

MS450\_029

**Interviewer: Bayor, Ronald H.**

**Interviewee: Jackson, Maynard**

**Interview date: 1987-11-23**

**Transcription date: 2014**

**Georgia Institute of Technology Archives, Ron Bayor Papers  
(MS450)**

RONALD BAYOR: Eight, nine, ten. OK, let me get this going.

Number one, there's a quote by Clarence Coleman said a little while back, and he said, "No matter what Allen and Massell did, they still saw it from the white viewpoint. It was important to get a black mayor." I was curious about why. What was different about your leadership as opposed to Massell and Allen that you'd want the black community to see?

MAYNARD JACKSON: Well, the proof is in the pudding, and it's a question of whether people were talking a good game or delivering on one. And I'm not going to include Allen -- Allen was of a different era, and what he did was in the context of that era, and he did very important things. His political and moral leadership on the race question was an important breakthrough for Atlanta. It was an appeal to the pragmatism of the business community because he knew that that's how they were going to respond. [00:01:00] He knew because he was of them, and to the manner born as they were, so to speak. At that time, it was a tighter

power structure group. Mills B. Lane was the guy who made a turn, and Woodruff made Mills B. Lane turn, so there was no mystery about how things happened. On the other hand, Massell should have been a lot more aggressive than he was. But my point is that if even he didn't because there is a perspective that is the result of one's life experiences. It does not mean that whites cannot lead a heavily black city successfully. Some whites can. And it does not mean that blacks cannot lead a heavily white city successfully. Some blacks can. [00:02:00] So, generalizing but admitting of many exceptions, OK? We are the product of our environments and of our total experiences, and we have been trained to think a certain way, and that in fact, the black community is not on the daily agenda of our thinking. It is not that Massell woke up in the morning and said, "What can I do now to hurt the black community?" I'm sure he never -- I can't believe he ever felt that or sensed that. The issue is whether he woke up saying, "What can I do for the people of this city, including the black community, who are the most in need?" Now, the proof is in the pudding: black participation and contracts, when I became mayor, even after four years of Massell's leadership as mayor, were only about 1%. [00:03:00] There was only one black department head in all of city government, in a

city that is half-black. We had a \$600 million investment fund being managed at a time by Raymond -- well, later, by [Raymond Akimbo?], the other time, by somebody else in the finance department under [Charlie Davis?] -- handled largely by the Atlanta banks.

BAYOR: The white banks.

JACKSON: They were, then. They still are, of course, but at that time, when you said "white banks," that meant lily-white. Of all the downtown banks and their vice presidents, at that time -- that was when I became mayor and when I began this discussion with the banks, there was not a single black VP, and a VP in a bank is not a real high position. It's clearly middle to lower middle [00:04:00] management, OK? And how many were there downtown? Let's estimate 100 to 125 vice presidents among all the downtown banks, OK? Six banks. I think at least that number would be the case. Not one was black. Not a single board of directors with any downtown banks was integrated, not one. So, I would think that what Clarence Coleman said, in the context of my answer, had some more validity to it. Now, the interesting addendum to this answer is that Sam Massell was an historic figure in Atlanta politics, not just because he was the first Jewish mayor, and the white, so-called Gentile community's

reaction to that. [00:05:00] For example, Piedmont Driving Club automatically dropped what had been automatic membership for all Atlanta mayors when Sam Massell got elected. That was stopped. And when I became mayor, they buried the envelope, probably. But Sam was the first mayor to be elected in Atlanta's history with a minority of the white vote, of that -- and a majority -- oh, and where the majority of the total vote that he got was black.

BAYOR: Well, he was beholden to the black community.

JACKSON: I mean, no question.

BAYOR: He knew that, I'm sure.

JACKSON: He knew that, too. He only got 16% of the white vote.

Mayor Allen, on some bad advice that he got, in my opinion, came out at the last, at the eleventh hour in the campaign, pushing hard for Rodney Cook, who was the power structure's candidate. [00:06:00] The last time the power structure won the election in Atlanta, including a referendum, was 1965. The issue of their importance -- and they are critically important to this city -- and they are, in my opinion, comparatively speaking, the most civically responsive and committed power structure in this country among major cities. The most overwhelming percentage of them live in the city; they give of their time and so forth; they've made more than their share of mistakes, like

we all have. But they haven't won an election since 1965, and their importance is in governance and service to the people of Atlanta because you need all factors pulling in the same direction.

BAYOR: So, they have to compromise on certain points if they want to achieve anything in power?

JACKSON: Certainly. It's going to be a -- some trade-offs.

BAYOR: What was the level [00:07:00] of compromise with you? Because they seem to have given you a lot of problems when you first came to office.

