

Emory in the Community
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Emory's role in the community can be viewed in some ways as paradoxical from the beginning—paradoxical, because while Emory has always been closely aligned with its two hometowns in various ways—Oxford and later Atlanta—the manner of that alignment has often led to Emory's being cast as detached or aloof from the community, rather than intimately connected to it. Perhaps a more accurate description than “paradoxical” would be to say that Emory has often played two roles in the community, and those two roles have usually been in tension with each other.

To state my conclusion up front, what I want to explore is the notion that Emory has been **deeply** rooted in its communities, as the focus of those communities' best aspirations for the larger society of which they were part. But in earlier years those communities actually sought to **restrict** the manner of Emory's involvement with the larger society, so that students and faculty members were actively **discouraged** by those root communities from engaging in “community” writ large, in the way we now think of community engagement. In particular, the roles of certain philanthropists and civic

leaders in Atlanta helped to shape the Atlanta experience of Emory in a way that we are now still recovering from—and by “the Atlanta experience of Emory” I mean not only Atlanta’s experience of Emory but also Emory’s experience of Atlanta.

In its earliest days, Emory had its roots in community, grew out of community, took on reality because of the dreams of a particular community. That community was the community of Georgia Methodists. In fact when the Georgia Methodist Conference sought a charter for its new college in 1836, the college’s trustees bought 1400 acres of land on which to build a whole **new** community, the town of Oxford, as a haven for the college. In many respects Emory College in those early days was harbored by the town: Oxford’s prohibition against commerce, gambling, or inebriation within the city limits was perfectly in keeping with the *in loco parentis* posture of the college toward its students, who were prohibited from venturing beyond the bosom of the immediate community without permission somewhat grudgingly granted.

Similarly, when discussions were under way about the possibility of creating a new Methodist university in Atlanta after the falling out between the church and Vanderbilt University early in the first decade of the twentieth century, the **community** of Atlanta avidly embraced the idea. No

less an Atlanta figure than Asa Griggs Candler, founder of one of the city's most flourishing companies and soon to be the city's mayor, not only gave money and land for the enterprise but also built the bandwagon onto which many of his friends and business acquaintances leaped. No less a community organization than the Chamber of Commerce helped to midwife the birth of the new university with a pledge of half a million dollars—quite a sum in those days. The very first classes of instruction in the new university were held downtown in the Wesley Memorial Building, which stood at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Ivy Street (now Peachtree Center Avenue), close to the heart of the city. And Wesley Memorial Hospital, which stood just a few blocks away, joined Grady Memorial Hospital as a location for the clinical teaching of Emory's new School of Medicine in 1915 and functioned there until moving to the Druid Hills campus in the late autumn of 1922 to become Emory University Hospital.

So, given the rootedness of both the early Emory College and the later Emory University in their respective municipalities, it is interesting that our received wisdom is that Emory has always been aloof, distant, and something of an ivory tower. No doubt there is some truth to this characterization, or at least something understandable about it. Any institution that sets itself apart for the purpose of study and research and the

sometimes seemingly irrelevant pursuit of education—whether the campus is six miles distant from the center of town, like Emory, or fenced off from the neighboring blocks of its city like Columbia and Penn—is bound to incur criticism prompted by envy as well as by the niggling suspicion that our society would be better off if those people working in their isolated libraries and labs would get a real job.

Yet, curiously enough, a case can be made that some of the perception of Emory as a playground for people out of touch with the realities of the world can be traced precisely to some of the early moments of Emory people engaging quite passionately and personally with the larger community in their roles as academics. Here's an example: One of the great historians of the twentieth century, C. Vann Woodward, enrolled in Emory College as a junior in 1928 after transferring from Henderson-Brown College in his native Arkansas. Both by inclination and by upbringing, in a home where Methodist do-goodism was directed by an intellectual critique of society, Vann Woodward was at heart a dissident. Unwilling to be tamed by the lovely but proper campus in Druid Hills, and unable to be beguiled by the amusements of Pushball and fraternity life, Woodward sought friendship and intellectual challenge in the theater life, the political machinations, and the social unrest of Atlanta in the early years of the Depression. His most

celebrated involvement came two years after graduation, when he was teaching English at Georgia Tech.

