's history. Perhaps more important, the bread, the flutes, the Confederate flag stamps, and the newspapers were consumable commodities the purchase of which helped parents to demonstrate their authority to their children. UA, then, was an attempt to suburbanize downtown for white middle-class families.

However, UAI officials envisioned a different face for UA at night. As a place for downtown festivities, it needed to fulfill the demands of those visiting the central business districts on business (especially male conventioners) and of party-craving students from Georgia State College. UAI officials, aware of both the need and the opportunity, did not want UA to be only a historic district, which entailed rigid regulations in the look of its buildings and nature of its businesses. Indeed, they stated a preference for an upscale nightclub over "an antique doll shop . . . , which at the onset won't be profitable."²⁶ Therefore, the business establishments in the area were diverse, including everything from a banjo bar, an ice-cream parlor and a jazz lounge to a cabaret theatre. At the same time, nightclubs had to abide by the UAI's rules to maintain overall respectability and to guarantee the "safety and cleanliness" of the area, exemplifying an attempt to strike a balance between night-

life and family entertainment. Likewise, security guards in Victorian costume were on duty around the clock, as promoters emphasized that UA was not going to be “a Gaslight Square [St. Louis], an Old Town [Chicago], or a French Quarter [New Orleans],” all of which were historic districts famous for their adult entertainment. They also promised that they would not welcome “the hippie crowd,” which was often regarded in the late 1960s as a source of disorder.²⁷

Nevertheless, the merger of family entertainment and nightlife produced a space that was less controllable than Disneyland or Sea World because UA did not have a physical boundary in the form of a gate and walls. Despite its appeal to the suburban middle class, UA’s lack of an admission fee allowed anyone to hang out in the area. Ironically, it was this very inclusiveness that the newspapers of other cities admired. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, for example, wrote that UA was “very different and exciting,” since “everybody goes there, the young and old alike, in evening gowns, in hippy dress.”²⁸ The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* observed that “while UA was a magnet for young swingers—it’s also great for children and for older folks.”²⁹ A tourists’ guide book introduced the site by advising readers that “there are plenty of places to suit everyone, so don’t hesitate to bring the kids, the clergy, or the grandparents.”³⁰

III. THE “BELLY DANCER IN A HOOPSKIRT?”³¹

By 1972, UA had reached “its glorious zenith.”³² Amiable crowds—teenagers enjoying ice cream, old couples dancing to banjo music, and children cheering the performance of a clown—filled the subterranean area every weekend. The number of business establishments exceeded eighty, which was twice as many as there had been in 1970, and more than 4.5 million people visited the area.³³ In the same year, the Society of American Travel Writers awarded UA for “outstanding contributions to a quality travel environment through conservation and preservation.”³⁴ Its reputation as a “family place” persisted. In 1973, the *New York Times* applauded UA’s effort to contain bars and “family fluffs” together safely, offering a “downtown alternative to the topless joints and X-rated movie houses.”³⁵ Nevertheless, UA was on the verge of collapse, largely because the balance between family and other forms of entertainment was more fragile than it appeared.

In 1972, a nightclub named New Year’s Eve located close to—but not in—UA, began to feature “go-go girls.” Because the club was not on their property, the UAI could not regulate the show, but this did not prevent it from

disrupting UA's image of middle-class respectability. The City of Atlanta, especially Vice Mayor Maynard Jackson, who later became the city's first African American mayor, loudly denounced the "girlie show" that was so close to UA, "a place where a man can take his wife and children for entertainment without running the risk of encountering lascivious entertainers." The owner of the New Year's Eve club stressed that the dancers were "not strippers" and were "going to be clothed." They were, he explained, just "waitresses who dance in high-neck evening gowns and a hot pants suit."³⁶ Furthermore, the owner believed that girlie shows were "the most asked-for thing down here" and that the show would "draw people to UA."³⁷ In an effort to stop the performances, Vice Mayor Jackson and UAI officials discovered that the club did not have a required city permit for entertainment and, claiming that "families and girlie shows do not mix," urged the City of Atlanta's Aldermanic Committee to deny the New Year's Eve such a permit.³⁸ Despite their efforts, however, the committee granted the go-go bar's request based upon the promise of the club's attorney that they would not have "striptease dancing" and that the women would be attired in "appropriate clothes."³⁹ On May 15, 1972, the City of Atlanta issued the permit.⁴⁰

