

Stuart Blumberg Memory

I attended the famous campaign rally at the Marine Stadium in 1972 where Sammy Davis Jr. hugged Richard Nixon-but first, a little background.

In 1968, I was managing the Hilton Plaza Hotel, which was the last Hotel in Miami Beach to be built until the Loews Hotel, which was opened in 1998. We ended up being the campaign headquarters for Presidential Candidate Richard Nixon for the 1968 Republican Party Convention, which was held in Miami Beach. This was truly an experience for me as I had been a political science major in college. I wound up meeting and getting to know all of the President's key staff-Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, etc.

When the 1968 Presidential campaign was over, I was fortunate enough to continue my relationship with Ehrlichman, and in fact I went to the White House several times.

In 1972, I was between careers, and Nixon's staff reached out to me and said that they wanted me to run their campaign hotel headquarters in Miami Beach, which was the Doral Beach Hotel (that year, both the Republican *and* Democratic Conventions were held in Miami Beach). This time, it was different; as President, Richard Nixon participated in very few public gatherings and there was much greater security.

The public rally at the Miami Marine Stadium was the exception to the rule for President Nixon. The defining moment was when Sammy Davis Jr. introduced the President: "The President and Future President of the United States of America!". When Nixon came onto the stage, Sammy Davis Jr. hugged him.

Nixon was clearly as surprised as everyone else when Sammy Davis Jr. hugged him. The crowd was really enthusiastic and didn't react to this-but I remember thinking that this was not what I expected. After all, the President was not known for being especially friendly to blacks or other minorities.

The second thing that was unusual about that night was Nixon's clothes. In just about every picture you see of Nixon, he had a dark suit on. At the Marine Stadium, he had a light suit-he was certainly not in his typical outfit. I'll just never forget the combination of Richard Nixon-in a light suit, being hugged by a black entertainer, Sammy Davis Jr.

I came back to the Hotel with Nixon's entourage. I wasn't privy to what people were saying, but the expression on everyone's face was "Whoa, how are we going to handle this now?". While Sammy Davis Jr. may have taken a hit from his own people over the incident, Nixon did, too.

I was like everyone else, I loved the Marine Stadium. I saw other performances there-Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson. But nothing else stood out for me like that night when I was a little part of history.