

Riding with Lester Maddox, Pulling for Stacy Abrams

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In the spring of 1965, I picked up the phone and dialed the number for the Pickrick, the cafeteria on Hemphill Street in downtown Atlanta owned by Lester Maddox. He was our state's controversial arch-segregationist and—for an alarming number of supporters—the champion of “true, God-fearing Americanism.” His outrageous and crude racist diatribes embedded in paid advertisements for the Pickrick had been appearing in the Atlanta newspapers since 1950.

Although never elected to public office, Maddox had made a strong showing each time his name was on the ballot for Mayor of Atlanta or Lieutenant Governor of Georgia. His reputation as a fierce and uncompromising segregationist was growing throughout the state, and now he was running for governor.

“Pickrick here, you pick it out, we rick it up, Lester Maddox speaking, what can I do for you?” he said on the telephone in his squeaky, high-pitched voice.

Both surprised and excited to be talking directly with Lester Maddox himself, I introduced myself and explained that I was working on my master's degree in American Studies at Emory University.

“You have quite a following, Mr. Maddox, and I'd like to interview you in order to better understand your background and perspective. Would you give me a chance to do that? I'd be glad to come to your restaurant at a time convenient for you, and I'd like to bring my tape recorder.”

“Yes sir, that'll be just fine. Come on over after rush hour about 2 pm next Tuesday and you can have some segregated fried chicken and vegetables on the house. Be glad to talk with you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Maddox, I'll be there. I look forward to meeting you.”

I was struck by the fact that he had not asked me a single question. My guess is he wanted all the attention and publicity he could get. I wondered what he would be like on a personal level and whether he would talk openly with me. My plan was to ask questions and let him talk, to document not judge. I anticipated that some of my Emory friends would think I was crazy spending time with someone commonly thought of as a racist clown, but I also knew that some would crave to be in my shoes.

Maddox and I would be two Georgia boys hanging out together—one a rabid segregationist and folk hero of the far right, the other a flaming liberal graduate student on a mission.

Dr. Harvey Young in the Institute of Liberal Arts at Emory University had originally suggested the idea of interviewing Maddox. I was in his office to discuss my book report on W. J. Cash's *Mind of the South*, published in 1934. No one has described better than Cash the contradictory forces, beliefs, and values swirling around in the heads of white Southerners—"the demand for conformity, the Puritanism, the individualism, the capacity for unreality, the propensity to violence, the paternalism, and the 'Negro-phobia'." I had grown up in a small South Georgia town, shaped and confused by these contradictions, and I appreciated the chance to talk about them with Dr. Young, a warm and friendly scholar and my favorite professor. With one year of teaching and two years in the military behind me, I was twenty-six years old and on the hunt for deeper understanding.

"Have you heard much about Lester Maddox?" Dr. Young had asked.

"I've seen a few of his racist rants in the *Atlanta Constitution*," I said, "but I don't know much about him."

"He made a good showing when he ran for Mayor of Atlanta in 1957, and he came in second with 138,000 votes for Lieutenant Governor in 1962. He may seem like nothing but a populist clown, but if he gets elected one of these days, we'll wish we knew more about him. He reminds me of a snake oil salesman on the frontier, hawking simplistic cures for complex problems, preying on the gullibility of voters. I call it political quackery. I think you ought to consider interviewing him. You'd be just right for that, I think. If you get him to open up, you might be able to turn a series of interviews into your master's thesis."

"I like that," I said.

"Well, why don't you call him, see what happens?"

Before I could get out the door, Dr. Young stopped me. “And be sure to study Richard Hofstadter on the paranoid style of American politics and get his book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*; and read anything you can about the Southern demagogues. That’ll help you see Maddox in context, I think. Good luck and let me know how it goes.”

The next day I pulled my eight-hour shift as a part-time aide on the psychiatric unit of Emory University Hospital, grabbed a bite to eat, and hustled across the Quad to the Emory Library. I began reading and taking notes from Hofstadter’s book. Among the passages that stood out: “There has always been in our national experience a type of mind which elevates hatred to a kind of creed; for this mind, group hatreds take a place in politics similar to the class struggle in some other modern societies.”

