

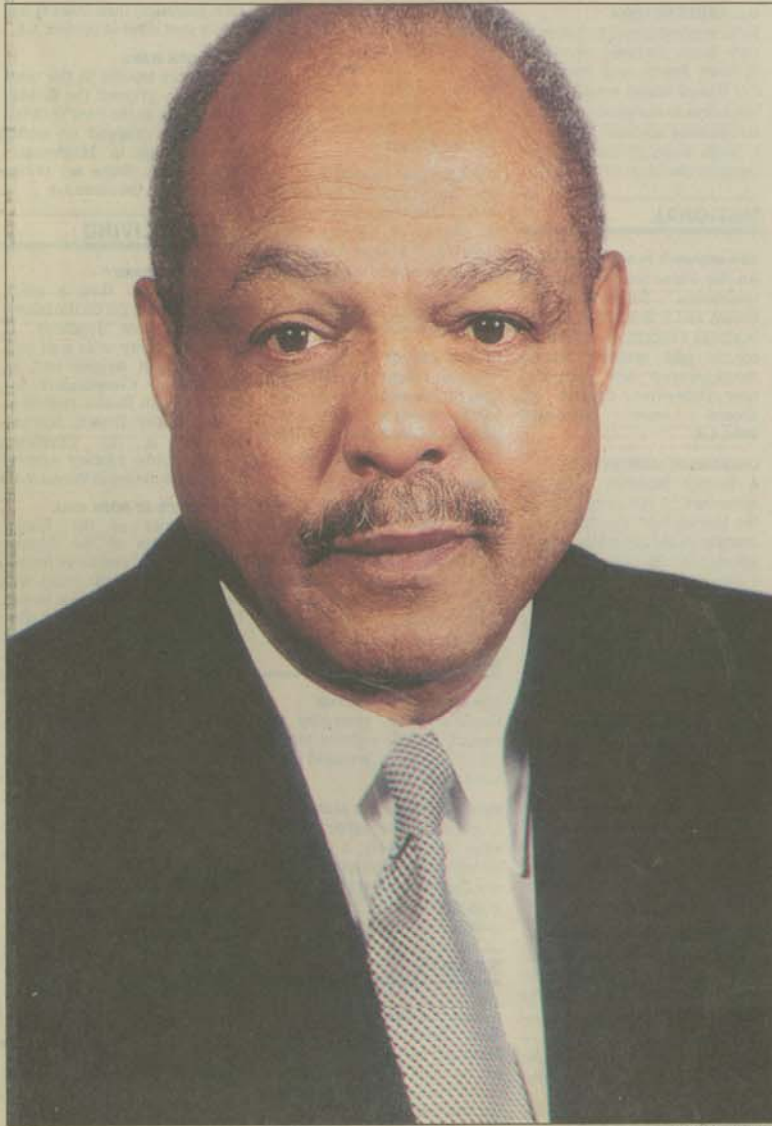
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THE PLAIN DEALER

OHIO'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER 35¢ NEWSSTANDS & MACHINES

FINAL

CLEVELAND, THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 1996



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Former Cleveland Mayor Carl B. Stokes was elected as the first black mayor of a major city in 1967.

First black mayor recalled as trailblazer

By PAUL SHEPARD and RICHARD M. PEERY
PLAIN DEALER REPORTERS

From the beginning, those who led the effort to elect Carl B. Stokes mayor had their sights extended far beyond Cleveland.

It started in 1964 when Jean Capers organized a small interracial group of activists who met weekly to analyze voting patterns across the city and to develop a strategy to win City Hall. A year later, the group began circulating petitions to draft Stokes for mayor.

Stokes heard about the effort and told Capers he did not want to run, but the petition drive generated such enthusiasm he changed his mind.

"We ran the campaign with almost no money," Helen Summons, a retired caterer, recalled. "We had our first fund-raiser at the Wade Park Manor

- A timeline of his life. 12-A
- An editorial, and a tribute by cartoonist Jeff Darcy. 10-B.
- Forum Page articles by those who knew him. 11-B

Hotel. Some of the waiters there had worked for me. They told me, 'Don't worry about the food running out.' They kept refilling the trays and punch bowls."

Stokes lost that year, but the stage was set for his historic 1967 victory, which helped open city halls across the country for blacks — as Capers had hoped it would.

SEE REMEMBERED/12-A

Carl Stokes

1927-1996

By RICHARD M. PEERY and PAUL SHEPARD
PLAIN DEALER REPORTERS

Carl Burton Stokes and victory were rarely far apart.

Whether it was during his historic run to become the first black mayor of a major American city, at the billiard table or in the boxing ring, Stokes exhibited an all-consuming quest for triumph.

Stokes, who rose from a childhood of poverty in Cleveland to become one of the country's most influential black leaders, died yesterday after suffering from cancer.

"I have lost a brother, and the nation has lost one of its most famous sons," Rep. Louis Stokes said yesterday. "My brother utilized his brilliant mind and intellect to challenge this nation's political system.

"It was through his keen analytical, political acumen that he carved out his own unique place in American political history."

Cleveland Clinic spokeswoman Holli Birrer said Stokes, 68, died of cancer at 5:05 a.m. yesterday. He had been hospitalized for about a week.

Stokes had been ambassador to the Seychelles Islands since 1994, but he took a medical leave of absence in June 1995 after he had cancer of the esophagus diagnosed. He had radiation and chemotherapy before surgery to remove a tumor from his esophagus, the tube that carries food to the stomach, and he had additional surgery as recently as Feb. 5.

Louis Stokes, a 14-term congressman, said his younger brother "inspired black Americans to aspire to higher political office all over the country."

It was undisputed political gospel.

"All that exists now in the political spectrum for African-Americans are seeds from trees that Carl Stokes planted," said the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, president of the National Rainbow Coalition and former presidential candidate.

SEE STOKES/13-A



DALE OMORI / PLAIN DEALER PHOTOGRAPHER

Cleveland police officer Gregory W. Pollard adjusts his hat in preparation for honor guard duty yesterday at a memorial to former Cleveland Mayor Carl B. Stokes in the rotunda of City Hall.