

Lou Stokes (D/OH), Cleveland, April 25, 1998

Book #1

- Luke Davis (driver), Jackie _____ (staffer).
- I flew into Cleveland on Friday evening, stayed at Beechwood Marriott. Took cab to his office in Shaker Heights. Jackie _____ was there.
- His office is not a typical congressman's district office. It's like a doctor's office. You enter a small waiting room with open closet and six chairs. The room is about 6' wide and 13' long. At the end, away from the door, is a window 3' x 3' with a glass front. It's raised 4" from the bottom with a little bell-for-service on the lip. It is off-putting and cold and official. Presumably, you ring the bell for service.
- The walls have about ten pictures of various sorts: Lou and others, some pictures from the newspaper of Lou at the LS summer arts festival and LS wing of library ceremonies. There's one with Clinton, one LBJ, one Mandela. There are two framed copies of bills with president's signatures at bottom and a pen - one is Voting Rights extension (R. Reagan), and one is passage of Interior Appropriations Bill (Carter). There's a complimentary Sabrina Eaton article in plastic after Republican take-over 9/20/95.
- There's a small table and on it are three or four handouts - notice of a Louis Stokes Job Fair in May, pamphlet on disabled blind, a sheet on where veterans can call, and an art gallery brochure. There's nothing congressional, like a newsletter, or anything with the congressman's name on it, except the job fair. Not the usual congressional documents.
- There's one door that leads obviously into the bank of office rooms. But you have to get a buzzer to get through the door. You can't just walk in. You have to be buzzed in, like a bank vault.
- As it turned out, I sat there for an hour-and-a-half. You couldn't hear what was going on anywhere in the office-eerily quiet in contrast to the normal buzz. The staffer, Jackie, sat behind the window, spoke not a word to me and spoke in hushed tones into the phone as if everything were a secret. (She was the only staffer there - but Lou was there.)
- One net impression was that the office was not the office of

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a congressman. It was the office of a dignitary. That is, he is more than a congressman. He's there to serve, but he serves from a station that is a bit above the people he serves.

- Here's the way it went: I got there 15 minutes early at 8:45. He came in and greeted me cordially, "Dick Fenno, it's good to see you again. It's been a long time. You haven't changed," etc., etc.
- Then, "Rochelle didn't give you a very good day. Most of it is right here in the office. Jackie, did you give Professor Fenno a copy of the schedule? (No.) Would you give him one." She does and I look at it. He's right. Nothing at night, as I had assumed. Two events were outside the office. Several office calls. He waves his hand up and down my schedule, apologizing as if he doesn't know quite what to do with me. "These are private meetings," he says of the first two. "You can go away and come back if you wish." I say no. "I'll stay here and stay loose." As he waves his hands up and down the schedule, I say two or three times, "If we can talk, that will be just fine." And he says, "we can do that," pointing here and there to the schedule.
- Then he goes into the inner sanctum, followed by his driver. (Luke Davis, a policeman detailed to Mayor White and moonlighting. "I interviewed and got the job," he tells me later.)
- Then, all is quiet for a long hour and 20 minutes. No one comes in or out - (except Luke goes out and gets a morning paper.) I do a lot of speculating. Is he avoiding me, hiding, maybe losing it in old age?
- At 10:20 he came out and says, "It's confusing. My 9:00 appointment thought it was at 11:00, my 10:00 hasn't shown up. But it's given me a chance to make phone calls. We'll leave at 11:20 (to go to the one real event of the day - a flag raising downtown). So it looks like I'll wait another hour.
- But after 15 minutes or so, he comes out and we leave.
- We drive to the African-American museum, then we go to flag ceremony. Then he takes me to lunch at the Omni Hotel, then we stop by his house, then we go back to the office. He says, "What do you want to do?" I say, "I'd like twenty minutes when you've finished your office visits." He says fine, asks Jackie to "give Dick a place where he can work." She does

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(her office). I do my notes and after three hours, I get my twenty minutes. Luke and Lou drive me to the hotel. It is 6:30.

