

Mayor Andre Dickens
61st Mayor of Atlanta
January 3, 2022 – Inauguration Speech

Redeeming the Soul of Atlanta Together

Good afternoon, Atlanta!

I want to first thank Georgia Tech, my alma mater, and President Angel Cabrera for allowing us to have this ceremony here at Bobby Dodd Stadium. It means a lot to be back on campus for this honor.

I want to congratulate the Atlanta City Council Members and the new council President for your commitment to serve the people. I know the work of the council as a former council member, and the people are counting on you to passionately represent them for the next four years. Again, congratulations and I look forward to working closely with each of you.

To the judges who were sworn in today, thank you for your service. I know you will serve the city well and maintain the sanctity of our justice system.

Thank you to the other current and former elected officials for your service to the people of Atlanta, metro Atlanta, the state of Georgia, and our nation.

I want to thank my family and friends, because without your constant support, I wouldn't be standing here right now.

Finally, I want to give all praises to God for blessing me to be able to see this day.

God has given me so much and today I have to simply say “thank you, God, with all of my heart.”

I greet you today: As a native of Atlanta's Adamsville neighborhood, the son of a hard-working mother, the father of a beautiful 16-year-old daughter, a deacon in my church, a public servant, and a graduate of this prestigious university, Georgia Tech.

It's remarkable to believe that almost 30 years ago, I stood in those stands with my Kappa brothers during every football game as a student usher to make extra money during college. I ushered in those stands.

Today, I stand before you to usher in a new day in the city of Atlanta!

I greet you today in the spirit of my predecessors...Ivan Allen, another Georgia Tech graduate, the namesake of the GT College of Liberal Arts, who boldly testified in favor of the 1964 Civil Rights Act during a turbulent time in this country.

I greet you in the spirit of Maynard Jackson, who became the first black mayor of Atlanta, built the world's busiest airport and created the Minority and Women business enterprise program that has been implemented all over the world.

I greet you in the name of Ambassador and Mayor Andrew Young, who brought us the Olympics and whose vision of turning Atlanta into an international city has placed us on the global map.

I greet you in the name of Shirley Franklin, one of my strongest supporters, the first woman mayor of Atlanta, who had the temerity and courage to restore the public trust in government, tackle the neglected issues of improving our infrastructure, and create new and vibrant Atlanta institutions such as the BeltLine.

I believe, as they believed, that, together, there is nothing that we can't accomplish – starting with redeeming the soul of Atlanta.

Our true opponents are not some political competitors or some neighbor we disagree with.

No!

Our opponents are poverty, fear, inequality, violence, hopelessness and homelessness.

Each mayor had their burden--mine is to bring us together in a safe, clean, thriving city and to restore our sense of community.

I also want to recognize the positive contributions of other mayors before me:

William B Hartsfield, who had the vision for the great airport that has become the economic engine of the southeast for the last 50 years.

Sam Massell, who ushered in MARTA and who has been a business leader in Buckhead for several decades.

Bill Campbell, who was the first city councilman in the modern era to become mayor and who presided over the Centennial Olympic Games.

Kasim Reed, who oversaw the building of Mercedes-Benz Stadium and Tyler Perry Studios.

And Keisha Lance Bottoms, our outgoing Mayor, who had the wherewithal to steer us through the COVID-19 pandemic and defend against a cybersecurity attack.

This is an awesome list of public servants that have come before me.

And so it is, with an immense amount of reflection, humility, and honor, I hold out my hand to accept this precious baton of responsibility from those leaders. I accept the responsibility of uplifting the Soul of Atlanta.

None of my predecessors accomplished the things they did alone -- and neither can I.

I want to thank Atlantans from every neighborhood in our city, of every race and ethnicity, of every faith, of every gender and sexual orientation, of every political background, and I want to tell you that this mayor, this council, these judges, we see you. We are here to serve.

Together we will write a new chapter for Atlanta, for this beautiful city in a forest. This city that W.E.B Dubois 125 years ago called the breathless city of a hundred hills.

