



Interview with **Carl Stokes**

Date: October 28, 1988

Interviewer: Louis Massiah

Camera Rolls: 3044-3048

Sound Rolls: 320-322

Team: C

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3044]

[sound roll #320]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark one.

00:00:14:00

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK. We're gonna begin we're going to begin with one the one I did—we're, we're, we're gonna begin with one question in, in 1965. What made you decide to run in, in '65? How did you know then that the time was right for a, a Black person to, to run as Mayor of Cleveland?

00:00:34:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, I don't know that the time was right as much as it was that I felt that it could be done and it was a kind of natural aspiration of mine since I had been elected county-wide to the Ohio legislature and, and in a county that had only a eight percent Black population, it obviously indicated my ability to put together the White vote that would be needed in a majority White city. And, and it's a, a natural evolution of one who's in a profession to look toward the, the next echelon. In addition to which, the City of Cleveland was rapidly distinguishing itself as one of the worst examples of the urban crisis that was sweeping the nation and Black people here were undergoing perhaps, certainly by degrees, greater deprivations than in other northern cities in the United States. And consistent with my own historical understanding about the evolution of minority groups into the mainstream of America, that the next place for us to be was to be at the helm of, of the, one of the major cities. And I saw all of these factors coming together and decided that I would run.

00:02:05:00

Interviewer:

OK. Can you, can you talk to me a little bit about Geraldine Williams and Jean Capers approaching you to, to run? Could you, could you just recount that, that incident again?

00:02:16:00

Carl Stokes:

[coughs] While I was in the legislature, Geraldine Williams or I should say really, Jean Capers, who was a controversial politician here, councilperson who had served some three terms in council and then been defeated. Had converted her party and had been active in pursuing political goals of her own. The, she, with Geraldine Williams and a group of other people began circulating petitions to draft me to run for mayor. I had told them that if they got a certain number of signatures that they—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Carl Stokes:

—I would consider.

00:03:11:00

Interviewer:

OK, we just, we just ran out. Can we change the—

[cut]

[camera roll #3045]

[sound roll #321]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:03:14:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark two.

[slate]

00:03:17:00

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, could you tell the story of Jean Capers and Geraldine Williams approaching you to run for Mayor of Cleveland?

00:03:30:00

Carl Stokes:

The administration of Ralph Locher had been particularly [pause] punitive toward the Black community in the City of Cleveland. We were faced at that particular time, with a thrust from those of us who had been in the civil rights and in politics, of where to go and there's great deal of speculation as to the next step. In the process of all of this, a former councilwoman, Jean Murrell Capers and a small group of people began circulating petitions calculated to draft me to run for mayor. I was not willing to respond to the particular draft by the Capers group but this had been one of the things I had been considering and talking with people about and people had been talking about my doing. That, however, served as an impetus from the number of signatures that were gathered, to make it something for me to seriously consider and it had that purpose and effect.

00:04:36:00

Interviewer:

OK. When, when did you know, when did you really feel that a successful run in '67 would be possible? What, what was—

Carl Stokes:

In, in '67.

Interviewer:

Right. We're jumping to 1967.

00:04:48:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, in 1965, out of, of about three hundred twenty thousand votes cast, I had lost the election by less than six tenths of one percent. So, it was obvious that the, it was a doable thing. And so, in 1967, it wasn't a question of whether I would win but by what margin or who I would have to ultimately defeat in the General Election. That confidence was borne out by the fact that in running a head-to-head with the mayor, the incumbent mayor in the primaries, I defeated him by twenty thousand votes, which was a clear victory and, and it justified the optimism we had had.

00:05:37:00

Interviewer:

OK. How, how did you pull together the different elements of, of the Black community as well as, as, you know, the White community in, in, in putting together a campaign? How did, how did you, and...because there are all sorts of different folks, there are Black nationalists, there are political leaders. How did you pull people together to support, to support your candidacy?

