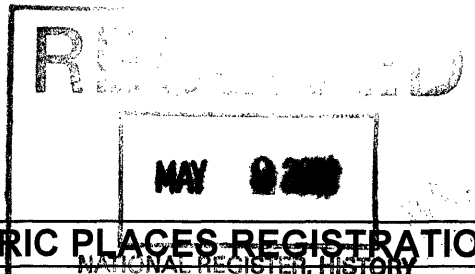


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES-REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

**1. Name of Property**

**historic name** Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation

**other names/site number(N/A)**

**2. Location**

**street & number** Roughly bounded by Freedom Parkway and John Wesley Dobbs Avenue on the north; Decatur Street on the south; Southern Railroad line on the east; and Interstate 75/85 on the west.

**city, town** Atlanta (N/A) vicinity of  
**county** Fulton **code** GA 121  
**state** Georgia **code** GA **zip code** 30312

(N/A) not for publication

**3. Classification**

**Ownership of Property:**

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

**Category of Property:**

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Boundary Increase:**

	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
<b>buildings</b>	443	79
<b>sites</b>	1	0
<b>structures</b>	1	0
<b>objects</b>	0	0
<b>total</b>	445*	79

\*Total does not include 37 previously listed resources.

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**Continuation Sheet**

Section 3--Classification

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**Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:**

<u>Name of previous listing</u>	<u>Number of contributing properties</u>
Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District (1974)	9*
Martin Luther King Jr., National Historic Site (1980) (This includes the 9 contributing properties previously listed.)	19
Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site additional documentation (1994) (This includes the 28 contributing properties previously listed and 7 additional contributing properties.)	35

\*9 represents the number of contributing properties identified in the National Register Information System.

J. K. Orr Shoe Factory (listed 9/29/95)	1
Trio Laundry (listed 9/18/97)	1

J. K. Orr Shoe Factory and Trio Laundry are located in the boundary increase but not in the original Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District.

<b>Total number of contributing properties previously listed in the National Register</b>	<b>37</b>
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**Name of related multiple property listing: N/A**

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

*Ricardo Coxes*

*5-4-01*

Signature of certifying official

Date

*for*

W. Ray Luce  
Director, Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

In my opinion, the property ( ) meets ( ) does not meet the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

*Patrick Andrus*

*6/21/2001*

( ) determined eligible for the National Register

( ) determined not eligible for the National Register

( ) removed from the National Register

( ) other, explain:

( ) see continuation sheet

*for*

Keeper of the National Register

Date

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## 6. Function or Use

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### Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling; multiple dwelling  
COMMERCE/TRADE/department store; specialty store; professional; restaurant  
RELIGION/religious facility; church school  
EDUCATION/school  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/storage  
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/manufacturing facility; waterworks  
SOCIAL/meeting hall  
GOVERNMENT/fire station

### Current Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling; multiple dwelling  
COMMERCE/TRADE/department store; specialty store; professional; restaurant  
RELIGION/religious facility; church school  
FUNERARY/graves/burials  
EDUCATION/education-related  
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/manufacturing facility  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum  
SOCIAL/meeting hall  
VACANT/NOT IN USE

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## 7. Description

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### Architectural Classification:

LATE VICTORIAN/Queen Anne; Italianate; Gothic; Romanesque  
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Bungalow/Craftsman  
MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne; International Style

### Materials:

**foundation** BRICK; STONE/granite; CONCRETE  
**walls** WOOD/weatherboard; BRICK; STONE/Granite; CONCRETE  
**roof** ASPHALT; METAL/tin  
**other** WOOD; BRICK; METAL; STONE; CONCRETE

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 7--Description

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#### **Narrative Description:**

##### Summary Description of the Original Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic District

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District was listed in the National Register on May 2, 1974. Within the boundaries of the original approximately 76-acre historic district, a smaller 15.4-acre district was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1977. In 1980, federal legislation established the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site and Preservation District. Located within the original historic district boundary, the National Historic Site is a small urban park comprising approximately 38 acres (4.78 acres of which are federally owned). The Preservation District, also established by the 1980 legislation, adjoins the National Historic Site on the east, north, and west.

The original Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District consists mostly of residential properties north of Auburn Avenue between Boulevard and Randolph Street as well as commercial properties along Edgewood Avenue between Jackson and Randolph streets. In 1980, federal legislation established the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site and Preservation District, intended to "protect and interpret for the benefit, inspiration, and education of present and future generations the places where Martin Luther King, Jr., was born, where he lived, worked, and worshiped, and where he is buried"<sup>1</sup> (photos 1-8).

The National Historic Site is a sub-area of the original historic district containing approximately 38 acres. The National Park Service administers the National Historic Site, which includes the King Birth Home (photo 1); residences along the block of Auburn Avenue where King was born (known as the Birth-Home Block, photos 1-5); Ebenezer Baptist Church, where King, his father, and grandfather were pastors (photo 7); commercial buildings along Edgewood Avenue (photos 54-55); and the King grave site (photo 8).

The Preservation District, which is larger than the national historic site, includes more of the Auburn Avenue neighborhood to the north, east, and west. In addition to encompassing all of the original Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District, the Preservation District also takes in the Sweet Auburn Historic District (designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976), which is located west of the Interstate 75/85 corridor.

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<sup>1</sup>Public Law 96-428, 10 October 1980.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Section 7--Description

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#### Description of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase:

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District, as amended by this registration form, comprises much of the historic residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial development in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood on the east side of the Interstate 75/85 corridor through downtown Atlanta, Georgia. Martin Luther King, Jr., grew up in the neighborhood in the 1930s and early 1940s and later returned to Atlanta in 1960. It therefore derives outstanding significance for its relationship to King and the American Civil Rights Movement and also because it evolved from an integrated residential district during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to a mixed use and largely black community of key importance from the 1910s through the Civil Rights era.

The original National Registration form, completed over twenty-five years ago, is vague in its determination of contributing and noncontributing properties and does not address areas of significance, such as community planning and development, that have since been recognized as essential to understanding the full significance of the historic district. In addition, the boundary was drawn to include the resources believed at the time to be most closely associated with Martin Luther King, Jr., but with little regard to the larger neighborhood in which King was reared, of which large portions survive intact.

The purpose of the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Register Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation is:

- to expand the boundaries of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District to include contiguous and intact portions of the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood that were not included in the original National Register nomination;
- to add new areas of significance to the nomination, reflecting additional research and evaluation;
- to provide an accurate identification of the contributing and noncontributing resources in the district; and
- to provide an accurate acreage count of the district.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary increase expands the boundaries of the original historic district to include additional contiguous properties on almost all sides of the original historic district. The boundary increase is irregularly shaped with the original L-shaped historic district in its center.

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### Section 7--Description

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The boundary increase includes historically residential properties as far as Interstate 75/85 corridor to the west. The elevated interstate was rebuilt and widened three times its original width since 1980 and is a large visual and physical barrier between the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District and the Sweet Auburn Historic District further west. Although these two historic districts were once part of a single African-American community, the interstate separates the Sweet Auburn district, which is exclusively commercial, from the Auburn Avenue neighborhood, which is mostly residential. That is, Sweet Auburn is considered downtown; the Auburn Avenue community is generally viewed a residential neighborhood on the east side of Atlanta.

Freedom Parkway, a downtown expressway constructed in the 1980s, forms the northern boundary. Although the historic neighborhood known as the Old Fourth Ward continues for several blocks north to Ponce de Leon Avenue, Freedom Parkway's four lanes, wide center median, and landscaped right-of-way on both sides of the roadway isolate the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District from the northern parts of the neighborhood.

DeKalb Avenue forms the boundary on the south because it and the rail line that runs parallel with DeKalb Avenue is the traditional boundary between the Auburn Avenue neighborhood and other neighborhoods south of DeKalb Avenue, including the historically white mill village known as Cabbagetown.

The Southern Railroad corridor to the east forms the boundary between the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District and the Inman Park Historic District. The rail corridor has been an integral part of the neighborhood from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when major industrial enterprises, such as the Atlantic Compress Company and the Phoenix Planing Mill with its vast lumberyard, were located along the rail line. Houses in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood were built out to the property lines of these industrial operations. These industrial complexes are included in the boundary increase because they employed workers from the neighborhood and because they are physically part of the neighborhood. The poured-concrete water tower associated with the cotton compress has long been a neighborhood landmark.

The boundary increase is a contiguous and historically cohesive area that exhibits a high level of architectural continuity because all of the resources now included were at one time part of the neighborhood known as the Old Fourth Ward and directly associated with the development of the Auburn Avenue neighborhood. The Old Fourth Ward was a political demarcation that extended as far north as Ponce de Leon Avenue. The district was physically and visually severed from the Old Fourth Ward to the north by the Freedom Parkway constructed in the 1980s.

The boundary increase comprises mostly residential, single-family dwellings. There are also a substantial number of multiple-family dwellings, both duplexes and apartment buildings. Residential

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buildings are located in all sections of the district, except on portions of two commercial corridors. These are the western third of Auburn Avenue that lies within the historic district and all of Edgewood Avenue that lies within the historic district. The houses in the boundary increase areas were built during the same periods of development and represent the same house types and architectural styles as those in the original historic district that was listed in 1974.

#### *Resources in the amended historic district north of Irwin Street and east of Randolph Street*

The amended historic district north of Irwin Street and east of Randolph Street is predominantly residential with houses set on narrow lots close to the street. Historic plan and landscape features include the widths of the paved streets, sidewalk widths, the two-way flow of traffic, and building setbacks from the street, nearly all of which have remained unchanged since the historic period. Some original granite curbs survive. This portion of the amended district is similar if not identical to the portion of the original historic district north of Auburn Avenue.

This area contains the largest concentrations of historic houses. Most are one-story, frame vernacular house types with limited stylistic ornamentation and were built between 1890 and 1930. Common house types are the hall-parlor, gabled-wing cottage (photo 37), and pyramidal cottages. These one-story dwellings are found throughout much of the eastern two-thirds of the district. Two-story houses are found on sections of John Wesley Dobbs Avenue and Irwin Street (photo 26). Stylistic ornamentation is generally limited to elements from the Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival styles.

This portion of the amended district also includes community landmark buildings such as the David T. Howard School (photo 27) where Martin Luther King, Jr., attended grammar school. The school is bounded by John Wesley Dobbs Avenue, Howell, Randolph, and Irwin streets. The original portion of the school was constructed in 1923 and is a prominent four-story brick building with Romanesque Revival-style details. The McGruder Street Church of God in Christ on McGruder Street (photo 34) is a small church that is typical of the small churches, sometimes sited on corners, that are located throughout the amended historic district. McGruder Street is a plain front-gabled brick building with a stone foundation and plain architectural details.

This part of the amended historic district includes industrial resources important to the history and development of the Auburn Avenue neighborhood. Along the Southern Railroad south of Auburn Avenue is the Atlantic/Southeastern Compress and Warehouse, a massive two-story warehouse with an open plan (photos 29-30). The warehouse was constructed in 1905 to store cotton. The compress has since burned. The two-story building features an early reinforced-concrete structural system with square concrete columns, floors, and ceilings. Interior and exterior walls are laid in Flemish bond and are non-bearing. One-story sheds of post-and-beam construction are attached



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along the north and west sides of the building, and the remains of a third shed may be observed on the building's south side. A concrete loading dock spans the entire eastern elevation. The interior of the building is divided into ten equal-sized bays on each of the two levels. The Atlantic/Southeastern Warehouse recently underwent a certified rehabilitation that converted the building to loft apartments. Northwest of the warehouse is a 100,000-gallon concrete water tower, constructed in 1907. Other historic industrial buildings along the railroad north of Irwin Street include Phoenix Planning Mill and the Atlanta Milling Company.

Noncontributing resources in this portion of the historic district are limited to modern infill buildings (mostly houses) and historic houses that have lost integrity as a result of alterations or neglect. Many of the nonhistoric houses are designed in a manner compatible with the historic houses in the area.

#### *Resources in the amended historic district south of Edgewood Avenue*

The amended historic district south of Edgewood Avenue includes commercial buildings (photo 56) and smaller, corner churches (photo 50) but is mostly residential. Houses are set close to one another on small lots on north-south trending streets. Surviving landscape features include the widths of the paved streets, sidewalk widths, the two-way flow of traffic, and building setbacks from the street, nearly all of which have remained unchanged since the historic period. Original granite curbs survive in this portion of the amended historic district.

Houses south of Edgewood include two-story dwellings, some constructed as duplexes, located on Jackson Street (photos 49). Most houses are one-story Queen Anne cottages that are located throughout this portion of the amended historic district (photos 52 and 57). Stylistic ornamentation is generally limited to elements from the Queen Anne, Craftsman and Colonial Revival styles. These houses are similar if not identical to those to the north in the original historic district.

Apartment buildings in this area were constructed in the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s (photos 47). These are primarily two- and three-story modern brick structures that lack stylistic ornamentation. Entrances to upper-level and ground-level apartments are typically on the outside, and thus the upper levels feature balconies that are accessed by concrete stairways. Many of these buildings are sited perpendicular to rights-of-way, and in the case of the several multi-building apartment complexes are more oriented inward--i.e., oriented to one another and to small interior-block courtyards--than they are oriented to the street. A few similar apartment buildings are found in within the original historic district, although more are located in the amended area. The Antoine Graves High Rise apartment building on Hilliard Street is an exceptional example of modern architecture (no photo). Constructed in 1965, it is a massive brick-and-concrete block raised on piers.

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Like the amended area north of Irwin Street, noncontributing resources in this portion of the historic district are limited to modern infill buildings and historic houses that have lost integrity as a result of alterations or substantial neglect.

#### *Resources in the amended historic district west of Jackson Street*

The amended historic district west of Jackson Street is closest to downtown Atlanta and features more nonhistoric intrusions along its boundary than other parts of the historic district. A row of single-family houses from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is located along Irwin Street between Hilliard and Jackson streets (photo 68). These include large, two-story, multi-family houses with Craftsman details, similar to houses in the original district as well as in other areas included in this boundary increase.

The west side of the amended district includes a substantial number of historic multi-family apartment buildings, most dating from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s (photos 47 and 69). These are primarily two- and three-story modern brick structures that lack stylistic ornamentation. Entrances to upper-level and ground-level apartments are typically on the outside, and thus the upper levels feature balconies that are accessed by concrete stairways. Many of these buildings are sited perpendicular to rights-of-way, and in the case of the several multi-building apartment complexes, are more oriented inward--i.e., oriented to one another and to small interior-block courtyards--than they are oriented to the street. The Wheat Street Gardens I, II, and III complex is a prime example of 1960s apartment construction in the Auburn Avenue community. The buildings of Wheat Street Gardens (photo 67), two and three stories in height, are generally oriented toward each other and to surrounding streets. Entrances to most individual apartment units are from the outside (rather than from interior hallways), and upper level units are accessed by means of exterior stairways and balconies. These modern buildings exhibit no stylistic ornamentation or other references to past historical styles.

West of Jackson Street on Auburn Avenue is a small commercial stretch composed of two-story brick buildings dating from about 1920 to the early 1940s (photo 63). These commercial buildings are directly associated with early to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century development of the Auburn Avenue neighborhood. No buildings survive in this area from before the 1917 fire. These buildings are characterized by plain architectural ornament and storefronts with typical commercial display windows. Exceptions include the Tabor Building at 328 Auburn Avenue and the Prince Hall Masonic Temple at 332-334 Auburn Avenue. The Tabor Building, constructed in 1927, is three stories in height and features limestone details on the front facade and at the roofline. The three-story Prince Hall Masonic Temple (photo 64), constructed in 1941, is a rare example in the historic district of the Renaissance Revival style. This building currently houses the national offices of the Southern Christian

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Leadership Conference. On Edgewood Avenue is another small stretch of continuous one-story storefront building that have maintained a high level of historic integrity. Photo 43 illustrates an isolated historic commercial building on the north side of Edgewood Street.

The area south of Edgewood includes several small brick factory buildings, such as the Atlanta Brush Company at 320 Tanner Street, built c.1910 (photo 44), the Trio Laundry dry cleaning plant/Berman Paper Stock Company at the northeast corner of Tanner and Hilliard streets, also built c.1910, and the J. K. Orr Shoe Factory/Red Seal Shoe Company at 14 William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive (photo 45). These three are particularly good examples of this building type and exhibit corbeled cornices and other brick detailing. The stencil signage on the Brush Company building is particularly distinctive. The three-story J. K. Orr Shoe Factory/Red Seal Shoe Company building also features a square, four-story corner tower.

West of Jackson Street is Wheat Street Baptist Church (photo 65), a large stone four-story building designed in the Gothic Revival style and completed in 1923. It features three- and four-story towers at each end of the main Auburn Avenue facade. Stained-glass lancet windows also distinguish the building. The church is located at the southwest corner of Auburn Avenue and William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive, which is named for the church's long-time pastor who served from 1937 to the 1990s.

Noncontributing resources west of Jackson Street include fast food restaurants, gas stations, and other commercial establishments. The Wheat Street Plazas North and South, completed in 1969 at Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street, form a small strip shopping center set back from the street to allow for parking spaces in front.

### Historic Integrity of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase

Demolition, alteration, and new construction have had a significant impact on limited areas in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood. Much of the change has come as a result of commemorative activities associated with Martin Luther King, Jr. Beginning in the early 1990s, the National Park Service began preparations for the 1996 Summer Olympics. In order to provide parking for the large crowds, the Park Service expanded the boundary of the National Historic Site north to Cain Street and then demolished about a dozen industrial buildings, including the Scripto Building where King participated in a strike near the end of his life. This area, which is now a paved swath from the National Park Service visitor center on Auburn Avenue north to Freedom Parkway between Jackson Street and Boulevard, is excluded from the boundary increase. The National Park Service also built a new visitor center and permitted the Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation to build a large new church on Auburn Avenue adjacent to the visitor center in exchange for control over the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church building across the street.

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New construction has occurred mostly on the west side of the amended historic district and on a scale smaller than the National Park Service projects. In the 1970s, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change demolished nearly a block of buildings on the south side of Auburn Avenue between Boulevard and Jackson Street to build its headquarters. This complex of red brick and concrete buildings now includes the King grave site. Small-scale nonhistoric commercial buildings and a larger retirement community were built along Auburn Avenue but these do not diminish the overall integrity of the street. Edgewood Avenue has lost some historic buildings due to demolition but its overall integrity also remains strong. The most significant changes to the historic fabric of the neighborhood have occurred along the boundary of the amended historic district. Demolition and new construction along DeKalb Avenue to the south is reflected in the irregular boundary drawn to exclude noncontributing properties. Interstate 75/85 to the west and Freedom Parkway to the north have isolated the remaining neighborhood by the large swaths of cleared right-of-way required for high-speed, limit-access thoroughfares.

