One of the most important aspects in the Black Power movement of the 1960s was politics. African Americans believed that if they exercised their right to vote and used black political power and elected candidates, especially black candidates, who were responsive to their needs, then they could begin to solve some of the problems that affected their communities. There was a historical precedent for such a belief; African Americans had witnessed for decades how white ethnic groups in American cities had used politics to advance the interests of their groups to obtain city services and to gain access to jobs in public service organizations such as the police and fire departments. Indeed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this was the “American way” for the Irish, Italians, Jews, and other European ethnic groups to make their way into the mainstream of American society. These ethnic groups dominated city jobs and literally blocked access to them by African Americans. In addition, they used their power, particularly in the police profession, to maintain the racial status quo in American cities and to subject African Americans to differential law enforcement, police brutality, and outright racist treatment.¹

The emergence of Black Power in politics in American cities in the 1960s and 1970s changed the relationship that African Americans had had traditionally with local city governments, and especially with urban police departments. White politicians needed black votes. White politicians, who were facing the decline of white majorities in major urban areas such as Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, had to give lip service to equal access for African Americans to city jobs and especially for fairer and less hostile law enforcement in
African-American communities. Nevertheless, the emergence of Black Power in urban politics demanded black representation in city government, and more specifically, black control of the agencies and institutions that had traditionally limited their access to city government. One of the most important city services that African Americans wanted to control was the police department. As we will see, when African Americans used black political power to elect the first African-American mayors in Cleveland and Atlanta, Carl B. Stokes and Maynard H. Jackson, respectively, both sought to use Black Power to reform the police departments in their cities. After he won election as the nation’s first African-American, big city mayor in Cleveland in 1967, Carl Stokes immediately sought to control the police department. His objectives for controlling police administration in Cleveland were simple: he wanted the police to do their jobs by enforcing the law in the city’s African-American communities the same way that they did in white communities; he wanted African Americans to have access to jobs in the police department; and he wanted to end the police brutality that African-American citizens had historically faced from the city’s predominantly white police department. While Stokes based his efforts to reform the Cleveland Police Department primarily on its historic, racist practices and policies against African Americans, he also had the 1966 Little Hoover Commission Report that recommended sweeping changes in police administration in Cleveland. The report showed that the department was not only inefficient in addressing the crime that plagued the city of Cleveland, but it also served as an entrenched political fiefdom for white ethnic groups who used police jobs for their own personal gain rather than to provide citizens police services. The department was also plagued by graft and corruption. Stokes felt that he had a dual mandate to reform the police department from the Little Hoover Commission Report as well as the black political power that had provided him the bulk of his political support in the 1967 election.
Upon assuming the office of mayor Stokes set out to find a public safety director and a police chief to implement the reforms that he planned for the police department. He was successful in finding a progressive public safety director who shared his vision and plans for police administration in Cleveland. He appointed one of his campaign advisors, Joseph McManamon, as public safety director. McManamon not only shared Stokes’s vision for reforming the police department on the basis of the Little Hoover Commission Report, he also was a former police officer and an attorney. While his choice of McManamon was successful, he did not have similar success in selecting a police chief. Between 1967 and 1970, he appointed three police chiefs before conceding that he was not going to be able to act on Black Power in the police department.4

Stokes was also forced to concede in his efforts to reform the police department because of three other incidents: the Glenville riot, the police promotional examination cheating scandal, and the debacle of hiring Lieutenant General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr, as public safety director. Each of these events and mistakes provided ammunition to his political enemies on the city council and in the media, squandered the black political power that made his election possible, and distracted from his efforts to build a power base for African Americans in Cleveland.

