

“You Can’t Legislate the Heart”: Minneapolis Mayor Charles Stenvig and the Politics of Law and Order

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In 1969, four-term Democratic-Farmer Labor (DFL) mayor and former University of Minnesota political science professor Arthur Naftalin declined to run for a fifth two-year term as the mayor of Minneapolis, leaving the contest open amid the social turbulence of the late 1960s. Naftalin was a close associate of former Minneapolis mayor Hubert H. Humphrey and a practitioner of Humphrey’s brand of liberalism. They believed that government’s role was to manage and coordinate different interest groups within society, such as business leaders, members of organized labor, and racial minorities, so that the city would function efficiently and social conflict could be avoided. By allocating money to various social programs, they believed urban problems such as crime and poverty could be solved.¹ In an unexpected move, Charles Stenvig, a 41-year-old detective in the Minneapolis police department and president of the police federation, threw his hat into the ring as an independent candidate for mayor. Running an unconventional campaign that spent little money and relied on volunteer labor, Stenvig won the 1969 election by pledging to “take the handcuffs off the police” and to crack down on “racial militants,” criminals, and student protesters.² Capturing 62 percent of the vote against a moderate Republican opponent, Stenvig shocked the city’s political establishment with his convincing victory. Running again as an independent in 1971, Stenvig defeated Harry Davis, Minneapolis’s first black mayoral candidate, receiving a remarkable 71 percent of the vote. After losing to DFL candidate Albert Hofstede in 1973, Stenvig

reclaimed the mayoralty for a final two-year term in 1975, only to lose a rubber match to Hofstede in 1977. By the end of the 1970s, Stenvig's political career was effectively over.

Stenvig was not alone as a law and order mayor in 1960s and 1970s urban America. As historian Michael Flamm argues, the crime issue moved from the national to the local level after the 1968 presidential election.³ In the wake of urban riots in Watts, Detroit, and Newark, conservative white politicians across the nation successfully attacked liberals for their permissive attitudes toward social protest. Conservatives also blamed liberal politicians for the increase in individual criminal acts that occurred in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, which conservatives argued reflected the fallacy behind liberals' approach to crime. In Los Angeles, Mayor Sam Yorty used the Watts' riot as a platform for a law and order campaign in the 1969 mayoral election. Philadelphia's Frank Rizzo followed Stenvig's move from the police force to city hall in 1971, despite allegations that as police commissioner Rizzo employed brutality and public humiliation as tactics against Philadelphia's black residents. The widespread success of law and order candidates in American cities in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s highlights the continuing politicization of crime at the local level well after the national turmoil of the late 1960s had died down.

In addition to highlighting the rise of law and order mayors in the 1960s and 1970s, this article focuses on how Stenvig successfully opposed liberalism's reliance on social scientific explanations to address issues such as crime. Stenvig's idiosyncratic brand of populism proved immensely popular with voters when compared to the technocratic expertise of the liberal politicians whom he



Figure 1: Minneapolis Mayor Charles Stenvig at a victory party. Image courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

challenged.⁴ Stenvig argued that technocratic solutions, and the sociological explanations they rested on, were an ineffective remedy for Minneapolis’s urban problems in the 1960s and 1970s. As a police officer only recently removed from the beat, Stenvig affirmed and embodied the unmediated, practical knowledge of the street and everyday experience. In his rhetoric, Stenvig attacked liberals’ wonkish attempts to apply theoretical knowledge to “real world” problems and dismissed the notion that politicians needed to rely on the expertise of academic professors, business leaders, and community activists to govern. This article demonstrates that the cultural resentments attributed to the backlash of the 1960s and 1970s were not solely motivated by racism and disgust with student protest, but also included anger toward liberal expertise. Within a national context, the success of Stenvig and other law and order mayors in urban America in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s adds an important dimension to developing literature on post-World War II conservatism. Adding these municipal histories to the narrative of the postwar New Right suggests the depth of grassroots disenchantment with liberalism, especially on crime, and highlights the multiple yet often compatible ideologies at work within conservatism during the late twentieth century.⁵

Stenvig’s Critique of Liberalism

As a candidate and mayor, Stenvig offered a powerful and popular critique of the liberal ideology that drove Minneapolis’s leaders throughout much of the mid-twentieth century. Bringing together politicians in city hall, social scientists at the University of Minnesota, and business leaders from the community, the city’s liberal leadership established a progressive legacy that imagined government as the technocratic management of the people, organizations, and resources that comprised society.⁶ Stenvig rejected this theory of governance, consistently emphasizing liberals’ seeming disdain for the knowledge and concerns of “average” citizens.

In Minneapolis, no one—except perhaps his mentor, Humphrey—exemplified the liberal ideology of governance better than Arthur Naftalin, Stenvig’s immediate predecessor as mayor. A former political scientist who moved easily between city hall and academia, Naftalin believed government’s role was to use social science and technology to shape the city and its population. Naftalin’s involvement in Minneapolis politics began in the early 1940s, when he coordinated Humphrey’s 1943 mayoral campaign while he was writing a dissertation on third-party politics, and was elected as a DFL mayor in 1961. After leaving the mayor’s office in 1969, Naftalin took a position with the School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.⁷ Historian Jennifer Delton describes Naftalin’s governing philosophy as an example of “political science in action,” which forged a close connection between the social sciences of the university and the leadership of city hall to govern through the lens of abstract, social scientific knowledge.⁸

Naftalin's connection with academia was a sharp contrast to Stenvig's open animosity toward higher education. Stenvig noted in a 1999 interview that he "hated school." Explaining why he nonetheless received a bachelor's degree from Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Stenvig explained, "my mother said one of us kids had to go to college, and I was it. So I got done in three years, got [out] of there fast."⁹ Much of Stenvig's support in the 1969 election came from voters without a college degree. According to one analysis, voters who attended college were far less likely to vote for Stenvig.¹⁰ As a supporter of Stenvig's sarcastically pointed out in a letter to the *Minneapolis Star* after his first victory, "Charles Stenvig did everything wrong. . . . He didn't have a lengthy background of education. . . . He was just a cop."¹¹ Stenvig reiterated his anti-intellectual credentials during the 1971 campaign, telling voters, "I'm no brain, I don't know everything, but I'll dig and I'll do my best for the city."¹²

For Stenvig, hard work and a willingness to listen to the concerns of Minneapolis residents trumped what he considered to be the abstract knowledge of social problems that emanated from the university. The academic community reciprocated in its dislike of Stenvig. In a letter to the president of the University of Minnesota, one student described "Mayer Stenvile" as someone "whom no intellectual could possibly respect," while a 1969 editorial in the *Minnesota Daily*, the university's daily newspaper, described Stenvig's victory as a triumph of "a shallow brand of law-and-order" over the "intelligent leadership of Arthur Naftalin."¹³ Stenvig's disdain for formal education and emphasis on real-world experience helped to break the close connection between the university and the mayor's office that was formed under the city's previous liberal mayors such as Humphrey and Naftalin.

In addition to maintaining a close connection between the mayor's office and the University of Minnesota, Naftalin's background in the social sciences led him to believe that government could ultimately function as a science, which, theoretically, could be perfected. This belief in the possibilities for rational and scientific governance of the city was evident in his long-range thinking about the possibilities of city government. Naftalin willingly outlined his programs to the press and openly theorized about how government could be improved through scientific reforms. Speculating in 1969 about the possibility of consolidating the fragmented governments in American metropolitan areas into singular, metropolitan-wide entities, Naftalin argued that with "proper computers," a single executive authority could easily—and rationally—control a widely-scattered metropolitan area. For Naftalin, a rational executive would have to make unpopular decisions based on his or her expert knowledge of what was best for the city. For example, Naftalin described himself as "an unflinching supporter of redevelopment, renewal, rehabilitation, and public housing," despite pressure from neighborhood groups that were "against redevelopment."¹⁴ Stenvig would exploit this seeming indifference to the concerns of average citizens by arguing that liberal leaders relied on abstract theories to make decisions that profoundly affected the lives of city residents.

