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SAM MASSELL INTERVIEW
KING IN THE WILDERNESS
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SAM MASSELL
Mayor of Atlanta
Interviewed by Chris Chuang
April 11, 2017
Total Running Time: 1 hour 4 minutes

00:00:00:00 CREW:
Massell interview, take one, marker, soft sticks.

00:00:05:00 CHRIS CHUANG:
So, the first question that I have is, tell us about the first time you met Doctor Martin Luther King and what your first impression of him was.

00:00:17:00 SAM MASSELL:
As a part of the political body of Atlanta, I had occasion to meet Doctor King through the media more than in person. Although he was an Atlanta resident, he did not do much publicly here. And it was only on the occasions where we would be at an event where I would have that opportunity to meet with him, and have a conversation, or develop a friendship.

CHRIS CHUANG:
And what was your first impression of him, when you did end up having a conversation with him?

00:01:03:00 SAM MASSELL:
I already knew about Doctor King's philosophies and policies from the media long before we actually physically met. So, I had a good understanding of what he represented, the nonviolent philosophy that he espoused. We were contemporaries, we

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were about the same age, family people with spouses and children; one spouse each. We got along well together. My feeling about him was that he was very gentle. If I had to sum it up in one expression on meeting him, he was gentle. He- you could tell that he believed in what he campaigned.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And through your years of knowing him, did you also get to know his family as well?

00:02:19:00 SAM MASSELL:

Yes. I did have the opportunity and the honor of getting to know Martin's family, his wife in particular. I know his children more now that they're grown than I did then. But I'm reminded of one instance that was really shocking, almost scary you might say too. Here in Atlanta at that time we had an annual event at our Lakewood Park called the Southeastern World's Fair. It was redneck city. I mean, I would not have dared go there in a coat and tie. But I ran into him when I was with my wife and children one time when he came to the Southeastern World's Fair on Lakewood Fairgrounds with his wife and very small young children. This would be in the early sixties.

00:03:25:00 And I was just scared that he would do that without security, without fear. He had no security because he had no fear. He took life as it came to him. He was not only Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. in all that he stood for, but he was maybe the only black in that whole park on that occasion. And I'll never forget seeing him and how nervous I got about it. At the time I was president of the Atlanta City Council. I wanted to call and get security for him and he wouldn't let me. But it gave me a very good insight to that man's heart and his soul as well.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And so, what was the relationship between Doctor King and Mayor Ivan Allen, and how did it develop over the years?

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00:04:30:00 SAM MASSELL:

Ivan Allen, who was my predecessor as mayor of Atlanta, was a very practical man, and a very successful businessman, and a very highly respected civic leader of our city who was really not a politician but learned how to do what politicians have to do. And he knew that it was necessary, it was important, it was part of his job to be arm-in-arm with a leader of this stature in our city. Although Ivan Allen had at one time flirted with the idea of running for governor on a segregationist platform, he had grown with the times and with his newest possibility as the Mayor of our city.

00:05:36:00 And he became friends politically with the King family in a very close, warm, mutually beneficial manor. He was there for Doctor King whenever needed. They were not social friends. They did not belong to the same country clubs. They didn't live on the same side of town, but they knew the similarities in their philosophies, one by intent to protect the world, Doctor King, and the other with the need and requirement to serve the citizenry of our city, the five hundred thousand strong, and what was best and what was needed, and what was the proper function and management of this government.

CHRIS CHUANG:

So, would you say that Mayor Allen and Doctor King shared the same vision of integrating Atlanta?

00:07:05:00 SAM MASSELL:

The both realized- Doctor King and Mayor Allen both realized that they had a similar responsibility, albeit for different reasons. Doctor King truly felt this through his heart. It was very obvious and very apparent that he had a mission from God and that he was going to perform that in stellar form. Ivan Allen knew that he was elected to protect and serve the citizenry of our city. And it happened that they both had to do the same thing and that was to maintain a peaceful community, a safe community, a nonviolent community, which Atlanta grew to have as a reputation envied by much of the country.

