

The University of Baltimore is launching a two-year investigation called “Baltimore’68: Riots and Rebirth,” a project centered around the events that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and their effects on the development of our city. UB administration and faculty members in the law school and in the undergraduate departments of history and community studies are planning a series of projects and events to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this pivotal event. We are currently working with the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History, The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Maryland Public Television and the Enoch Pratt Free Libraries to pursue funding for projects that may include conferences, a website and a library traveling exhibit.

Your potential participation in an oral history project would contribute to the very foundation of this project – the memories of Baltimoreans who lived through the riots and saw the changes that came about in response to them. Your life story can fill in the limited knowledge we learn from newspaper accounts and the television footage.

If you choose to participate in the project you would be interviewed by students from the University of Baltimore. They will ask you questions, but your memories will determine the direction of the interviews.

If you agree to serve as an oral history informant in this project, you will meet with a team of undergraduate students. The students will take a still photograph of you. In addition, if you have a photo of yourself in or around 1968, we would greatly appreciate it if we could borrow it, scan it, and return it. We would reserve the rights to reproduce those photos and use them on the website, conferences, exhibit or publications.

The students may conduct the interviews at a location of your choice, or you may meet them at the University of Baltimore Langsdale Library for your interviews. During the interviews, your recollections will be recorded in two forms: audio and video. The students will be responsible for operating the equipment. You can expect the interviews to last for a minimum of 30 minutes each.

Sometimes talking about events that occurred decades ago will unearth forgotten memories. Undoubtedly, some of those remembrances will be negative. We greatly appreciate your willingness to take the risk of exploring a potentially painful past so that your life experiences will be recorded.

After the interviews the students will transcribe your oral history. They will provide you with a copy of the transcription for your review before the transcription is published. The transcription, video and audio records will be archived in the Langsdale Library Special Collections and will be accessible to the public. Your name will be attached to these documents. The University of Baltimore may use your image and/or your words in any future documentaries, exhibits, conferences or publications. Participants in the oral history project agree to waive their confidentiality.

If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name published with your reminiscences

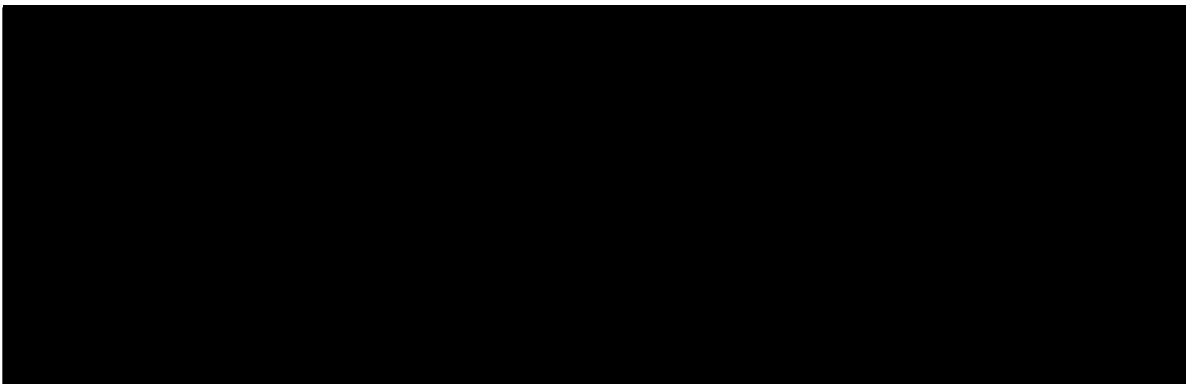
If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me at 410-837-5296. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth M. Nix, Ph.D.  
Visiting Assistant Professor  
History and Community Studies  
The University of Baltimore

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I have read and understand the information provided above, and consent to participate in the study. I have also been given a copy of the informed consent for my records.



Interview with Juanita Crider

**Nyasha:** So what was your situation in 1968?

**Juanita:** I was, in April of '68; I was 7 years old and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, elementary school I lived in East Baltimore on Curley St. on the 1200 block of North Curley St. right between Preston and Biddle, little small street and lived with both my parents and younger brother and my grandmother, she lived with us. Walked to school, elementary school and I had mostly, I had all, at that time I had all African-American school teachers. I don't know how familiar you are with the late '60s, a lot of my black teachers graduated from HBCUs so a lot of them really interspersed in our curriculum, you know African-American history, so I was really familiar with, as familiar as a 7-year-old could be, probably even more so than the average 7-year-old with you know, current events and things like that, especially as it related to the black community.