Naftalin and other liberal mayors of the period relied on close collaboration with foundations, private businesses, and other existing sites of power—a group that Stenvig lumped together as the liberal establishment—to turn their ideas into action. Minneapolis’s liberal establishment operated by bringing together individuals and institutions and creating a concentration of expertise, authority, and financial resources that gave a select group the ability to act across a broad network of people, things, and ideas. Minneapolis was not unique in its informal alliances between municipal officeholders and business leaders. In his study of “regime politics,” Clarence Stone demonstrates how other cities such as Atlanta were run by “governing coalitions” that often brought together elected officials and business leaders to enact policies that could not be accomplished within the often limited scope of municipal power.¹⁵ In 1960s Minneapolis, the liberal establishment was composed of men (and the establishment was almost exclusively male) such as John Cowles, Jr., publisher of the city’s two major newspapers, and Donald Dayton, head of Dayton Corporation. In addition to their business holdings, both were members of influential organizations like the Minneapolis Urban Coalition and the National Alliance of Businessmen. The city’s liberal establishment used its unique authority and powerful business and social networks to make broad changes in the physical and social fabric of the city.

One of Stenvig’s main arguments against liberalism was that these few influential members of the establishment exerted undue influence and power in Minneapolis at the expense of so-called regular citizens. In his 1969 campaign, Stenvig harshly critiqued the well-known associations between elected leaders and the city’s business and academic elite, arguing that “the little people” were “simply tired of the Establishment.”¹⁶ Once elected, Stenvig specifically targeted Cowles and Dayton, claiming that both men had opposed his 1969 election and that their determination to bring about social equality at any cost had left them beholden to the demands of minority communities.¹⁷ At a basic level, Stenvig’s animosity toward liberalism was based on the concentration of power in the hands of a few elite leaders, who actively solicited the opinions of black community leaders and student protestors, even when they advocated militancy, in order to brandish their progressive images. Such an approach, in Stenvig’s opinion, amounted to coddling criminals.

Stenvig was perhaps nowhere more critical of the liberal establishment than in his criticism of the local press, which he accused of portraying him negatively because he did not fit their idea of an appropriate mayor with the proper qualifications. Throughout his tenure as mayor, Stenvig displayed open animosity toward Cowles and his newspapers. Upset by what he perceived as a “liberal bias” in the Minneapolis press, Stenvig eventually barred reporters from the mayor’s office. At a convention of the League of Women Voters of Minnesota, Stenvig told a supporter, “you know what Star spells backwards.” For its part, the *Minneapolis Star* argued that Stenvig’s disdain for the press demonstrated his failure to engage in public forums, campaign debates, and other venues

where “the electorate [would have] a chance to make a fair evaluation.”¹⁸ In a move that foreshadowed the later emergence of conservative alternative media venues, Stenvig turned to small right-wing newspapers to promote his message.¹⁹ Although Stenvig was hardly the first—or last—politician to accuse the press of negative or biased coverage, his critique of the local media fit within his broader dislike of liberalism’s concentration of authority and expertise in the hands of a few key figures.

In addition to his ideological criticism of the local press’s authority, Stenvig understood that condemning the press could be politically advantageous. Privately, Stenvig admitted that by emphasizing the local media’s disdain for him, he was able to assume the role of David combating the establishment’s Goliath. As he put it, “what they did was make me look like the little guy against a big giant killer.” Stenvig’s 1969 campaign manager, Milton Bix, argued, “the majority of the people in Minneapolis do not follow the editorial policy of the *Star* and *Tribune* . . . the people view the paper as a tool of the power interest in Minneapolis. The people wanted someone to represent them. A number of people told us they would have not voted for Stenvig had the paper not endorsed [Stenvig’s 1969 opponent] Dan Cohen.” Stenvig’s anti-establishment posturing extended to other aspects of his mayoral campaign as well. Although he could afford it, Stenvig decided not to purchase billboards for his campaign. As campaign aide Gordon Johnson (who later became Minneapolis’s police chief) noted, Cohen’s “billboards were picturing him in new suits and behind the big desk and placed him with the ‘Golden West,’” of the city’s wealthy southwestern neighborhoods and western suburbs. As another aide put it in contrast, “the people saw these expensive billboards and then they compared them with little Stenvig signs . . . we were the poor people’s candidate.”²⁰

The animosity between Stenvig and Minneapolis liberals was put in sharp relief during a violent student protest at the University of Minnesota in 1972. In May of that year, violence exploded on the University of Minnesota campus between Minneapolis police and students protesting the Vietnam War. The tear-gas shrouded melee on the campus mall was mirrored by a bureaucratic showdown between University of Minnesota administrators and Stenvig. Charged with overseeing a large urban public university, University of Minnesota leaders favored dialogue and reconciliation with student protesters, while Stenvig, elected three years earlier on his tough, law and order pledges, believed the protesters were acting as criminals and urged direct police action. Stenvig’s handling of the 1972 student protests was a telling example of how conservative politicians challenged the social scientific and technocratic expertise of liberal leaders such as university officials.

In May 1972, student protesters occupied and barricaded the main route through the University of Minnesota campus in response to President Richard Nixon’s decision to mine Haiphong harbor in North Vietnam. University officials requested police assistance and Minneapolis police “tactical squads” were soon on campus. As the confrontation between police and students escalated into a pitched

battle, university officials attempted to contact Stenvig and ask him to order the police to use restraint. Although the exact sequence of events during the protest is disputed, Stenvig apparently cut off all communication with the university during the peak of the crisis, and called the National Guard for reinforcement. The protests subsided when the police tear-gassed the protesters occupying Washington Avenue and the crowds gathering in the adjacent neighborhood of Dinkytown.²¹

In the aftermath of the student protests, university leaders created a commission to study the riot and to develop remedies that could prevent further violence. The resulting report, which was not completed until more than a year after the riots, ultimately accused the police of fermenting the violence during the protest: “we must respond that numbers of men and officers of the Minneapolis police performed in an abominable fashion.”²² The report also took a decidedly academic format that would not have been out of place in a sociology thesis on student dissent, including recommendations on academic literature that could further illuminate the causes of youthful discontent. After losing control of the university to both student protesters and police tactical squads during the May 1972 events, the commission and its largely theoretical recommendations were partly an attempt by university officials to reassert control over the school.

Tellingly, Stenvig refused to participate in the commission’s investigation altogether. The commission report described the “continuing frustration” of the “inability to secure testimony from the Minneapolis Police Department, or from Mayor Stenvig.”²³ Perhaps Stenvig felt he did not have to answer to the university given the broad public support for his handling of the protest. In a poll conducted by the *Minneapolis Tribune*, 78 percent of Twin Cities residents expressed approval for the police response to the protests at the university.²⁴ In a broader sense, Stenvig likely did not participate in the study because he never believed the riots should be an object for intellectual study and contemplation. In contrast to the bureaucratic and academic expertise illustrated in the commission report, Stenvig believed the cause of the riot—and thus the obvious response to it—was the decision by protesters to break the law and flaunt authority. During an earlier conflict between Minneapolis police and student protesters, Stenvig had expressed his opinion that student dissent was acceptable so long as it remained within the boundaries of the law. “It’s alright to be militant,” Stenvig argued, “just as long as you do it within the system.”²⁵ The stark difference in attitudes between University of Minnesota officials and Stenvig regarding student protest—with university leaders seeing the students’ behavior as a radicalized generation responding to an unpopular war and Stenvig believing they were individuals choosing to break the law—reveals the divide between the governing ideology of liberalism and Stenvig’s cognitive framework.

Stenvig's Governing Ideology

If Stenvig was clearly against the underlying ideology of liberalism and its deep-seated belief in complex explanations for social problems and strife, what philosophy of government did he offer as an alternative? Although Stenvig was hardly a political philosopher and his anti-intellectualism limited theorizing on his part, a careful reading of his public pronouncements and recommended actions suggest that in addition to his sharp criticism of liberalism, Stenvig developed a coherent governing ideology. Put simply, Stenvig imagined the city not as a complex society of various interest groups needing to be effectively managed—this was the vision of liberalism—but as a collection of individuals making moral choices about right and wrong according to conservatively interpreted Christian values, a political worldview that correlates with what sociologist Gerard Delanty has described as “conservative communitarianism.”²⁶ The mayor's role, as Stenvig saw it, was not to craft programs or alter the city's society, but to offer an example of moral leadership through his own actions and, when necessary, use government to create a framework in which individuals could make the “right” choice. Conversely, as his singular dedication to law and order reveals, Stenvig did not hesitate to govern through the police when Minneapolis residents acted illegally.

