William C. Kashatus

On Saturday night, August 29, 1970, unknown assailants shot to death Philadelphia police sergeant Frank Von Colln while stationed in a small guardhouse in the Cobbs Creek section of the city's expansive Fairmount Park. No one witnessed the killing, but police suspected that it was the work of the Black Panther Party, an African American revolutionary organization that endorsed violence as a means of social change.

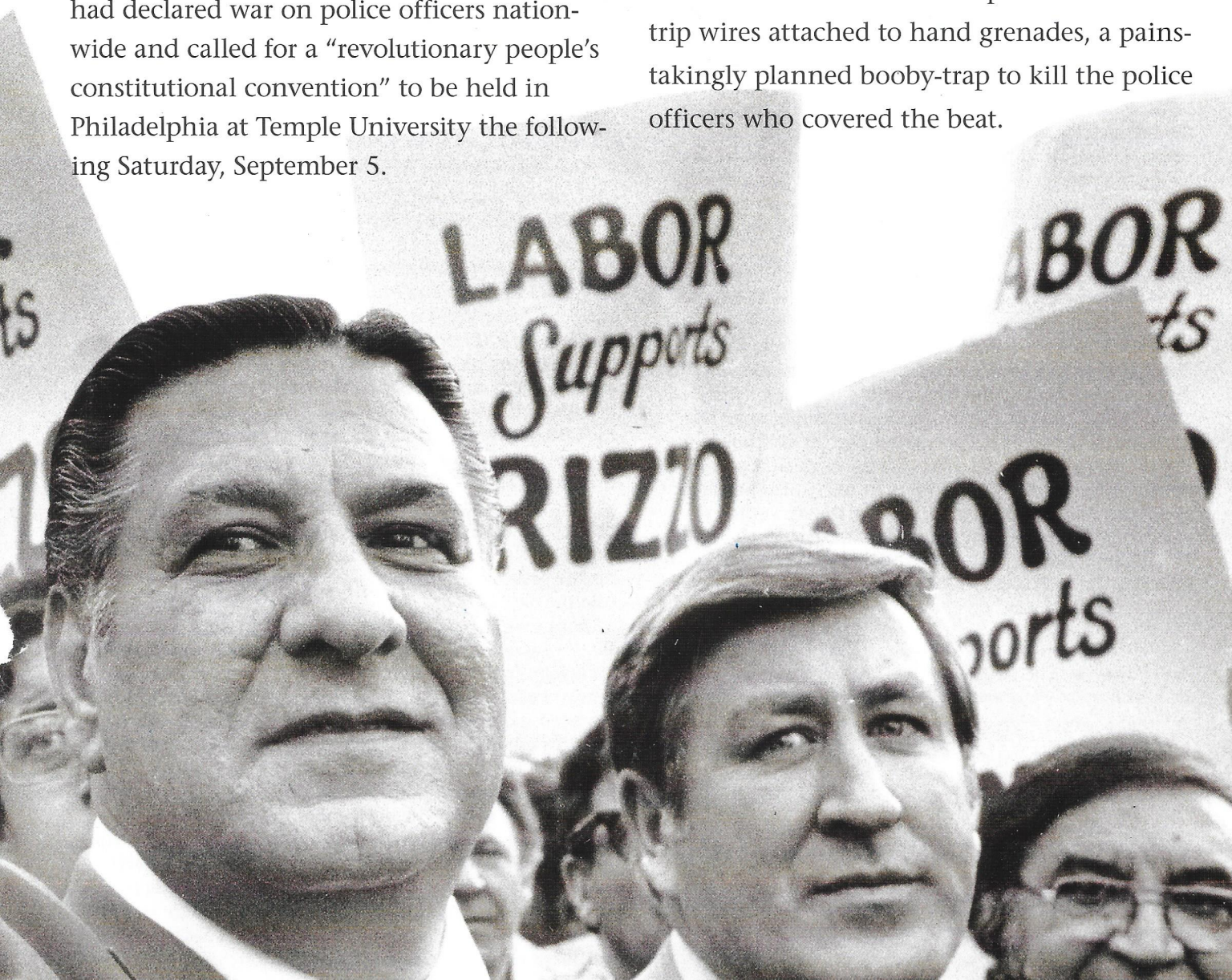
URBAN ARCHIVES/TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

FRANK RIZZO

PHILADELPHIA'S TOUGH COP TURNED MAYOR

The Philadelphia Police Department was already under a high state of alert. Just a few months earlier, Huey P. Newton (1942–1989), a cofounder and inspirational leader of the Oakland, California, based Black Panthers, had declared war on police officers nationwide and called for a "revolutionary people's constitutional convention" to be held in Philadelphia at Temple University the following Saturday, September 5.

Determined to apprehend the suspects in Von Colln's murder, Philadelphia Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo ordered the entire highway patrol unit to search the Cobbs Creek area. The search uncovered a complex network of trip wires attached to hand grenades, a painstakingly planned booby-trap to kill the police officers who covered the beat.



