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Langsdale Library
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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 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 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.

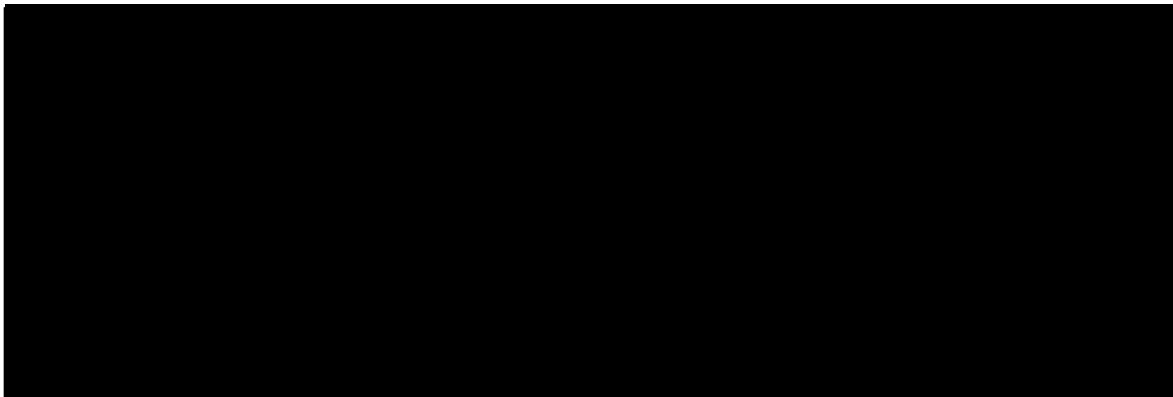
If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name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

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 Raymond Getzel

Maria: O.K. So first of all, can you say your full name?

JRG: John Raymond Getzel. G-E-T-Z-E-L. I spell it because people spell it wrong.

Maria: O.K. And in the 1960's what was your situation - How old were you? Where did you work, Where did you shop, Where did you live?

JRG: I lived in this house. We've been here 47 years now. I was about 47 at that time. And I worked down at General Register Company in what they called at that time The Greater Baltimore Industrial Park, which today is Hunt Valley the business district out there on 83, worked as a purchasing agent out there. And of course I commuted from here in Highlandtown which they now call Canton, out to the Industrial Park via the Jones Falls Expressway. Like I said I was a purchasing agent for General Register which was a division of American (Totalizator) who makes the racehorse machines for the various racetracks and that's the reason I commuted. And as I commute back I would come down Monument Street off Jones Falls Expressway and Monument Street was east coming back home and it went through a business district - of the black and the white business district in order to get home.

Maria: And living here in Canton-Highlandtown, where did you do your personal shopping, grocery store and clothing...

JRG: Well at that time earlier when we first moved here which was 1960, we had a fairly decent shopping mall or shopping center or shopping strip I guess you might go up on

Eastern Avenue where the library is at the present time. But just about that time just prior to that they built Eastpoint and that took the business away from Highlandtown. So naturally we would go to Eastpoint to do all of our shopping, grocery shopping all kinds of shopping.

That was before any of the other malls were opened up at that time. But that was our principle.

Maria: Before the riots, and the year before the riots what sorts of interactions did you have with people of other races usually?

JRG: Well through working we worked with various ethnics, various colors. I worked for Baltimore Contractors at first we had a combination of a lot of the people that worked in the field in the construction were of different colors and different races. Same way inside the office where I worked at that time. Same way out at General Register and when I worked down when I retired from Rucker Terminals. It was a combination of all kinds of ethnic and races and there was no problem. When you worked with each other it's a whole lot better than when you're just meeting somebody else as far as that goes. I don't know if that answers the question or not but that's - we worked with all kind. I have no problem with race or relations as far as that goes. Long as, when I was in the service I trust some of the, our black people, more than I would some of the whites. And in the service combined you came into different races, different creeds came into one as a unit there as far as that goes.

Maria: When were you serving actively in the military?

JRG: I was in from early 1944 to the middle of 1946. Over in the Pacific area on (Sipan) which is a group of islands where Guam is found there. In fact I was, the island south of us is where the bombers took off to drop the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. So we were (-) in the Army, we were stationed there for a good portion of the time there. Like I said, we had all types of people, all types of color and in the service it doesn't matter as it is.