- I did get a lot of questions in the car and at lunch. But when I get my "end of the day" twenty minutes, he is tired.
- It wasn't ideal, but it was better than the same amount of conversation in DC. "The district" does produce different questions.
- I decided to come home Sunday. That night, he has a celebration at his church. Arnold Pinkney Is MC. But it was too much hanging around with no prospect of contact.
- Is district easy to represent? Yes, because it is all in black and white terms. The constituency he sees is black. I read him my stuff on no trouble voting, etc. freedom, etc. and he said just what he said in 1970-71. "I know what black people want. We all want the same things. Once I proved to them that I would stand up and fight for the things we wanted, they had faith in me, they trusted me. I'm the repository of their trust. As far as voting is concerned, I have complete freedom. They support everything I do. Even if there are only eight votes on our side, my constituents know that I'm doing what's right. They don't question me or ask me to explain. I can take the strongest liberal positions and they will support me. Take the anti-crime bill. It was outrageous in the way it affected minorities. There were only 12 of us on one vote. But I can do that without worrying. It's a matter of trust." A black congressman can't imagine that his/her black constituents would think that they weren't representing them, i.e., fighting, standing up. The common interests are self-evident. *and my account brand, basic*
- What is trust? "It's them saying, 'We have a very tough time in this world. We need someone to stand up and fight for us. And you're the guy.'"
- In Bianco's terms, the uniform, unshakable assumption is that they share a common interest on all matters. The idea of constituency constraints just isn't relevant.
- He also mentioned abortion. "On abortion, I can take the most extreme liberal position, and my constituents won't say a thing. I know that there are black people in the churches that disagree with me on late-term abortion, but they don't criticize me because they know that I'm helping them on

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everything else. For the white community, I get complaints, but that doesn't bother me. I tried some town meetings there, and I told it like it is straight-out. After it had gone on for awhile, it got kooky. Finally I said, 'You've had your meeting. That's it.'"

- I asked about 1992 redistricting. "They changed the ratio from 65-35 to 60-40. It became a very different district. I picked up 13 or 14 suburban areas - Shaker Heights, University Heights, Cleveland Heights, Highland Heights, West Herhn(?) Heights, Maple Heights, South Euclid - then he began to fuzz 80 and 90 redistrictings and said, "it's all in the record."
- I read him my Euclid quote: "They redistricted me twice. The first time they gave me one ward in Euclid and two precincts that I could live with. Because of the out-migration of Euclid, and they were mostly black. The next time, they gave me the rest that was substantially white. But it's not like it used to be. Because of the out-migration from the city, there are a considerable number of blacks throughout Euclid. In addition, I have made more and more in-roads into acceptance in the white community. They have begun to understand and to speak out vocally that I give them service. They have comprehended that no matter how I vote, I bring money into the district. When they see that I've brought money into their part of the district, I get acceptance plus voting support.
Carl
- Re Caucus: "I founded an additional political organization in addition to the Caucus, BEDCO is the acronym - Black Elected Democrats of Cleveland Organization. It consists of all the elected black Democrats of Cleveland - the school board, state representatives, state senate - 22 of them. They aren't from the suburbs unless some of their territory happens to include a bit of a ^{CD} suburb. It supplemented the Caucus in terms of political activity. The Caucus has some semi-political activity. But BEDCO is now the potent organization."
- Why the change? "Ms. Chapman got older. I kept her as Executive Director. It was all my doing. I didn't have time to be here and to keep up with infusion of younger people and to keep it viable. It was losing its potential power. The Caucus was me, period. Somehow or other, I had to pull the elected officials back together. It could only be done on a peer basis and only by me. I put it together and we began functioning together. The Caucus still has a grass roots membership. They still have the Labor Day picnic and its still the biggest thing in town. They had a party for

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disadvantaged children recently - with 7,000 people."