The assault on Philadelphia's finest continued the following evening in a predominantly black business district in West Philadelphia, near 52nd and Market Streets. Thomas Gibbons and John Nolen, officers assigned to the area, pulled over a banged-up Cadillac. As they approached the automobile, the driver pulled a revolver and shot Nolen in the head. The passenger in the Cadillac shot Gibbons in the back. Gibbons managed to crawl for cover under a parked car and, miraculously, Nolen regained consciousness and fired six shots at the fleeing shooters.

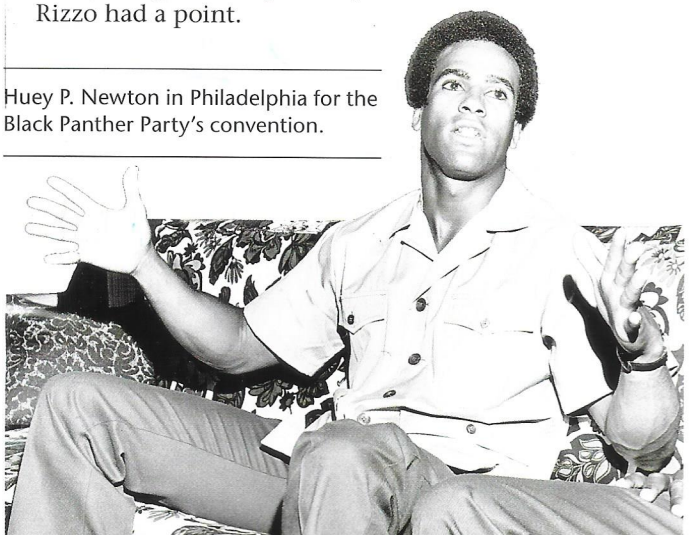
An extremely polarizing figure, Rizzo was loved and hated more than any other politician in the history of Philadelphia.

Rizzo had enough. A career cop with a reputation for toughness, he refused to tolerate an assault on his police department. The following night he declared unconditional war on the Black Panthers, even though there was no direct connection between the organization and the assault on his officers. Assembling more than two hundred police officers, the commissioner approved a raid of the Black Panthers' local headquarters on Wallace Street in North Philadelphia.

At 2 a.m. on Tuesday, September 1, the officers moved in, exchanging gunfire with members of the radical organization. After the shooting stopped, police arrested fourteen members of the Black Panther Party and forced them to strip naked in the street while they tore apart their headquarters looking for weapons. The following day the incident made national newspaper headlines, accompanied by photographs of shotgun-wielding police officers.

When Newton appeared in Philadelphia for the Panthers' convention on September 5, he ridiculed Rizzo and the police for strip-searching his adherents, who were freed because of lack of evidence. With the mayoral election just months away, Rizzo, the Democratic candidate, remained calm. When questioned during the campaign about the incident by the city's black community, he dismissed any and all prejudice. "What did I ever do to black people?" he asked. "All I did was protect them from crimes and riots, and promote them in the police department. Let me remind you that while every other city burned in the 1960s, Philadelphia didn't. That wasn't luck. Nobody was shot and killed by the police, or police by rioters."

Rizzo had a point.



Huey P. Newton in Philadelphia for the Black Panther Party's convention.

During his term as police commissioner, the City of Brotherly Love claimed the lowest crime rate of all major American cities. The achievement endeared him to white ethnic groups and blue-collar workers. White liberals and blacks, on the other hand, believed that he made "crime control" synonymous with frequent raids on the city's African American community and loathed him.

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As street cop, as police commissioner (above), and as mayor, Frank L. Rizzo quelled protests and riots.

An extremely polarizing figure, Rizzo was loved and hated more than any other politician in the history of Philadelphia. Regardless of the perspective, both friends and enemies agreed that he dominated the city for three decades. "Many loved him, many hated him, but nobody ignored him," wrote historian and author Philip Jenkins in his chapter, "The Postindustrial Age, 1950–2000," appearing in *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth*, copublished by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and the Penn State University Press in 2002. As police commissioner during the tumultuous sixties, he took center stage by squelching bloody struggles over civil rights and protests over Vietnam, and garnering the respect and friendship of President Richard M. Nixon. As two-term mayor, from 1972 to 1980, he drastically cut the city's crime rate, betrayed his supporters, and neutralized Philadelphia mob boss Angelo Annaloro (1911–1980), better known as Angelo Bruno, whose reign ended when "The Gentle Don" was gunned down, at the age of sixty-nine, in his automobile. A consummate campaigner, Rizzo spent the remaining decade of his life seeking redemption—and just one more chance to rule the city he loved.

