

Hippies

When I agreed to move to Atlanta for a year in 1969, we had to rent our house in the Chicago suburbs for a full year, although my visiting professorship at Morehouse College only required my presence there for nine months. However, my salary at Morehouse extended for the full year—as did the housing provided by the college—so we could stay in Atlanta through the summer of 1970 without it being a financial burden. As a result, I decided to stay in Atlanta for those months and involve myself in some interesting volunteer work.

Early during our stay in Atlanta, we became members of a small Lutheran congregation on the north side of the city. While we were there, the congregation began to take an interest in the Hippie community that had begun to grow substantially in size on North Peachtree Street, not too far from where the church was located. Through the church, I became involved in an outreach to that community, meeting with its leaders, learning about their aspirations and hearing their plans for making their aspirations a reality. By the time I completed my obligation at Morehouse, I had become one of the more knowledgeable individuals in Atlanta in regard to the activities of the Hippies and their potential impact on the city. And, although I don't now recall how it happened, that reputation became known to some city leaders and I was asked to assume for that summer the role of semi-official ambassador between the city and the Hippie community. They gave me a desk and telephone at the office of the local Community Chest in downtown Atlanta and I set about the duties I had assumed.

Those duties were pretty much whatever I decided to do. No one—either in the umbrella organization in which I was working or in the business community of the city—had much of a clue about what was going on up on North Peachtree Street. They were looking forward to my finding out for them. Regrettably, I didn't keep a journal of my visits into the Hippie enclave—and 45 years have replaced most of my memories with cobwebs. However, I must have become fairly knowledgeable, because I do remember that I was asked to address the downtown Atlanta Rotary Club to update them on my experiences with the Hippies and my impressions on how their activities might influence prospects for their peaceful integration into public life in Atlanta.

While I was there, I must also have had a meeting with the managing partner of the Atlanta office of the Arthur Anderson accounting firm. I don't recall such a meeting, but I do recall impressions of the man, which I had an opportunity to recall shortly after I returned home from Atlanta—so we must have met. That opportunity occurred shortly after I resumed my work at Argonne and I received a letter from this man inviting me to take a full-time job in Atlanta, working for a charity of which he was chairman of the board. What I recall most clearly, as I considered that offer, was having the distinct feeling that this man was likely to be very intrusive in his leadership over the activities of whomever took over the job he was offering. That was not the primary reason I declined the offer, but it certainly accelerated my decision.

Of course, my brief involvement with the Atlanta Hippies in the summer of 1970 was only a minor event in that year we were living in the city. Yet it did give me a more informed perspective on civil disobedience and social rebellion. Shortly thereafter, the main cause of that rebellion—the Viet Nam War—came to an end and the Hippie movement soon faded into oblivion.