Responding to the many challenges facing the city in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Stenvig consistently offered the simple solution of encouraging people to make the right choices and sharply punishing those who chose the wrong path. On his first day in city hall, Stenvig told supporters, “In the past, we have had a lot of theory, flowery speeches, and news releases on how to solve the many problems confronting our city.” In contrast to these previous approaches, Stenvig urged “action” and argued, “My philosophy is simple. . . . I will not tolerate biased treatment toward any individual or group.”²⁷ From the beginning of his mayoral career, Stenvig rejected the idea that social groups within the city should be treated differently because of their divergent socioeconomic opportunities or past histories. Stenvig's governing philosophy was, ironically, accurately summarized by one of his critics, who noted in an editorial the simple and moralistic worldview animating Stenvig's politics. Facing “crime in the streets [and the] breakdown of the law and order,” Stenvig responded with “the golden rule.” The critic continued: “A weakening of the traditional moral fiber? Ban sex education. A sub-culture that challenges our basic value structure? Crack down on all those welfare freeloaders. Mandatory jail sentences for dope peddlers.”²⁸ Although the editorial criticized Stenvig's simple responses to what the author felt were complex societal problems, it nonetheless points out how Stenvig saw government as a moral authority that held the power to punish immoral or illegal choices.

In place of proactive governmental programs, Stenvig reasserted the importance of individuals making the right choices. After Cohen criticized Stenvig's proposal for tough law enforcement during the 1969 election and

suggested that human-relations programs were just as important as police on the street, Stenvig replied that his proposed human-relations program could “be summed up in one saying: the Golden Rule. If everyone followed this, we would take big steps forward.” Indeed, Stenvig likely believed government ultimately could do little to affect the moral choices of individuals, besides punishing those who broke the law. As he noted in the same context, “You can’t legislate the heart.”²⁹ Stenvig’s emphasis on independent decision-making carried over into the political realm, where his much-touted independence from political parties served to highlight his political worldview. In a newspaper interview, Stenvig expressed his opinion that Minnesota’s primary system, which forced voters to participate in either the DFL or Republican primaries, was contrary to democracy. “You can’t vote for who you want,” Stenvig argued, “I like to vote for the man.”³⁰ According to Stenvig, voters should decide based on the character and choices of an individual, not their participation in a larger group such as a political party.

Stenvig’s governing ideology was supplemented by his deeply held religious beliefs. In his public rhetoric, Stenvig talked openly about his Christian faith and suggested that it offered a model for running the city. In the aftermath of his surprising mayoral victory in 1969, Stenvig made his first appointment on the spot at a victory celebration, declaring, “My chief advisor is going to be God. . . . And don’t you forget it.”³¹ God was apparently re-appointed by Stenvig in 1971. After he was informed of his reelection that year, Stenvig told supporters, “I guess it was God’s will again. . . . He’ll be in my corner again, I hope. Like I say, thank you, God.”³² Stenvig’s claim that God would play an active role in city government was mocked by some commentators, but it reflected Stenvig’s underlying belief that government’s appropriate role was to enforce the boundary between righteous and profane behavior, and, in the process, reward those who made appropriate moral choices while punishing those who made poor decisions.

Voters elected Stenvig for his get-tough approach to crime in the city and his attitude toward crime and policing clearly demonstrates his underlying ideology of governance. In the realm of crime, Stenvig argued that his personal expertise was superior to the abstract and social scientific knowledge of the liberal establishment. Stenvig presented himself to voters as a politician with the firsthand experience necessary to deal with crime, precisely the type of on-the-ground knowledge that liberals supposedly lacked. Stenvig claimed to “know” the crime problem—and thus have the ability to solve it—not through the abstractions of sociology or criminology, but through his personal knowledge of criminals gained from years of working a beat. After attending a criminology conference in Great Britain, Stenvig criticized the academic approach to crime evident in the conference speeches: “Some of the conference people seemed to know all about the problem, in theory. The police have to deal with crime as a fact, not an abstract function.”³³ For Stenvig, crime was not an issue of social causes or theories, but a matter of individuals choosing to break the law. Thus, government’s appropriate function was to catch these criminals and punish them. From Stenvig’s perspective, the more liberal politicians sought out explanations

to criminal behavior, the more likely criminals were to seize on the excuses that liberal experts provided them.

Stenvig used the connection between police officers and on-the-ground knowledge of the crime problem to his political advantage. Stenvig's experience as a police officer "automatically made him a law and order candidate as the image was there for us," according to his campaign manager.³⁴ Rather than trying to frame Stenvig as an experienced politician, which his campaign could have accomplished by emphasizing his leadership of the police federation, they highlighted instead that he was an ordinary officer. The association between Stenvig and the police force was so strong that during the 1971 election, his black opponent Harry Davis was asked by an elderly white woman, "How are you going to protect us if you're not in charge of the police?"³⁵ Acting as mayor, Stenvig translated his personal knowledge of criminals—and his presumed knowledge of how to rein them in—into a promise to let the police do their work free from oversight boards or political compromises. Stenvig vocally promised to not allow "any civilian review board of police as long as I'm mayor," directly confronting the city council's efforts to establish a commission that would oversee alleged discrimination cases and incidents of police brutality.³⁶ Again, Stenvig used his on-the-ground expertise as a former police officer to support his ideology of crime as a matter of individual choice that should be punished by harsh police action.

When Stenvig did advocate active government involvement in shaping city life, it was often in the name of creating a framework to steer individuals away from decisions and activities that he believed threatened the moral vitality of the community. Thus, at several points during his career Stenvig tried to censor what he believed were immoral publications. During his first administration, Stenvig put public pressure on the Minneapolis public library to remove the publications *Rolling Stone*, *Black Panther*, and *New Left Notes*, since they advocated drug use, disrespect for authority figures, and violence against the police.³⁷ As the alleged threat of black and student militancy declined and the corresponding need for a crackdown on radical protest lost urgency in the mid-1970s, Stenvig focused more on what he called decency issues. In 1975, when Stenvig sought to revenge his loss to Albert Hofstede, he sent a letter to ten thousand Minneapolis churchgoers accusing then-Mayor Hofstede of "being soft on pornography." As Stenvig explicitly stated, "This is a special appeal to Christian people to help me rid the city of the filth we've got—increased dirty movies and increased dirty bookstores. The present mayor hasn't said 'Boo' about it."³⁸ While he was back in the mayor's office in 1977, a judge filed a contempt of court order against Stenvig after he personally ordered the arrest of an adult bookstore clerk, which violated an injunction that prohibited arrests on obscenity charges.³⁹ Banning these materials was an appropriate use of government, in Stenvig's eyes, because it prevented the temptation that could lead to immoral or illegal choices by citizens.

Stenvig was also hostile to the gay rights movement that emerged in Minneapolis during his time as mayor. During his final administration, Stenvig

was a vocal critic of the city’s Gay Pride Day amendment, which legislated a day recognizing and celebrating Minneapolis’s gay community. He repeatedly held up the amendment (passed during the two years when he was out of office) as an example of Hofstede’s leniency regarding “moral values” and tried to force the council into revoking it. In 1977, his wife Audrey Stenvig ran for a seat on the Minneapolis school board at the same time that Charles was running for the mayor’s office. In her campaign, Audrey promised to prevent “admitted homosexuals” from working as teachers in the public school system and Charles supported the proposal, saying, “I am running for the school board through my wife.”⁴⁰ In a broader sense, Stenvig seemed to reject the very idea that homosexuals represented a distinct social interest group within the city. Describing his response to the demands of Minneapolis’s gay and lesbian community in the 1970s, Stenvig claimed, “I knew several of the gay leaders . . . and I told them if they wanted to be treated like everyone else, just obey the law like everyone else.”⁴¹ This claim, however, was not consistent with his actions. Stenvig did not tolerate gays and lesbians in Minneapolis as long as they obeyed the law (as he implied was the case), but instead treated homosexuality as an inherent threat that demanded active suppression. Since Stenvig seemed to believe homosexuality was a violation of shared community values, the gay rights movement had no valid place in Stenvig’s governing philosophy. In the same manner that Stenvig resisted social scientific explanations surrounding the origins and reasons for criminal activity, he also refused to think of sexuality as a complex and varied facet of social behavior that could accommodate non-heterosexual relationships.