Stokes had served as mayor for less than a year when the Glenville riot occurred. On July 23, 1968, members of a black nationalist group led by Fred Ahmed Evans engaged in a shootout with Cleveland police officers that killed seven people, including three police officers, and wounded fifteen others. Although Stokes acted quickly to reduce the violence in the area and to prevent retaliation against African-American citizens by removing all white police officers and replacing them with African-American police officers and community volunteers, he was severely criticized by the media, the city council, and the Cleveland business community for
“interfering with the police function” and for having “surrendered to black revolutionaries.” In addition, his signature program, Cleveland Now!, a program to reduce blight, to revitalize inner-city neighborhoods, and to provide more housing for African-American citizens was severely undermined when an audit of the program found that Evans’s group had received $6,000 from the program. The Cleveland Now! program allocated the money to Evans’s group for salaries, but the inference was that the group used the money to buy the guns that killed the police officers. Whatever was the case, the Glenville riot and the public response to it (especially by whites) severely hampered Stokes’s efforts to reform the police department. As he stated in his autobiography, “The aftermath of that night was to haunt and color every aspect of my administration the next three years.”

Six months after the Glenville riot, Stokes faced another crisis directly related to his efforts to reform the police department. In January 1968, Stokes appointed three new members of the Cleveland Civil Service Commission and charged them with helping to recruit more African Americans for the police department. In 1968, only 165 African Americans served on a police force of 2,200 men and women. The new members of the Commission developed new entrance and promotional examinations for the police department. Under Stokes’s direction the Commission worked with the NAACP to recruit African-American applicants and to help them to prepare for the entrance examination. Despite opposition from the Cleveland Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) that the entrance examination “lowered standards” and the promotional examination was “unfair” because it examined police officers on material other than city ordinances and the Ohio Code, the Commission administered the tests in October and December 1968. Less than fifty percent of the applicants passed the entrance examination. But irregularities emerged when the promotional examination was administered because several
police officers had purchased copies of it and distributed it. A Grand Jury investigation found that two of the members of the Civil Service Commission appointed by Stokes, one black and one white, had leaked or sold the examination in advance. As a result, after a lawsuit filed by the FOP and the indictment of the Commission members who leaked and sold it in advance, the examination was thrown out. The media, the FOP, and the city council blamed Stokes for the scandal that resulted from the incident. It appeared that he had encouraged his appointees to the Civil Service Commission to cheat in order to integrate the police department and to reform it.\textsuperscript{7}

While the Glenville riot and the police examination cheating scandal further tarnished Stokes’s administration, his final effort to use black political power to reform the police department convinced him to give up the fight. Despite his problems, his mistakes, and his ongoing battle with the city council and the media, in November 1969 Stokes handily won re-election. He increased his share of the white vote from nineteen to twenty-three percent and won ninety-two percent of the African-American vote. He did not interpret his re-election as a mandate to continue his efforts to reform the police department. But he continued to believe that something had to be done to protect the lives of African-American citizens and to make members of the police department do their jobs. In January 1970, he tried a new solution: hiring Lieutenant General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. as public safety director to replace Joseph McManamon who was retiring. On the surface, Davis seemed to be an ideal choice. He was a career military officer; during World War II he had commanded the historic 99\textsuperscript{th} Pursuit Squadron (the Tuskegee Airmen); and he was African American. Plus, no one could accuse Davis of being “soft on crime” and willing to coddle criminals.\textsuperscript{8}

Once again Stokes’s efforts failed. Upon his arrival in Cleveland, Davis quickly aligned with the white members and reactionary leaders of the police department. He supported a brutal
and unprovoked police raid on the offices of the Black Panther Party. He authorized the purchase of extra lethal dum dum bullets and a tank for the police department. He refused to provide police protection for African-American students who were attempting to integrate a previously all-white high school on Cleveland’s West Side, stating that he did not want his officers involved in “political disputes.” Stokes had to order him to assign police officers to protect the students and to supervise them himself. Finally, after less than six months he abruptly resigned from the position and publicly accused Stokes of supporting the “enemies of law enforcement.”

According to Davis, Stokes did not support his efforts to enforce laws against demonstrators and other critics of his policies. In order to answer the charges, Stokes published Davis’s “enemies list” to show that he was a right wing reactionary who did not believe that dissenters or those who disagreed with him should have freedom of speech, freedom of the press and assembly, and any of the rights guaranteed to all Americans by the Bill of Rights.  