Born October 23, 1920, Francis Lazzaro Rizzo was the eldest of four sons of Italian immigrant Ralph Rizzo, a Philadelphia police officer, and American-born Theresa Erminio Rizzo. Raised in a two-story row house in one of the city's old Irish neighborhoods, Rizzo's childhood was largely unremarkable. He had no interest in sports. His schoolwork was mediocre at best, and he had few friends. Those friends he did have respected him as a street fighter. "Downtown, it seemed I was always the big brother," he recalled years later. "I was always the guy they came to when they wanted things done." He began working at the age of seven as a delivery boy and later as a butcher's apprentice earning ten dollars a week. With little ambition, the young street tough, in 1938, dropped out of high school a few days shy of his eighteenth birthday and joined the U.S. Navy. Although he later earned a high school equivalency diploma and took courses in government administration at the Fels Institute, he felt uncom-

Diabetes curbed Rizzo's military service and the Navy discharged him for medical reasons only eight months after he had enlisted. Returning home to Philadelphia, he took a job at the Midvale Steel Corporation making naval guns as the United States was gearing up for World War II. His marriage to Carmella Silvestri, a candy maker, in April 1942, sparked a desire to do more with his life than settle for a low-paying job as an open-hearth worker. The young couple moved to a more upscale neighborhood in the city's Germantown section. With the help of a local ward leader, the twenty-three-year-old Navy veteran secured an appointment as a Philadelphia police officer on October 6, 1943.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

The oldest of four brothers, Frank L. Rizzo (center, rear) grew up in an Italian American neighborhood in South Philadelphia.

Like his father, Rizzo belonged to a police department marked by scandal, marred by suspicion, and manipulated by the city's Republican machine. State grand juries had found dozens of department members on the take from bootleggers, speakeasies, gambling halls, and brothels throughout the city. On most nights, more police officers were moonlighting than available for duty. Dominated by the Irish and Germans, the department did not take kindly to Italian Americans and let Rizzo know it in subtle—and not-so-subtle—ways. It was not uncommon, for example, to be subjected to ethnic slurs or be the target of cruel pranks. While he had little choice but to tolerate the discriminatory treatment, Rizzo also promised himself that he would one day become much more than a $42-dollar-a-week cop walking the working class beats of Philadelphia.

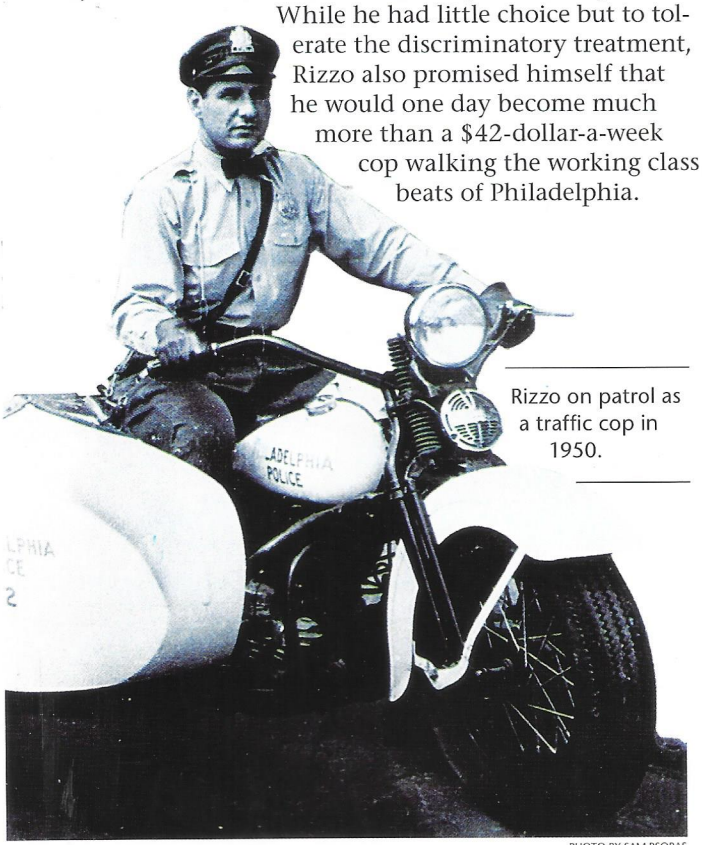

PHOTO BY SAM PSORAS

Rizzo on patrol as a traffic cop in 1950.

"The very first day he was to report to work," recalled Carmella Rizzo, "I helped him put on his uniform. He was looking in the mirror. He was so proud. And he said to me right there, 'I am going to be police commissioner one day.' And, you know what? I believed him."

During the following decade, Rizzo transformed himself into the most spit-polished officer in the Philadelphia Police Department. Quick to subdue a criminal with his nightstick or fists, he earned the reputation of a cowboy on the streets and a braggart in the stationhouse. His reckless abandon and ruthlessness earned him the respect of fellow officers, who called him "The Cisco Kid" after a cowboy starring in the lead role of the popular television series by the same name in the early 1950s. He also struck fear into those who were foolish enough to challenge him. In 1950, when city police departments across the nation were coming under increasing scrutiny by the federal government, Rizzo emerged as a point man in Philadelphia's effort to wipe out the corruption. Promoted to sergeant, he was given charge of a squad stationed at Seventh and Carpenter Streets in South Philadelphia, and ordered to "clean up the numbers rackets once and for all." Not only did he infiltrate the corrupt activities in his beat, but those of other officers, including his father.

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Carmella Silvestri Rizzo.