I scanned back issues of the Atlanta newspapers to glean the flavor of the Pickrick advertisements:

PICKRICK SAYS: I understand that the race-mixing equalizers are disturbed because all of the astronauts are white and unless a non-white gets shot into space soon, they will demand the ending of all our space programs. Is the jig up? The race-mixers have brought racial strife and violence—plus economic harm to Little Rock, New Orleans, Athens, and other cities. Will these same destructive forces come to Georgia Tech and Atlanta, and instigate these same lawless conditions? Where there is peace, calm, and productivity, will the race-mixers come and bring hate, violence, and economic and educational slowdown? SPECIAL TONIGHT; order of Pickrick Skillet Fried Chicken, drumstick and thigh, 25 cents.

—Advertisement in the *Atlanta Constitution*, March 28, 1964

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WITH seating for more than three hundred customers, the Pickrick was dotted with tables covered with red, white, and blue tablecloths. I spotted Maddox moving from table to table, pouring fresh coffee, and offering everyone a hello. I walked over to introduce myself. Slender, about 5’10”, balding and bespectacled, he greeted me with a lame handshake and sent me to the serving line where black servers gave me a plateful of fried chicken, mashed

potatoes, string beans, fried okra, and biscuits. Mr. Maddox took a seat across from me in a side booth. Every now and then a customer would pass by and wave: "God bless you Mr. Pickrick," and Maddox would respond, "Y'all come back to see us now, you hear? Thanks for supporting Pickrick."

As the crowd thinned out, I placed my black tape recorder on the table and pushed the "record" button. While still gnawing on my last drumstick, I explained again to this sallow-eyed, mild-mannered cafeteria owner that I considered him to be a significant political figure and felt it was important to document his ideas.

"Well, just go right ahead, ask me anything you want."

"Let me start by asking about your childhood and your family."

He took a swig of coffee and said: "My sisters and brothers and I grew up in the country out a ways from the city, raised hogs and chickens and vegetables. The Depression hit us real hard in '31 and '32. Daddy and Mother were hungry, and my six sisters and brothers were hungry. As a young boy, I was spending all my time on Peachtree Street, down on Ponce de Leon, at Sears, or anywhere trying to find a job, selling newspapers or doing anything.

"Mother was a very religious woman of stern Baptist upbringing. Daddy had a third-grade education and worked hard as a roll turner in a steel mill. He seldom spared the rod. He gave us certain things to do every day and gave us instructions to do them. It had to be done or we had to pay for it. He was very powerful when it was whipping time. One time he caught me when I was supposed to be in school. He carried me to the bathroom, raised up the switches in one hand, was holding me with the other, and he looked at me for a long time. Then he put the switches down and never did say anything else. I think he realized the conditions we were in, without food and clothes and things like that, had something to do with my not being in school. I believe he understood that. That's the only time he ever started to whip me and didn't. Daddy's only real serious problem was that he drank considerable amounts of alcohol for a number of years. He was harsh and strict, and he taught us to be obedient to our parents, be honest and respectful of our friends and adults, earn our way, and to work for what we want to accomplish."

"Where did you go to school?"

"Never was a good student," he said, "and I dropped out when I was seventeen to help feed and clothe my family."

“How did you get in the restaurant business?”

“Back in 1944, with four hundred dollars, I opened a short order grill, Lester’s Grill, and it was enough of a success for me to sell it for \$4,500 a year later. I sold real estate for a while until I had enough to build this restaurant, and we just kept expanding.”

“How’d you come up with the name?”

“Lots of folks ask me that. Pick means to fastidiously eat, and rick means to pile up, to heap, to amass; so we say Pickrick means you pick it out and we’ll rick it up.”

He seemed willing to talk on and on with utter sincerity and candor about his family, his opposition to integration of the races, and his resistance to “Godless Communism.” He didn’t need questions or prompts. I felt encouraged that this interview could go somewhere. I was emboldened to ask if he would let me travel with him from time to time when he had speaking engagements. “Yes sir, that’ll be just fine. If you want to go with me next Monday, I’ll be speaking at the Student Union on the campus of the University of Georgia over in Athens. Just meet me here in the Pickrick parking lot at 5 p.m. and we can talk some on the ride over to Athens and back.”