After three tumultuous years of attempting to reform the police department, Stokes resigned himself to the status quo. His efforts to realize and turn black political power into fair and authoritative law enforcement for African Americans and equal access to police jobs for them had failed. His experiences with the police department (as well as in other areas such as equal access to housing) demonstrated the limits of Black Power in American politics. Whereas other ethnic groups had used their political power to take advantage of city services and jobs, white racism still limited African-American access to power, public services, and jobs in Cleveland. After Stokes decided not to run for a third term as mayor in 1971, the Shield Club, Cleveland’s black police association, began to challenge the police department in an effort to pursue equality in employment and promotions and to reform its treatment of African-American citizens. The Shield Club filed several lawsuits to challenge the ongoing discrimination and lack
of access to jobs and promotions that its members faced in the police department. Five years after Stokes left office, only 190 African Americans served on a police force of 2,119 officers. They were less than ten percent of the police force, but forty percent of Cleveland’s population.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1973, when Maynard H. Jackson won election as the mayor of Atlanta, he was the nation’s first African-American mayor in a major southern city. Like Carl Stokes in Cleveland, he faced the same opposition to his efforts to control police administration in his city. Unlike Stokes, who had served as the mayor of a city that was only thirty-nine percent African American, Jackson served as mayor of a city in which African Americans were the clear majority. From his first year in office Jackson was determined to act on the Black Power that Atlanta’s black majority had given him. Just as in Cleveland, however, the media, the city’s business community, and the entrenched white members of the police department were determined to maintain the racial status quo.

Opposition to Jackson’s Black Power agenda emerged immediately. Upon taking office Jackson implemented affirmative action programs to provide African-American businesses access to city contracts and procurement services. The white business community that had traditionally dominated and received all but less than one percent of the city’s contract and procurement expenditures balked at Jackson’s efforts and called them “reverse discrimination.” When he began the plans to build Atlanta’s new international airport he upset the city’s business community in two ways: he decided to locate the airport in the southwestern part of the city near Atlanta’s African-American neighborhoods and he mandated that African-American vendors, businesses, and entrepreneurs share in the concessions that the airport would generate. Despite the attacks on and criticism of his deliberate efforts to empower African Americans and to include them in the financial development that city’s contracts and procurement services
generated, Jackson continued his efforts to exercise the Black Power that his African-American constituents demanded.\textsuperscript{11}

Even before he became mayor of Atlanta Jackson had plans to reform the police department and to make it responsive to and respectful of Atlanta’s African-American majority. One month after his election, he proposed an “Office of Police Ombudsman” to investigate police brutality. This was an unprecedented proposal to provide civilian oversight over the Atlanta Police Department.\textsuperscript{12} But his biggest decision was to fire John Inman, the police chief who he had inherited from the administration of the previous mayor Sam Massell. During the course of his tenure as chief under Massell, Inman had provoked the ire of African Americans in Atlanta by running the police department as if it was his own private fiefdom and with little regard for the safety and protection of African-American citizens. He had refused to investigate cases of police shootings and brutality against African-American citizens. In the year before Jackson won election as mayor, African-American members of the Atlanta city council called on Mayor Sam Massell to fire Inman for his insensitivity to African-American citizens and for his retaliation against African-American police officers in the Afro-American Police League who criticized him for the racism that he tolerated in the police department. To support his policies and as a show of force against his critics, 300 white police officers armed themselves and formed a barricade around Inman’s office to show the city council and Inman’s critics that they would not allow him to be removed from office.\textsuperscript{13}