In fact, the New Year's Eve had many influential advocates in Atlanta politics, including Mayor Sam Massell, whose brother was a close friend of the owner. The mayor argued that UA was not Six Flags Over Georgia and that the controversy was like trying to "make some mountains out of some molehills."⁴¹ As a result, the UAI could not stop the collapse of the family-oriented setting that the middle class favored for UA. During this invasion of adult entertainment, some joked that UA's major attraction was "antebellum belly dancers"; whereas people had once viewed the area as a place to learn Atlanta's history with children, they increasingly began to see it as a place for nightlife entertainment. The *Atlanta Constitution's* editorial cartoonist Clifford Baldowski captured this changing perception in a drawing of a family throwing an anxious look at a member of Atlanta's aldermanic board, who was striking a pose with a performer from the "girlie shows" (Fig. 2). In 1977, an editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* insisted on dumping X-rated businesses into UA because "a marriage" between UA and the adult industry "might solve two problems [by keeping] UA viable and [getting] the sex business off the main thoroughfares."⁴² This shift symbolized UA's inability to maintain its reputation as a family place.

In addition to the deterioration of its family-oriented environment, UA was also losing its claim to historical authenticity, which actually was the major ingredient of the tourist enclave's appeal to the middle class. In 1973, MAR-

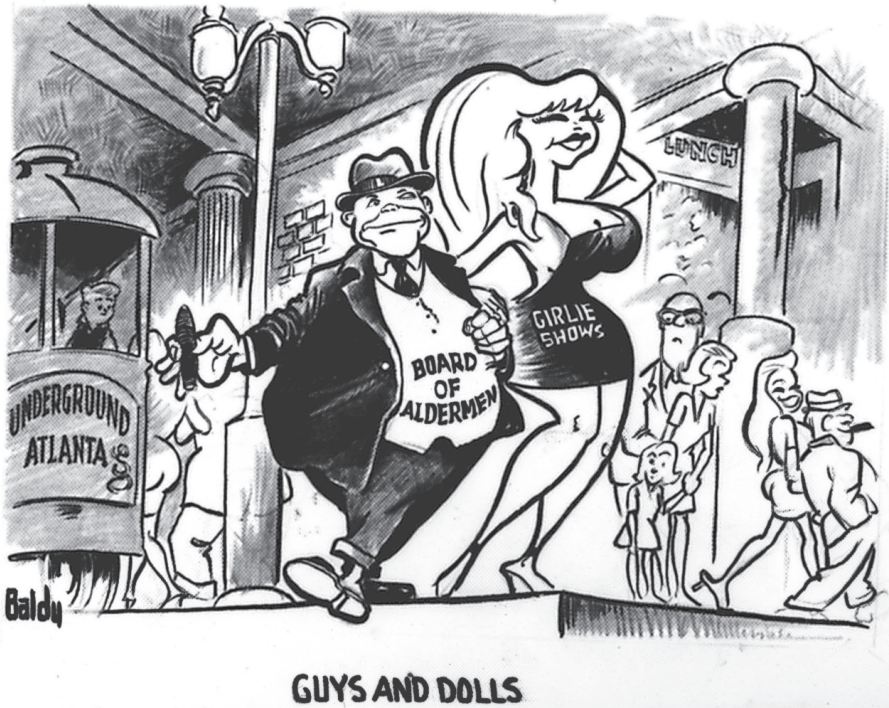


Fig. 2 *Atlanta Constitution*, May 14, 1972, Clifford H. “Baldy” Baldowski Editorial Cartoons. Courtesy of the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries.

