

# Atlanta, GA



## Origins of Juneteenth

Atlanta, GA has a rich African American history and culture that is reflected and preserved by the historically large black population in the city. Before the Civil War, the city was divided into five wards, with Black settlements residing in the first, second, and fourth wards. Historic black settlements in Atlanta include Summerhill, Jennings town, and Shermantown. Following emancipation in 1865, African Americans across the South, including Texas, migrated to other locations. In the 1870's Atlanta's African American population grew as a surge of free Blacks migrated to seek refuge in Atlanta's Black Neighborhoods. Juneteenth celebrations spread across the nation to places where blacks settled and developed communities. The celebration of emancipation is not a new event in Georgia, as it is recorded that formerly enslaved people celebrated on several other days, including President Lincoln's birthday (February 12), January first each year in honor of the day the Emancipation Proclamation was enforced.

## Celebrations of Freedom in Atlanta

### Early Emancipation Celebrations (1866)

Emancipation Day celebrations in Georgia date back to the year following the end of the Civil War. The oldest known celebration took place in 1906 at Big Bethel A.M.E. Church in Atlanta. Upson County has been celebrating Emancipation Day since 1866 on May 29th, and in 1996, Georgia House passed resolution (HR) 859 to designate May 29th as "Emancipation Day" in Upson County.

### Solidarity Day Reamplifies Juneteenth (1968)

In the 1960s, Rev. Ralph Abernathy merged the celebration of Juneteenth with the national civil rights movement and the goals of the Poor People's Campaign. In 1968, Abernathy orchestrated the first Solidarity Day on June 19, a crucial event in the campaign. Solidarity Day brought together around fifty thousand people to participate in a march on the Washington D.C. Mall in response to President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty". At the event, Coretta Scott King delivered a speech that was originally intended to be given by her late husband, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The combination of Solidarity Day with Juneteenth gave Georgia residents a newfound opportunity to acknowledge the ongoing struggles caused by slavery, the promises of emancipation, and how the fight for equality persisted during the Civil Rights era. Because of Solidarity Day, many participants in the Poor People's Campaign event later established official Juneteenth Celebrations in their local communities across Georgia.

### Georgia Officially Recognizes Juneteenth (2011)

Georgia became the thirty-seventh state to recognize Juneteenth in 2011. Co-sponsored by state senators Lester Jackson from Savannah (District 2), Donzella James from College Park (District 35), and Valencia Seay from Riverdale (District 34); S.R. 164 was read and adopted on February 16, 2011. Today, Atlanta hosts one of the country's largest and most lively Juneteenth celebrations which include a large music festival, parades, cultural arts programs, and social gathers.

## Trailblazers of Freedom

### Atlanta Board of Alderman (1870)

In 1870, during Reconstruction, William Finch and George Graham made history by becoming the first African Americans to be elected to the Atlanta Board of Aldermen, which is now known as the Atlanta City Council. However, it took another 96 years for the council to elect another black councilman, Q. V. Williamson, in 1966. In 1980, Carolyn Long Banks became the first black woman to be elected and serve on the Atlanta City Council.

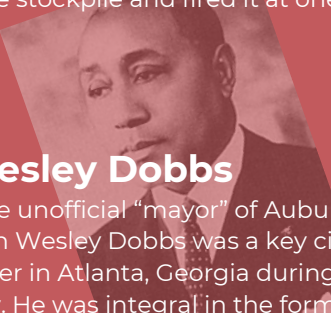


### Higher Learners in Atlanta

Atlanta boasts the largest black academic community in the United States. The Atlanta University Center (AUC) was formed in 1929 as a group of six historically black colleges (HBCUs). These include Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University, and Morris Brown College, which are now united as the Atlanta University Center. The consortium has since expanded to include the Morehouse School of Medicine and is recognized as a symbol of educational excellence in Atlanta. It has produced numerous notable alumni, such as James Weldon Johnson and Spike Lee.

### John & Gertrude Burke

During the period following Reconstruction, the threat of white violence increased in Atlanta. The need for "collective self-defense" was needed to combat police brutality and the lack of due process. In 1881, when a young Atlanta black man, John Burke, was facing arrest for pushing a white woman off a sidewalk. In response, hundreds of angry black men and women formed a protective circle around Burke to prevent his arrest. As the story goes, his mother Gertrude Burke stole a gun from a police stockpile and fired it at one of the officers.