Right now over in Iraq if you notice that there's a combination of all kinds of people there. And that's what you have to have it's one of those things. You just learn to live with it as far as that goes. And you can live with it.

Maria: How would you describe the racial mood in Baltimore before the riots?

JRG: It was quiet, I mean like today everybody lives in their own section. And you get along with your own section. When you get out of your section, well it's a little bit different. I don't think that it's has been any difference, much difference between there and now. There unfortunately young ladies here there always going to be contention between the whites and the blacks. I don't know why but it is. There's contention you find - your people of the white race that are mindless. They have a prejudice against anybody. If they, I think if GOD came down here they'd be prejudice against him. For example, I go to a Catholic church we had a foreign black priest come in - very nice person, educated. There were a couple people there that would not go to communion because he was giving out communion. That's stupid as far as I'm concerned. But this is the way I think it's always gonna be this, always gonna be contention between the blacks and the whites. It shouldn't be that way but that's the way it is.. And that's the way it is

then and that's the way it is now. In fact I think it's a little bit worse now than what it was then.

Maria: What do you remember about the assassination of Martin Luther King?

JRG: Well it was of course naturally publicized, it was frightening. Truthfully it wasn't too much that was said about it except that it happened in the south. The South has always been a hot spot anyhow. And it was talked about some agreed with it, some disagreed with it. Wasn't right regardless of what

It was it wasn't right to take another person's life. It was no purpose in it at all except hate. That's all it comes down to it comes down to hate. But it was talked about. But at that time you got to remember 40 years ago people weren't as up to date as they are today - with the television, the radio talking and you just talked amongst yourselves. So if there's any prejudices, the prejudices were amongst themselves. But it was talked about but it wasn't spoken as it would be today. You'd have an opinion of it as far as that goes.

Maria: Do you remember how you heard about it?

JRG: Through the television and the radio at that time.

Maria: How did you hear about the riot starting?

JRG: Well as I wrote in the letter working out at General Register coming home I had to come down Monument Street and I went through the black business and white business. And I don't remember if it was a Friday night or a Saturday because I used to work some Saturdays. But when I rode down through Monument Street there was nary a soul on that

street. Not a person, I can remember because I even came home and said to the wife - I don't understand it, there's nobody on Monument Street in the business district. So it had to be a Friday. And when I got home and that was before the riot - the day before the riot and when I got home and the next day we find out through the news that the riot started. And then we found out through the news - the radio, reading the paper that this was the reason because of the assassination the people had rioted for that purpose there. That's how we found out from the news but we noticed it, I noticed it the night, the day before it actually happened while riding through the business district. And I mean it was not a soul on the streets. It was actually deserted.

Maria: And did you hear about the riots in other cities before you heard about Baltimore?

JRG: No, I think we were more interested in what was happening in Baltimore than anywhere's - we did hear about it. I won't say that we didn't but I think we were more interested in our own place here because it affected us more.

Maria: Did you watch the television coverage mostly for your information?

JRG: Yeah, I still watch the news everyday and read the newspaper everyday just to keep up to date on things like that.

Maria: Did you see any of the rioting firsthand?

JRG: I'm sorry...

Maria: Did you see any of the rioting firsthand, did you witness any of it?

JRG: Not the riots themselves, we did - of course they put a curfew on the city and the National Guard camped over at this what I called the second part. Where the Pulaski Highway , Pulaski and Monument is- they camped over there to protect this part of the city. And it was, it was like I can remember it was like they were when they moved out and done their duty - it was like a line, a line between the black area and the white area. So that nothing could happen. So that there was no riots. There was no riots in this area here but it's because of the National Guard, the curfew. The curfew I believe it was at 6:00 or 7:00, I don't remember offhand cause we used to sit out on the steps in the nighttime. And even at times they would come by and say to go in because people have a tendency to start walking around. And they didn't want people to get into different areas where they weren't supposed to. Cause you have the hot head whites that would like to cause problems but we never saw anything directly rioting itself. But we saw the effects of it on the people around us here.

