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Langsdale Library
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University of Baltimore
1420 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear MR. DI BLASI

The University of Baltimore is launching a two-year investigation called "'68 Riots and Rebirth," a project centered around the events that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 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 40th 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 television documentary 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 who are currently taking "The New South and Civil Rights." Their work in this course will inform their 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 on three different occasions. On the first meeting, 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 in the documentary, 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.

The general topics for the two interviews will be:

- 1) Your life before 1968
- 2) Your experiences of the events of April 1968
- 3) What you see as changes that came about as a result of the riots

You will be interviewed three times to give you a chance to process the questions and make sure you are giving the fullest narrative possible. 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.

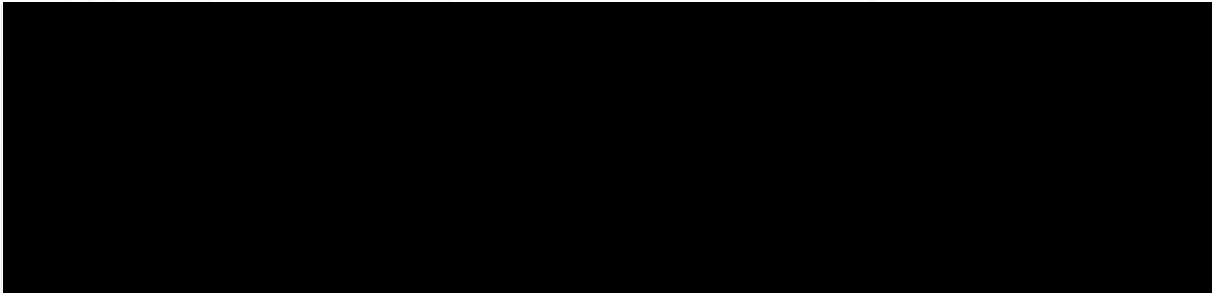
If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name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

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.



Informant Transcriptions
Joseph John DiBlasi

John Fincato
Katherine Hennessey
Stephen Mahar
New South and Civil Rights - HIST 377, Professor Nix

1st Interview: Friday, November 3, 2006 – 3:00PM

Interviewer: Full name

Informant: Joseph John Diblasi

Interviewer: What do you do for a living?

Informant: Sports Marketing Consultant and Executive Search Consultant.

Interviewer: How long have you lived in Baltimore?

Informant: A lifetime

Interviewer: What's a lifetime?

Informant: Been in Baltimore since I was born

Interviewer: Where did you live before the riots?

Informant: Been in Baltimore since I was born
In South Baltimore grew up near the Cross Street Market and stayed in South Baltimore and this is the area that I eventually represented as councilman in my adult life.

Interviewer: What were you doing before the riots?

Informant: Ah working at Maryland National Bank and I was going to school at the University of Baltimore at night and I was in the National Guard.

Interviewer: What was the atmosphere in Baltimore like in the days before the riots?

Informant: Calm, Calm just routine everyday life just the way it is today.

Interviewer: What was the racial climate in Baltimore like?

Informant: It was only tense in terms of what I would experience as a child as a student in grade school when Southern High School in South Baltimore was integrated in the early 50's. It had been an all-white school and the first blacks who came to school were repelled. I remember being in grade school at Saint Joseph's on Lee Street which since been torn down and they

rejected the white population. The student population did not want the black students in school and there were three or four days of riots and they closed our elementary school and we had to stay home while there was tenseness in the neighborhoods at that time.

Interviewer: Did you support/how did you feel about the civil rights movement?

Informant: Well we were teenage kids we did not really pay a lot attention to it if it does not affect you personally. You just might see a thing here or there on TV. The thing at Southern attracted attention because it was going on in the neighborhood. I can remember Riverside Park. The first time Riverside Park Pool was integrated it was a swimming pool there I was about fifteen years old, the exact same situations as there were just divisions in Baltimore in terms of sections. You had white sections, Italian sections, black sections still have neighborhoods in Baltimore today, Baltimore is known for being a community of neighborhoods, but when racial lines were crossed it caused tension first time.

Interviewer: What did you think of the some of the events surrounding Civil Rights-sit ins Freedom Rides Lynching etc.?

Informant: Well again it would depend on who was trying to achieve their purpose and to what end. I wasn't phased by it. I was doing what teenage guys do at the time playing baseball, basketball, be at the park, the police boys club, and do my schoolwork do whatever didn't have an effect on me.

Interviewer: How were you treated before the riots?

Informant: Same. There was no climate that would let you know the riots were going to come. Never. No foreshadowing. None at all.

Interviewer: The Teachers in schools first integrated -- the teachers did they show any...?

Informant: I was a grade school student so I did not know what was going on in the high school and again it was a question of you had to have police intervention at the time just to calm things and then administrative staff school Baltimore City Superintendent schools whoever that was at the time I would not know I was a kid a but I am sure things calmed down after three or four days and had settled in. Down south was it Medger Evers. I think got when he got on the bus or whatever, he walked across the line there was tension there just like when Jackie Robinson crossed the baseball line. You could go back and research that. I think the Red Sox were the very last team to put a black player on their roster. That did not occur I think I can tell you it was a guy named Pumpsie Green that was very late in the process in the 60's late probably late 60's and the Red Sox were the last team in baseball to integrate. You really don't have anything against any nationality, race, or religion. There was no mix until people crossed lines -- if you will -- imaginary lines that existed -- that don't exist today.

Interviewer: Growing up as a kid, were black people just foreign? You were out there, you just?

Informant: I would not say foreign because we played ball in different communities and you know, different teams, if they had a Korean on the team or had a black guy on the team it was no big deal if he was it was just a player a good pitcher a good hitter that's how you saw him.

Interviewer: You accept them? You did not have any...?