* * *

AS I reflected the following weekend on what I had gotten myself into and pondered my upcoming trip with Maddox, I was flooded with a stream of racial memories and images from my years growing up in Albany, Georgia, and my years in college and the Army:

There was the ice cream parlor on third street where we played the pinball machines Saturday mornings—seeing the manager serve a little black boy his vanilla ice cream cone and telling him loudly: “You go home now boy and you tell your mama you sho is black.” The wide-eyed, barefoot little boy responding, “Yes sir, I sho will.”

...

Mother firing our maid for stealing food from our home, using a needlessly harsh tone in her berating Bessie, a black woman with many children to feed and not being paid enough to live on.

...

As a teenager, selling peanuts at the Albany Cardinals baseball games in the summertime, watching Big Joe, the concessions manager, make black boys take upper arm fist hits—one hit for every dime they were short when they checked in after the game, the white boys reprimanded but never hit for the same thing ... feelings of embarrassment watching this ritual as twenty or so of us stood in a circle gawking in the dark parking lot behind the stadium close to midnight.

...

The Gordon Hotel Barber Shop on the downtown square where I got my crew cuts and observed the shaming of Old Boney, the stooped 68-year-old black “shoeshine boy” enduring the racial innuendos and verbal cruelty of the customers and the barbers, Old Boney smiling and chanting over and over, “Shine, Boney, Shine” while brushing hair off the customers with his whiskbroom, holding his hand out for a dime, “thank you, boss man.”

...

Youth representatives of the Presbyterian Church gathered at Montreat, North Carolina, discussing and praying in 1955 with ministers, missionaries, and Christian youth directors about what the theme of youth literature should be for next year. We pleaded for the theme to be “brotherhood.” We had all been raised to believe that Jesus loved all the little children of every color. “Too controversial this year, not the right time,” our adult mentors decided. A wound that would not heal. If the church wouldn’t stand up for brotherhood, what would it stand up for?

...

Running for president of the student body at Davidson College in 1959, one of three candidates answering questions in the student union. ... “What will each of you do if the Board of Trustees votes to

admit black students?" "Form a welcoming committee," I said. I lost that election.

...

A turbulent week in Albany in December 1961, with Martin Luther King, Jr. joining the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, leading protest marches through the center of town, praying on the courthouse steps, hundreds of arrests, no violence. Just out of artillery school, home on furlough for a week, preparing to fly to my assignment in Poitiers, France. Shall I join the marches, ally myself publicly with King? I observed, read the newspapers, attended court sessions—and balked. I escaped to Europe to fulfill my ROTC obligation.

...

Back in Albany, Georgia, after two years of military service in Europe, attending a U.S. Army Reserve meeting in the fall of 1963, having coffee afterward one night at Davis Brothers Restaurant with a group of uniformed white and black soldiers ... two Albany policemen entered the restaurant and made us leave immediately or be arrested. ... When will this shit stop?

MOVING at rush hour through heavy traffic, Lester and I drove out of Atlanta onto State Road 29 and two-lane Georgia—green fields, rotting barns, “Jesus Loves You” billboards, fruit stands, and tiny towns pinned to the corn fields with white church steeples. Lester steered us towards Athens in his aging white Pontiac station wagon, back seat piled high with political pamphlets, little American flags, bumper stickers, and bubble gum for his enthusiastic admirers.

Maddox was a seasoned campaigner who had run unsuccessfully three times before, yet he boasted of his political inexperience. He said God was his campaign manager. Actually, it was his brother, Wesley.

We passed by Stone Mountain where the largest granite relief sculpture in the world depicts Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and “Stonewall” Jackson riding horseback.

Turning on my tape recorder with Mr. Maddox’ permission, I kicked things off. “I understand Stone Mountain was once owned by the Venable Brothers and was the site of the founding of the second Ku Klux Klan in 1915. Are you a member of the Ku Klux Klan?”

