



# **City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America's Urban Future**

*Mark Pendergrast*

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**City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America's Urban Future** Mark Pendergrast  
**What we can learn from Atlanta's struggle to reinvent itself in the twenty-first century**

Atlanta is on the verge of either tremendous rebirth or demographic meltdown. Atlanta has the highest income inequality in the entire country, blighted neighborhoods and hideous highways, suburban sprawl, and racial injustice. While many cities across America suffer similarly, nowhere but Atlanta have they so dangerously collided.

The most promising plan for Atlanta's rebirth is the Beltline, a massive ring of defunct railways already being transformed into a series of parks, pathways, and streetcars. Cutting through forty neighborhoods ranging from affluent to impoverished, the Beltline will complete a twenty-two-mile loop encircling downtown: shifting the character of the city toward a more walkable, prosperous, and enlightened future. By embracing its physical limitations, by building infrastructure and public amenities, and by offering citizens a vision to fight for, Atlanta is hoping to redeem its past and save its future. *City on the Verge* reveals how cities across the country can transform themselves for the better.

## **City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America's Urban Future Details**

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## **From Reader Review City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America's Urban Future for online ebook**

### **James Ruley says**

On the Verge details the history of the Atlanta belt line, while at the same time serving as an introduction to the history of Atlanta. The most interesting parts of this book to me were the parts about the history of Atlanta, the general overview of the belt line, and the introduction to different Atlanta neighborhoods. That being said, at times this book felt bogged down in names and dates that are somewhat confusing and burdensome. Overall though, a fascinating discussion of the past and an inspiring vision of Atlanta's future potential.

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### **Dana-gabriel says**

As someone who cares deeply about Atlanta and is also not native to Atlanta, I found this book to provide historic context I was missing in understanding Atlanta's obvious challenges. I had "aha" moments when the author's research shed light on Atlanta's problems with economic divides and lack of comprehensive mass transit. Some of the history in the book created a sense of righteous anger in me. Hopefully, this book will play a role in Atlanta becoming a well connected city with homes for all people, regardless of race or economic status, as envisioned by the BeltLine.

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### **Daniel says**

Nice book which covers the Atlanta Beltline, a visionary greenway that is transforming the city and connecting neighborhoods previously divided. The Beltline is a grassroots-driven effort which will not only improve mobility but also attempt to right some of the wrongs of the past, including racism, segregation, and economic inequality. The story of the Beltline is inspiring for communities and demonstrates how activism and partnership building can remake and revive neighborhoods.

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### **Beth says**

Loved it!!!! Granted, I live in Atlanta, so this is extremely relatable, but I think everyone in Atlanta (ITP and OTP) should read this book. The author thoughtfully explains history, race relations, socioeconomic factors that affect the way we live, work and play in Atlanta. Also serves as a great resource for other cities to better understand what to do, what not to do. Should be required reading for every realtor, elected official and public servant.

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### **Jordan Bethea says**

The author starts by breathlessly proclaiming how important the beltline project is and how atlanta is

doomed without it, and then spends an entire book musing on whether or not this is true. He spends a lot of time looking at the history of atlanta and talking to people in different neighborhoods, which is interesting in its own right - but then doesn't relate it to the beltline project in any real meaningful way. He thinks the beltline is a cure for all atlanta's ills, but can't quite figure out exactly how it would work, when you get to the details.

I'm an Atlanta resident who supports and has watched the beltline grow over time, and knows most of the neighborhoods talked about in this book (though not all that personally). If you want to learn about the city, its history, topography, then it's a fine book. As a history of the beltline project, it's pretty thorough. As an argument for the beltline, it's too biased, especially when compared to its lack of actual argument. It would be better if he toned down his rhetoric and got a more technical answer from city planners, economists, and the like.

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### **Aaron Terrazas says**

This is an interesting and at times powerful read, but a very local story. Admittedly not without lessons or parallels to other communities, it remains uniquely specific to Atlanta. Those who do not have particular ties or interests in that community will have a harder time staying engaged.

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### **Megan says**

What I appreciated most about this book was that it provides a snapshot of Atlanta in the early 2010s, amidst Beltline madness and a period of rapid growth. There were a couple factual inaccuracies (FCS ministries did NOT found the Georgia avenue food cooperative) and I felt that he could have provided more insight into how depressed neighborhoods are negatively impacted by real estate speculation. (He did highlight the case of rick warren in English avenue, though.) I particularly enjoyed his epilogue.