The short version of the story is that, through a series of professional connections and personal commitments, Woodward became one of the fund raisers and public spokespersons for the legal defense of Angelo Herndon, an African-American member of the Communist Party who had been arrested for trying to organize black support for the party, campaigning for the party's presidential candidate, and protesting Atlanta's welfare cuts. All of these activities led to Herndon's being charged with violating Georgia's antebellum law against insurrection, which had been designed to suppress abolitionists and rebellious blacks. It was serious business and meant the death penalty if Herndon were convicted.

Although Woodward was then employed by Tech, he and Emory were closely identified in this case with the cause of the Communist agitator from the North. As one of Woodward's biographers puts it:

The courtroom did produce occasional moments of comic relief from the pathos of the obviously impending death sentence. For one, [Professor] Mercer Evans of Emory attempted to testify that the materials found in Herndon's room were not subversive and in fact were available at the Candler Library. . . . [T]he corpus delicti included the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, . . . and some standard translations from Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. Unfortunately for Evans's plan, the Candler Library did not then have these materials; but Evans, not to be outdone by circumstances, slipped into the library with the intention of

putting his own books and journals on the shelves. Caught out by a diligent librarian, Evans could only concede defeat: Angelo Herndon surely did have in his possession books of unusual thought not to be found at a decent school like Emory.

Evans, incidentally, taught economics at Emory and published three works prior to that year that give you an idea of his outlook. They were “The Political Consequences of the Propertyless Classes in the South,” “The History of the Organized Labor Movement in Georgia,” and “Are Southern Cotton Mill Villages Feudalistic”? The prosecutor in the case blasted Evans and his fellow professor Troy Cauley as “renegades” and proclaimed Emory “a hotbed of iniquity.”

Vann Woodward’s engagement with the revolutionary currents in Atlanta was not unique. In 1934, Nathan Yagol, a graduate student in chemistry at Emory, was arrested in Atlanta when police, acting on a tip, broke up a meeting in a private home. Taken into custody along with Yagol were a woman school teacher, a black worker, and a New York lawyer with a Russian name—apparently a potentially combustible combination of identities when they were all gathered in one place. Yagol became the symbol of tensions between city authorities and their conservative backers, on the one hand, and the Emory campus on the other. President Harvey Cox issued a public statement firmly supporting freedom of speech and the freedom to assemble, and the faculty rallied behind the president.

Public statements also played a crucial role in the 1950s and pitted the University publicly against civil authorities, as engagement by some representatives of the Emory campus with the larger Atlanta community led to further tension. When government officials throughout the state of Georgia and the city of Atlanta talked openly about closing the public schools rather than integrate them in response to federal mandates, some 250 members of the Emory faculty issued a public statement opposing the move and underscoring the irreparable damage to the city and the state that would result from such a step.

One lesson to take away from these examples of engagement and tension between town and gown is that there is a difference between the kinds of ad hoc engagement the students and faculty members and alumni showed in these instances, and the institutionally sanctioned engagement that has sometimes been slow to develop. This kind of institutional involvement has often been fitful and erratic and haphazard, without achieving a consistent traction, and these qualities also might account for some of the perception that Emory has been dis-engaged. There is also a difference between engagement that appears to put the institution at odds with civic authorities or the public, and engagement that seeks to partner with other private or public institutions for the sake of public benefits.

Often this latter kind of engagement, or partnership, has come about because of leadership at a high level. The vision of an Asa Candler was perfectly compatible with the vision of the nineteenth-century founders of Emory College, who believed that the Gospel of Christ called them to improve the quality of life as well as the quality of the souls of the people in their society, and who felt that they had every reason to put in place the means to effect such improvement. For instance, when the Methodists in the early twentieth century saw the need for better health care in north Georgia, they determined to raise funds and establish a new hospital. It fell to Asa Candler to contribute most of the money for Wesley Memorial Hospital, but clearly there was a recognition of community need and an institutional desire to respond to that.

The same can be said for the way Robert Woodruff fostered involvement of Emory with the larger community. For instance, he saw the need for better understanding and treatment of diseases that constituted a public health hazard—whether it was the malaria afflicting his workers on his Baker County plantation or the tuberculosis and other communicable diseases that festered in the city of Atlanta. And through his efforts and his friendship with President Dwight Eisenhower, the CDC was moved to land that Woodruff acquired next door to Emory. That move has resulted in some

of the most comprehensive and effective ways in which Emory has engaged with the world, whether by working with Atlanta schools to help prevent injury and death by gunshot and accidents, or by working in the developing world to establish clinics or schools of public health.

