

A SERENDIPITOUS CHAIN OF EVENTS brought me to Atlanta in 2003, having visited the city once before as a tourist. I returned with the screenplay for *Gone With The Wind*, which I purchased from The Margaret Mitchell House. Once home, I promptly asked Evelyn Keyes, my neighbor, to autograph it since she was the actress who played Scarlett's sister in the film. It was a great chance to hear some of the stories from the highest point of the veteran's career and recollections of the fabulous Fox Theatre in 1939. I also came away with meaningful memories taken from the Martin Luther King Memorial museum and well-worn steps to the Auburn Avenue home where the legend was born. The warmth of a summer night resonated somewhere within me. Yet at the time, I had no idea I would soon return to this Southern capital to live. *Why Atlanta* was the most common question I was asked when I first relocated here. My replies were of a personal nature: career opportunities, affordable real estate, the prospect of four relatively mild seasons, and year-round access to outdoor activities.

Locals warned me about the traffic—yet having moved from Los Angeles—I wondered if everyone were on vacation. Certainly there was nothing close to what one finds leaving Manhattan on a Friday afternoon. With Atlanta's meandering surface streets, I was able to drive strategically and mostly avoid traffic altogether. The public transportation is also a helpful perk; especially when going to the airport as the baggage check-in is just off the MARTA exit. *Why Atlanta* is no longer a question simply hurled at a California transplant. Many in the entertainment industry are observing the staggering growth of the business and wondering why. *Know Atlanta* reports that revenues for the state of Georgia are up 400 percent in the sector, according to Bill Thompson, deputy commissioner for the Georgia Department of Economic Development's Film, Music and Digital Entertainment Office (FMDE). This leap in filmmaking appeal has been decidedly swift. *Movie Maker* magazine's annual ranking of the "10 Best Cities to be a Moviemaker" did not even include Atlanta in their 2004 edition. Now the city is considered to be in the top five, while vying to be included in the same breath as L.A. and NYC.

I believe one of the reasons for steadfast growth is the infrastructure in place that supports projects, already home to Turner Studios, CNN and Tyler Perry {just named the "Highest Paid Man in Entertainment" by *Forbes* magazine September 2011, followed up by Jerry Bruckheimer and Steven Spielberg in the number two and three slots, respectively.} Sony's Screen Gems has settled nicely into their new Atlanta digs and are poised to offer their shooting facilities along with providing stiff competition for some of the postproduction houses in town. Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce uses glossy, data-rich marketing brochures—currently available in English, Spanish, French, Mandarin/Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, German, Portuguese, Korean and Italian—to successfully court businesses to the peach state. Among the top reasons cited for establishing a presence in Atlanta is the business-friendly climate, home to many Fortune 500 companies. Entertainment industry projects often set up offices around their projects, so having a thriving business

community helps. The Chamber also touts the region as a "Pre-Eminent Logistics Hub in the U.S." with easy access to the busiest airport in the world, freight trains, and one of the fastest growing ports in the world, Savannah. Film projects never know what they'll need in a pinch; it's reassuring to know they *can* get it.

According to economist Joe Cortright's study, *The Young and the Restless*, Atlanta led the nation last decade in its gain of the "overall US market share of college-educated 25 to 34-year-olds." Adding, this is the most "coveted demographic in the nation" for any industry seeking a talent pool, which bodes particularly well for the hiring managers at local entertainment industry firms. When contemplating whether or not to pay travel expenses for crew, equipment, and services – producers are finding a reservoir of quality resources in Atlanta that streamline projects and provide a substantially lower price tag. The tax incentive program currently offers up to 30% of the budget back in tax credits, making the whole package very cost effective, shooting in *this* state alluring.

The Governor's mansion is not the only Georgian rolling out the proverbial red carpet and courting Hollywood; local counties are getting engaged and extending their signature Southern charm. FMDE's "Georgia Camera Ready Community" recognizes that access to a variety of shooting locations enhances the prospect of securing TV and Film projects for the entire state. In response, they've created helpful guidelines for counties to expedite the process significantly. Once the commission approves, a webpage is launched with an array of shooting locations, and providing a designated contact person in the area. This is invaluable to any project's busy location manager seeking cinematic backdrops for their scenes. By August '11, over a hundred counties had secured this designation and the program is still growing. Atlanta based novelists are also feeding the industry with material such as the 2011 hits *Something Borrowed*, *Something Blue* and *The Help*. Recently, I was invited by a writer's club to conduct Screenwriting Workshops for Authors looking to adapt their stories to film. The natural talent of these local writers and the intriguing stories that are coming out of the classes strikes me. It's certainly a great time to be in Atlanta and witness a new frontier unfolding that's redefining Hollywood.



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