Given Stenvig’s ideology of governance, it is not surprising that he proposed few active programs as mayor. Observers at the time, familiar with the social engineering of liberal mayors, were surprised that Stenvig had so few programs to offer. Stenvig’s initial two-year term in office was marked by what commentators believed was a decided lack of any governmental activity. “Almost no programs emanate from Stenvig’s walnut-paneled suite,” one reporter noted. Stenvig vetoed almost every bill presented by the city council. A liberal Republican city council member even questioned the underlying logic of Stenvig’s mayoralty: “I don’t think Stenvig is even trying to provide leadership in the traditional sense,” the councilmember claimed, arguing that he saw “Stenvig acting as a spokesman for what’s called the Silent Majority, and that thrust has been largely negative.”⁴² When compared to the liberal mayors who preceded him, Stenvig’s time in office produced little active government programming. Yet this inaction was consistent with Stenvig’s belief in government’s proper role as guardian of community values rather than social engineer. Although opponents in the 1971 election criticized Stenvig for simply vetoing city council proposals and not offering any programs of his own, Stenvig responded that these vetoes were “affirmative” because “the people have had it up to here with government and it was time to put a stop to it.”⁴³

Stenvig's supporters actually saw the lack of government programs as a positive development, and emphasized instead the value they placed in Stenvig's character and his image as mayor. Reviewing Stenvig's first two-year term as mayor, a reporter argued, "one impression of Minneapolis under Stenvig seems unarguable . . . [;] it is that a policeman-mayor can give a city confronted with change a feeling of security, even while temporizing on important issues." The reporter quoted a cabdriver: "Stenvig hasn't done much. He hasn't done much right and he hasn't done much wrong. But it's nice to know that if anything happens we've got a tough guy who can handle it in City Hall."⁴⁴ In turning his political ideology into practical action, Stenvig rejected the activist government involvement of liberalism and instead sought to lead by moral example and character. Although critics accused Stenvig of offering more style than substance, the two were indistinguishable in the minds of many of his supporters. His style of making few public speeches, promising to take direct action against criminals, and his personal history with the police all contributed to the personal image he cultivated of the strong, resolute executive and the masculine antidote to what he portrayed as the emasculated style of liberal governance. As a female supporter commented, "[Stenvig] can bring about many changes that have resulted from too many years of parental permissiveness which has resulted with so many of our young people defying authority in so many ways."⁴⁵ In a letter to the editor, another Minneapolis resident admitted that Minneapolis had problems under Stenvig but declared that he would continue to support him because no other candidate "has the intestinal fortitude that Chuck Stenvig has got."⁴⁶ For Stenvig, one of the mayor's primary responsibilities was to act tough and appear virtuous.

Stenvig's emphasis on his independent status allowed him to claim that he was vulnerable to attacks from Minneapolis's established political parties. In the 1973 election, which Hofstede won by a margin of less than 5,000 votes, Stenvig blamed his defeat on the party forces aligned against him. Prior to the election, the Minnesota state legislature passed a law requiring candidates to designate party membership with either the DFL or the Republican Parties, in order to appear on primary ballots. Labeled the "Stenvig law" by the incumbent mayor and his supporters, Stenvig argued that the legislation's sole function was to make it more difficult for him to get reelected. In addition, Stenvig pointed out that his opponent, Hofstede, vastly outspent him during the campaign due largely to the strong DFL backing for Hofstede. Sarcastically, Stenvig accused the *Star* and *Tribune* newspapers of slanted electoral coverage and of doing a "beautiful job" of preventing his reelection. Stenvig had gone into the 1973 election with a significant lead in the polls and he was clearly surprised by his defeat, even insinuating that the DFL had illegally registered voters in precincts where they were not residents, effectively tipping the scales against him.⁴⁷

The media pointed to other reasons for Hofstede's victory. Stenvig's hostility to college-educated police and the value of higher learning in general came back to hurt him in 1973. In 1969 and 1971, Minneapolis's police federation endorsed Stenvig and unofficially assisted his campaign. In 1973, however, the federation

voted to remain neutral, in part because college-educated police did not support Stenvig’s approach to solving crime. As former chief of police Donald Dwyer commented, Stenvig represented “the old, historical hard-nosed cop versus quite a lot of idealism in a younger, far better educated group who are disenchanted with the present administration.”⁴⁸ Without the federation’s endorsement, Stenvig’s ability to promote himself as the policeman’s candidate for bringing law and order to the city was greatly weakened. In addition, Hofstede, a DFL insider, tapped into the party’s connections with organized labor in a manner that neither of Stenvig’s previous opponents had been able to do. In 1973 the major labor unions in Minneapolis endorsed Hofstede, reversing their 1971 position. While Stenvig continued to receive rank-and-file support, it declined enough to help the DFL claim victory.⁴⁹

After defeating Hofstede in a 1975 rematch which Stenvig won by approximately 500 votes, Stenvig’s final defeat occurred in 1977 and was also related to perceptions of his personal character. For most of his last term, there was widespread speculation that he would simply walk away from the job of mayor. Rather than challenging these rumors, Stenvig fueled them further. Only four months after the 1975 election the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported Stenvig as saying, “if the right offer comes along, I’ll get out.”⁵⁰ Such a lackluster response to his job—after an election he had barely won—must have disappointed supporters who still believed Stenvig was a resolute fighter willing to take on any challenges. At the same time, Stenvig found himself embroiled in personal scandal. Prior to the 1977 election, he was accused by a DFL alderman (and former police officer) of padding his police overtime pay when he was on the force between his loss in 1973 and re-election in 1975. Although the police department’s internal affairs unit ultimately cleared Stenvig of the charges, it refused to release any of the files from the investigation. This personal scandal was a harsh blow to Stenvig’s credibility as a model of virtue for the city.⁵¹ His emphasis on the mayor’s responsibility to act as a moral leader for the city allowed Stenvig to avoid debates about policy, but it also set the stage for his downfall amid allegations of scandal.

From Ideology to Practice: Reorganizing the City’s Social “Interest Groups”

As this article has argued up to this point, Stenvig challenged liberalism’s governing ideology that the mayor should act as a technocratic manager of the city’s social interest groups, instead offering his own philosophy of government that emphasized individuals’ responsibility to act morally and uphold “traditional” values, such as a respect for authority figures. Yet as mayor, Stenvig could not wipe the slate clean after several decades of liberal leadership in Minneapolis. Unable to ignore them altogether, Stenvig worked with the social interest groups that liberal politicians devoted specific attention to—such as organized labor and African Americans—and attempted to realign them into something more

amenable to his own ideologies of government. In other words, even though Stenvig believed the city was composed of individuals responsible for controlling their own actions, many of these individuals saw themselves as part of distinct social groups, such as labor, African Americans, and business, that had a collective identity and demanded acknowledgement from government. Stenvig could not erase these identities, but he could—and did—suggest other identities more in line with his vision of the city.

The working-class vote was a crucial base of support for DFL politicians in Minneapolis prior to Stenvig's 1969 election. Stenvig, too, relied on white, blue-collar voters for his mayoral victories, but he also sought to subtly change the meaning of a working-class or blue-collar identity away from a purely economic station. Stenvig frequently talked in terms that might be classified as discussions of "class," but his rhetoric catered to a working class that was organized around a vague set of cultural resentments rather than any concrete economics.⁵² It is clear that by the late 1960s and 1970s the question of who was qualified to represent the social abstraction of Minneapolis's "working class" was up for grabs. Stenvig's victory revealed the distance between liberal politicians, the labor leaders they courted, and the city's working-class voters.

