The Politics - Administration Dichotomy in an Era of Change:

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. as Cleveland, Ohio Public Safety Director

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Abstract

In November 1967, Carl B. Stokes became the first African-American mayor of a major American city when he was elected mayor of Cleveland, Ohio. Stokes inherited a city bureaucracy whose demographic makeup did match that of the city population. In an effort to encourage more equitable racial representation and procedures within the public safety administration, Stokes appointed Lt. Gen. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. (USAF-Ret.) Director of Public Safety in January 1970. Davis was the first African-American to achieve three-star rank in the U.S. armed forces. This paper is an examination of the brief working relationship between Stokes and Davis.

Keywords

- Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.
- Bureaucracy
- Carl B. Stokes
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Leadership
- Management
- Police
- Politics – Administration Dichotomy
- Race
- Vision

The ability of elected officials to shape and influence policy is governed to no small extent by their selection of personnel to implement policy. This oftentimes fractious arrangement can become incendiary when governmental policies represent social change and not mere adjustments to bureaucratic procedures. The proper selection of individuals to implement the vision of the policymaker is crucial in achieving the desired, administrative goals. Meier (2006) stated "The aggregation of preferences, whether of the general public or of highly motivated elites, is accomplished through processes of representation" (p. 15). In a representative democratic state, it is assumed the responsibility for the aggregation of preferences for stakeholders is the purview of the elected official. The legacy of an officeholder is dependent upon their ability to not only to identify those changes that need to be made and promise change, but to deliver upon the promises made to their constituencies. In 1967, when Carl B. Stokes was elected the first African-American mayor of a major American city, he entered office with the intent to implement social change through the enforcement of civil rights policies.

Mayor Stokes

Carl B. Stokes, who served as Cleveland, Ohio's 50th mayor from 1967 to 1971, had an improbable, yet impressive, rise to political power. His father, a laundry worker, died when Stokes was two. His mother was left to raise both he and his brother in Cleveland's first federally funded housing project for the poor, Outhwaite Homes. She did so on a cleaning woman's salary (Stokes, 1989).

The few biographical works of Stokes emphasize the importance of his mother in shaping his character and personality. Once upon accompanying her to home she was cleaning, he asked to play with home owner's children's toys. "She made one exception: 'There ain't but one toy

here that I'll let you play with,' she told him as she grabbed a book from a nearby bookshelf. 'You play with this and learn how to read it so when you get older you won't have to do the kind of work I'm doing'" (Moore, 2002, p. 11). Although a model student in elementary and middle school, by the time Stokes reached high school he began associating with youths involved in drug use and petty crime. Stokes claimed he never participated in their extralegal activities, but instead focused on pool hustling and boxing, hoping to make it as a professional fighter. He soon left high school and worked menial jobs that paid well, but offered little future.

At the age of 18, Stokes enlisted in the U.S. Army to avoid what he termed in his autobiography as a "nowhere" existence. "I just wanted to get the hell out of a world I had had enough of" (1989, p. 28). Stokes served in the army for 18 months, much of this time spent on bases in Europe. Returning to Cleveland after his military duty was over, he found himself again in the same circumstances as when he left. "Almost immediately on arriving home, I was enveloped in everything oppressive about being poor and black and uneducated in America" (Stokes, 1989, p. 29). Stokes was motivated to finish his high school degree and, with the help of the G.I. Bill, was able to enter college, eventually finishing with a bachelor's degree in 1954. Influenced by his brother Louis, a practicing attorney in Cleveland, he entered law school and graduated from Cleveland-Marshall Law School in 1956 (Moore, 2002).

Stokes worked as a probation officer while he was attending law school. One evening he received a call from the wife of one of his parolees saying rats in her apartment had attacked her baby. When Stokes arrived at the apartment, he found litter and filth. The child's nose and upper lip had been completely gnawed away. "… that job had brought me into contact with those who were not making it, people whose spirits had been broken by oppression, filth, and squalor. I was

supposed to be their supervisor and guide, but I began to see they needed more than that, they needed advocates at the highest level of government" (Stokes, 1989, pp. 39-40).