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CHRIS CHUANG:

And so, by nineteen sixty-five, King had already achieved his greatest accomplishments in the civil rights movement by helping to get the Civil Rights Act passed and the Voting Rights Act, but how was he accepted by the people of Atlanta back then? Was he still a controversial figure in his hometown?

00:08:33:00 SAM MASSELL:

Doctor King was controversial. There was no way to escape that. But not just with the white leadership of our city, but with the black leadership as well. At the senior level at the era- the arena if you want to call it that, of leadership from the black leader- black business community was just as concerned, nervous, confused, going through a period of learning, each from the other, what mankind expected, and would need, and should have over the future of their lives and those that follow. And it was a time of concern and uneasiness, but I repeat, it was not just the white leadership that you would expect because they were unaccustomed, it was all something new, it was a different life, a different quality of life, a different expectation of what they would see when they started the day and ended it, as well.

00:10:14:00 But, you know, Atlanta was fortunate in having six predominately black colleges at that time. And as a result, not only did we have the academic leadership, the presidents of these colleges and their boards, but they had the alumni the schools had produced over the years. And we were proud that we could brag Atlanta had black ownership of a national bank, of a national insurance company, of a radio station, of a daily newspaper, of businesses that were operating profitably, and representing a segment of our community that came close to representing fifty percent of the population.

00:11:14:00 So, this made a big difference. I felt for some of our competing southern cities where they struggled with the whole concept of nonviolence and didn't understand the changes that were taking place, where we were able to handle it so much better as a result of sitting around the conference table. Whites and blacks who were equals with

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Phi Beta Kappa keys, with, you know, people who were well read, world traveled. Whether they were black or white, it didn't make any difference. They were people who had equal achievement and education levels that made it a business decision when they met, to deliberate and debate the methods of moving forward, which we did so well.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And so, the ones who didn't celebrate him necessarily, be it white business owners or black business owners, what was the version of Martin Luther King that they believed?

00:12:40:00 SAM MASSELL:

We find going through life that at a young age, it may have taken some of us longer than others to learn, that change is inevitable. And there are needs that have to be met. And we have a system of governments, of the three branches, that tell us how we shall function, that meet the standard of the constitution, and the laws of the state and the city. And we work within those requirements. And in our case, we would have to depend on the leadership, white or black, to help guide others in this principle of nonviolent change. The student movement, for instance, is an entirely different school of thought, but they were guided by the older black leaders as well as Doctor King and his philosophy.

00:14:10:00 And they- you know, I can't help but reflect on that when I mention the students. My father, who was a lawyer, was explaining to me at my early age that if you break the law you are going to be punished. And that these young students, whether it was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or whether it was a disorganized group of youngsters just rebelling, that they had tremendous courage knowing that they would sit down because they felt the law was wrong, which it turned out to be, of course, with the courts convicting and directing the future in equal rights, but they knew they'd be punished for doing it and it was worth it to them. And it's just such a beautiful story when you stop and think about that. That one after another would do

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something that their parents didn't approve of perhaps, in many cases, because they were the older- the senior leaders of the city, in the business community or wherever. And they would still do it because they knew that they had a cause that they wanted to follow. And sometimes Doctor King disagreed with them, but they would continue forward because they were willing to pay the price for these reforms.

00:15:53:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

Do you remember after King won the Nobel Prize there was an incident with the Commerce Club of Atlanta and whether they would hold a dinner recognizing him? Tell us that story.

00:16:06:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well... when Doctor King was honored with the Nobel Prize- Peace Prize, our city was honored as well, but there were those who felt that it was for the wrong reasons. It was for integration, which they didn't believe in. And as such, they did not approve of Doctor King and there's no way of escaping that, that those were the facts of life. That for the most part, in my opinion, it was fear of the unknown, different lifestyles, something they hadn't understood or experienced. I mean, we've seen the changes that have taken place since that are momentous- there are tremendous reforms, albeit not far enough maybe, but there's still much to do, but so much was achieved because of Doctor King's preaching.

