

GLOBAL ATLANTA SnapSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



C E N T R A L A M E R I C A N S

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were created to foster understanding among all people of the Atlanta region. The Snapshots show the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that our region now enjoys. The residents of Atlanta's ethnic communities may have lived in the region for a long time or may have recently arrived. They may come from cultures and have customs significantly different from each other's, and from those of the general population of the Atlanta region. What they have in common with the rest of the region is that they make it their home, and they share in and contribute to its success. The Snapshots introduce and portray selected communities in terms of their backgrounds, their customs and cultures, their roles in the regional economy, and specific local resources available throughout the region.

Who are the Central Americans?

The countries of Central America occupy the narrow land bridge that separates the Pacific Ocean from the Caribbean Sea, stretching from the Mexican border on the north to the South American mainland on the south. The nations included in this publication – Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama – share Spanish as their primary language. Most of these countries also share a history of political and economic turmoil, natural disasters and varying degrees of entanglement with the United States. (Belize was included in the “Global Atlanta Snapshot” on the English-Speaking People of the Caribbean.)

Central America was home to a series of pre-Columbian civilizations, some quite sophisticated in their social organization; patterns of settlement; and religious, artistic and cultural expression. When Christopher Columbus first encountered the Central American mainland in 1502, the dominant indigenous group was the Mayas. Mayan civilization was concentrated in the region comprising the modern-day countries of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador, as well as southern Mexico. The Mayas, who achieved their highest level of development centuries before the arrival of Europeans, were themselves successors to earlier Amerindian groups, including the Aztecs, Toltecs, Olmecs, Mixtecs and Teotihuacans.

Contemporary Central American people reflect the various strands of ethnicity resulting from the 16th century Spanish conquest of lands occupied by the indigenous Amerindian groups and the subsequent importation of slave labor from the African continent. Central America today has a population of nearly 40 million.

Common issues for the region include the fact that a small percentage of families hold a large portion of the wealth. While there is a growing middle class, the majority in the region still lives in deep

poverty, which serves as a major incentive for migration to the U.S. Regional efforts to combat poverty have taken various forms. Most recently, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have entered into the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the U.S. to foster regional integration and economic cooperation. In 2004 the Dominican Republic joined the negotiations over the trade agreement, which was renamed DR-CAFTA.

This publication focuses on Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, which have contributed the largest number of Central Americans to the Atlanta region.

Guatemala

The most populous nation in the region, Guatemala has its roots in the great Mayan civilization that flourished in southern Mexico and northern Central America centuries before the arrival of Europeans. Many of its people today are descendants, either directly or indirectly, of the Mayans. The largest population group is the combination of *Mestizos* (mixed Amerindian-Spanish, called *Ladino* in Spanish) and Europeans at 59.4 percent. Another 40.3 percent consist of various

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Guatemalan Dancers

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A PERSONAL STORY

Publio Sance is the pastor of the 200-member Iglesia Bautista Nuevo Jerusalem in Norcross and has many roles, including counseling families and children, social work “with a religious emphasis, of course,” helping congregation members with translations and providing education about civil responsibilities, community responsibilities and personal finances. The congregation is made up mostly of Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans in equal numbers.



Sance came to Atlanta 25 years ago, after a brief visit to Columbia, S.C., where he lived for a few months with evangelical missionaries. In Guatemala, he was a high school math teacher but once in Atlanta he began working in maintenance at a church. He originally planned on getting a job as a high school teacher in Atlanta and after seven years he received an offer to teach math at a Jonesboro high school. “That was basically my calling – to help in any way I could,” he said.

The desire to help was not limited to other Hispanics. He felt a desire to help adults and families regardless of their background or ethnicity. After 10 years in Atlanta, he started working on becoming a pastor and attended the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary for five years. The school has an extension in Georgia but he had to travel to New Orleans in order to get some of his credit hours. He became a pastor in 1991, and he has been the pastor of his own church since 1994.