Admitted to the Ohio bar in 1957, he joined the firm of Stokes, Stokes, Character, and Terry initially practicing criminal law and handling divorce cases. His interest in politics grew during this time. He joined the Young Democrats, the Urban League, and the local NAACP chapter. He also began honing his public speaking skills by accepting speaking engagements throughout the city. It was during this time Stokes identified one of the strongest political mechanisms within the African-American community: the church. "When you need zeal, when you need people out there working for you, having a hundred black preachers out there rallying them up for you is invaluable, invaluable" (Stokes, 1989, p. 43).

Stokes was able to capitalize on his political connections by being the first African-American democrat elected to the Ohio House of Representatives. Beginning in 1962, he served three terms before embarking on his first campaign for mayor of Cleveland. The 1965 campaign was unsuccessful. However, Stokes loss was by a small margin and he considered it a "moral victory" (Moore, 2002, p. 43). Stokes' opponent had the support of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party, the two major local newspapers, local unions, and twelve thousand city employees. Considering the odds against him, Stokes lost by a mere one percent. His opponent, Ralph Locher, may have wished he had not won re-election if he had known what was to occur the next year.

The Hough Riots of 1966 received national attention. The Cleveland section known as Hough was the city's poorest and had the highest concentration of African-American citizens (87.9 percent) (Moore, 2002). The riots lasted for a six-day period from July 18 – 24, 1966. Numerous Caucasian-owned stores were burned and looted. Fires were set throughout the area

and sniper fire was also reported. Mayor Ralph Locher was forced to request assistance from the Ohio National Guard to help quell the crowds. When the riots were over, four people had been killed, 30 had been wounded, and over 300 arrests were made (Hough Riots, n.d.).

The residents of the Hough area were living in conditions that Stokes had identified in his first mayoral campaign. Poverty was the norm with housing being grossly inadequate. It was the consensus among citizens in the Hough area in 1966 that there were few, if any, opportunities for advancement.

> In all the discussion with rioters throughout the disorders, one word was frequently used – frustration. The residents of Hough were frustrated in attempts to partake in the decision-making process that determined their way of life. The residents of Hough were frustrated in their efforts to secure better and decent housing. The residents of Hough were frustrated when they tried to secure gainful employment and anything but menial jobs. The residents of Hough were frustrated by their inability to improve abusive police practices. And the residents of Hough were frustrated in their efforts to leave the ghetto and improve their socio-economic standing in the community (Lackritz, 1968, p. 59).

In 1967, Stokes was able to capitalize on the frustration of the marginalized in Cleveland and to celebrate victory as Cleveland's first African-American mayor. His opponent, Republican Seth Taft, was the grandson of former President and Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court William Howard Taft. To Taft's surprise, much of the business community backed Stokes' campaign in an effort to curb racial tensions.

Stokes entered office determined to implement rapid change. His first major initiative, Cleveland: Now!, was an innovative means of instituting urban renewal by obtaining federal, state, local, and private funding. Popular with the African-American community, Cleveland: Now! became an important political asset for Stokes. Using few local tax dollars for the funding of Cleveland: Now!, the Cleveland city council had little say in how the monies were allocated. Cleveland: Now! also received considerable support from the Caucasian community. "Stokes

successfully mobilized a broad base of support for Cleveland: Now! by exploiting white fears of racial unrest" (Moore, 2002, p. 75).

Stokes first eight months in office were hailed as successful. Distancing himself and his office from scandal, Stokes was able to implement urban renewal programs that would help reduce the frustrations of inner-city residents. Stokes was also able to cement his image as a stabilizing force between the African-American and Caucasian communities after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968. The murder of Dr. King sparked riots in over 100 cities including Chicago, Denver, and Baltimore. Stokes was able to alleviate tensions among the community during. He pulled Caucasian officers out of African-American neighborhoods and instituted a "peace patrol" composed of leaders of the African-American community. In the days immediately following the King assassination, Stokes was praised at both the state and national levels for his leadership in diffusing potential racial violence. However, the "honeymoon" period of his tenure ended with Glenville (Moore, 2002).

