

8132 Carr Place
Springfield, Virginia

October 1, 1966

Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr.
City Hall
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Mayor Allen:

The other evening I watched on a nationally televised news program as you expressed your feelings regarding the nomination of Lester Maddox for the democratic candidate for governor of Georgia. I was born and raised in Georgia, went to college in Atlanta, and still consider myself a life-time citizen of that state where I frequently return to in order to visit my old home and relatives and friends. I have lived away from Georgia, however, for the past fifteen years, and during this time I have tried to look upon Georgia and the rest of the south as objectively as possible, to listen to the criticisms and to try to understand all viewpoints, both within and outside the state. I presently live in the Washington, D. C. area, but most of my recent years have been spent in the west. So, I feel that I am fairly well qualified to express a sound judgement of your nationally televised statement on the Georgia nomination of Maddox.

If I were currently living in Georgia, I do not know whether I would even be supporting Maddox. I learned long ago that outside the south it is extremely difficult to get a true picture from the news media of people and events in the south--on the whole. Consequently, I feel that I know too little about the man to try to judge him. However, he apparently has been a successful business man, with very little formal education, and that is a much greater accomplishment than you can say for a lot of successful politicians who have had much formal education. Determination and common sense are of far greater worth than merely formal education. You said that Mr. Maddox was "totally unqualified" to be the governor of Georgia. Upon what do you base this? Certainly not upon the fact that he had the courage--that most people lack-- of daring to stand up for his legal rights a couple of years ago at his business establishment in Atlanta. This no doubt piqued you, as Mayor of Atlanta, at a time when anyone who opposed so-called civil rights was considered stupid by the so-called liberal press and other news media. Is this the real reason you dislike Mr. Maddox? I truly wish that I

could learn the answer to that.

Mr. Allen, although you gave Mr. Maddox much more harsh criticism than I think the man deserves, the thing that really hurt me in your statement, and the real reason for my writing this letter, was your complete condemnation--if not damnation-- of the state of Georgia and the people of Georgia. If you are so "ashamed" of the state of Georgia after this nomination, then why don't you leave there? Why don't you have the courage to back your convictions as Mr. Maddox has? I have a feeling that you might have been playing to the so-called liberal elements of Atlanta when you so castigated the state of Georgia for nominating a man of such stern conservative principles. If it was not for this reason, then why did you condemn the state of Georgia such as you did? What did such a statement accomplish? What good did it do? You, yourself, were the only one who stood to gain from such verbal extremism. If it was not to improve your position at the voting booth in Atlanta, was it to improve or confirm your image before those so-called liberals outside the state of Georgia, such as Abraham Ribicoff, Bob Kennedy, Jacob Javits, and others of that ilk whom you so impressed at the recent committee hearings in Washington? --the same hearings that were turned into a political circus, as witness the questioning of the Mayor of Los Angeles. Did it ever dawn on you, Mr. Allen, that you might have only been used at these hearings and that you might have only been bait for some other political fish being sought after by the politicians who conducted these hearings?

If you want to disagree with or oppose Mr. Maddox, then that is your right. But don't condemn the people of Georgia and be "ashamed" of them for expressing the democratic right to nominate a candidate of their choice. You are actually condemning the democratic processes of this country by going on national television to let the rest of the nation know that through your lofty judgement you are now "ashamed" of the people of Georgia, even though a great majority of them think that you are wrong. Your ill-considered statement hurt the great state of Georgia, and it hurt me, as a Georgian, and I want to let you know, Mr. Allen, that I am ashamed of you. It is just such statements as this that inflame the rest of the country against the south. I do not agree all the way with Governor Wallace of Alabama, but he certainly understands, better than do you, the distorted views that others have of the south, and he is to be commended for trying to straighten some of the distortions rather than contributing to them as you have just done. Believe me, the state of Georgia is to be praised, not condemned. It is one of the best.

copy:
Mr. Lester Maddox

Yours very truly,

John R. Peterson