Many buildings in the amended historic district have suffered neglect. Some are in need of modest repairs while others have substantially deteriorated. Overall, the level of integrity for residential buildings, which comprise most historic resources in the amended historic district, is high. Few have had major additions and in most cases it is easy to determine the original building form. Exterior surface coverings, primarily asphalt brick veneer, are not uncommon, but aluminum and vinyl sidings are rare. A significant number of houses and apartment buildings have been rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as part of the National Park Service's Tax Incentives Program. In addition, a number of new houses have been constructed on lots that once contained houses. These houses are among the best infill houses in the city and reflect the design, scale, and massing of neighboring historic houses.

#### Development of the Auburn Avenue Neighborhood

Opened in 1853 as Wheat Street, Auburn Avenue and the surrounding area developed slowly until 1880. That year marked the subdivision of the large landholding of John Lynch, who owned property on both sides of Auburn Avenue between Jackson Street and Howland (now Howell) Street. In 1884, the Gate City Street Railroad Company constructed a horse car line from downtown Atlanta, along Auburn Avenue to Jackson Street, and then north on Jackson. An electric street railway line, Atlanta's first, was opened along Edgewood Avenue in 1889, and in the early 1890s horse car lines were electrified and new electric lines were built. Thus, by the mid-1890s, the Auburn Avenue community had direct access to downtown, where many residents worked and shopped.

Several residences were built along and near Auburn Avenue in the 1880s, although only one house (521 Auburn Avenue) survives from prior to 1890. By 1900, Auburn Avenue was developed east to Randolph Street, although the densest development remained west of Boulevard. Most dwellings on

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Auburn Avenue were two-story Queen Anne houses (photos 2-3). By the 1890s, residential development was established north of Auburn Avenue. The area bounded by Irwin Street on the north, Boulevard on the west, Old Wheat Street on the south and Randolph Street on the east was built-out by 1892. A two-block area bounded by Irwin Street on the north, Hilliard Street on the west, Old Wheat Street on the south, and Boulevard on the east was nearly vacant in 1892, and the easternmost of these blocks remained undeveloped for another two decades. Further north, relatively little residential development had occurred east of Howell Street between Irwin and Houston streets by 1892, but north of Houston Street (now John Wesley Dobbs Avenue) was substantially developed. West of Boulevard and north of Irwin was also developed by the early 1890s, including Gaines Hall and Grant Hall, the first two buildings of Morris Brown College (both demolished), and the North Boulevard Public School for white children.

By 1892, the blocks south Auburn Avenue were developed consistently from block to block and most lots had been built upon (photos 57 and 59). Houses on Auburn and Edgewood consisted mostly of large, two-story residences, but south of Edgewood most dwellings were smaller and only one-story in height. Very little commercial development was evident in the area prior to 1900, with the exception of quite a few businesses on Decatur Street and a few small stores on Auburn and Edgewood avenues. Two major industrial facilities were present by the early 1890s, the Trowbridge Furniture Company at northeast corner of Fort and Decatur streets and the Richmond and Danville Railroad Car Shops along the Southern Railroad east of Randolph Street.

Late 19th- and early 20th-century residential development within the historic district consists of mostly small, vernacular dwellings with Folk Victorian ornamentation. The vernacular house types include: shotgun houses, hall-parlor houses, gabled-wing cottages, and pyramidal cottages with relatively plain architectural ornament (photos 19, 24, and 33). A group of nine double-shotgun houses were constructed c.1905 along Auburn Avenue, at the northeast corner of Auburn Avenue and Boulevard (photos 15-16). Two-story residences also were built at this time, both single-family dwellings and duplexes. In 1911, a two-story building was constructed at 590 Auburn Avenue that featured a small store on the first floor and an apartment above.

By 1910, the majority of building lots in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood were developed for residential uses. Several large houses had been constructed in the northern section of the district at Boulevard and Houston Street. Highland Avenue had been substantially developed by 1910, as had several blocks to the north of Highland that are within the Auburn Avenue community (photos 39 and 42). There were a few individual stores on Auburn Avenue, primarily toward the west end of the district near Fort Street and at the intersection of Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street, but Auburn remained primarily residential. Commercial establishments were generally limited to Decatur Street and Edgewood Avenue (photos 54-55, and 60). Large and small churches were built throughout the community on corner lots (photos 7, 34, 50, 62, and 65). Industrial development by 1910 was

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located at several points, primarily around the periphery of the district. The largest industrial enterprises, Atlantic/Southeastern Compress and Warehouse Company (photos 29-30) and the Phoenix Planing Mill, were both located at the eastern end of the community along the tracks of the Southern Railroad. The cotton compress facility was a substantial complex, built in 1905, that included a brick warehouse, a large platform (destroyed by fire in the early 1990s) fronting along the main Southern Railway tracks, and a 100,000-gallon, poured-concrete water tower.

The Atlanta fire of 1917 destroyed a considerable portion of the historic district north of Auburn Avenue. To the south, only a relatively small area between Fort Street and Yonge Street (now William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive) suffered substantial damage, whereas virtually everything north of Auburn between Fort Street and Boulevard was destroyed. Thus, there was a great deal of rebuilding activity in this area in the late 1910s and 1920s. The established pattern of vernacular building types continued, although some dwellings from the post-Atlanta fire years exhibit Craftsman-style ornamentation that had not previously been seen. Particularly significant is a block of two-story houses built along John Wesley Dobbs Avenue between Howell and Randolph streets (photo 26). This block became known as Bishop's Row because two African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church bishops resided on this street.

A second block of significant two-story houses is located on Irwin Street between Jackson and Hilliard streets (photo 68). Several of these houses were built by Alexander D. Hamilton and Son, the most prominent early black contracting firm in Atlanta. Two others were built by the Pharrow Construction Company, founded by R. E. Pharrow and associated with Standard Life Insurance Company founder Heman E. Perry. During the 1910s and 1920s, many commercial buildings were built that now line Edgewood Avenue as well as Auburn Avenue between William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive and Fort Street. These are primarily one- and two-story brick buildings with little ornamentation (photo 43 and 63). In 1923, the David T. Howard Grammar School was completed in the north central part of the historic district (photo 27). It functioned as an elementary school between 1924 and 1930 and had junior high grades added in 1931. The Howard School was converted for use as a high school in 1947 and remained open until 1976.

By about 1930, the entire Auburn Avenue community was substantially developed. The first three decades of the 20th century thus constituted a period of considerable construction activity in all sections of the district, particularly in the residential area to the northeast. From the Depression years of the 1930s through the early 1950s was a period of minimal construction activity in the Auburn Avenue community. This was in part due to the economic conditions of the 1930s, but also because the area was virtually built out by 1930. One major addition to the area came in 1931, when Scripto, Inc., constructed a manufacturing plant at 423 Houston Street. The Scripto plant was demolished for National Park Service visitor center parking (photo 12). A rare example from this

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period is the Wigwam Apartment building at the southwest corner of Auburn Avenue and Randolph Street (photo 23). It is one of the finest examples of Moderne-style architecture in Atlanta.

In the early and mid-1950s, considerable changes occurred in the community. The housing stock had deteriorated in many sections of the neighborhood, and most dwellings by mid-century were rental properties with few long-term tenants. Atlanta as a whole was going through a difficult period of urban renewal and decision-making concerning residential patterns. New brick apartment buildings were built in the Auburn Avenue community in the early and mid-1950s, and similar construction continued into the 1970s (photos 35 and 47). These buildings are mostly two- and three-story, modern brick structures exhibiting minimal stylistic elaboration. Most feature low-pitched gable roofs and metal sash windows. Entrances to upper as well as ground level apartments are typically on the outside, and thus the upper levels feature balconies accessed by concrete stairways. The Houston Square Apartments, built c.1960, are a representative example of the types of apartments that were built during this period (photo 69). In addition to typical features such as masonry construction, low rectangular building forms, and access provided at the exterior of both levels, Houston Square reveals the effort sometimes made to provide open space between buildings composing an apartment complex. Some of these buildings are arranged in large complexes, most notably Wheat Street Gardens I, II, and III (photo 67).

#### Developments in the Auburn Avenue Neighborhood Since 1968

During the thirty-year period since the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., considerable change has taken place in the Auburn Avenue community. In 1968, Coretta Scott King founded the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. This organization continues King's work toward economic and social equality and is housed in the King Center complex, which was completed in 1981.

Wheat Street Plaza, built in 1969 on the northwest and southwest corners of Auburn Avenue at Jackson Street, is a commercial center developed and owned by Wheat Street Baptist Church. It is an example of direct involvement by a religious institution in the economic development of the area. As such, Wheat Street Plaza can be compared to the church's earlier direct involvement in housing development represented by the Wheat Street Gardens complexes.

In the early 1970s, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s body was moved from Southview Cemetery where he had been buried next to his grandparents to a memorial plaza in the King Center adjacent to Ebenezer Baptist Church (photo 8). The memorial tomb was dedicated in 1977. The Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site, which includes the Birth Home, Ebenezer Baptist Church, the grave site, and about three dozen historic residences, was established in 1980.

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The decades of the 1970s and 1980s represent a continuation of decline in the condition of the area's historic housing stock. Few new housing units were constructed in the area during these two decades, but losses of historic dwellings increased due to severe deterioration followed by some mandatory demolitions required by city building inspectors. However, in 1973, two major housing facilities were completed. The eleven-story Antoine Graves Annex at 110 Hilliard Street was built to increase the facilities of the existing Antoine Graves Apartments High Rise at 126 Hilliard. Wheat Street Towers, yet another effort by Wheat Street Baptist Church, was opened in January of 1973 at 375 Auburn Avenue. This fourteen-story, 210-unit structure was built at a cost of \$4 million and consists entirely of one bedroom apartments intended for low- and moderate-income elderly residents (photo 65).

In 1980, the Historic District Development Corporation (HDDC) was founded as a neighborhood-based community development corporation with the goal of rehabilitating and revitalizing residential and commercial properties in the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site and Preservation District. The HDDC is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization composed of neighborhood residents, community leaders, neighborhood businesspeople, and professional advisors. HDDC seeks to "restore the area to the proud, economically diverse and viable community that originally existed, while preventing displacement of existing residents and maintaining its historic character" (HDDC summary). HDDC typically acquires vacant, dilapidated, and condemned structures within its target area, rehabilitates them, and sells or rents the improved units to low- and moderate-income persons (photo 22). By 1998, HDDC constructed more than twenty new houses with more than a dozen planned.

In 1992, the National Park Service initiated a two-year planning process to upgrade the National Historic Site in preparation for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, which were held that year in Atlanta. Major construction projects emerged from these plans, including a new National Park Service visitor center (photos 9-10), a surface parking facility (north of the visitor center between Jackson Street and Boulevard, photo 12), and a new 1,800-seat sanctuary for Ebenezer Baptist Church (also photos 9-10), which enabled NPS to take over interpretation of the historic Ebenezer church under a ninety-nine-year lease arrangement. In addition, NPS purchased and rehabilitated over a dozen historic buildings, most located on the Birth-Home Block, and then leased them back to neighborhood residents. The construction of the parking facility, however, resulted in the demolition of several historic industrial buildings, including the Scripto Building at 423 Houston Street, site of a strike by black employees in December of 1964 in which Martin Luther King, Jr., participated.



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## 8. Statement of Significance

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**Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:**

nationally  statewide  locally

**Applicable National Register Criteria:**

A  B  C  D

**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):**  N/A

A  B  C  D  E  F  G

**Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):**

Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Social History  
Community Planning and Development  
Architecture

**Period of Significance:**

c.1853-1968.

**Significant Dates:**

1853 - Opening of Auburn Avenue (Wheat Street)  
1906 - Atlanta Race Riot  
1917 - Atlanta fire  
1929 - Birth of Martin Luther King, Jr.  
1964 - Strike at the Scripto Plant; Opening of Wheat Street Gardens I Housing Complex  
1968 - Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.  
1976 - Martin Luther King, Jr., Grave Site constructed.

**Significant Person(s):**

King, Martin Luther, Jr.

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

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**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

Agnew, A. P. -- builder  
Aiken and Faulkner -- builder  
Aiken and Parr -- builder  
Brown, A. Ten Eyck -- architect  
Burley, J. H. -- builder  
Carr, H. J. -- builder  
Joseph Cohen and Associates -- architect  
Mackle Crawford Mackle Construction Company -- builder  
Daley, Vincent -- architect  
Farmer, J. H. -- builder  
Foot, G. W. -- builder  
Green and Company -- architect  
Giffin and Harris -- builder  
Goodrich, G. A. -- builder  
Goosby, Thomas -- builder  
Griffin Construction Company -- builder  
Griffin and Harris -- builder  
Hamilton, Alexander D., Sr. -- builder  
Hamilton, Alexander D., Jr. -- builder  
Hanie, A. F. -- builder  
Hopson, Charles -- architect  
Howard, Ross -- architect  
Kalb, Louis C. -- builder  
Roane, W. H. -- builder  
Russell, H. J. -- builder  
Seiz, E. C. -- architect  
Service Company (R. E. Pharrow, Manager) -- builder  
Smith and Vanover -- architect  
Smithfield, E. O. -- builder  
Usher and Woods -- builder  
Whatley Construction Company -- builder  
Wilson, Joe -- builder

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#### **Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District as amended comprises the historic residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial development centered on Auburn Avenue east of the Interstate 75/85 corridor through downtown Atlanta. The district is significant under National Register Criteria A, B, and C in the areas of ethnic heritage: black, social history, community planning and development, and architecture. The historic resources in the amended areas bolster the significance of the historic district as a whole by documenting additional resources to support the themes of black ethnic heritage and architecture identified in the 1974 National Register nomination. The themes of social history and community planning and development have been added to the amended documentation.

In the area of ethnic heritage: black, the amended district is significant as a neighborhood that developed after the turn of the century into a thriving black community that became the most prominent African-American community in early 20th-century Atlanta. The district represents the struggles and achievements of working-class and middle-class blacks in a southern urban area during the first two-thirds of the 20th century. Several key leaders of Atlanta's black community resided in the district, including Martin Luther King, Jr., who was born and reared on Auburn Avenue before his family moved farther north on Boulevard. King later became the leading figure in the American Civil Rights Movement, returning to Atlanta from Alabama to help direct the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at its Auburn Avenue offices.

Many buildings in the district represent this area of significance. These include the Martin Luther King, Jr., Birth Home and numerous other houses in the vicinity of the King Home on Auburn Avenue that were occupied by influential blacks; residential areas north of Auburn Avenue that were also occupied by influential blacks, specifically the block of John Wesley Dobbs Avenue known as Bishop's Row and the block of Irwin Street between Hilliard Street and Jackson Street; several groupings of dwellings that are outstanding examples of house types typical of black neighborhoods in the south; the many black churches that exist throughout the district; commercial buildings along Auburn Avenue and Edgewood Avenue that taken as a group signify this as the predominant black commercial district during the early decades of the 20th century; and educational buildings such as the David T. Howard School that are representative of the importance of education to the Auburn Avenue community and of the fact that education was segregated for much of the historic period of the revised district.

In the area of social history, the amended district is significant for the efforts of many of its black residents to achieve racial equality. For most of the 20th century, the district was witness to voting rights demonstrations and efforts to increase black voter registration and participation in local, state, and national politics. Efforts were made in the historic district to increase the salaries of blacks to a level equal with that of whites. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference established its

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headquarters along Auburn Avenue in the late 1950s, and from that point the district was the base of operations for the American Civil Rights Movement. A key figure associated with the American Civil Rights Movement was Martin Luther King, Jr., who was born and reared in the district and returned in the 1960s in conjunction with his activities in support of Civil Rights.

Examples of buildings that represent this area of significance include Ebenezer Baptist Church and Wheat Street Baptist Church, where many activities of the American Civil Rights Movement were planned, Prince Hall Masonic Lodge, which was the headquarters for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Mount Zion Second Baptist Church, site of a rally during the Scripto strike of 1964.

In the area of community planning and development, the amended district is significant for the development of the Auburn Avenue community from the opening of Wheat Street in 1853 to the late 1960s and because it represents several periods and patterns of residential and community development characteristic of Atlanta's overall growth and development. Shortly after the Civil War, the Wheat Street area developed into a substantially integrated residential district. Transportation improvements, specifically development of the streetcar system in the 1870s and 1880s and the presence of the railroad to the south and east, contributed greatly to the growth of the Auburn Avenue community. Industrial development began to occur during this period, primarily along the eastern and southern edges of the community. Shortly after the turn of the century, racial tension in Atlanta increased and a major race riot took place in 1906. This had a direct influence on Auburn Avenue and the surrounding area, as many black-owned businesses relocated from downtown Atlanta to Auburn Avenue and the community began a shift from its status as a largely integrated area to a black district. Much of the residential development in the community occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century, and the area became the center of black life in Atlanta. Auburn Avenue was of particular importance because while it remained primarily residential east of Jackson Street, blocks to the west had become commercial and the area became known as "Sweet Auburn" west as far as Courtland Street.

By the 1930s, signs of decline were evident in the Auburn Avenue community. Gradual movement by blacks to Atlanta's west side during the 1920s increased in the 1930s and coincided with the beginnings of a shift to largely rental occupancy in the Auburn Avenue community and gradual deterioration of the housing stock. By the 1940s and 1950s, the majority of residential structures in the area were classified as substandard. Legalized segregation was an important factor in directing residential growth in Atlanta at this time, with the events in the west side Mozley Park community serving as a prime example. There, in 1949, whites who had kept the area segregated were outraged when a black minister purchased a house and moved in. Mayor Hartsfield agreed to create the Westside Mutual Development Committee to address the situation, and a compromise was reached in 1952. The black Empire Real Estate Board and the real estate committee of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce agreed that if whites conceded the Mozley Park residential section as well as a park and elementary school, blacks would not be sold houses south of Westview Drive. While the

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Auburn Avenue community did not experience anything quite along the lines of the Mozley Park confrontation, there was an effort made by the all-white Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) and city officials to remove the entire Auburn Avenue business district to the west side. It was the MPC's 1952 "Up Ahead" planning report that proposed such action intended to remove influential black business and community leaders from the city center.

These developments occurred at a time of increasing black activism locally and growth of the broader American Civil Rights Movement. Housing became a serious issue in Atlanta in the 1960s and racial tension increased. The return of Martin Luther King, Jr., to Atlanta heightened awareness of problems faced by blacks. Several new housing developments were built in the community during the 1960s, including the nationally significant Wheat Street Gardens I, II and III Apartment Complex. Wheat Street Gardens was initiated by Rev. William Holmes Borders of Wheat Street Baptist Church, who had become dismayed at the deterioration of the area's housing stock, the increase of housing demolition and the displacement of low-income families from the Auburn Avenue community. The undertaking involved a variety of agencies and organizations, including the Atlanta Urban League, the Atlanta Housing Authority, the Federal Housing Administration, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Citizens Trust Bank, Trust Company of Georgia, and the Atlanta Aldermanic Board. With HUD guaranteeing a forty-year loan for development, the three-phase apartment construction project began on December 21, 1961. Wheat Street Gardens I, the first phase, opened on April 19, 1964. It was the first major low- to moderate-income housing project in the United States that was sponsored by a nongovernmental organization. Wheat Street Gardens II and III opened in 1968. During the late 1970s and 1980s, however, housing conditions continued to decline and few new housing units were constructed in the area. Losses of historic buildings due to severe deterioration increased. From the mid-1980s to the present, however, increased efforts have been made to revitalize the Auburn Avenue community. Numerous buildings have been rehabilitated and sensitive new construction has occurred; recent emphasis has been placed on compatible new "infill" housing and small-scale "scattered-site" housing rather than the large complexes of the 1950s and 1960s. Buildings and landscape resources throughout the amended historic district reflect aspects of community planning and development.