What is now referred to in the literature regarding Cleveland history as the Glenville Shooting was a series of violent events that took place from July 23 to July 28, 1968. Glenville's population was, at the time of the shooting, predominately African-American. It was not considered to be as economically unviable as the Hough neighborhood was. There were numerous African-American owned businesses in the Glenville area as well as vibrant African-American churches.

A Glenville resident, Fred "Ahmed" Evans, had been under surveillance by the Cleveland police for possibly purchasing illegal weapons. He and his group, the Republic of New Libya, were considered to be subversive by most of the rank-and-file of the police department, but

Mayor Stokes had made an effort to reach out to black nationalists in the Cleveland area. Evans was one of these young men (Porter, 1976).

There is debate as to what the catalyst for the violence was, but, on July 23, 1968, gunfire was exchanged between Evans and Cleveland police officers. The police soon found themselves outmanned and outgunned. The police-issued sidearms were no match against the automatic weapons and armor-piercing bullets used by the New Libyans. By the end of the first day, seven police officers and civilians had been killed, and 15 were wounded. The bulk of the violence was over by the end of the first day, but looting continued. Like he did in the aftermath of the King assassination, Stokes replaced Caucasian police officers in the area with African-Americans. Yet the confrontations continued and the mayor requested the assistance of the Ohio National Guard. When the guard arrived in force on July 25, order began to be restored. By July 28, the violence was over, yet the damage to the Stokes' reputation as a stabilizing force in the African-American community had been done.

> The Glenville riots completely shook the confidence of whites who had naively believed that electing Stokes would permanently ensure against racial disorder. The riots also completely antagonized the police department. But the worst shock came from the revelation that Fred (Ahmed) Evans, a rather kooky leader of belligerent black nationalists, had bought guns for himself and followers from funds given to him by Stokes from the CLEVELAND NOW funds (Porter, 1976, p. 242).

The Cleveland Police Department

The frustration of Cleveland citizens, particularly those from the African-American community, was not merely focused on inequities in economic opportunities and disparities in housing, but was also directed at their treatment by law enforcement officials. Stokes had pledged to change the manner in which Cleveland police dealt with the minority communities. In the wake of the Hough riots, Cleveland civic leaders instituted what they called the Little Hoover

Commission. The purpose of this commission was to privately report to commission members on the state of city government. The commission found that reports of crime were haphazardly filed. Major crime rose by over 80 percent. Vice crime flourished with few efforts at prevention or interdiction by police (Stokes, 1989).

The report was particularly critical of police administration and organization in Cleveland. "The division's formal organization violates sound organizational concepts in many respects. It is further confused by informal arrangements, power centers, and unusual likes of communications which make the apparent structure of organization meaningless" (Stokes, 1989, p. 169). Addressing police relations with the community, the commission found "… the division stands aloof from very serious community problems, it is hostile and suspicious of those it is there to serve" (Stokes, 1989, pp. 169-170).

After taking office, Stokes received a list of recommendations concerning the police department given to him by African-American officers. Among these recommendations were: transferring certain officers in administrative positions and replacing these officers with African-American police officers who had been vocal in their opposition to police policies, integrate the mounted unit, and assign an African-American officer to each district office to report any illegal treatment of prisoners. Stokes was able to provide the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons (NAACP) with a $15,000 grant to help with recruiting African-American officers. Police criticized the Stokes administration in its efforts to alter the civil service entrance and promotional examinations. It had been found test materials had been leaked before the examinations to both African-American and Caucasian applicants (Stokes, 1989).

