

= ATL ( film ) =

ATL is a 2006 American drama film , and the feature film directorial debut of music video director Chris Robinson . The screenplay was written by Tina Gordon Chism from an original story by Antwone Fisher , and is loosely based on the experiences of the film 's producers Dallas Austin and Tionne " T @-@ Boz " Watkins ( of the R & B group TLC ) growing up in Atlanta , Georgia ( ATL ) . The film is a coming @-@ of @-@ age tale concerning Rashad , played by Atlanta native and hip hop artist T.I. in his film debut , and his friends in their final year in high school and on the verge of adulthood . The film also stars Antwan Andre Patton , aka Big Boi of the hip hop group OutKast , Evan Ross , Jackie Long , Lauren London , and Mykelti Williamson .

ATL was the first feature film for its director and the majority of its cast . Filmed in Atlanta , Georgia in summer 2005 , many celebrities from the city make cameo appearances , including Jazze Pha , Killer Mike , and Monica . ATL received generally favorable reviews from critics .

= = Plot = =

Rashad ( T.I. ) is a teen living in Atlanta , Georgia with his Uncle , George ( Mykelti Williamson ) and his little brother Ant ( Evan Ross ) . He and his brother were raised by their uncle George since their parents died in a car accident , and they work with him as part of his custodial company . When not working or finishing his last year of high school , Rashad spends most of his time with his friends Brooklyn ( Albert Daniels ) , Teddy ( Jason Weaver ) , and Esquire ( Jackie Long ) . Rashad is a talented artist but does not see much of a future in that field as he has become accustomed to working the family business . Esquire , Rashad 's best friend , goes to a prep school on the opposite side of town from where they live , and is trying to attend an Ivy League college after senior year . However , he finds out that he will need a letter of recommendation from someone of high stature to better his chances of acceptance at the school he wants to attend .

Rashad and his friends are also a skate crew , known as " The Ones " , on Sunday nights at Cascade , a skating rink where local teens hang out . While there , Rashad catches the eye of New @-@ New ( Lauren London ) , a round @-@ the @-@ way girl with a mysterious background , since he only sees her around when she is hanging out with her friends Veda ( Khadijah Haqq ) and Star ( Malika Haqq ) . The two become attracted to one another and they later kiss when he gives her a ride home in his Chevrolet El Camino . However , in contrast , Esquire instantly develops a disliking for Rashad 's new love interest , considering her bad company . Meanwhile , no longer under Rashad 's watchful eyes , Ant becomes involved with a drug dealer named Marcus ( Patton ) and begins to sell for him . He also starts dating a girl named Tondie ( April Clark ) , who takes a liking to him only after he began to make money through drug dealing .

At work one day , Esquire meets John Garnett ( Keith David ) , a millionaire who heads a successful business venture called the United Express . The two quickly become friends , with Garnett 's admiration for Esquire 's ambition and Esquire 's respect for Garnett 's success driving the relationship . Esquire sees an opportunity to obtain the letter of recommendation that would bring about his acceptance to his primary college choice . When Esquire goes to Garnett 's house to pick up the letter , he meets his daughter Erin , who , to his surprise , turns out to be New @-@ New , whose real name is Erin . Erin says that she will reveal where Esquire is really from ( something he lied to her father about ) if he tells Rashad about her .

Things soon begin to fall apart for Rashad ; Ant is arrested for selling weed , and later Rashad finds out the truth about Erin . He no longer speaks to his friends , realizing that Esquire knew about Erin the whole time . Esquire , feeling guilty about the way he obtained the letter , decides to return it to Garnett , and reveals the truth about himself and his background . He , Brooklyn , and Teddy attempt to make peace with Rashad and ask him to attend Skate Wars , Cascade 's annual skate competition , with them ; Rashad , however , refuses their offer . Just as he decides that he will go , after being persuaded by his uncle , he finds out that Marcus is looking for Ant on the streets , searching for cash that Ant owes to him . Rashad tracks the two down and throws the money that Ant owes Marcus in his face . Marcus then holds Rashad at gunpoint and makes a rude comment .

Rashad knocks the gun off of Marcus 's hand , it goes off , and they fight briefly until Rashad gets up to leave . Rashad tells Ant to get into the car while Marcus grabs his gun and ends up shooting Ant ( later revealed ) in the chest . At the hospital , Rashad and Ant are able to reconnect ; likewise , Erin , Esquire , and Rashad make peace , as the scene ends with the poem " Love 's Deceit " by rapper Big Rube playing .

