

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Louis Stokes

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Stokes, Louis, 1925-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes,
Dates:	February 7, 2007 and March 18, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005 and 2007
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:43:04).
Abstract:	U.S. congressman The Honorable Louis Stokes (1925 - 2015) was the first African American member of Congress from Ohio. During his thirty-year tenure, he served on a number of committees including Appropriations, Intelligence and Ethics. He was also a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus. Stokes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 7, 2007 and March 18, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_071
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Politician, attorney and civil rights champion Louis Stokes was born on February 23, 1925 in Cleveland, Ohio. Raised by his mother, Stokes graduated from Central High School in 1943 where he was a member of the track team, the school newspaper, and the Latin club.

Soon after graduation, Stokes was inducted into the United States Army and he served in World War II. After his discharge in 1946, Stokes enrolled in Case-Western Reserve University and in 1953, Stokes earned his doctor of laws degree from Cleveland Marshall Law School.

Starting his law career as the in-house attorney for Carmack Realty Company, in 1955 Stokes established the law practice of Minor, Stokes and Stokes. During his fourteen year law career, Stokes participated in three cases before the United States Supreme Court including the landmark case of *Terry v. Ohio*, a search and seizure case which he argued and is taught in every law school. Elected to the United States Congress in 1968, Stokes became the first African American congressman from Ohio. He served fifteen consecutive terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

A co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus in 1969, Stokes served on a number of congressional committees including Appropriations, Intelligence and Ethics. In 1976, Stokes chaired the House Select Committee on Assassinations where he conducted hearings on the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John F. Kennedy.

A recipient of many awards for his service to the community, Stokes retired from Congress in 1999 and worked as senior counsel at Squire, Sanders, and Dempsey and as a faculty member at Case-Western Reserve University. His brother, Carl, was the first black mayor of a major American city when he was elected mayor of Cleveland in 1967.

Stokes was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 7, 2007. Stokes passed away on August 18, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes was conducted by Larry Crowe and Racine Tucker-Hamilton on February 7, 2007 and March 18, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congressman The Honorable Louis Stokes (1925 - 2015) was the first African American member of Congress from Ohio. During his thirty-year tenure, he served on a number of committees including Appropriations, Intelligence and Ethics. He was also a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Stokes, Louis, 1925-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Tucker-Hamilton, Racine (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Stokes, Louis, 1925-2015--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Ohio

Occupations:

U.S. Congressman

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, February 7, 2007 and March 18, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_001_001, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes was born on February 23, 1925 in Cleveland, Ohio to Louise Stone Stokes and Charles Stokes. His mother was one of eleven children born to Fannie Brinson Stone and William Stone in Wrens, Georgia. As a young woman, Stokes' mother moved to Cleveland in search of domestic work. There, she met and married Stokes' father, who was employed as a laundry worker. When Stokes was three years old, his father died, leaving his mother to raise him and his younger brother, Carl Stokes, with the help of her mother. Stokes grew close to his maternal grandmother, who lived with the family and cooked breakfast each Sunday. Stokes began his education at Giddings Elementary School in Cleveland, and aspired to become a lawyer after reading about the U.S. Supreme Court's Scottsboro Boys case in the newspaper. His extracurricular activities included baseball, football and boxing. He also attended Boy Scout meetings at Cleveland's St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was raised in the Outhwaite Homes and attended Central High School. Upon graduating in 1943, he was unable to afford a college education, and trained as a salesman at Isadore Apisdorf's Outdoor Sportswear, Inc. Later that year, Stokes was drafted into World War II. After completing basic training at the Jefferson Barracks Military Post in Missouri, he was sent to Camp Stewart in Georgia, where he and his fellow black soldiers were charged with cleaning the white troops' barracks. Stokes refused to comply, and was punished for insubordination. After completing his U.S. military service in 1946, Stokes returned to Cleveland, where he enrolled at Western Reserve University, while working full time as a typist for the U.S. Department of the Treasury. He went on to attend the Cleveland-Marshall Law School, where he studied contract law under Professor Robert L. Lewis. Upon graduating in 1953, he joined Cleveland's Carmack Realty Company.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_001_003, TRT: 0:27:41 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes began his law career at the Carmack Realty Company in Cleveland, Ohio, where he focused on criminal defense cases. With his brother, Carl Stokes, Stokes founded the law firm of Stokes and Stokes, which was renamed Minor, Stokes and Stokes after Norman S. Minor, a respected trial lawyer, joined the firm. During the 1960s, Stokes became active with the Cleveland Branch NAACP, and served as the chairman of the NAACP Legal Redress Committee. He was tapped to represent John W. Terry and Richard Chilton in the case of Terry v. Ohio, and argued unsuccessfully before the U.S. Supreme Court that his clients were subject to an unlawful search. The case was decided in 1968, and set the precedent for the interpretation of the Fourth Amendment. Stokes went on to successfully challenge the gerrymandering of the Ohio's 21st District, and began receiving encouragement to run for the U.S. Congress. He also talks about his brother's election as the mayor of Cleveland in 1967.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_001_004,