Off-duty uniformed police, antagonized by Stokes efforts at departmental reorganization, the Glenville Riots, and the testing scandal, stationed themselves at polling places used predominately by African-American voters on the day of Stokes reelection. African-American voters later claimed these officers challenged and intimidated them. Police Chief Gerity personally witnessed some of these acts but did nothing to prevent them. Stokes entered his second term in office even more determined to reform the Cleveland Police. While Chief Gerity attempted to institute department reorganization policies more in line with Stokes vision for the department, it was not enough to save his job (Moore, 2002).

The General

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., one of the first African-American West Point graduates and a Tuskegee Airman of World War II fame, was selected by Stokes to replace public safety director Joseph McManamon who retired for health reasons in 1969. Stokes saw McManamon's retirement as a perfect opportunity to bring in someone who would be sensitive to the needs of the minority community while at the same time appealing to the Caucasian police officers, many of whom were veterans.

Prior to his assuming office in Cleveland, General Davis had served with distinction in the United States Army, the Army Air Corps, and the United States Air Force. The provision for African-Americans to train as fighter pilots in World War II had given Davis the opportunity to prove he was both a talented flier and an effective leader of men. Shunned because of race at West Point and during the early part of his military career, Davis found his professional niche in the Air Corps. Beginning with command of the 99th Fighter Squadron of the 332 Fighter Group, his record of achievement in combat was impressive. In operations in the European theater

during World War II, Davis' men destroyed 111 aircraft in the air and 150 aircraft on the ground. This was in addition to numerous fixed installations, railcars and one destroyer (Davis, 1991).

Given an opportunity to enroll in the Air War College after the integration of the armed forces in 1948, Davis successfully completed the curriculum. The opportunity to attend the Air War College was considered essential to rising in rank above the grade of colonel. Afterwards Davis was placed in charge of the Air Defense branch of U.S. Air Force operations where he commanded Caucasian officers and troops. He was then assigned to command the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing during the Korean Conflict. Soon after Davis received his promotion to Brigadier General (Davis 1991). Upon leaving the Air Force as deputy director of U.S. Strike Force Operations, Davis retired as a Lieutenant-General. His reputation among his subordinates was that of being both capable and fair (Hatch, 1970).

Having rejected several opportunities for post-military careers, Davis accepted the offer of Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes to assume the duties of retiring public safety director McManamon.

> Cleveland's problems were similar to those of all large cities: the vicious cycles of racism, poverty, addiction to narcotics, and crime that continue to afflict our young people. I knew that Cleveland's difficulties could not be corrected in five minutes or five years by waving a wand, but I looked forward to doing what I could to alleviate them. It seemed to me that if anyone could accelerate change, Carl Stokes could (Davis, 1991, pp. 337-338).

> The possibilities struck me. A military man! A general! Black or no, the police would have to respect him. And, being black, he would have to be the kind of man who would agree with what I wanted to do. In retrospect, I can only say that it was my own desperate need that drove me to believe such foolishness … allowed myself to be carried into the greatest personal debacle of my career (Stokes, 1989, p. 180).

A Brief Experiment

Davis was sworn in office by Stokes in January 1970. Immediately upon entering office, Davis was placed in the midst of a political crisis over the office of police chief. Having accepted the resignation of Chief Gerity, Stokes searched for a replacement that would share his vision for the reorganization of the police department. He eventually settled on Chief William Ellenburg of the Grosse Point, Michigan police department. However, within hours of formally accepting the post of Cleveland police chief, the *Detroit Free Press* ran an article implicating Ellenburg of being involved in an illegal abortion clinic. The story's information was obtained by a former felon who accused Ellenburg and other officers to receiving payoffs to allow the clinic to operate. Stokes initially supported his new chief. However, under intense community pressure, when Ellenburg offered Stokes his resignation, the mayor accepted it. No charges were filed against Ellenburg, but his career as a police officer was effectively over (Moore, 2002).

