



Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms

Inaugural Address

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Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College
Atlanta, GA

Remarks as prepared

Good afternoon. Happy New Year.

Standing here today as the 60th Mayor of Atlanta is one of the happiest moments of my life.

I want to thank all of Atlanta – and each and every one of you here today – for your support, your encouragement and your faith in me.

I am truly blessed to be among so many friends and loved ones this afternoon in the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel on the campus of Morehouse College.

I want to thank my husband, Derek, and my children – Lance, Langston, Lincoln and Lennox – for their love, and for the courage and patience they showed throughout our campaign.

I want to thank my mother, Sylvia, and my father, Major Lance, for raising a girl who was taught to believe in the possibility of the extraordinary.

I know my dad is leading the great crowd of witnesses from heaven who are smiling down on us today, including his mother, Lucinda Lance and my maternal grandparents, Clifford and Ramona Robinson, who came to Atlanta in a horse and buggy from East Georgia.

They were the grandchildren of former slaves and came to Atlanta as children, with their parents who were seeking opportunity in this shining City on a hill. I stand here this afternoon carrying the hope of the slave.

I am grateful to my sister Tracey; my brother Darrian; all of my family and friends; our many volunteers; the faith-based community; and my team for always being at my side with an extraordinary amount of energy, inspiration, and belief in the impossible.

I want to thank all of our current and past elected officials who are here with us today, especially my former colleagues on the Atlanta City Council and each of Atlanta's previous Mayors.

I want to give special thanks to my predecessor, Mayor Kasim Reed. Thank you for your unwavering support and outstanding stewardship of our City over the last eight years.

I know Sarah-Elizabeth and Maria Kristan will be glad to have Mayor Reed around a bit more in the coming days but, before he leaves, please join me in a round of applause for the 59th Mayor of Atlanta, Kasim Reed.

(pause for applause)

It would be nice to say that being elected Mayor of my hometown is the culmination of a lifelong dream. The truth is, it was never a path I imagined for myself. Like so many couples, Derek and I were focused on our careers and raising our four beautiful children.

My passion for public service found an outlet in my church, community and in my professional roles as a lawyer, judge and then a member of City Council.

I am not an historian, but I believe I will be the first Mayor in Atlanta's (at least recent) history to have served in all three branches of government! And I think that's pretty cool.

Even as I was engaged in my roles of wife, mother and professional, my spirit was restless and I didn't quite know why.

At various stages of my life, I'd ask myself what I would do if I weren't afraid to fail. This time, when I asked myself, the answer was clear. And after much soul-searching and prayer, this is the path I felt compelled to take.

One of my favorite Bible verses is Proverbs 19:21: It reads, "Many are the plans of a person's heart, but it's the Lord's purpose that prevails." What I know to be true is that the Lord's purpose has a home in my heart, and that purpose will inspire and guide me to be the Mayor that God created me to be.

I indeed am quite grateful for such a time as this. And I am thrilled to serve as only the second woman mayor of our great city. I also know that we'll do very well with a woman governor next year. So, the time is right again for a woman to lead the City of Atlanta.

On the night of the runoff, I spoke of black girl magic. Black girl magic is something I have experienced throughout my life, and experienced daily during our campaign. I truly believe it was the energy and inspiration of generations of black girl magic that fueled our victory.

We now have a new challenge in front of us. We must expand that magic and create an Atlanta magic in every community, school, and workplace across this great city.

It is imperative that we be united, so we can move forward and take the next great step in our collective future.

Now is the time to put aside race and division and geography and politics, and invest in becoming One Atlanta.

As the 60th Mayor of Atlanta, I will seek a new understanding, one grounded in civility and productive dialogue, to build a greater Atlanta.

We must draw on the power of our Olympic spirit and the shared purpose of the Civil Rights era and become an undivided Atlanta, locked arm-in-arm to build our children's future and achieve our City's destiny.

We will succeed because the prayers of generations are with us. When we are One Atlanta, I believe we are truly unstoppable.

Fifty years ago, last month, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his final Christmas sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church. That day he spoke about the way our faith encompasses the "cosmic companionship" that we all have with one another.

I believe as Dr. King believed that we are all interconnected, "tied into a single garment of destiny." To overcome our biggest challenges, we must put our differences aside and join in a common mission to lift everyone up.

To quote the feminist poet Audre Lorde, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences."

But there are some differences we cannot accept. It's no secret that we have economic disparity in Atlanta. That's why the theme of my campaign was "Keep Atlanta moving forward, leaving no one behind."

That's why my Administration will prioritize affordability and equity in the City of Atlanta. We cannot stand by and watch prosperity for some push others out of the City and strand them on the margins of society.

In the coming months, we will roll out a \$1 billion-dollar affordability plan that will create equity and provide opportunity for all Atlantans. It will be the largest affordable housing investment in our city's history.

We have done our due diligence for eight years to put Atlanta's finances in a strong place. Now we must maintain and use that solvency as a runway where everyone can take flight to achieve their dreams.