Informant: No the same way by the time I got to high school it was an accepted thing. We played ball together and the community it became an accepted thing. The thing that triggered the riots as you lead up to the question was the assassination of Martin Luther King and its good to tell you the story. We were, I was in the Guard --the National Guard and we had trained. And you would meet every weekend and I started off at the Pikesville Armory 129th signal battalion. We then consolidated with a group in Parkville and became the 1204 Transportation unit and drilled at Edgewood but I can remember when we were a Parkville in '68 and there was tension around the country in terms of this quote unquote "integration." What would happen if there were a civil disturbance? And we would train to be able to patrol the streets and just to be taught what action to take if there were disruptions and it was ironic because it was a Saturday in April of '68 and we had had a drill that day. A regular guard duty day and we were going home, me and friend who had rode together, and as we drove through and area in East Baltimore coming home on Lombard street, people started throwing. They were throwing rocks at traffic just indiscriminately throwing rocks at traffic and like accosting cars and

Interviewer: People you mean by that African Americans?

Informant: Mostly, but it was a mixed neighborhood, so and as we were riding by we are saying to one another, "We got to get out of here. Something is going on and this was after the assassination, maybe a day or two after Martin Luther King, and I guess things like that were starting to occur around the country. We did not think it would ever happen in Baltimore, but that particular night on the way home when people were throwing stuff towards the traffic, we got home maybe a half-hour after we got out of that area and we got a phone call and we just thought it was another call like an alert. Like "How fast can you get to the Armory. Come back." We got back to the armory. They said we have been activated, that several disturbances have started in earnest in Baltimore, meaning looting and burning and just general disruption and it was too much for the city police to handle by themselves and the Adjutant General at the time I think it was Governor Taus was the Governor and we were activated that night and we thought we were just going out for another alert and how long does it take to get you here in case we need you and a we did not have any of are equipment and that's what made it tough because we were assigned to Kirkfield. We slept on the concrete at Kirkfield on 25th Street and a day or two later they were deploying troops the more troops they have on the street to quell the disturbances moved to Norman R. Poole Elementary school. I do remember that we did not have cots or anything. We did not have are duffle bag or gear we just went back to the armory and had one uniform basically and um and the could not let any of us get back to our houses because they needed us where we were. So for a couple of days you know you just reacted to the situation. You didn't have much chance to clean yourself up or whatever. We were working almost 18, 20 hour days um you know just patrolling the streets basically.

Interviewer: In the 1204th Truck Trans Company as Edgewood which still by the way exists by the way was it primarily or completely white unit or was it an integrated military unit?

Informant: Um, boy I remember at Parkville it was integrated so I guess that carried over but there was not a high concentration of integration. It was majority white unit at the time but I do remember we had some black solders

Interviewer: And how were you accepted during the patrolling?

Informant: And again we would be isolated if you will. If I were a sergeant in charge of 12 guys and we were patrolling any given neighborhood, that's where we were and that's all we saw and it was three or four days, very dangerous the best word I can give you. There were things going on that you would never think to happen in your city. It was a normal day to day living until that happened. We could see fires breaking out -- big fires three-and four-alarm type fires. There were people running in and out of the stores and just taking anything that they wanted to take and in all the neighborhoods that we patrolled. Until the fourth or fifth day, I think the troops were brought -- soldiers up from Fort Bragg to help our force I guess we were 5 or 6,000 and they added another 5 or 6,000 so at one given time interval. During the ten or twelve day run there were about 10,000 solders in the streets trying to keep order.

Interviewer: Was it all of Baltimore?

Informant: Well the troops were deployed in all of Baltimore, not knowing where you could have a disruption. We were as we said, the 25th Street area near Kirkfield [Kirk Ave?] and Norman R. Poole which is just below that. Looking back on it I can remember one time and this was a 24-hour process. We go back in, try to get some sleep, get called back out. There was looting and destruction in sections. Just simply police the area and that's what we would do. They were never there when we got on the scene. There was never confrontation. Never basically the presences of troops, soldiers, if you will. The people would stop doing what ever it was they were doing in that area. That's how eventually there was a lid on it ,you know. But mayor Tommy D'Alessandro, a who served four years as mayor was a really good mayor his father had been a congressman, then the Mayor of Baltimore. This guy was looked upon to be a leader for the future and the riots took such a toll on him that he did not run again he served his four years and that was it and actually his resignation, no not really his resignation. He did not pursue politics anymore after his term ended and that's when William Donald Schaeffer then became Mayor and of course his legacy is historic

Interviewer: Why is it historic?

Informant: Because after mayor he became Governor and I had the opportunity to serve in the city council when Schaeffer was mayor just before he became governor

Interviewer: Now I know that I understand that you were talking about how you were all separated um and I am not trying to ask the hard question here but when you were there in that field house trying to sleep on the concrete when you were all together what was the

general attitude of the average National Guard Maryland National Guard soldier that was called up -- Were they upset? Were they mad? Was there any racism at all involved in any of that?

Informant: Nope. No racism. Just we were kind of in disbelief

Interviewer: I got you.

Informant: We were bewildered. We were only 20-21-22 years old. Like, how can this be happening? They would go on lookouts --the highest towers they could find --to see what --scope out the territory. Maybe it's going to be a quite night that given night and boom there would be a fire and as soon as a fire started there would be all kind of chaos in that neighborhood. But as soon as we got into the streets, people would disburse because they did not want to be arrested and the state police helped us. I can tell you one time that I was the most frightened it was I cannot remember the street um might have been Madison Street. We were just patrolling and there was sniper fire at our convoy. State police were with us and I can remember three or four state police cars pulling up . The fire was coming from apartment buildings and they asked us um did we want to go in or should they go in and they decided that we would just stay in the street to keep peace and the tried to go in to find out where the sniper fire was coming from so it was serious stuff. I mean that was the only time that I can remember an incident.