### John Wesley Dobbs

Known as the unofficial "mayor" of Auburn Avenue, John Wesley Dobbs was a key civic and political leader in Atlanta, Georgia during the mid-20th century. He was integral in the formation of the Atlanta Negro Voters League, which significantly increased Black voter participation and political presence in Atlanta.

## The Path to Absolute Equality

### Emancipation in Atlanta

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 did not immediately end the practice of slavery in Georgia. During the Civil War, emancipation was achieved by thousands enslaved people in Georgia who were determined to secure their own freedom. It is estimated that between 10,000 to 20,000 enslaved African Americans joined U.S. General William Tecumseh Sherman during his March to the Sea campaign. Following the war, freedmen and women struggled to claim their freedom amidst fights against Black Codes, apprenticeship laws, and white racial terror.

### A Black Mecca - Black Neighborhood Emerge

Following emancipation, African Americans established close-knit communities across the Atlanta area. Atlanta was divided into wards. Self-sufficient communities, like Auburn Avenue, became a major source of black economic success and social progress. The deep history of black communities, both de facto or de jure, has contributed to Atlanta being regarded as a black mecca, both historically and in contemporary times.

### Fighting for Freedom Against Forced Labor

The Chattahoochee Brick Company, established in 1880 and owned by former Atlanta mayor James English, serves as a sinister symbol of the convict labor system and the wealth it created in Atlanta. The Chattahoochee Brick Yard, along with the Bellwood Quarry, are two historic sites in ATL where black workers were chained together and forced to work in some of the most brutal conditions. Both the Chattahoochee bricks and the Bellwood granite were used to rebuild Atlanta. Today the Chattahoochee Brick Company Descendants Coalition and The National Center for Civil and Human Rights, are working educate others and memorialize these important sites.

### Atlanta Race Riots (1906)

The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot grew out of white fear of black progress, the idea of "Negro domination", and unwarranted claims of violent acts towards white women by black men. In defiance of the law, black Atlantans began to acquire firearms illegally. It is estimated that more than 40 black Atlantans were killed by white mobs during the riots. In the years following the riot, Atlanta became one of the most segregated cities in the country. Police brutality, discrimination, and racial conflict continued in the city until the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

### Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement

Atlanta is considered the hub of the modern civil rights movement. It is home to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in 1957 by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. David Abernathy. During the 1960s, student leaders like Lonnie King and Julian Bond led sit-ins and protests across the city. Today, the city is remembered for its role the civil rights movement and continues to be a cornerstone of black political advancement in America,





## Andrew Young

Andrew Jackson Young began his career as a pastor in Atlanta. As a young man, he emerged as an early leader in the civil rights movement. He served as the executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), where he and Martin Luther King Jr became confidants. Young was an active politician at the state and nation level. He served as a U.S. Congressman from Georgia, United States Ambassador to the United Nations in the Carter Administration, and the 55th Mayor of Atlanta.

## Titans of Entertainment

Atlanta is home to many notable African Americans in the entertainment industry. Many of the Atlanta-based entertainers have paved the way for other African Americans in entertainment. A few key figures from Atlanta include Kandi Burruss, T.I., Usher, Jermaine Dupri, Andre 3000 & Big Boi, Chris Tucker, Ciara, Ludacris, Toni Braxton, Tyler Perry, Jasmine Guy, and Gladys Knight.



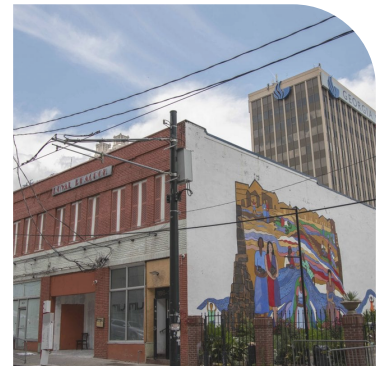
**BIG BETHEL AME CHURCH**

**SOUTHVIEW CEMETERY**



**THE KING CENTER**

**THE ROYAL PEACOCK**



## Historical Resources and References

### Famous Black History Sites and Landmarks

<https://discoveratlanta.com/explore/itineraries/auburn-avenue-black-history/>

### THE ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN ATLANTA, 1880-1910

<https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/november-2006/the-origins-of-the-civil-rights-movement-in-atlanta-1880-1910>

### Atlanta Reckons with the Convict Labor that Built the City

<https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/atlanta-reckons-with-the-convict-labor-that-built-the-city>



[www.absolteequality.org](http://www.absolteequality.org)