00:05:56:00

Carl Stokes:

The 1965 or 1967 elections, both, you must remember, was, were merely focuses of the political and civic and civil rights activity I had been involved in for fifteen years. And the groups that had been of assistance to me, Americans for Democratic Action, organized labor, NAACP, Urban League, the, the different civic and community street clubs all had been part of my elections to the Ohio legislature. And then in '65, I refined the process and in, then in 1967, it was refined even more. Black nationalists as well as liberal Whites and blue-collar White labor class people always had been part of, of, of my campaigns, which were at large campaigns and it was just, in my own case, it was just a question of, of sharpening and focusing them upon the mayoralty election.

00:07:04:00

Interviewer:

OK. Among some people in, in the business community, there were, there was a feeling that electing Carl Stokes would, would ease racial tensions and would in a way, might buy them fire insurance in a more negative way to look at it. Did you think you could deliver? Did you think that you could keep, you know, you could alleviate some of the tension and some of the, some of the feeling of misery in the Black community? Did you think you could keep Cleveland cool?

00:07:30:00

Carl Stokes:

No, I never thought that I could keep Cleveland cool. I mean, after all, what was happening, the social phenomenon that was expressing itself in the rioting throughout the United States, all of the, the factors that were basic to that, were more than present in Cleveland and in many other places. So, there was no, never any, any realistic reason for me to believe that. But from a standpoint of being able to evidence to the, to the Black and the poor people of Cleveland that I could do what they most wanted to do and that is to have a concern and interest in it and to apply the resources available to doing something about them, this is what I knew that I could do. Obviously, the White business community never understood the sociological factors that, or socioeconomic factors that were going into the conflagration of the cities. And the only thing that they wanted to do was, is there somebody who probably will stop Cleveland from going up in flames? No matter how often I told them and others told them that electing Carl Stokes isn't going to stop riots, nonetheless, they believed that. And, since they were so disenchanted with the incumbent mayor and saw no other reasonable alternatives from the other candidates offering themselves, they found it easy to accept me with that very primitive reason.

00:09:06:00

Interviewer:

OK. You, you campaigned in, in the White community, in the White ethnic community. What kind of response did you, did you receive there?

Carl Stokes:

Well, obviously, fr—having defeated the mayor by twenty thousand votes in the primary, I got very good response. And, and the—

Interviewer:

Could you just reframe it to talking—

Carl Stokes:

Reframe it? OK.

Interviewer:

—about the White ethnic community [unintelligible].

00:09:33:00

Carl Stokes:

When I ran against the incumbent mayor in '67 in the primary election where the choice was between me and him and that campaign took us into the White ethnic areas, I had every confidence that they were gonna respond to me because of the fact that they had been as deprived in the White ethnic areas as the Black people had on the East Side of Cleveland. And they did respond enthusiastically to the extent that I was able to defeat the mayor by twenty thousand votes.

00:10:06:00

Interviewer:

OK. OK. The, when, the night of the, the primary, one of the television stations announced that, that Locher had won the election. Do you remember that night and, and what, what was your response? What, describe the scene to me, where were you? What was your response when you heard it and what, what did you do?

00:10:22:00

Carl Stokes:

We were at the, at our headquarters, downtown Cleveland when, watching the television, and I re—recall Hugh Danaceau from Channel 5 coming on and projecting that Ralph Locher was going to be the winner. That was about nine o'clock in the evening. And this was during a time that we had paper ballots. The, Hugh Danaceau and I guess the rest of the media did not understand the history of, of printed ballots in relationship to the Black community because almost never do the ballots cast by the Black voters arrive at the Board of Elections early in the evening with the White areas. In addition to which, we were carrying, at that time, a precinct-by-precinct report to us about what in fact the vote was in that precinct and we were keeping a running summary. So, when we heard Hugh Danaceau, it was a source of great amusement to us because we knew that he certainly didn't have the information that we had. And shortly thereafter, hearing the broadcast, I just went out and told him that our own

projections are that we would win the election by twenty thousand votes. Which was greeted by the media there as that we must have gone off our bonkers or something because the information available to them was that we were losing badly. Later that night around one o'clock, in fact, our prediction came true.