In the film 's final scene , Teddy opens his own business concerning the production of gold teeth , Brooklyn finds a job at a Krystal restaurant , while Esquire receives a mysterious letter of recommendation ( presumably from Garnett ) and is able to attend his college . The twins Veda and Star remain in the old neighborhood and hang out at Cascade on Sundays , while Erin goes to Spelman College , the school she wanted to attend . Uncle George starts attending church more often and finds a good woman to date . Ant changes direction , discarding the notion of drug dealing , finds a new girlfriend and begins to focus on his studies in school . Rashad , lastly , becomes a comic artist for the Sunday edition of the Atlanta Evening Standard , the city 's newspaper . The film ends with Rashad leaving his skates in Cascades , and the building 's lights go off .

= = Cast = =

T.I. as Rashad , the narrator of the story . Chris Robinson had directed Harris ' first music video four years prior to the creation of ATL , and was very impressed by his charisma and presence . " But on this film he came to the table , worked so hard and never tried to be T.I. ? he became Rashad . " On being a part of the film 's production , Harris said he felt " it was the most honest representation of my culture and my city ever to be put on screen and the largest production to be ever filmed in Atlanta , so I [ feel ] somewhat obligated . "

Evan Ross as Ant , Rashad 's younger brother . ATL marks Ross ' film debut , which he says actually made his first foray easier , since it was also co @-@ star T.I. ' s debut . " It ? s his first movie too , and that has been good because we ? ve been able to find ways of doing it together that has made it a lot easier for each of us . "

Lauren London as New New / Erin Garnett , Rashad 's love interest and John Garnett 's daughter . The character of New @-@ New was loosely based on R & B group TLC 's " T @-@ Boz as a kid , " said London . " I talked to her about my character ... she explained to me how it was when she was young ? the attitude and the flavor . And it ? s funny , a lot of people say that I act like she used to act at the skating rink . ? Director Robinson was impressed by London and " everything from her look , to the fact that she 's new . And there 's just so much truth in her , and she doesn 't know how to lie yet as an actress . It was perfect . "

Jackie Long as Benjamin " Esquire " Gordon , a close friend of Rashad 's . The character of Esquire was inspired by a friend of producer Austin 's , who worked at a country club but would tell his friends he worked at a hot dog joint . " And you ? d think his family had money , but he lived in the projects . " Long auditioned a year prior to shooting the film at the director 's home in California . " And he was a long shot but he came in and he became that character , " said Robinson .

Albert Daniels as Brooklyn , a New York transplant and one of Rashad 's closest friends . Robinson had known Daniels since he was a fifteen @-@ year @-@ old production assistant on his music video shoots in New York . " He was an annoying little kid who got fired every time he was a P.A. because he was so inquisitive . But every time they fired him I 'd bring him back because I felt like he always had something . " Eight years later , Robinson ran into Daniels at a poetry reading in New York City , and told him to audition for the film . Daniels didn 't have any money to get to Atlanta where he had to audition , so he hustled money doing poetry in subways , and bought a bus ticket to get there .

Jason Weaver as Teddy , a close friend of Rashad 's . Weaver impressed producer Austin in his previous film Drumline enough to get a role in ATL . The director felt that Weaver , the veteran of the young cast , and his experience would be helpful to the other cast members .

Antwan " Big Boi " Patton as Marcus , the drug dealer Ant begins to work for . He serves as the antagonist of the film , as he plans to lure Ant from Rashad for his own profit . The film also marked Big Boi 's film debut . As said by director Robinson in reference to Big Boi 's performance , " he

wasn't the normal kind of a bad guy . He put so much charisma and flavor behind it . We loved it . "

Nicholas Sheriff as Zero the leader of the gang D @-@ Boys . Nick is a great actor and a pleasure to work with . As said by director Robinson in reference to Nick 's performance , " he wasn't the normal type of gang member . He put so much charisma and attitude behind it .

Keith David as John Garnett , Erin 's father and Esquire 's acquaintance . He is unaware of the fact that Esquire is lying about who he really is .

Mykelti Williamson as Uncle George , Rashad and Ant 's uncle and guardian . George means well but he is very stingy with his snacks so he keeps them locked up in his room or labels them " Property of George " . When Rashad and Ant fall out about Ant 's drug dealing , George says things to Rashad he doesn't mean but they later make up .

April Clark as Tondie , Ant 's girlfriend . At first , she was rude to Ant when he would try to talk to her . After he begins to become more popular , she begins to develop a crush on him and asks him to be her boyfriend .

Khadijah Haqq as Veda , New New 's friend and Star 's twin sister .

Malika Haqq as Star , New New 's friend and Veda 's twin sister .

Lonette McKee as Priscilla Garnett , Erin 's mother and John Garnett 's wife .