- On the idea of him being a local leader, whether he wanted to or not - that he had to be involved in local politics and be leader. "For survival purposes, I couldn't stay out of local politics. Remember, I had people back here who wanted to take my place. If I had ignored the local scene, they would have become so strong that they would have become a threat to me. By staying involved, I was able to keep my place for 30 years."

I asked whether a "leader" shouldn't pick successor. "I had mixed feelings about that. It was my intention to endorse Stephanie Jones Tubbs as my successor because I thought she was the best qualified for the job. The other two came to me and asked me not to endorse anyone, that if I did, it would be over for them. I agreed not to. There were two conditions. I knew each of them had a following of some kind. I also knew Stephanie could beat either one of them. So why alienate people in either of their camps when I'm leaving Congress. She doesn't need me. I'd only be frosting on the cake and I'd leave that alienation. Also, I listened and gave consideration to the merit of their argument. Each one would say, 'If it hadn't been for Lou Stokes, I would have won. I didn't want Stephanie to go to Congress with that hanging over her. And I would have given credence to their explanation. But if I gave them their shot, then they'll know she beat them."

- Then he went into the story in the papers. Both the National and Cleveland AFL-CIO endorsed her and Stokes asked them to give her a fund-raiser. Someone finds out and tells it to Plain Dealer. Next day, there's a cartoon - LS is fishing in "muddy waters" with Tubbs name on his back. Then they do cheers and jeers and he get jeers.

- "In order to help these guys (AFL-CIO), I'm taking a beating around. By trying not to help her, I got a whipping." Seemed quite philosophical and not very regretful about it. He still maintains it's not an "endorsement."

- The request of the other two candidates indicates his power in district. And the fact that he goes into questions like this in detail, but not the general ones, tells me a lot about his local involvement. I got it right in Home Style.

- Re support of Plain Dealer: "Alex Machaskey came in as publisher about ten years ago. At that time, they only paid

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attention to me when they could write something negative. We met; and I lamented the situation to him, that Cleveland was missing out. I said that we were doing so much that was constructive for the community, that to be completely negative was a disservice to the community. He agreed - to a point - that we represented the city and that he would be fair. From that point, I noticed that the Washington Bureau began to cover us and not just look for negative things to report. While they still take shots at us whenever they can, overall they've done a better job. When I announced my retirement, they printed it on the front page for two days running. People couldn't believe the praise. It was as if I had died... It took them 30 years to realize what I had done." (The way I put it was that "they never knew what they had," he agreed and said what he said.)

- I asked him, are there any votes of yours in 30 years that I'd find interesting in relation to his constituency. "No, nothing exciting."
- Are there any elections since we talked that I might find interesting in terms of competition? He said of 1992, "You might want to look up that one."
- Re 1992, "After the redistricting, several white candidates jumped into the race. They thought the time had come for the white community to take back the 11th District - what with the larger proportion of whites and the blacks not as likely to be registered. There was the Mayor of Western Heights and a nasty councilman from Euclid and some others. When the black community realized I was under attack from the white part of the district, they rallied around me. Our vote dipped down into the 70's (chuckle). After that, we got it back up into the 80's. You might take a look at that one." The one where he "dipped into 70's" is the best he could do.
- So no interesting votes, no interesting elections since I was with him.
- On getting a piece of the pie, "The Mayor of Brooklyn, Ohio, John Coyne, held office longer than anyone in Ohio. When he wanted to become Cuyahoga County Chairman, he forged an alliance with me. In exchange for my support, he agreed to give me some of the things I had been working so long for. And with my support, he became Chairman. He gave me a spot on the Elections Board I had been trying to get. I gave it to Carl Character and then I appointed him to a judgeship on the Municipal Court. He opened up jobs at the Election Board. He

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gave me another first - the first black jury commissioner in Cuyahoa County. I got Stephanie Jones Tubbs as prosecutor - the first black woman. She took the place of _____ a nemesis of the black community. There were lots of gains. Now, the Chairman is Jimmy Dimora. He thinks its to his advantage to go against Lou Stokes cut off when we arrived at Central Middle School for flag raising.