Labor leaders backed Dan Cohen, Stenvig's Republican opponent, in the 1969 election but Stenvig nevertheless convincingly won majorities of up to 81 percent in the city's blue-collar wards.⁵³ In 1971, the AFL-CIO Minneapolis Central Labor Union Council, the Teamsters, and the Building and Trades Unions officially endorsed Stenvig, although observers believed that labor leaders were following the rank-and-file support for Stenvig in an attempt to remain relevant to their members.⁵⁴ Stenvig also pitched himself to white, blue-collar voters through his critique of liberals and by promising to end economic programs specifically directed at minority communities. Stenvig's frequent use of the term "workingman" alludes to this subtle reshaping of working-class identity around cultural resentments in Stenvig's rhetoric. "People are sick and tired of politicians and intellectuals," Stenvig claimed in a telling pairing, adding, "They want an average workingman from the community to represent them—and that's me."⁵⁵

Closely connected to his appeal to the "average workingman," Stenvig also tapped into an emerging discourse of victimhood among Minneapolis's white, working-class population that rejected what they perceived as the differential treatment minority groups received, and the lax attitude politicians displayed toward student radicals. As a Minneapolis resident wrote to the *Tribune* before the 1969 election, "It seems that [Naftalin's] present administration has created a legion of untouchables and no warrant can be served, regardless of the seriousness of the crime, because of interference from high authority."⁵⁶ A machinist reiterated this point in the immediate aftermath of Stenvig's 1969 victory: "They should start jailing some of them guys who are breaking the law, regardless of race, color or creed. They shouldn't let a minority get by with probation or short sentences while everybody else gets the book thrown at them."⁵⁷ Although scholars have interpreted white claims to victimhood in the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction

to the excesses of liberalism, they also illustrate a growing dissatisfaction with liberals’ claim that their social scientific expertise made them the natural managers of the city’s problems.⁵⁸ Stenvig took advantage of this sentiment in the late 1960s, displaying (or, perhaps more accurately, performing) a type of vigilante resistance. If blacks in Minneapolis faced discrimination and violence, so did whites like Stenvig. Referencing alleged threats on his life during the 1969 campaign, Stenvig proudly asserted that he “‘got a carbine and sat in the window’ of his home one night when he was informed that ‘they’ intended to dynamite his house and endanger his family.”⁵⁹ Stenvig’s appeal to white victimhood suggests that Minneapolis residents had embraced alternative identities that were in direct opposition to liberal policies that presented African Americans as the true victims of social problems.⁶⁰

Perhaps nowhere was Stenvig’s attempt to redefine how different groups perceived of their interests more complex than in the arena of race. In his rhetoric and policies regarding African Americans, Stenvig attempted to craft a political language that could admit the existence of racial difference while denying the effects of racism’s legacy. Although Stenvig denied that his political strategy included appealing to white racism, his law and order rhetoric likely appealed, even if indirectly, to the racist vote.⁶¹ This issue has vexed historians as well, who have questioned whether public support for law and order in the 1960s and 1970s represented a type of thinly veiled racism that was also present in the attempts of urban whites to block residential integration. A rich body of scholarship has shown that while urban whites acting to maintain residential segregation could be explicitly racist, they also claimed to be defending property values or a shared ethnic culture.⁶² Stenvig’s political use of law and order was similarly complex. As Kenneth Durr argues in the case of Baltimore’s working-class whites in the 1960s, discussions of law and order took off just as more overt racist language was waning. For Durr, this indicates that “the popular appeals to ‘law and order’ that saturated urban American politics by the late 1960s were not merely racism in disguise—they were qualitatively different.”⁶³ Although Dan Cohen, Stenvig’s opponent in the 1969 election, called him “nothing more than a George Wallace in Minneapolis clothes,” such attacks do not capture the nuances of how race mattered as a political issue in this period.⁶⁴

At the national level, many observers were surprised that race could even be a political issue in Minneapolis given the city’s numerically small minority population. Describing Stenvig’s popularity, a reporter from *Harper’s* expressed surprise at his success in a city where “there are practically no Negroes.” He added that with a population that was “only 3 percent Negro . . . you wonder what the whites are afraid of.”⁶⁵ The number of African Americans living in Minneapolis was growing during this period, but it remained small compared with other American cities. During the 1960s, Minneapolis’s non-white population grew from 11,785 to 18,998, an increase of 38 percent. Still, African Americans counted for only 4.5 percent of the city’s total population in 1970.⁶⁶

Although the city's African American population was relatively small it was concentrated in several neighborhoods, which led to frequent incidents of alleged police harassment and the belief that residents of black neighborhoods were treated unfairly by the overwhelmingly white police force. Incidents of racial unrest occurred in Minneapolis, along with many other American cities, in the late 1960s. Routinely during his mayoral campaigns, Stenvig would raise the specter of Minneapolis's 1967 riots as an example of the real threat of black militancy. The disturbances resulted in destroyed buildings and businesses along Plymouth Avenue in Minneapolis's predominantly black North Side. While police response to the disturbance was restrained, Mayor Naftalin ultimately asked for assistance from the National Guard after two nights of rioting. Minneapolis's riots were small in comparison to the Detroit riots that began several days later, but they nonetheless provoked an angry response from some of the city's white population. For example, four white youths were arrested during the riots after they attempted to bypass a National Guard barricade. The youths said they were trying to prevent "you niggers coming up to the northeast." For some Minneapolis residents, the appropriate response to the riots was not restraint but aggressive confrontation.⁶⁷

Stenvig used the riots not only to attack Naftalin's and liberals' distrust of the police force, but also to challenge the wisdom of programs he felt were designed to appease black activists and radicals. As he commented to a gathering of supporters following his 1969 election, "if we have riots, what's the good of all these programs if it takes you years to build society up and they burn it down."⁶⁸ Six years after the actual disturbances Stenvig was still alluding to their implications, pledging that he would continue his efforts to "stop them from trying to burn people out of their homes and businesses."⁶⁹ As the *Minneapolis*

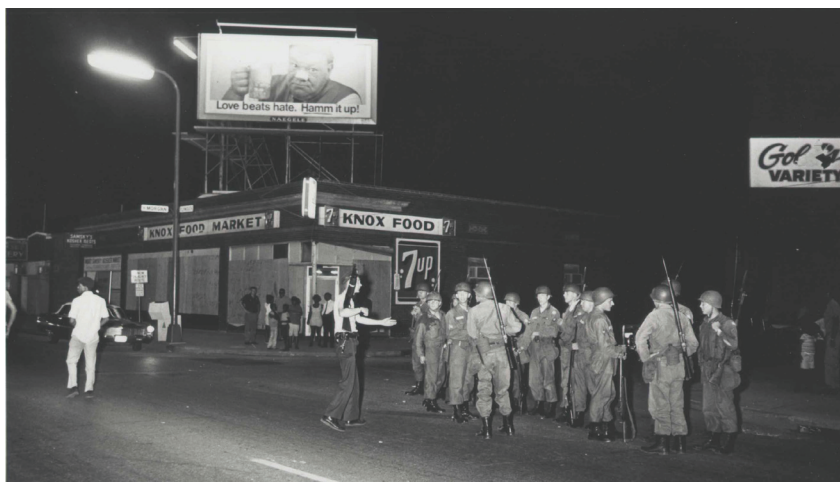


Figure 2: National Guard soldiers on a North Minneapolis street after disturbances in 1967. Image courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

Star editorialized, “never in our memory has a Stenvig law-and-order euphemism been so inescapably pointed in its reference to minorities.”⁷⁰ Despite the city’s small minority population, the 1967 riots had a profound effect on white attitudes toward African Americans and crime, on which Stenvig willingly capitalized.

Stenvig’s opponents frequently accused him of racism and argued that his calls for law and order were barely coded forms of racism. During the 1971 mayoral campaign, African-American DFL candidate Harry Davis repeatedly tried to label Stenvig a racist and force him to admit that his practice of rhetorically linking African Americans with crime was a thin disguise for racism. Davis drew attention to Stenvig’s enervating of the city’s civil rights department, making it powerless over cases of police brutality. Davis claimed these actions were “allowing brutes and sadists to run wild in this city.” Stenvig refuted these claims by arguing that brutality worked both ways. He cited the personal example of being attacked by a criminal during a routine arrest.⁷¹ Just as Stenvig offered voters an image of him in the dark with a gun, ready to protect his home from criminals that Minneapolis liberals let run free, Stenvig framed himself as a victim, making a valiant stand on behalf of all police officers and, at times, white voters.

There was intense controversy over the treatment of African Americans in Minneapolis during Stenvig’s first two years as mayor. Stenvig’s critics accused him of “emasculating” administrative bodies intended to oversee the city’s police. When a 12-year-old African-American boy was attacked by a police dog and dragged down the street by two policemen, many saw it as confirmation of Stenvig’s attitude toward blacks. Supporters of Stenvig and officials in the police department denied these allegations. Deputy police chief Eugene Wilson called them “baloney,” noting that a 1971 grand jury investigated thirty cases of alleged police brutality in the city and found “no evidence of a deliberate, calculated policy of unfair, repressive law enforcement.”⁷² Although condemned in some quarters as a racist, Stenvig consistently denied these charges by insisting that he simply treated all criminals equally, a position consistent with his political ideology but ignorant of other factors affecting the nexus of race and crime.