Markice Moore as Austin , Ant 's friend and Marcus ' cousin .

La 'Shontae Heckerd as Tonya , Rashad 's ex @-@ girlfriend .

Tasha Smith as Gayle , Veda and Star 's mother .

Monique " Whyte Chocolate " Harris @-@ Ford as Sexy Pizza Customer .

Buffie Carruth as Big Booty Judy .

Monica as Waffle House Waitress .

= = Soundtrack = =

The music for ATL was to be released as a soundtrack but they recorded so much music it became T.I. 's 4th studio album King . It features such singles as What You Know , Top Back , Why You Wanna and Aaliyah 's At Your Best ( You Are Love ) .

= = Production = =

ATL 's story is loosely based on material by producers Dallas Austin and Tionne Watkins , who set out to describe their experiences growing up on the south side of Atlanta in the early ' 90s . Watkins and producer Jody Gerson approached James Lassiter with the idea of a story about a skating rink that many involved in the Atlanta music scene had started at , and how all of these people would attend the rink every Sunday night in their teen years .

Chris Robinson , a renowned music video director , was contacted with an offer to direct Austin and Watkins ' visualization , and took on his first feature with ATL . The films producers decided Robinson would be well @-@ suited for the project because of his ability to capture the music @-@ driven aspects of the film , as provided by his experience in the field . They also cited his talent in storytelling . According to producer Austin , " a lot of music video directors can't capture the story , so what we'd do was turn on the directors ' tapes , turn down the music and just watch to see if we could find the story . Chris was far and away the best . " About making ATL his first feature , Robinson stated that " as a music video director , I'd get a lot of scripts that had to do with really big visual pictures . But I wanted to start off doing something that had heart . " After being hired , Robinson traveled to Atlanta and spent time with Austin to try to soak up the vibe and energy of the unique city .

Open auditions were held in Atlanta , Chicago , Los Angeles , and New York to comb the crowd for candidates who could compose the film 's ensemble cast . Robinson had already decided he wanted relatively unknown actors to perform in the film . Once the cast was assembled , Robinson had his actors converge in Atlanta for six weeks to rehearse the script and familiarize themselves with each other . " All this young black talent out there , all these young black actors who don't get a shot or who have to wait years to get their shot , are getting their shot in this film , and they're bringing it . "

Three months prior to the start of production , the actors gathered at Atlanta 's Skatetown to begin training for the skating sequences in the film . Some had never been on roller skates before . Vaughn Newton , the actors ' skate captain , worked with them rigorously , usually practicing five hours a day . Lauren and the twins , Malika and Khadijah , adapted very quickly , " said Newton . " The guys came along a little slower . Al Be , Jason and Jackie Long developed very fast . T.I. was determined to learn . They were all great students and very supportive of each other . In addition to the main cast , Robinson decided to include numerous cameos in the film , generally involving people popular in the Atlanta music scene , a core element of the movie . Music producer Jazze Pha played the skating rink 's DJ ; Rico Wade , a part of the Atlanta @-@ based production team Organized Noize , who also frequented Jellybeans in the early ' 90s , made an appearance as well . R & B singer Monica , a protégé of producer Austin 's , also plays a Waffle House waitress in the film . A few of the south 's most sought after music video models made appearances as well including ' Whyte Chocolate ' also known as Monique Harris @-@ Ford . There are also cameos from rappers Bone Crusher , Konkrete , and Killer Mike .

Dallas Austin coordinated the music for the film , which executive producer Timothy M. Bourne says is " all new music that 's rooted in the Atlanta vibe . " Austin had already produced his first feature with Drumline in 2002 , and wanted to be sure ATL would be similarly authentic to the culture of his hometown by using its current hip @-@ hop scene as the story 's backdrop . Music in the environment of the rink was the way Austin pitched the film " as a way to make a musical without putting Singin ' in the Rain on the screen ... without the kids breaking into song . I 'm determined to show Hollywood and New York the culture from the South . "

Under the working title " Jellybean " , the film was shot over a span of six weeks in fifty @-@ two locales throughout the city of Atlanta . Filming took place in the summer , sometimes in temperatures over a hundred degrees , challenging the cast and crew 's ability to stay motivated . " A lot of times we had to motivate each other to say ' listen , up your game . Go hard , ' " said Robinson . " And sometimes we needed to step back , take a breath , so we could get through . "

= = = Design = = =

Chris Robinson and Robb Buono , the film 's production designer , decided that the script was composed of two distinct parts ? the reality of the teens ' lives and the time they spent at the skating rink . According to Buono , " we wanted to look at it [ the rink ] through rose colored glasses , because when you think back on your memories of that time period ? no matter what age you are ? you see everything bigger . Our goal was to make that roller skating rink a character that grows as we keep coming back , and each time it ? s more magical ? a Saturday Night Fever @-@ like contrast to the reality of life . ? Robinson and Buono chose to shoot at the Cascade Family Skating Rink in Atlanta after visiting and witnessing the energy and excitement of the rink . However , the filmmakers felt Cascade 's interior design was too bland and decided it should be redesigned .