Interviewer: Fear for your life...

Informant: They weren't necessary firing at us individually they could have been just firing shots to frighten us and of course they did and I will tell you what was strange about it that looking back on it um I don't think that the citizens knew at all that we did not have ammunition in our weapons. We did not have ammunition. We carried ammunition but we did not put it our weapons and that was by command because they did not want us to get in some kind of a confrontation with citizens. All our job was to restore order. Just get in the street and be present to deter what was going on

Interviewer: So riot control...

Informant: That's what it was. That's exactly what it was -- riot controlling other words. If you --if we showed up I can remember vividly when there was a fire at a liquor store at the corner of North Avenue and Pennsylvania, and I remember being the first jeep with a truck of soldiers backing me on the scene, and you just had to think on your feet. People do anytime you're in that kind of emergency kind of a situation. I got in the middle of the street with my bayonet and I started directing traffic as the fire department arrived to try to put the fire out, and as soon as we got there the people that might have been taking things from the liquor store stopped and they were gone and we restored order to that intersection and the surrounding block. But you did what you had to do and we just got in the middle of the street with weapons and it scared the people away and that's how eventually the riots were quelled eventually.

Interviewer: How long did that take?

Informant: I think it was about ten days and I remember um the thing that led to it quieting down the most was during that ten-day window the Orioles had their home opening game on 33rd street and that was the first return to normalcy if you will or attempt to return to normalcy that the city saw from the day the riots began. And then once baseball started it was like, “Ok we are going to try to get things back to normal now.” And they played because I know it was a big decision to make --whether or not the Orioles would play baseball while we were federalized. We were federalized I mean when these soldiers came up from Fort Bragg we were also under federal jurisdiction. Normally the National Guard is under state jurisdiction but because of the riots what the term is federalized so that when you mention that earlier someone was in the Air National Guard, remember they were actually activated and they were sent over seas during that time window because they were federalized they were under the direction of the President.

Interviewer: So during this ten day period um you said earlier maybe where you were from at the time where you were living um your parents are from Baltimore also?

Informant: Yes

Interviewer: Did you get to call your parents or your girlfriend at the time?

Informant: The parents or friends got to come to see us one time during that ten-day window. That was only if you were fortunate enough that you made contact with them you told them where you were and they had permission to come on to the base if you will where ever we were at a make-shift command post

Interviewer: I am sure they must have been frightened for you?

Informant: Oh yeah it was strange. The whole thing was just strange. It was almost like we were in a dream, like in a movie, like, “How can this be happening?” But again there was never any physical skirmishes or one-on-one confrontation or any thing like that. It was just a question of well we are on duty now. We’re in the National Guard. This is supposed to be our primary function and we have been quote unquote “called up.” We’re on the streets. There is a disturbance. It’s our job now to stop it.

Interviewer: It was like out of the blue, right?

Informant: Yeah and the whole thing, even looking back on it, you could just extract those ten days. I could take them out as if they never happened but they did and happened since. God help us never happen again, never happen before. You know the thing I saw when I was seven or eight years old at Southern High School was a microcosm of what happened across the city but they’re looting, and the burning, the destruction of property mean buildings were being set on fire during the riots -- just set on fire and that was totally indiscriminate and the people that did that -- I don’t know why they would choose to do that in the first place or why they would

choose or where they would choose to do it but it happened and then it stopped and then it was over.

Interviewer: Was this an all day thing or at night?

Informant: Night --it was a good question. It was sporadic, completely sporadic. There would be increments of time where two or three hours would go by and we would say to ourselves, "It's over." Another fire would be reported or we would hear sirens, fire engines, police cars responding, but if it was not in our radius, we did not have to go out. But if it was close to us then it was our job to be on the streets again and just like everything else it cannot go on or compare to war. Certainly it cannot compare to war. I don't want to make it out like that dramatic than what's going on today in the world with our troops. Because guardsmen and reserve men have been sent overseas, you know, they have been sent overseas since World War I and World War II etc., etc What's going on in Iraq -- now this pales in comparison to that. The thing about this was that this was the neighborhood -- the city that you grew up in and you would just look around and say, "how can this be happening?" You know our own city is being destroyed by our own citizens.

Interviewer: Did that make you mad at all?

Informant: It made you wonder. It just made you wonder see what triggered it was King's assassination and it was as if the African American community was saying, "We just had enough. We just had enough. It's like if you get mad at somebody and you want to do something about it and whoever led that; however it got organized or started ,that was there. They were releasing whatever that venom was. Like, "This is not right. This is our response to it."

Interviewer: Were you guys aware in the unit that this was happening?

Informant: We did not have any information and we did not exposure to any media at all no televisions or radios or anything of that sort and no newspapers. It would be a good question to find out if the papers were even being distributed.

Interviewer: Is the city effectively shut down?

Informant: There could have been areas of the city that might not of been affected, but we wouldn't have known that

Interviewer: What about the average citizens. Did you have any contact with them -- the people who lived here but weren't?

Informant: Not during those ten days - No way we would of even have known what was going on and of course today's generation with the internet, cell phones, technology you know back then you could not grab your cell phone on your side and tell somebody where you were and what was going on and they could not tell you what was going on and where they were so it was just a question of waiting it out until it finally subsided.

Interviewer: Where you have said where MLK assassination was the impetus to this. What do you remember?

Informant: He was the primary person well and again with Bobby Kennedy that was a major component of civil rights and um everybody looked up to both of them and we lost both of them within whatever it was sixty or ninety days of one another to assassins. The kind of thing you just don't believe, like "How can this be happening?" but it happened and when I cannot remember the first day that civil disturbances might have happened as a result of what happened as the assassination of Martin Luther King but I remember seeing news events or reports of it saying to myself that won't happen here. That's there and we never thought about it and then it happened here.