Just as he challenged liberals’ sociological explanations in the political realm by offering examples culled from personal experience, Stenvig argued that his personal and intimate interactions with blacks proved that he was not racist. In 1969, Stenvig campaigned with Lon Perry, a black woman, and publicized a 1963 incident when he gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to her child. As Perry stated to the media several times: “He wasn’t a racist when he put his lips to my baby’s!”⁷³ Another anecdote Stenvig used repeatedly during campaign events was his friendship with the starting football guard on the high school football team, to whom he had served as a back-up.⁷⁴

After his election in 1969, Stenvig appointed Richard Parker, a conservative African-American community activist from North Minneapolis, as an aide and member of his inner council. Stenvig implied that literal physical closeness with African Americans refuted charges of racism and worked against the social scientific understandings of race supported by Minneapolis liberals. At a 1970

church meeting, Stenvig distanced himself from residential segregationists and claimed that he would gladly welcome black neighbors into his working-class white neighborhood because, he said, “we’re all brothers under the skin.” He was quick to add, however, “We’re not going to be able to legislate it. It will have to come from ourselves.”⁷⁵ Critiquing a plan put forward by the city council to ensure city contractors hired minorities, Stenvig argued that instead of making “hiring minority people” a prerequisite, the city should simply focus on “getting the best dollar value and getting the job done.”⁷⁶ Once again, Stenvig asserted that he was not racist but simply insisted on treating all citizens the same, regardless of race. This early formulation of a seemingly neutral language of racial politics reveals that if liberalism had a language to discuss race, conservatives were developing their own racial lexicon in a manner that could not be dismissed as simple bigotry.

Stenvig complicates the too-easy answer that 1960s and 1970s populists were politically successful solely because of racism. Like conservative politicians today, Stenvig fashioned a language that he touted as race neutral—he claimed that he was concerned with crime, rioting, and militancy, not the race of the agents behind these actions. Yet “race blind” accounts of social problems deny and ignore the structural forces that have historically made race salient, such as access to jobs, housing, and education.⁷⁷ Nor do they provide insight into how Stenvig’s constituents thought of race and how they possibly linked his strong rhetoric about crime with overtly racist beliefs. During the 1971 mayoral campaign against Harry Davis, for example, Davis received death threats and had to request FBI protection. At times, he was only able to campaign in certain neighborhoods when escorted by former Vice President Humphrey or Congressman Don Fraser.⁷⁸ Obviously, for certain Minneapolis residents Stenvig’s law-and-order appeals were inseparable from explicit antipathy toward the city’s black population.

Nevertheless, many liberals were also responsible for assuming that law and order was solely a racial issue when they advanced a political discourse that made it hard to separate race and crime. Christopher Wren, a former District of Columbia police officer, wrote in the *Washington Monthly* that the success of politicians like Philadelphia’s Frank Rizzo and Stenvig could not be reduced to simple racism, arguing “that crime in the streets has a reality for most Americans that goes beyond simple code words.” Wren went so far as to link liberal explanations for crime with a type of suburban-based elitism, which in his opinion, “perpetuates, if only implicitly, the myth that the only suitable environment for stable personality development is the white, middle-class suburb.” Although Wren had campaigned for George McGovern in 1972, he was frustrated with liberal “remoteness—physical and philosophical—from the center of violent criminal activity.”⁷⁹ While Stenvig made no concerted effort to distance himself from racist supporters, he also promoted law and order as an issue that could be seen in non-racial terms, a view that directly challenged liberals’ insistence on the connection between race and crime.

Conclusion

After his surprising victory in 1969 and landslide reelection in 1971, Stenvig’s popularity with Minneapolis voters declined in the mid-1970s. Returned to office with a very narrow victory in 1975, Stenvig lost to Hofstede in the 1977 election and never again held public office. Lacking the party and business connections that have traditionally allowed defeated politicians to remain active in public life, Stenvig remained largely outside the public eye since his political defeats in the late-1970s. If he is remembered at all by Twin Cities residents today, his name functions as shorthand for memories of the conservative backlash of the late 1960s and 1970s. As a reporter noted during the 1993 Minneapolis mayoral election, “mention of that name—Charlie Stenvig—still sends a shudder through the city’s progressive hearts.”⁸⁰

Stenvig retired to Sun City, Arizona. Unlike many other former Minneapolis mayors who moved easily between political offices, corporate jobs, and academic positions, Stenvig simply returned to the police force after leaving the mayor’s office. His “outsider” status and lack of party affiliation limited his connections with influential people and organizations. The Cowles and Daytons of Minneapolis had little desire to bring Stenvig into the city’s civic life as a private citizen. As Stenvig told a reporter in 1999 while proudly declaring that he did not profit from political office, “Hey, how many former big mayors do you know who live in a house trailer?”⁸¹ In personal conversations with the authors of this article, Stenvig adamantly attempted to distance his legacy from accusations that his brand of politics was racist. Reminiscing, Stenvig was much more comfortable emphasizing the novelty of his political career, portraying himself as the novice who happened to be in the right place at the right time. These memories downplay his acumen as a politician who successfully attracted widespread support by attacking both the image and governing rationale of the city’s liberal establishment. Stenvig died on February 22, 2010.

Stenvig’s career was not a novelty act but rather an illustration of the changing ideologies and philosophies of governance at work in the late twentieth century. In a city known for its liberal leadership and the close connections between city hall, academia, and progressive business leaders, Stenvig effectively challenged the ideology of liberalism. He criticized the concentrated power of the liberal establishment and their claim that social scientific expertise allowed them to rely on abstract theories to alter people’s lives in the city. Although arguably conservative politicians today rely on their own cadres of social scientists who produce ideologically compatible expertise, like Stenvig, many openly mock liberals’ reliance on complex sociological explanations for issues such as crime and poverty. In addition, as Stenvig realized, contemporary voters still stake importance in a candidate’s personal image and perceived morality and these credentials at times matter more than a politician’s educational background.

While Stenvig’s story is significant in its own right and his charismatic personality and media-ready quotes make for a fascinating narrative, when placed

in the context of other law and order mayors who gained office in the 1960s and 1970s the national significance of law and order mayors is evident. Los Angeles's Sam Yorty, for example, cultivated a populist persona as mayor during the 1960s and early 1970s. Yorty fended off accusations that government negligence of Los Angeles's African-American community was responsible for the Watts Riots by turning the table on his critics and calling for increased law and order and stricter punishment for black criminals. In the 1969 Los Angeles mayoral election, Yorty successfully portrayed his African-American opponent, Tom Bradley, as soft on crime because Bradley proposed a civilian review board to examine allegations of police brutality in minority neighborhoods. Yorty also used political allies to insinuate that the Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panther Party had put Bradley up for election. These allegations were particularly ironic because Bradley had served as a police officer for twenty years before entering politics and Yorty had initially supported him as a moderate Democrat. Although Yorty began his political career as a New Deal Democrat, he steadily moved to the right while in office. In 1960, Yorty endorsed Richard Nixon's presidential campaign and, after losing to Jerry Brown in the 1966 California Democratic gubernatorial primary, he offered his support to Brown's Republican opponent, Ronald Reagan. In 1973, Yorty switched parties altogether, although that year he was defeated by Bradley, who became Los Angeles's first black mayor.⁸²

In Philadelphia, Frank Rizzo followed Stenvig's path from the police force to city hall. Earning a reputation as a "supercop" who was tough on crime and black militancy while police commissioner of Philadelphia, Rizzo won the mayor's office in 1971. As Stefano Luconi highlights, like Stenvig, Rizzo rose to power in a city where liberal ideas had dominated municipal politics in the 1960s. For example, Italian Americans and the other white ethnic groups that propelled Rizzo to office were hesitant to support increased public school financing and new curriculum initiatives, which many thought were "too concerned with African American grievances." In the 1971 election, the Democratic Rizzo faced a liberal Republican opponent in Thacher Longstreth, the former executive director of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce who was closely tied to the same elite social circles that Stenvig denounced in Minneapolis. Whereas Longstreth criticized police brutality, Rizzo pledged open warfare against the Black Panthers. As police commissioner, Rizzo was involved in an internationally publicized incident in which several Black Panthers were strip searched in front of television cameras and, during his time as mayor, he was the defendant in a federal civil rights lawsuit that accused the Philadelphia police department of institutionally discriminating against black residents. Rizzo and Stenvig also had personal connections. Prior to his election, Rizzo visited Stenvig in Minneapolis to learn how a policeman could successfully run for mayor of a major American city.⁸³ The political success of law and order mayors such as Stenvig, Yorty, and Rizzo, among others, highlights the continuing politicization of crime at the local level, a development that greatly weakened liberals' ability to discuss crime as a product of social conditions. The end result of this new discourse of crime was,

as Flamm puts it, a “political atmosphere in which grim expectations displaced grand ambitions.”⁸⁴