JACKSON: I don't know if we have enough time to get into that this morning. The -- no, I'll try to give you a quick answer. The level of compromise was minimum. There was more a feeling on their part that I was forcing them to change. That was the result, I think, more of perception and style, my style, that was admittedly pushy, after 18 months of negotiations had failed. I want to emphasize that.

BAYOR: The negotiations regarding what, the airport, or --

JACKSON: We're talking about the banks at this point.

BAYOR: Oh, the banks.

JACKSON: OK. Integrating the economy in Atlanta, the banks were going to be the leaders in this move. We're talking not only about the city contracts that we can control, but

also those [00:08:00] who do business with the city and who did business in the private sector, because we wanted to see a policy, a moral tone set, that would carry over into the private sector as well, in affirmative action and equal opportunity. A lot of which we see today.

BAYOR: This is the basis of your --

JACKSON: Not as much as we'd like to see, but more than in most cities.

BAYOR: Yes, that's true. This is the basis of your pulling city monies out of some of these banks, I imagine.

JACKSON: That's correct. I only had to do it on one, though.

BAYOR: Which one?

JACKSON: I don't really want to say. Well, I -- but let's put it this way: there was a bank that did -- after 18 months of getting nowhere, and you've got to trust on this, an aggressively-pursued period of negotiations, however their offices and my office, singly and as a group. The group meeting was a mistake -- I forgot that they're competitors, also, and not monolithic, and [00:09:00] they're not going to sit up there and talk about their affirmative action programs in front of each other, so zero was accomplished at that meeting. And I met with them individually, had them in my office for breakfast, all that kind of stuff, not once but a couple of times, went to their offices by

and large, and I mean, there was not a single breakthrough. Not a single person, and the reactions were quite disappointing. The reaction that I got at committee, the leaders were quite disappointed to me.

BAYOR: So, in terms of Atlanta being a city that works by compromises, it's not working at all [in this way]?

JACKSON: Well, you know, when you get down to the nitty-gritty, integrating the economy, this was brand-new for everybody, hadn't been done before. We had to kind of find our way, they had to find their way. I'm not, in retrospect, I'm not awfully -- I was disappointed. I was particularly disappointed that at the time when I needed [00:10:00] my white friends more than ever before, they cut and ran. Now, I've never said that publicly, before. I know that they feel that I didn't treat them right because I was pushy, in their eyes. The perception is -- does not allow for the fact that 18 months were spent trying to negotiate.

BAYOR: And by "white friends," you mean white businessmen who had worked with you before?

JACKSON: That's correct. Now, that was not -- you know, it's not totally true. Paul Austin at Coca-Cola remained a friend and confidant. And one or two other people who were not really in the power structure but who were professional people, lawyers and so forth, and -- I would rather -- I

would rather that the power structure would come in there and say, you know, "Maynard, God damn it," you know, "you're the most hard-headed, arrogant SOB we're ever seen, we don't agree with this, we don't agree with that, we don't agree with this," you know, [00:11:00] so forth and so on, rather than simply write it off and turn around.

Now, the bottom line on that, however, is that that's past.

BAYOR: Well, they did turn around at (inaudible).

JACKSON: Oh, yes. We had to move a \$500,000 account out of a bank that would not comply.

BAYOR: And that was what?

JACKSON: With the city policy, which was a bank that had come in on the twenty-ninth day, with 30-day last -- yes, it was an ultimatum in effect. It was gently put, but First Georgia Bank came in and said, "We want to move," and it was going to take us six months because we've identified the person we wanted there inside, we don't want to pull from the outside. I said, "Fine," they were surprised. [Carl Sanders?] called me, said, "Who do you want to vote to go on the board?" I said, "No, I'm not going to point fingers. I don't want people to think that I'm trying to get my buddies jobs." [00:12:00] This program is not about that, so I don't want to compromise the principle of affirmative action, joint venturing, and integrating the



economy of Atlanta by running the risk that people would say, "Well, he really wanted to get so-and-so on the board." So, it is -- he said, "Well, what -- you know, we'd like to have your opinion. If we come back with three names, would you give us a reaction?" I said, "Yes," that's how [Tom Cordy?] went on the board of First Georgia Bank. He was on no boards at that time. And we moved a \$500,000 account, a small one, but they got the message.

BAYOR: Was anything moved to Citizens Trust at all?

JACKSON: Well, they took the maximum that, under the Federal Reserve Bank, they could have.

BAYOR: And they had not gotten any of the city money before?

JACKSON: No, they had some, I think, of a minimum amount. No, we -- the problem with Citizens Trust Bank is they could not exceed their reserve requirements under the Federal Reserve Bank, so they had the max they could handle [00:13:00] from the city under our -- under my administration.