TA announced a construction plan for its railway system that bore serious consequences for the future of UA. In order to build the east-west line and the central Five Points Station, MARTA was going to bulldoze a third of UAI’s property, an area that contained fifteen establishments, including popular clubs, bars, and eateries. For UA, the impending demise of these businesses was critical, but the real mortal damage would be to the Underground’s reputation as a historic festive place. Under the National Environment Policy Act of 1969, as the recipient of a federal grant, MARTA had to conduct an environmental impact study to “evaluate the effects the bus and rail rapid transit system will have on the environment,” including the impact on Atlanta’s historic sites.⁴³ MARTA’s final report revealed that the building of the MARTA station would have only “relatively minor impact on existing historical sites,” stating that downtown Atlanta contained only “few historical structures remaining” due to “Sherman’s capture of the City” and “indiscriminate re-

moval during major highway construction and urban renewal programs.” UA was no exception to this judgment, as the report emphasized that “the Five Point Station will take out some old commercial structures, but *none of prime historical importance* [italics mine].” With this statement MARTA largely minimized UA’s value as a site for history buffs. Indeed, according to the document, the construction would need only a “temporary relocation of Zero Mile Post,” which commemorated the birth of the City of Atlanta as a railway station, and that was it.⁴⁴

IV. MANUFACTURING SEGREGATION

After losing its middle-class appeal, UA encountered further financial obstacles and, by the mid-1970s, could no longer conceal its dire financial straits. The *Atlanta Journal* had already reported in 1972 the rumor that some shops and nightclubs in UA were “in trouble,” but the UAI had responded quickly that business volume was still better than other cities’ tourist enclaves, like Larimer Square in Denver and Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco.⁴⁵ By the mid-seventies, however, it was obvious that UA needed help. The *Atlanta Journal* reported that the area was becoming a “honky-tonk tourist trap,” and the UAI disclosed that the company had failed to rent many of the spaces on the property and had an increasing number of unpaid debts.⁴⁶ Financially devastated, the company solicited compensation from MARTA. Because some restaurants and bars decided to leave UA, partly because the construction plan had shown that they would have to leave eventually anyway, the developers insisted that MARTA take responsibility for UA’s financial hardships and provide compensation prior to beginning its construction. Not surprisingly, MARTA declined the UAI’s request.⁴⁷ The UAI then submitted a proposal to the City of Atlanta to turn UA into a “public park,” a designation that would allow the UAI to build a fence around the area and charge an entrance fee to visitors.⁴⁸ Maynard Jackson, by then the city’s mayor, agreed with the UAI and responded quickly by establishing an ordinance to create “an Underground Historic Park” to enable UAI to charge admission.⁴⁹ Advocates of the ordinance argued that, while the fencing was to enable collection of the admission fee, it would also make it possible for UA to attract middle-class visitors again, thereby bringing “Underground Atlanta back to Atlanta.”⁵⁰ However, the “public park” proposal also encountered some opposition. For instance, one councilman disapproved of the proposal, reiterating MARTA’s argument that UA did not contain anything historically authentic other than “a few gas lamps” and was “the honkiest, tonkiest-look-

ing place I have ever seen.” He argued further that establishing a “historical zoning code” would be more effective because it would eliminate a “shooting gallery” and undesirable “storefront signs,” and help the place develop more historical features.⁵¹ The restoration of historical assets, rather than a fence and a gate, he claimed, would bring middle-class visitors back.

Nonetheless, the fencing advocates had a compelling case, contending that the best way to restore the space was to exclude “undesirable elements,” particularly homeless people, who were thought not to fit to UA’s middle-class environment. Many, including UAI officials, believed that UA’s lack of a sense of security was contributing to its decline and that a fence would help ameliorate this concern for it would keep out those likely to disturb “public safety.” A nightclub owner who favored the ordinance contended that fencing should work because it would “screen out the small number of undesirables.” A fence and gate would quell safety concerns because people know that “nobody’s going to commit a crime when they have to pass through a turnstile on the way out.”⁵²

On March 17, 1975, the city council approved the fencing ordinance, which enabled the UAI to use the City of Atlanta’s budget to build a physical boundary around the property. However, legal complexities delayed construction as some tenants opposed the fencing because it would divert the pedestrian traffic that normally passed by their businesses. The city also had difficulties finding a construction company that satisfied its bid standards for minority employment and price. By the time construction finally began in 1977, the UAI was almost gone, with potentially mortal consequences for UA.⁵³ That year a flamboyant, two-page advertisement of the company disappeared from the City Directory, the company failed to provide garbage collection or security services to the area, and, in 1978, the UAI declared bankruptcy.⁵⁴ Without the management company, vendors dealing in cheap t-shirts, cheesy novelty goods, and low-quality paintings filled the alleys of the subterranean area. UA was becoming a “dive.”⁵⁵