00:17:28:00 And the business community wouldn't say publicly they were opposed to him or his philosophy, but- but they would not go as far as honoring him. Until Mr. Woodruff, Bob Woodruff of the Coca-Cola Company, which is headquartered in Atlanta, who was a CEO for that time and highly respected in the business community as a leader in many, many ways, philanthropically too. He gave a great deal of money to this city for parks and education and many other causes. But when he said, "You're going to have the dinner," they decided they'd have the dinner. And that's all it took really, was Doctor King having a place in history and Mr. Woodruff recognizing it as something important.

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00:18:42:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

I wanted to ask you a few questions about Lester Maddox. So, I guess we'll start by setting it up. So, through your work with Mayor Allen's administration, did you recognize the growing backlash at the end of the sixties? Did you see that it was coming? And if so, what did it look like?

00:19:05:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, what I saw coming when I was president of the city council, which is part of what prompted me to run for mayor successfully in nineteen sixty-nine, was the transformation of Atlanta's power structure from all white to an all-black city hall. And to do that peacefully would be my legacy as mayor, but it was what was coming when Ivan Allen was mayor and I was president of the council, then called the Board of Alderman. It was pretty clear, in my opinion, that that was a direction we would be taking in Atlanta as well as the rest of the country. Doctor King's reforms were practical. They were meaningful. They were productive. They were lifesaving in many ways. And if he was still living today we would have even more progress, in my opinion, but he gave us the route and he gave us the guidance to travel it. And it's been a real feather in the cap of our city, in my opinion, that it was headquartered here, that his organization was in Atlanta. And it's interesting because it didn't do much in Atlanta, as far as marching. I mean, I was with him on a couple of occasions here, but it was mostly out of town. And maybe this was another reason we were able to get by better than our competing cities, because they were our own residents, our own neighbors, our own- We may not have lived in the same neighborhoods but we understood the hood.

CHRIS CHUANG:

Moving onto Lester Maddox, who was elected in nineteen sixty-six, could you tell us who Lester Maddox is and maybe even why you think he was elected?

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00:21:36:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, Lester was elected on a populous approach, representing all peoples who were poor and downtrodden. And he was white. And as such, he could make inroads where the typical sophisticated, polished, successful business person who would get involved in politics couldn't compete. And Carl Sanders had been our governor. And when he was running, the woman who was handling his campaign, Helen Bullard, who was the political guru of that era, she handled my campaigns, Ivan Allen's campaigns, Bill Hartsfield's campaigns, many others. And when Carl Sanders was running for governor he was too sophisticated for the audience, she made him chew gum on television to try to bring him down to the common man denomination. He was called "Cufflink Carl" because he was too well dressed. And you have to meet head on with the citizenry and that's what Lester was able to do.

00:23:30:00 There was indeed a stronger sentiment then than we enjoy today racially. Back then you couldn't get whites and blacks together for a sporting event. But today you'll see, whether it's in Atlanta or any other city where you have a basketball team, a football team, a baseball team, or you name it in professional sports, and you'll see blacks and whites sitting together, hollering to kill the umpire together. They're all on the same page. And these are things that grew because we grew. Lester Maddox was- was scared of integration. He was a white supremacist, a white segregationist. He was all of that before Doctor King came along. Lester Maddox lived that way. He ran a restaurant and wouldn't think of serving blacks, but he would welcome them to work there, and to clean up there, and to serve food there, but he wouldn't let them sit down. So, that was Lester's style and he was able to muster enough people statewide to get elected.

