

OUR CENTURY

1968

AT A GLANCE

Blood, protest and upheaval

Only once in the 87 years of the City Club Forum has a speaker been promised that there would be no questions from the audience. It may have been the most dramatic forum ever.

The date was April 5, 1968, the day after Martin Luther King's assassination. The speaker was Robert F. Kennedy, brother of the assassinated president and himself a candidate for president.

"The victims of violence are black and white, rich and poor, young and old, famous and unknown," Kennedy told a hushed audience. "No one, no matter where he lives, or what he does, can be certain who next will suffer from some senseless act of bloodshed."

Two months to the day later, Robert Kennedy was dead, the victim of an assassin's bullet.

A man shot to death during the week of the Glenville riots wasn't counted with the victims, though it turned out later that he was



Tedd Browne

Bishop-elect William Cosgrove was the principal celebrant at the crowded funeral Mass. As Browne's casket was carried out, the words of Bob Dylan filled the church: "Yes, and how many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died? The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind..."

The case would be solved eight years later.

It was a tumultuous spring. On the same day that 87,000 people marched in New York to protest racism and the war in Vietnam, 2,000 gathered for a similar demonstration on the Mall in Cleveland. The national protests came to a violent climax in August, when Chicago police beat demonstrators outside the Democratic convention in Chicago.

The election was peaceful but close. Ohio's 20 electoral votes helped Republican Richard Nixon, who had been Dwight Eisenhower's vice president, edge Democrat Hubert Humphrey, Lyndon Johnson's vice president.

John Gilligan had ended Frank Lausche's long political career with an upset victory in the Democratic Senate primary, but Republican William Saxbe defeated Gilligan in November, largely because Gilligan trailed other Democrats in Cuyahoga County.

A redistricting led to a shake-up in Congress. Louis Stokes, the mayor's brother, was elected from the redrawn 21st District. Charles Vanik, who had represented the 21st District for 14 years, ran against Frances P. Bolton, who had represented the 22nd District for 28. Vanik won. Cleveland voters passed Mayor Carl Stokes' \$100 million bond issue for water pollution control.

After 35 years, Ernest Bohn, "the father of public housing," retired as director of the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority. Bohn had drawn criticism in recent years for sticking to "old-fashioned" projects such as Dike-Park (now King-Kennedy), then under construction at E. 66th St. and Woodland Ave., and in particular for not building in white neighborhoods.

The CMHA board chose as director Irving Kriegsfeld, who as director of the civic group Plan of Action for Tomorrow's Housing had been one of Bohn's critics. Kriegsfeld immediately moved to put public housing in white areas and ran into a firestorm.

A year after Joe Adcock led the Indians to a last-place finish, manager Alvin Dark raised the 1968 team to third place. The team batting average was only .235, with 131 home runs in 161 games. But Luis Tiant won 21 games and led the league with an earned run average of 1.60. Sam McDowell won 15 while, as usual, leading the league in strikeouts and walks.

Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and the state paid \$120,000 for a study of the feasibility of a domed stadium. The architect in charge suggested adding an arena for basketball and hockey.

The Browns' new quarterback, Bill Nelsen, was a wreck from the knees down but made up for it from the neck up. Leroy Kelly led the league in rushing for the second straight year, and the Browns won the Century Division with a 10-4 record. In the first playoff game, 80,000 fans saw the Browns upset the Dallas Cowboys, 31-20, at the Stadium.

The NFL title game, before another Stadium crowd of 80,000, was a complete reversal of the Browns' 1964 shutout of the Baltimore Colts. Final score: Colts 34, Browns 0. The Colts were 18-point favorites in the Super Bowl. Final score: Joe Namath's New York Jets 16, Baltimore 7.

The Plain Dealer carried a lexicon of today's language for over-30s, explaining the meaning of "hang-up," "turn-on," "uptight," "cop-out" and "grooving."

By Fred McGunagle

Burning and looting spread across the nation. Chicago, Boston, Pittsburgh and Baltimore were in flames. At least 24 people had been killed, 1,000 injured and 700 arrested. Five thousand soldiers were ordered into Washington, D.C.

Cleveland was calm.

Mayor Carl Stokes was waiting to give a speech at RoeHM Junior High School in Middleburg Heights on the evening of April 4 when he got word that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King had been assassinated. He told the audience, hurried to his car and alerted his Cabinet as he sped back to City Hall.

All three television stations interrupted their programming to carry the mayor's emotional plea: "I appeal to all Clevelanders to maintain racial peace as a testimony to martyred civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

He then drove to black neighborhoods and spent the night calming crowds on street corners. So did other black leaders, including members of the Indians and the Browns.

For three nights, while other cities burned, Stokes cruised the streets, talking headstrong youths into going home. Cleveland's calm was hailed around the nation.

Business leaders congratulated themselves on having backed the right man. Stokes had "kept the lid on."