Asked about the adjustment to life in Atlanta, Sance said that it was complicated: “Twenty-five years ago, it was very difficult because of the lack of opportunity to learn the language and lack of access to things in our own language. I felt lots of frustration because I already finished my career in Guatemala; so to transfer here and start all over again was very difficult. Self-esteem was a problem also. I had to do things that I never planned to do for a living in order to survive even though I already got my education. Dealing with rejection because of being different and not being able to speak the language clearly enough for people was also difficult. It took many years to overcome this and feel confident about myself. The turning point came when I became a pastor and found my purpose for being here.”

Sance hasn’t visited Guatemala in five or six years. Since his father died and his mother can come here when she wants to, there is no longer a reason to go. He has one sibling in Atlanta and four in Guatemala. The latter come here for visits, but they have no desire to live here. Sance no longer has any desire to live in Guatemala.

Sance noted that his two children, ages 18 and 20 and who are in college, were raised with Guatemalan traditions, saying, “I have been trying to teach them our culture and they have been able to assimilate it very well. They’re mixed [Guatemalan and American]. Regarding his own identification as a Guatemalan, Sance says, “I love Guatemala, but being out of the country for so long, I identify with this country after 25 years here. Also, my wife is from this country I learned to love my wife’s culture as much as my own. I’ve been a U.S. citizen for a long time. I love both countries equally.”

Holidays Celebrated

In addition to other Western holidays, Central Americans may celebrate the following:

March/April	Holy Week/Easter – Semana Santa Celebrated with Carnival-like events in different cities by the large Catholic population.	Oct. 12	Columbus Day – Día de la Raza This day commemorates the discovery of the Americas
May 1	Labor Day – Día de lo trabajadores International Labor Day	Nov. 2	Day of the Dead –Día de los Muertos A day on which people usually visit the tombs of deceased loved ones. (November 1 may be commemorated as well.)
May 10	Mother’s Day – Día de la Madre A day for honoring mothers.	Dec. 25	Christmas Day –la Navidad In many communities, December 24 (Christmas Eve) is the major day of celebration — often to the point that it is considered the actual day of <i>Navidad</i> — with December 25 serving as a day of rest.
Aug. 1-7	August Festivals – Fiestas de agosto Week-long festival in celebration of <i>El Salvador del Mundo</i> , patron saint of El Salvador.		
Sept. 15	Independence Day – Día de la Independencia Celebrates independence from Spain, achieved in 1821		