But, again, that model of engagement relied to a large extent on the vision and connections of prominent civic and business leaders. That top-down model can be seen also in the fact that Henry Bowden Sr., who as an alumnus was for a long time identified as “Mr. Emory,” served simultaneously throughout the sixties and seventies as the chairman of the Board of Trustees and the city attorney for Atlanta. It can be seen in the nexus of the Coca-Cola Company, Trust Company of Georgia (later SunTrust Banks), and the law firm of King and Spalding, whose interlocking boards and executive leadership had significant representation on Emory’s own board of trustees, both helping to channel resources to the University and perhaps shielding the University from a different kind of engagement that might have brought it into conflict with the city. This leadership perpetuated a kind of paternalism that had grown up after the 1906 Atlanta race riot as an effective means of keeping the peace by brokering a separate and only somewhat parallel, hardly equal, civil society for blacks and whites. And while white Emory did engage with white Atlanta, these leaders

of Emory saw no apparent reason to be involved with black Atlanta or its historically black institutions of higher education. I don't intend by these remarks to demean the importance of the contributions of these leaders. I merely intend to note that Emory has always been engaged in the community, but that the kind of engagement differed from what we think of today as community engagement.

The transition to a new model may have begun with the advent of Jim Laney to the deanship of the Candler School of Theology. Two programs initiated during his deanship strike me as examples of what we as a university strive for when we say, in our vision statement, that we are an inquiry-driven and ethically engaged community working for positive transformation in the world. This new model sought to build into the academic programs of the University a recognition that the community and the academy can in fact partner with each other in ways that serve both of their interests. The community can provide the laboratory for research and teaching, while the academy can provide the resources of new learning and, to some extent, people-power to effect change in the community.

The first program that Laney put in place was what has come to be called Contextual Education—affectionately and somewhat facetiously known as “Con Ed” for short. The idea was very much of the sixties, when

many students and faculty members across the country began speaking of “relevance” as perhaps the overriding criterion for what made an academic enterprise worthwhile. It was Laney’s and the Candler school’s intention to make relevance absolutely relevant, by requiring that students preparing for ministry get involved in prisons, hospitals, inner-city churches, and other placements where they experienced what we now call service-learning. They worked in these settings—led prayer meetings, taught Bible classes, served soup, and so on—but also spent a great deal of time in theological reflection. And what was perhaps most important and maybe unique about the program was that each week, as the students met to discuss their work with their field supervisors, there was a Candler faculty member in the group helping to “make it real,” as we say—helping to bridge the experience of daily community service and the learning that was going on back at the campus, so that learning and service became the two main ingredients that had to be combined for education. The mixing bowl, as it were, was the community.

One particular Con Ed setting matured into a separate program, known as the Teaching Parish Program. This program has its roots in the 1970s, when the theology school and the North Georgia Conference collaborated to bring a kind of rigor to the training of student pastors, many of whom were serving small churches in the countryside and towns of north

Georgia while pursuing their education at Candler. What really established the program, though, was the generosity of O. Wayne Rollins, who himself had grown up in north Georgia, had deep connections to the small towns and rural parishes of the area, and understood the impact that this kind of collaboration between the school and local communities could have. This was really the seedling from which the Rollins family's interest in Emory grew, and from that little seedling has sprouted not only the Rollins Center for Church Ministry but also the Rollins Research Center and, most importantly, the Rollins School of Public Health.

It was also Mr. Rollins whose vision directly moved Jim Laney and, eventually, the Carter Center into one of the more significant attempts to bridge University and community in a meaningful and practical way. In one of Laney's last visits with Mr. Rollins—indeed, maybe his very last visit—before Mr. Rollins died in 1991, they had a long and searching conversation that later stood out in Laney's mind as one of those profound moments of introspection and insight that come near death. As Laney recounted it several times—in a baccalaureate address, in his report to the Board of Trustees that year, and in a conversation with President Jimmy Carter—Mr. Rollins commented on the seemingly intractable social ills that afflict American cities, decade after decade, despite the hard, hard work of people

like Jane Addams and Dorothea Dix in the nineteenth century, the Social Gospel Movement in the early twentieth century, and the Great Society programs of the end of the twentieth century. And he wondered whether the power of the University could somehow be brought to bear on those ills. Surely all the brilliant minds, all the energetic young people, and all the passion of a university committed to moral goodness as well as to intellectual excellence ought to be able to do something about these things.