00:11:57:00

Interviewer:

OK. We're, we're now moving into the, the General Election. Were you surprised by the amount of, I don't know if I, I, if I can call it backlash but the amount of White crossover vote for Taft once it was announced that you had won and Taft was gonna be your, your adversary, the, the Republican?

00:12:15:00

Carl Stokes:

No, we were not surprised at the, at the White voter crossover to...in support of Seth Taft because he was an acceptable kind of person to, to, that, that a White voter who didn't want to vote for Carl Stokes, could, with some security, be able to vote for Seth Taft. His record in the community was an excellent one. He himself was an outstanding member of a long-time political dynasty. And I had no, no, I was not in any kind of way surprised at the narrowness of the General Election despite the fact that the City of Cleveland is overwhelmingly Democrat. The, in addition to which, of course, throughout the campaign, we had been tracking voter attitudes with polls and so we knew before the November 7th date that the election would be very close.

00:13:20:00

Interviewer:

OK. I'm gonna ask you that once again and make it just a little bit shorter. Were you surprised by the, the White backlash or the crossover in the White community once it was a fact that you had beaten Locher and, and Seth Taft, your Re—your Republican was gonna be your adversary?

00:13:36:00

Carl Stokes:

No. I was not surprised at the White backlash or the crossover of n—of normally Democrat voters to support the White Republican in General Election, primarily because Seth Taft was entirely a different creature from Mayor Locher. And those Whites who were reflecting their own racism found it comfortable to vote for Seth Taft because he was an outstanding civic and community figure, the member of the longtime Taft—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Carl Stokes:

—political dynasty in this state.

00:14:15:00

Interviewer:

OK. Just, we're gonna have to change our film reel.

[cut]

[camera roll #3046]

00:14:19:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:14:23:00

Interviewer:

OK, what was it like going out to the streets of Hough and Glenville, going out on the, the Black West Side while, during your campaign? What was, talk about the feeling of exhilaration? What, what was going on in the streets?

00:14:36:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, the, the, maybe the most poignant little vignette was when *we were in a motorcade coming down East 55th Street. And my wife Shirley and I are sitting on the back seat of the convertible and a little Black kid that was maybe eight years old probably, came up to us as we were stopped at a traffic signal and he said, Are you Carl Stokes? And I, I said, Yes. And he just gave a little leap in the air and ran down the street clapping his hands saying, He's colored. He's colored. He's colored. He's colored. I thought that sort of caught the kind of the thing that was coming, a sense of pride* and, and the historical aspect

of the moment that, *that I felt as I went through the Black areas of the City of Cleveland.* Also very sobering, I might say to you because so many of the people were expressing in different kinds of ways about the confidence that they had, both that I would win and that when I won, that I'd be able to correct all the wrongs and the problems that beset them. And, and when you realize that people have that sort of feeling about you, that you're going to be some sort of savior from their dilemma, it's very sobering because it imposes a great responsibility upon you and I felt that quite keenly through that period.

00:16:18:00

Interviewer:

And the night of the, the, the primary election, the night, the night you won the primary, can you talk about that night? Can you talk about that, the feeling, what you saw when you went outside and also in the [unintelligible]?

00:16:29:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, in the Downtown area this, it happens that we were, we were near the, the high-level bridge and this is a very wide-open business area. And I don't know, there must have been ten thousand people down there and as we came outside, they had heard the news and, and people were laughing and, and literally, dancing in the street and, and hugging one another and crying, some of them, of, from the emotion of the moment. And when I came out, they just all closed in on me and, and it was sort of a scary moment but you just realized that this was an outpouring of love and affection and, and happiness at the moment. It's an extraordinary time. I, I often tell people, the only just spontaneous demonstration like that I'd seen in my lifetime was when Joe Lewis defeated Schmeling in the, the second, in the second fight and, and the Black community just turned out, just so happy. Everyone had identified with that struggle between the, the exponent of Hitler's Aryan supremacy and this Black American.