Learning of repeated complaints of noisy, late-night activity in front of a brothel and numbers parlor, the burly twenty-seven-year-old sergeant burst through the door, pushed his way through the crowd, and dragged out nine men and women. Marching them down to the local police headquarters, Rizzo charged them with disorderly conduct, telling the magistrate that he had been "pushed around" while trying to make the arrest. His heroics did not please his father, who was assigned to the very same district where the arrest was made. A few days later, an embarrassed Ralph Rizzo reprimanded his son in front of his own police squad.

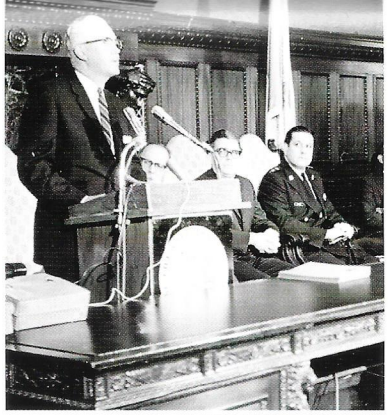
The young sergeant's cockiness, gruffness and, especially, no-nonsense tactics captured the attention of Frank Palumbo, owner of a popular South Philadelphia restaurant and nightclub that during its heyday attracted such luminaries as Frank Sinatra. Palumbo had close ties with U.S. Representative William A. Barrett, a Democrat representing South Philadelphia, and leaders of the Italian mafia. Both parties were good customers and the flamboyant restaurateur realized it would be bad for business if Rizzo's crusade to clean up crime pitted them against one another. Palumbo cultivated the young sergeant, encouraging him to appear tough on street crime, but advising him to steer clear of the mob. Rizzo listened and earned a reputation as a clean cop, while the South Philadelphia mafia went unchecked.

In 1952, the Democratic Party wrested control of Philadelphia City Hall from the corrupt Republican machine that had controlled Philadelphia politics for more than half a century. The city adopted a new home rule charter, giving municipal employees civil service protection. Assigned to the highway patrol, Rizzo continued to ascend the promotional ladder, becoming an inspector in 1959. But the 1960s would test his

ability to restrain himself when dealing with various social and ethnic groups, especially African Americans.

Racial unrest plagued Mayor James H. J. Tate's administration as it struggled with the painful reality that Philadelphia was two cities—one white, the other black. While most Philadelphians accepted integration in theory, they had difficulty accepting the reality of it. With a population of nearly 400,000, Philadelphia's black community was the third largest in the nation. Even residential patterns reflected the tacit principle of racial inequality. Blacks settled on the fringes of center-city, residing in cheap row houses once occupied by first and second generation immigrants who had since relocated to the suburbs. North Philadelphia became the principal black residential area. At one time the area had been known for its working class neighborhoods of Irish, Italians, and Jews employed by the surrounding industries, among them Midvale Steel Company, Philco, Exide, Tasty Baking Company (known around the world as Tastykake), Baldwin Locomotive Works, and the Budd Company (now known as Thyssenkrup Budd). As many companies relocated their operations and plants beyond the city limits, white residents began abandoning North Philadelphia. The Irish moved to the more commodious housing of West Oak Lane. Italian families migrated farther south and west of center-city. Jews moved to Oxford Circle, leaving West Philadelphia and Strawberry Mansion, which filled the need for growing black housing.

Like many American communities, Philadelphia typified "white flight," the migration of the white middle-class from the city to suburban areas. From Philadelphia, affluent residents moved to the stable Main Line communities of Bala Cynwyd, Merion, Haverford, and Swarthmore, or the outlying suburbs of Plymouth Meeting and Abington. Migration steadily increased, reflecting the desire for upward mobility, as well as reinforcing the racial stereotyping of African Americans as social inferiors. With the exceptions of Germantown, Mount Airy, Queen Village, and Fairmount, the predominantly white middle-class northeastern section of the city, and the wealthy white enclave of Chestnut Hill, mostly poor black and low-salaried white residents remained to shoulder Philadelphia's diminishing tax base.



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Mayor James H. J. Tate (standing) and Deputy Police Commissioner Frank L. Rizzo (far right) in 1965.

Spiraling expenses forced city leaders to make difficult decisions on questions of education, employment, and public welfare. The "race factor" often became a rhetorical device to garner greater state and federal funding to meet the city's needs. Protest movements, focused on education and job training, took to the city's streets. Together with Philadelphia's rising crime rate, black unrest and protest accelerated white flight. To his credit, Mayor Tate realized the widespread unrest was being fueled by both idealism and resentment, and he responded with a two-pronged approach by catering to the African American community's call for reform and by growing tougher on crime.