TRT: 0:28:40 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes decided to run for the U.S. Congress with the encouragement of his brother, Carl Stokes; and wife, Jeanette Francis Stokes. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1968, and took the oath of office alongside Shirley Chisholm and William Clay, Sr. in 1969. Stokes was one of the founders of the Congressional Black Caucus, whose early membership included Charles Diggs and Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins. To bring attention to President Richard Nixon's refusal to meet with the caucus, the members boycotted his State of the Union address. They also advocated for the hiring of more minority employees in congressional offices, and established the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. Stokes served as the chairman of the caucus for two years; and, under the advisement of Congressman Ronald Dellums, urged the caucus members to seek seats on influential committees like those on appropriations, rules and ways and means.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_001_005,
TRT: 0:09:10 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes served as the chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations. On the advice of Congressman Parren J. Mitchell, III, he developed a group of experts from the health field to advise the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies. In 1976, Stokes became the chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, which was established to investigate the deaths of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The committee conducted its investigation over two years with a budget of \$6 million. They concluded that the murders were carried out by Lee Harvey Oswald and James Earl Ray, and that there was a possibility of conspiracy in both cases.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_006,
TRT: 0:28:36 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes was born on February 23, 1925 in Cleveland, Ohio to Louise Stone Tokes and Charles Stokes. His maternal great-grandfather was born a slave, and his descendants became sharecroppers after slavery ended. Stokes' mother spent her childhood picking cotton on her family's farm in Wrens, Georgia, where she was educated through the eighth grade. Stokes' father was born in Cordele, Georgia, and died of an infected appendix at the age of twenty-eight years old. After his death, Stokes' mother worked long hours as a domestic worker, and Stokes spent the majority of his time with his maternal grandmother, Fannie Brinson Stokes. Stokes' mother emphasized the importance of education, and encouraged Stokes and his younger brother, Carl Stokes, to earn their high school diplomas. When Stokes was fourteen years old, his mother moved the family to the majority-black Outhwaite Homes in Cleveland. Stokes also remembers his maternal cousin, musical artist Rick James.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_007,
TRT: 0:29:02 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes grew up in a poor household in the Outhwaite Homes housing project in Cleveland, Ohio. In his spare time, he learned to box, and played baseball and marbles with his brother, Carl Stokes. He also enjoyed listening to radio programs like 'Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy' and 'Amos 'n' Andy.' He delivered the Cleveland News and The Plain Dealer, and read African American newspapers like the Chicago Defender and Pittsburgh Courier, where he learned about southern racism. From an early age, Stokes aspired to become a trial lawyer, although there were few African American