In the area of architecture, the amended district is significant for its large, substantially intact collection of residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial buildings constructed from the 1880s through 1968. These structures represent the wide range of buildings constructed and utilized by the middle- and working-class residents, both black and white, of the Auburn Avenue community during the late-19th and 20th centuries. They also represent the architectural styles and building types that have been historically constructed in African-American neighborhoods in large southern cities such as Atlanta.

The residential buildings in the historic district range from large late-19th-century houses built along Auburn Avenue that were built by whites and later occupied by blacks to small- and medium-sized working-class houses found throughout much of the district. Early and mid-20th-century duplexes

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and larger apartment buildings and apartment complexes built during the 1950s and 1960s are also common. Most dwellings in the district date from the 1890 to 1930 and represent frame vernacular house types with limited stylistic ornamentation. Particularly common house types are the shotgun, double-shotgun, hall-parlor, gabled-wing cottage, and pyramid cottage. The most prominent architectural styles are the Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival styles.

The smaller dwellings within the historic district have close ties with other house types occupied during the immediate post-Civil War decades by black tenant farmers as well as freedmen in urban areas. The shotgun house, for example, is a type that was built for rental purposes as early as the 1870s and was common in rural areas, small towns, and larger cities. The more unusual double shotgun, which was almost always built in urban areas, is a duplex and a variation on the shotgun composed of two dwelling units each with a shotgun floor plan (one room wide, usually three rooms deep with doorways in line from front to back). Most other house types in the district are common throughout Georgia and are not primarily associated with the black population. The gabled-wing cottage, for example, is perhaps Georgia's most common late 19th-century house type and was built into the early 20th century.

A substantial number of historic multi-family modern apartment buildings exist in the district, most dating from the mid-1950s through 1968. These are brick-and-concrete buildings with little or no ornamentation that references past architectural styles. The Wheat Street Gardens I, built in 1964, and Wheat Street Gardens II and III, both built in 1968, are outstanding examples of this building type. These plain brick-and-concrete buildings have much in common with public housing designs of the late 1930s through the 1960s. The Antoine Graves High Rise apartment building, completed in 1965, is an outstanding example of modern architecture. It rises eight stories with massive concrete-slab balconies on each facade. The proportions and composition are akin to those of earlier modern multi-family apartment buildings, such as Le Corbusier's Unite d'Habitation at Marseille, built from 1947 to 1952.

Among the historic district's many churches, Wheat Street Baptist Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church are the largest religious institutions. Both are Gothic Revival-style buildings. The most recent historic church is Mount Zion Second Baptist Church. This modern church, completed in 1959, is a modern design with brick construction and concrete detailing the full height of the front facade, which is surmounted by a tall steeple above the front entrance.

Most commercial buildings in the historic district were built in the first decades of the 20th century and are characterized by restrained styling and storefronts with large display windows. Those along Edgewood Avenue include several with more substantial decorative treatments than the majority along Auburn Avenue. A number of early 20th-century buildings built in the Italianate style are particularly notable, but nearly all of the historic district's commercial buildings functioned as community businesses and are small in scale. Industrial buildings along and near Edgewood Avenue, such as the Atlanta Brush Company, J. K. Orr Shoe Factory, and Trio Laundry, represent

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white-owned industrial enterprises along Edgewood Avenue. These large buildings are not elaborate but exhibit detailed brickwork, such as corbeled cornices.

Black urban churches built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were very much like rural churches: plain, rectangular, frame buildings with few or no stylistic features. However, they were larger and more likely to have a tower centered over the entrance or, more common, twin towers. Built in stages, these urban churches often had basements (rather than galleries), which served as the sanctuary during construction. Sometimes new additions were built or galleries were added as the size of the congregation increased. Brick veneers were often applied in 1940s or later. Size, design, and building materials were not only indicators of the congregation's economic status but measures of the leadership's ability to organize and sustain fund raising.

### National Register Criteria

The amended Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its development as an important black community within the city of Atlanta. The amended district is eligible for National Register listing under Criterion B for its association with the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr., a leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. The amended district is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C for its large and substantially intact collection of historic residential, commercial, institutional, industrial buildings, and their associated landscapes, all constructed from c.1853 through 1968.

### Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

C. Ordinarily, a birthplace or grave of a historical figure is not eligible for listing in the National Register. However, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Birth Home and the Martin Luther King, Jr., grave site are eligible because they are integral parts of the historic district and relate directly to King's childhood development and his activities in the American Civil Rights Movement. Both sites were identified by Congress in the legislation that created the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site.

G. A property achieving significance within the past 50 years is not ordinarily eligible unless the property is of exceptional importance. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase meets the exceptional significance test through its direct associations with Martin Luther King, Jr., and the American Civil Rights Movement. This Criteria Consideration is discussed below under Period of Significance justification.

### Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins with the opening of Auburn Avenue c.1853. First named Wheat Street, Auburn Avenue was the first principal street laid in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood. (The Sweet Auburn and Auburn Avenue communities both take their names from this street.) The street is

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a planned feature that provided the impetus for the physical development of the neighborhood. It runs through the center of the community and retains a high level of historic integrity. The period of significance ends with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death in 1968.

During this period the historic district developed from a racially mixed neighborhood to a predominantly African-American neighborhood where blacks achieved a level of social and economic independence that was unique in the South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District is significant in many areas but is most significant because of its association with ethnic black history, the American Civil Rights Movement, and the life and work of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The period of significance extends to 1968 for all areas of the historic district because in the 1960s the Auburn Avenue neighborhood provided King with support as he co-pastored at Ebenezer Baptist Church and directed many of the activities of the American Civil Rights Movement. King even participated in a labor strike at the Scripto plant on Houston Street in 1964.

The most common resources built in the historic district in the 1960s are apartment building complexes. These are significant under the themes of community planning and development because they demonstrate changing patterns of settlement and habitation and the theme of architecture because they represent new trends in housing and modern architecture as they first appeared in this African-American neighborhood. Moreover, the modern apartment complexes are significant because they represent the setting (historic environment) of the neighborhood during the period that King was leading the Civil Rights Movement until his death in 1968.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., grave site, although constructed in 1976, is considered contributing to the significance to the historic district because of King's outstanding historical importance. The grave site is identified as historically significant in the Congressional legislation that created the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site in 1980.

### **Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)**

Contributing resources in this district are those constructed between c.1853 and 1968 that retain all or most aspects of historic integrity and are associated with a historic theme for which the historic district is significant. Noncontributing resources are those constructed after 1968 and those that no longer add to the historic district's sense of time and place and historical development because of additions, alterations, or destruction after 1968.



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#### **Developmental history/historic context**

##### Historic Contexts

The following four historic contexts have been developed for this National Register Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation:

- A. The Development of the Auburn Avenue Community in Atlanta, Georgia, c.1853-1968.
- B. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Neighborhood, 1929-1968.
- C. The American Civil Rights Movement and Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Community, 1945-1968.
- D. Architectural and Landscape Resources in Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Community, c.1853-1968.

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#### **A. The Development of the Auburn Avenue Community in Atlanta, Georgia, c.1853-1968.**

##### Introduction

The Auburn Avenue community has long been regarded as Atlanta's predominant black neighborhood, an area that has produced some of the city's most outstanding black individuals and institutions throughout Atlanta's history. The community also reflects many of the problems blacks in Atlanta have faced for nearly a century and a half, most the result of white efforts to limit their participation in public affairs and place restrictions on the areas of the city in which they could reside. As the environment in which Martin Luther King, Jr., grew up and later worked, the Auburn Avenue community played an important role in shaping King's views on racial equality. Not only did the Auburn Avenue community influence King's childhood and development as a young man, but King in turn motivated many in the community to work to change unjust social policies and improve many of the basic aspects of their lives.

The amended Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District embodies the historical and architectural significance of the Auburn Avenue community through the full range and extent of its surviving physical features and characteristics. Historic resources survive from all periods of the community's history and thus convey the full range of key historical aspects of the Auburn Avenue community as it grew and developed through 1968.

##### Antebellum Period to 1877

Incorporated in 1847, Atlanta never had an opportunity to establish the sort of racial composition that was common among other southern cities prior to the Civil War. This was due in part to the fact that Atlanta was such a young city, and was therefore relatively small. When the Civil War began in 1860 Atlanta had a population of 9,554, and only 20.3 percent of this total was black. In sharp contrast to antebellum Atlanta was Charleston, South Carolina, where between 1820 and 1850 blacks outnumbered whites and lived in all sections of the city. Furthermore, the physical destruction of much of Atlanta that occurred during the war required substantial rebuilding, and this in turn resulted in an almost complete reorganization of residential patterns in the decades that immediately followed.

##### *Reconstruction-Era Growth and Settlement in Atlanta*

Atlanta's population grew quickly during Reconstruction, and several distinctly black enclaves developed. However, the city again differed from the southern norm in terms of black and white settlement patterns. Soon after the war's end, scores of unemployed black and white men flocked to Atlanta in search of jobs, and many found work with the railroads. Other blacks, women as well as men, were employed as domestic servants. The black population reached 12,214 by 1870 and represented 45.6 percent of the city's total. But unlike most urban areas, whether southern or

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northern, Atlanta's black neighborhoods took hold primarily on the city's periphery. This was due to the post-war rebuilding that took place in the city center, which served to push the newly freed blacks outward, toward what were then the city limits. Given the increasing construction costs and high prices of land near downtown, many blacks had only the option of choosing between undesirable, low-lying urban "hollows" or newly settled areas further from downtown. There was, however, more integration of black and white residents in Atlanta than was generally common in the South, but this pattern began to diminish as early as the 1870s.

One of most impoverished of the early black districts became known as "Buttermilk Bottom," located in a valley just below the desirable Peachtree Street ridge. It was Atlanta's best example of what might be considered a typical late-19th-century black slum. Less typical for the South, however, were several prominent black communities established further from downtown during the 1870s and 1880s, some within the city limits and some beyond. Most were working-class areas, such as Reynoldstown to the east, Thomasville to the southeast, Summerhill to the south, Pittsburgh to the southwest, and Tanyard Bottom to the northwest. To the west also grew a more mixed-class neighborhood, known originally as Jennings town, that developed in the vicinity of Atlanta University (founded 1865) and Spelman College (founded 1881). And to the east, in the area around Auburn Avenue, rose Atlanta's most prosperous black community.

#### *The Political Scene*

Blacks in Atlanta were able to vote and hold public office for the first time in 1868, when the entire South was under military control and Reconstruction was being directed by the United States Congress. That same year also marked the first attempts by white Atlantans to limit the black vote as well as the degree to which blacks could participate in public affairs. The Democratic-controlled Atlanta city council was able to pass an ordinance imposing a poll tax in 1868 and also passed a law that changed the manner in which councilmen were elected. The ward-based system was replaced by an at-large system, which effectively eliminated the opportunity for blacks to be elected from wards in which they represented the majority. Republicans gained control of the Georgia legislature in 1870 and promptly struck down both Atlanta's poll tax and at-large voting system, and that same year two blacks were elected to the city council. The following year, however, Democrats took back control of the legislature and reinstated at-large voting. It was not until 1953 that another black held city office. Also in the early 1870s, the city's Democrats first instituted the white primary, excluding blacks from participating in this preliminary selection process. This method of limiting black political power was to be used consistently from the 1890s to the 1940s.

#### *Origins of the Auburn Avenue Community*

Auburn Avenue, originally named Wheat Street, honored early white Atlanta merchant Augustus M. Wheat. The street was opened in 1853 in Atlanta's Fourth Ward, northeast and east of downtown. Now commonly referred to as the "Old Fourth Ward," this large area originally extended from Decatur

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Avenue and the Georgia Railroad on the south as far north as Ponce de Leon Avenue and from Peachtree Street on the west as far east as the Southern Railroad. During the years immediately following the Civil War, Wheat Street was largely residential and home to blacks and whites in nearly equal numbers. Virtually all of the black-owned businesses that existed in the late 1860s and 1870s, however, were located in downtown as well as along Decatur Street. Wheat Street thus began as an almost exclusively residential thoroughfare. Also opened as early as 1853 was Yonge Street (now called William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive), which appears on Edward A. Vincent's "Old Map of Atlanta" produced that year. Vincent's map depicts an unnamed street to the west of Yonge, and this is probably Hilliard. The presence of these streets suggests that there was at least some development in the area well prior to the Civil War. Wheat Street was officially renamed by the Atlanta City Council in April of 1893, at the request of white residents who did not want their street confused with the less desirable Old Wheat Street and thought Auburn Avenue sounded more stylish.

From its beginnings, the Auburn Avenue community was distinct on several counts. For one, it was substantially integrated, much more so than most other residential areas in Atlanta, with blacks and whites in many cases living next to each other along the same street. By the 1890s, when most of Atlanta was quite segregated, the Auburn Avenue community remained integrated and included several streets that were evenly divided between black and white residents. Furthermore, this area was quite close to downtown at a time when most blacks lived either in low-lying slums or in newly settled peripheral communities.

#### The Post-Reconstruction Period to 1906

The end of Reconstruction in 1877 marked the beginning of several decades of change and inconsistency in racial relations throughout the South, particularly in Atlanta. Political participation by blacks varied considerably from place to place during this period as did the level of racial mixing in common areas, on public transportation, and in work places. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, prohibited the denial of the franchise "by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Nevertheless, beginning around 1880, southern governments increased efforts to disenfranchise blacks by means of devices such as all-white primaries, literacy tests, poll taxes, and complicated voting procedures. Many of these measures also served to limit the franchise of less affluent whites, despite mitigating efforts such as grandfather clauses (which exempted from literacy requirements those individuals whose ancestors had voted prior to emancipation). By 1900, nearly all southern states had enacted suffrage and segregation legislation, the so-called "Jim Crow" laws, that prevented most blacks from voting and greatly limited their residential mobility.

The Republican Party in Atlanta went through a period of decline in the 1870s, to the extent that during the 1880s, nomination in a Democratic primary usually assured victory in the general election. Black votes were occasionally sought, however, in close contests. The rise of the Populist Party in the 1890s led to increased competition for southern black votes, and in the Georgia elections of

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1892, 1894, and 1896, Populist and Democratic candidates vied for urban and rural black votes. These elections led to a resumption of efforts to effectively disenfranchise blacks; efforts that met with success in 1908 with an amendment to the state constitution that was ratified by referendum.

In the South during the late 19th century, whites increased efforts to codify the practice of racial segregation. The United States Supreme Court in 1883 declared the enabling clauses of the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional. The 1875 Act had prohibited segregation on steamboats and railroad cars and in hotels, theaters, and other places of entertainment, but the Supreme Court's action nullified its effectiveness. The Court went further in 1890, upholding a Mississippi law mandating "separate but equal" accommodations for black and white railroad passengers, and in 1896, the Supreme Court sanctioned the same principle of racial segregation in education through the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. These actions opened the way for individual Southern states to enact numerous segregation or "Jim Crow" statutes limiting black and white contact in most public places.

The period between 1880 and 1910 was one of tremendous growth in Atlanta, and the overall population grew to more than 154,000. During this time, the city's black population increased from 16,300 in 1880 to 51,602 in 1910. As a result, land and housing near downtown were in ever shorter supply for whites as well as blacks. The city expand its municipal boundaries in a series of annexations. Increasingly crowded conditions may well have contributed to rapidly deteriorating race relations during this period.

The post-Reconstruction period was also one of considerable growth in the area that was to become the Auburn Avenue community. In the late 1870s, nearly all of the land along Wheat Street between Jackson and Howell (then called Howland) streets was within the large land holdings of John Lynch. In 1880, Lynch began dividing this land and selling lots. The sizeable area between Boulevard (then named Jefferson Street) on the west and Randolph Street on the east and between Wheat Street on the south and Houston Street on the north was already substantially subdivided by the late 1870s and contained several dozen houses.

#### *Transportation and the Growth of the Auburn Avenue Community*

Transportation changes and improvements played an enormously vital role in Atlanta's late-19th-century development, and the Auburn Avenue community was certainly affected by the dynamics of transportation. Atlanta began development of a streetcar system in the 1870s, and in 1884 the Gate City Street Railroad Company constructed a horse car line which traveled from the central business district along Pryor Street to Wheat Street, east along Wheat to Jackson Street, then north on Jackson. This streetcar line provided direct access to downtown Atlanta and spurred residential development along Wheat Street. Two years later, the Atlanta and Edgewood Street Railroad Company was chartered. Several of Atlanta's most significant leaders were involved in this venture including Joel Hurt, Asa Candler, and W. P. Inman. It was Hurt's idea to construct a streetcar line

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from the present intersection of Edgewood Avenue and Pryor Street east to what later became Inman Park. Edgewood Avenue did not exist in 1886 and there was no continuous thoroughfare along its future route. The road was opened by September of 1888, and the new line was opened on August 22, 1889. The Edgewood Street Railroad Company initiated the electric trolley car era in Atlanta and contributed significantly to the growth of Inman Park and adjacent areas. It also provided easy access to downtown for those in the Auburn Avenue community living along Edgewood Avenue.

Atlanta's second electric streetcar line was soon put into service by the Fulton County Railroad Company and became known as "Nine Mile Circle." The route was as follows: beginning at Broad and Marietta Streets; northeast along Broad to Peachtree and to Houston Street, east on Houston and to Highland Avenue, counter-clockwise on Highland east and then north (crossing Ponce de Leon) to Virginia Avenue, west on Virginia to Boulevard and south on Boulevard back to Highland and Houston and back to the point of beginning. This line provided yet more traffic through the Auburn Avenue community and another means of travel between the community and downtown.

#### *Development Patterns: 1880s and 1890s*

By 1880, the Auburn Avenue community had become a truly mixed area, comprising nearly equal numbers of blacks and whites. Working-class residents lived in close proximity to people of considerable means. While most blacks were working class, there was a black middle class composed of proprietors of groceries, meat markets, restaurants, wood yards, and other businesses. Professional blacks were primarily teachers, ministers, doctors, dentists, and lawyers. Auburn Avenue was perhaps the most integrated street in Atlanta at this time, and nearly all side streets in the Auburn Avenue community were occupied by blacks and whites either living next door to one another or in clusters.

