



“Anita Beaty, Community Leader from Atlanta Corrects the Record – the 96 Olympics Hurt Atlanta” recorded at the request of No Games Chicago, September 21, 2009 - - <https://tinyurl.com/NGC-Anita-Beaty> - (6 min, 21 sec)

Hi, my name is Anita Beaty, and I’m the Executive Director of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, and I’m here to talk about the Olympics that we experienced, the 1996 summer Olympic Games in Atlanta. We understand here that our Mayor (Shirley Franklin) has reported to you about the Olympics and the promises that you hear from elected officials, particularly mayors in the lead-up to the Games, and certainly in the attempt to get the bid. We’ve seen that in many cities that even the bid attempt, the bid proposal time, creates an enormous amount of development hysteria in cities across the world who have competed to get the bid for the Olympics.

And so here is what we have experienced in Atlanta, beginning in 1991 when we organized the Atlanta Olympics Conscience Coalition, when we tried very hard to make sure that the Olympic planners and the Olympic Committee would at least do what they promised. One of the promises was that there would be no public funds used to produce the 1996 Olympics. Well, by 1995, somewhere over \$400 million in public funds had been used because so many venues that were selected were on public land. So, for example, the Centennial Park, which is one of the legacies of the Olympics, so we are told, is on public land and is managed, secured, and policed by public facilities, public security, and so the cost goes on. Another \$120 million was spent actively by the Board of Regents of the Georgia University System to improve the facilities and help with the Olympic Village, which has since been turned over as dormitories for the Georgia Tech and Georgia State students, and some Atlanta University students, I understand. But in no case was there a profit made in the Games. In fact, if there is evidence that Atlanta broke even on the cost for the Games in 1996, we haven’t seen it.

We also hear that Mayor Franklin claimed that the Olympics created thousands of jobs in Atlanta, and that was absolutely a joke! In fact, we had Labor on board with us for our resistance efforts to try to make sure that the jobs that were created by the construction and the Games themselves went to Atlanta unemployed people and Atlanta skilled workers who were under-employed. That did not happen, and I’m sorry to say that Labor was one of the first groups to “peel off” and to make some sort of “for crumbs” deals with the Olympic planners in the early planning process and in the construction process. But most of the contractors who got the bids brought workers in from outside Atlanta. That was deplored locally, but it didn’t get much press attention.

Also, the Mayor, I think, said that there was no harm done to anybody in the preparation and lead-up to the Olympics and during the Olympics. Well, my organization and some others who were part of the Olympics Conscience Coalition documented 9,000 arrests of African American men in the 12 months leading up to the year of the Games. These 9,000 people were not all arrested at once, but one of the first completed projects in the construction deals for the Olympics was a new jail with expanded capacity, which was very much used the minute it was opened. ***So, we had the documentation of 9,000 people being harassed and arrested. We even had - we got a copy of an arrest citation that was blank. The charge was blank, the name was blank, but the description was "African American man, homeless," and these arrest citations were preprinted and given in stacks to the police.*** That documentation, those certifications, were part of the basis for the lawsuit that we caused to be filed, and was heard, two days before the opening ceremonies. So, a federal judge granted an injunction and restraining order and said to the city, "Bad, bad City! You stop arresting people without probable cause." The case was settled two years later when some financial damages went to the plaintiffs who were homeless and stayed through those long years to bring the suit. However, that was a news story that was sort of heard around the world because the international press was kind of bored with the staged façade they were being allowed to see when they were bussed around the Olympics by the planners. They ostensibly couldn't go beyond the Potemkin Village front and get to what was really going on in Atlanta, which was deep poverty, deep racism, and which only got sort of a steamroller charge during the Olympics, sort of a dress rehearsal for what we have experienced since the Olympics.

So, we would say there are many downsides to hosting the Games, and that you won't hear about those from the planners and from the elected officials, many of whom stand to benefit from the Games. And there were people who benefited; they were the private folks who planned the Games and who benefited from some of the contracts for media and to the access to Olympic memorabilia. So, there was plenty of benefit, but it did not accrue to the public entities that supported it.