”I’ve never been a member, but I know some members of the KKK who are very good people. I’m for the purpose of the Klan if it’s to preserve constitutional government, racial segregation, and private property rights, and they say that they are, then I’m one hundred percent for them.”

“Are you a member of the John Birch Society?” I asked.

“I have known many of their members, and I have never known any member but that he was a strong Christian, a strong responsible, substantial business person. I have never known any of the people who are pictured as ultra-right or extremists or riff-raff or rabble-rousers. I’ve never seen fit to join the Society because I didn’t want to burden them with my political identity.”

“What is the fundamental basis for your total opposition to integration?”

“Well, in Noah’s Ark God put two of each kind of everything, didn’t he? If God had wanted us all one race, we wouldn’t have different races. The white race excels in many areas, the Negro race in many areas; but if you make a melting pot of both of them and kill the identity of each, you commit a crime against man and a sin against God. Now I’m going to pull over in this service station to pass out a few pamphlets, take a leak, and put on my necktie. Come on with me if you want to but turn off the recorder. We’ll be right on time.”

* * *

WHEN we entered the auditorium on the University campus, the Student Union was packed with about a thousand students and faculty, standing room only. Amidst a ripple of cheers and boos, Maddox, in dark coat and tie, shook hands with student organizers, bounced up the steps to the stage, and took his seat.

I leaned against the side wall, flipped on my recorder as Maddox was introduced as “an independent-minded maverick member of the Democratic Party and strong opponent of racial

integration who seeks now to sit in the Governor's Chair of the State of Georgia."

Maddox stepped to the podium with a tight smile and a nod to scattered applause. When things calmed, he launched without notes into his stock fifteen-minute speech:

"If I am elected Governor of Georgia, I will stand on my philosophy as pro-America, pro-free enterprise, pro-private property rights, and pro-states' rights. This will preserve and restore freedom for all Americans. My administration will emphasize morality, particularly in government, and we will always tell the truth about Communism.

"People ask me to explain why I want to run for governor. As your governor, I can bring to the Negro and white people of Georgia a program of truth, patriotism, and Americanism. I think we can give this truth to our people, I think we can better our race relations, I think we can befit both our Negro and our white citizens with a program of truth, patriotism, and Americanism. There would be no discrimination under my administration because we would certainly use conservative-thinking colored people just as soon as I would white people who would promote this program. I will offer a conservative voice that business and industrial concerns have not had for many years. We would promote tourism, educational improvement, and better mental health facilities.

The race-mixers know our people are wise to their efforts that would bring harm to our good Negroes and white citizens. Power-hungry race-mixers are not helping our good Negroes but are using and hurting them.

My administration would emphasize spending the necessary money in caring for the people who really can't help themselves. All of this would promote truth, patriotism, and Americanism and still bring progress for Georgia, and I think even greater progress than we now have.

Now I'll be glad to answer any questions.

The audience sat silent a few seconds, and then dozens of hands went up. The most memorable moment came when a female student with long dark hair stood, took the hand-held microphone, and asked with trembling voice: "Mr. Maddox, please help us understand how you, as a professed Christian, can justify your vehement defense of racial segregation. I am a Christian and I am not a Communist. How do you explain your stand for white supremacy? Why do you spread hatred instead of love? Why do you...." She choked up in tears and sat down to wild applause.

Maddox waited for a brief moment, then offered his reply: "America needs to get back to God and the Holy Bible and drop the Communist program to integrate America. You can't take God's Word and prove that it is Christian to integrate and amalgamate the races. We need God-fearing Americans who love this country enough to stand before the world and proclaim, 'I am Christian enough and American enough to fight.' And, in my opinion, this attitude would look good coming from our weak-kneed elected officials in Washington."

For my part, I could only silently process what I'd seen:

This has got to be the most simplistic political speech I've ever heard. No substance. All he does is repeat shibboleths and quote the Bible, stirring the emotions of his most rabid, least educated core followers. Not many of them in this room tonight but there are tens of thousands of them in this state, maybe enough to elect him.