An examination of Atlanta city directories from the 1880s and 1890s reveals that the Auburn Avenue community was closer to integrated than almost any other southern community at the end of the 19th century.

*Hilliard Street*, one of the oldest streets in the neighborhood, in 1883 consisted of fifty residential buildings (two of which were vacant). The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was thirty-three to fifteen (or sixty-nine percent black). It is worth noting, however, that there were three cases of a white primary resident having black renters living at the "rear" of the house. (It is not known whether these would have been auxiliary dwellings or simply rooms in the main house.) In 1892, Hilliard consisted of eighty residential buildings (and there were no vacancies, although one dwelling was listed as "unfinished"). The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was forty-seven to thirty-two (or nearly sixty percent black). Thus, during the 1880s, Hilliard Street actually shifted from being more than two-thirds black to a nearly even distribution of black and white residents. The street in 1892 was all white from Decatur north to Schofield (no longer existing, approximately one block south of present-day Tanner Street) then

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nearly all black to Houston, after which it was all white once again to Cain Street (only a small portion of which still remains, because much of this street was destroyed during construction of Freedom Parkway).

*Yonge Street*, (now called William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive) was opened at least by 1853 and in 1883 consisted of thirty-four residential buildings (three of which were vacant). The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was ten to twenty-one (or thirty-two percent black). In 1892, Yonge consisted of forty-one residential buildings residences (three of which were vacant). The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was thirteen to twenty-five (or thirty-four percent black). Thus, during the 1880s Yonge Street remained nearly constant at roughly one-third black and two-thirds white. The street in 1892 was all white from Decatur to Pitman's Alley then mixed to Gartrell. Between Gartrell and Edgewood the street was all white, but north of Edgewood to its ending at Wheat Street it was all black with the exception of a single white resident.

*Howell Street* between Decatur and Wheat in 1885 consisted of forty-six residential buildings (four of which were vacant). The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was eighteen to twenty-four (or forty-three percent black). The distribution of blacks and whites consisted of several groupings of three to five black-occupied dwellings followed by three to five white-occupied dwellings, although there were sections of the street that alternated black and white occupants nearly every-other dwelling. In this sense, Howell Street between Decatur and Wheat appears to have been one of the most completely integrated sections of the Auburn Avenue community in the 1880s.

Daniel and Cornelia streets each extend only between Decatur Street north to Edgewood Avenue (which did not exist as a continuous thoroughfare until its creation in 1888). These two streets underwent a shift from primarily black in the early 1880s to substantially white by the early 1890s. This may have been due to the opening in 1881 of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill, located on the south side of the Georgia Railroad line. The residential area that eventually developed around the mill, known as Cabbagetown, was constructed in a piecemeal fashion. As an urban mill operation, Fulton Bag was not entirely dependent upon housing in the immediate vicinity, since during the 1880s and 1890s many mill employees walked to work from several neighborhoods just east of downtown Atlanta.

*Daniel Street* in 1885 consisted of ten residential buildings. The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was eight to two (or eighty percent black). In 1892, Daniel Street consisted of fifteen residential buildings. The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was six to nine (or forty percent black).

*Cornelia Street* in 1885 consisted of seven residential buildings. The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was three to four (or forty-three percent black). In 1892

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Cornelia Street consisted of twelve residential buildings. The ratio of black-occupied residences to white-occupied residences was three to nine (or twenty-five percent black).

The 1892 map entitled "Bird's Eye View of Atlanta, Georgia" provides substantial information about the extent and type of development in the Auburn Avenue community. With the exception of just a few areas, the entire community is well established. Clearly visible along Edgewood Avenue are the tracks of the Edgewood Street Railroad Company. In addition, the tracks of the Fulton County Railroad Company's "Nine Mile Circle" route may be seen running down the middle of Houston Street, Boulevard, and Highland Avenue. Residences are situated throughout the area and some appear quite substantial, particularly some along Wheat Street, Edgewood Avenue, and Houston Street between Hilliard and Jackson. (This particular block of Houston was occupied entirely by whites until 1910 at which time it began transition to a black-occupied area. By 1916, the block of Houston between Hilliard and Jackson was one hundred percent black.) Most of the streets south of Edgewood are lined by smaller dwellings. The western half of the block bounded by Houston, Howell, Irwin, and Boulevard contains three substantial educational buildings. The pair to the north are Gaines Hall and Grant Hall of Morris Brown College, while Boulevard Public School fronts Irwin Street. At the northeast corner of Wheat and Fort streets may be seen Wheat Street Baptist Church.

Industrial buildings and complexes are also clearly visible on the Bird's-Eye map. At the northeast corner of the intersection of Fort and Decatur streets is the Trowbridge Furniture Company plant. This facility undoubtedly employed many residents in the area. The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill, established in 1881, is located directly east of Oakland Cemetery and south of Decatur Street and the railroad, opposite from Bradley and Cornelia streets. A major employer, Fulton Bag was the center of what became known as the Cabbagetown mill village, but many working-class whites living in the Auburn Avenue community worked there as well. Along the tracks of the former Richmond and Danville Railroad company, at the eastern boundary of the community, may be seen the Richmond and Danville Railroad Car Shops. This was another major employer for many residents of the Auburn Avenue community in the 1890s.

The most important building contractor in the Auburn Avenue community during the 1890s was Alexander Hamilton. He and his son, Alexander Hamilton, Jr., established themselves under the motto "We Build Good Homes," and they constructed not only residences but also buildings at Clark, Morehouse, and Morris Brown colleges as well as the Butler Street YMCA. Most of the dwellings Hamilton built in the Auburn Avenue community during the 1890s were for white clients, as few blacks had the financial means to build a house. Alexander Hamilton Jr.'s own residence, built c.1895, is located at 102 Howell Street.

#### *Late-19th-Century Educational Developments*

In addition to its expansion as a residential district, the Auburn Avenue community was the site of new educational buildings during the 1880s and 1890s. In 1880, Morris Brown College was founded



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by the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Georgia. The following year, land was purchased at the northeast corner of Boulevard and Houston Street, and in 1884 the first building was constructed. During the first decade of its existence, Morris Brown College offered only high school courses, but in 1894 a liberal arts college was organized.

In 1888, the city of Atlanta opened the Boulevard Grammar School (also known as the Boulevard Public School) for white students. It was located at the northeast corner of Boulevard and Irwin Street. Boulevard Public School continued as a city school until 1922 and closed because the neighborhood it served had become mostly black-occupied. The property was purchased by Morris Brown College, which utilized the building until the institution relocated to its present site adjacent to the Atlanta University complex west of downtown.

#### *Auburn Avenue at the Turn of the Century*

By the turn of the century, Auburn Avenue had become well established and was known as "The Avenue" among most blacks. It was the preferred place of residence for black Atlantans and, according to Auburn Avenue barber Dan Stephens, "Auburn really was a black man's pride and joy."<sup>2</sup> Auburn Avenue was still almost entirely residential east of Fort Street at this time with the commercial district to the west.

The block along Auburn Avenue between Hilliard and Yonge streets was home to three of Atlanta's first black members of the medical profession, two physicians and dentist J. R. Porter. Between Jackson and Boulevard was a section known at the turn of the century as "Negro Peachtree." This was because houses along this particular block were modeled after a row of houses along Peachtree Street north of Ellis Street.

Kathleen Adams, a black woman born on Auburn Avenue in 1890, recalled the street at the turn of the century:

The first people who went in there on Auburn Avenue were those little boys that had been, let's say, eight to ten years old when they came out of slavery, and naturally they had dreams and they wanted everything to be just like they had seen other people have. They were all trained by American missionaries. They had all the accouterments of any other race. Even to their dress, they were formal. Whatever they did was on the formal side. Their stores were kept meticulously. Their businesses were monitored

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<sup>2</sup>Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joy and E. Barnard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 39.

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and run according to sound business principles. They had a certain pride and dignity as they stood in their store doors or they walked the streets.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Churches and Social Support Organizations*

During the post-Reconstruction period, blacks in Atlanta, particularly within the Auburn Avenue community, established various institutions such as churches, fraternal societies, and social support organizations. These institutions addressed problems such as housing, education, and orphaned children without the assistance of public funds. Several area black churches, which would grow in importance and play major roles during the most difficult periods of the Civil Rights era, had their origins soon after the Civil War. By the turn of the century, they were well-established institutions within the community.

Big Bethel AME Church was founded in 1865 and has been one of the major forces in the development of the black community along Auburn Avenue as well as throughout Atlanta. It was at Big Bethel, for example, that the city's first school for black children opened shortly after the end of the Civil War. Big Bethel is located in the Sweet Auburn National Historic Landmark district.

Wheat Street Baptist Church was founded as Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in 1869, an outgrowth of the Friendship Baptist Church mission (then located near the intersection of Hunter and Haynes streets, just west of downtown). Mt. Pleasant was briefly located on Howell Street midway between Wheat and Irwin streets and then moved to Fort Street. In the 1880s, the church moved to the intersection of Old Wheat and Fort streets, but when the church building was destroyed in the disastrous 1917 fire, the church relocated to the northeast corner of Auburn Avenue and Yonge Street. Wheat Street Baptist Church has played a profound role in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood and beyond. For example, the Butler Street YMCA was founded by the Wheat Street church in 1894. Rev. William Holmes Borders, pastor of the church from 1937 to 1989, was a key figure during the Civil Rights era in Atlanta. He led the effort to desegregate buses in Atlanta and worked to develop the Wheat Street Gardens and Wheat Street Towers housing complexes.

Ebenezer Baptist Church was founded in 1886 on Airline Street. It relocated to McGruder Street in the mid 1890s and then moved to the corner of Bell and Gilmore streets in 1898. Ebenezer's strong growth at the end of the 19th century is credited to the leadership of Rev. Alfred Daniel (A. D.) Williams. In 1922, the congregation moved into its present church at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street. Rev. Williams died in 1931, and his son-in-law, Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., who had served as assistant pastor since 1927, assumed the full pastorate. His elder son, Martin Luther King, Jr., grew up as an active member of Ebenezer Baptist Church and was deeply influenced by the church and the Auburn Avenue community.

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<sup>3</sup>Kuhn et al., 55.

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#### *Increasing Racial Tensions*

In addition to the changes and advances in city-wide transportation and black education and commerce, Atlanta's race relations became more strained at the turn of the century. Neighborhoods during this time began to polarize along racial lines. Decatur Street and the Georgia Railroad line served as a racial dividing line between predominantly black areas to the north and white to the south. The Auburn Avenue community became increasingly black during this period and the Cabbagetown neighborhood south of the Georgia Railroad remained decidedly white. In 1881, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill was established on the south side of the Georgia Railroad at the site of the abandoned Atlanta Rolling Mill, which had produced iron plates for the Confederate forces during the Civil War. The operation grew gradually with additional buildings added in 1895 and 1902 and again following a 1905 fire. Blacks in the Auburn Avenue community and elsewhere in Atlanta understood that Cabbagetown was a place to avoid. "You couldn't go on Kelly Street," recalled one black resident of Summerhill. "Kelly Street was out-of-bounds. Whites lived over there. . . . If you were colored, you knew not to go over there and try to move in."<sup>4</sup>

#### *Atlanta Race Riot of 1906*

In September 1906, a race riot occurred in Atlanta that may have claimed as many as 100 lives. (Immediately after the riot, the death toll was placed at ten or twelve, but most modern estimates are much higher.) The riot was precipitated that summer by a heated gubernatorial campaign that included Atlantans Clark Howell and Hoke Smith, both of whom appealed to anti-black sentiment. Smith's reform platform advocated a constitutional amendment to disenfranchise blacks while Howell claimed that the white primary was an adequate safeguard against black votes. Well-known Georgia political figure Tom Watson, a former United States congressman and a presidential candidate two years earlier, played a key role in the campaign. Watson actively supported Hoke Smith, particularly his stand for black disenfranchisement, and the August election resulted in a landslide victory for Smith.

The Atlanta press had for nearly a year preceding the 1906 riot given considerable and increasingly sensationalized coverage to a series of alleged assaults upon white women by black men. White newspapers had also been giving coverage to what they termed deteriorating conditions along Decatur Street, the most notorious thoroughfare in Atlanta at the time. It was argued that black restaurants and saloons were the primary contributors to these problems and that downtown Atlanta would be vastly improved by shutting them down. In fact, Decatur Street had gained its reputation as the city's vice district before black establishments even existed in the area, and there were more white-owned saloons on Decatur Street than there were black-owned establishments. The *Atlanta*

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<sup>4</sup>Kuhn, et al., 36-37.

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*Journal* published an editorial in August 1906 which spoke of blacks growing “more bumptious on the street” and possessing “the instinct of the barbarian to destroy what he cannot attain to.” The editorial concluded by encouraging whites to “stand together with deep resolve that political power shall never give the Negro encouragement in his foul dreams of a mixture of the races.”<sup>5</sup>

Violence broke out on Saturday, September 22, 1906. A large group of young white men began the bloodshed by attacking a black bicycle messenger near the corner of Decatur and Pryor streets. The young black was rescued by police, but the white gang soon became a mob of about 2,000 men. Soon, several blacks riding trolley cars were attacked. The violence spread and worsened as blacks were assaulted with bricks and gunfire, and their bodies subsequently dumped in an alley adjacent to the Georgia Railroad. Atlanta police took action to stop the mayhem and were soon assisted by the fire department, although some contended that the police made less than a serious effort to control the situation and there were even reports of police joining the rioters in their violent attacks. At one point, Mayor Woodward stood atop a box at the intersection of Decatur and Pryor streets and begged for the violence to halt, but the bloody attacks continued. Black-owned businesses in the downtown area such as barber shops, pool rooms, and saloons were targeted by the mob. The riot continued for four days and eventually the state militia was called to assist in bringing the situation under control.

The 1906 race riot occurred mostly outside the Auburn Avenue community, although black residents and business owners feared for their lives during the several days of violence. John Wesley Dobbs later recalled the night he waited at 446 Auburn Avenue, where he and his wife Irene lived with Irene’s brother and sister-in-law, Ed and Carolyn Wright. A white mob approached from downtown, and Dobbs watched in fear as they neared the house and then turned north on Boulevard.<sup>6</sup>

#### The Auburn Avenue Neighborhood as the Center of Black Atlanta, c.1906-1940

In the years immediately following the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, nearly all black-owned businesses left downtown. Whereas these establishments had formerly catered to a mixed clientele, after 1906 most black businesses served only blacks.<sup>7</sup> Many of the businesses that left downtown relocated to Auburn Avenue, primarily between Courtland and Jackson streets, and the Auburn Avenue community’s growing black residential population provided a customer base for these establishments. Some blacks, however, continued to work downtown in white-owned businesses. During this period, blacks focused inward on Atlanta’s black communities.

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<sup>5</sup>Garrett, 500.

<sup>6</sup>Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: The Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 76.

<sup>7</sup>Kuhn, 95.

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#### *Tactics of Segregation*

In the two decades after the race riot, white Atlantans made efforts to legally prevent blacks from moving into white neighborhoods. Segregation ordinances were passed in 1913 and 1916, and after the United States Supreme Court declared segregation ordinances unconstitutional in 1917, the tactic of citywide comprehensive zoning was employed as a means of separating the races. Atlanta's 1922 zoning designations were not termed in the manner of a segregation ordinance but instead were organized according to land uses, building types, and tenant categories. White leaders believed that such a treatment would be a way to legally get around the 1917 ruling. Racial zoning designations were considered to be property usage classifications and thus within the city's authority.

The intent behind the designations was to retain control of black migration and establish "buffers" between black and white areas. These aspects of the 1922 zoning ordinance were declared unconstitutional in 1924, but other forms of racial zoning were employed. A 1929 law, for example, forbid persons the right to move into a building on a street containing a majority of residences "occupied by those with whom said person is forbidden to intermarry."<sup>8</sup> These sorts of laws were all struck down by the courts, but Atlanta's white leaders continued to view certain areas as only being appropriate for black development and certain other areas as only being appropriate for white development. Transportation planning was also utilized in an effort to direct residency patterns based on race.

#### *Early 20th-Century Development Along Auburn Avenue*

Between the 1906 race riot and the Depression of the 1930s, the Auburn Avenue community occupied the unrivaled position as the center of Atlanta black life. It was early in this period that John Wesley Dobbs labeled the area "Sweet Auburn," a reference to the fact that black achievement was so readily visible there. Auburn Avenue and vicinity contained influential black businesses, churches, and a diverse black residential population. Commercial establishments remained concentrated west of Jackson Street while residential neighborhoods developed to the east, north, and south. The number of black-operated businesses on Auburn Avenue increased from ten in 1900 to sixty-four in 1909 to seventy-two in 1920. An increasing number of black professionals (physicians, dentists, and pharmacists) were present along Auburn Avenue by the 1910s.<sup>9</sup> The east end of Auburn Avenue remained residential and was a preferred location for prominent blacks as was Houston Street a few blocks to the north. A single block of Houston became known as "Bishop's Row" because it was

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<sup>8</sup>Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 55.

<sup>9</sup>Andrew M. Ambrose, "Redrawing the Color Line: The History and Patterns of Black Housing in Atlanta, 1940-1973" Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1992), 72-73.

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home to several African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) bishops and other black leaders. Bishop Joseph S. Flipper, ordained into the ministry in 1880, lived at 541 Houston Street and became a bishop in 1908. Bishop Flipper was also dean of the theological department and later president of Morris Brown College. His brother, Henry Ossian Flipper, was the first black cadet to graduate from West Point Military Academy and lived at 550 Houston Street. Bishop William Alfred Fountain, who resided at 564 Houston Street, was ordained as an A.M.E. minister in 1894 and elected bishop in 1920. He too served as president of Morris Brown College from 1911 until 1920.

Several black businessmen and leaders were especially prominent in Atlanta and along Auburn Avenue during this period, among them Alonzo Herndon, Heman E. Perry, C. A. Scott, and John Wesley Dobbs. Herndon began his career as a barber for white clients in downtown Atlanta. In 1905, he founded the Atlanta Mutual Insurance Association, which eventually became known as the Atlanta Life Insurance Company and grew to become a leading success story in Atlanta business circles. Herndon was Atlanta's first black millionaire. Perry founded the Standard Life Insurance Company in 1909, and by 1921, it had grown into the largest black insurance company in the United States. From the success of this venture, Perry was able to branch out and establish a holding company known as the Service Company. It began several enterprises such as Citizens Trust Company Bank, the Service Realty and Development Company, the Service Laundries, Service Pharmacies. Perry's Service Realty Company was responsible for building an early black subdivision on Atlanta's west side and also sold the tract of land on which Booker T. Washington High School, the city's first public high school for blacks, was built in 1923. C. A. Scott was publisher of the *Daily World*, Atlanta's leading black newspaper during this period. Dobbs, credited with naming Auburn Avenue, "Sweet Auburn" was one of the first black officials of the Republican Party in Georgia and Master of the Prince Hall Masons.