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### **Tori Miller says**

It felt like I was reading a list of names, dates, amounts, and places. I wish the author had spent more time clarifying his opinions at the end and I would have liked to hear other opinions also. I thought that was the more interesting part of the book but it was very brief. That was originally why I wanted to read the book.

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### **Michael Lewyn says**

This book feels like two pretty good magazine articles stitched together, preceded by some background. The first "article" is an impressively detailed blow by blow history of the Beltline, which ably shows some of the obstacles that the Beltline faced and continues to face. The Beltline still hasn't acquired all the land it needs, and will not be able to create an effective streetcar system unless it somehow connects with the Atlanta subway- which may be difficult, since I'm not sure that any Beltline parks are likely to connect with the subway in its current form. The second "article" is a guide to some of the neighborhoods likely to be affected by the Beltline, dominated by the life stories of some of the neighborhood residents Pendergrast met. (One

thing I liked: Pendergrast uses street names so we can use Google Street View to "walk" along with him).

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### **Alison Law says**

Listen to my interview with Mark Pendergrast in Episode 24 of the Literary Atlanta podcast. Our conversation was recorded live at The Wren's Nest "Beyond Books" event on January 10, 2018.

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### **Chris says**

This book is tremendously well researched and thorough. The author spent years on personal interviews and experiences. Still, it reminds me of reading 15 years' worth of local sections in the newspaper all at once. It was a tough slog to stay interested in particular community council meetings or the details of bond issues. The book needs a narrative thread to keep readers interested in this boring yet important topic.

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### **Laura says**

Rating: 3.5

This history of the Atlanta Beltline project - still less than half completed, so maybe a bit premature - is probably most interesting to people who live close to it. Mark Pendergrast combines the story of how the project has progressed with a historical discussion of the issues underlying the need for the project and a "tour which circumnavigates the city on Beltline properties, discussing the specific issues and prospects for the future of the project. The book is written well, and well-documented. The most interesting segments to me were the anecdotal elements, discussing the Beltline with people living in areas affected by the project. I'm not sure how much the book helps with cities facing similar transportation/inequality/ economic development issues -- the author speaks frequently to Atlanta's uniqueness -- but if you live here and you are interested in the project the book provides lots of information, detail, and context.

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### **Matt says**

Fascinating history of both Atlanta and the Beltline. If you're interested in Atlanta, urban planning, or how investments in a walkable city impact neighborhoods, especially neighborhoods that have experienced decades of neglect, this is a great read.

Full disclosure: I know nearly all of the characters in this book and have brief appearances, so I may not be a neutral reader.

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### **Paul Miller says**

As a soon-to-be empty-nester wondering where we should live in the next phase of life, I was drawn to this

story of today's Atlanta, as seen through the development of the BeltLine, a planned loop of trails/transit encircling Atlanta. The author 'walks the BeltLine' by describing each of the neighborhoods along the proposed route. This highly readable book invokes a number of reactions: Delight that the 'two Atlantas' has moved from "black vs. white" to "permanent underclass vs. the rest"; middle and upper class blacks have integrated through the metro region. Hopelessness - despite tons of money from numerous well-intentioned programs, there's no clear path forward for those 'left behind' in the hood. Frustration - with any major project w/government participation, there are so many mouths to feed w/very different, and often self-serving interests.

Nevertheless, the book is certainly thought provoking - it taps into the trend of millennials and empty nesters seeking live/work/play, often aspiring to move back into the city. As I read about the aspiration for safety and walkable neighborhoods, I found myself marveling at how much resource is being applied to replicate what is taken for granted in most suburban settings. The author points out this irony, even mentioning the wildly popular development of Avalon near where I live.

Net net - thought provoking read if you're an Atlantan, and certainly an eye-opener to the complexities of urban planning.

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### **Cara says**

Not a fan. Having lived through and been involved with much of the history Pendergrast describes, I felt he was "off-base" at times and just plain wrong at others. Disappointing. The book has a compelling title and a good marketing hook, but what it really needed was a strong editor and a reliable fact-checker. Unfortunately "City on the Verge" will be held up as a "definitive" source for Atlanta BeltLine history, doing the project and our city a grave disservice.

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