00:17:48:00

Interviewer:

OK. When we spoke on the phone, you talked about how you resisted Dr. King and a number of Black major national Black political leaders when they wanted to enter the campaign. Why did you not wanna portray yourself as just or, or just a Black candidate? Why, why did you resist their, their involvement in the campaign?

00:18:10:00

Carl Stokes:

The reality of being elected Mayor of the City of Cleveland in which the population of the city was only 35 percent Black and the remaining 65 p—

00:18:22:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Stop.

[cut]

00:18:24:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:18:25:00

Interviewer:

OK. Why did you resist the involvement of national Black political leaders in your campaign?

00:18:36:00

Carl Stokes:

The realities of being elected Mayor of the City of Cleveland, which was 35 percent Black at that time and 65 percent White, and White Eastern European ethnics, was that you couldn't run a civil rights campaign here. You had to run a straight political campaign in which you blurred or eliminated the racial distinctions as much as you could. We had come through a primary election in which the White community had managed to put aside the racial issue. And now, as we came into the General Election with a Seth Taft, in which we knew that White people would find it much easier to vote for Seth Taft and, and, and that we must, to the extent possible, not inflame their basic prejudices. It meant that you couldn't have a, a civil rights campaign there and the sloganizing about Black Power etc. or otherwise you, you may well have a cause that has gotten a great deal of publicity but you would, would not win a political election. In that regard, one morning, we received a telephone call, a political—I'm sorry, we didn't receive—let me start over on that. One

morning, we, when we were reading the morning paper, there was a nationally syndicated story that the civil rights "Big Six" had met in New York the day before and decided that they would come to Cleveland to help Carl Stokes. I had not invited anyone to come to Cleveland to help me and I knew that if we had such a group come here with Black sloganizing and whatnot, I could forget about being able to capture the needed White votes that I would have to have to win this election. As a consequence, my campaign manager, Dr. Kenneth Clement and I contacted Dr. Kenneth Clark who served really, as the advisor to the, to the major civil rights organizations, arranged for Dr. Clement and I to go to New York City the next day. We met at the airport hotel with Dr. Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, NAACP, Whitney Young of the Urban League, of, McKissick of CORE, Stokely Carmichael from SNCC, and Bayard Rustin, representing A. Phillip Randolph. At that time, we explained to them the political realities that if they came there, they would certainly upset the delicate balance that we've been able to affect and that we were sure that what they wanted us to do was to win in Cleveland not turn it into a media event for Black Power demonstrations that would result in a political defeat. Although there was some resistance from Stokely Carmichael, Bayard Rustin and Dr. King prevailed and they agreed not to come.

00:21:46:00

Interviewer:

Now, we're moving into the General Election and there were a series of debates. The first debate, from what I've read, you did very well at, and then the second debate at, I think it was John Marshall High School on the West Side, there was a little bit of a, of a controversy based on a statement you made bringing, supposedly bringing race into the campaign. Could you just talk about that night as you remember it? Louis Seltzer is the moderator and your, Seth Taft, your, your opponent is, is, is next to you. What happened? I mean how, how, how did it happen?

00:22:22:00

Carl Stokes:

Few people recall from the night of the debate at John Marshall what preceding information there had been about a conversation that Seth Taft and I had had at, at my law office the day of the debate in which Seth Taft had come to me and had [pause] entered into a discussion about whether or not [pause] I would either—well, wait a minute. Why don't you hold it, a minute?

00:22:57:00

Interviewer:

Let's just cut.

Carl Stokes:

Let me, let me recollect that—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Carl Stokes:

—because it may not be—

[cut]

00:23:02:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed. Marker.

[slate]

00:23:04:00

Interviewer:

OK. We're at the second, there are a series of debates. We're at the second debate at John Marshall High School on the West Side. Why did you bring up the subject of race of that debate?