#### *Community Development by 1911*

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps prepared in 1911 provide considerable information about the extent and types of development in the Auburn Avenue community by that year. Virtually all of the Auburn Avenue community was built out by this time. Industrial properties existed along the Southern Railway at the eastern edge of the community, and Decatur Street to the south was primarily commercial with a few industrial facilities on Decatur toward downtown. Edgewood Avenue consisted of commercial establishments its entire length except for a few blocks at the east end of the community that also included some residential development. Auburn Avenue was still primarily residential west to Fort Street, although by 1911 there were several commercial establishments clustered in the block between Hilliard and Fort streets and also scattered further east along the avenue.

Along the west side of the tracks of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, which in 1894, was absorbed by the Southern Railway Company, the Atlantic Compress Company was established after the turn of the century. In 1905, the Atlantic Compress Company constructed a large cotton

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warehouse and platform. Three cotton compresses were located on the platform where cotton was compressed, graded, and stored until it was delivered to cotton mills. In addition, a brick-and-concrete water tower was built on the south side of Irwin Street not far from the cotton platform. From the early 1920s until 1944, the cotton compress facility was operated by the Southeastern Compress and Warehouse Company. Southeastern operated eighteen warehouses and sixteen compresses during this period and could store 750,000 bales of cotton at one time. The company, headed by William H. Glenn and Asa Candler, and was considered the most significant cotton storage company in the southeast. Workers were drawn from the Auburn Avenue community as well as other nearby neighborhoods. The platform was destroyed by fire in 1991, but the warehouse remains.

The Phoenix Planing Mill and the Atlantic Milling Company were located further north along the west side of the Southern Railroad and south of Highland Avenue. The Phoenix Planing Mill specialized in the construction of cabinets and doors and by 1911, consisted of a large main building as well as two sizeable lumber sheds, a sash and door warehouse, and a box warehouse. Two sidings of the Southern Railroad entered the Phoenix facility. The Atlanta Milling Company produced processed grains and flour. A large building with a grain warehouse was located south of the Phoenix Planing Mill. Another railroad siding provided transportation access to the Atlanta Milling Company facility. Again, workers for these companies lived in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood.

On May 21, 1917, a major fire destroyed a significant portion of Atlanta's fourth ward including some properties within the Auburn Avenue community. The fire started in a storage building on the north side of Decatur Street between Fort and Hilliard streets (now the site of the Grady Homes public housing complex). The fire quickly spread to the north and northeast through a large portion of the Auburn Avenue community's residential section but missed the heart of the Auburn Avenue commercial area. In a report the following day, the *Atlanta Journal* described the damage:

Between Edgewood Avenue and Houston Street there is a section occupied almost exclusively by Negroes, many small dwellings packed close like rabbit hives, groceries, soda stands and the like. The fire burned through them faster than a man can walk. It swept away from Auburn Avenue on the city side, thus missing the big Negro office building there and other Negro buildings comprising the colored business section. . . . After wiping out the Negro section from Auburn Avenue to Old Wheat Street, it was hoped that the broad circus grounds, between Old Wheat and Irwin streets, would serve as a check. The fire roared over them as if they had not been there. In the next block, on the east side of North Boulevard, are Boulevard School and Morris Brown University, a Negro institution. The fire missed them, raging along on the other side and on North Jackson Street.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Garrett, vol. II, 701-702.

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The fire destroyed a total of 1,938 Atlanta houses, and 10,000 people, most of them black, were left homeless. Only one life was lost as a result of the fire.

Shortly after the 1917 fire, city officials devised a redevelopment plan that proposed Atlanta's first use of roads for the purpose of segregation. A 150-foot-wide parkway (the "Grand Boulevard") was intended to run along Hilliard Street from Houston Street up to North Avenue and would have been a racial dividing line. Areas south of Houston and east of the parkway were designated for blacks while areas north of Houston and west of the parkway were designated for whites. Although this plan was never implemented, it may indicate that white leaders believed other forms of segregation could achieve the desired results regardless of the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court had already declared such tactics to be unconstitutional.<sup>11</sup>

Many new homes were built in the Auburn Avenue community after the 1917 fire. The entire block of Irwin Street between Hilliard, and Jackson streets had been destroyed during the fire, and it was soon rebuilt by blacks. Several of the new residences were constructed by Alexander D. Hamilton and Son, the best-known black contracting firm in Atlanta during this period.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, additional employment centers were established primarily along Houston Street including laundries, and in 1931, the Scripto pencil factory. These establishments provided working-class jobs while middle-class professionals operated retail businesses along Auburn Avenue itself including the largest black-owned banks and insurance companies. The result was the Auburn Avenue community during the pre-Depression period boasted a wide range of social and occupational diversity.

In 1923, the city of Atlanta opened the David T. Howard Grammar School on the block bounded by Houston, Randolph, Irwin, and Howell streets. The school was named for David Tobias Howard, a prominent mortician and leader in the black community. Intended for blacks only, the Howard School absorbed students who had previously attended the Gate City School and the Storrs School (both were located outside the Auburn Avenue community). Construction of the Howard School was completed in phases and the initial building opened in 1924, but additional elements were never added to the structure as originally planned. Howard School was utilized by elementary students only between 1924 and 1930 and included junior high grades between 1931 and 1947. (Martin Luther King, Jr., graduated from the elementary school in 1940.) The building was converted for use as a high school in 1947 and served in that capacity through 1976. The building now serves as an administration building and archive for the Atlanta public school system. In 1943, the John Hope Grade School was constructed at the southwest corner of Irwin Street and Boulevard and has remained in use since that time.

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<sup>11</sup>Bayor, 55-56.



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#### *The Decline of Auburn Avenue and the Rise of Atlanta's West End*

Auburn Avenue's commercial prominence increased during the 1910s and 1920s. In 1920, for example, there were seventy-two black-owned businesses and twenty professionals located on Auburn Avenue. By 1930, these numbers had increased to 121 businesses and thirty-nine professionals. But during this same period the residential areas immediately adjacent to Auburn Avenue began to decline. Whereas middle-class and professional blacks formerly resided along and near Auburn Avenue among working-class blacks, the 1920s brought change. Blacks with the financial means to leave the neighborhood gradually left the Auburn Avenue community, resulting in the conversion of single-family houses to multi-family houses, increased tenancy, and deterioration of the housing stock. Some of those who left moved to Atlanta's west side where large, black neighborhoods were being established. Others, however, remained in the Auburn Avenue community. By the early 1930s, Houston Street, especially the block between Howell and Randolph known as "Bishops Row," a block of Irwin Street, and several blocks of Boulevard directly north of Irwin, constituted the newly preferred section of the community.

By 1941, when Martin Luther King, Sr., moved his family to a house on Boulevard, he was aware of a new type of division within the Auburn Avenue community:

The area around Boulevard was a comfortable residential community. Negroes who lived there were by no means fabulously wealthy as some people in other parts of Atlanta imagined. The black middle class worked hard. But as economic security was being achieved, it was often necessary to withstand certain jealousies that arose *within* the black community, where success by some was often greeted with mixed emotion by others. There were Negroes who believed that a black person with anything couldn't have gotten it honestly, that is, without selling out his soul to whites, "tomming," betraying his brothers in the ghetto.<sup>12</sup>

The gradual movement by blacks to Atlanta's west side began about the time of the 1917 fire. A housing crisis occurred in Atlanta between 1915 and 1920, precipitated by low cotton prices, and on the city's east side the fire only worsened the situation. Prior to the World War I, Ashby Street on the west side of downtown Atlanta had been a firm dividing line between blacks to the east and whites to the west. Between 1919 and 1922, however, black entrepreneur Heman Perry purchased 300 acres west of Ashby and his Service Engineering and Construction Company built bungalows on the property. Washington Park, Atlanta's first public park designated for blacks, and Booker T. Washington High School, the city's first black public high school, were also constructed in this area.

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<sup>12</sup>The Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., *Daddy King: An Autobiography* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 110.

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The movement of blacks to the west side was met with strong opposition. The Ku Klux Klan held cross burnings and rallies in an effort to intimidate blacks who might consider moving to previously white neighborhoods. By the early 1940s, more than one-third of Atlanta's black population resided on the west side near the commercial district along Hunter Street (later renamed Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard). Nearby Atlanta University Center had come to rival Auburn Avenue as the focus of black life and culture in Atlanta. Many whites made efforts to curtail blacks from moving to the west side's remaining white neighborhoods. Again, road construction was proposed as a means of containing black mobility, although the proposed parkways and "racial forbidden zone" between black and white neighborhoods were never implemented.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Continuation of Segregationist Policies*

In 1940, forty percent of Atlanta's black population resided on the west side but segregation remained firmly in place. The practice of giving streets dual names (e.g., Boulevard as it ran through black neighborhoods and Monroe in white areas; Courtland in black areas, but Juniper in white areas) was a reflection of segregated housing patterns. Nevertheless, housing conditions for blacks had improved at least slightly by the 1940s. New Deal programs were responsible for extending sewer lines and other municipal services into black neighborhoods, and the nation's first public housing projects (Techwood Homes for whites and University Homes for blacks) were constructed in Atlanta in the mid-1930s with funds from the National Industrial Recovery Act. (The pattern of racially segregated public housing was followed in Atlanta through 1960 by which time a total of 7,984 dwelling units had been constructed, 4,954 of which were built for blacks. Most of the black public housing projects were located in established black neighborhoods.)<sup>14</sup> However, most black neighborhoods were not considered for civic improvements, such as parks, recreational facilities, libraries, and even city services such as paved streets and regular garbage collection. Improved sanitation and water supply facilities were achieved primarily because whites feared a high black disease rate would eventually infect Atlanta's white neighborhoods.

#### Atlanta and the American Civil Rights Movement, c.1940-1968

Between World War II and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 blacks achieved increased influence in public affairs in the United States. In Atlanta, this occurred despite ever more sophisticated efforts on the part of the white leadership to further segregate Atlanta and remove blacks from the city center to locations such as the west side.

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<sup>13</sup>Bayor, 58.

<sup>14</sup>Ambrose, 120-121.

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#### *Housing Shortage and the Beginnings of Urban Renewal*

Atlanta experienced a housing shortage in the years during and immediately following the end of the World War II, which was caused by a decline in housing production during the war and the population increase resulting from new manufacturing facilities in and around the city. The GI Bill was created to assist returning soldiers and their families by providing low-interest financing for home loans and loans for educational purposes. While helpful to many, the GI Bill was not nearly sufficient. Blacks were at a particular disadvantage due to segregationist policies that limited their housing options. The post-war housing difficulties blacks faced were compounded during the 1950s and 1960s by highway and civic construction projects and urban renewal programs that destroyed black neighborhoods throughout the nation.

In 1946, the Temporary Coordinating Committee on Housing (TCCH) was formed with the assistance of the Urban League to address the problems of black housing in Atlanta. The Atlanta Housing Council was formed as a sub-group of the TCCH and worked to determine "areas for peaceful black development." Six such expansion areas were identified, most partially developed lands owned by blacks to the north, west, and south of existing black neighborhoods. City officials gave their private approval of these areas in 1947, and in 1952 the all-white Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) officially endorsed them in its "Up Ahead" planning report.

While the "Up Ahead" plan acknowledged the need for black residential expansion, it also contained proposals to demolish extensive areas of black housing and commercial property in and near downtown Atlanta. The MPC cited the 1949 National Housing Act on slum clearance and redevelopment as justification for these concepts. Those displaced by slum clearance would be relocated, sometimes beyond the city limits. A key aspect of the plan was the proposed elimination of the Auburn Avenue business district, which was to be relocated to the west side of Atlanta. The proposal to remove the Auburn Avenue commercial enclave struck most blacks as insulting and insensitive. Moreover, no blacks were consulted during preparation of the plan. Black realtor and business leader T. M. Alexander, who was president of the Empire Real Estate Board, told the Metropolitan Planning Commission that "comparable white business interests would not have been treated so cavalierly."<sup>15</sup> Other blacks saw the plan as an effort to disperse black voters and thus weaken black political power, especially downtown. Atlanta *Daily World* publisher C. A. Scott called for maintenance of the black residential areas surrounding Auburn Avenue and also requested black housing in the Auburn Avenue community. Mayor Hartsfield supported these views and plans to eliminate the black presence on Auburn Avenue were rejected.

Urban renewal in Atlanta began in the mid-1950s with efforts to demolish downtown slums for new commercial construction. A five-year slum clearance program was authorized by the city council in

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<sup>15</sup>Bayor, 71.

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1955. White leaders were at first worried that such a plan would result in the construction of public housing near downtown, but the Atlanta Housing Authority provided assurances that this would not happen. Those displaced by urban renewal were seldom relocated near former neighborhoods. In the 1960s, there was an emphasis on slum clearance as a step toward civic improvements, such as Fulton County Stadium (demolished in 1995), the civic center, and the east-west (I-20) and north-south (I-75/85) expressways. The path of the north-south expressway was initially intended as a means of separating the central business district from black neighborhoods to the east including the Auburn Avenue community. The first plan called for the roadway to cut through the heart of Auburn Avenue's commercial district including demolition of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company Building. Black leaders, however, were successful in getting the expressway moved a few blocks to the east. Although disruptive to businesses, this route bisected Auburn Avenue closer to the existing split between commercial development and residential development.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the battle over black movement into the white Mozley Park neighborhood on Atlanta's west side continued. In 1937, a black physician purchased three lots and attempted to build a house in the neighborhood but was scared off when a group of angry whites threatened the construction crew. A similar incident took place the following year. In 1949, a black minister purchased and moved into a dwelling on Mozley Place, bringing about a violent reaction among whites. A large group marched to the capital and demanded that the governor take action and receiving no satisfaction, continued on to City Hall. Mayor Hartsfield told those assembled that he could not take any legal action, but he did establish the Westside Mutual Development Committee to address the situation. Although this group was biracial and had no official status, it achieved a compromise by which the black Empire Real Estate Board agreed not to sell houses to blacks south of Westview Drive if blacks were able to move into the Mozley Park residential section and utilize an elementary school and park in the community. Westview Drive thus became a well-defined racial barrier that separated blacks and whites for more than a decade.

#### *Increased Black Involvement and Civil Rights Activism*

By 1960, blacks in Atlanta had seen great upheaval in their neighborhoods and had become more vocal in their attempts to influence development in the city. In 1959, *Daily World* editor C. A. Scott said what many black leaders were thinking:

The entire Negro community had better wake up. If the present trend of forcing displaced persons out of the northeast areas of the city continues, the churches and businesses in the Auburn Avenue section will eventually die on the vine. And if this happens the economy of our racial group in the city in general will be seriously undermined.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ambrose, 152-153.

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The primary need was for affordable relocation housing directly east of the central business district, particularly the Buttermilk Bottom area, but white leaders argued that land close to downtown was too valuable for low-rent housing. When the site of the abandoned Egleston Hospital (northeast of the Auburn Avenue community) was chosen by the Atlanta Housing Authority for a public housing development, the nearby white Georgia Baptist Hospital and several area white churches and residents raised strong opposition. These groups feared that black-designated public housing would result in rapid racial transition of the surrounding area, and in the end the proposal was voted down.<sup>17</sup>

Mayor Hartsfield and some others were worried by this result, and the Mayor commented that, "We cannot solve the Negro rehousing problem by ignoring it. You might as well try to ignore a wall of water--either you channel it or become inundated."<sup>18</sup> Hartsfield's concern was not so much for the well-being of the city's poor blacks as for whites who preferred that black housing be located in particular areas away from downtown. Yet, there were some who worried--with more sincerity--that if black housing issues were not addressed soon there would be trouble. Blacks were becoming more resentful over displacement and the lack of black involvement in housing decisions. These changing attitudes coincided with the rise of discontent among Southern blacks and the beginning of sit-ins and other protests.

In 1959, the Atlanta-Fulton County Joint Planning Board issued a study entitled "Shall We Rebuild Again? Atlanta Faces the Problem of Central Area Blight." The report states that Atlanta's "number one problem" was housing obsolescence and deterioration and examines nine "Study Units" delineated "on the basis of size and commonness of problems." Structural conditions were determined for more than 26,000 buildings in preparation of the study, and a classification system assigned each with ratings "standard," "substandard--in need of repair" and "substandard--dilapidated." Study Area C-10, defined as "a blighted and densely populated Negro residential area with intense mixed uses along its major thoroughfares and railways" was bounded by Cain Street and Johnson Avenue (demolished to make way for Freedom Parkway) on the north, the Southern Railway on the east, the Georgia Railroad on the south, and the "Cross-town connector" on the west.

Thus, the C-10 Study Area includes at least seventy-five percent of the Auburn Avenue community with the only area not included located in the northeast corner of the community north of Highland Avenue.

Study Area 9 extends from Johnson Street north to Ponce de Leon and includes Highland Avenue, Alaska Avenue, and Kendall Street in the northeast corner of the historic district. Historically, Highland Avenue represented the racial dividing line with whites living north of Highland and blacks to the south. However, this changed early in the 20th century and by 1940 the block north of Highland

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<sup>17</sup>Bayor, 72-73.

<sup>18</sup>Ambrose, 157.

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bounded by Glen Iris (Randolph Street), East Avenue, and Sampson Street was “chiefly” African American. Residents recall that during the 1940s and 1950s, blacks lived as far north as Forrest Avenue and Willoughby Way and by 1959, the Joint Planning Board study reported that the entire study area was predominantly African American. Among the observations in the report are the following:

- John Hope Elementary School and David T. Howard High School were both found to be badly overcrowded. Hope Elementary had a design capacity of 528 students but had an enrollment in 1959 of 722 students. Howard High had a design capacity of 1,300 but had a 1959 enrollment of 1,997.
- No parks or recreation areas were located in the study area, except at the schools;
- High population densities were common throughout the area, facilitated by numerous conversions from single-family dwellings to multi-family apartments.
- More than eighty-eight percent of the residential structures in the area were classified as substandard. “Most of these homes are beyond repair,” the study concludes. Furthermore, fifty-eight percent of the area’s commercial buildings were determined to be in need of repair.
- The study concludes that “in general this is an area of extreme deterioration. Many streets are not paved. Public schools and recreation facilities are inadequate. Blighting influences include the abundance of poor platting and street layout, poor original construction and maintenance, heavy traffic on major streets, mixed land uses, and others.”<sup>19</sup>

The “Shall We Rebuild Again?” study thus painted a very bleak picture of the Auburn Avenue community at the end of the 1950s.

