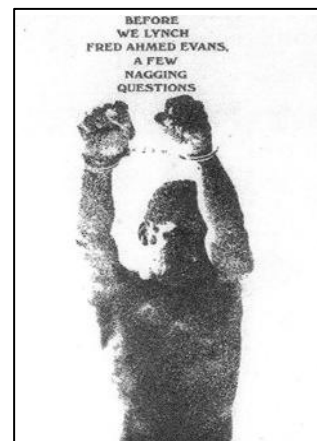


A FEW NAGGING QUESTIONS: Background

Three generations of my family are connected to the event at the center of ***A Few Nagging Questions***: a gun battle in Cleveland, Ohio in 1968 between police and Black Nationalists that left 10 people dead. The police description of what took place is that ‘black militants’ lured them into the Cleveland community of Glenville and killed three of their officers in an unprovoked attack. In our film, veteran activists and residents in the neighborhood as well as expert witnesses provide firsthand evidence of a very different account of the night in question and its repercussions.

“They never expected black people to fight back like that.”

I was a high school student in Cleveland at the time of the shootout, a shocking event affecting family and friends. My father, George Sapin, who had a track record for producing media for social justice campaigns, was asked to create an ad protesting the unfair trial and murder conviction of Fred Ahmed Evans, the leader of the Black Nationalist group. The ad demanded answers to ‘a few nagging questions’, now the title of the documentary I directed and that Sam Sapin, my son, edited.



Fifty years after the shootout, my sister rang to tell me that a copy of the ad had been sold as a poster at a major New York art auction house. I decided to find out more about the controversial image and its message. It soon became clear that there were still unsolved questions about how the night unfolded, including who fired the first shot. As a filmmaker, I recognized the power of the story to illustrate the impact of police violence and injustices, but at first, I wasn’t sure if it was mine to tell. I talked with friends and contacts about the shootout and its lasting legacy when I came back to Cleveland for my father’s memorial. Veteran Black Nationalists and former New Libyans told me that they had been unable to enlist filmmakers from the community to tell their story – and that they were keen to participate in a film that could set the record straight about important issues for our times, including the distortion and denial of black American history.

I didn’t want to tell the story from my point of view and explored a different approach with African American educator Gayle Gadison, the Director of Social Studies for Cleveland Metropolitan School District. We discussed how it might be possible to bring a younger generation together with



veteran activists and residents who had been caught up in the events at the time. This took us to Glenville High School, once a thriving community of 3,000 African American students - now reduced to less than 300 - where Principal Jacqueline Bell and teachers Sarah Hodge and Shanita Horton identified students to undertake a study of the history of their neighborhood.

The film follows Glenville students as they uncover shocking details of the previously hidden event that took place just a few blocks from their school. They gather compelling testimony about the night of July 23, 1968 that raises questions about the police version of the gun battle still stigmatizing their community. They seek out experts who

analyzed gunshot wounds and blood alcohol levels amongst the police casualties - reports that state prosecutors attempted to bury during the trial.

A Few Nagging Questions



The young people also find out that Glenville was once a prosperous and vibrant neighborhood known as 'the gold coast'. They discover that after the shootout, a series of crippling economic sanctions devastated their area – and Glenville became one of the lowest income communities in America with appalling levels of dereliction and childhood poverty.

When I first met our participants, most felt underserved by their schooling and few were motivated to consider further education. Fearful about their lives in Glenville, leaving the area was the only future they

envisaged. But talking with their elders about Black activism in the sixties gave them a stronger sense of identity as well as a deeper understanding, connection and commitment to their community. Realizing that they have agency, they insist that even uncomfortable and painful truths about discriminatory access to rights, state sanctioned violence and judiciary coverups be revealed. Their efforts endow them with the power to transform their own lives and they became inspired to take up educational programs and pursue college degrees.

This independent film was made with the help and cooperation of members of the Glenville community, Cleveland educators and the remarkable students of Glenville High – and has benefitted from the involvement of individuals with different backgrounds, ages, ethnicities and experiences working together over several years. Despite our no to low budget, we are proud of the quality of the film. The drive to finish and distribute it is exclusively due to a desire on all of our parts to do justice to the inspiring young people who gave so much of themselves to tell this story.

Witnessing them become active, conscious and hopeful citizens who draw from and in turn re-energize their elders has been one of the most moving experiences of my 40 years of making documentaries.



Paul Sapin

Production team



Paul Sapin

Director



Victor Tadashi Suarez

Director of Photography



Vanessa Kirkpatrick

Producer



Mandy Chang

Executive Producer