Central Americans in the Atlanta Region: By the Numbers

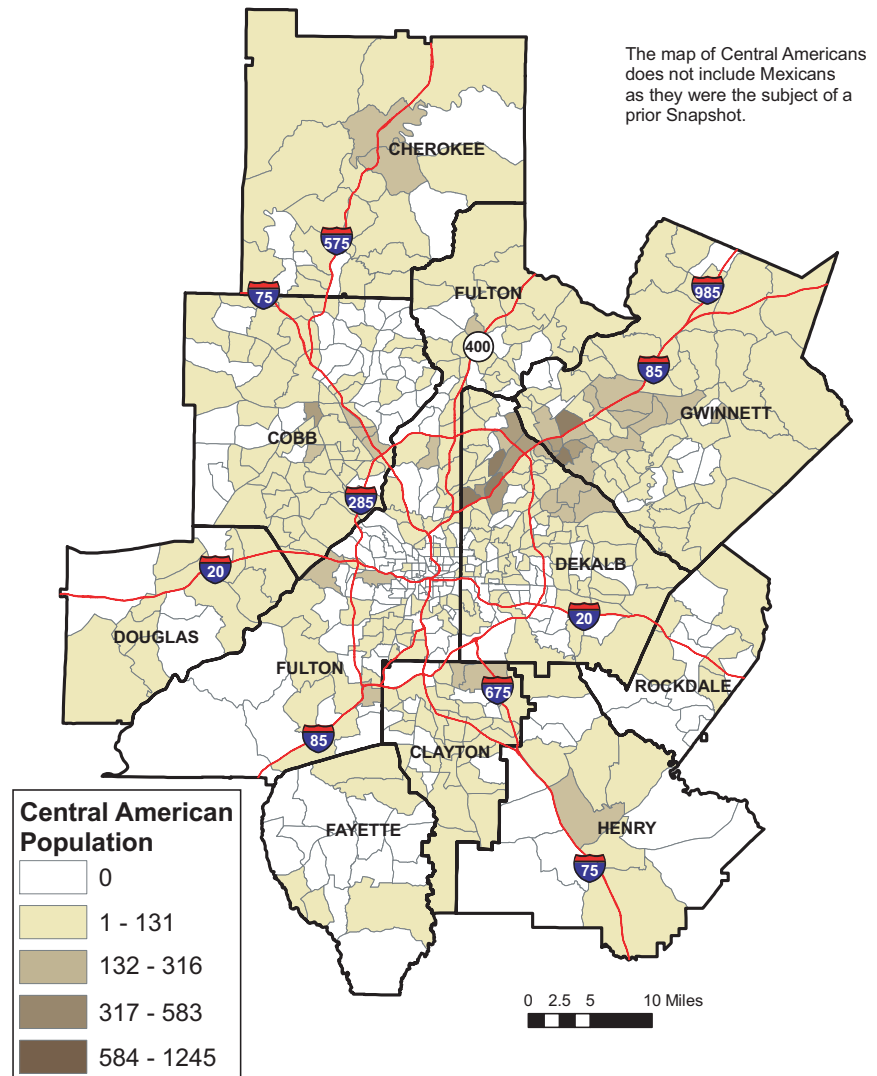
Cherokee: 951	Clayton: 1,452
Cobb: 3,380	DeKalb: 8,454
Douglas: 133	Fayette: 116
Fulton: 2,591	Gwinnett: 7,367
Henry: 258	Rockdale: 102

Total 10-county Region: 24,804

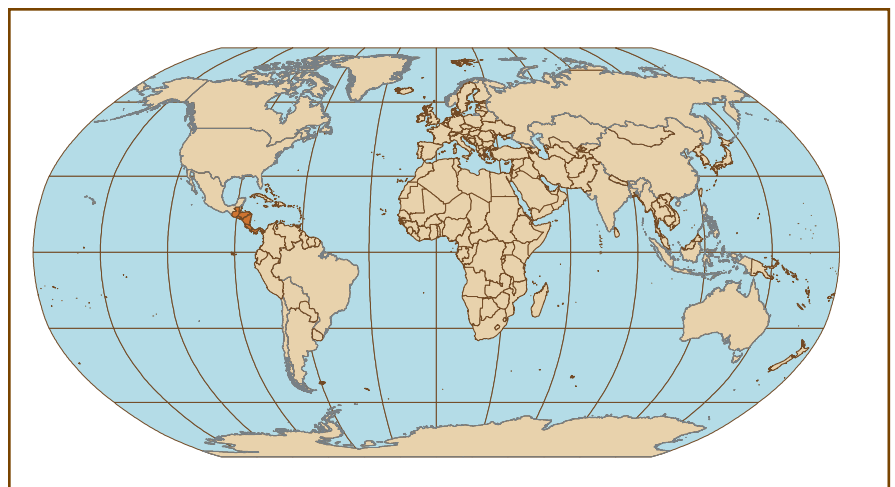
According to the 2000 Census:

- **DeKalb County** is home to the largest population of Central Americans, with 8,454, followed closely by **Gwinnett** with 7,367. **Cobb County** is next with 3,380.
- **DeKalb and Gwinnett** are home to **64 percent** of the Central Americans in the Atlanta region and **41 percent** of the Central Americans living in Georgia.
- The 10-county Atlanta region is home to approximately **42 percent of Georgia's total population**, but represents **65 percent of the state's Central American population**.
- The largest concentrations of Central Americans are found along the I-85 corridor in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties.

CENTRAL AMERICAN POPULATION IN ATLANTA Atlanta Region, 2000



(Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth)



Who are the Central Americans continued

indigena groups: K'iche, Kaqchikel, Mam, Q'eqchi and other Mayan. The remaining 0.3 percent are indigenous non-Mayan and others.