#### *1960s Activism and Housing Development*

The decade of the 1960s was a period of intense racial tension in Atlanta and in many urban areas in the United States. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had grown up in the Auburn Avenue community and was strongly influenced by the community and its people, churches, and other institutions, led the American Civil Rights Movement that had gained momentum since he became involved in the movement in Montgomery, Alabama in the mid-1950s. King called for non-violent means of attaining equal rights for all people, and he helped found and subsequently led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) headquartered on Auburn Avenue. King returned to Atlanta in 1960,

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<sup>19</sup>Atlanta-Fulton County Joint Planning Board, “Shall We Rebuild Again? Atlanta Faces the Problem of Central Area Blight” (1959), pp. 2-11 and 63-66.

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and while he resided on the west edge of the Vine City community, he remained a presence in the Auburn Avenue community. Although most of his civil rights activities occurred in other cities, King did participate in several important events in his hometown. His assassination in 1968 caused mourning by millions throughout the United States and around the world.

During the 1960s, housing was a primary issue in the Auburn Avenue community, as it was for King and his co-leaders of the civil rights movement. The development of the Wheat Street Gardens I, II, and III Apartment Complex during that decade constituted a nationally significant event in the provision of housing for low-income black families. During the early years of urban renewal, Rev. William Holmes Borders of Wheat Street Baptist Church was dismayed at the sight of houses being demolished and low-income families being displaced. He became convinced Wheat Street Baptist Church could play a major role in housing construction and provision in the Auburn Avenue community. Wheat Street entered discussions with a variety of agencies and organizations including the Atlanta Urban League, the Atlanta Housing Authority, the Federal Housing Administration, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Citizens Trust Bank, Trust Company of Georgia, and the Atlanta Aldermanic Board. In the final agreement, HUD guaranteed a forty-year loan for development of a three-phase apartment construction project. On December 21, 1961, Wheat Street Church purchased 22 acres of land for \$450,000. The property was bounded by Cain, Jackson, Old Wheat, and Fort streets. The architectural firm of Wise, Simpson and Aiken was hired to design the complex.

On April 19, 1964, an opening celebration was held for Wheat Street Gardens I, the first major housing project sponsored by a church organization for low- to moderate-income families in the United States. The complex consisted of 280 two-bedroom units that initially rented for \$72 to \$78 a month. During the ceremony, Rev. Borders commented that:

In its pragmatism, religion is meeting needs in the lives of people. Housing is a need--more urgent among Negroes in Atlanta than any other group. Negroes represent one-third of the population and live on one-seventh of the land. Sixty percent of Negro housing is sub-standard. Wheat Street Gardens is a bright spot--which Wheat Street Baptist Church supports, proving the pragmatism of its religion.

Four years later marked the opening of Wheat Street Gardens II and Wheat Street Gardens III, which consisted of 84 one bedroom units and 108 three bedroom units, respectively. These apartments were rented with 100% rent subsidies.

From the beginning, the Wheat Street Gardens complex faced serious problems due to faulty construction and poor management. By the early 1970s, it became apparent that the complex was inadequate and a series of improvements were made. In 1976, property inspections revealed that major renovations would be necessary to repair damage caused by the use of inferior building materials and construction techniques as well as property abuse by some tenants. The complex

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suffered from high turnover rates, vandalism, drug trafficking, and sexual abuse cases. Thirty percent of the units were determined uninhabitable, and requests for assistance from the City of Atlanta were turned down. In 1977, Wheat Street Baptist Church entered into a partnership with the National Development Corporation (NDCI) of Los Angeles to manage the complex. NDCI took over on September 1, 1978 through a sub-contracted professional management company. New problems developed immediately because NDCI did not recognize Wheat Street Church as a general partner in the operation. No financial reports were provided to the church and all funds collected were forwarded directly to NDCI. The new management company proposed major renovations and also the sale of units in Wheat Street Gardens II and III to tenants as condominiums, but the proposal was rejected by the church. A series of meetings were held in late 1978 and 1979 in an effort to alter the original contract with NDCI so that renovation plans could be granted HUD approval, but these efforts failed. On December 1, 1980, HUD foreclosed on Wheat Street Gardens II and III. Since that time the Wheat Street Charitable Foundation has continued to own and manage the Wheat Street Gardens I complex while the church remains engaged in an effort to obtain a clear title to the Wheat Street Gardens II and III.<sup>20</sup>

Another significant housing development in the 1960s was the Antoine Graves Apartments High Rise, completed in 1965 at 126 Hilliard Street. This eight-story tower was constructed to provide public housing primarily for the elderly poor.

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<sup>20</sup>Gloria Borders, member of Wheat Street Baptist Church and daughter-in-law of Rev. William Holmes Borders, interview by John A. Kissane, March 1998; Rev. William Holmes Borders, ed., *45th Pastoral Anniversary, 1937-1982*, Wheat Street Baptist Church (Josten's American Yearbook Company, 1982).



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#### **B. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Community, 1929-1968.**

##### Introduction

Martin Luther King, Jr., made a profound contribution to the American Civil Rights Movement and to efforts to promote racial equality and social justice. He helped bring to the forefront of the political scene the plight of disadvantaged and downtrodden blacks in the United States and, through new approaches to activism, encouraged blacks to participate in nonviolent protests. Although he achieved success on many levels, King discovered that the ingrained racial prejudices of many in the United States could not be totally removed. His most lasting contribution has been providing his generation, and succeeding generations with an example of total commitment and perseverance that guides many as they continue in the work that King helped initiate.

The revised Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District embodies the historical and architectural significance of the Auburn Avenue community through its physical features and characteristics. Historic resources survive from all periods of the community's history. Numerous resources have direct associations with Martin Luther King, Jr., such as the Birth Home (501 Auburn Avenue) where King was born on January 15, 1929 and lived until his family moved in 1941 to a house (no longer extant) at 193 Boulevard; Ebenezer Baptist Church (407-413 Auburn Avenue) where King and his father and maternal grandfather all preached; and the David T. Howard School (590 John Wesley Dobbs Avenue), where King completed his elementary education. The Auburn Avenue community as a whole represents the environment of King's youth and is the neighborhood to which he returned as an adult to lead the American Civil Rights Movement.

##### *Family Background*

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929 at 501 Auburn Avenue, a house constructed in 1895 and known today as the Birth Home. This residence had been purchased in 1909 by King's maternal grandfather, the Reverend Adam Daniel (A. D.) Williams, who at the time was pastor of nearby Ebenezer Baptist Church and had served in that capacity since 1894. King's father, Martin Luther King, Sr. (early on known as "Mike," and later as "Daddy King"), moved into the house in 1926 upon his marriage to Alberta Williams.

Martin Luther King, Sr., born in 1899 in Stockbridge, Georgia, came to Atlanta in 1920 to attend Bryant Preparatory School and work toward his high school diploma. The boarding house in which King resided (no longer extant) was located on Auburn Avenue and was owned by Mabel H. Laster. The Bryant School, founded in 1913 by Sylvia C. Jenkins under the sponsorship of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association, was also in the Auburn Avenue vicinity. Soon after his arrival in Atlanta, King met Alberta Williams, daughter of Rev. A. D. Williams and a student at Spelman College. After six years of study at Bryant School, King received his diploma and was encouraged by

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Alberta to apply for admission to Morehouse College even though he was also preaching at two churches in College Park and East Point. King was initially denied admission to Morehouse but was later accepted only after he argued his case to the school's president, John Hope.

Martin Luther King and Alberta Williams were married on November 25, 1926. The couple had three children: Willie Christine, was born in September of 1927; Martin Luther, Jr.; and Alfred Daniel (A. D.), born on July 30, 1930. Martin Luther, Sr., completed his bachelor's degree in theology at Morehouse in early July 1930, a few weeks before A. D. was born. The following spring, Alberta's father, Reverend Williams, died unexpectedly of a heart attack, and Martin Luther, Sr. was called to the pastorate of Ebenezer Baptist Church.

#### *The King Boyhood*

As a young child, Martin Luther King, Jr., observed blacks succeeding within the constraints of a segregated society. The Auburn Avenue community was almost entirely black by the time of King's birth, so he had no direct experience of life in an integrated environment. Through Daddy King's ministry, the King family was afforded regular contact with leaders of the black community. Black clergymen, businessmen, and educators often visited Ebenezer Baptist Church and the King home, and yet King also witnessed the day-to-day struggles of working-class blacks and those living in abject poverty. The Auburn Avenue community thus exposed King to diverse environments made up of the richness and the poverty of black life in Atlanta and the South.

King's parents both played vital roles in his childhood development. Alberta, trained at Spelman College to be a teacher, could be strict and always demanded that her children give their best efforts in school. She ensured that they arrived to school on time every morning and tended to their homework as soon as they returned home in the afternoon. Chores around the house were also required. Each child was treated as an individual, and according to Daddy King, Alberta "knew each of her children almost as well as she knew herself."<sup>21</sup> She recognized her son Martin's gifts at an early age and enrolled him in grade school with his sister a year early. Teachers soon found out the precocious young Martin was only four-years old, and he was not permitted to continue at school. The following year he started anew and Alberta soon succeeded in persuading teachers to advance him a grade, so he again was in the same grade as Christine.

Daddy King, characterized by many as a strict disciplinarian, was both a role model and mentor for his elder son, not only as a church pastor but also in the broader capacity of community activist. In 1935, his leadership efforts extended beyond his position as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church when he proposed that Atlanta's black churches become the central headquarters for a drive to register blacks to vote. Daddy King suggested a voting-rights march to initiate the effort. Ebenezer's

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<sup>21</sup>King, Sr., 130-131.

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deacons were at first hesitant to support this plan, but Daddy King had substantially strengthened the Church's economic position and was highly popular with the congregation, so the deacons could not bring themselves to stand in his way. The march began with a rally of more than a thousand assembled at Ebenezer and then continued through downtown to Atlanta City Hall.

Reverend Williams, as president of the local branch of the NAACP, had also organized successful rallies. In 1919, he directed the first voter registration drive in 20th-century Atlanta, and a few years later he led opposition to a municipal bond issue that contained no provisions for black high school education. This effort brought about the construction in 1924 of Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta's first public high school for blacks. The next year, Daddy King provided leadership for an organization of black schoolteachers who were protesting unequal pay scales for blacks and whites. This included a series of meetings conducted at the King's Auburn Avenue home. Some blacks termed Daddy King's efforts "rocking the boat," believing that upsetting whites would only worsen the plight of blacks in Atlanta. Daddy King would not hear it, and he taught his own young children that segregation was evil and change would come about only as a result of blacks seizing the initiative and making it happen.

The role of Ebenezer Baptist Church in the Auburn Avenue community no doubt impressed upon the young Martin Luther King, Jr., the ways in which churches could assist those in need. In writing about Ebenezer during the Depression era of the 1930s, Daddy King observed:

Ebenezer became a church where the service lasted around the clock. . . . They were a generous congregation, and what money Reverend Williams could take in he poured back into the community to make food available to the hungry and clothes to those without them. We kept the children while mothers worked. The church bought and supplied medicines. Ebenezer tried to be an anchor as the storm rose.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, Martin Luther King, Jr., simply "loved church," according to his father. He enjoyed music and singing and especially the sense of ceremony and ritual.<sup>23</sup>

An early incident that occurred when King was six-years old introduced him to the complexities of racism. One of King's first close playmates was a white boy whose father owned a grocery store (no longer extant) in the Auburn Avenue community. When they began attending separate schools, the two children no longer saw each other as regularly. King later recalled what he discovered about the reason for the change:

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<sup>22</sup>King, Sr., 89.

<sup>23</sup>King, Sr., 127.

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This was not my desire but his. The climax came when he told me one day that his father had demanded that he would play with me no more. I never will forget what a great shock this was to me. I immediately asked my parents about the motive behind such a statement. We were at the dinner table when the situation was discussed, and here, for the first time, I was made aware of the existence of a race problem. I had never been conscious of it before.<sup>24</sup>

From an early age, King resented the limitations segregation imposed on blacks, both within and outside his community. One day, also at the age of six, he accompanied his father to downtown Atlanta and spotted a pair of shoes he wanted in a storefront display window. When Daddy King took his son into the store he was told by a clerk to go to the rear of the business, where black customers were served. Daddy King refused, and the clerk responded "You take it like everybody else, and stop being so high and mighty!"<sup>25</sup> The Kings left the store, but young Martin did not understand what had just happened.

As we drove back toward Auburn Avenue, I was able to speak quietly about the whole episode in the store, but the questions, the confusions, remained in his eyes. . . . And I said to him that the best way to explain it was to say that I'd never accept the stupidity and cruelty of segregation, not as long as I lived. I was going to be fighting against it in some way or other as long as there was breath in me. I wanted him to understand *that*.<sup>26</sup>

In 1941, the King family moved from 501 Auburn Avenue to 193 Boulevard, a large yellow brick house just three blocks away. The house, built about 1924, was occupied by black physician John W. Burney from 1925 to 1939 and is no longer standing. Daddy King said he always vowed he would one day own a brick house, and it was a symbol of real achievement when he moved his family into this dwelling. The King family's move was probably also in part due to the deterioration of their street, which Daddy King described as "running down" in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, he described the Boulevard area as "a comfortable residential community" composed of the black middle class. One of

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<sup>24</sup>David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 33.

<sup>25</sup>King, Sr., 108.

<sup>26</sup>King, Sr., 108-109.

<sup>27</sup>Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Mentor, 1985), 13.

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the Kings' neighbors was well-known black activist John Wesley Dobbs, who Daddy King described as "a shrewd negotiator, able and quite outspoken."<sup>28</sup>

King attended Yonge Street and David T. Howard elementary schools, both of which were segregated institutions within the Auburn Avenue community. He rode in the rear of buses while commuting to the Atlanta University Lab School for seventh and eighth grades and Booker T. Washington High School, both on Atlanta's West Side. Like most blacks growing up in Atlanta during this time, King received discriminatory treatment at downtown stores, movie theaters, and restaurants. An especially troubling experience occurred on a bus trip home from a South Georgia high school oratorical competition. The driver ordered King and his teacher, Miss Sarah Bradley, to give up their seats toward the front of the bus to whites. King had to stand for several hours as the bus returned to Atlanta, and twenty years later he recalled that he was never angrier than on that day.<sup>29</sup>

King observed the efforts of his father and others to resist the inferior treatment of blacks. In his autobiographical work, *Stride Toward Freedom*, King told how his father forcefully objected when a white policeman called Daddy King a boy. King's father and grandfather both worked to register black voters; A. D. Williams's efforts helped defeat Atlanta school bond issues until they provided for a black high school. Daddy King was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and helped lead efforts to equalize the pay of black and white school teachers, to establish Booker T. Washington High School (Atlanta's first public high school for blacks), and to desegregate elevators in the Atlanta City Hall.

#### *King's Higher Education*

Following in his father's footsteps, King entered Morehouse College as a freshman in September 1944. He continued to live at home while attending college and commuted by bus to classes on the west Atlanta campus. While at Morehouse, King came under the influence of the institution's president, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, a man who greatly influenced the young scholar and who remained a friend throughout King's life. For the previous several years, King had struggled over whether to follow in his father's footsteps and become a minister; this was what Daddy King had wanted, although King sometimes found himself at odds with the "emotionalism" of the black church. It was Dr. Mays who finally convinced King to enter the ministry. In the fall 1947, during his senior year at Morehouse, King was granted a license to preach by Ebenezer's board of deacons. He began serving as assistant pastor to his father, and on February 25, 1948 Daddy King presided at his son's ordination.

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<sup>28</sup>King, Sr., 111.

<sup>29</sup>Garrow, 35.

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After graduating from Morehouse College in 1948, King left Atlanta to attend Crozier Seminary in Pennsylvania. One of only six blacks in the student body of one hundred, King excelled in his studies and graduated with honors. He received the Pearl Plafkner Prize for scholarship and was offered a full scholarship to the university of his choice. King proceeded to Boston University and began work toward a doctorate in comparative theology. It was in Boston that he met Coretta Scott, then a graduate student in voice at the New England Conservatory of Music. The two were married on June 18, 1953 in Heiberger, Alabama, at the home of Coretta's parents. Daddy King performed the ceremony.

#### *Alabama, Atlanta, and the Civil Rights Era*

In 1954, having completed his studies in Boston, King returned to the south. He accepted the position of pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist in Montgomery, Alabama, and also continued working on his doctorate. Within a matter of a few months in Montgomery, King had become thoroughly involved with the activities of the NAACP and other organizations and was soon regarded as one of the city's leading black activists. The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956 thrust King into the national spotlight as a skilled civil rights leader. In January 1957, he briefly returned to Atlanta to help form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which was founded at meetings held at Ebenezer Baptist Church. In 1960, King moved back to his hometown, serving as co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer while also leading activities of the SCLC. The King family--Martin, Coretta, and their two children, Yolanda, and Martin Luther King III--initially rented a house in the Auburn Avenue community on Johnson Avenue, a block north of Houston Street. (This house was demolished to make way for Freedom Parkway.) The King family later moved into a larger house at 234 Sunset Avenue, at the western edge of Atlanta's Vine City neighborhood, west of downtown.

During the final eight years of his life, King led a variety of civil rights campaigns in the South as well as in several northern cities. Through the SCLC, he supported local movements against segregation in Birmingham and Selma, Alabama; Albany, Georgia; St. Augustine, Florida; and elsewhere. Relatively few of these efforts were in Atlanta, but with the SCLC headquartered in the Auburn Avenue community (first at 208 Auburn Avenue and then at 334 Auburn in the Prince Hall Masonic Temple Building), King was a regular presence in the city and in the area in which he grew up. He directly participated in several local protests and strikes. Furthermore, in his role as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, King used the pulpit to influence church members and nonchurch members in Atlanta and throughout the nation. United States Representative John Lewis joined Ebenezer when he moved to Atlanta in 1963 and has referred to it as "The Movement Church." "It was a place where you could go to worship. . . . But when you heard Dr. King preach, you were ready to march into hellfire. You were willing. He was so inspiring."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Macon Morehouse and Hollis Towns, "Civil Rights Movement Got Strength at Ebenezer Baptist." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 5/1/96, p.B6.

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In October 1960, King joined a student sit-in protest at Rich's Department Store in downtown Atlanta, a completely segregated business at that time. This resulted in King's arrest on October 19. He was jailed for eight days. It was the first time King had been incarcerated, and it drew national attention. King had been under probation on an existing charge of driving without a valid driver's license, and DeKalb County Judge J. Oscar Mitchell sentenced him to four months at Reidsville State Prison. Many people, including Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, worked behind the scenes to secure King's release. When Kennedy telephoned King's wife Coretta to express concern, his brother and campaign manager, Robert Kennedy, was upset about the communication and believed it would politically align his brother with King and black activism. Later, however, Robert Kennedy telephoned Judge Mitchell to express his belief that all defendants had the right of being released on bond while appealing a charge. The matter was resolved when King's attorney, Donald L. Hollowell, convinced Mitchell to release King on bond on October 26.