V. THE “DOWNTOWN FIGHTER” AND THE DEMISE OF THE “PUBLIC” PARK

By the time construction of the fence was finished, the Underground Atlanta Merchants Association (UAMA), an organization for business owners in UA, had replaced the UAI as managers of the property.⁵⁶ Dante Stevenson, the UAMA president and the owner of Dante’s Down the Hatch, a popular nightclub and fondue restaurant, became a *de facto* leader of UA. To provide security and maintenance services, Stevenson collected fees from bars and

restaurants on the property. His opinions appeared frequently in newspaper articles and were aired on local television programs. "The people in the Underground Office," Stevenson argued, "once they got into hot water, didn't know what to do," but he differed in that he had a "fighting spirit."⁵⁷ As if to demonstrate this spirit, he began to collect a 25-cent admission fee even before the completion of the fence; even though the City of Atlanta had not authorized UAMA to collect the fee, Stevenson just ignored the city.⁵⁸ His fearless attitude as a "downtown fighter" made Atlantans believe that "the hordes once again will return to Underground Atlanta."⁵⁹ Stevenson was an ardent supporter of the fencing project, believing strongly in its ability to prevent "undesirables" from coming in. The fee also required all visitors to pass through a gate, where the gatekeepers stared "the grunge element" down, often telling them, "You don't belong here."⁶⁰ At the same time, Stevenson emphasized the safety of UA, pointing out that the area had "the lowest crime rate in the city since 1973" and that it was "safer than any college campus, any shopping mall, any neighborhood in metro Atlanta." One conventioner commented that she was surprised that UA was not "dirtier and scarier," and even the Atlanta Police Department admitted that "there was not a significant crime problem" in the area.⁶¹

Indeed, Stevenson understood that the real problem was suburbanites' fear of downtown crime, particularly muggings and vandalism, and the primary goal of manufacturing segregation was to convince suburbanites that UA would provide a sanctuary for them downtown. On a sunny day in September 1978, Stevenson and Maynard Jackson celebrated the one-year anniversary of the fencing project, the first official celebration for the rebirth of UA as a "public park." While the city of Atlanta could not announce and celebrate the completion of the fence and gate the year before, when UAMA started to collect admission fees without the city's permission, there was another reason to celebrate: With the entrance fee and financial help from an Oklahoma investment firm, UA had already begun showing signs of revival.⁶² The income sources enabled UAMA to deploy "stewardesses selling balloons, a band and a popcorn vender in the streets," all of which contributed to a feeling of security.⁶³ When Jackson and Stevenson appeared on the podium surrounded by colorful balloons and microphones, the audience—blacks and whites, men and women, businesspeople with ties and suits and children with ice cream and candy—welcomed them, clapping and cheering. After the mayor's speech assured them that "Underground Atlanta's one of the safest spots in the entire five-county tier," the "downtown fighter," Stevenson, stood up and said:

Six Flags is fenced. Disney World is fenced. Stone Mountain is fenced. People feel safer inside a fence. . . . We can't find religious fanatics now to come in here and debate with us, whereas before it used to be a problem. The problem of the winos and the beggars and the panhandlers—that's all but disappeared. The fence has an amazing constructive effect on bringing in the people you want and keeping out the people we don't want, because if you're a shoplifter and you see a fence, you know you are gonna get caught so why bother to shoplift? So they go elsewhere.⁶⁴

As a showcase for Atlanta's history, UA's fence and admission fee allowed it to choose who would belong to Atlanta's tradition and who would not. "Undesirable elements"—homeless people, political radicals, and street preachers—were being kept out while more middle-class people were coming back. WSB News underscored the purpose of the fence, commenting that "throughout history, men have built barricades to keep people out, but this fence here at Underground built a year ago has actually served to keep people in."⁶⁵

