



## Buddy James was a crusading Cleveland law director: news obituary

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**Grant Segall**

By

As Cleveland's law director, Buddy James sued utilities, passed an equal employment law, dodged gunfire and chased down a fleeing policeman.

He later chaired a federal tribunal and persuaded Congress to scrap it.

The outspoken James died Dec. 20 at Copper Ridge in Sykesville, Md., after a couple of years with Alzheimer's disease. He was 78.

"He was a good friend and a great lawyer," said former Congressman Louis Stokes, who urged his brother, Mayor Carl Stokes, to hire James. "He really idolized Carl. Whatever the mayor wanted, Buddy sought."

James started his career at Legal Aid of Cleveland. "He was the low man on the totem pole, but he was best lawyer we had," said Burt Griffin, James' boss back then, now a retired judge from the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas.

In 1968, The Plain Dealer wrote that colleagues considered James one of the nicest and hardest-working lawyers in town.

Known as Buddy from childhood, Clarence L. James, Jr. was the oldest child in a Los Angeles family. He set a state record in the high hurdles, started a popcorn stand at his high school and sold it for a hefty profit at graduation.

He went to Ohio State University on a track scholarship, but hurt his leg and gave up the sport. He joined the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and married a schoolmate, Patricia Ellen Douglas. Her father, Rodman Douglas, a pioneering black antitrust prosecutor in Cleveland, urged him to become a lawyer.

James spent six years as an investigator for Cuyahoga Common Pleas, went to Cleveland-Marshall College of Law at night, graduated in 1964 and joined Legal Aid. He ran its new West Side office, then became chief of its civil division and opened offices in other neighborhoods. He also co-chaired a national legal task force and



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moved from Cleveland to Shaker Heights.

In his autobiography, "Promises of Power," Carl Stokes wrote that he liked how fairly James, still at Legal Aid, told the courts about an inconsistent paternity claim against the mayor. In 1967, Stokes asked him to become the city's chief counsel.

As James later recalled, Stokes promised him a few days to think over the offer. Then, during a reception, the relentless Stokes shouted across a packed City Hall rotunda, "Buddy, you going to take that job?" James blurted an assent.

Two days after his swearing-in, Stokes proposed him for the suddenly vacant job of law director.

James didn't wait for cases to trickle in. He helped pass an equal-employment ordinance for city contractors. He sued utilities for alleged overcharges and expropriations of public lands. He wrangled with unions over layoffs and suburbs over water and sewage costs.

He lobbied nationally for consumer protections from misleading contracts. He opened the prosecutor's office around the clock to shorten stays in jail. He sold land to the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority for scattered-site homes.

James served as acting mayor during Stokes' absences. He also led the Cleveland-Marshall alumni association.

""James worked Glenville's streets during the riot there, dodging shots and preaching peace. He also commandeered a police car, jumped inside and helped chase down a fleeing officer accused of unjustified gunfire.

Looking back in 1996, he wrote in The Plain Dealer, "I played on an awesome stage.... I learned about power and how to use it to produce results for all the citizens.... The tide rose, and for the first time, it truly lifted all boats."

When Stokes left office in 1971, James practiced law privately in the Standard Building with several leading partners. Among other work, he negotiated teacher contracts for the Cleveland schools. He also invested in controversial properties in Columbus and Cleveland, including the Beehive Apartments on Lee Road, but was not among defendants in cases that resulted.

In 1976, James went back to California as deputy campaign manager for presidential candidate Jimmy Carter. Carter rewarded him with the \$58,000 chairmanship of the new Copyright Royalty Tribunal. James came to feel that a single employee could do all the panel's work. He lobbied to scrap this "blatant waste of money" and quit in 1981 before Congress complied.

James kept living in Silver Spring, Md., and joined Keefe Co., an international firm for public and

governmental relations in Washington, D.C. He later became the firm's president.

After 14 years at Keefe, he went of counsel to the law firm of Manatt Phelps and Phillips in D.C. In 1993, he began to chair his son's Douglas James Securities in Miami Beach. He lived part-time in Florida and won a contract to issue bonds to expand the Miami International Airport. He also formed a partnership with Cleveland's Forest City Capital Corp. for \$50 million worth of derivatives.

Late in life, James changed from Protestant to Catholic. He retired with Alzheimer's in 2010. His wife died last year.

**Clarence Lewis James. Jr.**

**1933-2012**

**Survivors:** Sons, Clarence III of Ellicott City, Md., and Craig Douglas of Miami Beach, Fla.; three granddaughters; two sisters and a brother.

**Memorial Service:** 1 p.m. on Jan. 28 at Mountain View Cemetery, Altadena, Calif.

**Contributions:** Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, Attn.: Buddy James and Patricia Douglas James Memorial Fund, 1223 W. Sixth St., Cleveland, OH 44113, lasclev.org.

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