Stenvig also offers an intriguing example of the political ideology behind conservative populism. Historians now acknowledge that the New Right is a multifaceted movement, but conservative populists such as Stenvig have received relatively little attention as important contributors to an intellectual history of modern conservatism. Attributing the support of law and order conservatives such as Stenvig to pure racism or knee-jerk reactionaries does not capture the complexity or coherence of his approach to governing. Far from a naïve reactionary, Stenvig presented a political ideology that was sharply critical of liberalism and rejected social scientific knowledge and abstractions as useful guides for governance. Although it is unlikely that Charles Stenvig was familiar with conservative academic critiques of liberal social policies, by the late 1960s prominent conservative intellectuals had begun offering a counterpoint to liberal concern about the “urban crisis.” Edward Banfield’s 1970 *The Unheavenly City*, argued that while American cities faced problems involving crime, race relations, and poverty, when liberals made these issues into a broader “urban crisis” they exaggerated the problems at hand for the purpose of advancing their own social scientific objectives. Writing about urban crime, Banfield posited that “‘subjective’ factors (such as alienation) can seldom be defined and related to crime with much precision” and that ostensibly “‘objective’ factors (such as housing)” were similarly vague, since they failed to account for the “culture and personality” of the individual criminal. Although Stenvig did not reference Banfield and as a mayoral candidate his depictions of criminal intent did not call on an academic language, they nonetheless shared a critique of liberalism’s underlying logic for addressing crime. Conversely, Stenvig’s liberal predecessor Arthur Naftalin—professor of public affairs at the University of Minnesota in 1970—responded to Banfield’s argument with sarcasm, commenting that the book “relieves us of all responsibility for doing anything about urban problems.”⁸⁵ Naftalin was not alone in his belief that there was a real and definite need for liberal social policies and that to suggest otherwise was to set cities like Minneapolis on a dangerous path. Ironically, one reporter noted that Minneapolis’s political experts “couldn’t believe law and order [was] a viable issue in [Minneapolis] and a state where civil and human rights organizations, religious and secular, multiply and feed on each other.”⁸⁶ In other words, these experts could not see how the committees, organizations, and alliances they had created to make Minneapolis liberal had actually contributed to Stenvig’s rise.

Finally, confronting the intellectual history of conservative populists such as Stenvig is a difficult task precisely because Stenvig was so critical of the inherent power dynamic underlying social scientific understandings of urban problems and governance. For example, Stenvig’s statement that “my chief advisor is going to be God” demonstrates the distance between academic analysis and Stenvig’s politics. Stenvig’s liberal contemporaries mocked this comment and we have found that it can produce laughter when repeated today. Most scholarly disciplines

that deal with politics do not to have a model that includes deities as advisors or participants in government. Yet if Stenvig's reliance on God sounds far-fetched, Stenvig argued that liberal governance relied on a set of *a priori* assumptions that were equally far-fetched in comparison: for example, the idea that crime could be solved by researching its social origins and investing in remedying them, as opposed to simply arresting and imprisoning criminals.

The goal of this particular article is not to rehabilitate or justify Charles Stenvig's method of governing. Instead, we are trying to understand and take seriously the culture of modern conservatism and its vision for governing. Doing this for Stenvig and other conservative populists will likely require wrestling with a series of difficult questions that seem to defy any easy answers.

Notes

1. Jennifer Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 93-128.

2. "The Cop as Candidate," *Newsweek*, May 12, 1969, 63; Finlay Lewis, "Detective's 61.8% of Vote Beats Cohen," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 11, 1969.

3. Michael Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On the intersection of crime and politics generally, see Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

4. By describing twentieth-century conservatives such as Stenvig as "populist," we refer to an understanding of the term as a persistent undercurrent in American political life that emphasizes anti-elitism and celebrates "ordinary" people. Stenvig's populism bore little resemblance to the Populist movement of the late nineteenth century. For a detailed history of populism's different political uses, see Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

5. For a small sample of the burgeoning literature on post-World War II conservatism that emphasizes urban history and conservative populists, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Jefferson Cowie, "'Vigorously Left, Right, and Center': The Crosscurrents of Working-Class America in the 1970s," in *America in the Seventies*, edited by Beth L. Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 75-106; Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

6. Historians have described this type of government as a "broker state" in which government mediates between society's various social and economic interest groups. See Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995); and Robert F. Burk, *The Corporate State and the Broker State: The Du Ponts and American National Politics, 1925-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

7. Fred Powledge, "The Flight from City Hall," *Harper's*, November 1969, 73.

8. Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 15-16, 32-33.

9. John Gizzi, "An Early Outsider," *Human Events*, December 31, 1999, 14.

10. Bernie Shellum, "The How and Why of the Minneapolis Vote," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 23, 1969.

11. Jack Mithun, letter to the editor, *Minneapolis Star*, June 12, 1969.

12. Dennis Cassano, "City Voters to Judge Stenvig," *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 25, 1971.

13. Gary R. Gunderson to Malcolm Moos, May 15, 1972, Office of the President Papers, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; "The End of an Era?" *Minnesota Daily*, October 27, 1969.

14. Powledge, "The Flight from City Hall," 75, 74.

15. Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 3-12.
16. "The Cop as Candidate," *Newsweek*, May 12, 1969, 63.
17. George McCormick, "Mayor Vote Comments Are Muted," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 12, 1969.
18. "The Cities: God Is My Advisor," *Newsweek*, July 20, 1970, 58; Nick Coleman, "Stenvig Accuses Star, Tribune of 'Slanted, Out-of-Context Reporting,'" *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 22, 1973; "Stenvig's Hidden Campaign," *Minneapolis Star*, October 12, 1973.
19. Chip Berlet, "Who is Mediating the Storm? Right-Wing Alternative Information Networks," in *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right*, edited by Linda Kintz and Julia Lesage (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 249-73.
20. Gordon Johnson interview by James C. Robertson, in James Robertson, "The Political Strategies of Charles Stenvig," typescript, December 15, 1969, authors' personal collection (courtesy of Charles Stenvig). James Robertson was a University of Minnesota student who, prior to enrolling, worked for the Minneapolis police department. Due to this association, Robertson interviewed key members of Stenvig's campaign staff as well as Stenvig himself, transcripts of which are included as appendices to this term paper.
21. During the height of the protests, on May 10 and 11, 1972, the *Minnesota Daily*, *Minneapolis Star*, and *Minneapolis Tribune* all included extensive coverage of the events as they unfolded. For an account of the events after the tear-gassing, see "Officials Try to Avoid More 'U' Violence," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 12, 1972. Tension between Stenvig and the University of Minnesota predated the 1972 riots. In 1969, fears that anti-war student protests would spark conflict between police and students led University of Minnesota President Malcolm Moos to meet with the newly-elected Stenvig to draft a formal protocol stipulating how the university and city police would work together to handle protests in a non-confrontational manner. Although Stenvig signed off on the protocol, he embarrassed Moos by publicly stating that, despite the document, he would ultimately dispatch the police at his discretion alone. Stenvig would reaffirm this stance during the 1972 riots, telling the press, "final jurisdiction [over the University] lies with the Minneapolis Police Department." Brian Anderson, "Stenvig, Moos Reach Accord at Late-Night Meeting," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 12, 1972.
22. "Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry," November 26, 1973, Office of the President Papers, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
23. *Ibid.*
24. "78 Pct. in Survey Approve Police Work at 'U' Protests," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 14, 1972.
25. "Militancy Within System is Alright, Says Stenvig," *Minnesota Daily*, May 7, 1970.
26. According to Delanty, conservative communitarianism "tends to stress family, religion, [and] nation," and privileges majority views on the importance of maintaining these traditions, rather than individual rights. Although Stenvig emphasized the role of the individual citizen in adhering to the law, he did not believe that citizens had a right to engage in individual practices that went against his version of Christian morality, such as purchasing pornography. Gerard Delanty, *Citizenship in a Global Age: Society, Culture, Politics* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 23-35.
27. M. Howard Gelfand, "Mr. Charley," *Minnesota Daily*, July 8, 1969.
28. "The T Party," *Minnesota Daily*, December 9, 1969.
29. Lewis, "Detective's 61.8% of Vote Beats Cohen."
30. Dennis Cassano, "Stenvig Doesn't Vote in 'Closed Primary,'" *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 16, 1970.
31. "Minneapolis: God Is My Co-Pilot," *Newsweek*, June 23, 1969, 32; "The City: Contagion in Minneapolis," *Time*, June 20, 1969, 24.
32. Dennis Cassano, "Stenvig Elected to Second Term," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 9, 1971.
33. George Grim, "Police Forum Disappoints Stenvig," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 2, 1970.
34. Milton Bix interview by James C. Robertson, in Robertson, "The Political Strategies of Charles Stenvig."
35. W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, edited by Lori Sturdevant (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 212.
36. Dennis Cassano, "Civilian Police Review is Opposed by Stenvig," *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 2, 1969.
37. "Minneapolis Librarians Defeat Censorship Move," *Library Journal* 95, no. 21 (1970): 4090.
38. Milton Coleman, "Hofstede is Soft on Smut, Says Stenvig," *Minneapolis Star*, October 25, 1975.
39. Steve Johnson, "Stenvig, 3 Others Get Contempt Case Order," *Minneapolis Star*, June 25, 1977.
40. Regine Radniecki, "The Faces Are Familiar in Minneapolis Mayoral Race," *New York Times*, November 6, 1977.
41. Gizzi, "An Early Outsider."