ON our journey back to Atlanta, Maddox talked freely and responded to all my questions. He denied any ill feeling for members of the Negro race and spoke proudly of having worked side by side with Negroes as a young man.

"I'm proud of the loyal Negroes who have worked in my restaurant over the years. The good Negroes in this world are those who appreciate the blessings of segregation and are not moved by the rabble-rousers who demand integration."

I felt irritated but not surprised by this man's moral blindness. I had grown up in a town where racial segregation was sacrosanct

and the local newspaper publisher, James Gray, provided daily editorials vigorously defending the “Southern way of life.” Gray also purchased the city swimming pool and re-opened it as a private pool for whites only. It was abundantly clear that Mr. Maddox was a *true believer*, and any effort to argue rationally or to reason with him would be futile. And besides, my mission was to document, not to persuade.

PICKRICK SAYS: We should speak out against the mistaken who advocate following world opinion (Communism and Africanism) rather than what is best for America and Americans. If we are to be called “fanatics, extremists, and super-patriots,” then call me fanatic, extremist, and super-patriot Pickrick.

—Advertisement in the *Atlanta Constitution*, March 29, 1964

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TWO additional trips with Maddox in the spring of 1965 gave me abundant first-hand information about his early childhood, his hard-drinking father (the main thing that he and I had in common), his impoverished youth, his entrepreneurial drive, his restless search for satisfying employment, his passionate defense of property rights, and his ardent belief in the segregation of the races. I observed how different audiences responded to his rapid-fire extemporaneous delivery and his supreme confidence in the righteousness of his cause. He spoke in loud, flat tones with little inflection and was never eloquent, but he could grind on like a jaw-flapping Donald Duck for an hour or more without notes. I never heard him use the N-word.

PICKRICK SAYS: A few people have called and said they were going to integrate the Pickrick, but they know better—must have been drinking rocket fuel.

—Advertisement in the *Atlanta Constitution*, July 25, 1964

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THE clubbing of freedom riders; the bombings of black businesses, homes, and churches; the attacks on demonstrators with water cannons and dogs; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s marches in Albany, Georgia, and in Birmingham, Alabama; the Kennedy assassination; the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing discrimination based on race—these socially disruptive events characterized the turbulent early 1960s.

During the period I traveled with Maddox and recorded hours of conversations with him, he made headlines almost every day. He closed his restaurant rather than integrate it, he gave out axe handles in the parking lot of the Pickrick, he repeatedly embraced the views of the extreme radical right, and he enthusiastically supported Barry Goldwater for President. He handed out leaflets on the street, organized parades, and picketed the White House. Maddox' notoriety and his large following, especially among rural Georgians, grew stronger throughout the state as he became the voice of absolute resistance to integration of the public schools and total defiance of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on public accommodations. His advertisements served as a megaphone, which Maddox used to great effect.

PICKRICK SAYS: And should I go to jail, it won't be Lester Maddox going to jail. ... it will be freedom and liberty being placed behind bars, for life. The following will be responsible: the communists, the President of the United States and members of the Congress, the news media, weak and cowardly business leaders, and so-called Christian ministers who have kicked Christ out of the church and replaced my Lord with a social gospel. My life may be required of me. I stand ready.

—Lester Maddox news conference, Henry Grady Hotel, July 10, 1964

Most unusual of all Maddox's publicity stunts was his solemn dedication of a shrine to the death of free enterprise. On a chilly September day, approximately four hundred supporters gathered in the Pickrick parking lot and paid thirty-five cents each to enter the crudely constructed 30-foot white plywood shrine. Inside lay a casket containing a copy of the United States Constitution, and on the walls, quotations were inscribed from Daniel Webster, Barry Goldwater, and Lester Maddox. I showed up with my tape recorder, paid my thirty-five cents, and mingled in the crowd. Preachers prayed, Maddox harangued, and the crowd huddled

together to sing “Anchors Aweigh,” “Three Cheers for the Red, White, and Blue,” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Everyone fell silent as a small white helicopter landed on a corner of the parking area. James Gray, the Albany publisher, now chairman of the state democratic party, emerged with his blond female companion. The crowd cheered as Gray, the suave and sophisticated segregationist, embraced Maddox before taking the stage to praise “our hero defending our constitutional rights.” The crowd went wild. Billed as a funeral for free enterprise, it felt to me more like a re-birth ritual. I think everybody in this crowd went home feeling rejuvenated that night.

