

# NO JOBS Near?

Black Atlantans live disproportionately further away from employment clusters

By Sharon C. Adams

In 1931, JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS, WHO COINED THE TERM THE "AMERICAN DREAM," described it as the, "dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement." Many have tailored this dream to suit their own needs, however some things remain fundamental. Though Adams indicates that it is not merely about motor cars and high wages, those two along with adequate housing are what numerous people strive to achieve in order to set the foundation for attaining a higher goal. In the flourishing city of Atlanta, one would assume that achieving this dream would extend to all of its residents. However, recent studies have shown that the piece, which equates to affordable housing near prosperous job clusters, is escaping many in the African-American community.



**“Thirty percent of African Americans are more likely to work in areas where job clusters are declining compared to 20 percent of whites.”**

**—Myron Orfield**

A study conducted by the Institute of Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota Law School, indicates that a disproportionate share of the region’s poor and moderate-income residents live near the southern region of Metro Atlanta where job growth is the slowest. “Thirty percent of African Americans are more likely to work in areas where job clusters are declining compared to 20 percent of whites,” informs Myron Orfield, executive director of the University of Minnesota Institute of Race and Poverty. The study also shows that job centers in the Atlanta business district grew modestly during the 1990s by 4,400 reflecting a 3.9 percent increase, compared to the second largest and fastest growing job center located in Sandy Springs/Dunwoody, which grew 62 percent in the same time span. Other areas of increased growth include Cobb and Gwinnett counties and Alpharetta. According to the 2000 United States Census, African Americans represent 7.2 percent of north Fulton County’s population, which includes the cities of Roswell and Alpharetta and whites represent 82.6 percent; where as the demographics of south Fulton County is 73.97 percent African American and 21.85 percent white.



**Myron Orfield, Executive Director of the University of Minnesota Institute of Race and Poverty**

As job clusters are seemingly racing toward the north, it poses an increased burden for those who have to fight the traffic each day to keep up. “One of the biggest impacts in this type of imbalance for the region as a whole [is that] it creates, among other things, an extreme burden on transportation,” says Tom Weyandt, director of the Comprehensive Planning Department of the Atlanta Regional Commission. “Especially in light of the fact that the resources we have for

transportation are severely limited and are likely to [become] more so in the future.” Atlanta is home to the largest share of workers — about 30 percent — who commute more than 40 minutes to work.

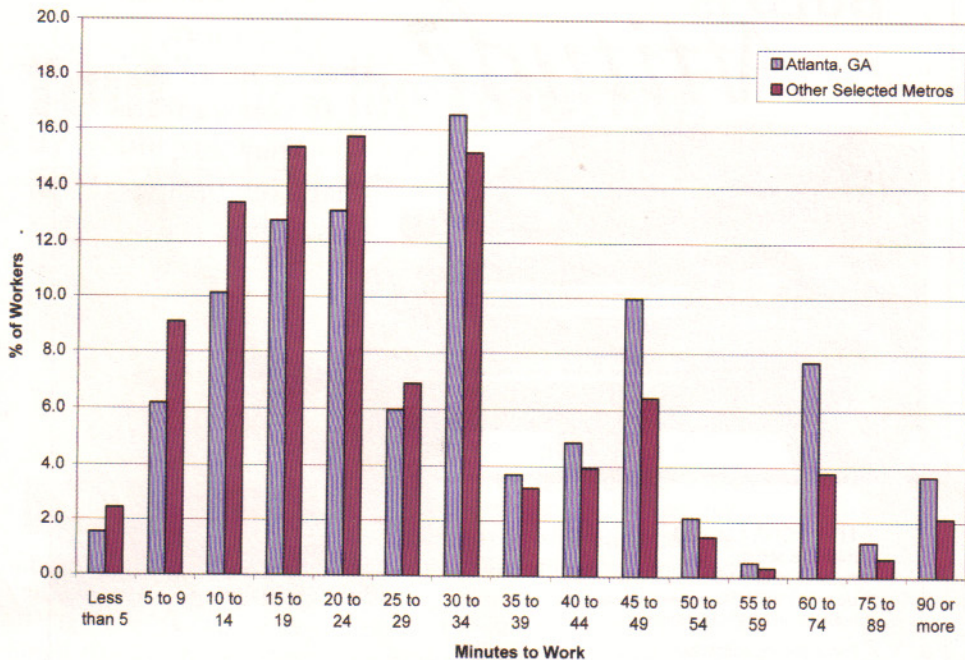
In an effort to alleviate the disparity, which translates to a lack of affordable



**Von Nkosi, Director of the Mixed Income Committee Initiative (MICI)**

housing and extensive commutes, Von Nkosi, director of the Mixed Income Committee Initiative (MICI), is creating a business case of promoting mixed income and mixed use communities. “We need to make builders understand that there is enough work for everyone, and also enough profit. There is a potential of over \$2 billion in profit in building mixed use communities,” he admits. Mixed income communities provide homes of varied price ranges in the same area, and mixed use communities incorporate houses with businesses, stores, restaurants etc. “[These types of] communities have twice as much property value than single use communities,” Nkosi notes. He adds that potential homeowners who are supportive of the

## Distribution of Workers Commute Travel Times, 2000



This Figure shows the same pattern for 2000. Fewer of Atlanta's workers have the shortest commutes (under 30 minutes) and more of Atlanta's workers have the longest commutes (over 30 minutes). It also indicates that commute times are inching upwards for the longest commutes, in both Atlanta and the other regions.

Contributed by Institute on Race & Poverty  
University of Minnesota Law School

mixed income, mixed use communities should attend zoning hearings to voice their opinions, as mostly people who are opposed show up.

Weyndat believes in time some of these issues will begin to rectify themselves and the market, in turn, will respond to overcrowding. "Because of the obvious congestion problems, we are beginning to see a slight shift in the development toward the south side," he notes. "There's only so far north companies will be willing to go before they will want to be [re-connected] with the central city and the airport and so on." He adds that the southern region is "generally a healthy economic region [but] it is important for local communities to think clearly about what they want their communities to be," and

that public and private sectors must work to ensure growth.

According to Adams' initial description of The American Dream, the dream itself is not complex or far-fetched. Today, however, for African-American communities with miles between them and the job clusters, it might entail more patience, gas and money. Adams argued, "It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." After tasting the satisfaction of realizing a difficult dream, the distance between the starting point and the finish is more even gratifying. **AT**



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