

POEM TO ATLANTA

We came to Atlanta at a time
when the obviously misnamed World Series
played to a nail biting finish.

We came to Atlanta at a time
when the obviously insane American election
has us still biting those nails into stubs.

We are worried, the world is worried
as history is strewn with men who gain
power with which they create havoc.

We huddled for three and a half days
in conference rooms and barrooms
that created a mental haven

in which to focus on the alchemy
between leaders and followers and context,
determined to keep looking for the keys

to the puzzles of who and why, of how and when?
The puzzles that have intrigued us from
the birth of this hopeful organization.

We were welcomed by this city called Atlanta,
its outstretched arms including us
as we included each other in this parade
of investigations, communications and yes, libations.

Our opening speaker in this city called Atlanta,
grew up only 4 doors from Dr. King.
Our conference theme of inclusiveness
makes us all Dr. King's neighbors.

In the warmth of Wednesday evening
A thousand of us walked to the jewel of Atlanta
The Center for Human and Civil Rights,

symbolically connecting ourselves
with marches that have transformed
this city, this country, this world.

To the fierce drumming of ecstatic
black and white women on their congas
we entered a preserve to the human spirit.

No ordinary museum, this monument
required we see our reflections in dark mirrors,
and confront the eyes of those who shifted history

through the behaviors most dear to us –
those of principled leadership
and of brave, committed followership.

The stage was set for our days of presentation,
elucidation, conversation, contemplation,
evaluation, innovation and ... candy at break times.

We were surprised in a temple of leadership
to hear the virtues of Authority, a call to renew
trust in authority despite past betrayals,

Leadership is on the line – it needs to deliver
Followership is on the line – it needs to deliver
Relationship is on the line – we need to dance.

And all the while the world swirls around us
with waves of refugees, surging seas, decaying trust,
crumbling infrastructures and rising carbon levels.

As we prepare to leave this fertile space
and continue our conversations and investigations
we ask and ask again: Leadership for what?

We will each go back into our worlds
better equipped, better attuned, better prepared.
We will finish our semesters, our dissertations,

our articles and books, our projects and consultations,
and then we can step back and each ask
how do I, how do we create inclusiveness?

How do I, how do we bring in the marginalized,
the other, whomever they may be to us,
the neighbor four doors down,

so that when we convene again to explore
the task of leadership in a turbulent world,
we have learned lessons and built bridges

on which we can anchor ourselves
to cast lines to those floundering in the seas
and. all together, avoid the whirlpool of chaos.

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