On Easter Sunday 1965, I attended services at Ebenezer Baptist Church to hear Dr. King preach. I came away deeply moved by the power and intelligence of King’s sermon of hope and goodwill. I shook his hand, looked in his eyes, and thanked him for his courage and for shaking things up in my hometown. Born and raised in Atlanta, both King and Maddox were Southern Baptists; two believers who knew how to move the masses but in totally opposite directions. Lester Maddox had told me that King would be “a nobody” if it were not for the race issue. Whether or not that was true for Dr. King, there can be no doubt that it was true for Lester Maddox.

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WITH my thesis all typed up and submitted in final form, I eagerly awaited the call from Dr. Young to get his reactions. I fervently hoped for no further revisions.

On a rainy Saturday morning, over a cup of coffee in Dr. Young’s home, I tried to sum up what I had learned from my study of Maddox. Taking a deep breath and pushing back in the faded green armchair, I rambled: “It’s been an unusual experience traveling with this man and seeing how people react to him. He’s a true believer with a Manichean perspective, but much less cunning than George Wallace and much less effective as an orator, I think, than any of the demagogues of old, like Tom Watson, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, Eugene Talmadge, and Huey Long. Maddox is folksy, and he’s a tireless campaigner. He seems utterly sincere in his beliefs. He sees himself as being on God’s side with regard to perpetuating racial segregation in our state—at all costs. His religious beliefs, his brand of extremism, and his passion for unrestrained free enterprise are inextricably intertwined.”

“I agree with you on that,” Dr. Young said.

“I think what he cares about more than anything in the world is property. He struggled out of poverty, bought land, built a business. His private property was his symbol of victory over adversity. This explains his total defiance of the Public Accommodations Act of 1964. His property was his manhood, his identity. He often quotes the book of Matthew where it says, ‘Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?’ And he once told an audience that the American free enterprise system could never have been established if it were not for the birth of Christ.

“You can’t reason with him. I honestly don’t believe he personally hates people of color across the board, but he certainly detests Martin Luther King, Jr. He knows how to use cruel, racist rhetoric to fire up his followers. He believes he’s doing God’s will to oppose the integration of the races. He’s a high profile hero now with a growing army of white, blue-collar supporters, and he has to be taken seriously whether we like it or not. His style and inflammatory rhetoric clearly feed the paranoia and racism of the masses. He’s riding a wave of resentment over the advance of the civil rights movement, and in the words of Hofstadter, he’s ‘elevated hatred to a kind of creed.’”

“I’ve read your thesis carefully, John. You’ve done a good job. I hope you’ll produce some articles that could be published in the *Atlantic* or *Harper’s*. Now that Maddox is running for governor, your material is valuable. Do something with it. And good luck to you!”

My thesis concluded with this statement: “Lester Maddox created his style out of his own experience of the world, and it is that style, coupled with peculiar circumstances of time and place, which made him a public figure and a defiant hero in the turbulent 1960s. From inauspicious origins, he more than realized his boyhood dream and left his mark on his region’s history. He became for many the symbol of proud and stubborn resistance to the destruction of the Southern way of life. For me and for many others, he represents the anachronistic survival of urges and ideas, latent in the consciousness of every Southerner and every American, which should have long ago been laid to rest. In his unique way, Lester Maddox is both the bearer and the burden of Southern history.”

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A Few days after Dr. Young signed my thesis, I hit the road in my trusty 1952 Ford and headed out for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, where I craved to wander in the pristine wilderness as an instructor with the Minnesota Outward Bound School. After a year and a half with Lester Maddox, I was eager for the purity of the Boundary Waters, the wild call of the loons, the smell of fresh caught Walleyed pike in the frying pan, long days of paddling and portaging, and exciting work with teenagers ripe for adventure.

