

“Several men came into the store with a gun and held it to his head, told him he’d die if he didn’t let them take whatever they wanted.”

—Stuart Silberg, University of Baltimore entrepreneur in residence, whose father owned a drug store at Monument and Rutland streets

Baltimore Riots of '68

“You need to go home; you need to go quick. There’s going to be a curfew. . . . They want to beat you down. Do not, I repeat, do not give them an opportunity to do that.”

—Melvin Williams, West-side resident atop a police vehicle relaying a message to rioters from General George Gelston of the National Guard

By TRAVIS LOCKHART
Contributing Writer

Four decades ago, in the days following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., flames from Molotov cocktails and widespread rioting scarred wide swaths of Baltimore in ways still visible today. Baltimore needed two weeks, thousands of National Guard troops and mobilization of every police officer in the city to quell the widespread disturbance.

From April 3 through 5, the University of Baltimore will host three days of scholarship, art and civic dialogue to mark the 40-year anniversary of these events. “Baltimore ‘68: Riots and Rebirth” will explore the causes of this landmark event as well as chronicle the efforts of civic healing, which continue today.

“Without a doubt, the 1968 riots were the most cataclysmic event in the history of modern Baltimore,” said Jessica Elfenbein, associate provost for university engagement and organizer of the conference. “For many reasons, most certainly because they denote such a terrible time for our city as well as for the rest of the country, these two weeks have, until now, been all but ignored by scholars and policymakers. Our program will present a first opportunity for the public to have a meaningful dialogue about what the disturbances did to the city.”

The conference will commence at 6 p.m. on April 3 in the Student Center Theater with a session entitled “Slavery, Jim Crow and the Death of a Dreamer: The Roots of a Riot.” Afterward, panels will focus on aspects of the riots, such as Gov. Spiro Agnew and his response, the local faith community and its involvement, and the economical impact of the riots, to name a few.

The conference will also feature performances by musicians, dancers and filmmakers.

“One of the primary goals of the conference is to place the events of 40 years ago within a larger historical context to allow a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of where we have been and where we are going,” Elfenbein said.

“Baltimore ‘68” will conclude at 6 p.m. on April 5 with a 40-year update on the Kerner Commission, which was established by President Lyndon Johnson to investigate the causes of the race riots in the 1960s.

The event is free, but registration is required. To register, view a complete list of events and topics and explore a wealth of information relevant to the riots, visit www.ubalt.edu/baltimore68.

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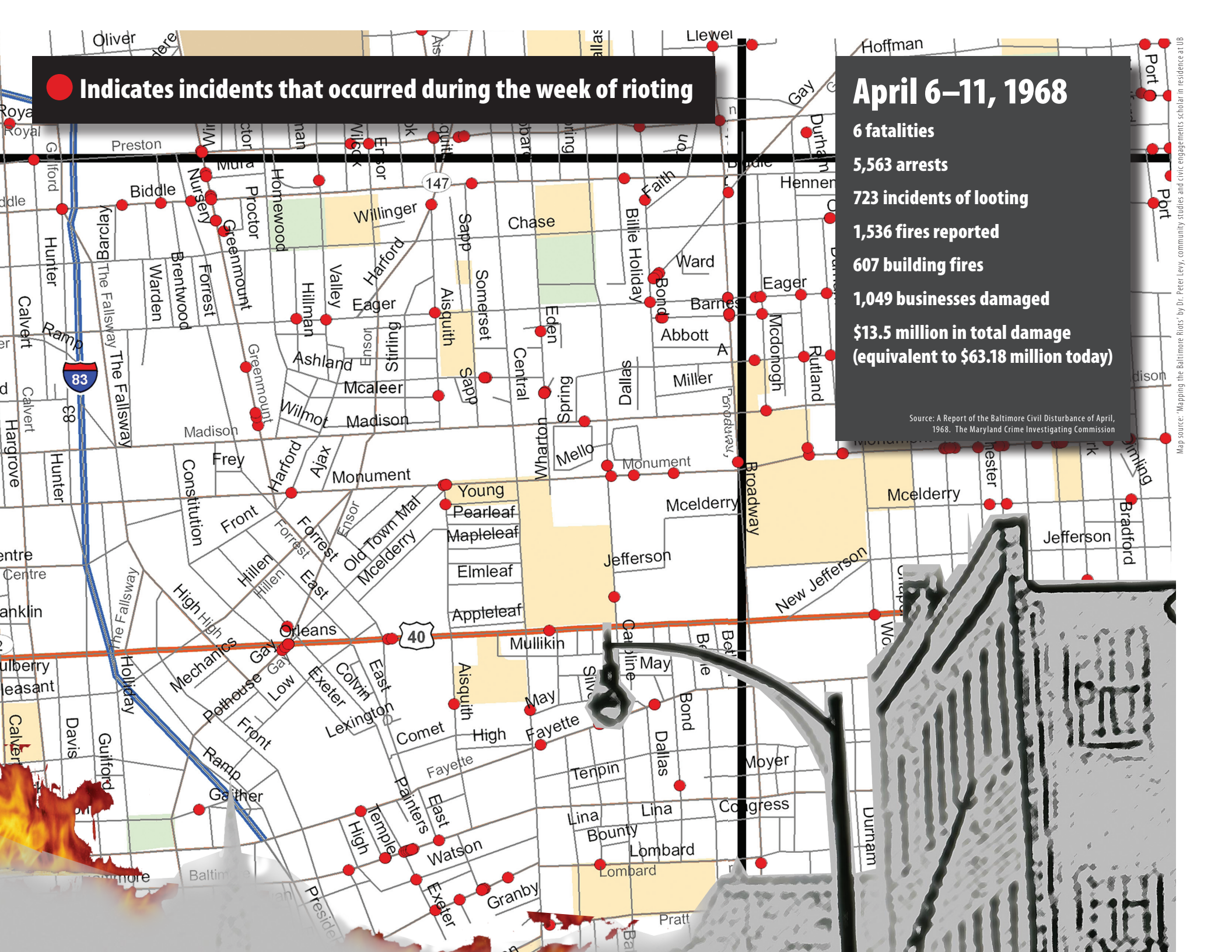
● Indicates incidents that occurred during the week of rioting