Despite its promising beginning, the construction of the fence did not save UA. MARTA's construction project, at its most intrusive in the late seventies, harmed UA's business, which brought in only 1.2 million visitors in 1978—barely a fourth of the number of visitors four years earlier⁶⁶. UA's decline might even have been caused by the fence, since the debates over it highlighted the danger inherent in coming downtown. When an *Atlanta Constitution* staff writer visited UA in 1979, ladies with antebellum garments did not welcome him as they had ten years before; instead, as he was about to enter, a "drug-addled nut" approached him, introduced himself as "Dr. Clinton," and attempted to escort him toward a bar for glass of "Jupiter Juice." Still, once inside the gate, the writer discovered a familiar place where there was "no cause for fear," even in "the most desolate alleyways." Discovering that "the spirit of place resided in the place as well as in its gas lamps, cobbled lanes and brick archways," the writer concluded that "Dr. Clinton" was "the exception rather than norm."⁶⁷ For middle-class readers in suburbia, however, the article would add to their concerns, as it seemed to portray UA as little more than a small fort in a downtown battlefield. The rupture between suburbia and downtown was complete.

About three months after the appearance of the above article, the *Atlanta Journal* ran an essay describing UA as "a tomb. Dark, dirty, depressing, and deserted," and reporting that nine out of ten tourists would be "disappointed in what they saw."⁶⁸ Stevenson still appeared in local newspapers and televi-

sion programs working to save UA, but it was only a matter of time before the inevitable, final collapse. By 1979, he acknowledged that suburbanites would not return to downtown. Even though he was an advocate of the “public street,” Stevenson recognized that he was not a “public institution” but a “capitalistic person.” To protect his fondue restaurant, he had to give up UA and move to a “location where locals are willing to come and hotels will send visitors by cab.” WSB News interviewed him just before he pulled his restaurant out of UA and asked why he had tried to be a “downtown fighter.” Stevenson explained that it was an “obligation” of “successful people” to give something back, and that downtown should be “important to all of us regardless where we live.”⁶⁹ Obviously, the importance of downtown had faded for the suburban middle class. By 1981, Dante Stevenson had moved his business to the Lenox Mall area in the upscale Buckhead section of Atlanta. By then, the gaslights—the symbol of the UA historic district—were turned off for good.

VI. CONCLUSION

By building UA, politicians, developers, UAI officials, and private business entrepreneurs like Stevenson attempted to recreate a lively central city street modeled on the early twentieth century and thereby bring middle-class suburbanites back to downtown Atlanta. The gas lights, cobblestone streets, marble facades, classic ice cream parlors, and monkey shows represented efforts to create the ambiance of an inclusive place where hippies, middle-class families, rich and poor, and young and old could all gather together. Many local papers from other cities looked on and extolled the openness of the festive enclave. However, it was this very inclusiveness that gradually undermined UA’s appeal to middle-class families. The expansion of convention business demanded nightlife entertainment, which led to the opening of “girlie shows” near UA. When the papers filed in the run-up to construction of a MARTA station in the Underground area undermined its image as a historical place, the combination decimated UA’s two primary characteristics as a historic park and family entertainment. A fence around the project was erected to exclude people whose behavior did not fit into middle-class norms and expectations, but ultimately the fence and gate did little more than symbolize UA’s failure to turn Atlanta’s downtown into a safe and wholesome place for middle-class families. Indeed, its existence represented a denial of the urban inclusiveness that UA had once treasured.