With the exception of the Ellenburg hiring, both men acknowledged their first months working together were harmonious. Davis' initial acceptation by the African-American community in Cleveland was a positive one (Davis acquired stature in military career, 1970). However, others recognized a reactionary bent in Davis' nature that Stokes had apparently overlooked. A Stokes appointee, Thomas Monahan, who worked with Davis in the public safety department recognized this soon after Davis' appointment. According to Monahan, the new public safety director was alarmed that police did not have machine guns or other automatic weapons. When informed that Stokes did not want local law enforcement to have access to this type of weaponry, Davis was to have replied "What the police want, they will get" (Moore, 2002, p. 148).

In his autobiography, Stokes related an instance where he specifically prohibited Davis from allowing police to use "dum-dum" bullets on the firing range. A dum-dum round, also known as an expanding bullet, is designed to spread on impact with its target. As such, it can cause a more serious wound than a regular bullet. Davis defended the position of the police to use this type of ammunition because these rounds were less likely to ricochet. Stokes repeated his demand. "He went into his West Point act, an amazing sight … He wheeled and strode straight out into the corridor. After that, my relations with the general deteriorated" (Stokes, 1989, p. 192). In his autobiography, Davis admitted his first responsibility was to the police department, not city hall.

> My major concern was, of course, the Police Department, which had been engaged in an ongoing struggle with City Hall since the election of Mayor Stokes. Racial antagonism was the root of the problem. Many white policemen, who made up the majority of the force, thought they had no support from City Hall, claiming that the mayor and his staff, many of whom were black, had usurped the police force's authority and were obstructing the exercise of legitimate police powers. In some respects, these men were right. Given this nearly impossible situation, it was my job to convince the police that they could depend on me to defend their interests in City Hall (Davis, 1991, p. 341).

Davis soon developed a public record of supporting the police that concerned both Stokes and his supporters. Soon after entering office, Davis publicly praised the SWAT team for breaking up a black power rally at Cuyahoga Community College. In April, 1970, the police department neglected to investigate the beating of an African exchange student in the Little Italy section of Cleveland. This drew strong criticism from the African-American community. He allowed officers to carry their own special weapons. "Since they are going to carry them anyway, why don't we show our appreciation" (Moore, 2002, p. 148). This ran counter to Stokes' contention that in order to properly investigate police shootings all police weapons should be of the same make and caliber (Stokes, 1989). Davis further alienated the African-American

community when he dismissed an African-American officer just shy of retirement because of unsubstantiated charges the officer filed a false police report (Moore, 2002).

Stokes had made concerted efforts to reach out to the entire African-American community. This included those active in the Black Nationalist movement. This effort at inclusion was hampered on June 29, 1970 when a police raid occurred on the Cleveland headquarters of the Black Panthers. Roughly 50 officers surrounded the headquarters to serve warrants and check for weapons. According to police reports, officers were fired on as they entered the building. One police officer and one Black Panther were wounded. Three Black Panthers were later charged with attempted murder. Although many in the African-American community urged Davis to initiate a formal investigation of the shooting, Davis refused (Moore, 2002).

Publicly, Carl Stokes was still pledging his support to Davis. "Privately, however, Stokes was incensed at Davis's desire to be one of the boys" (Moore, 2002, p. 149). A significant portion of Davis' criticism was by the local black nationalists. "In their opinion Davis was the personification of a sellout: a high-ranking black man in the white man's army" (Moore, 2002, pp. 149-150).

Although talented in public relations and in dealing with the press in general, Davis was concerned about the increasing criticism of his handling of the public safety department by prominent members of the African-American community. The *Call & Post*, Cleveland's leading African-American newspaper, was especially vociferous in its treatment of Davis' management. The level of criticism increased dramatically when Davis approved the police department's purchase of a tank which was justified by the department as a rescue vehicle (Stokes, 1989).

In the early summer of 1970, Davis met with Stokes and requested the mayor distance himself from those members of the community whose criticism of his handling of the police department was most severe. Stokes refused because of the impact these individuals and groups had in diffusing community tensions. On July 27, 1970, Davis submitted his resignation to Stokes and also delivered a copy of it to *The Plain Dealer*.