This city that Mayor Ivan Allen 55 years ago said was Too Busy to Hate.

This city that Influences Everything.

I stand here today as living proof that a little kid from Adamsville could dare to dream to be mayor and grow up to fulfill that dream by becoming the 61st mayor of Atlanta.

My visions for Atlanta are filled with optimism.

Oh Atlanta ... I am a positive person.

I try to look at good, where others see bad. I am strong in my faith, and I truly believe that together we can conquer insurmountable obstacles and undeniable challenges. And you have my full commitment that I will work hard every day, from can't see morning to can't see night, to ensure that this city is safe, clean and equitable.

For all of its citizens.

First of all, as your mayor and with your help, I want to make sure our city is safe from Bankhead to Buckhead.

I want our city to be a place where little kids can play without being afraid of getting shot by a random bullet.

Where women can stop at a gas station and pump a few gallons of gas without fear of physical intimidation.

Where elderly people feel empowered to come out of their homes and can enjoy a walk in the park on a sunny day.

As such, the first 100 days of my administration will be laser focused on reducing crime with a particular emphasis on balancing safety and justice.

We will beat back the scourge of crime through my SAFE Streets Plan.

We will hire 250 police officers by the end of the year.

Starting this quarter, we will train all new and existing officers in conflict resolution, de-

escalation and community policing.

And I will direct my police chief to remind all police officers they are here to protect and serve.

We will also focus on other technologies like streetlights, cameras, and shot spotters.

We will add 10,000 streetlights in every quadrant to see an Atlanta that is lit up like a Christmas tree from the Airport to Phipps Plaza.

We will professionalize, stabilize, and enhance the technology within our 911 operations because an emergency is the wrong time to be put on hold.

But we know that crime does not happen in a vacuum. We must attack the root causes of crime and that's why there needs to be a balance between Safety and Justice.

I will begin to hire and deploy specialists to address non-violent issues such as mental health and homelessness so that our officers can focus on preventing violent crimes.

It's important to note that roughly 60% of crimes were conducted by youth between the ages of 13 and 24.

So, we will partner with the Atlanta Public Schools, the faith community, and community organizations across the region to expand and enhance recreation, job training, internship, and apprenticeship programs aimed specifically at our youth.

It is going to take all of the community to chip in, and we must be diligent, strategic, and committed in our efforts to make Atlanta a place where we can all feel safe again and where hope is alive.

Next, I am going to ensure that we have a clean, honest and efficient city government. Where roads, sidewalks, sewers, and parks equipment are maintained.

Where green space is abundant and families, residents and visitors can work, live and play in peace.

A city where people are engaged and excited about participating in their communities.

We will give additional resources to Keep Atlanta Beautiful along with the Department of Public Works to launch Operation Clean Sweep starting later this month to Clean Up our City!

I promise that I will do all that I can every day to improve city operations and to improve the work environment for all city employees. I'll ride with city workers to understand their challenges and tour the city with City Council members to learn the neighborhood needs firsthand.

We depend on city workers, and they depend on the city.

I will be asking city workers to follow my lead and to redouble their efforts to treat all residents like the most valuable customers that they are.

Atlanta, you should expect a clean, well-run city.

In case you haven't heard, Atlanta is growing!! But not everyone has been part of this growth and that's why we need to focus on economic inclusion.

I want to see our city live up to its promises of equity.

Those with dreams and talent should know that this is a city that makes a way for them to achieve success.

I will create a new Atlanta Department of Labor to work with the private sector, labor unions, higher educational institutions, philanthropic groups, Invest Atlanta, and workforce development organizations to tackle the obstacles keeping us from full employment.

We are going to work to offer students a *personal development program* that provides either a track for a college degree or a high paying job. There are high paying jobs in technical fields that don't require a 4-year college degree, so I want to get more young people the certifications and the soft skills to thrive in the workforce.

A full workforce with great paying jobs will help us overcome another major issue across Atlanta: the lack of affordable housing.

The cost of housing in the city has increased by 65% since 2010, and it is a moral imperative to address this crisis.