- Comments on people:
 - **Fingerhut** - "he was a bright man, with a good education, articulate. He saw himself as a national figure and forgot his constituency. He was elected president of the freshman class or something and he wanted to be a national congressman immediately. He didn't understand he was sent up their to service his district." This was prompted a "Fingerhut for Senate" lawn sign. I asked Lou what he was running for - State Senate. So Eric's trying to get back.
 - **LaTourette** - "he's a decent man and smart. He knows enough to give labor some votes, so they aren't mad at him. And he will work with Democrats."
 - **Fattah** - "I think he'd be interesting to study. He had experience in the state legislature. He's bright. He does his own thing. He's done some things in education. I don't know what else. He keeps to himself." LS didn't know that CF wanted Appropriations. There's some sense that he's a little out of things.
 - Any regrets about going on Appropriations yourself? "Nooo way! It's the only committee to be on. All the rest is window dressing."
 - I asked about partisanship on the committee. "Historically and traditionally, it was bipartisan, but not anymore. Not since the Republicans."
 - Do you still get your share of what you want from the committee? "Yes, I've established rapport with the guys, that sort of thing. It would be worse if I were not a senior person. I've been the chairman of a subcommittee. I still get a lot - most of what I want. But if I were still chairman, I'd get more." What's interesting is that he never even hinted at friction between himself and Lewis - even though there was a history about it in CQ. I let it drop.
 - When I asked what was most satisfying to him after 30 years,

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there were two things: 1) "historic moments" and "historic precedents;" 2) "all the money I brought into the district." "I participated in a number of historic moments. I was chairman of the committee that investigated the assassination of two great Americans - John Kennedy and Martin Luther King. I'm the only person now alive who questioned James Earl Ray in public. I was the first black man to be Chairman of the Intelligence Committee. I was the first black man to chair the Ethics Committee. I did it once. I must have done a good job because I was called back to do it again a second time."

- Why all these positions. "My background in the law - constitutional law especially in the case of the assassinations. And secondly, people knew I wasn't afraid to stand up and tell it like I saw it." Then he went on to talk about local honors - wing of library, Stokes Boulevard. He showed me Stokes Boulevard - we rode on it. Nice. So, nationally, it was historic moment, locally it was recognition, both were first's.
- My second satisfaction is "all that money I brought into the district." Did anyone tote it up? "In the press they did. But not all of it. It's unbelievable."
- I asked him about the new young members of the Caucus. "I've noticed they have a different set of interests - peanuts and tobacco, stuff like that - that I know nothing about. I never studied farm issues." There's more diversity among blacks - Bishop ?
- Re Ohio delegation - does he get them (Democrats) together? "I used to get them together, but I sensed they don't want to be brought together. Oh, once in a while I might get them together when someone comes out there and wants to see everyone. But I leave 'em alone."
- Is Call and Post still important to you? "Yes. More people in the district read the Call and Post than the Plain Dealer. And I get a fairer shake there."
- Re W. O. Walker: "At his death, Carl and I were feuding with him. We had a falling out. Things were not the same. He was attacking us..." - cut off by something and never got back to it.
- Answers to questions at end of day in his office, when he was tired. Was founding of BEDCO connected with redistricting? "No. When Mike White was elected mayor, I thought it would be

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a good idea. He did not join, but he did not oppose it either. He said he was elected to be mayor of all the people. It was not a problem for me. I was happy to have everyone else." Did he think it was aimed at him? "No. He just said he didn't want to join." Very wary about this answer.