After the Spanish conquest, Guatemala was under colonial rule until it achieved independence in 1821. From 1823 to 1839, it was part of the Confederation of Central America, along with the newly independent nations of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. (Panama was a territory of Colombia until 1903). The latter part of the 19th century saw Guatemala governed by strong dictators, interspersed with periods of constitutional government.

The 20th century was marked by political instability and periodic interventions by the U.S. In 1954, the government led by Jacob Arbenz Guzman was overthrown by a CIA-supported coup. A series of right-wing governments did not bring about stability. It was not until 1986 that a new civilian-led government was in place. The 36 year civil war came to an end in 1996 and a presidential election was held in 1999.

Honduras

On his fourth and final voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus reached the coast of present-day Honduras in 1502. The land was a vibrant portion of the Amerindian civilization that developed over centuries. Today, Hondurans are primarily (90 percent) *Mestizos* (mixed Amerindian and European). The remaining population consists of Amerindians (7 percent), blacks (2 percent), and whites (1 percent).

For much of the 19th century and early 20th century, Honduras experienced political instability. The country is also among the poorest in the Americas. Honduras' agricultural economy, including its vast banana plantations, was so heavily dominated by two American-owned companies, United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit Company, that it gave rise to the term "banana republic".

In the 1980s, U.S. military forces were based in Honduras as part of efforts to counter the Sandanista government in neighboring Nicaragua. Just as Honduras appeared to be achieving a period of political stability, in October 1998 the country was devastated by Hurricane Mitch. The worst natural disaster to hit the region in modern times, the hurricane claimed 6,500 lives with many more missing in Honduras alone. Crop damage and loss of most of the country's infrastructure. Honduras' president at the time declared that the storm's damage cost 50 years of development progress.



Roatan Island, Honduras



Mayan Ruins

El Salvador

The smallest and most densely populated country in Central America, El Salvador's ethnic composition is similar to that of Honduras: *Mestizos* (90 percent), whites (9 percent) and Amerindians (1 percent).

El Salvador is also a land of volcanoes and occasional earthquakes. The most recent major quake occurred in 2001 and killed 1,000 people. But it was the country's civil war, lasting from 1979 to 1991, which brought the population the greatest deprivations. The war pitted the country's wealthy elites and the military against guerrilla forces. The latter, the Frente Faribundo Marti de Liberation or FMLN, was supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba and, consequently, viewed as a cold war threat by President Ronald Reagan. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War led to diminished support for the FMLN and the eventual signing of a peace accord. During the civil war, an estimated one million Salvadorans left the country, about half of whom settled in the U.S.

The combination of extreme poverty, civil wars of long duration, and calamitous natural disasters can easily explain the streams of migration from Central America to the U.S. in recent decades. This flow of people from Central America and Mexico, seeking refuge and economic opportunities, has also fueled the immigration debate in the U.S. Because of specific crises that have impacted their home countries, some Central Americans, specifically Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, have been granted Temporary Protected Status by the U.S. government; under certain conditions, they may not be deported, even though their initial entry into this country may have been unauthorized.

A total of 24,800 Central Americans were living in the 10-county Atlanta region in 2000. That number is estimated to have expanded significantly to 35,250 in 2005, based upon the American Community Survey. Using the 2005 estimates, the largest representations come from El Salvador (12,600), Guatemala (9,000) and Honduras (6,200). Those three countries account for about 78 percent of the Central Americans in the region. Other Central Americans in the region are Panamanians (3,300) and Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans, estimated at about 1,500 each.

Central Americans in the Atlanta Economy

Many migrants from Central America, along with those from Mexico, began coming to the Atlanta area from their native lands and the southwestern U.S. in the 1990s. Atlanta's economy and, in particular, its construction industry, was booming as the region prepared to host the 1996 Olympic Games.