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Stokes started a program called "Cleveland Now" to raise \$11 million from businesses and individuals and up to \$1.5 billion from foundations and the government for housing and social programs. The response was enthusiastic. Blacks were overjoyed. Even when the National Guard had to be called into Akron in July, they "kept cool for Carl."

Then came the night of July 23, a Tuesday.

It came out later that the FBI had reports that an uprising was planned for Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown. In particular, police were watching the house of Fred "Ahmed" Evans on Edmonton Ave. But two cars of white detectives, rather than moving around as had been advised, were parked in view of Evans and his followers. They responded by appearing with rifles and bandoleers. The tinder was in place.

The match was struck at 8:25 when a police tow truck, responding to a complaint made earlier in the day, stopped on Beulah Ave. to pick up an abandoned auto. Shots rang out. Suddenly, bullets were flying everywhere. It was urban warfare. Evans' men took over a minister's house on Lakeview Rd. and fired at police who raced to the scene with sirens screaming.

In the next hour, seven people were killed — three policemen, three suspects and a civilian who apparently tried to drag a wounded policeman to safety. Then Evans sent word he wanted to surrender and came out with his hands high.

"If my rifle hadn't jammed, I would have killed you three," he told his arresters. "I had you in my sights when the trigger jammed."

Mayor Stokes went on television again. "Go home if you are on the streets," he pleaded. "If you are inside, stay inside and keep your doors locked so that we can contain the situation."

This time, it didn't work. In what one witness called "instant insanity," burning and looting spread along the main streets of Glenville. By daylight, four more were dead. More than 200 people suddenly were homeless.

Stokes had called for the National Guard at the onset of violence. Now, on Wednesday morning, he met with police and guard officials and then with black leaders. He ordered a curfew and 24-hour ban on liquor sales. The black leaders urged him to allow blacks to enforce it while police cordoned off the area.

Over objections of the guard, he agreed. "The program is primarily in the black community and the black community will handle it," he said. But then he decided black police should be allowed in the riot area, and black reporters — but not white reporters.

It was a fateful decision. The police radio cracked with racial slurs. "Let the mayor handle it!" was a frequent response to assignments.

In the morning, Police Chief Michael Blackwell hailed the results: No deaths overnight. But the unarmed patrols had failed to prevent wide-



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Fires burn out of control on July 23. Below left, Fred "Ahmed" Evans. Below right, a riot-equipped Cleveland Police officer stands guard on July 24 at E. 105th St. and Superior Ave. while firefighters extinguish a blaze. Bottom, police officers leave a memorial service for slain colleagues.



spread looting.

"We merchants are being sacrificed to appease the looters," said Benjamin Weiss as he surveyed his wrecked furniture store on St. Clair Ave.

"I begged the National Guard and the police to help me, but they said they weren't allowed," said Leonard Kramer at his looted clothing store on E. 105th.

The American Civil Liberties Union and others praised Stokes' handling of the uprising. Chief Blackwell said an informant told him afterward that if white police had gone in "they would have been mowed down" by snipers with tripod-mounted machine guns.

But public sentiment turned against Stokes — especially after it was revealed that Evans' African Cultural Shop had received \$10,000 in Cleveland Now funds.

The Rev. DeForest Brown, president of the Hough Area Council, said, "The funds allocated to Ahmed were part of a sincere effort to give him and his associates the opportunity to work in a positive way in the community." But police said Evans admitted using some of the money to buy guns.

Gradually, calm returned. The last of the guardsmen left on Sunday. Hundreds of police marched to St. John the Evangelist Cathedral for the funeral of their slain comrades. Monsignor A. James Quinn told them, "Martyrdom was a possibility they lived with."

Damage from the riot was estimated at \$2.6 million. The greater damage was to Stokes' mayoralty. Disillusioned business leaders dropped their support of Cleveland Now and of Stokes. The police remained his bitter enemies. Racial division hardened in the city and espe-

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 31: Communist troops in Vietnam launch the Tet offensive.

Mar. 31: President Lyndon B. Johnson announces he will not seek re-election.

Apr. 5: The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated outside a Memphis, Tenn., hotel. The assassina-

tion touches off riots in several major cities.

June 8: Sen. Robert Kennedy is assassinated in a Los Angeles hotel after winning California's Democratic presidential primary.

June 8: King's killer, James Earl Ray, is arrested in London.

July 6: Billie Jean King wins her third Wimbledon tennis title.

Aug. 22: Soviet troops invade Czechoslovakia.

Aug. 29: Chicago police beat anti-war protesters during the Democratic National Convention.

Nov. 6: Republican Richard Nixon

is elected president, defeating Democrat Hubert Humphrey.

Born: Celine Dion, Barry Sanders, Gary Coleman, Toni Braxton.

Died: American writer John Steinbeck, six-time presidential candidate Norman Thomas, Soviet astronaut Uri Gagarin, writer Upton Sinclair, Helen Keller.