To stem the tide of protest, Tate appointed Charles Bowser, a young black lawyer, to head the Anti-Poverty Action Committee, an organization inspired by the federal government's "War on Poverty." Bowser, who worked hard to ensure local community participation on public welfare issues, represented the traditional leadership structure in the African American community. He tried to temper the black community's more

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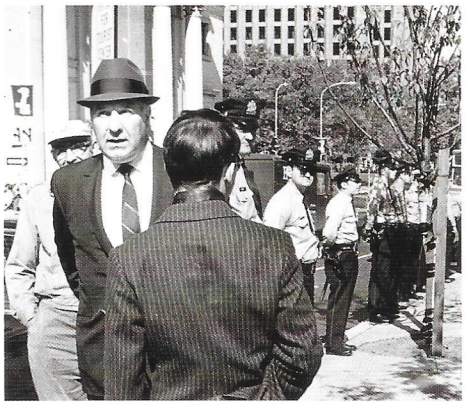
Demonstrators demand jobs and the withdrawal of police from schools in 1972.

radical leaders, such as Cecil B. Moore, a tempestuous defense lawyer and president of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Moore employed protest demonstrations and public rallies to create controversy and demand immediate change.

At the same time, Tate appointed Rizzo deputy police commissioner in charge of the city's six thousand uniformed police officers. Rizzo had previously received national exposure with testimony during a Congressional committee hearing after he attacked the courts and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for being "soft on crime" during a time of urban unrest throughout the nation. Philadelphia City Council granted Tate emergency powers and Rizzo, ever-present on the streets of Philadelphia, led his police force in confrontations with civil rights demonstrators and anti-Vietnam War protesters. While many American cities suffered violent riots, Philadelphia remained quiet.



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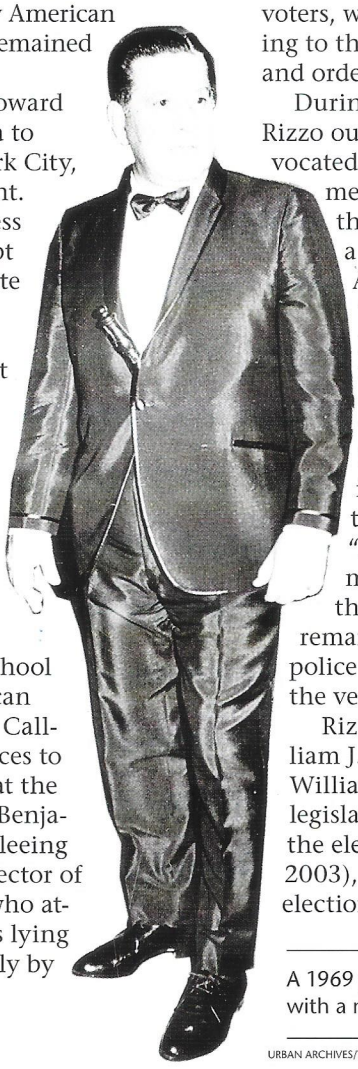
Rizzo was as comfortable in Philadelphia City Hall as he was on the street, in the midst of action and at the center of controversy.

In May 1967, Police Commissioner Howard Leary, a low-key liberal, left Philadelphia to become police commissioner of New York City, and Tate appointed Rizzo his replacement. Rizzo had called his predecessor a "gutless bastard" because he thwarted his attempt to charge rioters three years earlier, in late August 1964. The mayor and the police commissioner would use each other to advance their political careers. Later that year, Tate, with Rizzo's help, defeated Arlen Specter, Philadelphia's district attorney and a rising star in the Republican Party, for mayor by a small margin.

Thoroughly enjoying the limelight, Frank Rizzo continued to grab newspaper headlines with his hard-nosed tactics. Shortly after his appointment as police commissioner, he broke up a peaceful demonstration of black high school students who wanted an African American studies course added in the curriculum. Calling out riot police, Rizzo ordered his forces to wade into the crowd that had gathered at the School Administration Building on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. "I saw children fleeing from the police," said Spencer Coxe, director of the Philadelphia chapter of the ACLU, who attended the demonstration. "I saw others lying on the ground being beaten unmercifully by patrolmen with clubs."



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A 1969 photograph of Rizzo in formal clothes—and with a nightstick—circulated around the world.

On another occasion, Rizzo showed his mettle when he —with a nightstick conspicuously protruding from his cummerbund—left a black-tie affair in 1969 to "lead my men, my army" to break up a race riot. He did not mince words and reportedly once threatened a criminal suspect. "Make one false move, you black son-of-a-bitch," he boomed, "and it'll take thirty-six doctors to put you together again." At the same time, admirers credited him with expanding and integrating the police force, increasing the recruitment of black officers, and lowering the crime rate of Philadelphia below that of any other American city.

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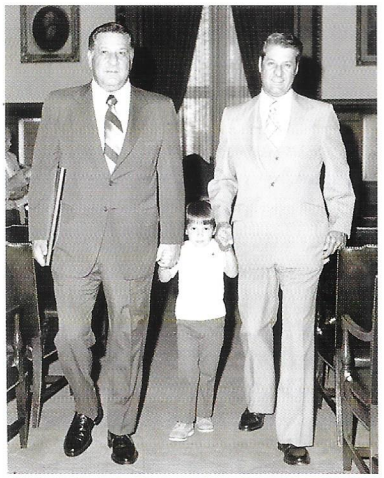
Mutual admirers: President Richard M. Nixon and Mayor Frank L. Rizzo.

