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Carl Stokes

Lead: In 1967 Carl Burton Stokes was elected mayor of Cleveland, the eighth largest city in America. He was a black man leading a white city and his problems were just beginning.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Stokes was the first African American to become a big city mayor, but others soon followed: Richard Hatcher, Walter Washington, Harold Washington, Coleman Young, Dutch Morial, Maynard Jackson. The irony is that, having faced discrimination and

disenfranchisement for generations, blacks came to power just as the deterioration of the great cities of America was beginning to accelerate. Carl Stokes experience illustrates the problem.

Stokes grew up in one of Cleveland's deprived neighborhoods. After service in the Army he attended the University of Minnesota and Cleveland-Marshall Law School. After establishing a law practice with his brother, future U.S. Representative Louis Stokes, Carl was elected to the Ohio legislature, which at that time was dominated by rural interests. Stokes interests were clearly urban.

In 1965 the shamelessly racist views of a white police chief compelled Stokes into a race for mayor of Cleveland. He lost the election, but the narrow margin, less than 2500 votes, established him as a viable player in city politics. Many whites were attracted to Stokes relatively moderate views on race and voted him into office in 1967. His two terms pointed out the difficulties black mayors would face in the years ahead: bad relations with a white dominated city bureaucracy and police force, lack of governing experience by his African American allies which led to mistakes in administration, and running disputes with black nationalists who were unhappy with the mayors' need to

compromise with established interests in order to government. After two troubled terms, Stokes became a newscaster and a respected nationally syndicated columnist.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Biles, Roger. "Black Mayors: A Historical Assessment,"
Journal of Negro History 77 (3, Summer, 1992): 113-125.

Stokes, Carl Burton. *Promises of Power: A Political Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.

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