Many people lamented UA’s death and one could read this as another story

of downtown's "decline," but documenting the biography of UA requires neither glorifying the efforts of promoters and planners nor mourning the early death of downtown Atlanta. As historians Alison Isenberg and Bryant Simon have recently cautioned, we would do well not to rely on the so-called declension narrative in chronicling downtown's history.⁷⁰ Those who lament the recent "death" of downtown tend to romanticize the past, assuming that downtown streets, movie theaters, and department stores, especially in the pre-war period, constituted urbane, diverse, and democratic space. This perspective overlooks the fact that downtown space, particularly before the Civil Rights Movement, was mostly segregated; it might have been vibrant and open, but it was only for whites. Seen in this light, UA presents an important case not only because it was one of the first efforts to create a public space in a post-Jim Crow Atlanta, but because UA promoters and developers endeavored to recreate a downtown that originally existed during a period of rigid white rule. Of course, this does not mean that UA attempted to preserve racial segregation; after all, Mayor Maynard Jackson was an African American who worked diligently to revive UA and restaurants and bars in the festive place cherished black entertainers and welcomed black customers. Manufacturing segregation in this context refers primarily to the exclusion of those who engaged in "inappropriate" behavior, including "go-go girls" and street preachers. Particularly, these promoters were compelled to exclude the "winos" and "panhandlers," since they disturbed the visitors from the suburbs, upon whose satisfaction downtown's survival depended.

Nonetheless, race remained important to the brief life of UA, for the primary target of physical exclusion was homeless people and one should not overlook the large numbers of African Americans among the homeless population of Atlanta. UA was destined to collapse, because it pretended to be open to any race and culture despite the fact that it targeted mainly middle-class folks. When the central city was being occupied increasingly with the poor and racial minorities, it was just impossible. They sought their final cure in gates and fences, but the remedy did not work; ironically, people saw it as evidence that UA (and downtown) itself had become an "inappropriate" space, strengthening their determination to stay away from downtown. Erecting gates and fences not only turned homelessness and blackness into proof of urban decay; the tactic also convinced suburbanites to shut the door on UA and, in so doing, prevented them from witnessing and learning the true character and origins of urban crisis.⁷¹ In short, UA was no longer alive as a public space; it could not be a "site of interaction, encounter and the support of strangers."⁷²

NOTES

¹ "Underground Atlanta: A Rollicking Place," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, undated, Forward Atlanta Newspaper Clippings, Jan. 1970, folder 2, box 4, Bell and Stanton Papers, MSS 596, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

² David Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1967–1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 156.

³ See Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996), 166–67; Goldfield, *Cotton Field*, 156; Harvey Newman, *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 177–78; Harold H. Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of its People and Events*, vol. III (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 460–61, 553–60; Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City 1946–1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 167–68, 198; Doug Monroe, "City Observed: What's Up with Underground?" *Atlanta Magazine* (December 2006), <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/article.php?id=310> (accessed July 23, 2007).

⁴ As for the relationship between suburbanization and urban decline, see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵ See Robert D. Bullard, "Introduction: Anatomy of Sprawl," in Robert Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, *Sprawl City: Race, Politics, and Planning in Atlanta* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000), 8–9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷ For further reading on historic preservation and urban renewal, see Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁸ Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 2, 6–7. Isenberg's analysis on the role of "nostalgia" in downtown redevelopment was also insightful in making this perspective. See, *ibid.*, 255–311.

⁹ Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 3–4.

¹⁰ Underground Atlanta, Inc., "Underground Atlanta: The Historic City beneath the Streets," pamphlet, no date, Vertical file "Underground Atlanta," Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

¹¹ See Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, vol. 2, 795–98; "Atlanta's Underworld: History in Viaduct's Dust," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* [hereafter *AJC*], 7 August 1960; Philip Hoffman, "Creating Underground Atlanta, 1918–1932," *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 13, no. 3 (September 1968): 55–66.

¹² "Wall Street Revival," *Atlanta Constitution* [hereafter, *AC*], 24 December 1967; Editorial, *Atlanta Journal* [hereafter *AJ*], 26 December 1967; "City's Trashiest Spot May Be City's Classiest," *Task Force Report*, 15 January 1968, 6; "Gay '90s to Glitter Again in Atlanta's 'Underground,'" *AJ*, 11 April 1969.

¹³ From Franklin Garrett to Steven Fuller, Jr., 2 January 1969, file "Underground Atlanta," Georgia Historical Commission Administration Papers, RG/SG/Series 061-01-001, 10, RCB-20279, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

¹⁴ "Underground Atlanta to Live Again," *Cobb County Times*, 2 March 1969.