00:23:16:00

Carl Stokes:

The debate at John Marshall occurred in an area of the city which was a hotbed of hostile racial attitudes and, and anti-Black experiences. The audience that night was ab—about 98 percent White and drawn from the John Marshall High School area. During the course of the debate, for whatever reason it is, today I can't recall, but I recall saying to Seth Taft, Seth, you've acknowledged to me that as a Republican who doesn't live in the City of Cleveland, that the primary thing you rely upon in being able to win this race is the fact that you're White and I'm Black. At that moment there was a great outpouring of protests from this audience I've described to you. And when the moderator was able to get them to subside a little bit, Seth Taft, who we subsequently learned had been well-coached that if some statement like this was made, retorted, Well, well, well, Carl, so now, we really have the real issue out on the table. It's not fair for me to talk about race but you can talk about it. And then of course, there was once again, a great reaction from the White crowd there. The next day

the news media focused entirely upon that reaction and, and termed that I had injected race into the campaign.

00:24:56:00

Interviewer:

Did, did you lose hope? I mean, it seemed the polls were beginning to close in and really, towards the election it looked like Taft might actually be taking a little bit of a lead. Did you ever lose hope? Did you ever think that you were not gonna win?

00:25:08:00

Carl Stokes:

I never had any question but that we would win. Now, as a professional politician, I'm always prepared to lose because I have both won and lost races but everything that I knew about the—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Carl Stokes:

—way in which that campaign was going and the information we were getting from our polling told me that we'd win, narrow though it might be, we would win.

00:25:35:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let's cut. Camera.

[cut]

[camera roll #3047]

[sound roll #322]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Great. Marker.

00:25:40:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark six.

[slate]

00:25:43:00

Interviewer:

OK. After that second debate and you've, you've made this statement, how did, how did your staff react the next day when you came back into the campaign headquarters? What happened?

00:25:55:00

Carl Stokes:

Dr. Clement who was the campaign manager and I had discussed, this was not a spontaneous statement, this was because of several things too extensive to go into here, I had decided I was going to say that that night, Dr. Clement had been opposed to it from the outset. The campaign press secretary, a fellow named Ostrow had believed that it should be said. And so, Ostrow and I outvoted Clement's decision. It turned out that Clement was right of course, in so far as what the reaction was, not to the, to the, to the accuracy of the statement, but the subsequent media reaction to it vindicated Clement's belief that we should not have, have made the statement.

00:26:48:00

Interviewer:

But, but when you went back into your office with all your campaign workers and you, you had brought up the subject of race the night before, what, how did they treat you? Did, did they make any comments? Do, do you remember, you know, going in that morning and, and talking to the people in the office?

00:27:01:00

Carl Stokes:

Of course. We didn't go in that, that morning and talk to people. We went back to the headquarters that night and discussed it. And we had to agree with Dr. Clement that it was a, an untimely remark and that the reaction that we had received was one that we should have avoided by not addressing the issue even though the reasons for it were plausible. It just wasn't politically sound.

00:27:31:00

Interviewer:

OK. Do, do you remember election night? I mean this was the night of the General Election, November 7th. Where, where were you, what, what happened? How, how long did it take before you found out about the victory and, and then what was the feeling afterward? Just talk us through that night.

00:27:47:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, we were at, at our suite in the Cleveland Sheraton Hotel on Public Square and I guess there were probably about thirty-five people there. Some business people, others who, whose work had been done and that were not in the street to work that day. And, and we watched the evening go by, getting reports not just on television but also reports that were being phoned in to us from the precincts. And as we came down through the evening hours after the polls closed at 7:30 p.m. and ten o'clock came and he was quite far ahead. And, and eleven o'clock came and Taft was still ahead. And then around midnight, we began closing the gap. And, at about 1:30 in the morning was when our information came to us that we were, all of our reports were in and we were just a little bit ahead. And about a half hour later, the Board of Elections announced that all of the precincts were in and had been counted and I had won by a small margin. It was about two o'clock in the morning. Of course, we were all exhilarated and we were all congratulating Clement and all the different people who had participated in the campaign. And then we went downstairs to an obviously, hysterical crowd and, and thanked them for their help and, and inviting them to the inauguration, which would be only a week away. Then we were pleasantly surprised by Seth Taft and his wife Franny who arrived at the celebration. Franny had a box of roses for Shirley, which I guess that they had had just in the event that the thing went that way. We had a very cordial few moments with them and appreciating Seth for the kind of positive campaign he had run. And, and then I don't just remember. The rest of the night just goes into, into a blank because we were, we were just euphorious and I don't know what all we did.