In May 1961, King was a central participant in meetings conducted at Ebenezer by the SCLC, CORE (Congress on Racial Equality), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and others to form the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee. On December 19, 1964, King walked the picket line at the Scripto, Inc., 423 Houston Street in the Auburn Avenue community, during a strike by black employees protesting discriminatory compensation practices. The next day, he addressed a rally at Ebenezer attended by a large group of Scripto employees. A settlement was reached shortly after these events. In early 1966, King was involved in protests in the Lightning and Vine City communities west of downtown Atlanta. These neighborhoods contained some of the worst slums in the city, and after King walked through the area, he demanded that Mayor Ivan Allen come and see the conditions for himself. The following day, city building inspectors and street crews were sent to Lightning and Vine City and a survey of residential housing needs was initiated. Mayor Allen, however, continued to believe that adequate housing for poor blacks was available.

In March and April 1968, King participated in efforts by striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. On the evening of April 4, 1968, he was assassinated while standing on his balcony at the Lorraine Motel. His body was returned to Atlanta and a funeral service, attended by leaders from across the nation, was conducted at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Tens of thousands listened to the service over loudspeakers outside the church, and large crowds watched and joined the funeral procession from Ebenezer to the Morehouse College campus. King was buried next to his grandparents at South View Cemetery.

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#### **C. The American Civil Rights Movement and Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Community, c.1945-1968.**

The revised Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District embodies the historical and architectural significance of the Auburn Avenue community through its physical features and characteristics. Historic resources survive from all periods of the community's history. Several resources have direct associations with the American Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr., such as Ebenezer Baptist Church (407-413 Auburn Avenue), where King preached numerous sermons on topics related to civil rights and where many critical meetings and planning sessions took place.

#### *Background*

There may be no clear point of beginning for the Civil Rights Movement in America, nor an obvious starting point for efforts to improve the lives of blacks in Atlanta. The NAACP was founded in 1909 and from that time began working to secure civil rights for blacks, although these efforts could not be defined as a national movement. In Atlanta, black leaders worked to better the lives of blacks from early in the 20th century. In 1919, Rev. A. D. Williams, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church and maternal grandfather of Martin Luther King, Jr., led the city's first voter registration drive, which in turn resulted in the defeat of a bond referendum for construction of only white schools. That year, NAACP Atlanta branch secretary L. C. Crogman commented, "the colored people of Atlanta are now realizing that the best weapon with which they have to fight this accursed race prejudice is the proper use of the ballot."<sup>31</sup> Two years later, following another successful black voter registration drive, a bond referendum was passed that resulted in construction of five new black schools; one of these was Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta's first public high school for blacks. The remainder of the 1920s and the Depression years of the 1930s were not successful years for black activist leaders.

In the mid-1930s, a new group of young black leaders emerged. Most of these men worked along Auburn Avenue and many lived in the Auburn Avenue community. They included, among others, John Wesley Dobbs (grand master of the Prince Hall of Masons, Georgia's most influential black Masonic lodge), C. A. Scott (publisher of the *Atlanta Daily World*), Rev. William Holmes Borders (pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church) and Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr. (pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church). In 1935, Rev. King led the then-largest black protest assembly in Atlanta's history in order to initiate a renewed effort for voter registration. At that time blacks accounted for one-third of the city's population but only six percent of its registered voters. The following year, the Atlanta Civic and Political League was founded with the goal of registering 10,000 black voters in order to bring improvements in education, increased hiring of black doctors, firemen and police, and establishment

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<sup>31</sup>Bayor, 17.



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of parks and playgrounds in black neighborhoods. Some progress was made in registration but the goal of registering 10,000 blacks was not met partly because poll taxes still had to be paid in order to vote.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Beginnings of the Movement*

By the end of the World War II, living conditions for many black Atlantans had become more difficult than at any time in the preceding several decades. The city experienced a wartime and post-war housing shortage that was particularly severe among the black community; housing options were ever more limited due to an increasing population, a decline in the condition of the housing stock, and heightened efforts on the part of the white leadership to move blacks away from downtown. These were all factors in increased efforts to register black voters in 1946. In March of that year, the newly formed and bipartisan All Citizens Registration Committee began a campaign to register 25,000 blacks in Fulton County within a period of two months. While not quite reaching the goal, the effort was successful, and by May 1946, the number of registered black voters in Atlanta had increased from 6,786 to 21,244. An ecstatic Dobbs commented that "Negroes now will rapidly come into their full political rights and thereby firmly establish themselves as citizens."<sup>33</sup> The statement proved overly optimistic, however. In July, Helen Mankin, Georgia's first elected female representative and who was strongly supported by blacks, was defeated in a re-election bid. The victory went to Judge James C. Davis, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan and cohort of segregationist Governor Gene Talmadge.

#### *Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Early Civil Rights Leadership in Alabama*

In 1954, after finishing at Boston University, Martin Luther King, Jr., accepted a position as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. There he joined the local chapter of the NAACP and the Alabama Council on Human Relations, one of the few interracial groups in the state. Within a year, King was known in Montgomery's black community as an activist and leader. NAACP members elected him to the Montgomery Chapter's Executive Board, and he also served as vice president of the Montgomery Chapter of the Alabama Council on Human Relations. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested by Montgomery police for refusing to surrender her bus seat to a white, an event that provided a much-needed test case to challenge city and state bus segregation laws. That same month, Montgomery blacks chose King to lead their protest against segregated buses, beginning his career as a civil rights leader.

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<sup>32</sup>Bayor, 19.

<sup>33</sup>Pomerantz, 152.

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The Montgomery bus boycott, which ended when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Alabama and Montgomery bus segregation laws unconstitutional, lasted 381 days and brought King a position of national prominence as a civil rights leader. In 1957, King played a key role in the establishment of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This organization evolved from meetings and strategy sessions held by black ministers during the Montgomery bus boycott. The SCLC soon overshadowed other groups and became the lead organization of the American Civil Rights Movement. It worked to raise funds for local civil rights protests and voter registration drives throughout the south and developed and trained black leaders. Most significantly, the SCLC was committed to nonviolence in all its endeavors.

The year-long black boycott of city buses in Montgomery encouraged Atlanta's black religious leaders to take similar action. An effort known as the "Triple L Movement" (for love, liberty, and loyalty) began in January 1957, under the leadership of the Rev. William Holmes Borders of Wheat Street Baptist Church. A group of black ministers boarded a downtown trolley bus and sat in front seats designated for whites only, a clear violation of Atlanta's segregation laws. The bus was taken out of service by a transit company supervisor, and while the white passengers got off immediately, the black ministers did not. They remained on the bus as it was driven to the bus barn and then they exited through the front door. Mayor Hartsfield did not want violence because he believed that it would be better to have Georgia's segregation laws tested in the federal courts. He secretly persuaded the ministers to board a public bus the very next afternoon. This time, six ministers were arrested including Borders, and the event marked the beginning of the legal test cases that eventually ended segregation on Atlanta city buses.<sup>34</sup>

In 1959, the executive board of the SCLC twice approached King and urged that he make their organization the primary focus of his activities. King had been experiencing feelings of guilt about the quality of his pastorship at Dexter Avenue Church, given his frequent absences and overburdened workload, and believed the church deserved better. Daddy King had for several years been worried that his son's situation in Montgomery was too dangerous and had urged King to return to Atlanta and co-pastor with him at Ebenezer. On November 29, 1959, after great deliberation, King informed the Dexter congregation that he was submitting his resignation and would be returning to Atlanta in February of the following year.

#### *King's Civil Rights Activities in Atlanta and the Nation, 1960-1968*

Once in Atlanta, King was soon involved in a series of major civil rights efforts throughout the South as well as in other parts of the country. This involvement began in February of 1960 when students from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College staged sit-in protests at a whites-only Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Greensboro protests helped initiate

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<sup>34</sup>Pomerantz, 216-217.

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several dozen sit-ins at cities across the southeast. A second important event during the early months of 1960 was the formation in April of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This occurred at Shaw State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, during a series of meetings partially sponsored by the SCLC. King was an advisor and speaker at the meetings and was officially recognized as a permanent advisor to SNCC once it had established its headquarters in Atlanta.

In October 1960, King spoke at the Atlanta conference of SNCC, the organization's first large gathering since Raleigh. The students decided to stage a sit-in protest against Richard H. Rich at his Rich's Department Store. Rich's, the largest department store in downtown Atlanta, was completely segregated. Although a reputed liberal, Rich had previously given no concessions in meetings with student leaders. A small group of students, including Julian Bond, Lonnie King, and Herschelle Sullivan, went to Ebenezer to meet with King in person and urge that he join in the protest. King was hesitant at first, but became convinced that if he was going to be effective as a civil rights leader he would have to participate in the sit-ins. The next morning, October 19, 1960, King and thirty-five others were arrested by Atlanta police for refusing to leave Rich's whites-only restaurant, the Magnolia Room. King determined that he would not make bond and, if convicted, would serve his time like the students. He spent the night in the Fulton County Jail, the first such experience in his life. Although Mayor Hartsfield convinced Rich to drop charges against the protesters, Judge J. Oscar Mitchell revoked King's probation on the earlier charge of driving without a valid driver's license and sentenced him to four months at the state prison in Reidsville.

On October 26, 1960, the morning after King's first night at the Reidsville Prison, Mitchell was convinced by Donald L. Hollowell, King's attorney, to release King on bond while the original traffic charge was appealed. During the previous week, many people had worked behind the scenes to secure King's release. Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy had telephoned King's wife Coretta to express his concern, perhaps partly in the hope of drawing support from black voters. Kennedy's brother and campaign manager, Robert Kennedy, had at first been highly upset about this communication and the likelihood that his brother would now be politically aligned with King, a national symbol of black activism. Nevertheless, Robert Kennedy was also infuriated that Judge Mitchell had jailed King, and he called the Judge to express his belief as a lawyer that all defendants had the right of being released on bond while they appealed.

Although much of King's attention in the years after the Rich's protest was focused beyond Atlanta, his presence in his home town--and in the Auburn Avenue community--was constant. Many of the most critical civil rights meetings and planning sessions were held at Ebenezer, such as in May 1961 when the SCLC, CORE (Congress on Racial Equality), SNCC, and others met at the church to form the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee to organize support for the Freedom Riders. This was an effort to enforce the desegregation of southern bus terminals ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court the previous year, whereby riders attempted to use white-only facilities and receive service at lunch counters. In May 1961, U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy asked the Interstate Commerce

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Commission (ICC) to declare segregation in all public transportation facilities illegal. The ICC did this four months later, providing the executive branch of government with a means of implementing the Supreme Court's intentions in the Montgomery decision.

Later in 1961 and 1962, ongoing efforts against continued segregation of transportation facilities in Albany, Georgia, resulted in the arrests of several hundred protesters. Because there was no serious violence the federal government did not step in to solve the impasse between blacks and whites. President Kennedy had publicly questioned why the Albany City Council could not sit down and talk with its own citizens about securing their rights. Furthermore, the Kennedy Administration filed a brief opposing the city's efforts to win an injunction against the Albany Movement, but that was as far as it would go. Albany's black leaders requested that King and Rev. Ralph David Abernathy come to their city. King and Abernathy both were jailed in Albany on two occasions, but local officials remained steadfast in their determination that there would be no negotiations with "outsiders." The local black leadership in Albany never got over some initial division and determined that there was no way to change the white leaders' stance. In the end, the Albany Movement was a failure for King, the SCLC, and all black organizations involved. It seemed that as long as violence didn't break out in a serious way, the Kennedy Administration would not give civil rights matters its primary attention.<sup>35</sup>

King was involved in several major successes in 1963 and 1964. One was in Birmingham, Alabama, where the SCLC led a large campaign of department store boycotts and protest marches. Despite the well-publicized counter efforts of Birmingham Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor, white merchants finally agreed in May of 1963 to desegregate fitting rooms, restrooms, and lunch counters and also promised to improve black employment opportunities in stores.

On August 28, 1963, SCLC, NAACP, and other groups organized the massive March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The immediate goal of the march was passage of a civil rights bill that the Kennedy Administration had already sent to Congress. The march also sought the eventual elimination of all legal segregation and increased job opportunities for blacks. National attention was brought to the civil rights movement through the event, which drew 200,000 participants. The march concluded with a rally in front of the Lincoln Memorial, where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" address, an impassioned plea for racial justice. President Kennedy's civil rights bill stalled in Congress when he was assassinated in November 1963, but President Lyndon B. Johnson strengthened the bill's provisions and engineered its passage in the summer of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited racial discrimination in most public accommodations, banned employment discrimination, created the Equal Opportunity Commission, and denied federal funds to any activity in which discrimination was practiced. King attended the bill's signing ceremonies in Washington, D.C., in July 1964.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Garrow, 213-217.

<sup>36</sup> Blythe, et al., 42.

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Also in 1964, King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent civil rights work. This most prestigious award, presented to him in Oslo, Norway on December 10, 1964, was the latest in a list of honors that included the NAACP's Springarn Medal in 1957 and *Time Magazine's* "Man of the Year" designation for 1963.

#### *The Scripto Strike*

In December 1964, a labor dispute led to a strike at Scripto, Inc., a manufacturer of pencils, pens, and cigarette lighters located in the Auburn Avenue community. Founded in Atlanta in 1923, Scripto built a manufacturing plant at 423 Houston Street in 1931, just a few blocks north of Ebenezer Baptist Church. Scripto expanded its operations from the 1930s through the early 1960s, adding plant buildings between Houston and Irwin streets and constructing offices and research facilities at 150 and 160 Boulevard. By 1964, Scripto employed 950 workers. Some 633 of Scripto's 836 production and maintenance workers were black women, and many were residents of the surrounding community.<sup>37</sup>

On November 27, 1964, Local 754 of the International Chemical Workers Union called a strike, alleging that Scripto's offer of a four percent raise to skilled workers and a two percent raise to unskilled workers was discriminatory. The union considered the offer unfair, because it believed Scripto refused to promote blacks to skilled positions. Only six of Scripto's 700 black employees were categorized as skilled workers. On November 30, Dr. King informed Scripto that the SCLC supported the strikers and threatened to lead a nationwide boycott of Scripto products if the strike was not settled. The company countered that the issues were entirely economic, not racial. King was scheduled to address a rally of strikers at Mt. Zion Second Baptist Church (at the northeast corner of Boulevard and Irwin) on December 1, but that day instead flew to Washington to meet with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. The Reverend C. T. Vivian of the SCLC substituted for King at the rally.<sup>38</sup>

On December 19, 1964, a day after his return to Atlanta from the Nobel Peace Prize ceremonies in Oslo, King walked the picket line at Scripto for 30 minutes. According to newspaper accounts, King walked the line with fifteen others including a representative from the union's international headquarters in Amsterdam. On December 20, King addressed a rally at Ebenezer Baptist Church attended by 250 striking Scripto employees. King announced that the SCLC was proceeding with plans to implement a boycott when Scripto agreed to pay Christmas bonuses to all employees. An agreement in principle between Scripto and the union appears to have been reached at this point,

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<sup>37</sup>Blythe et al., 43.

<sup>38</sup>Blythe et al., 43-44.

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and newspaper accounts do not mention any strike-related activity by King or SCLC after December 24. Scripto and the union officially announced a strike settlement on January 9, 1965. The basis of the settlement was an across-the-board wage increase for categories of employees. The Scripto plant remained in operation on Houston Street until December of 1977, when operations moved to Gwinnett County, Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

During the fall 1964, King had been involved with planning a major civil rights campaign for Alabama. On March 7, 1965, a protest march was planned from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in an effort to draw attention to the state's refusal to register black voters. As the marchers reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Selma's east side, state troopers and a group of "possemen" charged into the demonstrators, beating them with billy clubs and firing tear gas. Graphic national television coverage of the incident sparked widespread outrage, and President Johnson acted to send federal troops to the South to oversee voter registration. A second march from Selma to Montgomery was led by King on March 21-25, ending with a rally on the steps of the Alabama state capitol.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Housing, Poverty, and Economic Justice*

King continued to be involved with segregation and voting rights issues during the last years of his life, but of increasing concern were broader issues of housing, poverty, and economic justice as well as the nation's involvement in Vietnam. In 1965, the SCLC mounted a major effort in Chicago, joining a coalition of local groups known as the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations to address housing and employment discrimination, inferior public schools, and exploitative ghetto merchants. King moved to a Chicago slum apartment on a part-time basis to draw attention to the appalling conditions of inner-city ghettos. Confronting complex social and economic forces rather than legal segregation, the Chicago campaign had difficulty defining coherent goals. In the end, an agreement was negotiated with city officials and real estate professionals on a limited number of housing issues. Implementation was slow and the narrow scope and vague wording of the agreement drew criticism from some commentators and civil rights leaders outside of the SCLC.<sup>41</sup>

In early 1966, King participated in a dispute in Atlanta's Vine City and Lightning communities, just west of downtown. Since the previous summer, increasing concern had been voiced by the news media about the deplorable conditions in several of Atlanta's most impoverished neighborhoods. Some city leaders feared that an event similar to the Watts riot of 1965 could occur in Atlanta.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Blythe et al., 44.

<sup>40</sup>Blythe et al., 45.

<sup>41</sup>Blythe et al., 45.

<sup>42</sup>Bayor, 138.

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Urban renewal was depleting the city's low-income housing stock, and the housing code was not enforced in all areas. Several neighborhoods were actively engaged in self-help efforts such as playground construction and recreational programs, but these communities needed assistance from the city in areas such as street cleaning, road paving, and especially substandard housing. In Vine City and Lightning, housing conditions were particularly poor and neighborhood leaders threatened a rent strike as a means of protest. In February, King returned to Atlanta from Chicago (where he had been protesting slum conditions) and visited Lightning. When King announced, "I want Mayor Allen to see this. I don't believe he knows such conditions exist," the news media was there to cover it. King also discussed the rent strike possibility with neighborhood residents.<sup>43</sup> The very next day, city building inspectors and street crews were sent to Lightning and Vine City, and a survey of residential needs was begun. Mayor Allen commented that Atlanta Housing Authority rental units had numerous vacancies, but this was not a complete statement. In reality, although 350 units were indeed vacant, there were 950 families on the AHA waiting list, and these people could not move into the available units due to either family size or locational needs. Furthermore, many Vine City and Lightning residents would not even have been able to afford public housing rents.<sup>44</sup>

In the fall of 1967, King and the SCLC began planning the "Poor People's Campaign," which was to culminate in a second march on Washington the following spring. The goal of this effort was to dramatize the issue of poverty in America. This was the SCLC's first attempt to create a national movement rather than joining a preexisting local movement as it had done in the past. The Poor People's Campaign made several requests including congressional legislation for a full-employment commitment, a guaranteed annual income measure, and construction funds for at least 500,000 units of low-cost housing per year.<sup>45</sup>

In the spring of 1968, King became involved with a strike of sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. He participated in a rally of 15,000 strikers and supporters on March 18, and ten days later led a march that turned violent when a small minority of demonstrators began looting and police responded by attacking the peaceful marchers as well as the looters. King was deeply alarmed by what happened and vowed to return to Memphis and conduct a wholly peaceful march to vindicate his nonviolent beliefs.