¹⁵ Joseph S. Perrin to Merry G. Jewett, 7 March 1968, file "Underground Atlanta," Georgia Historical Commission Administration Papers, RG/SG/Series 061-01-001, 10, RCB-20279, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

¹⁶ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 166; Harvey, *Southern Hospitality*, 177; Martin, *Atlanta and Environs*, 460–61, 553–55.

¹⁷ The brief biography appeared in the *Atlanta Phoenix*, 1 no.1 (22 January 1970).

¹⁸ "Underground Project 'Gold Mine,'" *AJC*, 11 February 1968.

¹⁹ "Underground City to Start Tuesday," *AJ*, 25 November 1968; "Subsurface Project Begun in Underground Atlanta," *AJ*, 27 November 1968; Underground Atlanta Inc., "Underground Atlanta: The Historic City Beneath the Street," pamphlet, undated [1969], vertical file "Underground Atlanta," Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

²⁰ From Franklin Garrett to Sam Massell, Jr., 19 May 1968, file "Underground Atlanta," Georgia Historical Commission Administration Papers, RG/SG/Series 06-01-001, 10, RCB-20279, The Georgia Archives, Morrow Georgia; City of Atlanta, Civic Design Commission, "Resolution," 1966, Atlanta Urban Design Commission file, quoted in Newman, *Southern Hospitality*, 177.

²¹ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 166.

²² For instance, see UAI's advertisement in tourist guides like *Around Atlanta: Atlanta's Visitor Guide*, or UAI's pamphlets "The Historic City beneath the Street," vertical file "Underground Atlanta," Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia. Underground Atlanta's colorful flyers and photos are available at <http://www.atlantatimemachine.com/downtown/underground.htm> (accessed August 25, 2007).

²³ "1900 Alive in Atlanta: Underground Area Opens," *AC*, 9 April 1969; "Gay '90s to Glitter Again in Atlanta's Underground," *AC*, 10 April 1969; "Families Like Underground," *AC*, 21 May 1971.

²⁴ See *Atlanta Phoenix*; "Marthasville Era Recalled," *Daily News* (Athens, Ga.), 29 May 1969.

²⁵ Susan Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 162.

²⁶ "Sub-City Atlanta Opens Soon," *AJ*, 9 November 1969.

²⁷ "Underground City Project to Begin," *AJ*, 27 September 1968; "A Resurrection in Underground," *AC*, 2 April 1969. As for the rise and fall of Gaslight Square and Ghirardelli Square, see Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 272–97.

²⁸ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 25 October 1970, folder 2, box 4, Bell and Stanton Papers, MSS 596, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁹ *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, undated (1969), folder 2, box 4, Bell and Stanton Papers, MSS 596, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

³⁰ Robert K. Gardner, *Gardner's Guide to Atlanta* (Atlanta: Collegiate Visitors Guides, 1973), 205.

³¹ "Antebellum Belly Dancers for Atlanta," *AC*, 16 May 1972.

³² Harold Martin, *Atlanta and Environs* vol. 3, 559.

³³ "The Presence of the Past" *Atlanta Magazine* 52 (July 1970): 52.

³⁴ "Underground is Surfacing," *AJC*, 9 July 1972; "Travel Award Goes to Attraction Here," *AJC*, 12 November 1972.

³⁵ "What's Doing in Atlanta," *New York Times*, 2 December 1973.

³⁶ "Jackson Declares War on Underground Dancers," *AJ*, 17 April 1972.

³⁷ "Girls Dance in Underground," *AC*, 14 April 1972; "Who Needs Dancing Girls?," *AC*, 15 April 1972.

³⁸ "The Go-Go Girls Must Go," *AC*, 18 April 1972; "Negotiators Get Go-Go Girls Issue," *AJ*, 18 April 1972.

³⁹ "Dancers Get Go-Go at City Nightspot," *AJ*, 27 April 1972.

⁴⁰ Board of Aldermen, May 15, Read and Adopted, Minutes and Board of Aldermen, City of Atlanta, no. 12, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Jackson soon came up with a new zoning ordinance to force businesses in UA to "keep with the cultural and historic association of the place or district" and "iron out... the kinks." However, the ordinance could not get enough supporters. "Antebellum Belly Dancers for Atlanta?" *AC*, 4 January 1977.