42. "The Cities: God Is My Advisor," 58.
43. Cassano, "City Voters to Judge Stenvig."
44. "Minneapolis: Life Under Stenvig," *Newsweek*, June 14, 1971, 38.
45. Rosemary J. Vanek, letter to the editor, *Minneapolis Star*, May 19, 1969. George Lakoff has argued that one way in which a conservative worldview differs from that of a liberal worldview is in its attitude toward parenting and parenting's larger social implications. Whereas conservatives embrace a "strict father morality," liberals believe in a "nurturant parent morality." George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know that Liberals Don't* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
46. Robert Fayette, letter to the editor, *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 28, 1970.
47. Eric Pianin, "Stenvig Says He's Kept His Vote Muscle," *Minneapolis Star*, November 13, 1973.
48. Nick Coleman, "Stenvig's Image Apparently Falls among Policemen," *Minneapolis Star*, August 22, 1973.
49. Bernie Shellum, "Hofstede Victory Result of DFL Working Class," *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 7, 1973.
50. M. Howard Gelfand and Dennis Cassano, "Stenvig May Quit for Right Offer," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 23, 1976.
51. Walt Dziedzic, a policeman who later became a DFL alderman, took credit for uncovering and initiating the investigation into Stenvig's use of overtime. On Dziedzic's career and his relationship to Stenvig, see Joseph Hart, "Notes of a Native Son," *City Pages*, August 13, 1997.
52. On the broader shift in working-class identity during the 1970s, see Davis M. Anderson, "Levittown is Burning! The 1979 Levittown, Pennsylvania, Gas Line Riot and the Decline of the Blue-Collar American Dream," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 2, no. 3 (2005): 47-65; Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973," *Labor History* 43, no. 3 (2002): 257-83; "Vigorously Left, Right, and Center"; Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm, "Dead Man's Town: 'Born in the U. S. A.,' Social History, and Working-Class Identity," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2006): 353-78; and Joshua B. Freeman, "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 4 (1993): 725-44.
53. "The City: Contagion in Minneapolis," 24.
54. Cassano, "City Voters to Judge Stenvig."
55. "The Cities: God Is My Advisor," 58.
56. John E. Ralls, letter to the editor, *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 31, 1969.
57. Joe Rigert, "Stenvig Mandate: Cut Crime, Stop Militants?" *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 12, 1969.
58. On white victimhood at this time, see Dennis A. Deslippe, "'Do Whites Have Rights?': White Detroit Policemen and 'Reverse Discrimination' Protests in the 1970s," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (2004): 932-960; and Rieder, *Canarsie*.
59. Bernard Casserly, "One Issue: L & O," *Commonweal*, June 20, 1969, 384.
60. This is not to deny that urban crime was a real problem that left real victims. As Michael Flamm points out, crime rates in American cities rose steadily in both the 1960s and 1970s. However, when law and order advocates argued for, as Richard Nixon put it, "freedom from violence," they rarely acknowledged the freedom of blacks not to be collectively portrayed as criminals. Flamm, *Law and Order*, 175.
61. On racial discrimination and racial attitudes in Minneapolis, see Jennifer Delton, "Labor, Politics, and African American Identity in Minneapolis, 1930-1950," in *The North Star State: A Minnesota History Reader*, edited by Anne Aby (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2002), 316-34.
62. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 194-256; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-60* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kruse, *White Flight*; Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; and Jonathan Rieder, "The Rise of the Silent Majority," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 243-68.
63. Durr, *Behind the Backlash*, 134.
64. Casserly, "One Issue: L & O," 384. As Maria Lizzi notes, Mario Procaccino, a law and order candidate for mayor in New York City, was also labeled a George Wallace-style racist by his opponents. Lizzi argues that the Italian-American ethnic background of Procaccino's supporters led liberals to accuse them of being racist, since many liberals assumed that all working-class white ethnics were to some extent racist. By dismissing opponents as racists, liberals did not take the issue of law and order seriously. Maria Lizzi, "'My Heart Is as Black as Yours': White Backlash, Racial Identity, and Italian American Stereotypes in New York City's 1969 Mayoral Campaign," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 27, no. 3 (2008): 43-80.
65. Powledge, "The Flight from City Hall," 72-73.

66. Roberts, “Minneapolis: Life Under Stenvig,” 37-38.
67. “600 Guards Mobilized to Keep Order in City,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 22, 1967; “Fires, Fights Continue on North Side,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 21, 1967; “Fires Set, Rocks Thrown in City Mob Outbreaks,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 20, 1967.
68. Finlay Lewis, “‘Politician’ or ‘Guy Next Door’? Mayor Stenvig Still Has Them Guessing,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 25, 1970.
69. Eric Pianin, “Stenvig Drive Instills Racism, Blacks Charge,” *Minneapolis Star*, August 2, 1973.
70. “A Campaign Against ‘Them,’” *Minneapolis Star*, August 8, 1973.
71. Dennis Cassano, “Davis Claims Stenvig Condone Police Brutality,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 6, 1971.
72. Roberts, “Minneapolis: Life Under Stenvig,” 37-38.
73. Quoted in Gizzi, “An Early Outsider,” 14.
74. Finlay Lewis, “Stenvig: People Tired of Politicians, Hoodlums,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 30, 1969.
75. Lewis, “‘Politician’ or ‘Guy Next Door’? Mayor Stenvig Still Has Them Guessing.”
76. Finlay Lewis, “Mayor: GOP Plan Faulty,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 8, 1970.
77. For a detailed account of changing racial attitudes amid the persistence of race as a structural force, see Lawrence Bobo and Ryan Smith, “From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez-Faire Racism: The Transformation of Racial Attitudes,” in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, edited by Wendy F. Katkin, Ned Landsman, and Andrea Tyree (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and Eduardo Bonilla-Savila, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2003).
78. Davis, *Overcoming*, 207-20.
79. Christopher Wren, “Letting Rizzo Do the Thinking,” *Washington Monthly* 5, no. 10 (1973): 34-5.
80. Lori Sturdevant, “Mayoral Contest Seems Haunted by Stenvig Years,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, September 26, 1993.
81. Gizzi, “An Early Outsider,” 14.
82. McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 199-201; and John C. Bollens and Grant B. Geyer, *Yorty: Politics of a Constant Candidate* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Palisades Publishers, 1973), 166-8.
83. Stefano Luconi, *From Paesani to White Ethnics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 131-42. See also, Fred Hamilton, *Rizzo* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); Joseph Daughen, *The Cop Who Would be King: Mayor Frank Rizzo* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); and Gizzi, “An Early Outsider,” 14. On the federal lawsuit against Rizzo and the Philadelphia Police Department, see Frank Anechiarico, “Suing the Philadelphia Police: The Case for an Institutional Approach,” *Law and Policy* 6, no. 2 (1984): 231-51.
84. Flamm, *Law and Order*, 11.
85. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and the Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1970), quote on 159; Arthur Naftalin, “Unseen Hand,” in “Banfield’s *Unheavenly City*: A Symposium and Response,” *Trans-Action* 8, no. 3 (1971): 76.
86. Casserly, “One Issue: L & O,” 384.