- On school referendum, I tried to see whether this was a case of "nobody moves till I do." It wasn't "I opposed it. I relied upon the school union. But they had no money. The mayor had money, put on a big campaign and he won." He treated this as fact and received no for it. Again, wary. White does not seem to be a Stokes' protegee.
- But he added as if to scotch any idea of rivalry with the mayor. "The media still refers to me as the most powerful black politician in Ohio. Mostly that means the Plain Dealer. That is the only paper that writes about me. But their correspondent in Columbus calls me that. I'm not in the Dayton paper or the Cincinnati Enquirer."
- Do you see self as representing all black people? "Yes, of course, because black people have the same problems everywhere. When I talk about AIDS and the exchange of needles, I'm talking about people everywhere, not just Cleveland." Not a philosophical matter, just a statement of "that's just the way it is."
- Do you do much talking outside Cleveland? "A lot less than I used to. When we gave up honorariums, there was a lot less incentive to get up and fly to Minnesota or Miami. Other members felt the same way and so the market dried up."
- Is it fair to say that no one or any group ever threatened your political leadership of the district? "I've had opposition (in this election). Otherwise, I can't think of any threat to my political leadership - not in the Caucus or in BEDCO." Shook his head several times almost as if it were a silly question.
- AFL-CIO relations. "The AFL-CIO has always supported me. But they have never given money to my campaign. My PAC money comes from the union in Washington - from the big boys. They know how much I mean to them."
- Black businessmen. "They are not well organized. When they meet, it's ad hoc. Someone will call them together for some specific project. They support me. But the only times I have anything to do with them is when I ask them for money."

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They'll do anything I ask them to do; but they aren't organized."

- * It is almost an axiom of his status that anyone will do "anything I ask them."
- Minister support. He agreed that it's still true that ministers and elected officials are key. And he has them both.
- Re ministers, "They don't always stick together. There's a minister running now to succeed me. But he doesn't have the support of very many others. Of course, he wouldn't be running if I was."
- Coming home more, or less? No change. "I've always come home three out of every four weeks, sometimes all four. This last recess was the first time I haven't come home to beat the district. But I'm not running. But here I am; I got on the phone last night, have been here all day and will go back Monday. I'll probably follow that pattern to the end."
- It's still hard to get him to talk about discrete parts of the district. I didn't keep asking him "where are we now." But I asked about Hough Opportunities Corp. He said its assets had been taken over by another organization, HADC. And he said that "there are some beautiful homes in Hough that weren't here in 1970. The district is much better off than it was then."
- But he didn't elaborate or take credit for anything till I pushed him. "The money and programs I've worked on have helped tremendously. People here have taken advantage of them."
- He said another group had also taken over the Glenville Neighborhood Council. But he didn't point with pride to specifics or detail the demography of the neighborhoods.
- When we left the African American museum, "It's a shame that a museum like this has to be struggling."
- He's had a bypass since I saw him - a couple of years ago. When I fished around to see if that had anything to do with his retirement, he said no. Had shortness of breath, found 70% blockage - said "let's do it." This came up when he said, "If this were 1970, I'd take you to have some soul food, but I can't eat it." So we had turkey.

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- I never did get him to open up on why he retired. He did note that he had a press conference two years ago to say that he wasn't going to retire.
- When I asked him what he thought greatest accomplishment of Congressional Black Caucus was, he was vague. "It grew and prospered and established itself as a force to be reckoned with in Congress."
- "Gingrich got rid of 13 white caucuses in order to get rid of one black caucus. He was out to get us. But we are going along just as we always have."
- I asked him about the bank overdrafts in the context of "nothing you did could hurt you." And he said, "we took a poll and we found there was some fall off. I held a press conference right away and explained that it wasn't a bank and that I had never seen a congressional paycheck in my life. That you deposited your pay check and wrote (**Book #2**) checks against it. If you went over, they paid it because they knew your next check was coming. That was the system - the way it was done. I think most people understood. But there was some fall off. I think we dropped into the 70's, but next time, we were back in the 80's."
- This was the worst thing that ever happened to him. It coincided with the redistricting, I think, so both combined were what knocked him into the 70's at the polls. (Check this.)
- Speaking of Appropriations, he said, "I was third on the Democratic side. And with Sid Yates retiring, if I had come back I would have been second, behind Dave Obey." Did the idea of becoming chairman make you think about staying on? "I thought about it for one minute. Dave Obey is a lot younger man than I am, so that didn't seem like a good argument."
- When we went to the African American museum, the woman who runs it said to Lou, "A friend of mine said that when she went to see you it was like a pilgrimage. So today is my pilgrimage." It was first time he had been there. Lou said afterward, "She has no idea what I do." But her attitude was an example of why the Plain Dealer in Sunday's editorial called him "the revered Louis Stokes. "Revered" and "pilgrimage" suggest something unique. He doesn't get slammed like others. He means so much to people who need so much.
"When I think about Carl Stokes + Lou Stokes, how reverent people are."