⁴¹ "Jackson Declares War on Underground Dancers."

⁴² "A Proposal for Underground," *AJ*, 4 November 1974.

⁴³ Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, "News from MARTA," 7 February 1972, folder 1, box 57, Mule to MARTA Papers, MSS 619, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁴ The Urban Mass Transportation Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, *Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit System Project GA-03-0008, Final Environmental Statement*, 13 March 1972, folder 3, box 63, Mule to MARTA Papers, MSS 619, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁵ "Underground is Surfacing."

⁴⁶ "Underground Asks City 'Take Over,'" *AJ*, 11 October 1974.

⁴⁷ "15 Nightspots in Underground Fall to MARTA," *AC*, 8 October 1974.

⁴⁸ "Underground Asks City 'Take Over'"; "Underground Park Weighed by Atlanta," *AJ*, 11 February 1975; "Fences for Underground Atlanta?" *AC*, 12 February 1975.

⁴⁹ City Council, 3 March 1975, Read and Referred, 535, City Range A, A-5, City Council Minutes and Indexes, vol. 1, January 7, 1974–August 18, 1975, minutes and index, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁵⁰ "Fences for Underground Atlanta?" *AC*, 12 February 1975.

⁵¹ "Rid Underground of Honky Tonks, City Panel Asks," *AC*, 14 March 1975.

⁵² "Fences for Underground Atlanta"; "Fence Underground?" *AC*, 26 February 1975; "Fencing Fee May Make Underground 'Respectable,'" *AJ*, 3 March 1975.

⁵³ See "Fencing Project Stalled," *AJ*, 17 May 1976; "Underground Efforts," *AJ*, 18 May 1976; "Underground Fence Bids Still Too High," *AC*, 27 May 1976; "Still No Fence at Underground," *AC*, 17 April 1977; "Underground Getting Fenced in," *AJ*, 13 May 1977.

⁵⁴ "Can Underground Stage a Comeback?" *AC*, 2 August 1977; *Atlanta City Directory*, 1978–1979; "Merchants in Underground Abandoned by Parent Firm," *AJ*, 4 June 1977.

⁵⁵ "Underground Atlanta," *AC*, 7 June 1977.

⁵⁶ "Merchants in Underground Abandoned by Parent Firm."

⁵⁷ "Underground Atlanta."

⁵⁸ The turnstile enabled UAMA to earn \$12,000 in the first month, which was more than enough to provide maintenance and security service for the month. *AJ*, 15 July 1977.

⁵⁹ Editorial, *AJ*, 4 August 1977.

⁶⁰ *Augusta Chronicle Herald*, 16 October 1977.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*; "Can Underground Stage a Comeback?" *AC*, 2 August 1977.

⁶³ "So Much for Obituaries—Underground is Rallying," *AJ*, 31 August 1978.

⁶⁴ WSB News, 18 September 1978, rec. no. 28782, reel 2393, time in 5:08, WSB News Film Archive, the Instructional Resources Center, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ See "Sherman's Second March," *AJ*, 2 June 1976; "MARTA demolition in Underground Atlanta Criticized," *AJ*, 17 November 1976; "Underground Protests MARTA Street Closing," *AC*, 10 January 1978; "MARTA vs. Underground," *AJ*, 18 January 1978.

⁶⁷ Steve Daugherty, "Up and Down in Underground," AC, 16 January 1979.

⁶⁸ Ron Hudspeth, "Sinking Underground Atlanta 6 Feet Under," AC, 21 April 1979.

⁶⁹ WSB News, no date, rec. no. 38272, reel 0050, time in 37:50, WSB News Film Archive, The Instructional Resources Center, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

⁷⁰ See Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Isenberg, *Downtown America*; Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3–4.

⁷¹ The City of Atlanta sponsorship enabled Underground Atlanta to be resurrected once again in 1989. Managed by the Rouse Corporation, the \$142 million project again has engaged in a new effort at revitalizing Atlanta's downtown, but, as with its predecessor, the new Underground Atlanta is still struggling to attract middle-class visitors from the metropolitan Atlanta area.

⁷² Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 3–4.