Interviewer: So for ten days or so there are riots are going on and the Governor what was his name again tell me about him if you could?

Informant: I think the Governor was Miller Taus but it could have been this had been a while back Agnew was elected in '66 he was the Governor. Agnew was the Governor. Then Nixon had to pick him up for a running mate because of this. It was probably Taus when I got in the Guard and Agnew after that.

Interviewer: So after the riots when you were demobilized how did the city respond to the destruction and everything else that had happened? Was it was a situation that happened and you could take those ten days and take them out of the whole, or did the city actually really respond to it pretty active calling for a change or anything like that?

Informant: No it was kind of like it was over. Everything is back to normal. Everybody went back to work. Everybody went back to shopping. They went back to watching the Orioles play and then of course, I was not involved in the city government at the time then, but there were just areas of the city that needed to be restored -- complete restoration and that was the housing department and the mayor at the time they just had to bring those neighborhoods back and revitalize them again and eventually they did of course and then it took Schaeffer some time but when Schaeffer pushed hard for the advent of the Inner Harbor that's when Baltimore pretty much had its entire renaissance but the beginning of the Inner Harbor plans goes back again to McKelvin. When McKelvin was the mayor he was the first advocate to develop the Inner Harbor. William Donald Schaeffer inherited it and drove it to its completion.

Interviewer: The Inner Harbor was just um the ships were come in was there anything going on down there at that time?

Informant: Bethlehem Steel company was right around off Key highway and that's were everybody almost had a blue collar job.

Interviewer: Was there any rioting was there anything there?

Informant: I guess it was left alone to my knowledge. No housing or businesses were destroyed or set on fire there for the most part. Again I saw what happened near Kirkfield area 25th Street

corridor because we were in our own radius which ever Guard unit was deployed where ever had that radius and you didn't know what was really going on any where else.

Interviewer: Did you have the ability to arrest somebody if you saw them doing something or stealing something?

Informant: We technically did but we never had to because as soon as we showed up they would leave.

It was out of the country and are biggest apprehension you know National Guardsmen were quote unquote "the citizen soldier." You know, today the National Guard is activated and is overseas back then are primarily function was strictly civil disturbance kind of a focus we did not expect to be mobilized and that sent anywhere but when the term "federalized" was used and we were no longer under states jurisdiction but under the, you know, the commander and chief we could have gone anywhere and were thinking about your job first you're saying, "Am I going to have a job when this is over? 'cause you were going to a job before you were called out. You didn't know who was at the job. I worked at Maryland National Bank I didn't know if the bank was even open and if its open who is doing my job those were thoughts you had and if activated and going somewhere else beyond these ten days what happens to are lives as we knew ,um kind of a sigh of relief in a way that we would be back to normal when everything was quelled but when troops were brought in from Fort Bragg then it even got more of a what is going on with this movie added another dimension to it, and then we thought things had escalated across the city worse and things had gotten worse because they had to bring in 5,000 more troops. But I think what happened is when they brought in 5,000 more troops, that, I know that got around and now the paratroopers were here. Now it's going to stop and then effectively another day or too after their arrival it stopped. But as I say still think that when the Oriole season started it was a big, big factor because we did not have football here for twelve years after the Colts left and there was a void and now everybody is following the Ravens, buying tickets like crazy, now and whether the Orioles are winning or not, baseball is the barometer. It's just the community is steady with those kinds of things I would say that I would say basically baseball helped settle things back down

Interviewer: Being in the city where the stadium use to be 33rd street in that neighborhood near Morgan State near all that do you think because it's there and they see maybe that had something to do with it?

Informant: Maybe I don't know. I just I just, know that we were glad to be here, that the baseball season started because it was the first degree of something normal that we heard about since the riots started. Yeah like, oh good baseball is back and maybe this will be over also. I remember it being that we were on duty on Palm Sunday. I do remember that, 'cause I was wondering if we were going to be able to get to church, and um as far as I can remember they couldn't get us to church because we just stayed on patrol.

AFTER BREAK

Interviewer: Honestly Mr. Dibliasi or Joe it's the baseball thing that's brilliant, honest to God I don't follow baseball you know but when I mean when you know you try and think

back doing a history course, and you look back what were people thinking and you know it's a bunch of kids, it's about baseball and we're worried about the Orioles, it's an aberration.

Informant: The thing you should do is go back and look up opening day in '68 and see what the crowd count was and compare it to other opening days. Of course they did not draw big at Memorial Stadium. Anyway they won the World Series in '66 and they still had trouble getting a million fans, believe it or not

Interviewer: Now I would like to ask another question about the actual riots themselves and then I would like it to go back to before when you were younger but, during the riots did you notice any kind of animosity between the rioters as it were toward you as were in uniform because to me a lot of the animosity maybe wasn't only animosity that blacks had towards whites or maybe it was towards the government itself?

Informant: I didn't see it, and we did not experience it. I mean when we would ride through the neighborhood just patrolling neighborhood whether it was the black neighborhood or white neighborhood at the time it was like they could not believe troops were on their street. Either like, "What are you guys doing here?" and it did not matter. The racial composition had nothing to do with it. Just the riots per say. From our perspective, people were setting businesses on fire and breaking windows and going in and out of stores and just looting like you have seen it in snow storms in your generation. Most recent generation was the bad snow storm. The police always wonder, "How can we get in there if people break into a store if we don't have four wheel drive or what ever or where the streets aren't plowed?" Somebody basically however. It started after the assassination of Dr. King. Whatever release that the community was trying to I don't even know what the word, the exact word is, but it was, well, like, "Gee look we got a chance to maybe get some items out of a business," while that was going on and that's what happened. I didn't see any lines drawn was the whole thing was bizarre. If you lived in the neighborhood and I mean if like a kid taking a cookie out of the candy jar here is an opportunity. Ever see the dog jump up on the table and eat five cookies because they are sitting there and There is nobody watching them. Until you come in and guard the cookies, they're going to be taken. That's kind of what happened. Opportunity for some of the poor, poorer, poor neighborhoods to get items from a business even though it was against the law, stealing. But that's what happened. That's exactly what happened and it was our job to prevent that just by being present.