BAYOR: All of this, I guess, was part of the perception that your -- the beginning of the first administration was anti-white, as I've read in newspapers.

JACKSON: Which... Two counts, but number one, that was not true. I'm an integrationist, philosophically.

BAYOR: I don't think it was true, either.

JACKSON: No, but I mean, philosophically, I was trained that way. And I had a family that believed in and worked for it. Integration is not the usual. If it were, you wouldn't have to pursue it, it would just be there, right? OK. So, my parents and grandparents have worked at it for years, in terms of personal relationships and the broad societal compact, politics, economics, the whole thing. It's been a way of life in our family. I feel the same way. The problem is that some people [00:14:00] in positions of power, some people have the sense -- kind of felt that when they thought a certain way, that's the way the -- quote, "the white community" close quote, thought. Now, the neighborhood movement in the city was a powerful movement. They did not see me as anti-white.

BAYOR: So, you're saying there's really --

JACKSON: It was issue-oriented, and it's a question of who knocks at that door.

BAYOR: This is a response to the business community (inaudible)?

JACKSON: Well, many of its members -- not even all. I will tell you this, by the way, that I never proceeded with animosity. It was always a question right at the public policy and influence, and try to put it behind us, without letting the same just drip-drap, little bits here, little

bits there improvement over the next 10, 12, 14 years, we wanted to get it done and put it behind us. We did that. Now, there's speeches being made by members of the Chamber of Commerce, [00:15:00] bragging about Atlanta's affirmative action progress.

BAYOR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JACKSON: Precisely, and I'm very proud of that. I'm also proud of the fact that some people broke with me over the issue of Interstate 485. We were not going to have that expressway built through the neighborhood to the city, we weren't going to tolerate it. To expand the highways in their corridor as much as they could stand, that's what you see going on now, which Milton told you for six years they could not do, and which before I left, that was the part I agreed to do. But you run it through the neighborhoods unnecessarily, we're going to happen -- Morningside, Virginia-Highland, Midtown. There were hundreds of boarded up houses. Now, I asked you a question: in those neighborhoods with (inaudible) of boarded up houses, would they have built an IBM building, AT&T, Campanile, Midtown Plaza I, Midtown Plaza II, and all the other stuff now that is on Peachtree? The answer emphatically is what? No. The ultimate tool for the economic development of Atlanta [00:16:00] is strong, vibrant neighborhoods.

BAYOR: Right. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JACKSON: OK. Now, that issue is where they couldn't see the vision, and I didn't have any magic crystal ball myself; I just knew what I believed in. And it made sense, it was logical, and sure enough, we have been vindicated by ultimate actions.

BAYOR: Let me ask you something else --

JACKSON: Excuse me, one other thing: even those who today still don't want no -- you know, still remember, with some reluctance, that period of pretty stormy relations as we got used to each other, that was the first term. The second term was a lot better. But even in my second term, my white vote increased when I ran for reelection, so, from 25% to 31%. But now, when I make my rounds to talk within as the power structure, and as I sit on the board meetings of the Atlanta Action Forum, [00:17:00] board director's meeting at Central Atlanta Progress, Georgia Business Council, and so forth, 100%, they agree that issue's behind us now, and in terms of a policy initiative. Their limitation still remains a challenge in some regards.

BAYOR: Well, then, they appreciated even more of what you did, there --

JACKSON: Well, I think they do, and some have even said that, that they've actually had some people who were strong

opponents who've said to me, "Maynard, you know, I know we had our differences then, but I look back now and I have a better appreciation of what you were doing." And that makes me feel very good.

BAYOR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). In terms of race, is it an important factor affecting decision making? Was this a big part of your administration, mainly in terms of redressing early periods of neglect in the black community?

JACKSON: Well, the racial factor -- and this, by the way, is not peculiar to me -- Ivan Allen made the statement in his book that -- as I recall, I made the statement publicly -- and you can verify this in with Ivan Allen, Jr. -- [00:18:00] that there was not a single major decision in his eight years as mayor that did not have racial implications.

BAYOR: Would you say then same thing, then? Can you say the same thing?

JACKSON: No, and I think that's progress. I think I can say there were many major decisions that we made did not have a racial -- for example, this I-485 issue was not really a black issue. It was a neighborhood preservation issue; incidentally, Atlanta's sort of neighborhood movement, at that time, was white. And there were many other decisions. For example, I think we did more for certain low-income

sections of Atlanta than ever had been done to white sections, than ever had been done before, but it was not, hey, we're going to help the poor whites, it was we have policies [00:19:00] to improve the way of life for low-income people, period. Those people are black and those people are white, and very pleased by the what -- there were many, many, many, many decisions. And I don't think that a day went by where there was not some kind of decision made that did not have racial implications, but we made over 100 decisions a day. Now, race was still a major -- and still is a major thing in a lot of politics, and American politics -- Chicago, New York, you name it, doesn't matter where. California, it doesn't matter where, race is still a major factor in American life. However, let me just say that I had to come to grips with, but being the first -- underline the word "first" -- [00:20:00] black mayor... was one of the toughest jobs you could undertake because you had to deal with these two phenomena: number one, exaggerated white anxiety, and number two, exaggerated black expectations.