In mid-July that summer, I got a phone call from a political operative in the Republican Party of Georgia. “Mr. Huie, I understand you did a series of interviews with Lester Maddox over the past year. I wonder if you could, um, you know, um, provide us with any useful information that might, um, assist us in our opposition to him in the Governor’s race?”

“Sir, I’m trying to put Lester Maddox behind me, and I’m about to head out on a long canoe trip. All those interviews are on tape and available in the Emory University Library. If you’re looking for dirt on Maddox, you won’t find anything on those tapes that isn’t already widely known. Just take a look at his Pickrick advertisements in the Atlanta papers over the last fifteen years. Maddox is an open book, a true believer, a rabid racist, a fervent anti-Communist, and a conspiracy theorist. I’m not sure your candidate, Bo Calloway, is any different, just a whole lot more suave and sophisticated. Good luck to you.”

Lester Maddox was elected the governor of Georgia in November 1966, one year after my travels and interviews with him. In the Democratic primary, he beat state legislator Jimmy Carter by 21,090 votes but came second to Ellis Arnall by 45,808 votes. In the run-off with Arnold, Maddox took 54% of the vote to Arnold’s 45%—a decisive victory.

In the general election against patrician Republican and West Point graduate Bo Calloway, neither candidate got a majority of the votes. After some wrangling in the courts, the Democrat-controlled Georgia legislature selected Maddox as Governor.

In 1968, Bruce Galphin, editor of the *Atlanta Magazine* and a Harvard Nieman-Marcus Fellow, drew heavily on my interviews in writing and publishing *The Riddle of Lester Maddox*. I felt pleased that my interviews had not merely gathered dust in the Emory University Library. In the foreword to his book, Galphin wrote:

To John Carlton Huie I owe special gratitude for transcripts of interviews he taped while writing a

master's thesis at Emory University. Without the information he discovered about Maddox's childhood, the adult Maddox would remain an unsolved riddle.

Galphin warned: "It would be as easy as unwise to dismiss Maddox as a fluke, a political accident. It is true that an unusual set of circumstances put him into office: a crowded primary, an unpopular runoff opponent, a controversial Republican adversary, the divisions of a write-in campaign, and an archaic election law. But Lester Maddox speaks the language and expresses the emotions of untold millions of Americans. Is his election unique? Or is he the prototype of the anti-politician of the future, ignoring party structure to appeal directly to the wishes, fears, and resentments of the people?"

* * *

Afterword

As Governor of Georgia, 1967–71, Maddox inveighed against the liberal media and banned the Atlanta newspapers and major TV and radio stations from his press conferences whenever he felt like it. When Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, he made sure no official sign of respect came from the Capitol. Ironically, Maddox, man of contradictions, gave great attention to prison reform and appointed many African Americans to government positions.

By law unable to serve more than one four-year term, Maddox ran and won the office of Lieutenant Governor simultaneously with Jimmy Carter's election as Governor in 1970.

Upon taking office in 1971, Jimmy Carter said, "I say to you quite frankly that the time for racial discrimination is over." As Lieutenant Governor, Maddox made Jimmy Carter's tenure as difficult as possible.

As a graduate student in 1976, I organized Californians for Carter on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Jimmy Carter was elected President of the United States in November 1976.

Lester Maddox died in 2003 at age 88.

In 2018, Stacy Abrams, daughter of two Methodist ministers and graduate of Yale Law School, became the first black female major party gubernatorial nominee in the United States. In a hotly

disputed election, she lost her history-making campaign for governor of Georgia by a few thousand votes to her Republican opponent, Secretary of State Bryan Kemp, who ran under the banner of President Donald Trump.

Stacy Abrams was tapped in February 2019 to deliver the Democrats' official response to President Donald Trump's State of the Union Address. She said:

In this time of division and crisis, we must come together and stand for and with one another. America has stumbled time and again on its quest towards justice and equality. But with each generation, we have revisited our fundamental truths, and where we falter, we make amends.

This Daughter of the South is now considered a rising political star with a national voice that would cause Lester Maddox to wiggle in his grave.

"The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly fine." – Charles Beard

Confluence