**Maria:** What school did you go to?

**Juanita:** Ft. Worthington Elementary school, number 85.

**Maria:** And, what about the makeup of the student body at your school, was it predominantly black?

**Juanita:** Yes, I would say 99%

**Nyasha:** And do you remember where your parents used to shop, groceries, clothes?

**Juanita:** Oh definitely, definitely. Lexington Market was a favorite place for my dad and the market on Gay St, which is not Northeast market, I forget what market that was, it was another city market, I don't think its any longer in existence but it was also a market on Gay St, and they shopped on Gay St, Monument St, and then Lexington Market.

**Maria:** What about clothes, where did they shop for clothes?

**Juanita:** It was a place on Edison Highway called Two Guys, we'd go there a lot, downtown, downtown Baltimore really, downtown, all up and down, that's Lexington, Howard, Eutaw, definitely, no malls, not at that time.

**Nyasha:** Do you remember what kinds of interactions you had with people of other races before the riots?

**Juanita:** People that I saw of other races were predominantly professionals, what I mean by that is my principal, doctors, nurses, nobody in our, I take it back, there's a local grocer that had a store, a neighborhood store, Mr. Cohen, he was Jewish and we knew him, you know really well, the local grocer, but as far as friends, close friends of other races, anything like that, no.

**Nyasha:** How do you spell his last name?

**Juanita:** I believe it's C-o-h-e-n.

**Nyasha:** So how would you describe the racial mood before the riots in Baltimore specifically?

**Maria:** Or as a 7-year-old how did you perceive it?

**Juanita:** As a 7-year-old I would say it was probably isolated, us and them kinda thing, not, when I say us and them, not an animosity feeling, its just like you know, the White people are here and we lived in a, you know they had their neighborhoods, we had our neighborhoods, but we would, you know obviously we would see them when we went to the grocery store especially the market now, and it's probably interesting, perhaps I had a little different outlook. My father before we moved to Baltimore, my father was in the military so I had lived on the army base, prior to going to school, like preschool, so the

army base was very, it's a very racially diverse, usually in military bases, so I was used to interacting as a small kid, but when I came to Baltimore to live, like I said it was very, I guess I would call it isolated, but just, it was a geographical thing, because I wouldn't know at 7, at 7 years of age.

**Maria:** Were you aware as a child like when you went shopping or went out with your family that there were still sort of social prohibitions between the races?

**Juanita:** Oh I heard a lot growing up, you can't say that around white people. That was a very, more from my grandmother than my mother, but that was a very familiar phrase. [whispers] Shh, watch what you say, you can't say that around white people. Like if I was somewhere, shh, you can't say that. Not anything bad, just you know, yeah, I just heard that a lot, you know growing up, you can't say that around white people. Of course I was told that you had to work harder and be twice as good at whatever you do in order to you know succeed because that's how it was for black people. But I wasn't told, I don't really believe I was told there was any animosity, I mean I was told the stories of my mother and her mother told me about shopping downtown, and they couldn't try on clothes, they could buy 'em there but they could try 'em on. But they didn't tell me that with animosity, I believe they told me that to let me have appreciation for the fact that I could, things had changed, but they didn't tell me that with bitterness, not at all.

**Nyasha:** And do you remember the day Dr. King was assassinated and some of your feelings as a 7-year old?

**Juanita:** Yes, well I remember coming home from school, I can't remember the exact date, but I remember coming home and seeing the mood of my mother and grandmother, they were just sitting. My grandmother was crying, I remember that, literally just crying,