> I find it necessary and desirable to resign as director of public safety, City of Cleveland. The reasons are simple: I am not receiving from you or your administration the support my programs require. And the enemies of law enforcement continue to receive support and comfort from you and your administration. I request your acceptance of my resignation at your earliest convenience (Stokes, 1989, p. 200).

Lessons Learned

Carl Stokes thought he had found in Benjamin Davis his "perfect" public safety director. He was the man who would be able to appeal to both the African-American and Caucasian communities. Under different circumstances, he might have been. Both men shouldered some degree of blame for Davis' short tenure in Cleveland in their autobiographies. Both Stokes and Davis regretted not doing more research on each other before an agreement was struck (Davis, 1991; Stokes, 1970).

The circumstances of Stokes and Davis's backgrounds were vastly dissimilar. As discussed earlier, Stokes had been reared in poverty without a father. Davis grew up in middle-class comfort and had a close relationship with his father, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. Davis, Sr. was the first African-American to achieve the rank of general in the American armed services. Davis, Jr. credited his father's ability to excel in a military governed by racist policies as an example to him throughout his career.

Davis was also the product of thirty-plus years of military service. He had served in the armed forces prior to integration and had been active in advocating integration to the extent his duties allowed him to do so. While both Stokes and Davis had endured racist policies that curbed both their actions and opportunities, Davis had submitted to these quietly. His statement of resistance to racism was a determination to not be the best African-American officer in the U.S. Air Force, but to be the best officer period. He demonstrated this through his personal and professional conduct and what he expected of other African-American military personnel. "My own opinion was that blacks could overcome racist attitudes through achievements, even though those achievements had to take place in the hateful environment of racism" (AfriGeneasForum, 2006).

Conversely, Stokes was a product of the 1960s. Stokes wanted immediate change and knew that in order to effect the change he wanted in Cleveland he needed to be in a position to implement policies that would reduce the frustration he and others felt at government-sanctioned practices denying certain groups equitable treatment. "I was part of such a surge 20 years ago … a young man named Carl Stokes who dared to believe he could be anything – a mayor of a major city" (Stokes, 1989, p. I-2). To Stokes, Davis represented a way of doing things that could no longer be tolerated. Shortly after Davis resigned, Stokes wrote a letter to civil rights leader Julian Bond. In it he stated, "Thank you for your thoughtfulness in sending me the Atlanta Enquirer editorial regarding General Davis, we've been dealing with people like him throughout our fight for freedom. We have and will continue to overcome all they represent" (Moore, 2002, pp. 152-154).

There is a difference between leadership and management. According to Maccoby,

> According to the current wisdom, managers are principally administrators—they write business plans, set budgets and monitor progress. Leaders on the other hand, get

> organizations and people to change. That's true, as far as it goes, but there is a more useful distinction between management and leadership: Management is a *function* that must be exercised in any business, leadership is a *relationship* between leader and led that can energize an organization (2000, p. 57).

The careful selection of those to carry out a leader's visions and goals is of absolute importance. There is a profound difference between a person being what you want them to be and the reality of what they are. Stokes selected a subordinate in Davis that could effectively manage, but did not share his vision for change. Without the enthusiastic support of subordinates, the realization of the evolution of vision into policy will likely not come to fruition. Unfortunately for Stokes, he was never able to find the person who would shape the Cleveland Police Department into the type of law enforcement agency he wanted. "… it is true that I accomplished none of the substantive, structural reforms of the department that I hoped for" (Stokes, 1989, p. 205).

References

* Note to the Reader – Several of the newspaper article references listed below are incomplete. The bulk of newspaper articles used in preparation for this paper were found in clipping files for Gen. Davis and Mayor Stokes archived in the Public Administration Library at the Cleveland, Ohio City Hall. Much of the source information, dates and page numbers for the articles were not included when these were initially filed.

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