attorneys in his community at the time. He began his education at Cleveland's Giddings Elementary School, and then attended Central High School, where his teachers encouraged him to pursue his education. Stokes excelled in his history and English classes, and competed on the track team, while also working part time as a porter at Outdoor Sportswear, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_008, TRT: 0:28:48 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes worked part time at Outdoor Sportswear, Inc. while attending Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio. The store owner, Isadore Apisdorf, began training him as a salesman, and Stokes developed an aspiration to open a haberdashery. However, upon graduating from Central High School in 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. military. He completed basic training at the Jefferson Barracks Military Post in Missouri, and was stationed at a U.S. Air Force base in Georgia. There, Stokes led his fellow African American soldiers in protest after they were assigned to clean the white soldiers' barracks. He was later arrested and reprimanded for insubordination. After completing his military duty, Stokes enrolled at Cleveland's Western Reserve University, where his education was funded through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. After two years, he transferred to the Cleveland-Marshall Law School. He also remembers Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s effort to desegregate the U.S. military.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_009, TRT: 0:28:47 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes attended the Cleveland-Marshall Law School in Cleveland, Ohio, while also working full time as a typist at the U.S. Department of the Treasury and as a file clerk at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Upon graduating, Stokes represented John Carmack of Cleveland's Carmack Realty Company, and built his reputation as a defense lawyer. Around this time, Stokes met Norman S. Minor, who was a prominent African American criminal lawyer in Cleveland. Together with Stokes' brother, Carl Stokes, they founded the law firm of Minor, Stokes and Stokes in 1955. Stokes became involved with the NAACP Legal Redress Committee, and worked with lawyer Robert L. Carter and civil rights activist Daisy Craggett to desegregate Cleveland's public education system, which had relegated black students to severely overcrowded schools on the east side of the city. Stokes also remembers Cleveland Judge Jean Murrell Capers, and the Cleveland riots of 1965.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_010, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes served as the vice president of the Cleveland Branch NAACP in 1965, and the vice chairman of the Ohio State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. He was also chairman of the NAACP Legal Redress Committee; and, in this capacity, brought the case of *Terry v. Ohio* before the Ohio Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court. The court ruled in favor of the State of Ohio, and set the precedent for police departments' stop and frisk policies. In 1968, Stokes' brother, Carl Stokes, became the first African American mayor of Cleveland, Ohio. Three years later, Stokes was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he chaired the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on V.A., HUD, and Independent Agencies; as well as the U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He was also appointed by Speaker Jim Wright to investigate the Iran-Contra Affair.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_011,
TRT: 0:30:43 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes' brother, Carl Stokes, served as the mayor of Cleveland, Ohio from 1968 to 1971. During his tenure, he supported the Clean Water Act of 1972, which helped restore the polluted Cuyahoga River; created the Cleveland Now! program; and became the target of criticism during the Glenville riots of 1968, when black nationalist Fred Ahmed Evans killed three police officers. In the 1970s, Stokes became a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus alongside John Conyers, Jr., Shirley Chisholm, William Clay, Sr., Charles B. Rangel, Ronald Dellums and Reverend Walter Fauntroy; and went on to serve as the organization's chairman. In response to President Richard Nixon's refusal to meet with the African American U.S. Congress members, Stokes led the caucus in a boycott of the president's State of the Union address. Afterward, President Nixon contacted the group to discuss their concerns. Stokes also remembers Senator Edward Brooke, and the 1972 National Black Political Convention.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_012,
TRT: 0:29:56 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes served in the U.S. House of Representatives for thirty years. During this time, he was appointed to the House Un-American Activities Committee and the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, where he was the first black member. He also served as the chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and Committee on Assassinations. After stepping down from his congressional seat in 1999, Stokes joined the law offices of Squire Sanders and Dempsey. In 2001, the Louis Stokes Laboratories were named in his honor at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Stokes shares his views on the 1972 National Black Political Convention, the Vietnam War and the Iran-Contra Affair. He also talks about his mother, Louise Stone Stokes; and the career of his brother, Carl Stokes, after his mayoral tenure. Stokes concludes this part of the interview by describing his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Louis Stokes, Section A2005_071_002_013,
TRT: 0:12:19 ?

The Honorable Louis Stokes reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He also describes his family, including his wife, Jeanette Francis Stokes; and children, library director Shelley Stokes Hammond, Judge Angela Stokes, television journalist Chuck Stokes and news anchor Lori Stokes.