This was in the late winter or early spring of 1991. By that summer Jim Laney had shared Mr. Rollins's passionate concern with President Carter, who had long advocated a more practical role for American universities in solving the world's problems. President Carter was altogether too eager to take up the cause, and before Jim Laney could get out the phrase "partnership between Emory and the Carter Center," President Carter had adopted the mission and launched The Atlanta Project as one of the central programs of the Carter Center, rather heedless about whether the University could gear up quickly enough to come along.

Without going into great detail about The Atlanta Project, which lasted through 1996 before beginning the transition into a program housed at Georgia State, I would simply note that in retrospect it now looks very much like the kind of program that the Office of University and Community

Partnerships has become. The Atlanta Project was larger than OUCP, more formally structured, much more heavily funded, and intended to accomplish great things in a mere five years. It was, after all, the period when Atlanta was building for the Olympics, and if Atlanta of all places could win the right to host the world's largest and most complex sporting event, and pull it off, why not solve the problems of the American city in that time as well? The Project brought together corporate leaders, community members, foundations, and academics to establish specific goals and to engineer their achievement. One such achievement, to give an example, was the creation of a health-screening program at Booker T. Washington High School, which made the expertise and the good will of Emory's nursing school available free to the students and their family members through a two-person, part-time, on-site clinic.

The Atlanta Project had some real successes but also, in the end, foundered on those intractable ills that it had set out to conquer. They really **are** intractable. The project may also have suffered from some of that top-down do-goodism that characterized Emory's early involvement with the community. But one legacy of the Project has been a continuing interest on the part of Emory's schools and departments in finding additional ways to accomplish what the Atlanta Project set out to do. I recall, for instance, that

prior to the formal launching of the project, President Laney had convened a weekend meeting of academics from Vanderbilt with Jim Fowler of the Emory Center for Ethics and others from Emory to think seriously about how to bring the academy and the community together, to create a kind of clearing-house for the community's needs for research assistance, and the academy's needs for providing service, to match these things up. The example I recall is environmental studies students at Vanderbilt testing water quality for various municipalities as a way of learning certain skills but also carrying out work that the municipalities would not otherwise have done.

I could note other ways in which Emory has partnered with other institutions to meet its own and their needs, and in the course of things perhaps indirectly meeting the needs of the larger community.

I could note Grady Hospital, where Emory doctors and medical residents have provided health care to the indigent of Atlanta and others for more than a century.

I could note the University Center in Georgia, now called the Atlanta Regional Consortium for Higher Education, which in 1938 was formed to enable colleges and universities in Atlanta to collaborate in ways that allowed them to complement each other and draw upon each other's strengths.

I could note the DeKalb County Partners in Education program, which for more than two decades has brought Emory into partnership with Fernbank Elementary School, Shamrock Middle School, and Druid Hills High School, providing opportunities for our Educational Studies students to engage in real learning in the classroom, while also giving these public schools opportunities to draw on the resources of Emory.

I could note Volunteer Emory, which was an initiative of Emory undergraduates and for more than two decades has helped Emory students roll up their sleeves and work with dozens or scores of community organizations throughout the metro area.

So, in summary, I would say that the vision of Emory's founders, both in the early nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, had a very large place for the community as the **end** and the **purpose** of education. Service to the community was a large part of the **reason** for education as conceived by those Methodists. Communities needed educated leaders, and therefore the mission of Emory and other colleges was to raise up such leaders.

What this vision did not include was a sense of the community as the **means** for education, as a **partner** in education. Moreover, the relationship between Emory and the community was conceived as one whose

stewardship rested principally with Emory's administrative leaders, trustees, and prominent alumni in the community, not so much with the students or the faculty.

What has changed in the last couple of decades is the understanding of how higher education institutions can make a difference with the resources at their disposal. Instead of educating and training men and women to go out from Commencement and into their communities to work for positive transformation, we now understand that those men and women—and we ourselves—can make a difference by drawing on the resources of those communities to shape the education we have to offer **before** Commencement. This is a very substantial change and a very good change in the way we think of education and in the way we think of educational institutions within their communities.