After taking office, in May 1974 Jackson tried to fire Inman. But Inman refused to step down as chief; he had an eight-year contract that Mayor Sam Massell had given him in 1972. Although Jackson tried to void Inman’s contract, Inman fought back and obtained an injunction to prevent Jackson from voiding his contract and firing him as chief of police.\textsuperscript{14}
Unlike Carl Stokes, who had been virtually powerless in his efforts to reform the Cleveland Police Department, Jackson had a new charter that African-American members of the city council and he had helped to adopt. The new city charter gave him the power to reorganize the entire city government, including the police department. After losing his first effort to fire Inman in the court, he used the power of the new city charter to create a “super chief” who supervised Inman and who managed all of the police department’s internal operations. Inman fought against his demotion as chief by filing another lawsuit, but the Georgia Supreme Court ruled in the city’s and in Jackson’s favor and upheld his plan to reorganize the police department. Under Jackson’s reorganization of the police department, Inman became just a figurehead. A new director of public safety served as the super chief for all police, fire, and public safety services in Atlanta.15

Jackson appointed A. Reginald Eaves, a classmate from Morehouse College, as Atlanta’s new “superchief.” The appointment shocked the media and business community in Atlanta and Jackson was accused of “cronyism” for appointing a personal friend to the position. Moreover, the Atlanta media and Jackson’s critics questioned Eaves’s qualifications for the job and accused Jackson of sacrificing the safety and protection of Atlanta citizens from crime just to gain control of the police department. To his critics, Jackson appointed Eaves as a political ploy to solidify Black Power in Atlanta.16

Whatever his rationale, Jackson’s appointment of Eaves accomplished the desired results. Eaves took the required and obligatory tough stance against crime. During his three years as public safety commissioner he also gained control of the rogue police officers in the department by firing those who abused and brutalized African-American citizens. He reorganized the police department into the Bureau of Police Services and he demoted those officers who had served
under Inman and who tolerated brutality and the abuse of African-American citizens. He promoted and elevated those officers who supported his efforts to reform the police department. Most importantly, he began to integrate the ranks of the Atlanta Bureau of Police Services. When Eaves took command, less than twenty percent of the department was African American. By the time that he resigned in 1978 the percentage had risen to thirty-five percent. But the most important area of African-American progress in the Bureau was in promotions. Eaves promoted African Americans to every level of administration in the Bureau so that they were a substantial number and percentage of the sergeants, lieutenants, captains, majors, and deputy directors. Eaves successfully carried out Jackson’s mandates in the Bureau of Police and he made it reflect and represent the people that it was supposed to serve. He stated that he wanted as many “black police administrators as possible making decisions about black lives” in Atlanta. African Americans in Atlanta began to believe that the Bureau of Police Services was their friend and on their side.17

The struggle for Black Power in police administration in Cleveland and Atlanta had long range and lasting effects. The struggles of Carl Stokes and Maynard Jackson to control police administration shaped how each city addressed police community relations and the receptiveness of each city to the integration of African Americans and women into their police departments for the decades that followed. Cleveland, for example, continued to limit and fight the access of African Americans to police jobs, resulting in ongoing strife between African Americans and the police department.18 In Atlanta, by contrast, African-American leaders of the Bureau of Police Services developed innovative community policing programs and it became one of the most integrated police departments in the country. Even after Eaves’s departure due to a police examination cheating scandal, similar to the one in Cleveland during the Carl Stokes
administration, African Americans continued to dominate police administration in the city and to make the Bureau of Police Services one of the most progressive police departments in the country.¹⁹

Notes


³ Carl B. Stokes, Promises of Power: Then and Now (Cleveland: Friends of Carl B. Stokes, 1989); Cleveland Little Hoover Commission, The Eastman Report on Police, City of Cleveland, Project #6, George Eastman, Analyst; Carter Kissell, Chairman (Cleveland, 1967), 110 pages. The Little Hoover Commission Report made recommendations that included putting more police officers on street patrol and reducing the number who had desk jobs; eliminating the job of “police chief” because it created a barrier between the department and the civilian administration of the public safety director and the mayor; and increasing the amount of training time for new police recruits. Ironically, the report did not recommend recruiting more African-American police officers to improve the department’s relationship with the black community.


⁶ Masotti and Corsi.

⁷ Stokes; Moore.

⁸ Stokes; Moore.


12 “‘Watchdog’ on Police Proposal,” Atlanta Inquirer, 29 December 1973, clipping file, Samuel W. Williams Collection, Atlanta Public Library