The explosive sixties made law and order a major issue in urban and national politics. Rizzo's tactics had been hailed by President Nixon, who urged him to run for mayor in 1971. Although Rizzo preferred to run as a Republican, he chose the Democratic Party as the better vehicle to win. The city's Democrats needed him to hold onto the white blue-collar voters, who were defecting to the side of the law and order Republicans.

During the campaign, Rizzo outspokenly advocated capital punishment. "I'll tell you this," he said in a speech to the American Legion, "I will personally pull the switch if they run out of people who want to do it." He even went so far to suggest that the city should "have its own electric chair" as a "short-run, immediate solution" to existing homicide rates. When the press later challenged him for his controversial remarks suggesting that he supported the creation of a police state, Rizzo insisted, "my [Italian] heritage makes the very concept of a police state repulsive."



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The new mayor (left) ignited public controversy after he appointed his brother Joseph R. Rizzo (right) as commissioner of the city's fire department.

Rizzo easily won the primary over opponents William J. Green, III, a budding young Democrat, and Hardy Williams, the first black Democrat elected to the state legislature without party backing. He went on to defeat the elegant and erudite W. Thatcher Longstreth (1921—2003), a Republican city council member, in the general election with 71 percent of the vote.

Shortly after the victory, Rizzo named his brother, Joseph R. Rizzo, commissioner of the Philadelphia Fire Department. When accused of nepotism, he brushed aside the charge with humor. "I don't know what nepotism is," he replied. "So, I called my brother and said, 'Joe, did you pick up anything when you were stationed in Japan?'" Rizzo also endorsed President Nixon for re-election, calling the Democratic candidate, U.S. Senator from South Dakota George McGovern, a "f——g nut." These were the first of many controversial actions that made Frank Rizzo one of the famous—if not infamous—mayors in the United States.

Rizzo saw municipal government more as a vehicle for the protection of the citizens than for the delivery of social services. His style appealed to row house conservatives, labor unions, and white ethnic groups. His "tough cop" image and his charisma inspired unreasoned loyalty among them. At the same time, Rizzo offended liberals, minorities, homosexuals, and other non-conformists, and seized every opportunity to stifle freedom of expression when it did not complement or further his own interests.

On October 29, 1972, Rizzo, in defiance of a federal judge's order, instructed the police to arrest any demonstrator who carried an anti-Nixon sign when the president campaigned for re-election at Independence Hall. The following year he created a thirty-four-member spy ring to gather information on the political improprieties and sexual exploits of his political enemies, Democrat Party boss Peter J. Camiel and City Council President George Schwartz. When Camiel learned of the covert operation, he accused Rizzo of having offered him control over lucrative city contracts in exchange for his endorsement of the mayor's candidate for district attorney, Hillel Levinson, formerly the city's managing director. Rizzo immediately denied the accusation, calling Camiel a "lying Pollack." The *Philadelphia Daily News* offered to resolve the controversy by arranging for a lie detector test. Rizzo agreed, saying that he had "great confidence in the polygraph," insisting, "If this machine says a man lied, he lied." Rizzo failed the test, after which he swore the examination was "not worth the paper it's written on" and declared, "that machine is full of crap."

During the next three years, Rizzo would fight to save his political life. In 1974, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission, created by Governor Raymond P. Shafer (1917–2006), charged the Philadelphia Police Department with "systematic and widespread corruption." Court records revealed the homicide squad routinely coerced statements from suspects and witnesses, in some cases beating them in interrogation rooms. Detectives admitted Rizzo ordered the severe techniques. When interviewed about police abuse by Tom Snyder, a late-night television talk show host known for grilling guests, Rizzo brusquely dismissed the charge. Instead, he reinforced his pride of the department, boasting Philadelphia's police were "so tough, we could invade Cuba and win." Shortly after, Blaze Starr, a local stripper, told city newspapers that she had had a sexual relationship with the mayor. When he learned of Starr's allegation, Rizzo exploded. "That f——g bitch! I never did anything but arrest her. Treated her good, too. That lying bitch." After regaining his composure—and confidence—the mayor said that he would "not dignify the outrageous charge with a response."

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Exotic dancer Blaze Starr told reporters she had an affair with Rizzo.

Rizzo was becoming a national embarrassment to the Democrat Party. In 1975, Camiel tried to remove him from the party's ticket by promoting another candidate for mayor, Louis G. Hill, a handsome, wealthy Chestnut Hill lawyer and the stepson of former mayor Richardson Dilworth (1898–1974). Rizzo easily won the party's nomination on his tough stand against crime, boasting, "I'm going to make Attila the Hun look like a faggot when this election's over." True to his inflammatory words, he went on to defeat Republican

Another day, another protest: senior citizens march for a community center.

Tom Foglietta, and a black, independent candidate, Charles Bowser, a former friend, in the general election by a landslide of 182,730 votes.

Rizzo's re-election to office appeared to embolden him against his political enemies.