00:30:14:00

Interviewer:

OK. What do you think your election symbolized? What do you think your election meant for Cleveland in that day November 7th or really, the morning November 8, 1967, what did it mean?

00:30:28:00

Carl Stokes:

My election on November the 7th, 1967 had a great deal of meaning to America because this was a city, first, that was, in which the Black population was, was a distinct minority of the city. At a time in which cities were a hotbed of racial animosity and hostility and literal conflagration with, there'd been over 300 cities that, within the three-year period of time, all had gone up in flames including part of the City of Cleveland. It illustrated the ability of White people to vote for a Black candidate for mayor. To Black people, it introduced a whole new echelon of political power. That now, instead of having to go and ask the White mayor for a job, they could go to the Black mayor and expect a job. That, in looking at a police department, now, they would know that they were, police departments were no longer without someone who would have some say over what they did in the Black neighborhoods, that now they'd have a Black mayor there. To Black civil rights people who had arrived at the summit by achieving the, the '64 Civil Rights Act and '65 Voters Rights Act [sic], this represented now, the next plateau for them to arrive at and that is the involvement in the political process which then would it able, enable a system in to going into, the, the true economics of the country. So, there were a lot of reasons like that. And the historical significance that Black people in this election had indicated that their involvement in climbing the ladder, and toward ultimate participation in the mainstream of American society was following the same process that had been gone through by the European immigrants that came here beginning in 1850s and, and that we too would ultimately be involved in every level of political and economic power.

00:32:58:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you talk about some of the, the coalitions that you put together nationally as well as locally. So, some of the local leaders, some of the—

Carl Stokes:

In the campaign?

Interviewer:

—in, in the campaign. This is prior to the, to election night. The, the coalition that, that came together and some of the support that you received that, that helped.

00:33:18:00

Carl Stokes:

[coughs] In, in the 1965 and 1967 election, there was no involvement of national groups in the Cleveland election. We were very careful to keep it that way and, and the process was done here through leadership from the NAACP, the Urban League, *The Plain Dealer*, the,

I'm sorry, not *The Plain Dealer*, *The Call & Post*, which is a, was a Black weekly that was run by a man by the name of William O. Walker.

00:33:51:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let's just start that once again. I was wondering about any national leaders like Hubert Humphrey. I mean, people who, who really were supporting your candidacy as well as local groups, you know, *The Call & Post* and NAACP—

Carl Stokes:

There wasn't. I just told you that there were, there weren't any national groups.

Interviewer:

OK. Well, if there were. OK. But I thought people had reached out. Once again, what was the, the national and local support that you received or offers that you received for your campaign in 1967.

00:34:19:00

Carl Stokes:

In 1967, the election which had caught the attention of people around the country because of the close race in 1965 resulted in offers of aid and [phone rings] assistance anywhere from—

00:34:35:00

Interviewer:

Wait. Can we just stop one second?

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:34:41:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark seven.

[slate]

00:34:43:00

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, could you talk about the offers that you received nationally and locally, and to support your campaign, the coalitions that, that were forming or that tried to form around your campaign in, in 1967.

00:34:58:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, in 1967, there were many people and groups around the country who wanted to be part of the Cleveland election, most of which we had to refuse because of the fact we could not see that it would fit in with the way that we had organized and charted the course of the campaign here balancing the White and Black factors. So, where persons, for instance, such as Hubert Humphrey who was the Vice President of the United States at that time, and a longtime friend of mine, had wanted very much to, to come here, we felt that it would not be in our interest to have him here. The national civil rights leaders who wanted to come, we did not—

00:35:42:00

Interviewer:

Let's just.

