

The end of housing for the poor: Atlanta's Katrina?

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When Katrina hit New Orleans, she did more than flood a city. She exposed another city—mostly black and mostly poor—where people were living their lives in a lake. The levees broke, people died. New Orleans and the nation will never be the same.

I believe the Atlanta Housing Authority's intent to demolish the last public housing in Atlanta without any effort to replace it—unit for unit—for the poor could be *Atlanta's Katrina*.



If we do no more than we are doing now to provide decent, safe, affordable housing for the poor, seniors and working families, we will not have enough roads, runways, and BET awards to save us.

A few years ago, Fulton County officials attempted to locate 4,000 poor children and their families who once lived in Perry Homes. One of the sponsors of Atlanta's Perry-Bolton TAD, the County had spent four million tax dollars with the understanding that at least 20 percent of the new "mixed-use developments" would be set aside for former residents.

A few residents returned to the "mixed-use developments" at the old site. However, independent agencies have been unable to locate most of the families who attended the Springfield Missionary Baptist Church, and sent their children to the Scott Elementary School and Archer High School.

To claim they have been "successfully relocated" and now living in communities "where they can reach their human potential"—**without proof**—is to practice the same kind of deception and self-delusion that existed in pre-Katrina New Orleans.

It is unlikely AHA's displaced families found suitable housing within the city limits. In a recent national survey, Atlanta ranked 7th in the nation for the percentage of families paying more than half their annual income to rent a place to live.

It is also extremely unlikely that even in today's depressed housing market, private landlords with decent housing in safe communities are interested in rent-assistance vouchers held by former residents of AHA's Roosevelt and Palmer Senior High Rise Communities—also scheduled for demolition.

There is a significant difference between blowing up buildings and building communities: AHA has received the go-ahead to blow up buildings. The question is who has the skill, courage and political will to build communities?

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