Maria: Did you know anybody who was a business owner or was affected...

JRG: No at that time , no we were workers only and I don't know of anybody. It didn't do any harm around here. I think it would have been up on Monument Street where the business section was. But truthfully it blurs and I wouldn't want to give you any wrong ideas on that.

Maria: We're looking for your recollections

JRG: Yeah

Maria: Do you remember what neighborhoods beside Monument Street or other neighborhoods...

JRG: Well Monument Street and downtown and through some of the white and black because I can remember the 82nd Airborne Division which was a regular army. They were sent downtown. Now downtown at that time was Lexington Street and Howard Street which isn't built up anymore. That was the downtown district for Hecht's and Hoschild's and Stewart's and all those big department stores down there in that section. And that's where they sent the troops down there so it's no damage would be done to `em down there. Like I say around here it wasn't too much - it was Monument Street and downtown. And if there was there was any other ones I do not truthfully remember it at all. I know that they were all around, the police were all around, the National Guard was all around, the Army was all around but they were in the districts to keep peace in the district before they moved out.

Maria: The National Guard - Did they come down here?

JRG: They would send a patrol around - I use the word patrol, a car, a jeep would ride around just to make sure everything was all right. And to make sure the people, because they have guards stationed on the streets. But like the police would be but in certain spots. But there was no great amount of rioting around. It was just patrols that were sent down just to make sure that everything was straightened out.

Maria: How did that make you feel - about the National Guard around?

JRG: Well it made us feel safe. You know, I mean like anybody else whether you are African American or white or any of the nationalities you want to preserve what you're living in . And that what was the object of it for the Guard and the Army and the police was to keep people from going from one section to the other and starting trouble or causing trouble or burning things like that. So it gave us a certain amount of safety. Being over there I think it would deter anybody from going out of their district. I don't know whether they had a certain district that they patrolled or not but I know that they had certain areas that they were responsible for to keep peace - I use the word peace in the areas far as that goes.

Maria: Were you ever afraid that the riots would come down here?

JRG: Well you always think that might happen to you. I think the human spirit is that you're always afraid that something is always gonna happen to you rather than somebody else. And so yeah we did think that it possibly could come over into our area but for some reason it - as kids say now "Keep the faith" - make sure that there's no problems there. Yeah we were scared. You're always afraid something's gonna happen to your place as far as that goes.

Maria: How did it change your daily life during the riot?

JRG: Well you got up in the morning and you went to work and you came back from work and you came in the house and like I said as far as you went - you sat on the step, that was your recreation for that night. And I truthfully do not remember how we done our shopping. Apparently we went out shopping like I said to Eastpoint and then we

would come back. But once you were back, once you would say park the car you were in for the night. So if you got in from work at 6:00 and you didn't have any place you had to go for shopping that was your routine. You were home, you don't even go up to the next block. Well, you might go to the next block but normally you don't go to the next block, you don't go down to visit relatives. You were home, the curfew like I say you had to be in by the curfew and I think that was like 7:00 - I don't remember that offhand but after the curfew there's no traveling around not even a certain amount of walking around - within your block maybe but you may not even go over to Potomac Street because you were out of your area there.

Maria: What did you think about the TV coverage that you watched? Do you think that it was accurate?

JRG: They showed what they done now whether they go more for one area than another area. They showed what was going on . I can remember the 82nd Division - they showed it downtown, they showed the pictures. Otherwise I can remember the 82nd Division was in Baltimore at that time. It was on the television. I think it was also something in the paper. But they covered what they saw - like anything else which were they prejudice, did they like one area over the other - I would have no idea on that.

Maria: How do you think Baltimore changed after the riots?

JRG: I don't think it changed. I think you have the same problems today that you had back at that time, only more so. There's no happiness between the races which is bad. I don't understand why but it's just one of those things. And I don't think it has changed

one iota for the better. In fact I think it has changed for the worse because you still have hatred, hatred today and I don't understand why. But it's in the souls of the old people, the older people than ourselves that white is white and black is black - I don't know, I don't understand why that is individual people. But I don't think Baltimore has changed much whatsoever since 40 years. I think it's about the same.