Many of those initially attracted to job opportunities in construction tended to stay in that field. The 2000 census figures indicate that fully 46.2 percent of the Atlanta region's Central American male labor force was working in construction, extraction and maintenance occupations. Within that category, the largest grouping (12.6 percent of male workers) consisted of construction laborers. Also, painters and paperhangers and the category of "other construction trades" each accounted for a little over 8 percent of the male workers. Another large group of jobs (19.5 percent of men) was found in service occupations,



most prominently building and grounds cleaning and food preparation/serving.

The Central American labor force in Atlanta is heavily male-dominated; the division is 70 percent males and 30 percent females. Among the Central American female workers in the Atlanta region there is far less specialization, with the women represented across a number of occupational groups. The largest group (17.1 percent) is in production occupations, with 3.4 percent in textiles, apparel and furnishings; another 8 percent are in unspecified production work. The women also hold jobs in office and administrative support jobs (16.6 percent), building and grounds cleaning (14.2 percent), sales (10.7 percent) and food preparation/serving (10.6 percent). Another 9 percent are in professional occupations, including small clusters in education and health care-related jobs.

The median household income of Central Americans in the Atlanta region was \$44,523 in 1999, or about 86 percent of the median income reported for all households that year. A significant portion of income earned by Central Americans in the U.S. may be sent in the form of remittances to support family members in their home countries, up to nearly \$8 billion in 2004, according to the Inter-American Development Bank.

Central American Life in Metro Atlanta

Atlanta's Central American population is concentrated in four of the region's counties: DeKalb (with 8,450 residents born in Central America), Gwinnett (7,370), Cobb (3,380) and Fulton (2,590). Smaller numbers also live in Clayton (1,450) and Cherokee (950), which has a concentration of Guatemalan residents, according to the 2000 census.

Many of the people who currently come to the U.S. from Central America have not had the opportunity for a strong educational background. That lack of education, in particular, the language barrier (most don't speak any English; many may also not speak Spanish, but rather their local Indian dialects.), makes life harder. Their challenges are compounded by a lack of knowledge of local laws and the fact that many are from small towns, with little experience of life in the city.

The majority of assistance that immigrants receive comes from churches and other religious organizations serving the Hispanic community. They hear about possible assistance through word of mouth and also through the Spanish language radio stations.

Hispanics in generally still see radio as a major way of communication, just as in their home countries. Many prefer listening to the news rather than reading a newspaper. There are no Atlanta-based Spanish-language TV stations, though there are some newspapers for the local Hispanic community.

While Central Americans possess a rich cultural heritage, the pressures of making a living and the other challenges of modern urban living have prevented the community from developing a distinctive cultural presence – apart from the general Hispanic culture – in metro Atlanta. The one exception may be in the area of cuisine.

It is possible to find occasional Nicaraguan, Salvadoran and other Central American restaurants offering familiar foods. For example, *pupusas*, stuffed cornmeal tortillas, are the signature Salvadorean dish; they may be stuffed with various selections including *queso* (cheese), *chicharrón* (pork crackling) and *revueltas* (mixed items).



Central American Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with or have been established by local Central American Community. Additional resources are available at www.atlantaregional.com and www.globalatlantaworks.com

ASSOCIATIONS

Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO)
P.O. Box 29506
Atlanta, GA 30359
404-745-2580
Contact: Jerry Gonzalez, Executive Director
E-mail: jerry@galeo.org

Latin American Association
2750 Buford Highway
Atlanta, GA 30324
404-638-1800
404-638-1806 (fax)
E-mail: main@latinamericanassoc.org
www.latinamericanassoc.org

LAA – Gwinnett Outreach Center
Harmony Station Outreach Center
Harmony Station Apartments
1250 Old Norcross Tucker Road
Tucker, GA 30084
678-205-1018

LAA – Cobb County Outreach Center
Hickory Lake Outreach Center
Hickory Lake Apartments
490 Windy Hill Road
Smyrna, GA 30082
678-213-0500

LAA – Las Colinas Apartments Outreach Center
861 Franklin Road
Marietta, GA 30067
678-213-0360
404-396-7478 (cell)
678-213-0650 (fax)
404-929-9998
E-mail: cobboffice@latinamericanassoc.org