crying and you know, she said oh no, Dr. King is dead, what are we gonna do? Cause growing up, even before Dr. King's death and we had a mantel piece, and you probably have heard this before, maybe you haven't. There was a picture of Dr. King, JFK and Jesus Christ and some other family members on the mantel piece, they were just like the heroes of my grandmother, and I mean I've seen similar things in other black people's homes, that's just you know, how it was. My mother was visibly upset. What I remember most, I definitely remember the rioting, I remember the curfew, my father got arrested for breaking the curfew so that's why that really stands out in my mind, you know, Daddy's not coming home, he got arrested for being out past the curfew. I remember going to school still having to go to school, the teachers, one teacher, this is probably not a good thing but, threatened us that if we didn't behave she was going to keep us past curfew, [laughter] keep us after school past the curfew. We were scared cause we, especially and I wasn't the only one who had somebody in their family who had you know gotten arrested, it was mainly, the people that I knew, it was mainly for breaking curfew, wasn't, in my knowledge at the time, anybody that got arrested for looting or anything like that, but for breaking the curfew, just being out, and around the corner from where I lived, on the 1200 block of Linwood, there was a I don't know if you remember there used to be a store in town called Levinson and Klein, they sold furniture and appliances, and they had a warehouse right around the corner

**Nyasha:** What was it called?

**Juanita:** Levinson and Klein, it was a furniture appliance store and they had a warehouse right on the 1200 block of Linwood and people were looting in there and they had, I remember seeing the police, I don't know if it was the police or National Guard,

remember seeing somebody in uniform, standing on top of the roof, to keep the looters at bay of the warehouse

**Maria:** Do you remember, I mean you were very young, would you remember how you heard about the riots starting? Like did you hear about...

**Juanita:** TV. TV and radio, definitely.

**Maria:** Did you, do you remember hearing about the riots in other cities first?

**Juanita:** I believe I remember hearing about 'em in Washington D.C. first.

**Maria:** And so you were watching the coverage on TV, was there rioting happening in your neighborhood or near by?

**Juanita:** Just in that, just at the warehouse because there wasn't really, it was mostly residential you know, just the warehouse

**Maria:** Do you remember what neighborhoods were most affected?

**Juanita:** I remember Gay St, and that area, Gay, Monument, you know where the main Johns Hopkins Hospital is, I remember that street, that area being really, cause it was a lot of stores, in that area, was really affected. It was a long time before my mother and grandmother would go back to that area.

**Maria:** And what happened with your father, how long was it before he was allowed to come home?

**Juanita:** I think it was just 48hours, it wasn't very long, and he didn't even, and if my memory serves me right, I don't think it was even the fact that he had to really pay any major bail, I think it was just they just detained him and some of his other friends in the neighborhood, and they let him go after a day or two, probably once it calmed down. But I remember he missed work, that was a big issue in the family, he didn't get fired or

anything, but that was just a big discussion you know, my mother, my grandmother, my father missing work.

**Maria:** What did your father do?

**Juanita:** He was a common laborer

**Maria:** So you said you saw the National Guard?

**Juanita:** Yeah, I said men in uniform. I don't know whether they were police or National Guard, I just remember men in uniform.

**Maria:** How did that make you feel, do you remember?

**Juanita:** Yes I do remember. It was weird, I think if they were just, I had seen policeman walking a beat but to see them standing on top of a building, you know, that was really, it was kinda scary cause you know and then we walking to school and you know, my mother walking me to school just like don't pay attention to that, you know kinda like, of course you know a 7-year old, come on talking about, asking a lot of questions, why are they up there, did we do something wrong? You know, you know they're up there to protect the stuff in the store, you know that kind of thing. But it was definitely a big deal, we knew enough to be, I probably wouldn't have been as scared, I don't think if my father hadn't been arrested and then the teacher threatening, you know, threatening us she was gonna keep us after school if we don't behave. But I also, and this is a retrospect memory, I was thinking about it, I think everybody was kinda anxious, even the little kids, we may have not understood, but our parents were anxious, you know, we took whatever, we took it to school with us that antsy, hard to focus, and the teachers they tried their bests, but I remember teachers you know, talking about it, they would ask our questions and they wanted to answer our questions yet you know, I'm not even sure they



were done processing, you know, as I think about it, but here they had to try to, I think they really were tired of trying to keep life as normal for us as they could.

**Maria:** Did you say most of your teachers were African-American or all?

**Juanita:** All up to that, up to that point, up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. All had been. And, I just wanna share, and like I said it was '68 so they had talked to us about Dr. King, we talked about current events you know, he was a hero and you know, the things that he was doing, what civil means citizens, citizens have rights and those kinds of things

**Maria:** And how else do you remember your life, your daily activities being different during when the riots were going on?