Buono chose black and red for the rink 's new color palette . Red was used for its intensity and energy , and black was utilized because the rink would appear larger . Additionally , usage of black would contrast more boldly with the red colors . The ceiling above the rink was removed for lighting purposes . The rink floor was also refinished with darker colors to provide better light reflection . Rigging for the lights became an artistic challenge for Buono . Working with the art department , the rigging electricians and the rigging grips , he designed a wagon wheel effect that moved with the motion of the skating and allowed the lights to be programmed , aesthetically lighting both ends of the rink and capturing the action of the skating sequences . The skate rental section , arcade and snack bar were redesigned at the rink as well , so that the areas besides the skating floor wouldn 't feel monotonous . ? We did every inch of that rink , ? said Buono . ? The carpet on the walls , painting the ceiling , putting in the lights , painting the snack bar , changing the color of the tables . We used a lot of neon and bold bright colors . ?

= = Release = =

### == Box office ==

ATL was released on March 31 , 2006 in 1 @, @ 602 theatres across the U.S. The film grossed at \$ 11 @, @ 554 @, @ 404 , and ranked third at the box office behind Ice Age : The Meltdown at one and Spike Lee 's Inside Man at two ; the film 's opening weekend was a success . Its second weekend profits were considerably lower , as the film only earned \$ 3 @, @ 710 @, @ 215 , enough for it to be reach seventieth place on the list of widely released films with the biggest weekend drops in the last twenty @-@ six years . The film made less money in the following weekends , and by the end of its theatrical run ATL had accumulated a total of \$ 21 @, @ 170 @, @ 563 . After the theater take of approximately 50 % , ATL earned around half of its production cost , producing a significant loss .

### == Home video ==

The film was released in the U.S. on video and DVD July 18 , 2006 . DVD features include a behind @-@ the @-@ scenes featurette , deleted scenes , star T.I. ' s music video for his single " What You Know , " and the film 's theatrical trailer . The film was also released on Blu @-@ ray on November 14 , 2006 .

### == Reception ==

### == Critical response ==

ATL received generally positive reviews from critics . At Allmovie , the film was given three stars , and critic Derek Armstrong , in a positive review of the film , stated that the film is only an average coming of age story " because some substance must take a backseat to all this beautifully crafted style . " Melissa Walters at BlackFilm.com , while believing some of the writing to be clichéd and the story familiar , also called the film " heartfelt , genuine , and enjoyable . " Film critic Roger Ebert awarded the film three stars in his Chicago Sun @-@ Times review , declaring the film " warm " and praising the screenplay 's " unforced , genuine affection for its characters . " IGN.com gave the film a 4 / 5 rating , naming Robinson 's directorial debut " masterful . " Metacritic , a normalized film rating website , provided the film a 63 / 100 score . At the review aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes , the film averaged a 62 % approval rate . Ruthe Stein from the San Francisco Chronicle called the film one of the better kind of its genre , praising the performances of the young cast , and the film 's star T.I. in particular . At Yahoo ! Movies , based on 13 reviews the film has averaged a B- by the critics standards .

All reviews of the picture weren 't so enthusiastic , however . Lisa Schwarzbaum of Entertainment Weekly graded the film a B- , saying that while the skating scenes are a blast , the film stumbles when it attempts to be too much for too many audiences . Neil Genzlinger of The New York Times said he was surprised that with so many untested actors rounding out the main cast , " the most amateurish thing about it is the script . " Genzlinger also called the screenplay cliché- marred and predictable , while giving credit to the young actors of the film . He was also critical of Chris Robinson 's direction , stating that he " can 't stay with a scene long enough to let his actors build momentum . " At The Atlanta Journal @-@ Constitution , Bob Longino provided a negative review of the movie , pointing it out as " boring , uninteresting , and slow " . However , Longino did say that stars T.I. and Big Boi 's performances improved as the film progressed , and that there were a few laugh @-@ out @-@ loud comedic moments in the film .

### == Awards and nominations ==

= = Sequel = =

On January 7 , 2015 Chris Robinson posted a teaser poster of the sequel on Instagram with the main cast in it confirming that a sequel is in the works . On March 4 , 2015 T.I. confirmed on his instagram , that an ATL 2 is to be released .