In March 1976, Rizzo filed a $6 million libel suit against the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for satirizing him as a racist and male chauvinist. Calling the story "treason," the mayor blamed its publication on "ultraliberals who have gained control of the press" who use it "to destroy people who do not have the same philosophy." His supporters in local trade unions blockaded the *Inquirer* building to protest the newspaper's unfair treatment of the mayor. Rizzo refused to call in the police to break up the demonstration and hundreds of thousands of newspapers laid on the loading dock for twenty-four hours until federal marshals intervened.

Later that year, as Philadelphia prepared to host the nation's Bicentennial, Mayor Rizzo called for 15,000 federal troops to contain a sizeable but tame group of protestors who had gathered on Independence Mall and created embarrassing national headlines. The "City of Brotherly Love" had become an oxymoron. Prospective visitors decided to stay home and the Bicentennial, which once promised to be a major world's fair, became an ordinary, scaled-down celebration.

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MOVE members minced no words when it came to Mayor Rizzo.

Such incidents, together with a 50 percent increase in water and sewer rates—the largest in Philadelphia's history—served as the catalyst for a recall movement launched by a coalition of black leaders, labor unions, and liberal groups, among them the Americans for Democratic Action, the ACLU, and the newly created Philadelphia Party. Recall required more than 145,000 signatures, and Rizzo's adversaries collected at least 211,000. When his supporters challenged the validity of the signatures, however, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court settled the issue in a September 1976 decision that struck down the entire Philadelphia recall process. Nevertheless, Rizzo was still dogged by his hard-line approach to crime, evidenced by his handling of a radical black cult known as MOVE.

Founded in 1972 as the Community Action Movement, MOVE was originally an anti-urban, back-to-nature group, hostile toward modern technology. Committed to an African lifestyle, the group's members, both black and white, adopted Africa as their surname. Followers established their headquarters on Thirty-third Street in the Powelton section of West Philadelphia. Their way of life rejected normal standards of living, resulting in filth, disease, and a general deterioration of the neighborhood. Residents complained of verbal abuse, child neglect, and a weapons arsenal at the MOVE site.

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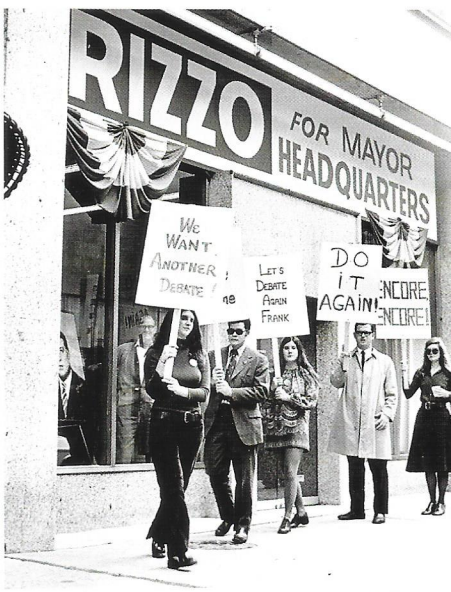
The MOVE confrontation culminated in 1985 when authorities dropped a bomb on its house, killing six adults and five children.

To address public concern, Rizzo steadily escalated pressure on MOVE over a fifteen-month period beginning in May 1977. Individual arrests, weapons collections, eviction notices, and police surveillance only served to heighten the resistance of the group's members, who complained about the infringement of their civil rights. "I want everybody to be treated equal," fumed an exasperated Rizzo in March 1978, "but certain groups want special privileges, and I just can't let that happen. They want to rub your nose in it. Make you back up. No way!" On Tuesday, August 8, he ordered the police to storm and take over the MOVE headquarters, which resulted in the death of one police officer, and injury to several others. Rizzo's methods and style, couched in the rhetoric of physical intimidation, served only to increase the negative exposure he and the Philadelphia Police Department received nationwide.

On August 3, 1979, the United States Department of Justice filed suit in Philadelphia charging Rizzo, during his tenure as police commissioner, and eighteen high-ranking city police officers had either committed or condoned "widespread and severe acts of police brutality," including the beating and shooting of suspects. The suit contended police abuse continued



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Voters demanded another debate by the candidate during his first campaign for the mayor's office in 1971.

during Rizzo's term as mayor. Rizzo again managed to escape unscathed when, in October, a federal district judge dismissed all charges except one dealing with racial discrimination on the grounds that the government had no authority to pursue it. The last charge was dismissed in December due to lack of evidence.

Rizzo could point to several achievements during his two terms as mayor. He improved relations between City Hall and the business community, resulting in the building of a bold new skyline. He pushed through large public works projects, including the modernization of the Philadelphia International Airport and a $300 million center-city commuter tunnel that linked the Reading Terminal and Suburban Station. Failing neighborhoods, including Society Hill, Queen Village, and Fairmount, were restored during his administration, and South Street, once popular for its offbeat culture and nightlife, was revitalized. But by 1980, the achievements seemed to be clouded by all the controversy that surrounded his administration.

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Despite a core of loyal followers, 85 percent of the electorate denied Rizzo an opportunity to seek a third consecutive term in November 1980.