00:25:09:00 He was very unforgiving during the funeral of Doctor King that occurred in Atlanta after the assassination. Lester was then governor and stationed sixty-something state patrol- armed state patrolman around the state capital, telling them if any of them tried to enter the state capital- any of the people in the funeral procession, if any of them tried to enter the state capital to "shoot them and stack them up." Those were his words, according to a book published shortly after the funeral. Lester warned us that

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he was not going to let it happen. He wasn't going to allow a state funeral. He wasn't going to allow the schools to close statewide. He wasn't going to have anything to do with it. He wasn't going to lower the flag halfway, until he found it was a federal law and had to do it. But he was very antagonistic, very adversarial. He was doing everything he could to make it difficult for city hall, which was right across the street from the state capital.

00:26:40:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

So, that leads me to my next question, was there a tension between the Maddox administration and Allen's administration? And how did the two feel about each other, personally?

00:26:53:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, I can't speak for either one of them as to how they felt for each other, but they certainly didn't say anything nice about the other one, each when they had the opportunities to do so. They didn't have the same philosophy. They didn't espouse the same policies. They had nothing in common. In their demeanor, Ivan Allen was very sophisticated and a business success story. Where Lester Maddox, I guess you could say in his own way he was a business success story where he sold fried chicken, but he was not of the same cloth by any means.

00:27:57:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

We're going to move on to the night of the assassination. And can you tell us about when you heard that Martin Luther King had been assassinated and what your reaction was?

00:28:08:00 SAM MASSELL:

When I heard that Doctor King had been assassinated, there was just a terrible sinking feeling to believe that we live in a time like that where great people were losing their lives. This had fallen, what four or five years after the Kennedy assassination, the

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president. And it was something I wasn't accustomed to growing up. I didn't know of, in our country, that leaders were assassinated like they were in some other third world countries. So, it was a terrible shock when I heard it. It was a sad news story, that- like any loss of a friend or loss of an asset, and he was an asset in my opinion to our city, our country, and beyond, that when you lose something like that, never to return, that it's a tremendous loss, a cost that can never be replaced. Many have tried since then. We haven't found a new Martin Luther King, Jr. You know, there are a lot of well-meaning people who have made contributions since then. There were many of his associates who have served their time in the political arena, and the ministry, and many other arenas to bring about a better quality of life for people of all races and all socioeconomic backgrounds of every kind. I mean, our ambassador, Andy Young, who was Martin's right-hand man when they marched and negotiated. He's still a champion at negotiating, Andy is. But- you know, there was only one Martin Luther King.

00:30:56:00 Except we don't want to overlook Daddy King, who was my closest friend in that arena and the civil rights movement. He and Abernathy and- well, you could go down the list of the leaders, but Daddy King was the one that did meet with all of us in politics from time to time. Whether it was in a screening session to decide who the Atlanta Negro Voters League would endorse, or whether it was helping bring in a new head of personnel for when I was mayor, or when I wanted to appoint somebody to that position. Or whether it was to calm down some students who maybe were going beyond what could be achieved in a practical way and needed some guidance from a senior member of the community. Daddy King was always there and is- here in Atlanta, as was Martin, but Daddy King, his father, Doctor King's father, was one that I repeat because his smile and his demeanor, his warmth, his persona in general was such that he was accepted more. I don't know exactly how to articulate that. Was it just his personality or was he really that smart that he tricked us all into thinking he was wonderful, because that's what I thought he was, and proud to say so. I don't know anybody that disliked Daddy King.

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00:33:01:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

And what do you think Daddy King and Martin had in common? I mean, did you feel like they were cut from the same cloth or did you feel like they were- it was almost as if, how could he have, you know, had this son?

00:33:18:00 SAM MASSELL:

We- It's hard to explain genealogy, the attitudes of children of- of the celebrity relatives. In this case it was reverse. It was Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. was the celebrity and his father, you would think, was in the shadows. You hear about relatives of sports figures, of Hollywood figures, of military figures, of- one after another who get in trouble and cause such pressure and discomfort, to say the least, of their families. But it was a difficult time for the relatives to live up to the other. I know you're asking me about Daddy King and Martin Luther King.