BAYOR: I guess the white community was deathly afraid of what you would do, in terms of rocking the boat.

JACKSON: Well, some whites were, many whites were, but I -- again, I want you to understand that the white community was not reacting to me monolithically.

BAYOR: Oh, I understand that.

JACKSON: Right.

BAYOR: There's another -- there's a quote I got from you --

JACKSON: This neighborhood movement is heavily influenced by people of all backgrounds, male and female, many of whom are professionals and so forth, all of whom have made a dramatic difference in Atlanta. [00:21:00]

BAYOR: Oh, no doubt about it. I mean, but in terms of decisions like joint venture, police brutality issue, housing and urban renewal, and those things, really were more geared to the black community, certainly.

JACKSON: I'll tell you this: I grew up in Atlanta, where police brutality was the number-one issue, not some days, every week. Every week, on the front page of *The Atlanta Daily World*, was something about -- and then ultimately, *The Enquirer*, and then *The Voice*, *The Atlanta Voice*, (inaudible). Something about police brutality in the black community. It was the issue.

BAYOR: Even if the blacks were coming into the police force?

JACKSON: Even after blacks were on the police force because you can recall that that was not a fair installation of blacks.

BAYOR: No, no. I spoke to some of the original black policemen.

JACKSON: OK, so you know they were made to change their uniforms at the Butler Street YMCA, and at first, they could not arrest whites. A white bank robber doing it right in front of him couldn't be arrested [00:22:00] by a black cop.

BAYOR: Which is certainly demeaning to a black policeman.

JACKSON: And it was also dumb business. That's the ploy of a dumb management. I want to keep us coming back to that point: integration is bad -- I mean, segregation is bad business.

BAYOR: Now, do you think the white business community felt that?

JACKSON: Racism -- ultimately, yes.

BAYOR: They realized that faster than the people in Birmingham, certainly.

JACKSON: Well, and that was the -- not only the Atlanta Airport, which was a big piece of these thing, but Atlanta and Birmingham in 1945 were pretty much at equipoise. You take one city that goes to the bargaining table to settle its racial differences, at least ostensibly, that's Atlanta. And the other put cattle prods, dogs, and fire hoses in the street. Atlanta moved beyond Birmingham like,



you know, at great speed, and the reason is that business does not want to be where there's a potential for violence and upheaval or so forth. [00:23:00] That was what Hartsfield meant by the saying that Atlanta's a city too busy to hate. It was his pragmatic appeal to the business community to understand that violence, in integrating the schools, was bad for business. And the result was they got behind it. Some didn't like it, some didn't change their opinions, some did change their opinions, but what happened was we integrated the schools with no violence.

BAYOR: We don't know if it [was a very popular?] type of integration that was going on.

JACKSON: But I'll take some over none any day. And what we're talking about is legislating behavior, and seeing attitudes evolve, it doesn't happen any other way. So, the result today is that Illinois and Michigan and New York and New Jersey are the least-integrated states in public education, and Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia are the most integrated [00:24:00] states in integration --

BAYOR: Well, and then Atlanta --

JACKSON: -- in public schools.

BAYOR: -- had one of the 10 most segregated school systems in the country.

JACKSON: Well, that's a practical matter, not enough white univer-- I'm saying with a tongue in cheek, OK, not enough whites to go around. We're 92%. Now, what does that say? What it does say is there's been a tremendous disinvestment by many whites and by a substantial number of middle and upper income blacks in the Atlanta public school system. Now, our schools are better than they used to be, but I'll tell you this, if all of a sudden the Atlanta school system becomes one of the top two, three, four school systems in the nation in excellence of education, there'll be a massive return of people who don't want to pay taxes for public schools and pay money to private school, also. Mark my word.

BAYOR: (inaudible)

JACKSON: Yeah. But short of that, we're going to have a practical problem that we have today: 92% of all [00:25:00] the public school students are black.

BAYOR: Another point, commissioner of --

JACKSON: But I suggest we break at this point. I've got the partners waiting.

BAYOR: Oh, OK.

JACKSON: And can we get back together?

BAYOR: Yeah, I'd love to. Can you? (laughter) Sure.

END OF AUDIO FILE