April 6–11, 1968

- 6 fatalities
- 5,563 arrests
- 723 incidents of looting
- 1,536 fires reported
- 607 building fires
- 1,049 businesses damaged
- \$13.5 million in total damage (equivalent to \$63.18 million today)

Source: A Report of the Baltimore Civil Disturbance of April, 1968. The Maryland Crime Investigating Commission

Map source: "Mapping the Baltimore Riots" by Dr. Peter Levy, community studies and civic engagements scholar in residence at UB

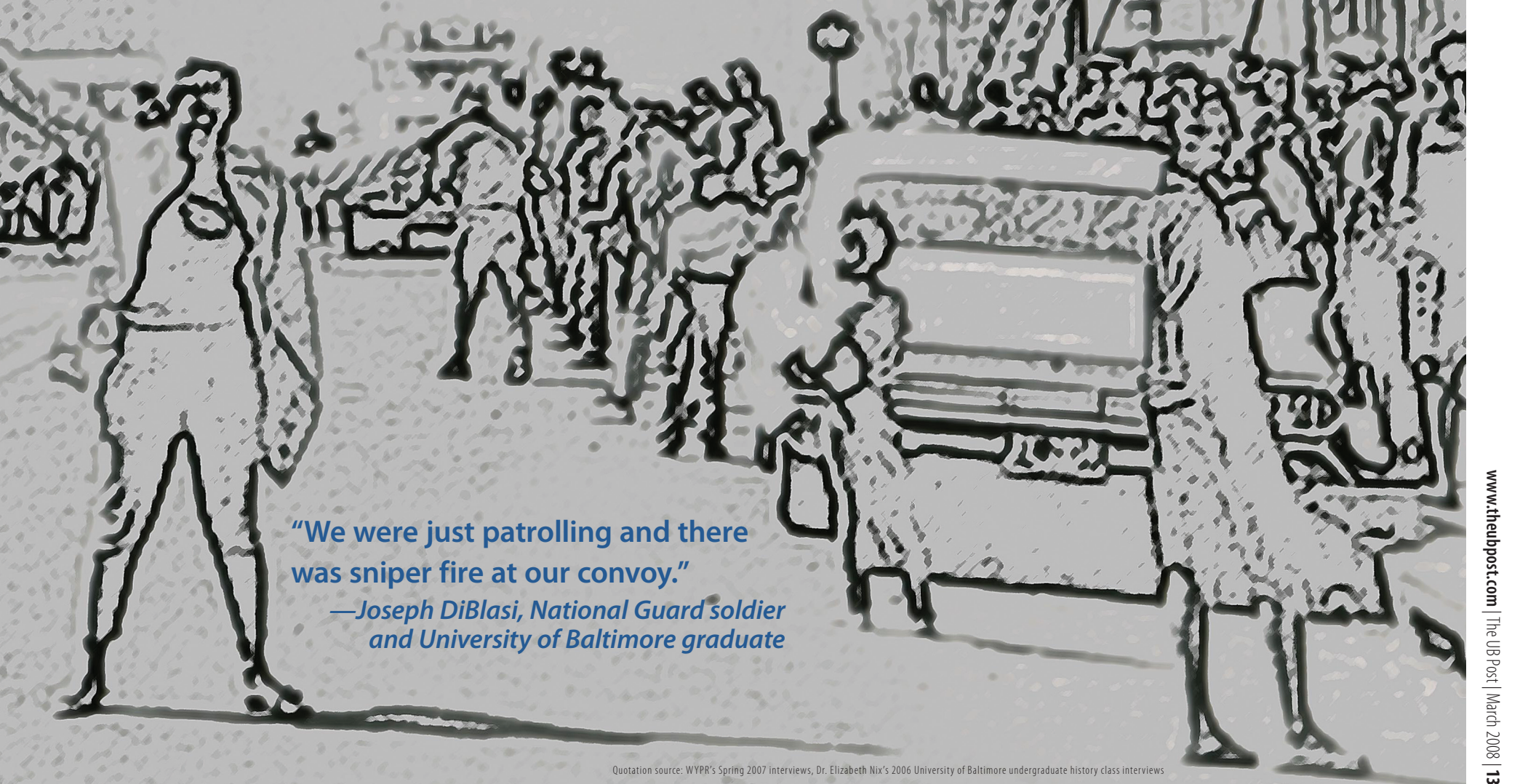


“People were trampled. Trampled, hear me? It was like letting a bunch of wild horses loose. And if you fell, you better hurry up and try to get up.”

—Ruth Stewart, West Baltimore school teacher

“We were just patrolling and there was sniper fire at our convoy.”

—Joseph DiBlasi, National Guard soldier and University of Baltimore graduate



Quotation source: WYPR's Spring 2007 interviews, Dr. Elizabeth Nix's 2006 University of Baltimore undergraduate history class interviews