Maria: In 1968, what was your understanding of why there were rioting?

JRG: Well their leader , their religious leader was killed by a white man. And they were gonna take out their frustrations - as everybody will white or black or any color - they will take out their frustrations by I'll use the word riot by just getting it out of their systems. So the first thing that you do, you start a fight, fight starts to something else, something else starts to something else and before you know it you got a riot on your hands. I can't blame the people for their leader being shot or being assassinated unfortunately it happened. And I think it was just frustration, it was frustration with the black people. Pardon my saying black because that's what we used to say to black people. The black people took their frustrations out, and this is the way they could get their anger out their system - right or wrong as the case may be.

Maria: Has this neighborhood changed at all in the last 40 years?

JRG: It's less owners of houses, more rentals. Young people have moved in rentals but we have one or two black people in the area. And they're nice people. So put that right because it's according to what you have and they're very good neighbors. We had the black people next door to us. They moved out, they were only renting the house

and they moved out. But they were very nice, didn't even know that they were there. The neighborhood has changed from the standpoint there's not that many people owning houses now, they're mostly renting houses because the older people died, the families got rid of the house, renovators took over and they don't sell them. \$250,000 for a rowhouse - out of their minds. But most of the houses now are strictly rented houses around here. So it has changed - not that much ownership anymore.

Maria: Do you think that the riots had an effect on that?

JRG: No, I think that these whatever started renovating houses and pricing houses up. I think that's what actually caused it here. We bought this house for \$8700 back in 1960, \$250,000 today - same house, same bricks, same everything. So, no I don't think the riots had to do with - I think it's just economic ways that we've had in the last 5 or 10 years.

Maria: Have your interactions changed?

JRG: I'm sorry...

Maria: Your interactions with other races - Did they change at all after the riots?

JRG: Oh yeah, like I say we, I work with in the three companies that I worked with all types of races and ethnic groups. And I have no trouble with them. It's the individual I go by - if the individual is good then it's fine. If they don't then I avoid `em. So there to me there's no difference in race or edification - a person works good, like say work down

Rucker Terminals

and there was quite a few of the races down there, I had no trouble with them. Real good friends, I worked in the office, they worked in the warehouse. Walked by and we talked to each other. So there's no reason why there shouldn't be - long as each person is decent that's where you get along together or something like that.

Maria: So you didn't find that you were treated differently cause you were white?

JRG: No, I don't think so. Again it's the company but I don't think so. I think the present management that's down there which is the third generation down there - I think they treat `em all the same, bonus wise, work wise, individual wise, I think down there that they're all treated equal so as far as that goes.

Maria: Did you notice some businesses that were affected that never came back or anything of that sort?

JRG: Yeah, I couldn't remember the names of them right now but there were some on Monument Street. Monument Street used to be like Highlandtown was - they had their own business district, they had clothing stores, they had furniture stores, 5 and 10's, and everything like that. And a few of them didn't come back. Again I don't remember the names of `em. Some of `em didn't come back but eventually like everything else the area was revitalized. The stores were either bought out and something else went into `em. Course Monument Street now, Highlandtown there dead business sections, there's nothing, there's stores there, there's nothing worthwhile - the shopping centers have done that to `em. But there were a few stores on Monument Street as I remember that did not come back. But names I don't remember `em , I don't remember.

Maria: Is there anything else about the riots that you recall?

JRG: Nothing special, it's always remembered by us you know. We always talk about it every so often. Hopefully it never happen again. Hopefully it won't happen again. Might been something that happens every 100 years. By the time your generation and my generation - they be gone, don't worry about it they'll be dead, far as that goes. But no , nothing special, nothing that I have written and nothing that I have talked here. It was something to live through though. The day I remember - the best was the day I rode down Monument Street and there was no people on that street. For some reason that's just in the back of my head. It was just absolutely, it was like a deserted street. And that's the big thing that I remember on that. Anything else comes up I'll gladly write it. But right now I have no idea, no idea. I hope I've given you some information, a little bit more information. After a number of years the mind forgets things. No sometimes the mind remembers things too.

Maria: Thank you very much

JRG: I'm glad to have done so.