Interviewer: Now going back before the riots when you were younger, you talked about the attempted integration of schools. Was there ever a moment in time when you were a young boy or a young teenager where you felt or noticed some unfairness that was going on? Maybe you felt sorry for certain segments of the population or was it just completely out of your picture as a young man/ young boy who lived in Baltimore?

Informant: Never gave it a thought, never gave it a thought. Now again maybe I was in a unique situation. I started playing baseball and football as soon as I could walk and I grew up about a block from the Cross Street Market and if you know that geographical area, that's not completely integrated but almost. Sharp Street comes in behind Patapsco Street down below the

Market. When we played ball we just played ball. Whoever showed up showed up and there were no racial lines

Interviewer: Did you hear anything when you were playing -- like other people that would walk by and maybe say something because you were playing?

Informant: Never because you did not look at it that way but when Riverside Park -- when the Riverside Park pool was integrated in '53, I remember that vividly because we had played ball with a community that was from West Baltimore -- were playing home and home series at our park and then at their place. I can remember the guy that was running the rec. center at Riverside Park and he invited all the teams to go to the park pool after the games and he was oblivious to it himself. He did not know that the park pool had never been integrated and when he invited them, people that were at the pool -- when the other neighborhood kids came in they resented the fact that they were trying to integrate what an all-white place, and there was tension there for days. That was just strictly a police thing. When I was a kid and we would just go up to see what was going on you know people we knew kept the black community from coming in to the white swimming pool. At the time so we didn't care we did not take a position is what I am saying

Interviewer: So after the riots, what rank were you?

Informant: I became a sergeant. I could have been a Spec 4 during I could have been a sergeant also cause I remember being in charge of a squad and the North Avenue/ Pennsylvania Avenue thing where I was the first one. We were the first people on the scene. Whether Baltimore City police or state troopers were National Guardsmen troops from Fort Bragg. I just remember I was the first person in the middle of the intersection that day and I was directing traffic and it's a big intersection. The point is, when I am in the middle of the intersection of North and Pennsylvania and there is a liquor store on fire and waiting for the fire department to get there and I am waiting for assistance because there are other troops, Baltimore City police/ state police whoever -- I am in the middle and saying to myself, "Well, I got this under control right now." And whether it would be a white citizen or a black citizen, all they want to see is a soldier. I mean you can't say that everybody was involved in the disruption because if there are if were ten citizens on a given block near Kirk field on North Avenue, nine of them wanted to stuff and too they did not want to see anymore disruption. They did not want to see their neighborhoods torn down and they did not want to see their businesses being set on fire. They wanted it stopped as much as anybody else did, but just like the classroom where you have one disruptive person, it's a disruptive classroom. So if there were one or two people who were still throwing rocks through the window and running in and grabbing a radio or whatever, it might be or a Molotov cocktail threw it or set it on fire. Everybody wanted it stopped.

Interviewer: So were you in school at the time or in college?

Informant: I was an employee at Maryland National at the time; I guess about 21, 22 years old

Interviewer: Was that all white or was it integrated the bank?

Informant: The Bank was integrated, O yeah the bank was integrated and you know that is a great question because I went -- I got out of high school. I went into a management training program and it was only three of us selected from High School. I have been in College Prep arty class at school at Southern and I decided to go to work and get my degree at night and um one of my best friends, a fellow by the name of Brice Davis who was from Carver, and he and I were in that training program together so the bank was integrated at the time and you know we, we worked together and I was seventeen years old when I took that job so I worked at integrated office 10 Light Street

Interviewer: So as a young man um as young leader in the army after the riots over with you got a full-time job and a good head on your shoulders you get to thinking about things. Did anything ever strike you after the riots did it change it your opinion of anything whether it's political or socio-economical? Any of your ideas about blacks in Baltimore the African-American community, about how we interact with each other, about how your idealism changed? Did you start feeling sorry for certain individuals. I mean what was your mind set after the riots?

Informant: That's a good question if I took you to the Cross Street Market right now you would see poor people outside both black and white ask you for money -- that they needed a cup of coffee help me get a sandwich or whatever. I guess in a way I was fortunate I saw that from the time I could walk, 'cause the market was right around the corner from me and I never saw any lines. There were never any lines drawn. The ten days were just a bad movie. Up to it everything was fine. It happened. It ended and we just went back on to our normal everyday life like it did not happen

Interviewer: Now that you went through all this what kind of accomplishments have you done since then staying with the National Guard?

Informant: I finished my six-year term with the national guard its ironic that you ask me that question because I was in the Maryland National there was a fellow who was in the training program with me who got in a year before I did. He was 18. I was 17. So when I became 18 he was 19. He came to work one day and he said my brother said there was some openings in the National Guard. We're going to have to do something one way or another because there was a draft. If you want to join the National Guard with me why don't you come? and that's how I got in the National Guard. Then I stayed at Maryland National for 30 years and eventually became a vice president there, and in I guess in 1979 I ran for city council first time and was runner up. I then was appointed when a vacancy occurred in that four-year window and February of 83 and got elected three more times and served thirteen more years as a city councilmen and again I was working with a very diverse group and representing a district that you know had a high just as many a high percentage of whites as they did blacks. And you know if you drew a line you would not get anything done it was the same way growing up and the same thing playing ball. You know, if you know the Dodgers had Jackie Robinson they were going to win. You know that's they way it was. You couldn't draw a line. If you drew a line, I guess you just go backwards.

