



Atlanta Inquirer Building. The building housing the Atlanta Inquirer as seen in February of 2015.

947 Martin Luther King Junior Drive SW: The Building

The building located on 947 Martin Luther King Junior Drive SW, Atlanta, GA and represented here as a birdhouse reveals a cross section of Black American society. Its history speaks not only to the strong voices of the well-known Civil Rights Movement but to the people who were taking steady action against institutional racism long before it gained national momentum. It most recently housed the Atlanta Inquirer, a bold and influential newspaper with a goal to “Seek Out the Truth and Report It Without Fear or Favor.” The Atlanta Inquirer was able to provide a voice to individuals who didn’t truly have one. Before the Atlanta Inquirer occupied 947 Martin Luther King Junior Drive SW, the building was home to the grandparents of Lena Horne. Lena Horne was an influential singer during and Civil Rights activist during the 1960s. Horne was largely raised in her grandparents’ house, making this building an important part of her life. The building ultimately was an important location for the spreading and development of activism and equality for black citizens.



An Atlanta Inquirer Issue

Atlanta’s Radical Newspaper

During the Civil Rights era, the student movement was hardly covered, leading to a knowledge gap between those in the movement and the local communities. *The Atlanta Inquirer*, created in August of 1960, strove to change that. When the first issue was published it included a promise to “endeavor at all times to reflect sincerity, honesty and integrity and be a credit to the City of Atlanta.” This vow provided a foundation in which they would make sure to accurately represent events occurring at the time,

despite any negative backlash they might receive. Throughout the years, the *Atlanta Inquirer* was able to successfully inform the black community of current events and provide a means by which citizens could engage with and be a part of the communication process. The newspaper was able to cover many important events in Atlanta, including the Atlanta child murder cases, the Olympics held in Atlanta, and the election of Atlanta’s first African American mayor. The *Atlanta Inquirer* was able to provide an informative outlet that could effectively promote inclusiveness, equality, and social justice.

Atlanta Inquirer Coverage

The *Atlanta Inquirer* truly honored their promise to “Seek Out the Truth and Report It Without Fear or Favor.” In the 51 years of active coverage from 1960 to 2011, the newspaper published thousands of editorials drawing attention to issues other newspapers swept under the rug of racial prejudice.

The Atlanta Child Murders rocked the Atlanta area from 1979 through 1981. The newspaper followed the disappearances and deaths of the at least 28 children and adults in the two-year period, as well as the subsequent investigation by the FBI and the conviction of Wayne Williams, who has maintained his innocence to this day. Many of the victims came from neighborhoods with which the newspaper had deep connections, putting the newspaper in the unique position to inform the population and assist in the investigation. **Atlanta’s “Berlin Wall”** was erected in 1962 by Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. as a barrier to prevent “intrusion” by black Atlantans into a white residential area. Coverage by the newspaper, helping to motivate citizens to protest the barrier, expressed the opinion that the barriers were unconstitutional, an opinion that was shared by a judge who struck down the barriers in March of 1963.

Published by Influencers

The *Atlanta Inquirer* was inspired by inadequate coverage of the **Atlanta Student Movement** of 1960 for desegregation and racial equality. As such, the newspaper was first written by individuals like editor M. Carl Holman, a teacher and advisor for the students of the movement, as well as reporter Julian Bond, who contributed to the students’ *An Appeal for Human Rights* that expressed their cause. Originally in the advertising department, Atlanta school teacher of 30 years and lifelong community activist John B. Smith became the long-time owner of the *Atlanta Inquirer* until his death in 2017.



John B. Smith (left) and M. Carl Holman (right)



Lena Horne

The House of Lena Horne’s Grandparents

Lena Horne was the product of a subsection of Black American society in the early 20th century that rarely shares the spotlight with the more vocal agents of the Civil Rights Movement that they paved the way for. Her grandparents, Edwin Horne and Cora Calhoun Horne, who died in 1939 and 1932, lived in this building and played a major role in raising Lena. These two were among the Black Americans who worked towards racial equality long before the Civil Rights Movement gained national momentum. Edwin Horne was a teacher, politician, and worked for a newspaper, the *Atlanta Defiance*, while Cora Horne was a college educated feminist and suffragist. She was especially civically minded for a woman at the time, and she has been quoted saying that it was more valuable to “go out and help juvenile delinquents and pregnant teenagers” than to “bake a good pie.” This civically active pair likely had quite the influence on their granddaughter Lena Horne, who used her fame and influence as a performer to push for civil rights and fair treatment of Black Americans and other discriminated groups in America. She worked with Eleanor Roosevelt for anti-lynching laws, worked with Paul Robeson in the Progressive Citizens of America anti-racism group, sued theaters and restaurants for racial discrimination, and was an active voice in the national Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. With this building’s early history of housing this exceptional and civically active family, it is fitting that it would next be filled by a newspaper that shared these powerful progressive values.

Birdhouse Seeking Resident:

This likeness of 947 Martin Lither King Jr. Drive boasts a 0.25 sq ft. unfurnished living space in Historic Washington Park. Rent is free, but accommodations are minimal: one bedroom, no bathroom, no kitchen. It would make a great home for a Brown-Headed Nuthatch seeking to start or continue a small family. Year-round residence is preferred.