Carl Stokes:

What, [shouts] who is that? [pause]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Carl Stokes:

Oh, her?

Camera Crew Member #2:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

00:35:49:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark eight.

[slate]

00:35:51:00

Interviewer:

OK. During your election in 1967, a number of national leaders and local leaders offered support in, in this campaign. Could you talk about that? Could you talk about the coalition that came together and people that, that wanted to be part of your campaign and how you, how you looked at it?

00:36:09:00

Carl Stokes:

Because of our very close race in 1965, the eyes of the nation were focused on Cleveland in '67 with what seemed to be now, to them, a probable win here and there were many people who wanted to be part of it. And they ranged anywhere from Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who volunteered to come here or very charitably also said that he would understand if we didn't want him to come. He would either endorse me or oppose me, whichever one would help me and we told him to do neither but we did not let him come. Similarly, the national civil rights leaders who recognized the great importance of this election to the, to the whole fight for freedom and equality had wanted to come here. We necessarily rejected them also because in the delicate Black-White balance, we knew that anything representing the Black Power movement would cause a p—detrimental political effort. There were a number of, of people who otherwise, were involved in, in civil rights activities other than the, the organized groups as such who we did, who volunteered help and whom we did go out of the city and, and receive their financial aid and, and assistance. Here, in the City of Cleveland however, we organized the campaign utilizing the local components of the persons that we did not use in the national level. First, is organized labor members, NAACP or Urban League, the, those who were within the Black Power movement, we didn't have a Black Panther organization here but we did have a Black Afro Set. They were very much an integral part of the, of the campaign and worked very closely with us. Most important, I think, of all of the components of the winning campaign here was the Black clergy. They, they came down out of their pulpit, made each of their churches a veritable

political organization of itself and provided the real winning thrust, I believe, to the whole campaign effort of 1967.

00:38:25:00

Interviewer:

OK. Just very briefly, could you just talk about those local organizations, Afro Set, you began with organized labor, Afro Set, and the Black clergy. Could you talk about the, the local groups that came together in coalition to support the, the campaign in '67?

00:38:44:00

Carl Stokes:

The combination of forces here that were most responsible for my election in 1967 was first, the Black clergy, who had felt affronted by the way in which they had been treated by Mayor Locher and who almost unanimously, Baptist, Protestant and otherwise, combined to lead the campaign and virtually made each of their churches a, a political campaign committee of themselves. But they were joined by such liberal labor organizations such [phone rings] as the United Auto Wor—

00:39:16:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Stop camera one second. Sorry.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Carl Stokes:

See now, I know what time I had put them on hold.

[cut]

[camera roll #3048]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

00:39:22:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark nine.

[slate]

00:39:23:00

Interviewer:

OK. Briefly, could you talk about the local groups, local organizations that came together in coalition to support the '67 campaign for mayor?

00:39:34:00

Carl Stokes:

The primary group in the campaign effort were the Black clergymen of Cleveland, Baptist, Protestant and otherwise, who had suffered the indignities under Ralph Locher and were really the spearhead. They were joined by some of the liberal labor organization groups such as the United Auto Workers. Then we had very strong support from the NAACP and the Urban League, who at that time, were very strong organizations in Cleveland. Part of all of this was a continuous weekly support from the Black newspaper, the *Call & Post*, headed up by William O. Walker, their editor, and then of course, we had the Black Afro Set. And, and then such diverse groups as the Mothers Against, Mothers Against Muscular Dystrophy. I mean, groups that I had worked with over the years and street club organizations, all of these kinds of groups with the exception of the Democrat and/or Republican Party because the Republican party was engaged with my Republican opponent and the Democratic Party just was not participating in aiding and assisting me.

00:40:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. How did you get out the vote in the Black community? You, you knew the numbers but what did you have to do to, to get out that Black vote? And you can talk a little bit about the numbers that you know, you knew you needed to get in order to win.