We must also re-inspire confidence in our city government. That's why I plan to introduce the most sweeping ethics and transparency reform package in our city's history. We will make lobbyists register, and require increased disclosure from our elected officials, including the release of their tax returns.

We will clean up our contracting and procurement process by bringing in leading procurement experts to conduct a top to bottom review of our purchasing department and recommend any and all changes necessary to ensure tax payers feel confident city contracts are awarded on merit and merit only.

I believe that transparency enables good government, and I will not rest until all the business of city contracts is beyond reproach. Nothing less is acceptable.

We need to be a safe City. But as we work to ensure the safety of Atlantans, we must make sure that our police force is comprised of men and women who respect the communities they are sworn to serve and protect. As we grow our police department, we need officers who will continue to honor our city's legacy of respecting diversity in all its forms: race, religion, sexual orientation, and culture.

We have an opportunity to set a new course, building upon the new pre-arrest diversion initiative, and connecting people to services and support, rather than funneling them through the criminal-justice system.

We have the opportunity for real reform, and to build genuine respect and understanding between our officers and our neighborhoods.

Education is key to achieving One Atlanta. During my campaign, I spoke about my time as a judge, when I would watch men come into court and fill out the applications to secure the representation of a public defender; and the vast majority of them had not finished ninth grade.

It is essential that we improve our schools. As our City continues to grow and attract new residents, young families are going to want to move into communities with great schools. Great schools should not be an option just for the wealthy, but for all who call Atlanta home.

The neighborhood where a child is born should never dictate the quality of the education that child receives. Access to a high-quality public education is a fundamental American right.

Creating opportunities to fully realize the genius of our children is vital to the health of our economy and a strong and secure future for our city and country.

The words of Frederick Douglass remain true: "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

While the City government does not run our school system, we cannot ignore our moral responsibility-- education can and must be our priority.

I believe that we either pay on the front end or we pay on the back end, and friends, we are all weary of paying on the back end.

That is why, as Mayor, I will appoint a Chief Education Officer to my senior staff. This Chief Education Officer will address everything from early childhood education, to our partnership

with Atlanta Public Schools, to vocational training and apprenticeships. They will keep the future of our children and communities where they deserve to be – at the front of our mission and agenda.

The transformation that is needed in our school district will require our collective courage and commitment over the long term if we are to achieve our shared vision for Atlanta’s children and families.

I am putting a stake in the ground today that the City of Atlanta is committed to strengthening public education for all of our children, for every family and every community.

(pause)

Just as we know access to education can transform lives, so can access to transit.

My grandmother worked for Davison’s and then Macy’s in Lenox Square for over 30 years, starting when African-Americans could not work on the sales floor.

When MARTA was created, she rode the bus every day from her home off of ML King to Lenox square.

I am living proof that the very existence of transit can impact families for generations.

MARTA was a pathway for my grandmother to put money in the pockets of her grandchildren and buy each of us insurance policies, one of which I cashed and used to open my first bank account when I was 17, the same account I have today.

We must continue to provide transit options for our working families and build on the largest expansion of MARTA in its history. I look forward to working with our state and regional partners as we identify ways to expand transit throughout the metro area.

Families are depending on us and Atlanta’s future depends on it.

(pause)

I also look forward to working with our partners at the Gold Dome to re-authorize the Municipal Option Sales Tax, a one-penny sales tax which funds our sewer and water infrastructure. Because of this penny sales tax, our Department of Watershed Management is able to keep water and sewer rates stable. And I know a little something about unstable water bills...

(pause for laughter)

I look forward to working with members of City Council this year to protect against skyrocketing water and sewer bills and to continue the work of overhauling our infrastructure.

Atlanta is a world-class city and our credit and infrastructure should reflect that.

We came back from the Great Recession and worked hard for eight years to put Atlanta's finances in a strong place. We have made many sacrifices, been good stewards of your tax dollars and, as a result, Atlanta is on its strongest financial footing in more than 40 years.

That is why we will pursue a Triple A credit rating for Atlanta, the highest a City can achieve. We are close, but we need to finish the job and show the world that Atlanta's capacity to meet its financial commitments cannot be surpassed.

I am also excited to expand "The Clean City Initiative" to clean up and beautify the major entrances and exits to our city's amazing neighborhoods.

I will ask our Department of Public Works to bring forward recommendations to beautify more of our public spaces, and to enhance our public places with pedestrian-friendly improvements.

To remain a leading city, we must be a clean and beautiful city.

(pause)

As promised, I will push our Progressive Agenda forward by creating commissions in the critical areas of criminal justice reform, affordable housing, homelessness, economic development and workforce training.

These commissions will provide comprehensive proposals for policy initiatives with a recommendation for implementation within the first 100 days of my Administration, and beyond.

We are going to address our City's pressing challenges together and openly, with public participation at every stage.

It is vital for us to understand the insights of our nonprofit community and to listen to the voices in our historically marginalized neighborhoods.

We have seen how successful engagement can work in our City.

To build One Atlanta, we must work together and not be at odds with one other.