A second Memphis march was scheduled for April 8, 1968, and King arrived in the city on April 3 for talks with local leaders. That evening he addressed a small rally at the Memphis Mason Temple. The next evening, April 4, 1968, King was assassinated while standing on his balcony at the Lorraine

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<sup>43</sup> Ambrose, 199.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Garrow, 595-596.

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Motel. Blacks and whites alike reacted with sorrow and anger to King's murder. Riots in 110 American cities left thirty-nine dead in the days following King's assassination. Escaped convict James Earl Ray was tried and convicted of murdering King, although the question of whether Ray acted alone was never resolved. The Reverend Ralph David Abernathy succeeded King as president of the SCLC. Abernathy went ahead with the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, but the goals of the campaign were not accomplished.<sup>46</sup>

King's body was flown to Atlanta, where it lay in state at Sisters Chapel at Spelman College. On April 9, 1968, Abernathy, who had been with King since the Montgomery bus boycott, conducted his funeral service at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Prominent civil rights leaders, black entertainers, professional athletes, and the four leading presidential contenders (Senator Eugene McCarthy, Senator Robert Kennedy, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and Richard Nixon) also attended the services. A crowd exceeding sixty thousand listened to the service over loudspeakers outside, and as many as fifty thousand joined in the funeral cortege from Ebenezer to the campus of Morehouse College. King's casket was borne on a farm cart drawn by two mules, symbolic of the Poor People's Campaign. At Morehouse, college president emeritus Benjamin Mays gave a brief eulogy before King was buried next to his grandparents at South View Cemetery.<sup>47</sup>

King's widow, Coretta Scott King, founded the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change in order to carry on her husband's work and honor his memory. She purchased property on Auburn Avenue east of Ebenezer Baptist Church, and in 1971 King's body was moved to a commemorative site at the Center. The King Center complex was completed in 1981 and includes King's marble tomb and surrounding plaza, a library and archive, conference center, and exhibit areas.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Blythe et al., 47.

<sup>47</sup>Blythe et al., 47-48.

<sup>48</sup>Blythe et al., 48.



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#### **D. Architectural and Landscape Resources in Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Community, c.1853-1968.**

##### Summary

The Auburn Avenue community is composed of a variety of architectural resources as well as designed landscape features. These elements contribute to the historic character that defines the community today. In many ways, the historic resources of the Auburn Avenue community are representative of the types of properties built elsewhere in the urban South from the late-19th century through the 1960s. However, the neighborhood is not a "typical" African-American neighborhood.

The Auburn Avenue community was initially settled by whites prior to the Civil War. Wheat Street, later renamed Auburn Avenue, was opened in 1853. During Reconstruction and the final decades of the 19th century, whites and blacks lived in the area in virtually equal numbers. Extant turn-of-the-century residential development consists of large, two-story dwellings built for whites as well as smaller houses primarily occupied by blacks. There are also examples of larger residences built for blacks during the 1910s and 1920s north of Auburn Avenue. Auburn Avenue evolved into an all-black district near the turn-of-the-century. Edgewood Avenue's businesses only a block away remained largely white-owned. Thus, while the 20th-century residential development of the Auburn Avenue community has been predominantly black, the area was initially established as a white neighborhood. Even though the Edgewood Avenue commercial section now includes numerous black-owned buildings, most of these properties were built and owned by whites early in the 20th century.

Most of the historic residential resources within the Auburn Avenue community are vernacular buildings, although several architectural styles are evident. In most cases, stylistic elements have been applied to dwellings that represent house types common in Georgia. The most prevalent stylistic ornamentation is from the Italianate, Queen Anne, and Craftsman styles. There are relatively few true "high style" examples in the area. A substantial number of modern brick apartment buildings were built in the community during the late 1950s and 1960s. Many residences in the Auburn Avenue community have been altered over time, but as a group these resources exhibit a high level of historic integrity. Physical condition varies greatly from building to building. The vernacular housing in the community includes one-story house types such as the shotgun, double shotgun, hall-parlor, gabled-wing cottage, and pyramidal cottage. These one-story house types are found mostly in the eastern two-thirds of the district. Two-story houses are generally confined to Auburn Avenue, where there is a good collection of dwellings built mostly in the 1890s, as well as along sections of John Wesley Dobbs Avenue and Irwin Street.

The community's commercial resources feature varying levels of stylistic decoration. Most historic commercial buildings are brick one- and two-story structures with storefronts and sometimes

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decorative brickwork around the fenestration and along the parapet. Historic integrity is more inconsistent with the commercial buildings, and portions of Edgewood Avenue include altered properties as well as nonhistoric intrusions. However, most of the Auburn Avenue community's commercial buildings retain historic integrity and convey the overall pattern of commercial development.

#### Residential Architectural Resources

Historic residential buildings represent the largest property type in the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District. Most date from 1890 to 1930 and are one-story, frame vernacular house types with limited stylistic ornamentation. Particularly common house types are the shotgun, double shotgun, hall-parlor, gabled wing cottage, and pyramid cottage. Stylistic ornamentation applied to house types is generally limited to elements from the Italianate, Queen Anne, Craftsman and Colonial Revival styles. The condition of houses in the historic district vary greatly. Many are in need of maintenance and repair while some are in a deteriorated condition. Some residential buildings have had major additions, but in nearly all cases it is easy to determine the original building from the new construction. Nonhistoric exterior surface coverings, such as asphalt brick veneer, are common, but aluminum and vinyl siding are rare.

A substantial number of historic multi-family apartment buildings exist in the district, most dating from the mid-1950s through 1968. These are modern brick buildings that do not feature ornament or other references to past styles but are plain as was common for modern or International-style buildings. The buildings are mostly simple volumetric forms, such as squares or rectangles and often feature flat, or low-hipped roofs. The apartments are built in clusters and sometimes sited perpendicular to roadways. Several multi-building apartment complexes are oriented inward to create central courts and landscaped common areas.

#### Commercial and Institutional Architectural Resources

Historic commercial buildings in the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District are concentrated along Auburn Avenue between William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive and Fort Street and along Edgewood Avenue the full length of the district. The small commercial stretch of Auburn Avenue within the district is composed primarily of two-story brick buildings dating from about 1920 to the early 1940s. None of the buildings predates 1917 because this area was mostly destroyed by the 1917 fire. Edgewood Avenue is lined by one- and two-story brick buildings, most built between 1905 and 1920. Few buildings along Edgewood date from the 1920s or 1930s, but a large group dates from the 1940s and 1950s. In general, the commercial buildings along Edgewood exhibit more substantial decorative treatments than those along Auburn Avenue, and this is particularly true of the earlier Edgewood Avenue buildings. The Italianate style is well represented in storefronts with broad expanses of glass framed by columns or piers, round- and segmentally arched windows, horizontal

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stringcourses, flat rooflines, and projecting cornices.<sup>49</sup> Beyond the two principle commercial areas, the district also contains several small, one-story brick grocery stores. These are entirely utilitarian buildings and most were built from 1920s through the 1940s. Nonhistoric commercial buildings are generally incompatible with the district in terms of design and materials. These include fast food restaurants and gasoline stations. The Wheat Street Plaza North and South, which were completed in 1969 at Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street, are small strip shopping centers. They are set back from the street to allow for parking in front unlike historic commercial buildings in the historic district.

Churches represent the primary institutional resources in the community. The largest are Wheat Street Baptist Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church. Wheat Street Church is a large, stone, four-story building designed in the Gothic Revival style and was completed in 1923. It features three- and four-story towers at each end of the main Auburn Avenue facade. Lancet windows also distinguish the building, which is located at the southwest corner of Auburn Avenue and William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive. Ebenezer Baptist Church, begun in 1914 and completed in 1922, is a three-story red-brick structure designed in a more restrained Gothic Revival style. It is located at the southeast corner of Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street. It features two large towers at each end of the Auburn Avenue facade, which flank a steeply pitched gable roof. A two-story educational wing built in 1956 is attached at the northeast corner. A new sanctuary for the congregation of Ebenezer Baptist Church was completed in 1999 across the street. Other, smaller, less ornate churches are located throughout the neighborhood on corner lots or tucked among rows of historic houses.

Fire Station No. 6, built in 1894 on Boulevard at the southeast corner of Auburn Avenue, is an outstanding example of Romanesque Revival design in public building. The front facade features a large, brick-arched engine bay and a band of arched second-level windows. A small tower is located at the building's southwest corner and decorative brickwork is seen on the entire building.

### Industrial Resources

The most prominent industrial resources in the district are located along the tracks of the Southern Railroad, east of Sampson Street and southeast of the intersection of Sampson and Irwin streets. The Atlantic/Southeastern Compress and Warehouse at 659 Auburn Avenue is particularly notable. The present brick warehouse building is only a portion of the original complex (the compress was destroyed by fire) that was constructed in 1905 to compress, grade, and store cotton arriving by rail. Also, the area south of Edgewood includes several factory buildings, such as the Atlanta Brush Company at 320 Tanner Street, built c.1910, and the Trio Laundry dry cleaning plant/Berman Paper Stock Company at the northeast corner of Tanner and Hilliard streets, also built c.1910. The J. K. Orr Shoe Factory/Red Seal Shoe Company is located at 14 William Holmes Borders, Sr., Drive. Other industrial operations were formerly located at other points within the community but have since

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<sup>49</sup>Blythe et al., 76.

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been demolished. That industrial resources remain in the district is important for illustrating the historic relationship between residential and industrial resources and because they represent the places of employment for many residents of the Auburn Avenue community.

#### Landscape Resources

The most notable historic streetscape characteristics of the Auburn Avenue community include street paving widths, sidewalk widths, the two-way flow of traffic, and building setbacks from the street, nearly all of which have remained unchanged. Original granite curbs are in place in many sections of the community, including along most of Auburn Avenue. Original sidewalk materials (brown river stone aggregate and brick) are not commonly seen, as most have been replaced with concrete. In terms of residential yards, the community does not exhibit the individuality of residential landscapes that existed earlier in the 20th century. Oral history documentation compiled by the National Park Service in the early 1990s indicates that in the Birth-Home Block elements of historic residential landscapes remain but with little consistency. The same is true for other areas of the community.

The most significant surviving landscape resources within the district are associated with streetscapes and with building/lot relationships. The varying width of streets within the district is an example of important streetscape design. Auburn Avenue, Boulevard, and Edgewood (among other streets) retain their forty-foot widths from curb to curb, while streets such as Old Wheat and Howell south of Auburn Avenue are only eighteen feet from curb to curb. These are characteristics of the community's setting that contribute to its historic integrity. The placement of houses and other buildings on their lots is another significant aspect of landscape design in the district. Also important are the residential yard spaces, while perhaps not used exactly as they were during the period of significance, serve as important elements of the settings of historic houses. These yard spaces help define relationships between buildings and convey a sense of how these properties were used during the historic period.

Beginning in the 1890s, single-family dwellings and duplexes were typically built on long, narrow lots, most of which remain today. The shallow front-yard setbacks and minimal spacing between structures survives. Rear yards generally are two- to three-times as deep as front yards. While landscape treatments of the present day in many ways differ from those of the historic period, elements of historic landscapes may still be seen. A front walk centered on the front door and running perpendicular from the sidewalk to the porch steps has always been a common feature and is a treatment readily apparent today. It is also quite common to see front yards enclosed by hedges and sometimes fences along sidewalks, both being typical treatments from the historic period. Because the side yards are so narrow, they were not functional spaces and were only used for circulation from front to rear. Side yards today appear virtually unchanged from the historic period, and it is common to see hedges or fences delineating property lines. Rear yards, which were often large, were treated as utilitarian spaces and often included gardens, storage sheds, and clotheslines. Fences usually surrounded rear yards and were frequently made of miscellaneous materials such as

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unpainted boards and wire fencing. Rear enclosures were typically higher than front yard enclosures and often sat on low walls. Today, it is not unusual to find remnants of historic fences, but in many cases they have been replaced by chain-link or more recent board fences. Few elements such as gardens and clotheslines remain.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS): ( ) N/A**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued  
date issued:
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #GA-1171; GA-1178-E; GA-2169
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # (N/A)

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other, Specify Repository:

**Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):**

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreege of original Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District** approx. 15.4 acres\*

**Acreege of Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase** approx. 265 acres\*\*

\*Acreege listed in the National Register Information System.

\*\*This does not include the 15.4 acres previously listed.

### UTM References (boundary increase)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	16	743000	3738510
B	16	744520	3739010
C	16	743820	3737860
D	16	743000	3737600
E	16	742870	3738130

### Verbal Boundary Description

Boundaries are indicated on the attached map of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary of the original (1974) Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District boundary was drawn to include the resources most closely associated with Martin Luther King, Jr., as they were understood at the time. Recent scholarship indicates that the larger neighborhood (Old Fourth Ward) in which King was reared survives mostly intact. One of the purposes of this amendment is to expand the boundaries of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District to include contiguous and intact portions of the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood that was not included in the original National Register nomination.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase expands the boundaries of the original historic district to include additional contiguous properties on almost all sides of the original historic district. The boundary increase is irregularly shaped with the original L-shaped historic district in its center.

The boundary increase includes historically residential properties as far as Interstate 75/85 corridor to the west. The elevated interstate was rebuilt and widened three times its original width since 1980 and is a large visual barrier between the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District and the Sweet Auburn Historic District. Although these two historic districts were once part of a single African-American community, the interstate divides the Sweet Auburn district, which is exclusively commercial, from the Auburn Avenue neighborhood, which is mostly residential. That is, Sweet

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Auburn is considered downtown; the Auburn Avenue community is generally viewed a residential neighborhood on the east side of Atlanta.

Freedom Parkway, a downtown expressway constructed in 1980s, forms the northern boundary. Although the historic neighborhood, known as the Old Fourth Ward, continues north to Ponce de Leon Avenue, Freedom Parkway's four lanes, wide center median, and its landscaped right-of-way on both sides of the roadway isolate the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District from the northern parts of the neighborhood. The Southern Railroad to the forms the boundary between the Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District and Inman Park Historic District located on the east side of the rail line. DeKalb Avenue forms the boundary on the south because it (and the rail line that runs parallel with DeKalb Avenue) is the traditional boundary between the Auburn Avenue neighborhood and other neighborhoods south of DeKalb Avenue, including the historically white mill village known as Cabbagetown.

The boundary increase district is a contiguous and historically cohesive area that exhibits a high level of architectural continuity because all of the resources now included were at one time part of the neighborhood known as the Old Fourth Ward. The Old Fourth Ward was a political demarcation that extended as far north as Ponce de Leon Avenue. The district was physically and visually severed from the Old Fourth Ward to the north by the Freedom Parkway constructed in the 1980s.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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**State Historic Preservation Office**

**name/title** Steven H. Moffson, Architectural Historian  
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**Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable)** ( ) not applicable

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- (X) **consultant**  
( ) **regional development center preservation planner**  
( ) **other:**

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Photographs

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**Name of Property:** Martin Luther King, Jr., Historic District Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation  
**City or Vicinity:** Atlanta  
**County:** Fulton  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** December 1998

**Description of Photograph(s):**

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birth Home, 501 Auburn Avenue, photographer facing south.
2. Birth-Home Block, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing southeast.
3. Birth-Home Block, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
4. Birth-Home Block, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing southwest.
5. Old Wheat Street, photographer facing northwest.
6. Old Wheat and Hogue streets, photographer facing northeast.
7. Ebenezer Baptist Church, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing southeast.
8. Martin Luther King, Jr., tomb and memorial plaza, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing east.
9. Ebenezer Baptist Church and National Park Service visitor center, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northwest.
10. Ebenezer Baptist Church and National Park Service visitor center, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing east.
11. National Park Service visitor center plaza and King tomb (right), Auburn Avenue, photographer facing southeast.
12. National Park Service visitor center parking facility, photographer facing northwest.

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Photographs

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13. Birth-Home Block, Auburn Avenue at Boulevard, photographer facing northeast.
14. Boulevard, photographer facing northeast.
15. Birth-Home Block, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
16. Birth-Home Block, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northwest.
17. Howell Street, photographer facing northwest.
18. Howell Street, photographer facing northwest.
19. Howell Street, photographer facing northwest.
20. Auburn Avenue, photographer facing east.
21. Cornelia Street, photographer facing northwest.
22. Bradley Street, photographer facing northwest.
23. Wigwam Apartments, Randolph Street, photographer facing northwest.
24. Randolph Street, photographer facing northwest.
25. Randolph Street, photographer facing northeast.
26. "Bishops Row," John Wesley Dobbs Avenue, photographer facing west.
27. David T. Howard School, John Wesley Dobbs Avenue, photographer facing west.
28. Randolph Street, photographer facing north.
29. Atlantic/Southeastern Cotton Compress, view from Airline Drive, photographer facing north.
30. Atlantic/Southeastern Cotton Compress, view from Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing northwest.
31. Sampson Street, photographer facing north.

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### Photographs

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32. McGruder Street with David T. Howard School (center background), photographer facing west.
33. McGruder Street with David T. Howard School (left background), photographer facing northwest.
34. McGruder Street, photographer facing southwest.
35. Sampson Street, photographer facing northwest.
36. Lampkin Street, photographer facing northwest.
37. Sampson Street, photographer facing northwest.
38. Highland Avenue, photographer facing west.
39. Highland Avenue, photographer facing northwest.
40. Kendall Street, photographer facing west.
41. Alaska Avenue, photographer facing north.
42. Highland Avenue, photographer facing northwest.
43. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
44. Atlanta Brush Company, view from Hillard Street, photographer facing northwest.
45. J. K. Orr Shoe Factory/Red Seal Shoe Company, William H. Borders Drive, photographer facing northeast.
46. William H. Borders Drive, photographer facing northwest.
47. William H. Borders Drive, photographer facing northeast.
48. William H. Borders Drive, photographer facing northwest.
49. Jackson Street, photographer facing northwest.
50. Jackson Street, photographer facing northwest.

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### Photographs

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51. Fitzgerald Street, photographer facing northwest.
52. Gartrell Street, photographer facing northwest.
53. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
54. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
55. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing west.
56. Boulevard, photographer facing north.
57. Daniel Street, photographer facing northwest.
58. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
59. Howell Street, photographer facing north.
60. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing west.
61. Edgewood Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
62. Bradley Street, photographer facing northwest.
63. Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
64. Prince Hall, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northwest.
65. Wheat Street Baptist Church with Wheat Street Towers and Ebenezer Baptist Church in background, Auburn Avenue, photographer facing east.
66. Auburn Avenue, photographer facing northeast.
67. Wheat Street Gardens I, Hilliard Street, photographer facing northeast.
68. Irwin Street, photographer facing east.
69. Houston Square Apartments, Jackson Street, photographer facing west.
70. Irwin Street, photographer facing northeast.