00:41:00:00

Carl Stokes:

Well, we needed every, in 1967, we, we needed every Black vote that we could get and the targeted White votes. And we had another objective which was to not excite certain White areas that we knew, [phone rings] however many came from there.

00:41:16:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Can we just stop, one sec.

Carl Stokes:

How would they, if these things are on hold?

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:41:21:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark ten.

[slate]

00:41:24:00

Interviewer:

OK. You were talking about this three-part strategy of getting out the Black vote, selected targeted White communities and not exciting certain, the other elements of the White community. Once again, what was the strategy? What, what kind of, how were you trying to get the vote out? What were you, what, what was the strategy?

00:41:41:00

Carl Stokes:

What we had to do in '67 was to maximize the Black vote, to bring out targeted areas of liberal or moderate areas of the city and then thirdly, try not to excite the areas where we knew there were hostile anti-Black feelings so that they would not feel the need to boil out of their kitchen doors in order to go vote against Stokes. In relationship to the first two, relative to targeted areas of liberal or moderate Whites and Blacks, we utilized the churches primarily. The ministers were the most effective source. Each Sunday was devoted, part of their service was devoted to this campaign. On the Sunday before the Tuesday election, we had organized a city-wide movement for the churches of directions as to exhorting people that day and providing assistance people, for people to go to the polls on Tuesday. Each

church was given specific areas of the city to cover. Similarly, we were assisted by way of the clergy by a small group of White liberal ministers who were under a Protestant movement working on poverty matters here. They helped us in those moderate in—White income areas. The other thing that we avoided obviously, was anything of a hysterical nature going out over radio or television that would tend to excite any racial feelings in the White areas.

00:43:17:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. We have to cut for a second. I'm sorry.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:43:19:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:43:22:00

Interviewer:

When you, when you first ran in 1965, many of the Black political leaders, as I understand it, did not support you. Did that hurt you and did it hurt y—and did they come around in '67 and, and if not, did that, did that hurt you again?

00:43:37:00

Carl Stokes:

In 1965, there was not a single Black political elected leader who supported my campaign for mayor. Despite them, obviously, I came within just a hair's breadth of winning. Again, in 1967, when we launched our campaign, every Black elected official with the exception of one councilman by the name of James Bell supported Ralph Locher. When I defeated Ralph Locher in the May primary, I defeated every Black elected official in this city except Jimmy Bell. Their lack of involvement in my campaign went right up until September of that year when, with all of the furor from the Black community and total support of my candidacy

forced them for their own political survival, to join the campaign just about two and a half months before the General Election. But their participation as creatures of the party and harnessed by the, the party did not stop us in our electoral victory.

00:44:53:00

Interviewer:

Just one question that sort of follows up what you began before. Was this more than a race for mayor? Did you see this as, as an extension of the civil rights movement? And if you could just answer that.

00:45:05:00

Carl Stokes:

What I always understood as a participant in the civil rights movement myself was that once that we had gotten the laws, then we had to get into the, what I saw as the next process, which was the involvement in the implementation and the next step of participation in the American mainstream. And historically, I understood that to be the political process. And so, as a consequence, I came out of the civil rights movement combining that with the political movement and then took it, that first step that I saw as the next part of the evolutionary process for us. And obviously, I brought to the political process in which I was never supported by either political party, the civil rights movement and the involvement of people who were concerned about the, dealing with the problems of that day and not with the partisan political aspects of them.

00:46:06:00

Interviewer:

OK. Stop camera.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:46:13:00

Interviewer:

Was it, was it difficult to convince Black voters to vote for you that you were qualified?

00:46:19:00

Carl Stokes:

It is always difficult for a Black candidate to convince his people that he's qualified for a new venture in politics. Even though I had had the exuberant support of the Black community in running for the legislature, in 1965, we went through quite an educational process and had we been completely successful, we might have gotten that narrow vestige of Black support necessary to win then. But we did encounter that problem and we had to overcome it. And, in 1967, it demonstrated that Black people had—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Carl Stokes:

—been convinced of my ability, not just to get elected but also to do the job.

00:46:57:00

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:47:00:00

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