I had a famous uncle, Ben Massell, known to be the biggest developer in the state of Georgia when he was living. I was in real estate and whenever I would go meet a customer or a prospect they would meet me, "Sam Massell? Sam Massell? You related to Ben Massell?" I was in the shadow all the time. I was fortunate to win an award from the Georgia Association of Real Estate boards for the outstanding dealer of the year, and in receiving it I said, "You know, I may have reached my life's ambition that somebody is going to meet Ben Massell and they're going to say, "Ben Massell? Ben Massell? Are you related to Sam Massell?" And this is what Daddy King saw, what he ran into. And it's hard for you to realize it unless you've been in a shadow, but he was able to cope with it and he was his own man. And Daddy King made inroads and could have been a Nobel Peace Prize winner himself, just in a different era, just in a different way.

00:36:10:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

So, moving back to the night of the assassination, after you heard about it what did you and Mayor Allen do next? If you could just describe that night for me.

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00:36:26:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, I went to city hall to meet with the mayor. And we discussed what was next and what the risks were and what we needed to protect against. And you know, there were riots in other cities; we didn't have them. And that wasn't by accident. Ivan Allen provided leadership and I helped where I could. But the mayor has to be the voice of the city. And he brought calm to the city and stood up to Lester Maddox when it was necessary, but without, you know, arming city hall. We didn't get into a battle royale, we just handled it like you would expect responsible people to do.

00:37:30:00 They arranged for visitors from around the country to come to Atlanta. They directed private planes to Hangar One at the airport. And that was my job, to be there to welcome the dignitaries that came in for the days ahead, before and for the funeral. We had people from the political life of the world, from the entertainment centers of the country, from the sports fields. You know, we had the top leadership. Hubert Humphry, I remember, came to Hangar One, Jackie Kennedy did, Harry Belafonte came. I mean, could go down the list of dignitaries and celebrities of all different walks of life who came in. And it was a very somber occasion, of course, the hours and hours that we spent there as they came in. And we had to make arrangements with all the hotels. And so, that was a normal activity that you would undertake for a major convention, except it was an unorganized group of people, individuals who came here to pay their respects. And there was a day of celebrity for Atlanta. There was a period of uneasiness. There's no denying that many were worried about what could happen.

00:39:41:00 It's interesting, I was reflecting on this when I was contacted to be on this program, and I remembered in the march itself of the mule-drawn wagon with the casket, that it was guarded by a group of young men, African Americans, who I didn't know. They were not the school children. They were not the senior leadership of the business community. I don't know where they were from, but I could tell in their demeanor that they were in control and they marched on both sides of the casket. I say marched, accompanied it, through the whole route. I was there and joined the procession when it left- when it passed city hall. And you know, the people- Xernona Clayton was very involved with Coretta, who- Doctor King's widow. All the celeb- all the people I knew

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in the civil rights movement were there, white or black. There will never be another funeral like that, in my opinion. It was very meaningful, long lasting, insightful. It became part of Atlanta's history and shall remain so forever.

00:41:49:00 CHRIS CHUANG:

So, moving back to the days before the funeral, what was the mood in Atlanta like following the assassination? We talked to one of the people around King, Tom Houck and he referred to it as an “eerie calm.” And I don't know if you would agree, but if you could just talk about what the mood was like.

00:42:11:00 SAM MASSELL:

I do- Tom Houck had a good choice of words. It was exactly that. It was, I think, a suppressed feel on the part of the white business community and the black business community. In between I- I can't say how the student movement as such felt. They certainly were angry, more likely to be angry than the other two groups. But it was calm. It was quiet. It was like everybody was scared to say the wrong thing or make the wrong step. But at city hall, we went through day by day of doing what we had to do. And that was the way Atlanta's government was run then and is still, in a very professional demeanor.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And during this time did you ever see Mayor Allen personally mourn for Doctor King, or was it all just trying to get ahold of the situation?