That is why I am committed to working with City Council to resolve issues surrounding property deeds to the Atlanta Public Schools and land on the Morris Brown campus.

It is time to move forward.

(pause for applause)

I know that we must continue to enhance and fortify the greatest concentration of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the world, right here in the City of Atlanta, the home of Morehouse, Morehouse School of Medicine, Spelman College, Clark Atlanta University, Morris Brown and the Interdenominational Theological Center, and work to make them meaningful

partners in the transformation of the Westside. I want to take a moment here to point out that, as a graduate of Florida A&M University, I am the first Atlanta Mayor who is an HBCU graduate who did not attend Morehouse College or Howard University.

I'm very proud to say, the streak has been broken!

(pause for laughter)

Nevertheless, the Atlanta University Center, along with schools such as Georgia Tech, Georgia State and Emory University, will continue to produce the talented and diverse workforce that will remain the envy of the United States.

But we must make sure that all of our young people have an equal and fair chance to attend these institutions.

That is why I am pleased to announce that I will work with stakeholders across the city to create a citywide Children's College Savings account for each child entering kindergarten in the Atlanta public schools.

(pause for applause)

As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world."

You never know where people will find success. My father went from a sharecropper's farm in Mississippi to the Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago to become a world-famous, Grammy nominated recording artist.

He did it through talent and sheer persistence. He would not take 'No' for an answer. That's how he got his first record deal.

He used to sit in the lobby of an office building every morning with a cup of coffee for the man who ran the record label. He persisted. And, finally, he got his big break.

I didn't have an appreciation of how famous my Dad was until after he died, and the Internet came along and I saw him on "American Bandstand" and "Soul Train." To me, he was just Daddy, who coached a Little League baseball team at Adams Park and happened to know some famous people.

During my campaign, for the first time, I spoke extensively about my Dad's struggles with addiction and incarceration. It's not uncommon in many families to find good people dealing with personal issues that cause them to make bad decisions. It doesn't diminish their love for us, nor ours for them.

My Dad always wanted the best for me. He always made me believe that the extraordinary was within my reach if I worked hard and persisted.

That is a feeling all our young people should have, no matter their circumstances.

A few days before Christmas, I was busy with my transition team when I got a call from the courthouse telling me that a verdict was coming down in the case of my nephew.

A little more than three years ago, my nephew, Darius, was an innocent bystander in a gang war, and was murdered in a case of mistaken identity, just a few blocks from where we are today.

When I went to the courtroom that day, I saw these three young men, who could have been any of our sons, and I looked at them sitting emotionless as they were found guilty on all counts.

I looked at my family members in the courtroom that day and I thought to myself, what is the win in this? My nephew wouldn't be home for Christmas. Those boys wouldn't be home for the holidays. And it reminded me, as I told my husband, that this is what this election has been all about.

It's about making sure that, as leaders of this City, we are making decisions that will allow our young people to live and grow and become all that God created them to be.

It's what I want for my children, and we can make it a reality for all children.

(pause)

When I was running for Mayor, it never occurred to me that nobody outside my kitchen thought we were going to win. The people in that kitchen worked so hard to help me get here today.

My mother worked harder than me on this campaign. She was at my house every morning before I woke up, and often after I went to sleep, to help care for our children.

(pause)

My husband, Derek, and I just celebrated our 23rd wedding anniversary on the campaign trail. He has been with me every step of the way.

(pause)

I cannot express how much it means to me to have shared this journey with my sons and our daughter. They, too, made sacrifices. Every night spent at a forum was a night away from them. But just as a parent believes in their children, my children believed in me.

To Lance, Langston, Lincoln and Lennox – thank you. I hope that as Mommy-Mayor, I will continue to make you proud.

We all knew from the moment I made my decision to run for Mayor that this was about something bigger than our family. It's about something bigger than all of us.

And the reason I could keep my head high, even on the toughest days, was because I knew I was doing what God placed on my heart to do.

My prayer is that we continue to work together for what is right, because there is real work to be done. And that work begins today.

My grandfather took great comfort in the Book of Ruth and the words, “Your people will be my people. Wherever you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay.”

That is both my pledge, and my charge, to Atlanta. I will go with you, but let’s go forward together.

Let’s be each other’s people, because in Atlanta,
our magic is intentionality;
our magic is in our leadership,
our magic is authentic;
our magic is in our communities; our magic is our people.

Only in Atlanta could a young man have a dream and shift the conscience of a nation.

Only in Atlanta could the civic, corporate and government community come together to bring the Olympic games to our backyard.

And, only in Atlanta, could a young girl named Keisha who attended Frederick Douglass High School on the Westside of Atlanta, go on to become the 60th Mayor of the greatest city in the world.

The bar has been set incredibly high for our city and I thank you for your belief in me. I thank you for your belief that, as One Atlanta, we can raise the bar higher still.

Because...

I am Atlanta magic.

YOU are Atlanta magic.

WE are Atlanta magic.

and Atlanta Magic is REAL.

I’m honored to be your 60th Mayor. Thank you, Atlanta.

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