**Juanita:** Like I said, my father not working, and then us not going outside to play. You know, come home from school, get your little homework, you go outside and play, our parents wouldn't let us go outside even though it wasn't anything going on right in our block, you know, I think they were just afraid that it may spread or I don't know. I don't know if they were afraid it may spread, or if they were afraid, just a general fear, so you keep people close to you, you know what I mean, till it's all over. But it was a very, the adults were very sad, very in a quandary but they didn't, they tried their best to answer our questions but it was more like, teachers answered more questions than my parents, than my mother and my grandmother did as far as why people are, why they fight, why they taking stuff, why they burning things. And the teachers would say, people just don't know what to do. My mother would just say I don't know, you know, go play.

**Maria:** When you got older and you were able to understand it more, did you talk to your parents and your grandmother?

**Juanita:** A little bit, a little bit. One I would say frustration that'd come up with them even now, cause I asked my mother if she wanted to participate in the interview, she said no, she wasn't angry, she just, she didn't really want to talk about the memories. But one thing that came up, that comes up still, is why would they burn and loot in their own neighborhoods, with her generations and my grandmother's generation, that comes up. You know why, why would they destroy, we didn't have much, why would they destroy things in our own community. That's a very sensitive area for a lot of people, and my mother's 68, my grandmother's deceased now, but that you know, very common thought.

**Nyasha:** Well did your family personally know people who rioted or had family?

**Juanita:** I don't know, that I don't know.

**Nyasha:** So how do you think the riots affected Baltimore or you know the black community in Baltimore after the riots?

**Juanita:** I've been thinking about that, cause I figured that would be a question that you would ask me. I've really been thinking about that and as I think about the neighborhoods, and I grew up on the East side so I don't know, I mean I know I'm familiar with the West side but I'm sure they'd rioted in West Baltimore but I just can't think of the areas where they did it. I know they did it in East Baltimore, there's a certain irony that those were some of the most destitute and poverty stricken areas of the city now and is there a correlation, there probably is, I'm not a sociologist but you know there probably is some correlation. I think its a little more, I use the word irony, but I'm of the belief that it's a little bit more than irony; it has to be something, some reason why, why that is. It's because some of those areas were really thriving, they were very thriving economically, I don't mean you know, not in the upper strata as far as when you look at,

it was striving a lot more economically than it is now and some of 'em did bounce back but I wonder if they ever really went back to that, I called that glory you know phase, before April 1968.

**Maria:** Do you remember any places where like businesses where you, you and your family used to go that were destroyed and that you had to stop going to?

**Juanita:** That were completely destroyed? No.

**Maria:** How did your neighborhood change?

**Juanita:** The immediate neighborhood, probably not too much just from the...you mean the, are you talking about the physical look or the emotional feeling or both?

**Maria:** Both

**Juanita:** Okay. Physical look, I mean, we didn't see as much police presence obviously after everything kind of calmed down, emotionally, I think it was a lot more of a, how do I say this, trying to find the right word, cynic, that more cynical about race relations, like I said, it was already kind of isolated but then I think it was just like we were never gonna have anything, you know, particularly when it turned out to be that it was a white man that assassinated Dr. King, that just added fuel to, see we can't have anything, somebody try to do something for us and they take it away, now I think that just made it more of a pessimistic you know, very cynical and pessimistic, at least among the adults kind of thing. You know, I hope things are better for you all but I don't know.

**Nyasha:** Do you see a change in race relations?

**Juanita:** In Baltimore? You mean do I see it now, is this from a now?

**Nyasha:** Yeah. After the riots...

**Juanita:** To be honest with you, I hate to see this but I think it's worse in some ways. And the reason why I say that, I spend a lot of time in the Baltimore Sun's message board, you should go on there sometime and see some of the things, some of the highly vitriolic things people have to say about race, on both sides of the coin, both sides of the street, I don't wanna say that but sometimes I think it's worse and that saddens me, it really does.

**Maria:** What about in your own life and from your own perspective how did it change, if at all how did it change the way you approach people of other races or the way you feel they approached you?