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
P. O. Box 12104
Atlanta, GA 30355
www.lulac.org

GENERAL

Catholic Social Services
680 West Peachtree Street NW
Atlanta, GA 30308
404-881-6571
404-888-7841 (Hispanic Hotline)
www.cssatlanta.com
Note: Contact main office for services and outreach center locations

Patricia Boezio
Honorary Consulate of Ecuador
5505 Roswell Road, Suite 350
Atlanta, GA 30342
404-252-2211 (Mondays only)

Our Lady of The Americas Catholic Mission
5918 New Peachtree Road
Doraville, GA 30340
770-455-8437

HEALTH

Centro Medico Latinoamericano
2841 Buford Highway
Atlanta, GA 30329
404-321-5151

Clinica de la Mama
2685 Metropolitan Parkway SW
Atlanta, GA 30315
404-684-1250

5139 Jimmy Carter Blvd.
Norcross, GA 30093
770-613-9614

Clinica de la Salud Hispana
3652 Chamblee Dunwoody Road
Atlanta, GA 30341
770-451-0662

969 Windy Hill Road
Smyrna, GA 30080
678-888-0173

Clinic for Education, Treatment and Prevention of Addiction (CETPA)
7740 Roswell Road, Suite 700
Atlanta, GA 30350
770-452-8630

5195 Jimmy Carter Blvd, Suite 102
Norcross, GA 30093
678-282-0307
E-mail: cetpa@cetpa.org
www.cetpa.org

Emergency Clinic Los Remedios
275 Carpenter Drive, Suite 100
Atlanta, GA 30328
404-497-9739

Good Samaritan Health Center
239 Ivan Allen Jr. Blvd., NW
Atlanta, GA 30313
404-523-6571

St. Joseph's Mercy's Clinics (main office)
424 Decatur St.
Atlanta, GA 30312
404-880-3550

Northeast Plaza Clinic Location
3367 Buford Highway
Atlanta, GA 30329
404-880-3711

MEDIA

1550 AM Radio La Que Buena
1800 Lake Park Drive, Suite 99
Smyrna, GA 30080
770-436-6171
www.radiolaquebuena.com

Atlanta Latino
6400 Atlantic Blvd., Suite 200
Norcross, GA 30371
770-416-7570
www.atlantatlato.com

CNN en Espanol
Contact: Luis Beltran
770-677-9347
E-mail: luis.beltran@turner.com

Hispanic Yellow Pages
Casablanca Publishing, Inc.
P. O. Box 191033
Atlanta, GA 31119
404-844-0600
www.paginasamarillas-atl.com

La Vision (weekly newspaper)
196 West Pike St., Suite 201
Lawrenceville, GA 30045
770-963-7521
www.lavisiononline.com

Mega WAFS 1190 AM
5075 Jimmy Carter Blvd., Suite 1
Norcross, GA 30093
678-205-5032
www.megaatlanta.com

Mundo Hispanico (weekly newspaper)
P. O. Box 13808
Atlanta, GA 30324
404-881-1484
www.mundohispanico.com

Univision 34-Atlanta (Spanish speaking cable TV)
404-926-2304

WAOS-1600 AM La Favorita (Cobb, Clayton, Douglas, Fulton, Fayette, DeKalb and Paulding counties)
5815 Westside Road
Austell, GA 30106
770-944-0900
www.radiolafavorita.com

RELIGIOUS-RELATED

Adventist Church of the Seventh Day of North Atlanta-Hispanic Community
3554 Strait St.
Doraville, GA 30340
770-451-1515
E-mail: pastor@atlantanorte.com
www.atlantanorte.com

Iglesia Bautista Nueva Jerusalem
5300 Williams Road
Norcross, GA 30093
770-638-8388

San Martin de Porres Fraternity (Hermandad de San Martin de Porres)
6017 Western Hills Drive, Suite 101
Norcross, GA 30071
www.sanmartindeporres-georgia.org

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Charles Krautler, Executive Director Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator
The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the 10-county Atlanta region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 62 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of region wide consequence.

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