To get this right we will consolidate and coordinate our efforts to build or preserve 20,000 units of affordable housing in the next eight years, without displacement.

Relatedly, my administration will strengthen its efforts to address the city's growing number of those experiencing homelessness.

We will implement a Housing First model to rehouse individuals immediately when they experience homelessness through a network of motels, hotels, shelters, and apartments.

We will coordinate with the Fulton and Dekalb County Health Departments to provide mental and physical healthcare to homeless residents in need of services.

Finally, we will ensure that all unsheltered Atlantans who indicate readiness to work will be trained in the technical areas of need and receive help in job placement.

Once again, we will increase our efforts to reduce homelessness!

Additionally, we will create a more equitable transportation network in our city. We will add bike

lanes, sidewalks, complete streets, and yes, rail on the BeltLine!

Atlanta is known as a place for diversity and inclusion.

Nowhere else in this country can you find so many strong, competent, experienced, diverse leaders who are ready, willing and able to do business.

That's why big-tech companies like Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook are making their way here from the West Coast.

But we must ensure that these companies are using the untapped talent here in our city.

Because we have a diverse talent pool here in Atlanta that starts with our great universities: Spelman, Morehouse, Clark Atlanta University, Georgia State, Emory, and of course, right here at Georgia Tech.

As I've told many CEOs, I love that you are building buildings in Atlanta, but I want Atlantans in your buildings.

Inclusion and equity will be the bedrock of our economic growth!

Now let's talk more about the future.

As you know, I am a Georgia Tech engineer with plenty of respect for technology, and I want our city to be a shining light for what technology can mean for equity, inclusion and democracy.

Toward that end, I am calling on the technology and telecommunication industries to join the city in stamping out the digital divide and bringing the advantages of a connected city to each and every resident.

Our technological future is bright.

UPS and Amazon are studying innovations like autonomous vehicles, air taxis, and personal delivery robots.

I want Atlanta to be the beta test site for the nation's future in transportation, logistics, and digital equity.

We will be at the table for blockchain and clean energy, for baby bonds and early childhood education, for FinTech, health IT, and NFTs.

Innovation is the future, and we will show that Atlanta has something to say!

Finally, I believe our reputation as an arts and culture center can and should rival our reputation as a commercial, sports and business center.

To be a true international city, we will make deeper and smarter investments in arts, artists and our cultural centers.

As you have all seen, my currency is trust and energy.

I have already begun to travel to all parts of this city to listen to you, the people, and I have discovered that we all want many of the same things.

We want to be safe.

We want to be heard.

We want to be respected.

And we want action on the things that will enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

This time in our city's life reminds me of the story from the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was heart-broken to see that the infrastructure, the walls and gates around the city of Jerusalem had been in ruins.

Nehemiah was so determined that he inspired all of the people to work together to fix the gates and walls in front of their homes such that in just 52 days, the entire wall was fully rebuilt.

They chose to work together to accomplish difficult tasks.

They chose to unify and not divide. And we need to choose the same.

We don't need separate cities. We must be one city with one bright future.

We have survived hard times before:

We've survived crime waves, the missing and murdered children, Lester Maddox and his axe handle.

We survived the Olympic Park bombing, and we will survive the COVID-19 pandemic.

And as great as our past has been, our future can be even greater.

We are a city of great neighborhoods, great people, and great institutions.

From the C.T. Martin Recreation Center to the Grant Park Farmers Market.

From the Peachtree Hills to the rolling hills of Cascade Heights.

From Little Five Points to Summerhill.

And from Inman Park to Collier Heights.

We are a City of perseverance, hope, love, and passion.

And we are determined to show the world and ourselves what a great caring and collaborative city we can be.

I've told you before that I draw circles, I don't draw lines to divide us.
And I'll tell you now that I don't want any lines dividing this great city.
We need to believe in the power of drawing circles and coming together to move Atlanta, ALL of Atlanta, to a brighter future.

Let's come together, let's stay together and meet these challenges, together.

God bless you all, and God bless Atlanta.

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