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*From Note
This is his
"pride"
had become
older
30 years*

It's the fat and happy who do the slamming.

- He said that he had visited RIT once "because there were reports of insensitivity to minority deaf students there. I found quite a bit of insensitivity. I think I got their attention."
- At noon we went to "my old high school" for a ceremony raising a flag flown over the Capitol. At the school entrance up on the steps there was a mike and half-a-dozen seats for dignitaries. On the left side facing the school, along the walk leading in, there were 25 middle school kids dressed up (one was white), but not all the same as "the choir." About forty to fifty parents and other kids stood on the other side. They celebrated an alliance between "Cleveland Midtown," a group of businesses and Central Middle School, to educate kids, find them jobs, fix up the schools (they were in midst of painting the inside, with businesses footing the bill and school volunteers doing the painting). A big banner for each hung over the school, over it was a Federal Works Project building, built in the 30's, had Roosevelt's name engraved next to the door and was Central High School in LS day.
- After the Cleveland Midtown and school principal spoke, Lou spoke briefly, but in a strong voice.
- "I remember (pointing) when I used to walk to school from my home down there ~~on 1421(?) K Street~~, in the projects. I came down this street to school, every day, for three years. I had to leave school everyday at 2:00 to go downtown to a shoe shine parlor to help my mother who was on welfare. And after a while, I got a job ^{at} an Army/Navy store, and I left everyday at 2:00. This school was very special to me. When I graduated from Central High School, I went into the service. And when I came back, I applied for admission to Western Reserve College. They looked at my transcript and they rejected me. They said my transcript showed that I might not be able to make it. I went to see my old principal at Central, P.M. Watson, and I showed him my transcript and he said, "That's an outrage. You graduated from Central and there's no reason you can't make it." He called the school and he made them take me into that school. Because he didn't believe that "I might not be able to make it," because he believed in me, I was able to become what I am. That is what Central means to me... Carl Stokes and Louis Stokes stood right where you are standing today. You are just as good as Carl Stokes and Louis Stokes. If Carl Stokes could become mayor, judge, ambassador, and if Louis Stokes could walk down

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that street from the projects and become a congressman, you can be whatever you want to be. You are as good as - probably better than Carl Stokes and Louis Stokes. You are special; and you can be anything you want to be."

- That's a different pitch than you get elsewhere - a role model - because the community is at a different stage, with a different history.
- *But it's a nice companion to Fattah's talk in the middle of the roped-off street. Everyone pushes education - but black politicians are role models to a special degree in the process. Are connections like Lou's talk the pre-conditions of representation?
- The first thing we talked about when we got in the car was about his office. I don't remember exactly what he said. But it was triggered by my comment, "they call you 'Shaker Heights Democrat Louis Stokes.'" He moved to Shaker Heights a couple of years ago and closed down his office downtown. Has one office. He liked everything about it. "Nicer neighborhood," "easier to get to for constituents," "staff likes it better," "no congestion."

back
to handwritten
text
"By presenting
himself etc."

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