**Juanita:** I don't know cause after that I always went, after I left elementary school, I went to Hampstead Hill Junior High, it was in Highlandtown, so I was definitely around all races and then I went to Western, which I was definitely around. So my parents didn't, I think it was a concerted effort really to make sure that we weren't bitter about our history as far as the negative aspects, they didn't sugarcoat it, but I think they did their best to try to raise us with the hope that you should get to know people on an individual basis, yes this can exist but give people a chance. And I've tried to do that, you know, myself, since I live somewhere different, in Indiana, it's a whole 'nother animal [laughter]. But I don't think it has, it hasn't soured me, you know, I still try to meet people where they are, but I definitely am of the belief that structural, institutional racism is still a problem, a lot of people don't believe that just because laws have been changed that you know, they don't see that it still exists or not. I'm definitely in the belief that it still exists and I get into quite a few heated discussions with people about those things sometimes [laughter].

**Maria:** You said you think that, you would venture to say that race relations are actually worse now, do you think that something like this could happen again?

**Juanita:** I think Baltimore from what you read in the paper, looking at the message board, I think there are several ingredients in the mix that could make something like that happen again. Yeah. And it's interesting, I think it's worse among a certain generation, I don't think like, I'm 46, I think people my age, that I still have some friends here and everything, I think they're probably middle of the road like me. They see, but I think among the younger group, I think maybe those between 16 and 20 or 25, I think it's, I get worried a little bit, just a little bit.

**Nyasha:** Is it something besides the message boards, is it something that you've seen or you know do you have any examples?

**Juanita:** Since I've been here, I come like 2 or 3 times a year, no, I really, well there's places that I go that I don't see very many white people any more. I mean, I know the demographics have changed a little bit since you know I've actually lived here but still there was places where you'd see the crowds, you know, mixing. You know I went to Lexington Market a couple of days ago and I didn't see very many white people, not even working there and that you know, I was like, wow, I used to see a lot more white people there. Where else did I go? Somewhere on Harford Rd, like in Parkville. Didn't see too many, and I know the population is overwhelmed you know but, it's like a lot of, and then me reading the message board and a lot of white people they actually say we don't come into the city, or we won't come into the city after dark, that makes me sad. Its funny and I have this ritual that when I come and before I leave I always go for a ride and just drive around and see what has changed and whatever and I have my mother in the car

and I said I know this city is in a crisis, I read the stats and whatever, but you know what I love this city. And I said maybe because it's the city of my youth but, I grew up here, and I do, I have a love for the city. It's nothing like the sounds, the sights, the people, the beats, the rhythms but the pulse has definitely changed.

**Nyasha:** I understand you're a spoken word artist.

**Juanita:** Yes.

**Nyasha:** Could you do a piece or two for us? Do you have something related to the riots?

**Juanita:** I didn't bring it with me, I'm so sorry I packed. I'm so sorry.

**Nyasha:** You don't remember

**Juanita:** [laughter] I'm so sorry.

**Nyasha:** That's okay. Well maybe you could e-mail

**Juanita:** Yeah I'm gonna. I'm thinking about, I think I e-mailed the professor and I'm thinking about submitting a proposal for the conference and then I'll email her a sample of my pieces when I do that.

**Nyasha:** Is there anything else about the riots that you would like to share with us?

**Juanita:** One other thing, something. Oh I really, I did kinda wanna talk about the Jewish community a little bit, cause I have a lot of, well in high school a lot of Jewish friends, and as a matter of fact one lady I went to school with her sister, she's older than I am and she's Jewish and she lives in Indianapolis, and I live like an hour from Indianapolis, Indiana, so her and I talk and her parents still live her and I was telling her about this project and it's interesting, I guess sometimes I get a little sad because I don't know what the Jewish and African-American relations are like now in this community, but at one time, they were very, they worked very closely, side by side and I think that a lot of the,

some of the Jewish shop owners, some of the Jews that owned our neighborhood store, Mr. Cohen, and it was like a few Jewish shop owners on Gay St, some of them actually, they actually came back you know, they didn't, I mean they were frustrated probably by it too but it was almost like they had a sympathy that the overall white community didn't have. I remember that, I remember my parents talking about that, like I said I remember Mr. Cohen, you know, talking, going around to the store, and him talking about just oppression. Oppressed people understand oppression, I don't care what kind of you know, and I wish that people would remember that more than, or talk about it more than they do.