00:43:50:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, we were separated a lot of that time because I was at the airport and he was at city hall for days as the people came in. But... you know, he obviously expressed his sentiments verbally through the media and demonstrated, you know, everywhere he could with the family being with them. He went to the airport to meet Coretta when she came back. And he... Ivan did, I think, all that the family expected of him, all that

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he could do, all that he- that would be appropriate under the circumstances.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And when was the first time that you saw Coretta after the assassination? And how was she handling everything?

00:45:02:00 SAM MASSELL:

Coretta handled the tragedy in a very, you might say, mature demeanor in that she felt she had a job to do of being the widow of such a giant. And she had enough vision to see and learn that she was going to have a great assignment for life ahead of her. She and I worked together. I was a point man to get the birthplace of Martin put on the historical register. And I had us in- but she- when I would meet with her at her home, which is where we'd normally get together to talk, she was very determined as to what she should do, could do, would do. She maintained her composure in a calm way. She certainly felt the loss that we all shared, but she was the... she was his voice now. She was his face for the public and she maintained that stature in a very mature way, in my opinion.

00:47:02:00 Coretta Scott King was a leader in her own way. As the widow of Doctor King unexpectedly, all at one time a to be the focus of this movement for the rest of the world, she rose to the occasion. She conducted herself in a very mature, sophisticated manor. She obviously felt the loss greater than anyone else could, but she knew that she had a responsibility. I think she had the vision that she would now be in charge of a legacy that would have to be protected and nurtured, and that all of a sudden, she was taking on a whole new lifestyle. And I believe this demeanor was all that could be expected of her at that time, that she had to be the voice and the face for Martin, and for the movement from then on.

CHRIS CHUANG:

How did the white community in Atlanta respond to King's assassination? You mentioned that there was a lot of fear from white business owners. Could you talk

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about that?

SAM MASSELL:

00:48:59:00 The white business leadership of our city has had a longstanding reputation of responsibility that doesn't take a backseat to anybody, that stands tall when there's need and can take credit for much of the peaceful quality of life that we enjoy in our city. And they are ongoing in their growth of the reforms that are taking place then and now, but there's no denying that there was an uneasiness, a concern, a fear of what would come without Doctor King, because some who stopped to think about it realized he was the one that was preaching nonviolence. He was the one that was controlling the ones that would raise a fist. He was the one that saw the shortcomings that could be corrected in a peaceful way and a proper way, you know. for our community itself, for Atlanta. When you stop to think that we were fast approaching a fifty percent black population, to lose that influence, that participation, that- the green dollars or whatever you get in contributions from the citizenry, to not have that participate and be a part of your city, and our business community respected that, but we can't deny that there were prejudices then that continue today, but they are improving. They are improving.

CHRIS CHUANG:

could you tell us about the day of the funeral and what your experience was that day?

00:51:50:00 SAM MASSELL:

The day of the funeral was probably the one with the most pressure on those of us at city hall. Just because we felt it was all coming to a head, that... there was no way to be certain that we had dodged a bullet, but bad choice of words.

CHRIS CHUANG:

When you say it was all coming to a head, what do you mean necessarily? Is it the tension of the week is all coming to a head?

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00:52:38:00 SAM MASSELL:

Yes. That the tension of the week was all coming to a head because we had used up all our energy. We had felt our hearts beating, our muscles tightening, our eyes blinking. It was- it was hard to explain beyond that, that we had experienced heavy pressure mentally, emotionally, one could imagine because of the stature of this man and the horrendous crime that had been committed in his being murdered, and the loss to mankind of a philosophy at that moment disappearing. So, there's no question that we felt almost relieved. There was- you know, the early morning preparation was just looking out the window. When is he going to get here? When is he going to get here? The march. We got reports, of course, along the way. They didn't want us to have policemen participating for protection or whatever... but we had them, plainclothesman, because we felt it was important to the crowds that had assembled, to the visitors from out of town, as well as our residents. We felt it was a responsibility to see it through to a conclusion that was safe.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And what were the fears that you had about what might happen on the march?