Interviewer: In thinking in summary when you grew up you had seen all this before you seen had everything. Before you were playing everything out this was just more or less playing itself out this bizarre ten days?

Informant: I can tell you a story. I was in 9th grade at Southern. I was playing junior varsity baseball and Southern was the only high school that did not have its own athletic fields. To this day it does not have its own athletic fields that joins the school. They had to play their football games at Swan Park. Southern was at Warren Avenue. Condos now. New Southern is on Covington street -- looks cross Key Highway and to the development area. The old Southern was at Warren Avenue. The baseball had to go to Swan. No actually we to Carroll Park. I remember one day we put our baseball uniforms on for practice and the coach said the bus did not arrive to take us from the school over to Carroll Park which was in Southwest Baltimore. And he said, get there the best way you know how, and the first thought that some of the players had was well that means we have to walk through some tough neighborhoods that we normally wouldn't walk through. I mean riding through would be one thing. You know we're kids and we would have been told at the time don't go through a tough neighborhood if you were home. The coach said, get to practice, you know, just get yourself to practice and I can remember um I went over to this friend, who was an outfielder, Hawkie Moore, and he lived in the Sharp Leadenhall neighborhood right and he said c'mon come with me and you don't have to worry about anything anyway. We started to walk to the Hamburg Street bridge towards Carroll Park and were thirteen/fourteen years old. I said why don't we hitchhike, we've never done that. We wanted to get a ride, you know. We didn't feel like walking all the way to Carroll Park for baseball practice. And it's me and Hawkie Moore, and it was the black outfielder, who was a good hitter, and we'reit couldn't have been five minutes didn't go by and we were giving the thumbs, and a police car pulled up and I said to myself, "We're in trouble. We're in trouble." You know. It turned out to be somebody that knew us from the neighborhood, it was a neighborhood policeman, and he saw our baseball uniforms, and he drove us to practice. Fifteen years later or whenever, when I'm in the city council, that same policeman became the commander of the Southern District, and I never. I loved telling the story, because I would be the councilman and he'd be the commander and we would be in our given neighborhoods trying to make sure the neighborhood's safety and security as a council reprehensive and he was my police commander.

Interviewer: Not to get off subject what was one of the big guest things you did as council men in Baltimore city?

Informant: Constituent work. You want me to say the stadium thing when the Colts left. It was I don't get credit for this. It was a guy named Gil Griggs who wrote a letter to every council person who asked us to study a city charter. If we did not build baseball stadium we are going to loose the baseball team, too. And I called him and then we had a meeting. He put a group together, and it turned out the charter at the time said that we could not build a stadium anywhere but on 33rd Street, so we had to amend the charter that would allow for a construction of a new ballpark stadium downtown. After weeks and months went by I amended the legislation in the city to repeal that charter amendment that affectively led to the construction of both the football stadium and Oriole Park but it took us 18 months.

Interviewer: How long did it take the city? You mean you said you know, I am still kind of really impressed by the analogy you made. That it was like a movie -- things were normal, craziness happened and it went back to normal, but you also talked about infrastructure of the city being damaged -- neighborhoods, you know being damaged, being destroyed. How long did it take? I already tried to get you with the emotional side -- nothing really happened on that front -- but physically how long did it take to the city? Physically better than before -- back to normal or did it ever get completely back to normal?

Informant: Well, there are segments of any city -- if you go to Atlantic City four or five blocks off of Atlantic City and you will see some very, very a you know, rotten looking buildings that you wouldn't want to live in. There are pockets like that in every city. Now you know Baltimore had a big renaissance because of the Inner Harbor -- a bigger renaissance now because of Oriole Park and that's not because of my legislation it just happened, ok it happened, and then Federal hill took off. Property prices have soared. They have the whole water front development thing came on the values of that. That happened to be in my district, too, so I was involved in a lot of that. Intriguing, but there are still -- the direct answer to your question it probably took a few years depending on the quadrant, who in the city's administration business leaders wanted to see that area restored or not. There were probably areas that were burned that they probably tore down just like today. It depends on where you need to have that rehabbed, that renaissance, you know. You have political, elected officials today that still say you know the Inner Harbor go two miles west or go two miles east which ever direction want to go you have vacant houses. It depends where your funding comes from -- from an elected official's stand point, I know that when President Carter was in power that we received tons of federal money -- tons and tons of federal money and then when he lost he lost and that money dried up and the funding that was coming in to the city was lost, then you had to find other ways to generate that income. That's a whole entire different venue that you have to explore as what your property tax base, your income tax, what's going on with business development -- are businesses leaving the city? Are people coming to the city? I went through the Cross Street market the other day and the guy at the bakery complaining to me that a business right up the street on Light Street just closed and fifty people would come through the market everyday to get lunch and that business is closed and that is affecting the businesses now in the market. It's the same thing -- where do you put the tension and where is the funding ?

Interviewer: In these ten days of the riots I mean did they have a resonating affect on you?

I think its some neighborhoods it probably did but again, I don't think necessarily residential people were affected, but businesses were and if you owned a business that was, you know, pretty well beaten up during the riots, then you got to find a where-with-all to restore your business and you can get federal funding I guess or you could get state funding to try to help government grants or whatever. But again a guy who is 21/ 22 years old went just went back to work and never gave it much thought. You know all you thought about was again was the next time the Orioles played or what's going on with football that's what it was

Interviewer: In the days after the riots um when you go back to work with Brice Anderson and the black folks are working for --- is there any animosity?

