



This photo from Special Collections at the University of Baltimore's Langsdale Library captures the mayhem of the 1968 riots in Baltimore. (Police Lt. James V. Kelly Collection, Langsdale Library, University of Baltimore)

Sharing memories of 1968 Baltimore riots

Y of Central Maryland hosts 40th anniversary discussion

By Adam Bednar
abednar@patuxent.com

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Greg Hunter, 61, said he remembers April 6, 1968.

He was at a birthday party on the roof of his aunt's store in Baltimore when smoke started rising from buildings burning around the city.

At first they had no idea what was going on.

Riots had broken out in major cities across the nation in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. But Baltimore had stayed relatively calm -- until 5 p.m. that Saturday, when reports of window-smashing in the 400 block of North Gay Street began trickling in.

Word of the violence finally spread to the roof top. So Hunter took action to protect the store. He posted a sign in the window that read "Soul Brother" to let rioters know it was a black-owned store.

Hunter was one of several residents who shared their experiences on Oct. 23 at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Y of Central Maryland in Waverly as part of a dialogue on the 40th anniversary of the 1968 riots that erupted after King's assassination and the lingering impact of the riots on the city today.

Wanda Kenney, 54, said she recalled teenagers being beaten by police and National Guardsmen dispatched to quell the violence.

She said decimated neighborhoods never recovered from the disturbance. "When the riot came, what little we had they took away from us," she said.

The discussion was one of several being hosted by the Y of Central Maryland and the University of Baltimore.

The conference was the brainchild of UB Associate Provost Jessica Elfenbein.

"Anniversaries do provide good opportunities for reflection," she said.

Elfenbein, a historian, said the university hosted two conferences, in 1996 and 1999, about modern Baltimore, but the riots were never broached.

She said it is nearly impossible to understand Baltimore as it is today without talking about the riots and their impact.

The 40th anniversary was a good time to take stock, and to make peace so that the city can truly put the riots behind it, she said.

"It's not like a little wound that just heals itself," she said. "There are no winners in this story."