00:55:09:00 SAM MASSELL:

When you think of Governor Maddox circling the state capital diagonally across the street from the city hall, with sixty-something armed state troopers with orders to shoot to kill if any attempt was made to come into the capital, suppose just one wanted to go in to go to the restroom. It's a public building. It's publicly owned. It's publicly taxed. It's publicly, I mean, paid for by the citizenry at large. Anything could have triggered a bloodletting that we couldn't afford, that we wouldn't allow. And we just stood tall and protected the people of Atlanta the way we were expected to do.

CHRIS CHUANG:

So, you saw from city hall the funeral procession go by. What did it look like from a

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distance?

00:56:30:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, it wasn't that much of a distance. It was right at the- from the second-floor level of city hall where the mayor's office is located. I have to smile, because back in those days the president of city council didn't have an office at city hall, but... I worked out of a little office off of Prior Street and Wall Street. And we could look out the window from city hall, though, the mayor's office, and the lobby of that floor. And it seems like we could reach out to them because the street was filled with people from side to side, holding all they could. It was a- I don't remember how long the assembly followed the wagon, but there was a very, very large group. And they were very peaceful. There was no shouting. It was very quiet. The march was unlike most marches where you have some chance or a semblance of whatever the movement might be. Well, here it was somber and left to the visual rather than audible.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And so, you also described how they passed in front of the state capital. Could you talk about the tension that you and the other people at city hall were feeling as they were going by?

00:58:22:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, that was like hearing a shotgun being triggered, being charged, being set in motion, being prepared, being aimed, being threatening. It was just scary because if anything was going to happen it would probably happen then. And it didn't. And- I understand the mayor had promised a peaceful demonstration. We'd had many before then and have had many since then, so Atlanta is used to that. I remember the times when I was mayor of having the skinheads marching in one part of town, and organized labor in another part of town and Hosea Williams demonstrating just with two or three in another place, and SNCC- Stokely Carmichael, or whoever, in another area. We're used to demonstrations, even the Jewish war veterans, I remember them

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marching. So, things can be brought to a head with physical demonstrations that are peaceful and Doctor King set the stage for that. He gave us guidance and taught us how to live and let live.

CHRIS CHUANG:

And do you think Lester Maddox changed over the years after King's death? I've heard differing reports that he may have changed, personally.

01:00:31:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, I think Lester Maddox changed some over the years. And I may sound naïve, but I think a half a million residents of Atlanta changed over the years and for the good. And we're still changing. But it takes guidance of someone like Doctor King with a philosophy, with a ministry that is meaningful, and logical, and legal. And he brought it to a head and taught us how to do it.

CHRIS CHUANG:

The slogan for the SCLC is “Redeeming the soul of America.” How did you see his vision redeem the soul of America, Doctor King's vision?

01:01:30:00 SAM MASSELL:

Doctor King taught us not only what was good for the city and good for the country but taught us what was good for our inner souls, good for our hearts and mental state. He taught us that we can enjoy each other's company at a ball game, sitting next to each other, having a beer together, even if we've never met and don't speak other than cheering on or booing something that's happening on stage or on the field. We have an abundance of brotherhood in our city. And we keep building it and he showed us the way to do it. He had tremendous vision, tremendous courage, tremendous commitment. He had the formula for peaceful coexistence with equal rights for all in a nonviolent way.

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CHRIS CHUANG:

In the years after King was assassinated, have you seen any resistance to the honoring of Doctor King's legacy? Whether it's the celebration of Martin Luther King Day or the work that Coretta was trying to do to instate his legacy. Have you seen any resistance to that? And if you have, could you describe it?

01:03:31:00 SAM MASSELL:

Well, that train has left the station. To resist today about preserving Doctor King's legacy would be a pure waste of time because it's inbred now. It's rooted in our environment. It's part of our lifestyle. It has no way to go but up from here. It is just pure progress and prosperity and part of our heritage and his legacy that gives us something that... God had to have a way and a part in. We're very fortunate.

01:04:28:00 END OF INTERVIEW