

Shirley Franklin: Working Together

Shirley Franklin wasn't the typical candidate for mayor when she decided to run in 2002. Never before had a woman held the chief position of governing Atlanta. However, after more than 150 years of choosing male mayors, Atlantans took a leap of faith and brought a woman into office. She proved that not only could a woman be elected mayor, but that one could do the job well. The American presidency holds the same aura of masculinity that the Atlanta mayoral position once held. However, as mayor, Shirley Franklin has shown us that when it comes to taking on the tough issues, gender doesn't matter.

As one of the greatest American presidents of all time, John F. Kennedy described perfectly the political dilemmas that Franklin has overcome in present day Atlanta. Kennedy wrote how it would be much easier if we could all continue to think in traditional political patterns of "liberalism and conservatism, as Republicans and Democrats, from the viewpoint of North and South, management and labor, business and community," and equally narrow frameworks. But, he continued, this nation "cannot afford the luxury of such lazy political habits." Indeed, fifty years later, this nation (and this city) can not afford to live by these divides. So when Franklin came into office, she broke the mold of old Southern politics. This woman ended the traditional political patterns that for decades ruled—and hindered—Atlanta.

First off, Franklin brought together business and labor like no other mayor in Atlanta history. By reaching out to the business community when infrastructure was dire, she got engineering firms to do pro bono work to find out exactly what was happening in the antiquated sewers She made valuable ties to Atlanta commerce. While most politicians in her positions may have afraid to reach out to the wealthy business sector in fear of losing lower-middle class votes and endorsements, Mayor Franklin broke down traditional economic barriers. Furthermore,

she created a Commission on Homelessness to give voice to the city's growing urban crisis. She gave attention to all of Atlanta's many income brackets and financial sectors, not just a select few.

When it came time to working with suburban leaders, many unsympathetic toward Atlanta city politics and tribulations, the Mayor made an effort to communicate. She supported suburban growth initiatives like the Beltline and more parks and green space. In an amazing show of tact, Franklin convinced some stubborn and unsupportive rural congressmen to allow a vote that would in the make a one penny sales increase to pay for Atlanta's sewage reconstruction. In doing so she built a bridge with the city's rural counterparts, making a lasting impression. She talked to the suburban politicians with respect and equivalence, they responded the same.

Shirley Franklin reached across the aisle with Republicans to cut the budget and to make a universal Ethics Code for all Atlanta employees. She met fellow leaders *halfway* in making important decisions that affected people *all the way*. The Atlanta Mayor wasn't blinded by party-line politics and didn't let "party responsibility" stop her from negotiating sound and lasting policies. She did not crumble to the often overwhelming pressure that comes with representing only those who voted for her, but rather embraced the challenge to represent and work with all the people of Atlanta: Blacks, whites, Hispanics; upper-, middle-class, poor; rural and urban; business and labor.

In a time when the American Presidency needs leadership in unity more than ever, Franklin has offered something the current divisive partisanship hasn't. Mayor Franklin has shown what it means to join together in trouncing adversity through her candor and bring-it-on attitude. This next American President should be a unifier, not a divider and honest, not

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deceitful. Mayor Franklin has exemplified these ideals and brings new meaning to the concept of a female presidential candidate. Can a woman be elected President? Absolutely. But again, we as Atlantans put aside gender when it comes to our mayor. So whomever we elect to the Presidency in 2008—woman or man—let's make sure Mayor Franklin's leadership qualities shine through regardless.

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