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January 10, 2007

The Honorable Shirley Franklin
Mayor
City of Atlanta
55 Trinity Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Mayor Franklin:

We write to you on behalf of the Council of the American Historical Association to express our profound concern about an incident that occurred on the first day of the AHA meetings in Atlanta [January 4-7]. The members of the AHA who attended the annual meetings this past week are very grateful to Dr. Jamil Zainaldin and the other members of the Local Arrangements Committee for doing so much to make us feel very welcome in their home town. Unfortunately, some of our members were made to feel considerably less welcome by Atlanta police officers working as security guards for the hotels where the meetings were headquartered. In their zeal to prevent jay-walking between the Marriott and Hilton Hotels, some of these guards went well beyond what we would regard as helpful intervention.

The worst case was the arrest on Thursday, January 4th, of historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto, a member of the AHA and a citizen of the United Kingdom. Apparently, Professor Fernández-Armesto was jay-walking and did not heed a security guard's repeated attempts to prevent him from doing so. The guard then demanded that he produce identification, which Prof. Fernández-Armesto declined to do, and asked instead for proof that the guard (who was not in regular uniform) had the authority to detain him. According to Prof. Fernández-Armesto, he was bewildered by the behavior and harsh language of the officer (which he said would be unimaginable in the UK), and honestly did not understand what the problem was since jay-walking is not an offense in the United Kingdom. At some point, Prof. Fernández-Armesto was arrested, forced to the ground, handcuffed, and taken to jail. He spent eight hours in a jail cell until bond could be posted. The following morning the charges against him were dismissed.

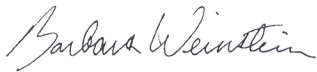
While we understand that the intention of the security guard was to prevent jay-walking in a location where there have been several accidents involving pedestrians in the past, we are still dismayed that an Atlanta police officer subjected a member of our association to such rough treatment and, in our judgment, significantly over-reacted to a situation in which the main problem was a lack of communication. As you can imagine, one of our highest priorities in choosing a location for our annual meetings is the sense that our members will be welcomed by the local community. Since most of the historians attending the meetings will be from other areas of the country, as well as from universities outside the United States, we expect the host city to treat them as valued

visitors, and to take into account their lack of familiarity with the convention area. Thus, it is entirely appropriate to try to *discourage* jay-walking in a dangerous crossing area, but it seems to us excessive to use punitive measures to accomplish this goal. And we would hope that in an increasingly globalized world, a city like Atlanta would train its police officers to be sensitive to situations where a visitor from abroad is being unresponsive because he or she simply does not understand what is going on.

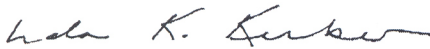
Given all the many efforts made by the local arrangements committee and by various institutions in Atlanta to ensure that our members felt welcome, we particularly regret that this episode, and several lesser incidents, have left many of them with a negative impression of Atlanta as a conference location. Frankly, in light of this experience, it would only be after the Association has received assurances from the appropriate municipal authorities that this problem has been addressed that we could again consider Atlanta as a future site for the AHA's annual meeting.

We hope that you will take steps to make such incidents less likely in the future, and we respectfully request that a formal apology be tendered to Prof. Fernández-Armesto by the mayor's office.

Sincerely yours,



Barbara Weinstein
President



Linda K. Kerber
Past President



Arnita A. Jones
Executive Director