Although Rizzo wanted to run for a third consecutive term, Philadelphia's city charter limited a mayor to two consecutive terms. He launched an unsuccessful campaign to change the charter. On September 11, 1980, a committee organized to revise the Home Rule Charter to allow the mayor to serve for more than two consecutive terms. The question was placed on the November ballot for voters. Rizzo's hopes were dashed when 85 percent of the electorate voted against the measure. Philadelphia's black community turned out in record numbers to vote against the change. William J. Green emerged as the Democratic nominee and went on to win the 1979 mayoral election.

To many, it appeared that Rizzo's political obituary had been written.

When Green decided not to run again in 1983, however, Rizzo ran in the Democrat primary against W. Wilson Goode, former city managing director and an African American. The pollsters predicted a vicious battle that would split the party along racial lines. Rizzo surprised everyone by running a clean campaign. Able to secure the support of a coalition of blacks, anti-Rizzo whites, and city business leaders, Goode won both the primary—and later the general election to become the city's first elected black mayor. In a gracious concession speech, Rizzo called Goode "the best man for the job," and pledged his support for the candidate during the general election

Rizzo's generosity astonished city council member Lucien Blackwell, an African American. "He really surprised me," admitted Blackwell. "I'll never forget when he put his arm around Wilson Goode and walked with him down Broad Street on Columbus Day. He was telling Philadelphians, 'This is my candidate for mayor.' Lots of his own people yelled at him for doing it. But he ignored all of their taunts and walked to the end of Broad Street. That took a lot of courage."

Rizzo spent the next four years redefining himself. He never considered himself to be a racist, but public perception that he was greatly disturbed him. He became outwardly compassionate toward the black community and listened more carefully to the advice of Tony Fulwood, his African American bodyguard and constant companion who became as close as a family member. "The race thing ate at him because it wasn't true," insisted Marty Weinberg, a longtime loyalist and campaign aide. "Frank Rizzo wanted everyone to know that he would be the mayor for both blacks and whites. He wanted redemption."

In 1987, the sixty-seven-year old Rizzo again ran for mayor, this time as a Republican. Thousands of his followers abandoned the Democrat Party to rally around their hero. He immediately won the support of Republican Party boss William Austin Meehan, universally known as Billy Meehan, who ensured that Rizzo won the primary. But he lost again in the general election to Goode, this time by less than 3 percent.

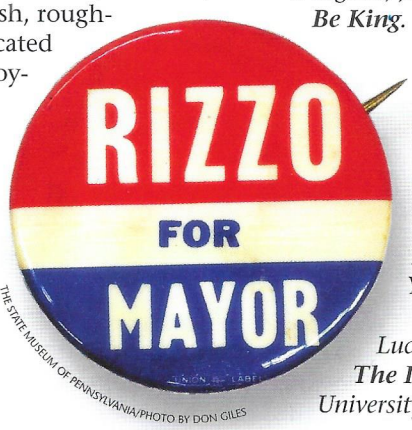
Tony Fulwood (far left) was not only Rizzo's bodyguard, but also became as close as a member of the family.

Undaunted by the defeat, Rizzo began preparing for the next mayoral race, in 1991, by taking a spot as a talk show host at WCAU-AM radio in Philadelphia. He used his show, "Frank Talk," to blast Goode and his administration. "I love the City of Philadelphia," became his trademark, often followed by a running commentary on how badly it had deteriorated under Goode's leadership. Of special concern was the growing crime rate. "I think it's awful what's happened," said Rizzo during his November 8, 1988, program. "The police department has fallen apart. The 911 is Dial-a-Prayer. We have a police chief who went to Japan to find out how to be a police chief. Safety in this town has gone right down the drain."

The call for Rizzo's candidacy in 1991 came, ironically, from the black community, plagued by a crack cocaine epidemic. The city's African Americans had also come to realize that Rizzo stood for "anti-crime," not "anti-black," and apologized for their racist rhetoric. He won the Republican primary after mounting a brutal campaign against finance expert Samuel P. Katz and Roland "Ron" Castille, a popular district attorney and Vietnam War hero. It was his final victory. With momentum building in the campaign, Rizzo suffered a massive heart attack and died on July 16, just three months before the general election. His funeral three days later proved legendary, covered by live television broadcasts. People lined the route of the procession from the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, where the funeral mass was celebrated, to Holy Sepulcher Cemetery, several miles away in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County. Popular reporters Andrea Mitchell and Larry Kane, who had skirmished with the mayor, broke down and cried when they heard of his death. For many, the death of Rizzo was also the end of an era.

THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA/PHOTO BY DON GILES

Frank Rizzo delighted in controversy and his two terms as Philadelphia's first Italian American mayor, like his tenure as police commissioner, were filled with it. At the same time, however, his churlish, rough-hewn, unsophisticated charm won the allegiance of city employees, hard-hat unions, ethnic groups and, ultimately, the black community, which he had once alienated with his tough-cop tactics. Perhaps he did, in the end, attain the redemption he sought as "mayor of all the people."



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URBAN ARCHIVES/TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

In happy times: marching in the 1971 St. Patrick's Day parade.

William C. Kashatus is a regular contributor to Pennsylvania Heritage.

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