Informant: No

Interviewer: Not at all?

Informant: None

Interviewer: Normal riot normal?

Informant: Yeah, that's why I say it was the riots were strange.

Interviewer: Bizarre was a good word.

Were you trying to say earlier that and do I have you correctly where it wasn't a black riot it was a riot of the people of Baltimore neighborhoods are rioting it wasn't primarily one race after another

Informant: It wasn't race against race.

Interviewer: Ok I see.

Informant: It wasn't race against race. It was sections of given communities that were frustrated. I am suggesting a guessing they were probably poor and if people were looting just like a snow storm. Again if they had a chance to take the cookies and nobody was watching that's what they were doing but it wasn't race against race.

Interviewer: Maybe the analogy is and obviously I am not the one being interviewed but my opinion I can get mad at someone and I much rather punch the table then punch that person. You think maybe that was the ...that had something to do with it maybe they were burning things down and doing damage to physical objects because they were upset with people?

Informant: The thing is the property that they were looting and burning was in their own neighborhood

Interviewer: Oh I see.

Informant: And that's why it was double bizarre if you will

Interviewer: That was one of the questions I had was um what do you think this riot was to accomplish. Were you thinking about it when you were on the street -- what are these rioters trying to accomplish?

Informant: We could not understand it and you could not give it a good answer today except my cookie analogy. You know you got a chance to take something that you don't have to pay for but you still have to be conscious of the fact that you are breaking the law. There were just -- there were many, many more good citizens in those neighborhoods that as we were coming

through they would cheer as we came through. Good. Its going to be quiet tonight there. That kind of a thing. Or I remember a senior citizen type person at the time, he come over to me and say, "I am glad you are here. It will be peaceful. You know, it's only that few only a handful that's causing these disruptions in each given neighborhood, a couple of people that were just disruptive."

Interviewer: Do you know um like the toll of the damage was?

Informant: No I have no idea I don't want to sound like I did not care about it you we would have to look it up I suppose in the millions of dollars

Interviewer: Any deaths?

Informant: I don't recall any incident of injury I don't recall any of that

End 1st Interview

2nd Interview - Friday, November 17, 2006

Interviewer: Ok All right - Well, were going to go back over just a couple questions and Marco will have a couple of questions for you. So, one of the ones I want to target again is what was the racial climate in Baltimore like you know when you were younger as you were you know as the riots were going on?

Informant: As a kid you never thought about race relations and I never really thought about them that much ever in my entire career, because high school was integrated and work was integrated when I graduated school was integrated here at the University of Baltimore. You know we got along.

Interviewer: That's good. And you supported the civil rights movement, nothing, you know, you did have not?

Informant: I was never affected

Interviewer: And when Martin Luther King died, did you in the back of your mind ever think that people would riot people would you know cause destruction or anything like that?

Informant: No and if you look back on it you don't know why they did and if you would ask those who that did it they would probably say we don't know why we did it either. It was like to them -- it was a perception it was a pent up release of frustration and that they lost their leader and, and they reacted.

Interviewer: Marco, do you have anything to add. Yeah, I have got, just a couple of questions. The Baltimore riot in 1968 started two days after the assassination of Dr. King at that time riots were also breaking out in 125 other American cities across the United States. Were you aware of these other riots at the time?

Informant: Some, some you would watch the news at the time news is no where, where it is today where you have 24 hours a day CNN and MSNBC all kind of cable outlets uh you watch the news in the evening there might be a few minute segment that there were rioting going on in a few cities and I remember saying to myself and some friends I hope that does not happen here and after the first few days it didn't and all of the sudden it erupted on that one particular Saturday.

Interviewer: And going back to what Katie asked you do you now believe that these riots primarily the Baltimore riot because that's what we are talking about were started or happened because of the assassination of King?

Informant: Well yeah I think that a it was a copycat thing of course. People in Baltimore saw what was going on in other cities and they started the same thing

Interviewer: Ok this is an interesting question I have for you. I just found out some of this stuff out myself. You may not answer this at all because you might not know who I am talking about, but if you do and were you aware that according to FBI reports activist and Black Panther party member Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin or as he was known the H Rap Brown was cited in Baltimore driving through the city during the riot assembling large groups of angry protesters and agitating them to escalate the rioting ?

Informant: Did not know that.

Interviewer: Were you aware of anyone taking a leadership role within the riots or were they just random acts?

Informant: Random acts, complete random acts

Interviewer: By the time the riots were over 6 people were dead 700 injured?

Informant: I did not even know that.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah.

Informant: Six people were dead. I did not know that. Citizens?

Interviewer: You know 6 citizens were dead, 700 were injured, and 4500 arrested and over 1,000 fires set 1968 dollars was 13.5 million dollars in damage?

Informant: Well see that goes back to because we were sectionalized - we only saw what we saw.

Interviewer: Right

Informant: So I wouldn't have known any of that.

Interviewer: So that leads into my next question: how were these deaths, arrests, and fires handled by the media or were they even discussed?

Informant: I guess they were but I'm, I am giving you my gut reaction. I did not know people died as a result of the riots.

Interviewer: And so to finalize on that did Baltimoreans discuss deaths, arrests and fires?

Informant: If they did I was ignorant of it or not aware of it

Interviewer: Ok finally during and after the riots, Spiro Agnew, the governor of Maryland, criticized local black leaders for not doing enough to help stop the disturbance - this angered many black and white Marylanders how do you feel about this statement was there any validity at all to this claim?

Informant: That would be hard to answer. I know that the mayor at the time was Tommy D'Alessandro Jr., and as we mentioned before, he was so frustrated because of the riots he decided not to run again for mayor and he was a good mayor everybody liked him. So from Agnew's perception and construct, maybe that's how he felt about it. But it was one of those things that seem like it was going to run its course no matter who would speak out. But I know when we were in neighborhoods, the people in the neighborhoods were upset that things were going on in their own neighborhood. They would say, "I don't know why this was happening. I wish it would stop." It just ran its course. We were fortunate. I guess it's because of a strong military presence that it finally died down and maybe what we talked about before too. Baseball season started. It seemed like things got back to a degree of normalcy in the city

Interviewer: I have a question for you when you were patrolling at night and everything is going on I mean there are these fires everywhere and there is smoke and things how did you feel I mean I would be scared I mean I would be...?

Informant: You had a feeling that it was not really happening. Like, how could this be happening? And yet it was, and again I remember, I thought about since the last interview. We could not even tell you who started the fires and I thought about the fact that there were a row of businesses that might have been on fire. A businessman could have set his own on fire and you don't know so you don't know who was behind it to start with. So you don't know if there was a leader or a ringleader to it. The direct answer to it is we were in disbelief, like how could this be happening and when is it going to stop?

Interviewer: Did you directly, like, I know you were patrolling the streets and some people are happy that you are there?

Informant: To protect them and their property

Interviewer: Exactly

Interviewer: Were some people just like leaving -- get out of here. We don't --- this is our town, this is our anchor?

Informant: No

Interviewer: This is our neighborhood?

Informant: No that never happened. No that never happened. That's just like if there is a domestic disturbance right now, police car comes by and the neighborhood is happy to see it because it restores peace.

Interviewer: So, So it's just amazing that it would, and you said you worked close with some of the police department now, how were they accepted were they accepted or were people?

Informant: The same no the same um we were just there to restore order so the neighborhoods wanted to see us

Interviewer: I mean I didn't know if some people...

Informant: I would think if you are in any given neighborhood whether there are businesses or all residential if you see patrols you would feel secure

Interviewer: Right

Informant: So they were, they were happy to see us

Interviewer: Do you want to pause if for a second – so I can ...missed the question on the tape?

Informant: Where it might not have been as bad as it was in other parts of the city

Interviewer: But you were saying that you as National Guardsmen you did not make any arrests?

Informant: I didn't

Interviewer: So it was the Baltimore City police department that made most of the arrests?

Informant: Well the state troopers were in Baltimore City. Police state troopers and National Guard, and then the federal troops. But I know that our individual unit did not make any arrests. Whenever we arrived on a seen everything quieted down and the people dispersed .

Interviewer: It was kind of like you were greeted, you know, they weren't holding animosity or anything toward you they just greeted you and said thank, thank you, you're here?

Informant: Well, the neighborhood citizens. But the people that might have been running in and out of a store just left before or they would have been subject to arrest because they were stealing, they're breaking the law.

Interviewer: I just think it so fascinating. I still can't – it's opening day. Like we were talking earlier having the baseball stadium in 33rd street, in the predominantly colored neighborhoods, just the presence of that.

Informant: Well its not so much that that people that go to the ball park have to come from every a neighborhood in the city so the people who weren't afraid to go to the ball park on opening day really were putting and end to disturbance because they weren't afraid to go to the ball park but you know I forgot to look that up we should see what the attendance was on opening day that year

Interviewer: Now anybody in your patrol because you worked with a patrol how did they feel about this were they like ok were here to do a job or did they have hatred or anger or anything towards what was going on?

Informant: As a National Guardsman anytime you were on active duty you were away from your job or your family and that's the only thing that you kind of -- you worried about that, but you had a job to do and you did it. So there was -- no there was never any discussion about it. We were just on duty and we did are job

Interviewer: I find it ironic that how you said earlier that you weren't carrying any ammunition?

Informant: Not in the weapons

Interviewer: Right, but you had it on you, but it wasn't in the weapons but if something happened?

Informant: Well we would have had to react like Barney Fife and Andy of Mayberry had his bullet in his pocket and so when he was told he could put it in

Interviewer: (laughter) I never saw an episode where he put it in. Did he ever put it in?

Informant: Yeah he did he put a hole in the ceiling but um we thought about that too. But at the same time it that kind of gave us a sense of security that we didn't need our weapons that our presence enough was going to be enough to deter what was going on

Interviewer: Though you could defend yourself with your weapon even with out ammo?

Informant: O yeah we had a bayonet but at the same time the citizenry did not know weather we had rifles with ammunition or not so naturally if they see a soldier in the street with a rifle they think you're fully armed...

Interviewer: During, during the riots did you see any like protesting or did you see any groups kind of meeting to plan something?

Informant: Nothing.

Interviewer: Nothing - just a bunch of people running around?

Informant: No because we would just be on patrol then we would go back to wherever we were assigned to stay and then back on patrol and that's all we saw. There would be times we would go out on patrol things would be very quiet and you would think that maybe it's over today and then a fire would start later and it wasn't over.

Interviewer: As you were patrolling could you see other sections of Baltimore on fire?

Informant: Yeah oh yeah we could.

Interviewer: What did you feel and how did you feel about that?

Informant: You felt insecure like how is this happening in our city - how could our own citizens be destroying our city. That's how we felt and it was strange it was it was bizarre. It was feeling like you were watching a movie, like this is not really happening and you know let's hope it ends.

Interviewer: So after the riots how did just thing you went back to normal?

Informant: Things went back to normal.

Interviewer: You went back to the bank, you continued your education. Did you have any thoughts or, or feelings afterwards like could I have done this better or did it or why why or did you get to talk to any of the citizens about how they felt?

Informant: Not really. We just went back to our jobs and then back to our normal weekend drills and we just hope it would never happen again and it didn't. Everything was back to normal.

Interviewer: I think that's it – that's all I have, Marco. That's all I have. Thank you very much for your time.

End 2nd Interview